

MAX LUCADO
GENERAL EDITOR



THE
*D*EVOTIONAL
BIBLE

EXPERIENCING THE
HEART OF JESUS



NEW CENTURY VERSION

The Devotional Bible

Experiencing the Heart of Jesus
Max Lucado, General Editor

Thomas Nelson Bibles
A Division of Thomas Nelson, Inc.

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General Introduction

by Karen Hill

The Devotional Bible is an exhilarating experience. As you read, you'll uncover a saga of suspense and intrigue. Flip over a few pages and find poetry and romance. Turn the pages again and read tales of clashing conquerors, brave shepherds, and a captivating Carpenter. Chronicles of faith, miracles, misdeeds, and good deeds. Kings, queens, peasants—the uncommon and the commonplace. Mystery, suspense, intrigue, drama, humor, poetry, romance ... it's all in these pages ... stories of real people, with real problems, real joys, and a real Savior. All of that, plus some distinctive features to help you see that what happened on these pages is still happening today—that the truths of old are truths for our age.

Features

Life Lessons

To enrich your study, this Bible has some unique features ... some helpful tools to expand your understanding. You'll notice *Life Lessons* in the margins. Each *Life Lesson* contains a *Situation*, *Observation*, *Inspiration*, *Application*, and *Exploration*.

The *Situation* gives a quick look into the context of the chapter: it answers the question, What's going on in this

passage?

The *Observation* goes beneath the action to explain the point of the action. What truth or lesson is noticeable in the action of these people?

The *Inspiration* takes a point or lesson found in the chapter and amplifies it. Excerpted from the writings of Christian authors, these inspirations extend the main point and give it a contemporary message that will be useful in your private devotion or for sharing with a group.

The *Application* brings the message home. “How can I use what I’ve learned in this chapter?” “Is there anything about my life that I should change as a result of what I’ve already learned by reading this?”

The *Exploration* lists other scripture related to the same theme, for further study. Reading the *Exploration* verses provides a strong sense of the Bible as a complete story, rather than just a collection of short stories and lists of rules.

Full-Page Devotional Bible Studies

Scattered throughout the text you will discover full-page devotional Bible Studies. These encouraging pages will reveal what God thinks about you. Use the index to the topical inserts on page ix in the front of this Bible to locate specific topics covered on these pages.

Christ Through the Bible

The *Christ Through the Bible* articles are a helpful tool for understanding how the Bible truly is one story—the story of God’s plan of salvation as fulfilled through his Son, Jesus Christ. These notes help you discover the presence and

attributes of Jesus Christ throughout the Old and New Testament. For example, observe how Jesus is foreshadowed as our high priest in the book of Exodus and how his title as Lamb of God can be seen in Leviticus.

New Life in Christ

The *New Life in Christ* articles help you walk through God's plan of salvation as it unfolds through the Old Testament and is fully revealed with the birth, life, and ministry of Jesus in the New Testament. This series of short articles will also help you explore the path of discipleship, as it delves into aspects of the Christian walk. Let the questions found at the end of each article prompt you to a closer walk with Christ.

He Did This Just for You Verses

These verses reveal more about who Christ is and what he did for you. They will help you personalize God's message and draw closer to your Savior.

New Believer Studies

These short studies will help you learn more about your faith and will answer some of the hard questions that may be on your mind. The studies cover a variety of topics, such as how to know that you're saved, how to pray, how to face temptation, and much more.

Spiritual Growth Verses

These verses cover topics of spiritual growth, such as your

daily walk with God, listening to him, and forgiving others.

“The Big Picture” Reading Plan

This simple 30-day reading plan will introduce you to key passages throughout the New Testament.

“Where to Turn When ...” Index

This list leads you to relevant verses for many of life’s complicated questions and situations.

Reading Program

Designed to inspire you in your daily walk, the study helps are streamlined for ease of use. The comments are quick, tightly written nuggets to give you the most information in the briefest format possible, to assist your search for understanding. How do you use *The Devotional Bible*? The *Life Lessons* coincide with the chapters they address. It is best to read the *Situation* first. Then read the scripture referenced with the *Life Lesson*. Go to the *Observation*—is this the point you understood as you read the action? Move on to the *Inspiration*. If you’re in a class, read and discuss the *Inspiration*, then use the *Application* for further discussion. If you are studying alone, keep a journal of your commitment to new goals suggested by the *Application*.

A Brief Note to Parents and Teachers

This Bible is adaptable to any age group and is especially useful with mixed-age groups. For adults, the margin

information can be used to initiate further study and discussion. For families or in children's classes, they can be used as self-contained devotionals. The *Life Lessons* are particularly useful in demonstrating that people of Bible times encountered similar problems to situations occurring today ... the same hopes, fears, desires, sins, and successes.

The General Editor's Acknowledgments

On the title page of my Bible, I have copied two verses. The first is from [Mark 12:37](#).

The large crowd listened to Jesus with pleasure.

What a compliment! “You ought to go hear this guy speak,” people must have said, “It’s a treat to listen to him.” When Jesus spoke, people listened. And when the people listened, they listened with joy. His message was clear. His stories were stirring, and his point was unforgettable.

What if the same were true today? What if every time Jesus’ words were read, the people “listened with pleasure”? What if people perked up when the Bible was opened? What if people passed out copies of the Bible, saying, “You ought to read what this guy said. It’s a treat”?

Wouldn’t that be great? I know some people who are committed to seeing this happen.

Let me introduce you to Thomas Nelson Publishers. They are more than a publishing house, they are a people with a purpose. Every day they are thinking of ways to make God’s Word more accessible and understandable. This Bible is the product of that desire.

The New Century Version of the Bible is accurate, reliable, and reader-friendly. The language is not so lofty as to be distant, nor so earthy as to be irreverent. The language is the language of today, pure and simple.

This devotional version of the NCV is a library worth of books in one volume. A team of diligent researchers has taken the best from hundreds of books and put it right where you

need it—in the margin of your Bible.

My hat is off to The Livingstone Corporation led by Bruce Barton, Christopher Hudson, Betsy Schmitt, and Dave Veerman. Dave, I especially appreciate your help with the minor prophets. Only God knows the number of hours you poured into this project. But God does know, *he will not forget the work you did and the love you showed for him by helping his people* ([Hebrews 6:10](#)).

I salute my friends at Thomas Nelson and W Publishing Group. What a terrific group! David Moberg deserves special mention. Without your devotion and dedication, this idea would still be that, an idea in a manila folder. Thanks for making it a reality.

Speaking of making ideas reality, Karen Hill does that for me every day. Thanks Karen, for being more than an administrative assistant, you are a lifesaver. You put many good hours into this effort. Thanks so much.

And Denalyn, my wife, what can I say? The reason Solomon had seven hundred wives is because he was searching for someone like you.

One final word of gratitude before you turn the page. A word of thanks to you the reader. I consider you my friend. How can I do that, being that we have never met? Remember I mentioned that I have a couple of verses penned on the title page of my Bible? This is the second,

I am a friend to everyone who fears you, to anyone who obeys your orders ([Psalm 119:63](#)).

You must be a person who fears God, or you wouldn't be reading his Word. You must be a person who obeys his teachings, or you wouldn't be studying them. I applaud your hunger for the Bible. I commend your desire to know his Word.

You are my friend. And for you, my friend, I pray as you study his message.

Max Lucado

How to Study the Bible

by Max Lucado

This is a peculiar book you are holding. Words crafted in another language. Deeds done in a distant era. Events recorded in a far-off land. Counsel offered to a foreign people. This is a peculiar book.

It's surprising that anyone reads it. It's too old. Some of its writings date back five thousand years. It's too bizarre. The book speaks of incredible foods, fires, earthquakes, and people with supernatural abilities. It's too radical. The Bible calls for undying devotion to a carpenter who called himself God's Son.

Logic says this book shouldn't survive. Too old, too bizarre, too radical.

The Bible has been banned, burned, scoffed, and ridiculed. Scholars have mocked it as foolish. Kings have branded it as illegal. A thousand times over it the grave has been dug and the dirge has begun, but somehow the Bible never stays in the grave. Not only has it survived, it has thrived. It is the single most popular book in all of history. It has been the best-selling book in the world for years!

There is no way on earth to explain it. Which perhaps is the only explanation. The answer? The Bible's durability is not found on earth; it is found in heaven. For the millions who have tested its claims and claimed its promises there is but one answer—the Bible is God's book and God's voice.

As you read it, you would be wise to give some thought to two questions. What is the purpose of the Bible? and How do I

study the Bible? Time spent reflecting on these two issues will greatly enhance your Bible study.

What is the purpose of the Bible?

Let the Bible itself answer that question.

Since you were a child you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise. And that wisdom leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus ([2 Timothy 3:15](#)).

The purpose of the Bible? Salvation. God's highest passion is to get his children home. His book, the Bible, describes his plan of salvation. The purpose of the Bible is to proclaim God's plan and passion to save his children.

That is the reason this book has endured through the centuries. It dares to tackle the toughest questions about life. Where do I go after I die? Is there a God? What do I do with my fears? The Bible offers answers to these crucial questions. It is the treasure map that leads us to God's highest treasure, eternal life.

But how do we use the Bible? Countless copies of Scripture sit unread on bookshelves and nightstands simply because people don't know how to read it. What can we do to make the Bible real in our lives?

The clearest answer is found in the words of Jesus.

"Ask," he promised, "and God will give it to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will open for you" ([Matthew 7:7](#)).

The first step in understanding the Bible is asking God to help us. We should read prayerfully. If anyone understands God's Word it is because of God and not the reader.

But the Helper will teach you everything and will cause you to remember all that I told you. The Helper is the Holy

Spirit whom the Father will send in my name ([John 14:26](#)).

Before reading the Bible, pray. Invite God to speak to you. Don't go to Scripture looking for your idea, go searching for his.

Not only should we read the Bible prayerfully, we should read it carefully. *Search, and you will find*, is the pledge. The Bible is not a newspaper to be skimmed but rather a mine to be quarried. *Search for it like silver, and hunt for it like hidden treasure. Then you will understand respect for the Lord, and you will find that you know God ([Proverbs 2:4, 5](#)).*

Any worthy find requires effort. The Bible is no exception. To understand the Bible you don't have to be brilliant, but you must be willing to roll up your sleeves and search.

Be a worker who is not ashamed and who uses the true teaching in the right way ([2 Timothy 2:15](#)).

Here's a practical point. Study the Bible a bit at a time. Hunger is not satisfied by eating twenty-one meals in one sitting once a week. The body needs a steady diet to remain strong. So does the soul. When God sent food to his people in the wilderness, he didn't provide loaves already made. Instead, he sent manna in the shape of *thin flakes, like frost ... on the desert ground ([Exodus 16:14](#)).*

God gave manna in limited portions.

God sends spiritual food the same way. He opens the heavens with just enough nutrients for today's hunger. He provides, *a command here, a command there. A rule here, a rule there. A little lesson here, a little lesson there ([Isaiah 28:10](#)).*

Don't be discouraged if your reading reaps a small harvest. Some days a lesser portion is all that is needed. What is important is to search every day for that day's message. A

steady diet of God's Word over a lifetime builds a healthy soul and mind.

A little girl returned from her first day at school. Her mom asked, "Did you learn anything?" "Apparently not enough," the girl responded. "I have to go back tomorrow and the next day and the next ..."

Such is the case with learning. And such is the case with Bible study. Understanding comes little by little over a lifetime.

There is a third step in understanding the Bible. After the asking and seeking comes the knocking. After you ask and search, then knock.

Knock, and the door will open for you ([Matthew 7:7](#)).

To knock is to stand at God's door. To make yourself available. To climb the steps, cross the porch, stand at the doorway, and volunteer. Knocking goes beyond the realm of thinking and into the realm of acting.

To knock is to ask, What can I do? How do I obey? Where can I go?

It's one thing to know what to do. It's another to do it. But for those who do it, those who choose to obey, a special reward awaits them.

The truly happy people are those who carefully study God's perfect law that makes people free, and they continue to study it. They do not forget what they heard, but they obey what God's teaching says. Those who do this will be made happy ([James 1:25](#)).

What a promise. Happiness comes to those who do what they read! It's the same with medicine. If you only read the label but ignore the pills, it won't help. It's the same with food. If you only read the recipe but never cook, you won't be fed. And it's the same with the Bible. If you only read the words

but never obey, you'll never know the joy God has promised.

Ask. Search. Knock. Simple, isn't it? Why don't you give it a try? If you do, you'll see why you are holding the most remarkable book in history.

[Topical Index to the Full-Page Bible Studies](#)

[Abundant Life](#)

A friend of the late American jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes asked him why he had taken up the study of Greek at the age of ninety-four. Holmes replied, “Well, my good sir, it’s now or never.” When J. C. Penney was ninety-five years old, he affirmed, “My eyesight may be getting weaker, but my vision is increasing.”

Growing old can be dangerous. The trail is treacherous and the pitfalls are many. One is wise to be prepared. You know it’s coming. It’s not like God kept the process a secret. It’s not like you are blazing a trail as you grow older. It’s not as if no one has ever done it before. Look around you. You have ample opportunity to prepare and ample case studies to consider. If growing old catches you by surprise, don’t blame God. He gave you plenty of warning. He also gave you plenty of advice.

“Those who try to hold on to their lives will give up true life. Those who give up their lives for me will hold on to true life” ([Matthew 10:39](#)).

“There are two ways to view life,” Jesus is saying, “those who protect it or those who pursue it. The wisest are not the ones with the most years in their lives, but the most life in their years.”

There is a rawness and a wonder to life. Pursue it. Hunt for

it. Sell out to get it. Don't listen to the whines of those who have settled for a second-rate life and want you to do the same so they won't feel guilty. Your goal is not to live long; it's to live.

Time slips. Days pass. Years fade. And life ends. And what we came to do must be done while there is time.

We would think it bizarre for a traveler not to be prepared for the end of the journey. We would pity the poor passenger who never read his itinerary. We'd be bewildered by someone who thought the purpose of the trip was the trip.

Others, however, are anticipating the destination. I hope you are. And I hope you'll be ready when you get home. For you, age is no enemy. Age is a mile-marker—a gentle reminder that home has never been so near.

STUDY GUIDES

READ ECCLESIASTES

- Describe a person you know who has aged gracefully.
- What is the difference between living long and really living?
- Why do you think so many people fight the natural aging process?
- What are some fears people have about growing old?
- What criterion do you think we should use in looking back over a lifetime and evaluating its worth?
- What are the “how to’s” for enjoying the life God gives us?
- Do you think old age gives you more or less ability to enjoy life?
- What do you fear most about aging? Why?
- What stage of life do you think is the best and which is the most challenging? Why?
- What can we do when we feel discouraged about growing old?

Adopted

Can you imagine prospective parents saying, “We’d like to adopt Johnny, but first we want to know a few things. Does he have a house to live in? Does he have money for tuition? Does he have a ride to school every morning and clothes to wear every day? Can he prepare his own meals and mend his own clothes?”

No agency would stand for such talk. Its representative would lift her hand and say, “Wait a minute. You don’t understand. You don’t adopt Johnny because of what he has; you adopt him because of what he needs. He needs a home.”

The same is true with God. He doesn’t adopt us because of what we have. He doesn’t give us his name because of our wit or wallet or good attitude ... adoption is something we receive, not something we earn.

We are welcome in God’s house because we have been adopted by the owner. God has adopted you. God sought you, found you, signed the papers, and took you home.

It would be enough if God just cleansed your name, but he does more. He gives you his name. It would be enough if God just set you free, but he does more. He takes you home.... God adopted you simply because he wanted to. You were in his good will and pleasure. Knowing full well the trouble you would be and the price he would pay, he signed his name next to yours and changed your name to his and took you home. Your Abba adopted you and became your father.

STUDY GUIDES

READ ROMANS [8:12-17](#)

- How does salvation compare with adoption?
- List some advantages of being God's child rather than just his creation.
- How has God been like a good father to you?
- How would your life be different if you didn't belong to God?
- In what ways have you tried to work for your "sonship" rather than just accepting your adoption into God's family?
- Why do people expect punishment rather than grace when they think about returning to God?
- What is our inheritance as God's children?
- In what ways do we share our inheritance with Jesus Christ?
- As children of God, how do we share in Christ's sufferings?

Almighty God

Your achievements, however noble they may be, are not important. Your credentials, as starry as they may be, are of no concern. God is the foundation of this house. The key question in life is not “How strong am I?” but rather “How strong is God?” Focus on his strength, not yours. Occupy yourself with the nature of God, not the size of your biceps.

That’s what Moses did. Or at least that’s what God told Moses to do. Remember the conversation at the burning bush? The tone was set in the first sentence. “Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground” ([Exodus 3:5](#)). With these eleven words Moses is enrolled in a class on God. Immediately the roles are defined. God is holy. Approaching him on even a quarter-inch of leather is too pompous. And as we read further, we discover that no time is spent convincing Moses what Moses can do, but much time is spent explaining to Moses what God can do.

The strength of Moses is never considered. No pep talk is given, no pats on the back are offered. Not one word is spoken to recruit Moses. But many words are used to reveal God. The strength of Moses is not the issue; the strength of God is.

STUDY GUIDES

READ EXODUS [3:1-6](#)

- What have been the “burning bushes” of your life, the things that have caught your attention and directed your focus Godward?
- Think of a time when you felt you were standing on holy ground. What was your response to the holiness of that moment?
- Moses hid his face out of reverence and fear of God.
- What do believers do today to show reverence?
- Why is there a temptation to focus on our own strength rather than God’s?
- How can you see God’s strength in the ways he meets your needs?
- How does the fact that God is, make the world a different place?
- How can God’s strength work through you?
- What have you been trying to do in your own strength rather than in God’s?

Anger of God

We have to see the mess we are in before we can appreciate the God we have. Before presenting the grace of God, we must understand the wrath of God.

Many don't understand God's anger because they confuse the wrath of God with the wrath of man. The two have little in common. Human anger is typically self-driven and prone to explosions of temper and violent deeds. We get ticked off because we've been overlooked, neglected, or cheated. This is the anger of man. It is not, however, the anger of God.

God doesn't get angry because he doesn't get his way. He gets angry because disobedience always results in self-destruction. What kind of father sits by and watches his child hurt himself?

What kind of God would do the same? Do we think he giggles at adultery or snickers at murder? Do you think he looks the other way when we produce television talk shows based on perverse pleasures? Does he shake his head and say, "Humans will be humans"?

I don't think so. Mark it down and underline it in red. God is rightfully angry. God is a holy God. Our sins are an affront to his holiness. His eyes "are too good to look at evil; [he] cannot stand to see those who do wrong" ([Habakkuk 1:13](#)).

God is angry at the evil that ruins his children.

The question is not, "How dare a loving God be angry?" but rather, "How could a loving God feel anything less?"

STUDY GUIDES

READ ROMANS [1:18-20](#)

- When have you seen righteous anger?
- Describe in your own words the difference between God's anger and human anger.
- Compare God's discipline to the way a parent disciplines a child.
- What does it mean to you that a God powerful enough to destroy us, loves us enough to discipline us?
- What feelings or attitudes keep us from returning to God after we have suffered the consequences of our own sin?
- If we know that sin destroys us, why do we keep on sinning?
- In what ways does God's anger lead us to his grace?
- In the last few weeks, how has God helped you resist temptation?

[Approach the Throne](#)

Christ meets you outside the throne room, takes you by the hand, and walks you into the presence of God. Upon entrance we find grace, not condemnation; mercy, not punishment. Where we would never be granted an audience with the king, we are now welcomed into his presence.

If you are a parent you understand this. If a child you don't know appears on your doorstep and asks to spend the night, what would you do? Likely you would ask him his name, where he lives, find out why he is roaming the streets, and contact his parents.

On the other hand, if a youngster enters your house escorted by your child, that child is welcome. The same is true with God. By becoming friends with the Son, we gain access to the Father.

Jesus promised, "All who stand before others and say they believe in me, I will say before my Father in heaven that they belong to me" ([Matthew 10:32](#)). Because we are friends of his Son, we have entrance to the throne room. He ushers us into that "blessing of God's grace that we now enjoy" ([Romans 5:2](#)).

STUDY GUIDES

READ EPHESIANS [2:13-22](#)

- Describe a time when you received something you didn't think you deserved. How did you feel?
- Think of a time when someone has vouched for you. What did you feel you owed that person?
- How has Christ's action on your behalf impacted your life?
- How would you describe to a friend the way to find peace with God?
- What does it mean to you to be the dwelling place of the Spirit of God?
- If we have access to God, what keeps us from interacting with him?
- How does our citizenship in heaven affect our life on earth?
- List some things that keep you from enjoying God's presence.
- What concrete action can you take to draw closer to God?

Bitterness

Black and cold, bitterness denies easy escape. The sides are slippery with resentment. A floor of muddy anger stills the feet. The stench of betrayal fills the air and stings the eyes. A cloud of self-pity blocks the view of the tiny exit above.

Step in and look at the prisoners. Victims are chained to the walls. Victims of betrayal. Victims of abuse. Victims of the government, the system, the military, the world. They lift their chains as they lift their voices and wail. Loud and long they wail.

They grumble. They're angry at others who got what they didn't.

They sulk. The world is against them...

You can choose, like many, to chain yourself to your hurt.

Or you can choose, like some, to put away your hurts before they become hates. You can choose to go to the party. You have a place there. Your name is beside a plate. If you are a child of God, no one can take away your sonship.

Which is precisely what the father said to the older son. "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours..."

And that is precisely what the Father says to you. How does God deal with your bitter heart? He reminds you that what you have is more important than what you don't have. You still have your relationship with God. No one can take that. No one can touch it.

STUDY GUIDES

READ LUKE [15:11-32](#)

- Think of a time when you acted out of frustration and bitterness. If you could do it over, how would you act?
- When you've been treated bitterly, how did you respond?
- What does our bitterness say about our trust in God?
- What perspective helps you out of a bitter attitude?
- The older son in the parable of the prodigal son became bitter. Describe his logic, as you imagine it.
- What advice would you give him?
- Describe the process by which someone becomes bitter.
- What bitterness do you need to lay at the altar?

Bride of Christ

Look long enough in the eyes of our Savior and, there you will see a bride.... He sees her,he awaits her,he longs for her.

And who is that bride? Who is this beauty who occupies the heart of Jesus?

You are. You have captured the heart of God. "As a man rejoices over his new wife, so your God will rejoice over you" ([Isaiah 62:5](#)).

The challenge is to remember that. To meditate on it. To focus on it. To allow his love to change the way you look at you.

You have been chosen by Christ. You are released from your old life in your old house, and he has claimed you as his beloved. "Then where is he?" you might ask. "Why hasn't he come?"

There is only one answer. His bride is not ready. She is still being prepared.

Engaged people are obsessed with preparation. The right dress. The right weight. The right hair and the right tux. They want everything to be right. Why? So their intended will marry them? No. Just the opposite. They want to look their best because their intended is marrying them.

The same is true for us. We want to look our best for Christ. We want our hearts to be pure and our thoughts to be clean. We want our faces to shine with grace and our eyes to sparkle with love. We want to be prepared.

Why? In hopes that he will love us? No. Just the opposite, because he already does.

You are spoken for. You are engaged, set apart, called out, a holy bride. Forbidden waters hold nothing for you. You have

been chosen for his castle. Don't settle for one-night stands in the arms of a stranger. Be obsessed with your wedding date. Guard against forgetfulness. Be intolerant of memory lapses. Write yourself notes. Memorize verses. Do whatever you need to do to remember. " Aim at what is in heaven. Think only about the things in heaven" ([Colossians 3:1-2](#)). You are engaged to royalty, and your Prince is coming to take you home.

STUDY GUIDES

READ MATTHEW [25:1-13](#)

- If someone asked you why Jesus would come back to earth for you, how would you respond?
- What keeps us from believing that God longs to be with us?
- In what ways does the church in today's society need to be more prepared to meet her groom, Christ?
- What kind of life do we need to live to be ready for Jesus, our spiritual bridegroom?
- For what reasons do you think God chose to keep the time of Christ's return a secret?
- Does the unexpected nature of Christ's return make you more wary or less wary about his coming?
- Describe the ways that we can keep watch for Christ's return, even though the timing will be unexpected.
- In what ways do you think we can best prepare for seeing Jesus?

Brokenness

There is a window in your heart through which you can see God. Once upon a time that window was clear. Your view of God was crisp. You could see God as vividly as you could see a gentle valley or hillside. The glass was clear, the pane unbroken.

Then, suddenly, the window cracked. A pebble broke the window. A pebble of pain.

Perhaps the stone struck when you were a child and a parent left home—forever. Maybe the rock hit in adolescence when your heart was broken. Maybe you made it into adulthood before the window was cracked. But then the pebble came.

Whatever the pebble's form, the result was the same—a shattered window. The pebble missed into the pane and shattered it. The crash echoed down the halls of your heart ... and suddenly God was not so easy to see. The view that had been so crisp had changed. You turned to see God, and his figure was distorted. It was hard to see him through the pain. It was hard to see him through the fragments of hurt.

You were puzzled. God wouldn't allow something like this to happen, would he? Tragedy and travesty weren't on the agenda of the One you had seen, were they? Had you been fooled? Had you been blind?

The moment the pebble struck, the glass became a reference point for you. From then on, there was life before the pain and life after the pain. Before your pain, the view was clear; God seemed so near. After your pain, well, he was harder to see. He seemed a bit distant ... harder to perceive. Your pain distorted the view— not eclipsed it, but distorted it.

STUDY GUIDES

READ PSALM [77:1-9](#)

- What kinds of circumstances cause such pain in our lives that our perception of God is altered?
- Why do painful circumstances sometimes make us doubt God's good intentions toward us?
- Describe the path that you think is necessary to fix a pain-distorted view of God.
- What are some reasons we sometimes assume life should be pain-free?
- What are the emotions we feel when we face great pain in life?
- What else would you compare pain to besides a storm?
- How do you get perspective when you wonder, "Is God doing this to me, or is this just life happening?"
- How long do you think it takes to restore a pain-distorted view of God?
- What kind of painful storm are you riding through right now?

Change

Where did we get the idea we can't change? From whence come statements such as, "It's just my nature to worry," or "I'll always be pessimistic. I'm just that way," or "I have a bad temper. I can't help the way I react"? Who says? Would we make similar statements about our bodies? "It's just my nature to have a broken leg. I can't do anything about it." Of course not. If our bodies malfunction, we seek help. Shouldn't we do the same with our hearts? Shouldn't we seek aid for our sour attitudes? Can't we request treatment for our selfish tirades? Of course we can. Jesus can change our hearts. He wants us to have a heart like his.

Can you imagine a better offer?

The heart of Jesus was pure...

Jesus' heart was peaceful...

His heart was purposeful...

His heart was spiritual...

God's plan for you is nothing short of a new heart. If you were a car, God would want control of your engine. If you were a computer, God would claim the software and the hard drive. If you were an airplane, he'd take his seat in the cockpit. But you are a person, so God wants to change your heart.

STUDY GUIDES

READ COLOSSIANS [3:12-17](#)

- List several excuses people typically give for not changing.
- To what extent are we able to fix or change ourselves apart from God?
- What kinds of tools does God use to make our hearts more like Jesus' heart?
- How does Christ's death on the cross enable us to change?
- List some practical benefits of living good and holy lives.
- How can a person figure out what he or she is holding back from God?
- What is one specific change you can make in your daily routine to become more like Christ?
- What happens to us when we surrender our hearts to God?
- What motivates you to continue striving to imitate Jesus?

Choice

He placed one scoop of clay upon another until a form lay lifeless on the ground....

All were silent as the Creator reached in himself and removed something yet unseen. "It's called 'choice.' The seed of choice."

Creation stood in silence and gazed upon the lifeless form.

An angel spoke, "But what if he ..."

"What if he chooses not to love?" the Creator finished. "Come, I will show you."

Unbound by today, God and the angel walked into the realm of tomorrow....

The angel gasped at what he saw. Spontaneous love. Voluntary devotion. Never had he seen anything like these.... The angel stood speechless as they passed through centuries of repugnance. Never had he seen such filth. Rotten hearts. Ruptured promises. Forgotten loyalties ...

The Creator walked on in time, further and further into the future, until he stood by a tree. A tree that would be fashioned into a cradle. Even then he could smell the hay that would surround him....

"Wouldn't it be easier to not plant the seed? Wouldn't it be easier to not give the choice?"

"It would," the Creator spoke slowly. "But to remove the choice is to remove the love."

... They stepped into the Garden again. The Maker looked earnestly at the clay creation.

A monsoon of love swelled up within him. He had died for the creation before he had made him. God's form bent over the sculptured face and breathed. Dust stirred on the lips of the

new one. The chest rose, cracking the red mud. The cheeks fleshened. A finger moved. And an eye opened.

But more incredible than the moving of the flesh was the stirring of the spirit. Those who could see the unseen gasped.

Perhaps it was the wind who said it first. Perhaps what the star saw that moment is what has made it blink ever since. Maybe it was left to an angel to whisper it:

“It looks like ... it appears so much like ... it is him!”

The angel wasn't speaking of the face, the features, or the body. He was looking inside at the soul.

“It's eternal!” gasped another.

Within the man, God had placed a divine seed. A seed of his self. The God of might had created earth's mightiest. The Creator had created, not a creature, but another creator. And the One who had chosen to love had created one who could love in return.

Now it's our choice.

STUDY GUIDES

READ GENESIS [2:4-25](#)

- What part of God's creation fascinates you the most?
- Why did God create the heavens and earth?
- What is the significance of Adam coming from the dust of the ground and God breathing life into him?
- What does creation reveal about God?
- What can we learn about ourselves from creation?
- In what ways do you see glimpses of God in the people he created?
- What kinds of things stand in the way of your choice to love and obey God?
- What most helps you to make the choice to be in relationship with God?

Confession

Perhaps we didn't take money but we've taken advantage or taken control or taken leave of our senses and then, like the thief, we've taken off. Dashing down alleys of deceit. Hiding behind buildings of work to be done or deadlines to be met. Though we try to act normal, anyone who looks closely at us can see we are on the lam: Eyes darting and hands fidgeting, we chatter nervously committed to the coverup, we scheme and squirm, changing the topic and changing direction. We don't want anyone to know the truth, especially God.

Am I missing the mark when I say that many of us attend church on the run? Am I out of line when I say many of us spend life on the run?

Am I overstating the case when I announce, "Grace means you don't have to run anymore!" It's the truth. Grace means it's finally safe to turn ourselves in.

Confession does for the soul what preparing the land does for the field. Before the farmer sows the seed he works the acreage, removing the rocks and pulling the stumps. He knows that seed grows better if the land is prepared. Confession is the act of inviting God to walk the acreage of our hearts. "There is a rock of greed over here, Father; I can't budge it. And that tree of guilt near the fence? Its roots are long and deep. And may I show you some dry soil, too crusty for seed?" God's seed grows better if the soil of the heart is cleared.

And so the Father and the Son walk the field together; digging and pulling, preparing the heart for fruit. Confession invites the Father to work the soil of the soul.

STUDY GUIDES

READ 1 JOHN [1:8-10](#)

- Think of a time when you felt very guilty about something. How did your guilty conscience affect your behavior?
- How does chronic guilt affect us physically?
- If God knows us better than we know ourselves and is eager to forgive us, what keeps us from confessing our sin to him?
- Describe the freedom that confession brings.
- Why is it so difficult to confess our sins to one another?
- What criteria do most people follow to determine which sins to openly confess to others?
- How do we relate to God and other people differently when we have confessed and received forgiveness?
- Why do people say, “Admitting your problem is the first step to overcoming it”?
- Think of the most difficult confession you’ve ever made. What did you learn from that experience?
- How can you practice confession on a more regular basis?

Contentment

Satisfied? That is one thing we are not. We are not satisfied.

We push back from the Thanksgiving table and pat our round bellies. “I’m satisfied,” we declare. But look at us a few hours later, back in the kitchen picking the meat from the bone.

We wake up after a good night’s rest and hop out of bed. We couldn’t go back to sleep if someone paid us. We are satisfied—for a while. But look at us a dozen or so hours later, crawling back in the sheets.

We take a vacation of a lifetime. For years we planned. For years we saved. And off we go. We satiate ourselves with sun, fun, and good food. But we are not even on the way home before we dread the end of the trip and begin planning another.

We are not satisfied.

As a child we say, “If only I were a teenager.” As a teen we say, “If only I were an adult.” As an adult, “If only I were married.” As a spouse, “If only I had kids.” As a parent, “If only my kids were grown.” In an empty house, “If only the kids would visit.” As a retiree in the rocking chair with stiff joints and fading sight, “If only I were a child again.”

We are not satisfied. Contentment is a difficult virtue. Why?

Because there is nothing on earth that can satisfy our deepest longing. We long to see God. The leaves of life are rustling with the rumor that we will—and we won’t be satisfied until we do.

STUDY GUIDES

READ 1 TIMOTHY [6:6-19](#)

- Describe what brings you the most happiness in life.
- Why is it important to realize that our earthly goods will be worthless in eternity?
- What is the danger in seeking material wealth?
- How can a person find true contentment?
- Why is it difficult to be satisfied with what we have?
- In what way can a desire for more money destroy a person?
- Why is it tempting to trust in our wealth, instead of God?
- On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being very content), how content are you with what you have?

Details

What matters to you, matters to God.

You probably think that's true when it comes to the big stuff. When it comes to the major-league difficulties like death, disease, sin, and disaster—you know that God cares.

But what about the smaller things? What about grouchy bosses or flat tires or lost dogs? What about broken dishes, late flights, toothaches, or a crashed hard disk? Do these matter to God?

He's got a universe to run. He's got the planets to keep balanced and presidents and kings to watch over. He's got wars to worry with and famines to fix.

“Who am I to tell him about my ingrown toenail?”

I'm glad you asked. Let me tell you who you are. In fact, let me proclaim who you are.

You are an heir of God.

You are eternal.

You have a crown.

You are a holy priest.

You were chosen before the creation.

But more than any of the above—more significant than any title or position—is the simple fact that you are God's child. “The Father has loved us so much that we are called children of God. And we really are his children” ([1 John 3:1](#)).

I love that last phrase! “We really are his children.” It's as if John knew some of us would shake our heads and say, “Naw, not me. Mother Teresa, maybe. Billy Graham, all right. But not me.” If those are your feelings, John added that phrase for you.

“We really are his children.”

As a result, if something is important to you, it's important

to God.

So go ahead. Tell God what hurts. Talk to him. He won't turn you away. He won't think it's silly. "For our high priest is able to understand our weaknesses. When he lived on earth, he was tempted in every way that we are, but he did not sin. Let us, then, feel very sure that we can come before God's throne where there is grace" ([Hebrews 4:15–16](#)).

Does God care about the little things in our lives? You better believe it.

If it matters to you, it matters to him.

STUDY GUIDES

READ MATTHEW [6:25–32](#)

- Describe one seemingly insignificant thing that can wreck your entire day?
- Name two things that you really, really believe might be too small for God to be concerned with.
- Which of life's basic needs do you think people worry about the most?
- Why is it sometimes difficult to believe that God cares about the small details of our lives?
- If God knows our needs, why do we worry about them?
- Explain what it means to you to know that you were chosen by God before creation.
- How does believing that you matter to God impact your attitude about your basic needs?
- What amazes you the most about God's concern for your life?
- If you were a child sitting on God's lap, what hurts would you tell him about?

Disappointment

If God is good, why do I hurt so bad?

Though the circumstances have changed, the questions haven't. They are asked anytime the faithful suffer the consequences of the faithless. Anytime a person takes a step in the right direction, only to have her feet knocked out from under her, anytime a person does a good deed but suffers evil results, anytime a person takes a stand, only to end up flat on his face ... the questions fall like rain.

"If God is really there, why am I here?"

"What did I do to deserve this?"

"Why are the righteous persecuted?"

Does God sometimes sit on his hands? Does God sometimes choose to do nothing? Does God sometimes opt for silence even when I'm screaming my loudest?

If you've asked for a mate, but you are still sleeping alone ... if you've asked for a child, but your womb stays barren ... if you've asked for healing, but are still hurting ... don't think God isn't listening. He is. And he is answering requests you are not even making.

STUDY GUIDES

READ ROMANS [5:1-8](#)

- How would you answer the question, “Why is life so unfair?”
- What helps you keep going when life is unfair?
- What unfair treatment did Christ endure? Why?
- How can Christ’s example help us endure unfair hardships?
- What was the goal Christ had in mind that helped him endure his suffering?
- What kind of mindset can help carry us through life’s difficulties?
- Why does God allow the godly to suffer?
- What have you prayed for that you feel has not been heard?
- What can you do this week as a step of faith that God is still listening?

Extending God's Grace

God's judgment has never been a problem for me. In fact, it always seemed right. Lightning bolts on Sodom. Fire on Gomorrah. Good job, God. Egyptians swallowed in the Red Sea. They had it coming. Forty years of wandering to loosen the stiff necks of the Israelites? Would've done it myself. Ananias and Sapphira? You bet.

Discipline is easy for me to swallow. Logical to assimilate. Manageable and appropriate.

But God's grace? Anything but.

Examples? How much time do you have?

David the psalmist becomes David the voyeur, but by God's grace becomes David the psalmist again.

Peter denied Christ before he preached Christ.

Zacchaeus, the crook. The cleanest part of his life was the money he'd laundered. But Jesus still had time for him.

The thief on the cross: hellbent and hung-out-to-die one minute, heaven-bound and smiling the next.

Story after story. Prayer after prayer. Surprise after surprise.

If God can tolerate my mistakes, can't I tolerate the mistakes of others? If God can overlook my errors, can't I overlook the errors of others? If God allows me with my foibles and failures to call him Father, shouldn't I extend the same grace to others?

STUDY GUIDES

READ TITUS [3:3-8](#)

- Describe a person in your life who has shown you the grace of God in a practical way.
- In what ways is our salvation an act of generosity on God's part?
- Having received God's love and mercy, why is it still difficult at times to show love and mercy to the people around us?
- Why do we get a sense of satisfaction when somebody gets what's coming to them?
- Why is it often easier to show judgment than grace?
- Why do we sometimes tend to forget what God saved us from?
- What three words best describe God's love for you?
- Describe a world where everyone gives someone else the break they hope to receive.
- To whom do you need to show God's grace this week?

Family

It's like a crammed and jammed elevator. People thrust together by chance on a short journey, saying as little as possible. The only difference is you'll eventually get off the elevator and never see these folks again—not so with the difficult relative. Family reunions, Christmas, Thanksgiving, weddings, funerals—they'll be there.

Does Jesus have anything to say about dealing with difficult relatives? Is there an example of Jesus bringing peace to a painful family? Yes, there is.

His own.

It may surprise you to know that Jesus had a difficult family. It may surprise you to know that Jesus had a family at all! You may not be aware that Jesus had brothers and sisters. He did. Quoting Jesus' hometown critics, Mark wrote, "[Jesus] is just the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters are here with us" ([Mark 6:3](#)).

And it may surprise you to know that his family was less than perfect. They were. If your family doesn't appreciate you, take heart, neither did Jesus'.

It's worth noting that he didn't try to control his family's behavior, nor did he let their behavior control his. He didn't demand that they agree with him. He didn't sulk when they insulted him. He didn't make it his mission to try to please them.

When Jesus' brothers didn't share his convictions, he didn't try to force them. He recognized that his spiritual family could provide what his physical family didn't. If Jesus himself couldn't force his family to share his convictions, what makes

you think you can force yours?

I can't assure you that your family will ever give you the blessing you seek, but I know God will. Let God give you what your family doesn't. If your earthly father doesn't affirm you, then let your heavenly Father take his place.

STUDY GUIDES

READ MARK [3:20-35](#)

- What circumstances or situations make family gatherings stressful?
- List several reasons why family relationships can be so challenging.
- How can jealousy divide and destroy families?
- How can having different convictions than members of your family cause strife and tension?
- List several things you expect to receive from your family.
- In what ways have Christian friends become like family members to you?
- How are our expectations different with friends than with family members?
- Describe what you believe is your responsibility to your family.
- How can you look to God to fulfill the needs that your family has not met in your life?

Fear

Faith is often the child of fear.

Fear propelled Peter out of the boat. He'd ridden these waves before. He knew what these storms could do. He'd heard the stories. He'd seen the wreckage. He knew the widows. He knew the storm could kill. And he wanted out...

Look into his eyes tonight and see fear—a suffocating, heart-racing fear of a man who has no way out.

But out of this fear would be born an act of faith, for faith is often the child of fear.

If Peter had seen Jesus walking on the water during a calm, peaceful day, do you think that he would have walked out to him?

Nor do I.

Had the lake been carpet smooth and the journey pleasant, do you think that Peter would have begged Jesus to take him on a stroll across the top of the water? Doubtful.

But give a man a choice between sure death and a crazy chance, and he'll take the chance ... every time.

Great acts of faith are seldom born out of calm calculation.

It wasn't logic that caused Moses to raise his staff on the bank of the Red Sea.

It wasn't medical research that convinced Naaman to dip seven times in the river.

It wasn't common sense that caused Paul to abandon the Law and embrace grace.

And it wasn't a confident committee that prayed in a small room in Jerusalem for Peter's release from prison. It was a fearful, desperate, band of backed-into-a-corner believers. It was a church with no options. A congregation of have-nots

pleading for help.

And never were they stronger.

At the beginning of every act of faith, there is often a seed of fear.

STUDY GUIDES

READ MATTHEW [14:24-31](#)

- Describe a time when something very unexpected terrified you.
- In what ways do you think our desperation fuels our faith?
- Describe the ways that fear can both prompt our faith and destroy our faith.
- What kinds of things do you fear in life?
- What convinces you, as Peter was convinced, that getting to God is better than sitting in your fear?
- As you compare your fears to Peter's fear for safety, what would be your equivalent of walking on water (that risk you would take to get to where God is)?
- What do you think Peter brought out of the storm experience that the other disciples (who stayed in the boat) didn't?
- What does prayer have to do with our ability to bring God into the midst of our fears?

Fruit of the Spirit

For the next twelve hours I will be exposed to the day's demands. It is now that I must make a choice. Because of Calvary, I'm free to choose. And so I choose.

I choose love

No occasion justifies hatred; no injustice warrants bitterness.

I choose love. Today I will love God and what God loves.

I choose joy

I will invite my God to be the God of circumstance.

I choose peace

I will live forgiven. I will forgive so that I may live.

I choose patience

I will overlook the inconveniences of the world. Instead of cursing the one who takes my place, I'll invite him to do so.

I choose kindness

I will be kind to the poor, for they are alone. Kind to the rich, for they are afraid. And kind to the unkind, for such is how God has treated me.

I choose goodness

I will go without a dollar before I take a dishonest one.

I choose faithfulness

Today I will keep my promises.

I choose gentleness

Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle.

I choose self-control

I refuse to let what will rot, rule the eternal.

I will be drunk only by joy.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. To these I commit my

day. If I succeed, I will give thanks. If I fail, I will seek his grace. And then, when this day is done, I will place my head on my pillow and rest.

STUDY GUIDES

READ GALATIANS [5:19-25](#)

- What personal challenges threaten your ability to maintain a positive attitude on a daily basis?
- What three choices would make the world a better place if every person made those choices each morning?
- When did someone else's attitude make all the difference for you?
- How did Jesus exemplify the attitudes described in this Scripture?
- What attitudes often stand in the way of living a life filled with the fruits of the Spirit?
- What words would you use to describe Christ's attitude while he lived on earth?
- How does your choice of attitude at the beginning of the day affect the remainder of it?
- In your own words, what does it mean to have a servant attitude?
- What spiritual attitudes are the most difficult for you to maintain?
- To live the kind of life described above, what kind of choices would you have to make every day?

God Listens

You and I live in a loud world. To get someone's attention is no easy task. He must be willing to set everything aside to listen; turn down the radio, turn away from the monitor, turn the corner of the page and set down the book. When someone is willing to silence everything else so he can hear us clearly, it is a privilege. A rare privilege, indeed.

You can talk to God because God listens. Your voice matters in heaven. He takes you very seriously. When you enter his presence, the attendants turn to you to hear your voice. No need to fear that you will be ignored. Even if you stammer or stumble, even if what you have to say impresses no one, it impresses God, and he listens. He listens to the painful plea of the elderly in the rest home. He listens to the gruff confession of the death-row inmate. When the alcoholic begs for mercy, when the spouse seeks guidance, when the businessman steps off the street into the chapel, God listens.

Intently. Carefully. The prayers are honored as precious jewels ... your words do not stop until they reach the very throne of God.

Your prayers move God to change the world. You may not understand the mystery of prayer. You don't need to. But this much is clear: Actions in heaven begin when someone prays on earth. What an amazing thought!

STUDY GUIDES

READ JAMES [5:13–18](#)

- How do you respond to the statement, “Your voice matters in heaven”?
- If there was a how-to manual about prayer, what do you think would be the first direction?
- What does the act of prayer accomplish in your life?
- How is praying to God like talking with a friend?
- In what ways does praying to God benefit you much differently than talking with a friend?
- What do you find difficult to understand about prayer?
- If you could ask God something directly about prayer, what would it be?
- What usually prompts you to pray?
- Why don’t we pray even though we believe that praying will make a difference?

God's Presence

Their question—What hope do we have of surviving a stormy night?

My question—Where is God when his world is stormy?

Doubtstorms: turbulent days when the enemy is too big, the task too great, the future too bleak, and the answers too few.

Every so often a storm will come and I'll look up into the blackening sky and say, "God, a little light, please?"

The light came for the disciples. A figure came to them walking on the water. It wasn't what they expected. Perhaps they were looking for angels to descend or heaven to open. Maybe they were listening for a divine proclamation to still the storm. We don't know what they were looking for. But one thing is for sure, they weren't looking for Jesus to come walking on the water ... and since Jesus came in a way they didn't expect, they almost missed seeing the answer to their prayers.

And unless we look, and listen closely, we risk making the same mistake. God's lights in our dark nights are as numerous as the stars, if only we'll look for them.

"When Jesus comes," the disciples in the boat may have thought, "he'll split the sky. The sea will be calm. The clouds will disperse."

"When God comes," we doubters think, "all pain will flee. Life will be tranquil. No questions will remain."

And because we look for the bonfire, we miss the candle. Because we listen for the shout, we miss the whisper.

But it is in burnished candles that God comes, and through whispered promises he speaks: "When you doubt, look

around; I am closer than you think.”

STUDY GUIDES

READ MATTHEW [14:25-33](#)

- What are the tough questions we face when we're dealing with doubt?
- Describe a time when God has come to you or someone you know in a period of darkness.
- On what do we base our expectations of how God will help us?
- When Jesus walked on the water, why do you think Peter wanted to go to Jesus on the water rather than asking Jesus to come to him?
- How do you think faith enables miracles such as Peter standing on water?
- After having witnessed Jesus' power and miracles, why do you think the disciples were still amazed when he worked a miracle?
- What kinds of things make you doubt God?
- What are your expectations of how God will meet you in life?

God's Workmanship

If we don't acknowledge God, we are flotsam in the universe. At best we are developed animals. At worst we are rearranged space dust.

With God in your world, you aren't an accident or an incident; you are a gift to the world, a divine work of art, signed by God.

One of the finest gifts I ever received is a football signed by thirty former professional quarterbacks. There is nothing unique about this ball. For all I know it was bought at a discount sports store. What makes it unique is the signatures.

The same is true with us. In the scheme of nature Homo sapiens are not unique. We aren't the only creatures with flesh and hair and blood and hearts. What makes us special is not our bodies but the signature of God on our lives. We are his works of art. We are created in his image to do good deeds. We are significant, not because of what we do, but because of whose we are.

Who has more reason to worship than the astronomer who has seen the stars? Than the surgeon who has held a heart? Than the oceanographer who has pondered the depths? The more we know, the more we should be amazed.

STUDY GUIDES

READ PSALM [139:13-16](#)

- If someone told you that humanity is not worth any more than the sum total of the chemicals required to form our bodies, how would you respond?
- What parts of creation most convince you that there is a Creator?
- What evidence of God's signature do you see on your life?
- Why is it sometimes difficult to value ourselves as God's creation?
- What difference does it make in your everyday life to know that God has ordained all of your days?
- What images or things rather than God do people in our society worship?
- In what ways does our society care for creation more than for the God who created it?
- What evidence of this kind of idolatry do you see around you?
- In what ways do you think God wants to be worshiped by his creation?

Good Enough?

One would think that the Creator would not be easily impressed. But something about this woman brought a sparkle to his eyes and, most likely, a smile to his face.

The woman is desperate. Her daughter is demon-possessed.

The Canaanite woman has no right to ask anything of Jesus. She is not a Jew. She is not a disciple. She offers no money ... But that doesn't slow her down. She persists in her plea.

“Have mercy on me!”

Matthew notes that Jesus says nothing at first. Nothing. He doesn't open his mouth. Why?

I think that he was admiring her. I think that it did his heart good to see some spunky faith for a change. I think that it refreshed him to see someone asking him to do the very thing he came to do—give great gifts to unworthy children.

How strange that we don't allow him to do it more often for us.

Perhaps the most amazing response to God's gift is our reluctance to accept it. We want it. But on our terms. For some odd reason, we feel better if we earn it. So we create religious hoops and hop through them—making God a trainer, us his pets, and religion a circus.

The Canaanite woman knew better. She had no resume. She claimed no heritage. She had no earned degrees. She knew only two things: Her daughter was weak and Jesus was strong.

We prefer to get salvation the old-fashioned way: We earn it. To accept grace is to admit failure, a step we are hesitant to take. We opt to impress God with how good we are rather than

confessing how great he is. We dizzy ourselves with doctrine. Burden ourselves with rules. Think that God will smile on our efforts.

He doesn't.

God's smile is not for the healthy hiker who boasts that he made the journey alone. It is instead, for the crippled leper who begs God for a back on which to ride.

STUDY GUIDES

READ MATTHEW [15:22-28](#)

- Why do you think “helplessness” is a repulsive concept to our culture?
- In what ways do we pray differently when we pray out of helplessness?
- How do you think desperation affects faith?
- If we aren’t approaching God from a position of helplessness, then how are we usually approaching him?
- What are the worst things about feeling inadequate?
- Describe the process of making peace with your own weaknesses.
- Why is it sometimes easier to reach out on behalf of someone else who is helpless than for ourselves when we are helpless?
- How does God’s perspective on helplessness or inadequacy differ from ours?

Grief

We don't like to say goodbye to those we love.

But we have to. Try as we might to avoid it, as reluctant as we are to discuss it, death is a very real part of life. Each one of us must release the hand of one we love into the hand of one we have not seen.

Scripture is surprisingly quiet about this phase of our lives. When speaking about the period between the death of the body and the resurrection of the body, the Bible doesn't shout; it just whispers. But at the confluence of these whispers, a firm voice is heard. This authoritative voice assures us that, at death, the Christian immediately enters into the presence of God and enjoys conscious fellowship with the Father and with those who have gone before.

Where do I get such ideas?

"I want to leave this life and be with Christ, which is much better" ([Philippians 1:23](#)).

The language here suggests an immediate departure of the soul after death.

Isn't this the promise that Jesus gave the thief on the cross? "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" ([Luke 23:43](#)).

If you'll celebrate a marriage anniversary alone this year, he speaks to you. If your child made it to heaven before making it to kindergarten, he speaks to you. If you lost a loved one in violence, if you learned more than you want to know about disease, if your dreams were buried as they lowered the casket, God speaks to you. He speaks to all of us who have stood or will stand in the soft dirt near an open grave. God transforms our hopeless grief into hope-filled grief. How? By telling us

that we will see our loved ones again.

STUDY GUIDES

READ 1 THESSALONIANS [4:13](#)—[5:3](#)

- Describe someone you are looking forward to seeing when you get to heaven.
- Describe the experience of someone who has been with a dying person when they passed from this life to the next.
- What do you imagine you will experience when you take your last breath here on earth?
- How do you respond to the fact that when Jesus comes back for you he'll bring with him the Christians you have lost through death?
- How do you feel about the fact that earthly marriages won't have the same meaning in heaven as they do on earth?
- What other relationships, besides marriages, do you think will be different in heaven?
- How does the promise of seeing our deceased loved ones again affect our grieving for them?
- What was the best comfort someone gave you at a time of loss?
- Why is it so difficult to say goodbye to those we love, even knowing we'll be reunited one day in heaven?

Grudges

“Grudge” is one of those words that defines itself. Its very sound betrays its meaning.

Say it slowly: “Grr-uuuud-ge.”

It starts with a growl. “Grr ...” Like a bear with bad breath coming out of hibernation or a mangy mongrel defending his bone in an alley. “Grr ...”

Being near a resentful person and petting a growling dog are equally enjoyable.

Don’t you just love being next to people who are nursing a grudge? Isn’t it a delight to listen to them sing their songs of woe? They are so optimistic! They are so full of hope. They are bubbling with life.

You know better. You know as well as I that if they are bubbling with anything, it is anger. And if they are full of anything, it is poisonous barbs of condemnation for all the people who have hurt them. Grudge bearers and angry animals are a lot alike. Both are irritable. Both are explosive. Both can be rabid. Someone needs to make a sign that can be worn around the neck of the resentful: “Beware of the Grrrrrudge Bearer.”

Add an “M” to the second part of the word, and you see what grudge bearers throw. Mud. It’s not enough to accuse; the other person’s character must be attacked. It’s insufficient to point a finger; a rifle must be aimed. Slander is slung. Names are called. Circles are drawn. Walls are built. And enemies are made....

Is this the way you are coping with your hurts?

STUDY GUIDES

READ GENESIS [37:3-20](#)

- In what ways has your life been affected by grudges?
- Describe the anatomy of a grudge. How do they come about?
- Think about a time that you held a grudge against someone. What changed about you during that time?
- How can a grudge, if unchecked, lead to even more serious sins?
- How do grudges affect your relationship with God?
- In what ways do you need God's help to deal with a grudge in your life, either in you or against you?
- What does it feel like to be on the receiving end of a grudge?
- What does it feel like to be grudge-free?

Guilt

Canyons of shame run deep. Gorges of never-ending guilt. Walls ribboned with the greens and grays of death. Unending echoes of screams. Put your hands over your ears. Splash water on your face. Stop looking over your shoulder. Try as you might to outrun yesterday's tragedies—their tentacles are longer than your hope.

Sometimes your shame is private. Pushed over the edge by an abusive spouse. Seduced by a compromising superior. No one else knows. But you know. And that's enough.

Sometimes it's public. Branded by a divorce you didn't want. Contaminated by a disease you never expected. Marked by a handicap you didn't create. And whether it's actually in their eyes or just in your imagination, you have to deal with it—you are marked: a divorcee, an invalid, an orphan, an AIDS patient.

Whether private or public, shame is always painful. And unless you deal with it, it is permanent. Unless you get help—the dawn will never come.

Take him with you to your canyon of shame. Invite Christ to journey with you. Let him stand beside you as you retell the events of the darkest nights of your soul.

And then listen. Listen carefully. He's speaking.

"I don't judge you guilty."

And watch. Watch carefully. He's writing. He's leaving a message. Not in the sand, but on a cross.

Not with his hand, but with his blood.

His message has two words: Not guilty.

STUDY GUIDES

READ JOHN [8:1-11](#)

- Think of a well-known person whose personal failure was covered by the media. How did he or she seem to cope with the shame of failure?
- In our society, what things bring shame on a person?
- How have you seen the church respond to a person living with shame?
- Explain the difference between shame and guilt.
- How can we find comfort when we are dealing with shame in our lives?
- In what area of life do you need to experience healing from shame?
- In what unhealthy ways do some people cope with shame?
- How can we tell the difference between feeling convicted of sin and feeling needlessly shamed?

Habits

I like the story of the little boy who fell out of bed. When his Mom asked him what happened, he answered, “I don’t know. I guess I stayed too close to where I got in.” Easy to do the same with our faith. It’s tempting just to stay where we got in and never move.

Growth is the goal of the Christian. Maturity is mandatory. If a child ceased to develop, the parent would be concerned, right? Doctors would be called. Tests would be run. When a child stops growing, something is wrong.

When a Christian stops growing, help is needed. If you are the same Christian you were a few months ago, be careful. You might be wise to get a checkup. Not on your body, but on your heart. Not a physical, but a spiritual.

May I suggest one?

First, the habit of prayer: “Base your happiness on your hope in Christ. When trials come endure them patiently; steadfastly maintain the habit of prayer” ([Romans 12:12](#), PHILLIPS).

Second, the habit of study: “The man who looks into the perfect law and makes a habit of so doing, is not the man who sees and forgets. He puts that law into practice and he wins true happiness” ([James 1:25](#), PHILLIPS).

Third, the habit of giving: “Every Sunday each of you should put aside something from what you have earned during the week, and use it for this offering. The amount depends on how much the Lord has helped you earn” ([1 Corinthians 16:2](#), TLB).

And last of all, the habit of fellowship: “Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead let us

encourage one another” ([Hebrews 10:25](#), TEV).

There they are ... habits worth having. Isn't it good to know that some habits are good for you? Make them a part of your day and grow. Don't make the mistake of the little boy. Don't stay too close to where you got in. It's risky resting on the edge.

STUDY GUIDES

READ LUKE [6:47–49](#)

- In your opinion, what are the two hardest habits to change?
- What are the three spiritual habits that you feel most strengthen your walk with God?
- What often hinders us from developing new habits that will help us grow spiritually?
- How do good spiritual habits function like a good foundation?
- What part does selfexamination play in changing life habits?
- How do we relate to God differently when we are in the habit of obeying him?
- What does it take to form a new habit?
- What does it take to change an old habit?
- Describe someone who, in your estimation, maintains a lifestyle of godly habits. What can you learn from that person?
- A year from now, what new habits would you like to have incorporated into your life?

Healing

A chronic menstrual disorder. A perpetual issue of blood. Such a condition would be difficult for any woman of any era. But for a Jewess, nothing could be worse. No part of her life was left unaffected.

Sexually ... she could not touch her husband.

Maternally ... she could not bear children. Domestically ... anything she touched was considered unclean. No washing dishes. No sweeping floors.

Spiritually ... she was not allowed to enter the temple.

She was physically exhausted and socially ostracized.

She had sought help "under the care of many doctors."...

She was a bruised reed. She awoke daily in a body that no one wanted. She is down to her last prayer. And on the day we encounter her, she's about to pray it.

By the time she gets to Jesus, he is surrounded by people. He's on his way to help the daughter of Jairus, the most important man in the community. What are the odds that he will interrupt an urgent mission with a high official to help the likes of her?

Very few. But what are the odds that she will survive if she doesn't take a chance? Fewer still. So she takes a chance.

"If I can just touch his clothes," she thinks, "I will be healed."

Risky decision. To touch him, she will have to touch the people. If one of them recognizes her ... But what choice does she have? She has no money, no clout, no friends, no solutions. All she has is a crazy hunch that Jesus can help and a high hope that he will...

There was no guarantee, of course. She hoped he'd

respond ... she longed for it ... but she didn't know if he would. All she knew was that he was good. That's faith.

Faith is not the belief that God will do what you want. Faith is the belief that God will do what is right.

"Blessed are the dirt-poor, nothing-to-give, trapped-in-a-corner, destitute, diseased," Jesus said, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" ([Matthew 5:6](#), my translation).

God's economy is upside down (or rightside up and ours is upside down!). God says that the more hopeless your circumstance, the more likely your salvation. The greater your cares, the more genuine your prayers. The darker the room, the greater the need for light.

A healthy lady never would have appreciated the power of a touch of the hem of his robe. But this woman was sick ... and when her dilemma met his dedication, a miracle occurred.

Her part in the healing was very small. All she did was extend her arm through the crowd.

"If only I can touch him..."

Healing begins when we do something. Healing begins when we reach out. Healing starts when we take a step.

STUDY GUIDES

READ MARK [5:21-42](#)

- Think of a time when you took a step of faith. What did you do and how did God respond?
- Why do you suppose Jesus stopped to point out this woman?
- Many people touched Jesus as he passed by. Why did Jesus' power affect this woman and no others?
- What does this woman's story reveal about faith?
- In what ways can you identify with this woman?
- What makes it difficult to step out in faith?
- In what area of your life do you need to experience Christ's healing power?
- What practical steps of faith do you need to take?

Heaven (1)

The most hopeful words of that passage from Revelation are those of God's resolve: "I am making everything new!"

It's hard to see things grow old. The town in which I grew up is growing old. I was there recently. Some of the buildings are boarded up. Some of the houses are torn down. Some of my teachers are retired; some are buried. The old movie house where I took my dates has "For Sale" on the marquee, long since outdated by the newer theaters that give you eight choices. The only visitors to the drive-in theater are tumbleweeds and rodents. Memories of first dates and senior proms are weather-worn by the endless rain of years. High school sweethearts are divorced. A cheerleader died of an aneurysm. Our fastest halfback is buried only a few plots from my own father.

I wish I could make it all new again. I wish I could blow the dust off the streets. I wish I could walk through the familiar neighborhood, and wave at the familiar faces, and pet the familiar dogs, and hit one more home run in the Little League park. I wish I could walk down Main Street and call out to the merchants that have retired and open the doors that have been boarded up. I wish I could make everything new ... but I can't....

I can't. But God can. "He restores my soul," wrote the shepherd. He doesn't reform; he restores. He doesn't camouflage the old; he restores the new. The Master Builder will pull out the original plan and restore it. He will restore the vigor. He will restore the energy. He will restore the hope. He will restore the soul.

When you see how this world grows stooped and weary

and then read of a home where everything is made new, tell me, doesn't that make you want to go home?

What would you give in exchange for a home like that? Would you really rather have a few possessions on earth than eternal possessions in heaven? Would you really choose a life of slavery to passion over a life of freedom? Would you honestly give up all of your heavenly mansions for a second-rate sleazy motel on earth?

"Great," Jesus said, "is your reward in heaven." He must have smiled when he said that line. His eyes must have danced, and his hand must have pointed skyward.

For he should know. It was his idea. It was his home.

STUDY GUIDES

READ REVELATION [21:1-8](#)

- Think of a time when you anticipated an upcoming event. What was the waiting like?
- What do you anticipate about heaven?
- In what ways will our relationships with God be different in heaven?
- Describe the new heaven and earth.
- How can you prepare for life there?
- List some words that describe what you think it will be like to spend eternity with God.
- What causes you to take your eyes off your wonderful future with God?
- List some of our responsibilities until the new heaven and new earth come.

Heaven (2)

The only ultimate disaster that can befall us, I have come to realize, is to feel ourselves to be home on earth. As long as we are aliens, we cannot forget our true homeland.

Unhappiness on earth cultivates a hunger for heaven. By gracing us with a deep dissatisfaction, God holds our attention. The only tragedy, then, is to be satisfied prematurely. To settle for earth. To be content in a strange land....

We are not happy here because we are not at home here. We are not happy here because we are not supposed to be happy here. We are “like foreigners and strangers in this world” ([1 Peter 2:11](#)).

Take a fish and place him on the beach. Watch his gills gasp and scales dry. Is he happy? No! How do you make him happy? Do you cover him with a mountain of cash? Do you get a beach chair and sunglasses? Do you bring him a Playfish magazine and martini? Do you wardrobe him in double-breasted fins and peopleskinned shoes?

Of course not. Then how do you make him happy? You put him back in his element. You put him back in the water. He will never be happy on the beach simply because he was not made for the beach. And you will never be completely happy on earth simply because you were not made for earth. Oh, you will have moments of joy. You will catch glimpses of light. You will know moments or even days of peace. But they simply do not compare with the happiness that lies ahead.

STUDY GUIDES

READ PHILIPPIANS [3:17-21](#)

- What is your favorite hobby or activity? Why do you enjoy it?
- What do you consider the greatest source of pain in life?
- Where do people look for satisfaction?
- What happens to us when we depend on people or objects to make us happy?
- When are you most likely to feel “at home” on earth?
- How is the happiness that God gives different from what the world offers?
- What is your greatest hope of heaven?
- How does your confidence in God help you face life’s challenges?

Impossibilities

Consider the case of Sarai. She is in her golden years, but God promises her a son. She gets excited. She visits the maternity shop and buys a few dresses. She plans her shower and remodels her tent ... but no son. She eats a few birthday cakes and blows out a lot of candles ... still no son. She goes through a decade of wall calendars ... still no son....

Finally, fourteen years later, when Abram is pushing a century of years and Sarai ninety ... when Abram has stopped listening to Sarai's advice, and Sarai has stopped giving it ... when the wallpaper in the nursery is faded and the baby furniture is several seasons out of date ... when the topic of the promised child brings sighs and tears and long looks into a silent sky ... God pays them a visit and tells them they had better select a name for their new son.

Abram and Sarai have the same response: laughter. They laugh partly because it is too good to happen and partly because it might. They laugh because they have given up hope, and hope born anew is always funny before it is real....

They laugh because that is what you do when someone says he can do the impossible. They laugh a little at God, and a lot with God—for God is laughing, too. Then, with the smile still on his face, he gets busy doing what he does best—the unbelievable....

He changes their faith. He changes the number of their tax deductions. He changes the way they define the word “impossible.” But most of all, he changes Sarah's attitude about trusting God.

STUDY GUIDES

READ GENESIS [18:1-15](#)

- Think about a time when you heard that a seemingly impossible thing would happen. How did you react?
- Sarah laughed when she heard she would be having a son. What could have been some thoughts in her head that caused that laughter?
- What do you think Abraham was thinking when the Lord said he would have a son?
- Think of a time when you lacked faith in God's plan. Why did it seem unbelievable?
- Describe a past experience when God fulfilled a promise to you.
- Why do you find it difficult to believe that nothing is too hard for God to handle?
- In what ways have you learned to trust God's perfect timing?
- What are the benefits of trusting God and his plan?
- What would you say to someone who is having trouble facing impossibilities in faith?

Jesus' Compassion

Interestingly, the stress seen that day is not on Jesus' face, but on the faces of the disciples.

"Send the crowds away," they demand. Fair request. "After all," they are saying, "You've taught them. You've healed them.

You've accommodated them. And now they're getting hungry. If we don't send them away, they'll want you to feed them, too!"

I wish I could have seen the expression on the disciples' faces when they heard the Master's response....

"You give them something to eat." ...

Rather than look to God, they looked in their wallets. "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

"Y-y-y-you've got to be kidding."

"He can't be serious."

"It's one of Jesus' jokes."

"Do you know how many people are out there?"

Eyes watermelon wide. Jaws dangling open. One ear hearing the din of the crowd, the other the command of God.

Don't miss the contrasting views. When Jesus saw the people, he saw an opportunity to love and affirm value. When the disciples saw the people they saw thousands of problems.

Also, don't miss the irony. In the midst of a bakery—in the presence of the Eternal Baker—they tell the "Bread of Life" that there is no bread.

How silly we must appear to God.

Here's where Jesus should have given up. This is the point in the pressure-packed day where Jesus should have exploded.

The sorrow, the life threats, the exuberance, the crowds, the interruptions, the demands, and now this. His own disciples can't do what he asks them. In front of five thousand men, they let him down.

"Beam me up, Father," should have been Jesus' next words. But they weren't. Instead he inquires, "How many loaves do you have?"

The disciples bring him a little boy's lunch.

A lunch pail becomes a banquet, and all are fed. No word of reprimand is given. No furrowed brow of anger is seen. No "I-told-you-so" speech is delivered. The same compassion Jesus extends to the crowd is extended to his friends.

STUDY GUIDES

READ JOHN [6:1-15](#)

- What do you think Jesus wanted his disciples to learn from this event?
- Who are you most like in this story? Philip? Andrew? The boy? The people? Why?
- Think of a time when God provided for your needs in an unusual or surprising way. How did that experience strengthen your faith?
- What problems in your life seem to have no solutions?
- Do you find it difficult to trust God to meet your needs? Why?
- What does this story teach us about the way God provides for his people?
- How does the faith of other believers inspire us to trust God?
- What sometimes keeps you from trusting God to meet your needs?

Jesus Prayed

“He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray.”

Jesus faced an impossible task. More than five thousand people were ready to fight a battle he had not come to fight. How could he show them that he didn't come to be a king, but to be a sacrifice? How could he take their eyes off an earthly kingdom so that they would see the spiritual one? How could they see the eternal when they only had eyes for the temporal?

What Jesus dreamed of doing and what he seemed about to do were separated by an impossible gulf. So Jesus prayed.

He prayed for the impossible to happen.

Maybe he didn't ask for anything. Maybe he just stood quietly in the presence of the Presence and basked in the majesty.

Maybe he lifted his head out of the confusion of earth long enough to hear the solution of heaven. Perhaps he was reminded that hard hearts don't faze the Father. That problem people don't perturb the Eternal One.

We don't know what he did or what he said. But we do know the result. The hill became a steppingstone; the storm became a path, and the disciples saw Jesus as they had never seen him before.

During the storm, Jesus prayed. The sky darkened. The winds howled. Yet he prayed. The people grumbled. The disciples doubted. Yet he prayed. When forced to choose between the muscles of men and the mountain of prayer, he prayed.

There are crevasses in your life that you cannot cross alone. There are hearts in your world that you cannot change without help. There are mountains that you cannot climb until

you climb his mountain.

Climb it. You will be amazed.

STUDY GUIDES

READ MATTHEW [14:23-33](#)

- Describe a time when you or someone you know needed a miracle.
- What keeps us from choosing prayer when we face the impossible?
- Why do you think prayer seems like such a passive activity at times?
- In what ways does prayer make such a difference in the impossible situations we face?
- How do you think your life would be different if you prayed more frequently and more fervently?
- How do you know if a prayer has been effective?
- Describe the most amazing answer to prayer you have ever witnessed or heard about.
- Why do you think prayer is the key to the impossible?
- What impossible situation do you need to turn over to God in prayer?

Money

If money is the gauge of the heart, then this study revealed that money is on the heart of most Americans. In exchange for ten million dollars:

- 25 percent would abandon their family.

- 25 percent would abandon their church.

- 23 percent would become a prostitute for a week.

- 16 percent would give up their American citizenship.

- 16 percent would leave their spouse.

- 13 percent would put their children up for adoption.

Even more revealing than what Americans would do for ten million dollars is that most would do something. Two-thirds of those polled would agree to at least one—some to several—of the options.

Jesus had a word for that: greed.

Jesus also had a definition for greed. He called it the practice of measuring life by possessions.

Greed equates a person's worth with a person's purse.

You got a lot = you are a lot.

You got a little = you are little.

The consequence of such a philosophy is predictable. If you are the sum of what you own, then by all means own it all. No price is too high. No payment is too much.

Greed is relative. Greed is not defined by what something costs; it is measured by what it costs you. If anything costs you your faith or your family, the price is too high.

STUDY GUIDES

READ LUKE [12:15–21](#)

- What is your definition of greed?
- Why does money tempt us to do things we wouldn't do for any other motivation?
- Describe the balance between preparing for the future financially and hoarding your wealth?
- What pressures in our society cause us to define ourselves by our possessions?
- How does greed show itself even in the necessities of life like food and clothing?
- Besides the price we pay for our possessions, what price do we pay in life for our greed?
- Describe the biblical balance between wealth and stewardship.
- At what age do you think we start learning to define ourselves by the things we own or have?
- Which of your possessions would be the hardest for to let go?
- How do you respond to the phrase, "Everybody has his price"?

New Creation

Matthew 5 describes God's radical reconstruction of the heart.

Observe the sequence. First, we recognize we are in need (we're poor in spirit). Next, we repent of our self-sufficiency (we're sad). We quit calling the shots and surrender control to God (we're humble). So grateful are we for his presence that we yearn for more of him (we want to do the right thing more than anything else). As we grow closer to him, we become more like him. We forgive others (we're merciful). We change our outlook (we're pure in our thinking). We love others (we're peacemakers). We endure injustice (we're treated badly for doing good).

It's no casual shift of attitude. It is a demolition of the old structure and a creation of the new. The more radical the change, the greater the joy. And it's worth every effort, for this is the joy of God.

And though your heart isn't perfect, it isn't rotten. And though you aren't invincible, at least you're plugged in. And you can bet that he who made you knows just how to purify you— from the inside out.

STUDY GUIDES

READ MATTHEW [5:2-12](#)

- Why is it difficult to make lasting changes in life?
- If we say we trust God, then why do we hesitate to allow him to change our hearts?
- Describe the methods God uses to reconstruct a person's heart.
- Describe the difference between changing from the inside out and changing from the outside in.
- List some ways to change bad habits.
- How can we be more receptive to God's changing work in our hearts?
- What can we learn from the way children trust and learn differently than adults?
- What area of your life do you need to surrender to God's transforming work?

Old Wounds

Do you have a hole in your heart?

Perhaps the wound is old ... and you're angry. Or perhaps the wound is fresh ... and you're hurt.

Part of you is broken, and the other part is bitter. Part of you wants to cry, and part of you wants to fight. The tears you cry are hot because they come from your heart, and there is a fire burning in your heart. It's the fire of anger. It's blazing. It's consuming. Its flames leap up under a steaming pot of revenge.

And you are left with a decision: "Do I put the fire out or heat it up? Do I get over it or get even? Do I release it or resent it? Do I let my hurts heal, or do I let hurt turn into hate?"

Are you allowing your hurts to turn into hates? If so, ask yourself: Is it working? Has your hatred done you any good? Has your resentment brought you any relief, any peace? Has it granted you any joy?

Allow the hole in your heart to heal.

STUDY GUIDES

READ MATTHEW [18:23-35](#)

- Describe the struggle between releasing or resenting someone after they've hurt you.
- Explain how it benefits us to show mercy to others.
- Why do you think God puts such a priority on our willingness to show mercy?
- How should God's mercy to us impact the way we treat others?
- In your own words, define judgment without mercy.
- What most often stands in the way of our showing mercy?
- What does showing mercy bring into our lives?
- To whom do I need to show mercy? How?

Peace

Want to see a miracle? Try this.

Take a seed the size of a freckle. Put it under several inches of dirt. Give it enough water, light, and fertilizer. And get ready. A mountain will be moved. It doesn't matter that the ground is a zillion times the weight of the seed. The seed will push it back.

Every spring, dreamers around the world plant tiny hopes in overturned soil. And every spring, their hopes press against impossible odds and blossom.

Never underestimate the power of a seed.

As far as I know, James, the epistle writer, wasn't a farmer, but he knew the power of a seed sown in fertile soil.

"People who work for peace in a peaceful way plant a good crop of right living."

The principle for peace is the same as the principle for crops: Never underestimate the power of a seed.

How good are you at sowing seeds of peace?

Pause for a moment and think about the people who make up your world. Take a stroll through the gallery of faces that are significant to you.

Want to see a miracle? Plant a word of love heartdeep in a person's life. Nurture it with a smile and a prayer, and watch what happens ... Never underestimate the power of a seed.

STUDY GUIDES

READ JAMES [3:17](#)—[4:3](#)

- How have you seen peace work like a seed?
- If peace works like a seed, how do you water it?
- What is the quickest way to erode peace between friends?
- Once an argument has started, why is it so difficult to stop?
- What things destroy your inner peace?
- What sense of responsibility do you feel for living peaceably with the people around you?
- In what kinds of life situations is it most difficult to sow peace?
- How does your life function differently when you are living at peace with others?

Power

The pole of power is greasy.

The Roman emperor Charlemagne knew that. An interesting story surrounds the burial of this famous king. Legend has it that he asked to be entombed sitting upright in his throne. He asked that his crown be placed on his head and his scepter in his hand. He requested that the royal cape be draped around his shoulders and an open book be placed in his lap.

That was A. D. 814. Nearly two hundred years later, Emperor Othello determined to see if the burial request had been carried out. He allegedly sent a team of men to open the tomb and make a report. They found the body just as Charlemagne had requested. Only now, nearly two centuries later, the scene was gruesome. The crown was tilted, the mantle moth-eaten, the body disfigured. But open on the skeletal thighs was the book Charlemagne had requested—the Bible. One bony finger pointed to [Matthew 16:26](#), “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”

You can answer that one.

STUDY GUIDES

READ MARK [8:34-38](#)

- What is the cost of true discipleship?
- What is the essence of true power?
- How do some people react when they learn that being a true follower of Jesus is costly?
- What does it mean to lose your life for Christ's sake?
- What does it mean to gain the whole world.?
- What power would you have to give up to deny yourself and take up your cross?
- What is the difference between denying self and self-denial?
- What do you need to change to be a true disciple?

Righteousness

Some would rather die than admit it. Others admit it and escape death.

“God, I need help.”

So the thirsty come. A ragged lot we are, bound together by broken dreams and collapsed promises. Fortunes that were never made. Families that were never built. Promises that were never kept. Wide-eyed children trapped in the basement of our own failures.

And we are very thirsty.

Not thirsty for fame, possessions, passion, or romance. We’ve drunk from those pools. They are salt water in the desert. They don’t quench—they kill.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness ...”

Righteousness. That’s it. That’s what we are thirsty for. We’re thirsty for a clean conscience. We crave a clean slate. We yearn for a fresh start. We pray for a hand that will enter the dark cavern of our world and do for us the one thing we can’t do for ourselves—make us right again.

We usually get what we hunger and thirst for. The problem is, the treasures of earth don’t satisfy. The promise is, the treasures of heaven do.

STUDY GUIDES

READ LUKE [18:9-14](#)

- What is the difference between wanting something and craving something?
- How would we live differently if we hungered for God like we crave our favorite foods?
- How does righteousness satisfy us like food and water satisfy our hunger and thirst?
- What kinds of things do people falsely assume will quench their spiritual thirst?
- What kind of righteousness does God offer to us?
- What stands in the way of our receiving the righteousness God desires?
- How does the fact that we belong to God change the way we view ourselves and our possessions?
- Describe in your own words what it means to know Christ.
- In what practical way can you seek God's righteousness this week?

Rivalry

Sweet milk turns sour from being too warm too long.

Sweet dispositions turn sour for the same reason. Let aggravation stew without a period of cooling down, and the result? A bad, bitter, clabberish attitude.

It's the story of Martha. A dear soul given to hospitality and organization. More frugal than frivolous, more practical than pensive. Ask her to choose between a book and a broom, and she'll take the broom.

Mary, however, will take the book. Mary is Martha's sister. Same parents, different priorities. Martha has things to do. Mary has thoughts to think.

Apparently Martha worried too much, too. So much so that she started bossing God around. Worry will do that to you. It makes you forget who's in charge.

What makes this case interesting, however, is that Martha is worried about something good. She's having Jesus over for dinner. She's literally serving God. Her aim was to please Jesus. But, as she began to work for him her work became more important than her Lord. What began as a way to serve Jesus, slowly and subtly became a way to serve self.

One look at the flour-covered scowl will tell you that. "That Mary. Here I am alone in the kitchen while she's out there."

Oh boy. She's miffed. Look at her glaring over her shoulder through the doorway. That's Mary she's staring at. The one seated on the floor, listening to Jesus. "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me alone to do all the work? Tell her to help me" ([Luke 10:40](#)).

It's easy to forget who is the servant and who is to be served.

Satan knows that. This tool of distortion is one of Satan's slyest. Note: He didn't take Martha out of the kitchen; he took away her purpose in the kitchen. He won't take you away from your ministry; he'll disillusion you in your ministry.

Guard your attitude.

What matters more than the type of service is the heart behind the service. A bad attitude spoils the gift we leave on the altar for God.

God has gifted you with talents. He has done the same to your neighbor. If you concern yourself with your neighbor's talents, you will neglect yours. But if you concern yourself with yours, you could inspire both.

STUDY GUIDES

READ LUKE [10:38-42](#)

- What kinds of attitudes could be associated with sour milk?
- Describe someone you know who became disillusioned with ministry.
- How can we keep Satan from robbing us of our joy in our service to God?
- In what ways are our attitudes as evident as the clothes on our bodies?
- What makes it so difficult to change a wrong attitude?
- If you had been in Martha's shoes, how do you think you would have felt about doing all the work while Mary chatted with Jesus?
- How do you imagine Jesus' words changed Martha's attitude?
- If positive attitudes get us farther in life, why do we give in to negativity?
- What wrong attitudes do you need God's help to change?

Salvation

Before he encountered Christ, Paul had been somewhat of a hero among the Pharisees....

Blueblooded and wild-eyed, this young zealot was hellbent on keeping the kingdom pure—and that meant keeping the Christians out. He marched through the countryside like a general demanding that backslidden Jews salute the flag of the motherland or kiss their family and hopes goodbye.

All this came to a halt, however, on the shoulder of a highway... . That's when someone slammed on the stadium lights, and he heard the voice.

When he found out whose voice it was, his jaw hit the ground, and his body followed. He braced himself for the worst. He knew it was all over.... He prayed that death would be quick and painless.

But all he got was silence and the first of a lifetime of surprises.

He ended up bewildered and befuddled in a borrowed bedroom. God left him there a few days with scales on his eyes so thick that the only direction he could look was inside himself. And he didn't like what he saw.

He saw himself for what he really was—to use his own words, the worst of sinners.

... Alone in the room with his sins on his conscience and blood on his hands, he asked to be cleansed.

... The legalist Saul was buried, and the liberator Paul was born. He was never the same afterwards. And neither was the world....

The message is gripping: Show a man his failures without Jesus, and the result will be found in the roadside gutter. Give a

man religion without reminding him of his filth, and the result will be arrogance in a three-piece suit. But get the two in the same heart—get sin to meet Savior and Savior to meet sin—and the result just might be another Pharisee turned preacher who sets the world on fire.

STUDY GUIDES

READ ACTS [9:3–20](#)

- Think of a time you have seen God's power revealed in the life of a friend. What happened to that person?
- How would you describe the power of God that was revealed in Saul's life during his conversion experience?
- With which person in Saul's story do you most identify: Saul, Ananias, Saul's companions, or Paul?
- What does Saul's conversion teach you about God?
- Think about your own conversion experience. What are the parallels?
- Think of a time when God used you to encourage someone in his or her faith. What did you do?
- How can you minister to someone who has not yet experienced God's saving power?
- What is the most mysterious thing to you about salvation?

Second Chances

The most difficult journey is back to the place where you failed.

Peter is in the boat, on the lake. Once again he's fished all night. Once again the sea has surrendered nothing.

His thoughts are interrupted by a shout from the shore. "Catch any fish?" Peter and John look up. Probably a villager. "No!" they yell. "Try the other side!" So out sails the net. Peter wraps the rope around his wrist to wait.

But there is no wait. The rope pulls taut and the net catches. Peter begins to bring in the net; reaching down, pulling up, reaching down, pulling up. He's so intense with the task, he misses the message.

John doesn't. "It's the Lord, Peter. It's the Lord!"

Peter plunges into the water, swims to the shore, and stumbles out wet and shivering and stands in front of the friend he betrayed. Jesus has prepared a bed of coals. Both are aware of the last time Peter had stood near a fire. Peter had failed God, but God had come to him.

For one of the few times in his life, Peter is silent. What words would suffice? The moment is too holy for words. God is offering breakfast to the friend who betrayed him. And Peter is once again finding grace at Galilee.

Now, it's just you and God. You and God both know what you did. And neither one of you is proud of it. What do you do?

You might consider doing what Peter did. Stand in God's presence. Stand in his sight. Stand still and wait. Sometimes that's all a soul can do. Too repentant to speak, but too hopeful to leave—we just stand.

Stand amazed.

He has come back.

He invites you to try again. This time, with him.

STUDY GUIDES

READ JOHN [21:1-11](#)

- Why do you think there is such a stigma on admitting failure when we know that even the most successful people fail along the way?
- How do you imagine Peter felt when he saw Jesus for the first time after denying him?
- Describe a time when you, like Peter, were too preoccupied or busy to recognize God's presence with you.
- Why do you think Peter was in a hurry to see Jesus after his failure?
- What keeps us from running to Jesus after we have failed?
- What personal fears do you think caused Peter earlier to deny Jesus?
- What kinds of fears motivate us to compromise our convictions?
- How do you imagine this experience impacted Peter for the rest of his life?
- What failure in life do you need to revisit with a greater awareness of God's presence?

The Church

When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight.

When energy intended to be used outside is used inside, the result is explosive. Instead of casting nets, we cast stones. Instead of extending helping hands, we point accusing fingers. Instead of being fishers of the lost, we become critics of the saved. Rather than helping the hurting, we hurt the helpers.

The result? Church Scrooges. "Bah humbug" spirituality. Beady eyes searching for warts on others while ignoring the wart on the nose below. Crooked fingers that bypass strengths and point out weaknesses.

Split churches. Poor testimonies. Broken hearts. Legalistic wars.

And, sadly, poor go unfed, confused go uncounseled, and lost go unreached.

When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight.

But note the other side of this fish tale: When those who are called to fish, fish—they flourish!

Nothing handles a case of gripes like an afternoon service project. Nothing restores perspective better than a visit to a hospital ward. Nothing unites soldiers better than a common task.

Leave soldiers inside the barracks with no time on the front line and see what happens to their attitude. The soldiers will invent things to complain about. Bunks will be too hard. Food will be too cold. Leadership will be too tough. The company will be too stale. Yet place those same soldiers in the trench and let them duck a few bullets, and what was a boring barracks will seem like a haven. The beds will feel great. The food will be almost ideal. The leadership will be courageous.

The company will be exciting.

When those who are called to fish, fish—they flourish.

STUDY GUIDES

READ EPHESIANS [4:11-16](#)

- From your experience what are the top three reasons for church conflicts?
- How have you seen this principle played out: That we tend to be negative when we have nothing better to do?
- Describe what we have been called to do as the body of Christ.
- List some dangers of having too much time on your hands.
- What is the balance between being too idle and being too driven regarding our service to God?
- If the church is like a body, how are church conflicts like cancer?
- What escalates disagreements in the church to the point of anger?
- Why do we often feel passionately about issues having to do with church?

Tithing

You don't give for God's sake. You give for your sake. "The purpose of tithing is to teach you to always put God first in your lives" ([Deuteronomy 14:23](#), TLB). How does tithing teach you? Consider the simple act of writing a check for the offering. First you enter the date. Already you are reminded that you are a timebound creature and every possession you have will rust or burn. Best to give it while you can.

Then you enter the name of the one to whom you are giving the money. If the bank would cash it, you'd write God. But they won't, so you write the name of the church or group that has earned your trust.

Next comes the amount. Ahh, the moment of truth. You're more than a person with a checkbook. You're David, placing a stone in the sling. You're Peter, one foot on the boat, one foot on the lake. You're a little boy in a big crowd. A picnic lunch is all the Teacher needs, but it's all you have.

What will you do? Sling the Stone? Take the Step? Give the Meal?

Careful now, don't move too quickly. You aren't just entering an amount ... you are making a confession. A confession that God owns it all anyway.

And then the line in the lower left-hand corner on which you write what the check is for. Hard to know what to put. It's for the light bills and literature. A little bit of outreach. A little bit of salary.

Better yet, its partial payment for what the church has done to help you raise your family ... keep your own priorities sorted out ... tune you in to his ever-nearness.

Or, perhaps, best yet, it's for you. It's a moment for you to

clip yet another strand from the rope of earth so that when he returns you won't be tied up.

STUDY GUIDES

READ NEHEMIAH [10:28-39](#)

- Describe a time when someone gave you the very best they had to offer.
- Why does God desire the first and best of people's resources?
- Explain the importance to you of tithing?
- What kinds of things make it difficult to tithe?
- What do we receive in return when we give money to the church?
- What is the connection between tithing and worship?
- In what ways can money enslave people?
- What steps can you take to loosen your grip on your financial resources?

Truth

The plain fact is we don't like the truth. Our credo is: 'You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you squirm.' Our dislike for the truth began at the age of three when mom asked, 'Did you hit your little brother?' We knew then and there that honesty had its consequences.

Not only do we not like the truth, we don't trust the truth. If we are brutally honest (which is advisable in a discussion on honesty), we'd have to admit that the truth seems inadequate to do what we need done.

We want our bosses to like us, so we flatter. We call it polishing the apple. God calls it a lie.

We want people to admire us, so we exaggerate. We call it stretching the truth. God calls it a lie.

We want people to respect us, so we live in houses we can't afford and charge bills we can't pay. We call it the American way. God calls it living a lie.

Do you tell the truth ... always? If not, start today. Don't wait until tomorrow. The ripple of today's lie is tomorrow's wave and next year's flood. Start today. Be just like Jesus. Tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

STUDY GUIDES

READ EPHESIANS [4:22-25](#)

- Think of the most reliable and honest person you know. How do you feel when you are with that person?
- How does it change a relationship when you suspect someone is being dishonest with you?
- How can honesty keep us from getting ahead in our professional lives?
- How would you explain to a child the importance of truthfulness?
- List some dynamics that keep us from being brutally honest with ourselves and others.
- How do people usually respond when they get caught in a lie?
- What tactics do we use to avoid the truth about ourselves?
- Describe how important it is to you that the significant people in your life are truthful with you, even when it hurts.
- What truths do you need the courage to tell?

Unity

Grace makes three proclamations.

First, only God can forgive my godlessness....

Second, only God can judge my neighbor....

Third, I must accept who God accepts....

Easier said than done.

God has enlisted us in his navy and placed us on his ship. The boat has one purpose—to carry us safely to the other shore.

This is no cruise ship; it's a battleship. We aren't called to a life of leisure; we are called to a life of service. Each of us has a different task. Some, concerned with those who are drowning, are snatching people from the water. Others are occupied with the enemy, so they man the cannons of prayer and worship. Still others devote themselves to the crew, feeding and training the crew members.

Though different, we are the same. Each can tell of a personal encounter with the captain, for each has received a personal call. He found us among the shanties of the seaport and invited us to follow him....

Though the battle is fierce, the boat is safe, for our captain is God. The ship will not sink. For that, there is no concern.

There is concern, however, regarding the disharmony of the crew.

Unity creates belief. Disunity fosters disbelief. Who wants to board a ship of bickering sailors? Life on the ocean may be rough, but at least the waves don't call us names... . Could it be that unity is the key to reaching the world for Christ?

STUDY GUIDES

READ EPHESIANS [4:2-6](#), [31-32](#)

- List some things that cause tension and disharmony among Christians.
- How has your personal encounter with God changed the way you relate to others?
- What kinds of disagreements cause people to give up on their relationships?
- Describe in practical terms what it means for Christians to live in unity.
- How does receiving God's grace enable us to practice Christian unity and love?
- Why is it often more challenging to love the people closest to us?
- What can people outside of the church learn from the way believers get along?
- If we are the army of Christ, what does division among the ranks cost us?

Usefulness

“Why do you think he’s blind?” one asked.

“He must have sinned.”

“No, it’s his folks’ fault.”

“Jesus, what do you think? Why is he blind?”

“He’s blind to show what God can do.”

The apostles knew what was coming; they had seen this look in Jesus’ eyes before. They knew what he was going to do, but they didn’t know how he was going to do it. Lightning? Thunder? A shout? A clap of the hands? They all watched.

Jesus began to work his mouth a little. The onlookers stared. “What is he doing?” He moved his jaw as if he were chewing on something.

Some of the people began to get restless. Jesus just chewed. His jaw rotated around until he had what he wanted. Spit. Ordinary saliva.

If no one said it, somebody had to be thinking it: “Yuk!”

Jesus spat on the ground, stuck his finger into the puddle, and stirred. Soon it was a mud pie, and he smeared some of the mud across the blind man’s eyes.

The same One who’d turned a stick into a scepter and a pebble into a missile now turned saliva and mud into a balm for the blind.

Once again, the mundane became majestic. Once again the dull became divine, the humdrum holy. Once again God’s power was seen, not through the ability of the instrument, but through its availability.

“Blessed are the meek,” Jesus explained. Blessed are the available. Blessed are the conduits, the tunnels, the tools. Deliriously joyful are the ones who believe that if God has used

sticks, rocks, and spit to do his will, then he can use us.

STUDY GUIDES

READ JOHN [9:1-12](#)

- Why do you think Jesus chose to heal that way?
- If you had witnessed this event, how do you think you would have responded?
- Describe a time when you have witnessed God using something unlikely to accomplish his will.
- Think about your personal strengths and weaknesses. How has God worked through your weaknesses for his glory?
- When have you seen a person's weakness or even a specific disability used for God's glory?
- What does it feel like to be used by God?
- Put into your own words why the "availability" of an instrument is just as or even more important than the "ability."
- In what ways can you be more available to God?

Vengeance

Revenge belongs to God! If vengeance is God's, then it is not ours. God has not asked us to settle the score or get even. Ever. Judgment is God's job. To assume otherwise is to assume God can't do it.

When we are mistreated, our animalistic response is to go on the hunt. Instinctively, we double up our fists. Getting even is only natural. Which, incidentally, is precisely the problem. Revenge is natural, not spiritual. Getting even is the rule of the jungle. Giving grace is the rule of the kingdom.

X-ray the soul of the vengeful and behold the tumor of bitterness: black, menacing, malignant. Carcinoma of the spirit. Its fatal fibers creep around the edge of the heart and ravage it. Yesterday you can't alter, but your reaction to yesterday you can. The past you cannot change, but your response to the past you can.

Revenge is irreverent. When we strike back we are saying, "I know vengeance is yours, God, but I just didn't think you'd punish enough. I thought I'd better take this situation into my own hands. You have a tendency to be a little soft."

To forgive someone is to display reverence. Forgiveness is not saying the one who hurt you was right. Forgiveness is stating that God is fair and he will do what is right.

After all, don't we have enough things to do without trying to do God's work too?

STUDY GUIDES

READ LUKE [6:27-36](#)

- Describe a situation from your childhood when you wanted to get even with someone.
- If left unchecked, how can anger and a thirst for revenge destroy a person's life?
- What is the balance between rightfully defending yourself and seeking revenge?
- How much of our desire for revenge do you think is merely a sense of justice?
- In what circumstances is it right and good to seek justice?
- How does it feel to let go of hurts or injustices?
- How do others typically respond when you repay evil with good?
- In what situation or relationship in your life are you still holding out for some revenge?

Where Is God?

It's called Bethesda [Bethzatha or Bethsaida]. It could be called Central Park, Metropolitan Hospital, or even Joe's Bar and Grill. It could be the homeless huddled beneath a downtown overpass. It could be Calvary Baptist. It could be any collection of hurting people.

An underwater spring caused the pool to bubble occasionally. The people believed the bubbles were caused by the dipping of angels' wings. They also believed that the first person to touch the water after the angel did would be healed. Did healing occur? I don't know. But I do know crowds of invalids came to give it a try.

Picture a battleground strewn with wounded bodies, and you see Bethesda. Imagine a nursing home overcrowded and understaffed, and you see the pool. Call to mind the orphans in Bangladesh or the abandoned in New Delhi, and you will see what people saw when they passed Bethesda. As they passed, what did they hear? An endless wave of groans. What did they witness? A field of faceless need. What did they do? Most walked past, ignoring the people.

But not Jesus. He is in Jerusalem for a feast....

He is alone. He is not there to teach the disciples or to draw a crowd. The people need him—so he's there.

Can you picture it? Jesus walking among the suffering.

What is he thinking? When an infected hand touches his ankle, what does he do? When a blind child stumbles in Jesus' path, does he reach down to catch the child? When a wrinkled hand extends for alms, how does Jesus respond?

Whether the watering hole is Bethesda or Bill's Bar ... how does God feel when people hurt?

It's worth the telling of the story if all we do is watch him walk. It's worth it just to know he even came. He didn't have to, you know. Surely there are more sanitary crowds in Jerusalem. Surely there are more enjoyable activities. After all, this is the Passover feast. It's an exciting time in the holy city. People have come from miles around to meet God in the temple.

Little do they know that God is with the sick.

Little do they know that God is walking slowly, stepping carefully between the beggars and the blind.

Little do they know that the strong, young carpenter who surveys the ragged landscape of pain is God.

STUDY GUIDES

READ JOHN [5:1-15](#)

- Think of a time when a friend showed special concern for you during a difficult time in your life. How did that person's support help you?
- What do you think motivated Jesus to go to Bethesda during a celebration?
- What do Jesus' actions in this story teach us about his character?
- What are some of the challenges of ministering to people with a serious illness? What are the rewards?
- How can we demonstrate God's love to people who are suffering?
- Why is it important for believers to minister to hurting people?
- Think of someone you know who is hurting? How can you reach out to that person?
- How can the church become more sensitive to the suffering around it?

[Two-Year Devotional Reading Plan](#)

Year One

Week One

Sunday Read Genesis Introduction and Key Verse

Monday [Genesis 1:1–2:3](#)

Tuesday [Genesis 2:4–3:24](#)

Wednesday [Genesis 4:1–5:32](#)

Thursday [Genesis 6:1–8:22](#)

Friday [Genesis 9:1–10:32](#)

Saturday [Genesis 11:1–32](#)

Week Two

Sunday [Genesis 12:1–20](#)

Monday [Genesis 13:1–14:24](#)

Tuesday [Genesis 15:1–17:27](#)

Wednesday [Genesis 18:1–20:18](#)

Thursday [Genesis 21:1–23:20](#)

Friday [Genesis 24:1–25:18](#)

Saturday [Genesis 25:19–34](#)

Week Three

Sunday [Genesis 26:1–35](#)

Monday [Genesis 27:1–28:9](#)

Tuesday [Genesis 28:10–30:43](#)

Wednesday [Genesis 31:1–33:20](#)

Thursday [Genesis 34:1–36:43](#)

Friday [Genesis 37:1–36](#)

Saturday [Genesis 38:1–30](#)

Week Four

Sunday [Genesis 39:1–40:23](#)

Monday [Genesis 41:1–57](#)

Tuesday [Genesis 42:1–43:34](#)

Wednesday [Genesis 44:1–45:28](#)

Thursday [Genesis 46:1–47:27](#)

Friday [Genesis 47:28–48:22](#)

Saturday [Genesis 49:1–33](#)

Week Five

Sunday [Genesis 50:1–26](#)

Monday Read Exodus Introduction and Key Verse

Tuesday [Exodus 1:1–22](#)

Wednesday [Exodus 2:1–4:31](#)

Thursday [Exodus 5:1–6:27](#)

Friday [Exodus 6:28–8:32](#)

Saturday [Exodus 9:1–10:29](#)

Week Six

Sunday [Exodus 11:1–12:50](#)

Monday [Exodus 13:1–15:21](#)

Tuesday [Exodus 15:22–17:7](#)

Wednesday [Exodus 17:8–18:27](#)

Thursday [Exodus 19:1–25](#)

Friday [Exodus 20:1–26](#)

Saturday [Exodus 21:1–22:31](#)

Week Seven

Sunday [Exodus 23:1–24:18](#)
Monday [Exodus 25:1–27:21](#)
Tuesday [Exodus 28:1–29:46](#)
Wednesday [Exodus 30:1–31:18](#)
Thursday [Exodus 32:1–34:35](#)
Friday [Exodus 35:1–38:31](#)
Saturday [Exodus 39:1–40:38](#)

Week Eight

Sunday Read Leviticus Introduction and Key Verse
Monday [Leviticus 1:1–6:7](#)
Tuesday [Leviticus 6:8–10:20](#)
Wednesday [Leviticus 11:1–15:33](#)
Thursday [Leviticus 16:1–17:16](#)
Friday [Leviticus 18:1–20:27](#)
Saturday [Leviticus 21:1–22:33](#)

Week Nine

Sunday [Leviticus 23:1–25:55](#)
Monday [Leviticus 26:1–27:34](#)
Tuesday Read Numbers Introduction and Key Verse
Wednesday [Numbers 1:1–2:34](#)
Thursday [Numbers 3:1–5:31](#)
Friday [Numbers 6:1–27](#)
Saturday [Numbers 7:1–9:14](#)

Week Ten

Sunday [Numbers 9:15–10:10](#)
Monday [Numbers 10:11–11:35](#)

Tuesday [Numbers 12:1–16](#)
Wednesday [Numbers 13:1–14:45](#)
Thursday [Numbers 15:1–41](#)
Friday [Numbers 16:1–18:32](#)
Saturday [Numbers 19:1–21:35](#)

Week Eleven

Sunday [Numbers 22:1–25:18](#)
Monday [Numbers 26:1–27:23](#)
Tuesday [Numbers 28:1–30:16](#)
Wednesday [Numbers 31:1–54](#)
Thursday [Numbers 32:1–42](#)
Friday [Numbers 33:1–36:13](#)
Saturday Read Deuteronomy Introduction and Key Verse *Week Twelve*

Sunday [Deuteronomy 1:1–3:29](#)
Monday [Deuteronomy 4:1–43](#)
Tuesday [Deuteronomy 4:44–5:33](#)
Wednesday [Deuteronomy 6:1–7:26](#)
Thursday [Deuteronomy 8:1–9:29](#)
Friday [Deuteronomy 10:1–11:32](#)
Saturday [Deuteronomy 12:1–13:18](#)

Week Thirteen

Sunday [Deuteronomy 14:1–16:20](#)
Monday [Deuteronomy 16:21–18:22](#)
Tuesday [Deuteronomy 19:1–20:20](#)
Wednesday [Deuteronomy 21:1–22:30](#)
Thursday [Deuteronomy 23:1–25:19](#)

Friday [Deuteronomy 26:1–19](#)

Saturday [Deuteronomy 27:1–28:68](#)

Week Fourteen

Sunday [Deuteronomy 29:1–30:20](#)

Monday [Deuteronomy 31:1–29](#)

Tuesday [Deuteronomy 31:30–32:52](#)

Wednesday [Deuteronomy 33:1–34:12](#)

Thursday Read Joshua Introduction and Key Verse

Friday [Joshua 1:1–2:24](#)

Saturday [Joshua 3:1–5:12](#)

Week Fifteen

Sunday [Joshua 5:13–6:27](#)

Monday [Joshua 7:1–26](#)

Tuesday [Joshua 8:1–35](#)

Wednesday [Joshua 9:1–10:43](#)

Thursday [Joshua 11:1–12:24](#)

Friday [Joshua 13:1–17:18](#)

Saturday [Joshua 18:1–19:51](#)

Week Sixteen

Sunday [Joshua 20:1–21:45](#)

Monday [Joshua 22:1–34](#)

Tuesday [Joshua 23:1–24:33](#)

Wednesday Read Judges Introduction and Key Verse

Thursday [Judges 1:1–2:5](#)

Friday [Judges 2:6–3:6](#)

Saturday [Judges 3:7–31](#)

Week Seventeen

Sunday [Judges 4:1–5:31](#)

Monday [Judges 6:1–7:25](#)

Tuesday [Judges 8:1–9:57](#)

Wednesday [Judges 10:1–12:15](#)

Thursday [Judges 13:1–25](#)

Friday [Judges 14:1–20](#)

Saturday [Judges 15:1–16:31](#)

Week Eighteen

Sunday [Judges 17:1–18:31](#)

Monday [Judges 19:1–21:25](#)

Tuesday Read Ruth Introduction and Key Verse

Wednesday [Ruth 1:1–22](#)

Thursday [Ruth 2:1–23](#)

Friday [Ruth 3:1–18](#)

Saturday [Ruth 4:1–22](#)

Week Nineteen

Sunday Read 1 Samuel Introduction and Key Verse

Monday [1 Samuel 1:1–2:11](#)

Tuesday [1 Samuel 2:12–3:21](#)

Wednesday [1 Samuel 4:1–5:12](#)

Thursday [1 Samuel 6:1–7:17](#)

Friday [1 Samuel 8:1–22](#)

Saturday [1 Samuel 9:1–10:27](#)

Week Twenty

Sunday [1 Samuel 11:1–12:25](#)
Monday [1 Samuel 13:1–15:35](#)
Tuesday [1 Samuel 16:1–23](#)
Wednesday [1 Samuel 17:1–58](#)
Thursday [1 Samuel 18:1–20:42](#)
Friday [1 Samuel 21:1–22:23](#)
Saturday [1 Samuel 23:1–24:22](#)

Week Twenty-One

Sunday [1 Samuel 25:1–26:25](#)
Monday [1 Samuel 27:1–12](#)
Tuesday [1 Samuel 28:1–25](#)
Wednesday [1 Samuel 29:1–11](#)
Thursday [1 Samuel 30:1–31:13](#)
Friday Read 2 Samuel Introduction and Key Verse
Saturday [2 Samuel 1:1–3:5](#)

Week Twenty-Two

Sunday [2 Samuel 3:6–4:12](#)
Monday [2 Samuel 5:1–6:23](#)
Tuesday [2 Samuel 7:1–29](#)
Wednesday [2 Samuel 8:1–10:19](#)
Thursday [2 Samuel 11:1–12:31](#)
Friday [2 Samuel 13:1–14:33](#)
Saturday [2 Samuel 15:1–16:14](#)

Week Twenty-Three

Sunday [2 Samuel 16:15–19:43](#)
Monday [2 Samuel 20:1–26](#)

Tuesday [2 Samuel 21:1–23:7](#)

Wednesday [2 Samuel 23:8–24:25](#)

Thursday Read 1 Kings Introduction and Key Verse

Friday [1 Kings 1:1–53](#)

Saturday [1 Kings 2:1–46](#)

Week Twenty-Four

Sunday [1 Kings 3:1–4:34](#)

Monday [1 Kings 5:1–6:38](#)

Tuesday [1 Kings 7:1–8:66](#)

Wednesday [1 Kings 9:1–11:43](#)

Thursday [1 Kings 12:1–14:31](#)

Friday [1 Kings 15:1–16:34](#)

Saturday [1 Kings 17:1–24](#)

Week Twenty-Five

Sunday [1 Kings 18:1–46](#)

Monday [1 Kings 19:1–20:43](#)

Tuesday [1 Kings 21:1–22:53](#)

Wednesday Read 2 Kings Introduction and Key Verse

Thursday [2 Kings 1:1–18](#)

Friday [2 Kings 2:1–3:27](#)

Saturday [2 Kings 4:1–6:7](#)

Week Twenty-Six

Sunday [2 Kings 6:8–8:15](#)

Monday [2 Kings 8:16–9:37](#)

Tuesday [2 Kings 10:1–36](#)

Wednesday [2 Kings 11:1–12:21](#)

Thursday [2 Kings 13:1–14:29](#)

Friday [2 Kings 15:1–16:20](#)

Saturday [2 Kings 17:1–18:37](#)

Week Twenty-Seven

Sunday [2 Kings 19:1–21:26](#)

Monday [2 Kings 22:1–23:35](#)

Tuesday [2 Kings 23:36–25:30](#)

Wednesday Read 1 Chronicles Introduction and Key Verse

Thursday [1 Chronicles 1:1–3:24](#)

Friday [1 Chronicles 4:1–9:1](#)

Saturday [1 Chronicles 9:2–44](#)

Week Twenty-Eight

Sunday [1 Chronicles 10:1–12:40](#)

Monday [1 Chronicles 13:1–14:17](#)

Tuesday [1 Chronicles 15:1–17:27](#)

Wednesday [1 Chronicles 18:1–22:1](#)

Thursday [1 Chronicles 22:2–24:31](#)

Friday [1 Chronicles 25:1–27:34](#)

Saturday [1 Chronicles 28:1–29:30](#)

Week Twenty-Nine

Sunday Read 2 Chronicles Introduction and Key Verse

Monday [2 Chronicles 1:1–17](#)

Tuesday [2 Chronicles 2:1–5:1](#)

Wednesday [2 Chronicles 5:2–7:22](#)

Thursday [2 Chronicles 8:1–9:31](#)

Friday [2 Chronicles 10:1–11:17](#)

Saturday [2 Chronicles 11:18–15:19](#)

Week Thirty

Sunday [2 Chronicles 16:1–19:3](#)

Monday [2 Chronicles 19:4–21:3](#)

Tuesday [2 Chronicles 21:4–24:27](#)

Wednesday [2 Chronicles 25:1–26:23](#)

Thursday [2 Chronicles 27:1–28:27](#)

Friday [2 Chronicles 29:1–32:23](#)

Saturday [2 Chronicles 32:24–33:25](#)

Week Thirty-One

Sunday [2 Chronicles 34:1–36:1](#)

Monday [2 Chronicles 36:2–23](#)

Tuesday Read Ezra Introduction and Key Verse

Wednesday [Ezra 1:1–2:70](#)

Thursday [Ezra 3:1–4:24](#)

Friday [Ezra 5:1–6:22](#)

Saturday [Ezra 7:1–8:36](#)

Week Thirty-Two

Sunday [Ezra 9:1–10:44](#)

Monday Read Nehemiah Introduction and Key Verse

Tuesday [Nehemiah 1:1–2:10](#)

Wednesday [Nehemiah 2:11–3:32](#)

Thursday [Nehemiah 4:1–23](#)

Friday [Nehemiah 5:1–19](#)

Saturday [Nehemiah 6:1–7:73](#)

Week Thirty-Three

Sunday [Nehemiah 8:1–18](#)

Monday [Nehemiah 9:1–10:39](#)

Tuesday [Nehemiah 11:1–13:31](#)

Wednesday Read Esther Introduction and Key Verse

Thursday Esther [1:1–2:23](#)

Friday Esther [3:1–4:17](#)

Saturday Esther [5:1–6:14](#)

Week Thirty-Four

Sunday Esther [7:1–8:17](#)

Monday Esther [9:1–10:3](#)

Tuesday Read Job Introduction and Key Verse

Wednesday [Job 1:1–2:13](#)

Thursday [Job 3:1–26](#)

Friday [Job 4:1–7:21](#)

Saturday [Job 8:1–10:22](#)

Week Thirty-Five

Sunday [Job 11:1–20](#)

Monday [Job 12:1–14:22](#)

Tuesday [Job 15:1–17:16](#)

Wednesday [Job 18:1–19:29](#)

Thursday [Job 20:1–21:34](#)

Friday [Job 22:1–24:25](#)

Saturday [Job 25:1–26:14](#)

Week Thirty-Six

Sunday [Job 27:1–23](#)

Monday [Job 28:1–28](#)

Tuesday [Job 29:1–31:40](#)

Wednesday [Job 32:1–37:24](#)

Thursday [Job 38:1–41:34](#)

Friday [Job 42:1–17](#)

Saturday Read Psalms Introduction and Key Verse *Week Thirty-Seven*

Sunday [Psalms 1:1–3:8](#)

Monday [Psalms 4:1–6:10](#)

Tuesday [Psalms 7:1–8:9](#)

Wednesday [Psalms 9:1–10:18](#)

Thursday [Psalms 11:1–13:6](#)

Friday [Psalms 14:1–15:5](#)

Saturday [Psalms 16:1–17:15](#)

Week Thirty-Eight

Sunday [Psalms 18:1–50](#)

Monday [Psalms 19:1–14](#)

Tuesday [Psalms 20:1–22:31](#)

Wednesday [Psalms 23:1–24:10](#)

Thursday [Psalms 25:1–26:12](#)

Friday [Psalms 27:1–28:9](#)

Saturday [Psalms 29:1–30:12](#)

Week Thirty-Nine

Sunday [Psalms 31:1–24](#)

Monday [Psalms 32:1–33:22](#)

Tuesday [Psalms 34:1–22](#)

Wednesday [Psalms 35:1–36:12](#)

Thursday [Psalms 37:1–40](#)

Friday [Psalms 38:1–39:13](#)

Saturday [Psalms 40:1–41:13](#)

Week Forty

Sunday [Psalms 42:1–43:5](#)

Monday [Psalms 44:1–26](#)

Tuesday [Psalms 45:1–46:11](#)

Wednesday [Psalms 47:1–49:20](#)

Thursday [Psalms 50:1–52:9](#)

Friday [Psalms 53:1–55:23](#)

Saturday [Psalms 56:1–57:11](#)

Week Forty-One

Sunday [Psalms 58:1–59:17](#)

Monday [Psalms 60:1–62:12](#)

Tuesday [Psalms 63:1–65:13](#)

Wednesday [Psalms 66:1–67:7](#)

Thursday [Psalms 68:1–69:36](#)

Friday [Psalms 70:1–71:24](#)

Saturday [Psalms 72:1–20](#)

Week Forty-Two

Sunday [Psalms 73:1–28](#)

Monday [Psalms 74:1–23](#)

Tuesday [Psalms 75:1–76:12](#)

Wednesday [Psalms 77:1–20](#)

Thursday [Psalms 78:1–72](#)

Friday [Psalms 79:1–80:19](#)

Saturday [Psalms 81:1–82:8](#)

Week Forty-Three

Sunday [Psalms 83:1–84:12](#)

Monday [Psalms 85:1–86:17](#)

Tuesday [Psalms 87:1–88:18](#)

Wednesday [Psalms 89:1–52](#)

Thursday [Psalms 90:1–91:16](#)

Friday [Psalms 92:1–93:5](#)

Saturday [Psalms 94:1–23](#)

Week Forty-Four

Sunday [Psalms 95:1–96:13](#)

Monday [Psalms 97:1–98:9](#)

Tuesday [Psalms 99:1–101:8](#)

Wednesday [Psalms 102:1–28](#)

Thursday [Psalms 103:1–22](#)

Friday [Psalms 104:1–35](#)

Saturday [Psalms 105:1–45](#)

Week Forty-Five

Sunday [Psalms 106:1–48](#)

Monday [Psalms 107:1–43](#)

Tuesday [Psalms 108:1–109:31](#)

Wednesday [Psalms 110:1–112:10](#)

Thursday [Psalms 113:1–115:18](#)

Friday [Psalms 116:1–117:2](#)

Saturday [Psalms 118:1–29](#)

Week Forty-Six

Sunday [Psalm 119:1–176](#)

Monday [Psalms 120:1–123:4](#)

Tuesday [Psalms 124:1–127:5](#)

Wednesday [Psalms 128:1–131:3](#)

Thursday [Psalms 132:1–134:3](#)

Friday [Psalm 135:1–21](#)

Saturday [Psalm 136:1–26](#)

Week Forty-Seven

Sunday [Psalms 137:1–138:8](#)

Monday [Psalm 139:1–24](#)

Tuesday [Psalms 140:1–144:15](#)

Wednesday [Psalms 145:1–150:6](#)

Thursday Read Proverbs Introduction and Key Verse

Friday [Proverbs 1:1–33](#)

Saturday [Proverbs 2:1–22](#)

Week Forty-Eight

Sunday [Proverbs 3:1–35](#)

Monday [Proverbs 4:1–27](#)

Tuesday [Proverbs 5:1–6:35](#)

Wednesday [Proverbs 7:1–27](#)

Thursday [Proverbs 8:1–36](#)

Friday [Proverbs 9:1–18](#)

Saturday [Proverbs 10:1–32](#)

Week Forty-Nine

Sunday [Proverbs 11:1–31](#)
Monday [Proverbs 12:1–13:25](#)
Tuesday [Proverbs 14:1–35](#)
Wednesday [Proverbs 15:1–33](#)
Thursday [Proverbs 16:1–33](#)
Friday [Proverbs 17:1–28](#)
Saturday [Proverbs 18:1–24](#)

Week Fifty

Sunday [Proverbs 19:1–29](#)
Monday [Proverbs 20:1–30](#)
Tuesday [Proverbs 21:1–31](#)
Wednesday [Proverbs 22:1–29](#)
Thursday [Proverbs 23:1–35](#)
Friday [Proverbs 24:1–34](#)
Saturday [Proverbs 25:1–28](#)

Week Fifty-One

Sunday [Proverbs 26:1–28](#)
Monday [Proverbs 27:1–27](#)
Tuesday [Proverbs 28:1–28](#)
Wednesday [Proverbs 29:1–27](#)
Thursday [Proverbs 30:1–33](#)
Friday [Proverbs 31:1–31](#)
Saturday Read Ecclesiastes Introduction and Key Verse *Week Fifty-Two*

Sunday [Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:26](#)
Monday [Ecclesiastes 3:1–5:17](#)
Tuesday [Ecclesiastes 5:18–8:17](#)

Wednesday [Ecclesiastes 9:1–12:14](#)

Thursday Read Song of Solomon Introduction and Key Verse

Friday [Song of Solomon 1:1–2:7](#)

Saturday [Song of Solomon 2:8–3:4](#)

Year Two

Week One

Sunday [Song of Solomon 3:5–5:1](#)

Monday [Song of Solomon 5:2–6:3](#)

Tuesday [Song of Solomon 6:4–7:9](#)

Wednesday [Song of Solomon 7:10–8:4](#)

Thursday [Song of Solomon 8:5–14](#)

Friday Read Isaiah Introduction and Key Verse

Saturday [Isaiah 1:1–31](#)

Week Two

Sunday [Isaiah 2:1–4:6](#)

Monday [Isaiah 5:1–30](#)

Tuesday [Isaiah 6:1–7:25](#)

Wednesday [Isaiah 8:1–10:34](#)

Thursday [Isaiah 11:1–12:6](#)

Friday [Isaiah 13:1–21:17](#)

Saturday [Isaiah 22:1–23:18](#)

Week Three

Sunday [Isaiah 24:1–27:13](#)

Monday [Isaiah 28:1–31:9](#)

Tuesday [Isaiah 32:1–35:10](#)
Wednesday [Isaiah 36:1–39:8](#)
Thursday [Isaiah 40:1–41:29](#)
Friday [Isaiah 42:1–43:28](#)
Saturday [Isaiah 44:1–46:13](#)

Week Four

Sunday [Isaiah 47:1–48:22](#)
Monday [Isaiah 49:1–52:12](#)
Tuesday [Isaiah 52:13–53:12](#)
Wednesday [Isaiah 54:1–55:13](#)
Thursday [Isaiah 56:1–57:21](#)
Friday [Isaiah 58:1–59:21](#)
Saturday [Isaiah 60:1–61:11](#)

Week Five

Sunday [Isaiah 62:1–64:12](#)
Monday [Isaiah 65:1–66:24](#)
Tuesday Read Jeremiah Introduction and Key Verse
Wednesday [Jeremiah 1:1–19](#)
Thursday [Jeremiah 2:1–6:30](#)
Friday [Jeremiah 7:1–10:25](#)
Saturday [Jeremiah 11:1–23](#)

Week Six

Sunday [Jeremiah 12:1–13:27](#)
Monday [Jeremiah 14:1–17:27](#)
Tuesday [Jeremiah 18:1–20:18](#)
Wednesday [Jeremiah 21:1–23:40](#)

Thursday [Jeremiah 24:1–26:24](#)
Friday [Jeremiah 27:1–29:32](#)
Saturday [Jeremiah 30:1–33:26](#)

Week Seven

Sunday [Jeremiah 34:1–35:19](#)
Monday [Jeremiah 36:1–32](#)
Tuesday [Jeremiah 37:1–21](#)
Wednesday [Jeremiah 38:1–28](#)
Thursday [Jeremiah 39:1–18](#)
Friday [Jeremiah 40:1–45:5](#)
Saturday [Jeremiah 46:1–49:39](#)

Week Eight

Sunday [Jeremiah 50:1–51:64](#)
Monday [Jeremiah 52:1–34](#)
Tuesday Read Lamentations Introduction and Key Verse
Wednesday [Lamentations 1:1–22](#)
Thursday [Lamentations 2:1–22](#)
Friday [Lamentations 3:1–66](#)
Saturday [Lamentations 4:1–5:22](#)

Week Nine

Sunday Read Ezekiel Introduction and Key Verse
Monday [Ezekiel 1:1–3:27](#)
Tuesday [Ezekiel 4:1–7:27](#)
Wednesday [Ezekiel 8:1–11:25](#)
Thursday [Ezekiel 12:1–28](#)
Friday [Ezekiel 13:1–14:23](#)

Saturday [Ezekiel 15:1–20:44](#)

Week Ten

Sunday [Ezekiel 20:45–24:27](#)

Monday [Ezekiel 25:1–32:32](#)

Tuesday [Ezekiel 33:1–36:38](#)

Wednesday [Ezekiel 37:1–39:29](#)

Thursday [Ezekiel 40:1–42:20](#)

Friday [Ezekiel 43:1–48:35](#)

Saturday Read Daniel Introduction and Key Verse *Week Eleven*

Sunday [Daniel 1:1–21](#)

Monday [Daniel 2:1–49](#)

Tuesday [Daniel 3:1–30](#)

Wednesday [Daniel 4:1–37](#)

Thursday [Daniel 5:1–31](#)

Friday [Daniel 6:1–28](#)

Saturday [Daniel 7:1–28](#)

Week Twelve

Sunday [Daniel 8:1–27](#)

Monday [Daniel 9:1–27](#)

Tuesday [Daniel 10:1–12:13](#)

Wednesday Read Hosea Introduction and Key Verse

Thursday [Hosea 1:1–3:5](#)

Friday [Hosea 4:1–5:15](#)

Saturday [Hosea 6:1–10:15](#)

Week Thirteen

Sunday [Hosea 11:1–14:9](#)

Monday Read Joel Introduction and Key Verse

Tuesday [Joel 1:1–3:21](#)

Wednesday Read Amos Introduction and Key Verse

Thursday [Amos 1:1–2:16](#)

Friday [Amos 3:1–6:14](#)

Saturday [Amos 7:1–9:15](#)

Week Fourteen

Sunday Read Obadiah Introduction and Key Verse

Monday [Obadiah 1–21](#)

Tuesday Read Jonah Introduction and Key Verse

Wednesday [Jonah 1:1–2:10](#)

Thursday [Jonah 3:1–4:11](#)

Friday Read Micah Introduction and Key Verse

Saturday [Micah 1:1–2:13](#)

Week Fifteen

Sunday [Micah 3:1–5:15](#)

Monday [Micah 6:1–7:20](#)

Tuesday Read Nahum Introduction and Key Verse

Wednesday [Nahum 1:1–3:19](#)

Thursday Read Habakkuk Introduction and Key Verse

Friday [Habakkuk 1:1–3:19](#)

Saturday Read Zephaniah Introduction and Key Verse *Week Sixteen*

Sunday [Zephaniah 1:1–3:20](#)

Monday Read Haggai Introduction and Key Verse

Tuesday [Haggai 1:1–2:23](#)

Wednesday Read Zechariah Introduction and Key Verse

Thursday [Zechariah 1:1–6:8](#)

Friday [Zechariah 6:9–8:23](#)

Saturday [Zechariah 9:1–14:21](#)

Week Seventeen

Sunday Read Malachi Introduction and Key Verse

Monday [Malachi 1:1–4:6](#)

Tuesday Read Matthew Introduction and Key Verse

Wednesday [Matthew 1:1–2:23](#)

Thursday [Matthew 3:1–17](#)

Friday [Matthew 4:1–25](#)

Saturday [Matthew 5:1–48](#)

Week Eighteen

Sunday [Matthew 6:1–34](#)

Monday [Matthew 7:1–29](#)

Tuesday [Matthew 8:1–34](#)

Wednesday [Matthew 9:1–38](#)

Thursday [Matthew 10:1–11:19](#)

Friday [Matthew 11:20–12:50](#)

Saturday [Matthew 13:1–58](#)

Week Nineteen

Sunday [Matthew 14:1–36](#)

Monday [Matthew 15:1–39](#)

Tuesday [Matthew 16:1–28](#)

Wednesday [Matthew 17:1–18:14](#)

Thursday [Matthew 18:15–19:30](#)

Friday [Matthew 20:1–34](#)
Saturday [Matthew 21:1–46](#)

Week Twenty

Sunday [Matthew 22:1–46](#)
Monday [Matthew 23:1–39](#)
Tuesday [Matthew 24:1–51](#)
Wednesday [Matthew 25:1–46](#)
Thursday [Matthew 26:1–75](#)
Friday [Matthew 27:1–66](#)
Saturday [Matthew 28:1–20](#)

Week Twenty-One

Sunday Read Mark Introduction and Key Verse
Monday [Mark 1:1–45](#)
Tuesday [Mark 2:1–28](#)
Wednesday [Mark 3:1–35](#)
Thursday [Mark 4:1–41](#)
Friday [Mark 5:1–43](#)
Saturday [Mark 6:1–7:23](#)

Week Twenty-Two

Sunday [Mark 7:24–8:38](#)
Monday [Mark 9:1–50](#)
Tuesday [Mark 10:1–52](#)
Wednesday [Mark 11:1–33](#)
Thursday [Mark 12:1–44](#)
Friday [Mark 13:1–37](#)
Saturday [Mark 14:1–72](#)

Week Twenty-Three

Sunday [Mark 15:1–47](#)

Monday [Mark 16:1–20](#)

Tuesday Read Luke Introduction and Key Verse

Wednesday [Luke 1:1–80](#)

Thursday [Luke 2:1–52](#)

Friday [Luke 3:1–38](#)

Saturday [Luke 4:1–44](#)

Week Twenty-Four

Sunday [Luke 5:1–39](#)

Monday [Luke 6:1–49](#)

Tuesday [Luke 7:1–50](#)

Wednesday [Luke 8:1–9:17](#)

Thursday [Luke 9:18–10:42](#)

Friday [Luke 11:1–54](#)

Saturday [Luke 12:1–59](#)

Week Twenty-Five

Sunday [Luke 13:1–35](#)

Monday [Luke 14:1–35](#)

Tuesday [Luke 15:1–32](#)

Wednesday [Luke 16:1–31](#)

Thursday [Luke 17:1–37](#)

Friday [Luke 18:1–43](#)

Saturday [Luke 19:1–48](#)

Week Twenty-Six

Sunday [Luke 20:1–47](#)

Monday [Luke 21:1–38](#)

Tuesday [Luke 22:1–71](#)

Wednesday [Luke 23:1–56](#)

Thursday [Luke 24:1–53](#)

Friday Read John Introduction and Key Verse

Saturday [John 1:1–51](#)

Week Twenty-Seven

Sunday [John 2:1–25](#)

Monday [John 3:1–36](#)

Tuesday [John 4:1–54](#)

Wednesday [John 5:1–47](#)

Thursday [John 6:1–71](#)

Friday [John 7:1–53](#)

Saturday [John 8:1–59](#)

Week Twenty-Eight

Sunday [John 9:1–41](#)

Monday [John 10:1–42](#)

Tuesday [John 11:1–57](#)

Wednesday [John 12:1–50](#)

Thursday [John 13:1–38](#)

Friday [John 14:1–31](#)

Saturday [John 15:1–16:4a](#)

Week Twenty-Nine

Sunday [John 16:4b–33](#)

Monday [John 17:1–26](#)

Tuesday [John 18:1–27](#)

Wednesday [John 18:28–19:42](#)

Thursday [John 20:1–31](#)

Friday [John 21:1–25](#)

Saturday Read Acts Introduction and Key Verse *Week Thirty*

Sunday [Acts 1:1–2:47](#)

Monday [Acts 3:1–4:37](#)

Tuesday [Acts 5:1–42](#)

Wednesday [Acts 6:1–15](#)

Thursday [Acts 7:1–8:1a](#)

Friday [Acts 8:1b–40](#)

Saturday [Acts 9:1–43](#)

Week Thirty-One

Sunday [Acts 10:1–11:30](#)

Monday [Acts 12:1–25](#)

Tuesday [Acts 13:1–52](#)

Wednesday [Acts 14:1–28](#)

Thursday [Acts 15:1–41](#)

Friday [Acts 16:1–40](#)

Saturday [Acts 17:1–34](#)

Week Thirty-Two

Sunday [Acts 18:1–28](#)

Monday [Acts 19:1–41](#)

Tuesday [Acts 20:1–38](#)

Wednesday [Acts 21:1–40](#)

Thursday [Acts 22:1–29](#)

Friday [Acts 22:30–23:35](#)

Saturday [Acts 24:1–27](#)

Week Thirty-Three

Sunday [Acts 25:1–27](#)

Monday [Acts 26:1–32](#)

Tuesday [Acts 27:1–44](#)

Wednesday [Acts 28:1–31](#)

Thursday Read Romans Introduction and Key Verse

Friday [Romans 1:1–32](#)

Saturday [Romans 2:1–3:8](#)

Week Thirty-Four

Sunday [Romans 3:9–31](#)

Monday [Romans 4:1–25](#)

Tuesday [Romans 5:1–21](#)

Wednesday [Romans 6:1–23](#)

Thursday [Romans 7:1–25](#)

Friday [Romans 8:1–39](#)

Saturday [Romans 9:1–33](#)

Week Thirty-Five

Sunday [Romans 10:1–21](#)

Monday [Romans 11:1–36](#)

Tuesday [Romans 12:1–21](#)

Wednesday [Romans 13:1–14](#)

Thursday [Romans 14:1–15:13](#)

Friday [Romans 15:14–33](#)

Saturday [Romans 16:1–27](#)

Week Thirty-Six

Sunday Read 1 Corinthians Introduction and Key Verse

Monday [1 Corinthians 1:1–31](#)

Tuesday [1 Corinthians 2:1–16](#)

Wednesday [1 Corinthians 3:1–23](#)

Thursday [1 Corinthians 4:1–21](#)

Friday [1 Corinthians 5:1–6:20](#)

Saturday [1 Corinthians 7:1–40](#)

Week Thirty-Seven

Sunday [1 Corinthians 8:1–9:27](#)

Monday [1 Corinthians 10:1–11:1](#)

Tuesday [1 Corinthians 11:2–34](#)

Wednesday [1 Corinthians 12:1–31a](#)

Thursday [1 Corinthians 12:31b–13:13](#)

Friday [1 Corinthians 14:1–40](#)

Saturday [1 Corinthians 15:1–58](#)

Week Thirty-Eight

Sunday [1 Corinthians 16:1–24](#)

Monday Read 2 Corinthians Introduction and Key Verse

Tuesday [2 Corinthians 1:1–2:4](#)

Wednesday [2 Corinthians 2:5–17](#)

Thursday [2 Corinthians 3:1–18](#)

Friday [2 Corinthians 4:1–15](#)

Saturday [2 Corinthians 4:16–6:13](#)

Week Thirty-Nine

Sunday [2 Corinthians 6:14–7:16](#)

Monday [2 Corinthians 8:1–9:15](#)

Tuesday [2 Corinthians 10:1–11:15](#)

Wednesday [2 Corinthians 11:16–12:21](#)

Thursday [2 Corinthians 13:1–14](#)

Friday Read Galatians Introduction and Key Verse

Saturday [Galatians 1:1–24](#)

Week Forty

Sunday [Galatians 2:1–21](#)

Monday [Galatians 3:1–4:7](#)

Tuesday [Galatians 4:8–31](#)

Wednesday [Galatians 5:1–26](#)

Thursday [Galatians 6:1–18](#)

Friday Read Ephesians Introduction and Key Verse

Saturday [Ephesians 1:1–23](#)

Week Forty-One

Sunday [Ephesians 2:1–22](#)

Monday [Ephesians 3:1–21](#)

Tuesday [Ephesians 4:1–5:20](#)

Wednesday [Ephesians 5:21–6:24](#)

Thursday Read Philippians Introduction and Key Verse

Friday [Philippians 1:1–2:30](#)

Saturday [Philippians 3:1–21](#)

Week Forty-Two

Sunday [Philippians 4:1–23](#)

Monday Read Colossians Introduction and Key Verse

Tuesday [Colossians 1:1–2:5](#)

Wednesday [Colossians 2:6–23](#)

Thursday [Colossians 3:1–4:1](#)

Friday [Colossians 4:2–18](#)

Saturday Read [1](#) and [2](#) Thessalonians Introductions and Key Verses *Week Forty-Three*

Sunday [1 Thessalonians 1:1–10](#)

Monday [1 Thessalonians 2:1–3:13](#)

Tuesday [1 Thessalonians 4:1–5:28](#)

Wednesday [2 Thessalonians 1:1–12](#)

Thursday [2 Thessalonians 2:1–3:18](#)

Friday Read [1](#) and [2](#) Timothy Introductions and Key Verses

Saturday [1 Timothy 1:1–2:15](#)

Week Forty-Four

Sunday [1 Timothy 3:1–16](#)

Monday [1 Timothy 4:1–6:21](#)

Tuesday [2 Timothy 1:1–18](#)

Wednesday [2 Timothy 2:1–26](#)

Thursday [2 Timothy 3:1–4:22](#)

Friday Read Titus Introduction and Key Verse

Saturday [Titus 1:1–2:15](#)

Week Forty-Five

Sunday [Titus 3:1–15](#)

Monday Read Philemon Introduction and Key Verse

Tuesday [Philemon 1–25](#)

Wednesday Read Hebrews Introduction and Key Verse

Thursday [Hebrews 1:1–14](#)

Friday [Hebrews 2:1–3:19](#)

Saturday [Hebrews 4:1–5:10](#)

Week Forty-Six

Sunday [Hebrews 5:11–7:28](#)

Monday [Hebrews 8:1–13](#)

Tuesday [Hebrews 9:1–22](#)

Wednesday [Hebrews 9:23–10:39](#)

Thursday [Hebrews 11:1–40](#)

Friday [Hebrews 12:1–13:25](#)

Saturday Read James Introduction and Key Verse *Week Forty-Seven*

Sunday [James 1:1–27](#)

Monday [James 2:1–26](#)

Tuesday [James 3:1–18](#)

Wednesday [James 4:1–17](#)

Thursday [James 5:1–20](#)

Friday Read [1](#) and [2](#) Peter Introductions and Key Verses

Saturday [1 Peter 1:1–25](#)

Week Forty-Eight

Sunday [1 Peter 2:1–25](#)

Monday [1 Peter 3:1–22](#)

Tuesday [1 Peter 4:1–19](#)

Wednesday [1 Peter 5:1–14](#)

Thursday [2 Peter 1:1–21](#)

Friday [2 Peter 2:1–22](#)

Saturday [2 Peter 3:1–18](#)

Week Forty-Nine

Sunday Read 1 John Introduction and Key Verse

Monday [1 John 1:1-10](#)

Tuesday [1 John 2:1-29](#)

Wednesday [1 John 3:1-24](#)

Thursday [1 John 4:1-5:21](#)

Friday Read [2](#) and 3 John Introductions and Key Verses

Saturday [2 John 1-13](#)

Week Fifty

Sunday [3 John 1-15](#)

Monday Read Jude Introduction and Key Verse

Tuesday [Jude 1-25](#)

Wednesday Read Revelation Introduction and Key Verse

Thursday [Revelation 1:1-20](#)

Friday [Revelation 2:1-29](#)

Saturday [Revelation 3:1-22](#)

Week Fifty-One

Sunday [Revelation 4:1-6:17](#)

Monday [Revelation 7:1-17](#)

Tuesday [Revelation 8:1-9:21](#)

Wednesday [Revelation 10:1-11](#)

Thursday [Revelation 11:1-19](#)

Friday [Revelation 12:1-18](#)

Saturday [Revelation 13:1-18](#)

Week Fifty-Two

Sunday [Revelation 14:1–15:8](#)

Monday [Revelation 16:1–21](#)

Tuesday [Revelation 17:1–18](#)

Wednesday [Revelation 18:1–24](#)

Thursday [Revelation 19:1–21](#)

Friday [Revelation 20:1–15](#)

Saturday [Revelation 21:1–22:21](#)

Preface to the New Century Version

God intended for everyone to be able to understand his Word. Earliest Scriptures were in Hebrew, ideally suited for a barely literate society because of its economy of words, acrostic literary form and poetic parallelism. The New Testament was first written in the simple Greek of everyday life, not in the Latin of Roman courts or the classical Greek of the academies. Even Jesus, the Master Teacher, taught spiritual principles by comparing them to such familiar terms as pearls, seeds, rocks, trees, and sheep. Likewise, the *New Century Version* translates the Scriptures in familiar, everyday words of our times.

The *New Century Version* is a translation of God's Word from the original Hebrew and Greek languages. Several previous editions of the complete *New Century Version* have been published, such as the *International Children's Bible* (1986); *Time with God* (1991); *The Odyssey Bible* (1994); *The Answer* (1993); and *The Inspirational Study Bible* (1995), among others.

A Trustworthy Translation

Two basic premises guided the translation process of the *New Century Version*. The first concern was that the translation be faithful to the manuscripts in the original languages. A team composed of the World Bible Translation Center and fifty additional, highly qualified and experienced Bible scholars and translators was assembled. The team included people with

translation experience on such accepted versions as the *New International Version*, the *New American Standard Bible*, and the *New King James Version*. The most recent scholarship and the best available Hebrew and Greek texts were used, principally the third edition of the United Bible Societies' Greek text and the latest edition of the *Biblia Hebraica*, along with the Septuagint.

A Clear Translation

The second concern was to make the language clear enough for anyone to read the Bible and understand it for himself. In maintaining clear language, several guidelines were followed. Vocabulary choice has been based upon *The Living Word Vocabulary* by Dr. Edgar Dale and Dr. Joseph O'Rourke (Worldbook-Childcraft International), which is the standard used by the editors of *The World Book Encyclopedia* to determine appropriate vocabulary.

The *New Century Version* aids understanding by putting concepts into natural terms. Modern measurements and geographical locations have been used as much as possible. For instance, terms such as "shekels," "cubits," "omer," and "hin" have been converted to modern equivalents of weights and measures. Where geographical references are identical, the modern name has been used, such as the "Mediterranean Sea" instead of "Great Sea" or "Western Sea." Also, to minimize confusion, the most familiar name for a place is used consistently, instead of using variant names for the same place. "Lake Galilee" is used throughout rather than its variant forms, "Sea of Kinnereth," "Lake Gennesaret," and "Sea of Tiberias."

Ancient customs are often unfamiliar to modern readers.

Customs such as shaving a man's beard to shame him or walking between the halves of a dead animal to seal an agreement are meaningless to most people. So these are clarified either in the text or in a footnote.

Since *meanings* of words change with time, care has been taken to avoid potential misunderstandings. Frequently in the Old Testament God tells his people to "devote" something to him, as when he tells the Israelites to devote Jericho and everything in it to him. While we might understand this to mean he is telling them to keep it safe and holy, the exact opposite is true. He is telling them to destroy it totally as an offering to him. The *New Century Version* communicates the idea clearly by translating "devoted," in these situations, as "destroyed as an offering to the Lord."

Rhetorical questions have been stated according to their implied answers. The psalmist's question, "What god is so great as our God?" has been stated more directly as, "No god is as great as our God."

Figures of speech have been translated according to their meanings. For instance, the expression, "The Virgin Daughter of Zion," which is frequently used in the Old Testament, is simply translated "the people of Jerusalem."

Idiomatic expressions of the biblical languages are translated to communicate the same meaning to today's reader that would have been understood by the original audience. For example, the Hebrew idiom "he rested with his fathers" is translated by its corresponding meaning—"he died."

Obscure terms have been clarified. In the Old Testament God frequently condemns the people for their "high places" and "Asherah poles." The *New Century Version* translates these according to their meanings, which would have been

understood by the Hebrews. “High places” is translated “places where gods were worshiped,” and “Asherah poles” is translated “Asherah idols.”

Gender language has also been translated with a concern for clarity. To avoid the misconception that “man” and “mankind” and “he” are exclusively masculine when they are being used in a generic sense, this translation has chosen to use less ambiguous language, such as “people” and “humans” and “human beings,” and has prayerfully attempted throughout to choose gender language that would accurately convey the intent of the original writers. Specifically and exclusively masculine and feminine references in the text have been retained.

Following in the tradition of other English versions, the *New Century Version* indicates the divine name YHWH, the Tetragrammaton, by putting Lord, and sometimes GOD, in capital letters. This is to distinguish it from Adonai, another Hebrew word that is translated Lord.

Every attempt has been made to maintain proper English style, while clarifying concepts and communication. The beauty of the Hebrew parallelism in poetry and the wordplays have been retained, and the images of the ancient languages have been captured in equivalent English images wherever possible.

Our Prayer

It is with great humility and prayerfulness that this Bible is presented. We acknowledge the infallibility of God’s Word and yet our own human frailty. We pray that God has worked through us as his vessels so that we all might better learn his

truth for ourselves and that it might richly grow in our lives. It is to his glory that this Bible is given.

The Publisher

The Old Testament

The Book of Genesis

Introduction

So there you are, a teenager at your grandparent's house. You don't really want to be there, but it's one of those family things and so you're there.

You sit politely and act like you are listening as your folks and grandparents talk. Then your grandmother says something that catches your attention. She refers to your great-grandfather and the trip he made to America from the "old country."

"What?" you ask.

Grandma smiles, knowing that at some point we all wonder about our origin and here you are wondering about yours.

She unravels a tale of your family escaping persecution and settling in eastern Virginia. Next she invites you into her room, where she opens a large chest that has sat at the foot of her bed for as long as you can remember. A rush of cedar and mothballs fills the room.

"Thought you might like to see this," she explains, handing you a black-and-white photo in a large walnut frame. "It's your great-grandpa." The only thing stiffer than his collar is his expression. "Here is his father," she hands you another photo, one of a cowboy wearing a wide-brimmed hat, riding a horse.

Piece by piece, the chest tells its family tales. Soon you find yourself lost in a floor covered with old wedding gowns, photo albums, diplomas, and bronzed baby shoes. And before you leave, you find yourself the owner of something precious—a heritage. An ancestry. A beginning. An origin.

You know that you are a part of a family tree. You aren't an isolated pond, but rather a part of a river winding through a

great canyon.

You leave a richer person. Knowing where you came from says much about where you are going.

Perhaps that's why the first book of the Bible is a book of beginnings. God wants us to know from where we came. Learning that will teach us much about the place we are going.

About This Book

Author: Moses

Date Written: c. 1500 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- In the ultimate act of creativity, God formed the sky and earth out of nothing.
- Sin entered the world through the wrong choices of the very first humans.
- Back in the Garden of Eden, God set into motion a plan for our redemption.
- God made a covenant with Abraham, to bless him and make him a blessing to all people. Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise.

Key Verse:

“In the beginning God created the sky and the earth” ([Genesis 1:1](#)).

Contents:

1. Beginning of the World [1:1–11:32](#)

2. Abraham [12:1–25:34](#)
3. Isaac and Jacob [26:1–36:43](#)
4. Joseph and His Brothers [37:1–50:26](#)

Life Lessons

Genesis 1:1–2:3

Situation

The magnificent story of The Beginning revealed God's creativity, majesty, and love. Yet the most humbling, puzzling, and awe-inspiring act took place when God breathed the breath of life into humanity.

Observation

God demonstrated power and love by creating. With only a spoken word God created everything around us. Then, with loving care, he formed Adam out of the ground.

Inspiration

With one decision, history began. Existence became measurable.

Out of nothing came light.

Out of light came day.

Then came sky ... and earth.

And on this earth? A mighty hand went to work.

Canyons were carved. Oceans were dug. Mountains erupted out of flatlands. Stars were flung. A universe sparkled.

Our sun became just one of millions. Our galaxy became just one of thousands. Planets invisibly tethered to suns roared through space at breakneck speeds. Stars blazed with heat that could melt our planet in seconds.

The hand behind it was mighty. He is mighty.

And with this might, he created. As naturally as a

bird sings and a fish swims, he created. Just as an artist can't not paint and a runner can't not run, he couldn't not create. He was the Creator. Through and through, he was the Creator. A tireless dreamer and designer.

From the pallet of the Ageless Artist came inimitable splendors. Before there was a person to see it, his creation was pregnant with wonder....

Mundaneity found no home in his universe....

Probe deep within him. Explore every corner. Search every angle. Love is all you find. Go to the beginning of every decision he has made and you'll find it. Go to the end of every story he has told and you'll see it.

Love....

He created a paradise. A sinless sanctuary. A haven before fear. A home before there was a human dweller. No time. No death. No hurt. A gift built by God for his ultimate creation. And when he was through, he knew "it was very good."

But it wasn't enough.

His greatest work hadn't been completed. One final masterpiece was needed before he would stop.

Look to the canyons to see the Creator's splendor. Touch the flowers and see his delicacy. Listen to the thunder and hear his power. But gaze on [humanity]—the zenith—and witness all three ... and more. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

Today you will encounter God's creation. When you see the beauty around you, let each detail remind

you to lift your head in praise. Express your appreciation for God's creation. Encourage others to see the beauty of his creation.

Exploration

God the Creator—[Nehemiah 9:6](#); [Job 26:7](#); [Psalm 102:25](#); [Acts 14:15](#); [Hebrews 11:3](#).

The Beginning of the World

In the beginning God created the sky and the earth.²The earth was empty and had no form. Darkness covered the ocean, and God's Spirit was moving over the water.

³Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.⁴God saw that the light was good, so he divided the light from the darkness.⁵God named the light "day" and the darkness "night." Evening passed, and morning came. This was the first day.

⁶Then God said, "Let there be something to divide the water in two."⁷So God made the air and placed some of the water above the air and some below it.⁸God named the air "sky." Evening passed, and morning came. This was the second day.

⁹Then God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered together so the dry land will appear." And it happened.¹⁰God named the dry land "earth" and the water that was gathered together "seas." God saw that this was good.

¹¹Then God said, "Let the earth produce plants—some to make grain for seeds and others to make fruits with seeds in them. Every seed will produce more of its own kind of plant." And it happened.¹²The earth produced plants with grain for seeds and trees that made fruits with seeds in them. Each seed grew its own kind of plant. God saw that all this was good.

¹³Evening passed, and morning came. This was the third day.

¹⁴Then God said, “Let there be lights in the sky to separate day from night. These lights will be used for signs, seasons, days, and years. ¹⁵They will be in the sky to give light to the earth.” And it happened.

¹⁶So God made the two large lights. He made the brighter light to rule the day and made the smaller light to rule the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷God put all these in the sky to shine on the earth, ¹⁸to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that all these things were good. ¹⁹Evening passed, and morning came. This was the fourth day.

²⁰Then God said, “Let the water be filled with living things, and let birds fly in the air above the earth.”

²¹So God created the large sea animals and every living thing that moves in the sea. The sea is filled with these living things, with each one producing more of its own kind. He also made every bird that flies, and each bird produced more of its own kind. God saw that this was good. ²²God blessed them and said, “Have many young ones so that you may grow in number. Fill the water of the seas, and let the birds grow in number on the earth.” ²³Evening passed, and morning came. This was the fifth day.

²⁴Then God said, “Let the earth be filled with animals, each producing more of its own kind. Let there be tame animals and small crawling animals and wild animals, and let each produce more of its kind.” And it happened.

²⁵So God made the wild animals, the tame animals, and all the small crawling animals to produce more of their own kind. God saw that this was good.

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image

and likeness. And let them rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the tame animals, over all the earth, and over all the small crawling animals on the earth.”

²⁷So God created human beings in his image. In the image of God he created them. He created them male and female. ²⁸God blessed them and said, “Have many children and grow in number. Fill the earth and be its master. Rule over the fish in the sea and over the birds in the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

²⁹God said, “Look, I have given you all the plants that have grain for seeds and all the trees whose fruits have seeds in them. They will be food for you. ³⁰I have given all the green plants as food for every wild animal, every bird of the air, and every small crawling animal.” And it happened. ³¹God looked at everything he had made, and it was very good. Evening passed, and morning came. This was the sixth day.

The Seventh Day—Rest

So the sky, the earth, and all that filled them were finished. ²By the seventh day God finished the work he had been doing, so he rested from all his work. ³God blessed the seventh day and made it a holy day, because on that day he rested from all the work he had done in creating the world.

The First People

⁴This is the story of the creation of the sky and the earth. When the Lord God first made the earth and the sky, ⁵there were still no plants on the earth. Nothing was growing in the fields because the Lord God had not yet made it rain on the land. And there was no person to care for the ground, ⁶but a mist would rise up from the earth and water all the ground.

⁷Then the Lord God took dust from the ground and formed a man from it. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nose, and the man became a living person. ⁸Then the Lord God planted a garden in the east, in a place called Eden, and put the man he had formed into it. ⁹The Lord God caused every beautiful tree and every tree that was good for food to grow out of the ground. In the middle of the garden, God put the tree that gives life and also the tree that gives the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰A river flowed through Eden and watered the garden. From there the river branched out to become four rivers. ¹¹The first river, named Pishon, flows around the whole land of

Havilah, where there is gold.¹²The gold of that land is excellent. [Bdelium and onyx](#) are also found there.¹³The second river, named Gihon, flows around the whole land of Cush.¹⁴The third river, named Tigris, flows out of Assyria toward the east. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The Lord God put the man in the garden of Eden to care for it and work it.¹⁶The Lord God commanded him, “You may eat the fruit from any tree in the garden,¹⁷but you must not eat the fruit from the tree which gives the knowledge of good and evil. If you ever eat fruit from that tree, you will die!”

The First Woman

¹⁸Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is right for him.”

¹⁹From the ground God formed every wild animal and every bird in the sky, and he brought them to the man so the man could name them. Whatever the man called each living thing, that became its name.²⁰The man gave names to all the tame animals, to the birds in the sky, and to all the wild animals. But [Adam](#) did not find a helper that was right for him.²¹So the Lord God caused the man to sleep very deeply, and while he was asleep, God removed one of the man’s ribs. Then God closed up the man’s skin at the place where he took the rib.²²The Lord God used the rib from the man to make a woman, and then he brought the woman to the man.

²³And the man said,

“Now, this is someone whose bones came from my bones,

whose body came from my body.
I will call her 'woman,'
because she was taken out of man."

²⁴So a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one body.

²⁵The man and his wife were naked, but they were not ashamed.

Life Lessons

Genesis 2:4–3:24

Situation

God the Creator completed his masterpiece by creating man and woman. God breathed life and spirit into his special handiwork. Though sin entered the world, God also provided for redemption from sin.

Observation

God created people with the freedom to choose or reject him. When his creation chose to rebel, God revealed his plan for salvation.

Inspiration

He placed one scoop of clay upon another until a form lay lifeless on the ground....

All were silent as the Creator reached in himself and removed something yet unseen. "It's called 'choice.' The seed of choice."

Creation stood in silence and gazed upon the lifeless form.

An angel spoke, "But what if he ..."

"What if he chooses not to love?" the Creator

finished. "Come, I will show you."

Unbound by today, God and the angel walked into the realm of tomorrow....

The angel gasped at what he saw. Spontaneous love. Voluntary devotion. Never had he seen anything like these.... The angel stood speechless as they passed through centuries of repugnance. Never had he seen such filth. Rotten hearts. Ruptured promises. Forgotten loyalties....

The Creator walked on in time, further and further into the future, until he stood by a tree. A tree that would be fashioned into a cradle. Even then he could smell the hay that would surround him....

"Wouldn't it be easier to not plant the seed? Wouldn't it be easier to not give the choice?"

"It would," the Creator spoke slowly. "But to remove the choice is to remove the love."

... They stepped into the Garden again. The Maker looked earnestly at the clay creation. A monsoon of love swelled up within him. He had died for the creation before he had made him. God's form bent over the sculptured face and breathed. Dust stirred on the lips of the new one. The chest rose, cracking the red mud. The cheeks fleshened. A finger moved. And an eye opened.

But more incredible than the moving of the flesh was the stirring of the spirit. Those who could see the unseen gasped.

Perhaps it was the wind who said it first. Perhaps what the star saw that moment is what has made it blink ever since. Maybe it was left to an angel to

whisper it:

“It looks like ... it appears so much like ... it is him!”

The angel wasn’t speaking of the face, the features, or the body. He was looking inside—at the soul.

“It’s eternal!” gasped another.

Within the man, God had placed a divine seed. A seed of his self. The God of might had created earth’s mightiest. The Creator had created, not a creature, but another creator. And the One who had chosen to love had created one who could love in return.

Now it’s our choice.

(From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

God did not create us as robots. Praise him for giving us the ability to serve and love him purposefully. Thank him for his gifts of freedom and creativity. Set aside time today for creative praise. Make that choice today.

Exploration

Human Spirit—[Job 32:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:7](#); [Acts 7:59](#).

The Beginning of Sin

Now the snake was the most clever of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day the snake said to the woman, “Did God really say that you must not eat fruit from any tree in the garden?”

²The woman answered the snake, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden. ³But God told us, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden. You must not even touch it, or you will die.’ ”

⁴But the snake said to the woman, “You will not die. ⁵God knows that if you eat the fruit from that tree, you will learn about good and evil and you will be like God!”

⁶The woman saw that the tree was beautiful, that its fruit was good to eat, and that it would make her wise. So she took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some of the fruit to her husband, and he ate it.

⁷Then, it was as if their eyes were opened. They realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made something to cover themselves.

⁸Then they heard the Lord God walking in the garden during the cool part of the day, and the man and his wife hid from the Lord God among the trees in the garden. ⁹But the Lord God called to the man and said, “Where are you?”

¹⁰The man answered, “I heard you walking in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.”

¹¹God asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat fruit from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?”

¹²The man said, “You gave this woman to me and she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it.”

¹³Then the Lord God said to the woman, “How could you have done such a thing?”

She answered, “The snake tricked me, so I ate the fruit.”

¹⁴The Lord God said to the snake,

“Because you did this,
a curse will be put on you.

You will be cursed as no other animal, tame or wild, will ever be.

You will crawl on your stomach,
and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

¹⁵I will make you and the woman
enemies to each other.

Your descendants and her descendants
will be enemies.

One of her descendants will crush your head,
and you will bite his heel.”

¹⁶Then God said to the woman,

“I will cause you to have much trouble
when you are pregnant,

and when you give birth to children,
you will have great pain.

You will greatly desire your husband,
but he will rule over you.”

¹⁷Then God said to the man, “You listened to what your wife said, and you ate fruit from the tree from which I

commanded you not to eat.

“So I will put a curse on the ground,
and you will have to work very hard for your food.
In pain you will eat its food
all the days of your life.

¹⁸The ground will produce thorns and weeds for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹You will sweat and work hard for your food.

Later you will return to the ground,
because you were taken from it.

You are dust,
and when you die, you will return to the dust.”

²⁰The man named his wife [Eve](#), because she is the mother of everyone who has ever lived.

²¹The Lord God made clothes from animal skins for the man and his wife and dressed them. ²²Then the Lord God said, “The man has become like one of us; he knows good and evil. We must keep him from eating some of the fruit from the tree of life, or he will live forever.” ²³So the Lord God forced the man out of the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴After God forced the man out of the garden, he placed angels and a sword of fire that flashed around in every direction on its eastern border. This kept people from getting to the tree of life.

The First Family

Adam had sexual relations with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to [Cain](#). Eve said, “With the Lord’s help, I have given birth to a man.” ²After that, Eve gave birth to Cain’s brother Abel. Abel took care of flocks, and Cain became a farmer.

³Later, Cain brought some food from the ground as a gift to God. ⁴Abel brought the best parts from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord accepted Abel and his gift, ⁵but he did not accept Cain and his gift. So Cain became very angry and felt rejected.

⁶The Lord asked Cain, “Why are you angry? Why do you look so unhappy? ⁷If you do things well, I will accept you, but if you do not do them well, sin is ready to attack you. Sin wants you, but you must rule over it.”

⁸Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out into the field.” While they were out in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

⁹Later, the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

Cain answered, “I don’t know. Is it my job to take care of my brother?”

¹⁰Then the Lord said, “What have you done? Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground. ¹¹And now you will be cursed in your work with the ground, the same ground where your brother’s blood fell and where your hands killed him. ¹²You will work the ground, but it will not grow good

crops for you anymore, and you will wander around on the earth.”

¹³Then Cain said to the Lord, “This punishment is more than I can stand! ¹⁴Today you have forced me to stop working the ground, and now I must hide from you. I must wander around on the earth, and anyone who meets me can kill me.”

¹⁵The Lord said to Cain, “No! If anyone kills you, I will punish that person seven times more.” Then the Lord put a mark on Cain warning anyone who met him not to kill him.

Cain's Family

¹⁶So Cain went away from the Lord and lived in the land of [Nod](#), east of Eden. ¹⁷He had sexual relations with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. At that time Cain was building a city, which he named after his son Enoch.

¹⁸Enoch had a son named Irad, Irad had a son named Mehujael, Mehujael had a son named Methushael, and Methushael had a son named Lamech.

¹⁹Lamech married two women, Adah and Zillah. ²⁰Adah gave birth to Jabal, who became the first person to live in tents and raise cattle. ²¹Jabal's brother was Jubal, the first person to play the harp and flute. ²²Zillah gave birth to Tubal-Cain, who made tools out of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah.

²³Lamech said to his wives:

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice!
You wives of Lamech, listen to what I say.
I killed a man for wounding me,

a young man for hitting me.

²⁴If Cain's killer is punished seven times,
then Lamech's killer will be punished seventy-seven
times."

Adam and Eve Have a New Son

²⁵Adam had sexual relations with his wife Eve again, and she gave birth to a son. She named him [Seth](#) and said, "God has given me another child. He will take the place of Abel, who was killed by Cain." ²⁶Seth also had a son, and they named him Enosh. At that time people began to pray to the Lord.

Life Lessons

[Genesis 4:1–5:32](#)

Situation

After Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden ([Genesis 3](#)), sin affected the life and death of every living creature. Sin and death reigned in every individual. Enoch, the one notable exception to the punishment of death, "walked with God."

Observation

Cain, like Adam and Eve, wanted to keep his distance from God. Rather than confess his sin, Cain tried to hide it to keep it from God.

Inspiration

Here is a good rule of thumb: Those who keep secrets from God keep their distance from God. Those

who are honest with God draw near to God.

This is nothing novel. It happens between people. If you loan me your car and I wreck it, will I look forward to seeing you again? No. It is no coincidence that the result of the very first sin was to duck into the bushes. Adam and Eve ate the fruit, heard God in the garden, and crept between the leaves.

“Where are you?” God asked, not for his benefit. He knew exactly where they were. The question was spiritual, not geographical. “Examine where you are, children. You aren’t where you were. You were at my side; now you have hidden from me.”

Secrets erect a fence while confession builds a bridge.

Once there were a couple of farmers who couldn’t get along with each other. A wide ravine separated their two farms, but as a sign of their mutual distaste for each other, each constructed a fence on his side of the chasm to keep the other out.

In time, however, the daughter of one met the son of the other, and the couple fell in love. Determined not to be kept apart by the folly of their fathers, they tore down the fence and used the wood to build a bridge across the ravine.

Confession does that. Confessed sin becomes the bridge over which we can walk back into the presence of God. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Application

Ask yourself: What am I trying to hide from God? Confess your sins and your desire to live your life independent of God. He wants us to live in full

fellowship and communion with him.

Exploration

Broken Worlds—[Exodus 2–3](#); [2 Samuel 11–12](#);
[Psalm 51](#); [Jonah 1–4](#); [Matthew 26:69–75](#).

Adam's Family History

This is the family history of Adam. When God created human beings, he made them in his own likeness.²He created them male and female, and on that day he blessed them and named them human beings.

³When Adam was 130 years old, he became the father of another son in his likeness and image, and Adam named him Seth.⁴After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters.⁵So Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died.

⁶When Seth was 105 years old, he had a son named Enosh.⁷After Enosh was born, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and daughters.⁸So Seth lived a total of 912 years, and then he died.

⁹When Enosh was 90 years old, he had a son named Kenan.¹⁰After Kenan was born, Enosh lived 815 years and had other sons and daughters.¹¹So Enosh lived a total of 905 years, and then he died.

¹²When Kenan was 70 years old, he had a son named Mahalalel.¹³After Mahalalel was born, Kenan lived 840 years and had other sons and daughters.¹⁴So Kenan lived a total of 910 years, and then he died.

¹⁵When Mahalalel was 65 years old, he had a son named Jared.¹⁶After Jared was born, Mahalalel lived 830 years and had other sons and daughters.¹⁷So Mahalalel lived a total of 895 years, and then he died.

¹⁸When Jared was 162 years old, he had a son named

Enoch. ¹⁹After Enoch was born, Jared lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. ²⁰So Jared lived a total of 962 years, and then he died.

²¹When Enoch was 65 years old, he had a son named Methuselah. ²²After Methuselah was born, Enoch walked with God 300 years more and had other sons and daughters. ²³So Enoch lived a total of 365 years. ²⁴Enoch walked with God; one day Enoch could not be found, because God took him.

²⁵When Methuselah was 187 years old, he had a son named Lamech. ²⁶After Lamech was born, Methuselah lived 782 years and had other sons and daughters. ²⁷So Methuselah lived a total of 969 years, and then he died.

²⁸When Lamech was 182, he had a son. ²⁹Lamech named his son [Noah](#) and said, “He will comfort us in our work, which comes from the ground the Lord has cursed.” ³⁰After Noah was born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other sons and daughters. ³¹So Lamech lived a total of 777 years, and then he died.

³²After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The Human Race Becomes Evil

The number of people on earth began to grow, and daughters were born to them.²When the sons of God saw that these girls were beautiful, they married any of them they chose.³The Lord said, “My Spirit will not remain in human beings forever, because they are flesh. They will live only 120 years.”

⁴The Nephilim were on the earth in those days and also later. That was when the sons of God had sexual relations with the daughters of human beings. These women gave birth to children, who became famous and were the mighty warriors of long ago.

⁵The Lord saw that the human beings on the earth were very wicked and that everything they thought about was evil.⁶He was sorry he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.⁷So the Lord said, “I will destroy all human beings that I made on the earth. And I will destroy every animal and everything that crawls on the earth and the birds of the air, because I am sorry I have made them.”⁸But Noah pleased the Lord.

Noah and the Great Flood

⁹This is the family history of Noah. Noah was a good man, the most innocent man of his time, and he walked with God.¹⁰He had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

¹¹People on earth did what God said was evil, and violence was everywhere.¹²When God saw that everyone on the earth

did only evil, ¹³he said to Noah, “Because people have made the earth full of violence, I will destroy all of them from the earth. ¹⁴Build a boat of cypress wood for yourself. Make rooms in it and cover it inside and outside with tar. ¹⁵This is how big I want you to build the boat: four hundred fifty feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and forty-five feet high. ¹⁶Make an opening around the top of the boat that is eighteen inches high from the edge of the roof down. Put a door in the side of the boat. Make an upper, middle, and lower deck in it. ¹⁷I will bring a flood of water on the earth to destroy all living things that live under the sky, including everything that has the breath of life. Everything on the earth will die. ¹⁸But I will make an agreement with you—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives will all go into the boat. ¹⁹Also, you must bring into the boat two of every living thing, male and female. Keep them alive with you. ²⁰Two of every kind of bird, animal, and crawling thing will come to you to be kept alive. ²¹Also gather some of every kind of food and store it on the boat as food for you and the animals.”

²²Noah did everything that God commanded him.

Life Lessons

Genesis 6:1–8:22

Situation

The size of Noah’s ark ensured that it could carry tens of thousands of animals. This dramatic event demonstrated God’s wrath toward sin, but also his mercy toward those who seek him.

Observation

Faithfulness to God remains vital, even if everyone around us marches to a different drumbeat.

Inspiration

“You’ll never catch *me* doing *that*,” one might say. “Oh yeah?”

Upright and obedient, Noah stood alone against a carousing, lustful world that drank itself silly. Who would have thought Noah would end up drunk? Abraham was ready to push obedience to the point of sacrificing his only son. Who would imagine he would lie straight-faced?

Look at Lot standing against the filthiness of Sodom. Hardly does he get delivered from the city’s destruction than he falls into incest. Who would have guessed? Bold and courageous David was brave enough to go up against Goliath, the warrior giant of the Philistines; later on he made believe that he was a madman for fear of his enemies.

And consider Elijah. We take him to be a rather brave man, wielding the sword of God’s vengeance against tens of thousands. But the threat of one woman then sends him into suicidal despair.

Peter, as part of the inner circle, followed the footsteps of Jesus closer than anyone. He ended up cursing and denying the Lord.

“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” ([1 Corinthians 10:11](#)).

Just when you think you know yourself, you do or say something that seems so out of character. But

it's not. The character of our body of sin and death is to sin. Don't be surprised. Just be careful that you, too, don't fall. (From *Diamonds in the Dust* by Joni Eareckson Tada)

Application

God wants us to stand against sin. Sometimes we must do it all by ourselves, but it is always easier to stand with others. If you are slugging it out alone, pray for a friend—someone with whom you can share the joys and struggles of faith.

Exploration

Faithful to God—[1 Corinthians 10:13](#); [15:58](#); [Galatians 5:1](#); [Ephesians 6:14](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:15](#); [Hebrews 2:18](#); [12:1–3](#); [James 1:12](#); [1 Peter 5:8–9](#).

The Flood Begins

Then the Lord said to Noah, “I have seen that you are the best person among the people of this time, so you and your family can go into the boat.² Take with you seven pairs, each male with its female, of every kind of clean animal, and take one pair, each male with its female, of every kind of unclean animal.³ Take seven pairs of all the birds of the sky, each male with its female. This will allow all these animals to continue living on the earth after the flood.⁴ Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth. It will rain forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe off from the earth every living thing that I have made.”

⁵Noah did everything the Lord commanded him.

⁶Noah was six hundred years old when the flood came.⁷ He and his wife and his sons and their wives went into the boat to escape the waters of the flood.⁸ The clean animals, the unclean animals, the birds, and everything that crawls on the ground⁹ came to Noah. They went into the boat in groups of two, male and female, just as God had commanded Noah.¹⁰ Seven days later the flood started.

¹¹When Noah was six hundred years old, the flood started. On the seventeenth day of the second month of that year the underground springs split open, and the clouds in the sky poured out rain.¹² The rain fell on the earth for forty days and forty nights.

¹³On that same day Noah and his wife, his sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives went into the boat.¹⁴ They had every kind of wild and tame animal, every kind of animal that

crawls on the earth, and every kind of bird. ¹⁵Every creature that had the breath of life came to Noah in the boat in groups of two. ¹⁶One male and one female of every living thing came, just as God had commanded Noah. Then the Lord closed the door behind them.

¹⁷Water flooded the earth for forty days, and as it rose it lifted the boat off the ground. ¹⁸The water continued to rise, and the boat floated on it above the earth. ¹⁹The water rose so much that even the highest mountains under the sky were covered by it. ²⁰It continued to rise until it was more than twenty feet above the mountains.

²¹All living things that moved on the earth died. This included all the birds, tame animals, wild animals, and creatures that swarm on the earth, as well as all human beings. ²²So everything on dry land that had the breath of life in it died. ²³God destroyed from the earth every living thing that was on the land—every man, animal, crawling thing, and bird of the sky. All that was left was Noah and what was with him in the boat. ²⁴And the waters continued to cover the earth for one hundred fifty days.

The Flood Ends

But God remembered Noah and all the wild and tame animals with him in the boat. He made a wind blow over the earth, and the water went down.²The underground springs stopped flowing, and the clouds in the sky stopped pouring down rain.³⁻⁴The water that covered the earth began to go down. After one hundred fifty days it had gone down so much that the boat touched land again. It came to rest on one of the mountains of [Ararat](#) on the seventeenth day of the seventh month.⁵The water continued to go down so that by the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains could be seen.

⁶Forty days later Noah opened the window he had made in the boat, and ⁷he sent out a raven. It flew here and there until the water had dried up from the earth. ⁸Then Noah sent out a dove to find out if the water had dried up from the ground. ⁹The dove could not find a place to land because water still covered the earth, so it came back to the boat. Noah reached out his hand and took the bird and brought it back into the boat.

¹⁰After seven days Noah again sent out the dove from the boat, ¹¹and that evening it came back to him with a fresh olive leaf in its mouth. Then Noah knew that the ground was almost dry. ¹²Seven days later he sent the dove out again, but this time it did not come back.

¹³When Noah was six hundred and one years old, in the first day of the first month of that year, the water was dried up from the land. Noah removed the covering of the boat and saw

that the land was dry. ¹⁴By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the land was completely dry.

¹⁵Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶“You and your wife, your sons, and their wives should go out of the boat. ¹⁷Bring every animal out of the boat with you—the birds, animals, and everything that crawls on the earth. Let them have many young ones so that they might grow in number.”

¹⁸So Noah went out with his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives. ¹⁹Every animal, everything that crawls on the earth, and every bird went out of the boat by families.

²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the Lord. He took some of all the clean birds and animals, and he burned them on the altar as offerings to God. ²¹The Lord was pleased with these sacrifices and said to himself, “I will never again curse the ground because of human beings. Their thoughts are evil even when they are young, but I will never again destroy every living thing on the earth as I did this time.

²²“As long as the earth continues,
planting and harvest,
cold and hot,
summer and winter,
day and night
will not stop.”

Life Lessons

[Genesis 9:1–10:32](#)

Situation

God promised that he would never again destroy the earth with a flood. A rainbow would follow rain as a reminder that God keeps his promises. Man must treat all living creatures well.

Observation

God created a special covenant with humans that gave them dominance over the earth, yet made them accountable to God for each action.

Inspiration

There's hardly a more sobering statement in Scripture than [Romans 14:12](#): “So then, each one of us will give an account of himself to God.” The words “each one of us” apply to Christians and non-Christians alike. And though believers will be saved by grace and not by works, once in Heaven our reward there will be determined on the basis of our works. The Lord will “test the quality of each man’s work,” and for each it will be either that “he will receive his reward” or “he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames” ([1 Corinthians 3:13–15](#))....

Jesus said, “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken” ([Matthew 12:36](#)).

If we must give an account to God for every word spoken, surely we must give an account for every

hour spent carelessly (that is, wastefully, negligently)

....

The wise response to such truth is to evaluate your use of time now and spend it in a way that you would like to hear at the Judgment. And if you cannot answer your conscience regarding how you use your time in the growth of Christlikeness now, how will you be able to answer God then? (From *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney)

Application

In what areas do you need accountability? Prayer time? Bible study? Sharing your faith? Pick an area in your life that needs improvement. Find someone to hold you accountable to help you make the changes God wants.

Exploration

Accountability—[Matthew 12:36](#); [Romans 14:10–12](#); [Hebrews 13:17](#).

The New Beginning

Then God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Have many children; grow in number and fill the earth. ²Every animal on earth, every bird in the sky, every animal that crawls on the ground, and every fish in the sea will respect and fear you. I have given them to you.

³“Everything that moves, everything that is alive, is yours for food. Earlier I gave you the green plants, but now I give you everything for food. ⁴But you must not eat meat that still has blood in it, because blood gives life. ⁵I will demand blood for life. I will demand the life of any animal that kills a person, and I will demand the life of anyone who takes another person’s life.

⁶“Whoever kills a human being
will be killed by a human being,
because God made humans
in his own image.

⁷“As for you, Noah, I want you and your family to have many children, to grow in number on the earth, and to become many.”

⁸Then God said to Noah and his sons, ⁹“Now I am making my agreement with you and your people who will live after you, ¹⁰and with every living thing that is with you—the birds, the

tame and the wild animals, and with everything that came out of the boat with you—with every living thing on earth. ¹¹I make this agreement with you: I will never again destroy all living things by a flood. A flood will never again destroy the earth.”

¹²And God said, “This is the sign of the agreement between me and you and every living creature that is with you. ¹³I am putting my rainbow in the clouds as the sign of the agreement between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and a rainbow appears in them, ¹⁵I will remember my agreement between me and you and every living thing. Floods will never again destroy all life on the earth. ¹⁶When the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and I will remember the agreement that continues forever between me and every living thing on the earth.”

¹⁷So God said to Noah, “The rainbow is a sign of the agreement that I made with all living things on earth.”

Noah and His Sons

¹⁸The sons of Noah who came out of the boat with him were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.)

¹⁹These three men were Noah’s sons, and all the people on earth came from these three sons.

²⁰Noah became a farmer and planted a vineyard. ²¹When he drank wine made from his grapes, he became drunk and lay naked in his tent. ²²Ham, the father of Canaan, looked at his naked father and told his brothers outside. ²³Then Shem and Japheth got a coat and, carrying it on both their shoulders, they walked backwards into the tent and covered their father. They turned their faces away so that they did not see their

father's nakedness.

²⁴Noah was sleeping because of the wine. When he woke up and learned what his youngest son, Ham, had done to him,
²⁵he said,

“May there be a curse on Canaan!
May he be the lowest slave to his brothers.”

²⁶Noah also said,

“May the Lord, the God of Shem, be praised!
May Canaan be Shem's slave.
²⁷May God give more land to Japheth.
May Japheth live in Shem's tents,
and may Canaan be their slave.”

²⁸After the flood Noah lived 350 years. ²⁹He lived a total of 950 years, and then he died.

Nations Grow and Spread

This is the family history of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah. After the flood these three men had sons.

Japheth's Sons

²The sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras.

³The sons of Gomer were Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah.

⁴The sons of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, [Kittim](#), and Rodanim. ⁵Those who lived in the lands around the Mediterranean Sea came from these sons of Japheth. All the families grew and became different nations, each nation with its own land and its own language.

Ham's Sons

⁶The sons of Ham were Cush, [Mizraim](#), Put, and Canaan.

⁷The sons of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca.

The sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan.

⁸Cush also had a descendant named Nimrod, who became a very powerful man on earth. ⁹He was a great hunter before the Lord, which is why people say someone is “like Nimrod, a great hunter before the Lord.” ¹⁰At first Nimrod's kingdom covered Babylon, Erech, Akkad, and Calneh in the land of Babylonia.

¹¹From there he went to Assyria, where he built the cities of Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, and Calah. ¹²He also built Resen, the great city between Nineveh and Calah.

¹³Mizraim was the father of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, ¹⁴Pathrusites, Casluhites, and the people of Crete. (The Philistines came from the Casluhites.)

¹⁵Canaan was the father of Sidon, his first son, and of Heth. ¹⁶He was also the father of the Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, ¹⁷Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, ¹⁸Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites. The families of the Canaanites scattered. ¹⁹Their land reached from Sidon to Gerar as far as Gaza, and then to Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha.

²⁰All these people were the sons of Ham, and all these families had their own languages, their own lands, and their own nations.

Shem's Sons

²¹Shem, Japheth's older brother, also had sons. One of his descendants was the father of all the sons of Eber.

²²The sons of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.

²³The sons of Aram were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Meshech.

²⁴Arphaxad was the father of Shelah, who was the father of Eber. ²⁵Eber was the father of two sons—one named [Peleg](#), because the earth was divided during his life, and the other was named Joktan.

²⁶Joktan was the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, ²⁷Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, ²⁸Obal, Abimael, Sheba, ²⁹Ophir,

Havilah, and Jobab. All these people were the sons of Joktan.
³⁰They lived in the area between Mesha and Sephar in the hill country in the East.

³¹These are the people from the family of Shem, arranged by families, languages, countries, and nations.

³²This is the list of the families from the sons of Noah, arranged according to their nations. From these families came all the nations who spread across the earth after the flood.

Life Lessons

Genesis 11:1–32

Situation

People built a tower and a city called Babel as a monument to their own greatness. God thwarted this arrogant behavior by causing all the people to speak in different languages. This caused the people to scatter all over the earth.

Observation

God will not permit us to replace him as supreme in the universe. We belong to him and are responsible for our actions.

Inspiration

The scene is almost spooky: a tall, unfinished tower looming solitarily on a dusty plain. Its base is wide and strong but covered with weeds. Large stones originally intended for use in the tower lie forsaken on the ground. Buckets, hammers, and pulleys—all lie abandoned. The silhouette cast by the structure is lean and lonely.

Not too long ago, this tower was buzzing with activity. A bystander would have been impressed with the smooth-running construction of the world's first sky scraper. One group of workers stirred freshly made mortar. Another team pulled bricks out of the oven. A third group carried the bricks to the construction site while a fourth shouldered the load up a winding path to the top of the tower where it was firmly set in place.

Their dream was a tower. A tower that would be taller than anyone had ever dreamed. A tower that would punch through the clouds and scratch the heavens. And what was the purpose of the tower? To glorify God? No. To try to find God? No. To call people to look upward to God? Try again. To provide a heavenly haven of prayer? Still wrong.

The purpose of the work caused its eventual abortion. The method was right. The plan was effective. But the motive was wrong. Dead wrong. Read these minutes from the "Tower Planning Committee Meeting" and see what I mean:

"Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and [watch out] let us make a name for ourselves."

Why was the tower being built? Selfishness. Pure, 100 percent selfishness. The bricks were made of inflated egos and the mortar was made of pride. Men were giving sweat and blood for a pillar. Why? So that somebody's name could be remembered.

We have a name for that: blind ambition.

We make heroes out of people who are ambitious.

And rightly so. This world would be in sad shape without people who dream of touching the heavens. Ambition is that grit in the soul which creates disenchantment with the ordinary and puts the dare into dreams.

But left unchecked it becomes an insatiable addition to power and prestige; a roaring hunger for achievement that devours people as a lion devours an animal, leaving behind only the skeletal remains of

relationships.

Blind ambition. Distorted values.

God won't tolerate it. He didn't then and he won't now. He took the "Climb to Heaven Campaign" into his hands. With one sweep he painted the tower gray with confusion and sent workers babbling in all directions. He took man's greatest achievement and blew it into the winds like a child blows a dandelion.

Are you building any towers? Examine your motives. And remember the statement imprinted on the base of the windswept Tower of Babel: Blind ambition is a giant step away from God and one step closer to catastrophe. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

What towers have you been building? Wealth? Success? Recognition? Focus on what God wants you to build. Simplify your life. Surrender your desires to him! Let him guide your efforts.

Exploration

Pride—[Judges 8:1–3](#); [15:14–17](#); [Psalm 10:11](#); [Luke 1:48](#).

The ripple of today's lie is tomorrow's wave and next year's flood. —Max Lucado (*Just Like Jesus*)

The Languages Confused

At this time the whole world spoke one language, and everyone used the same words.² As people moved from the east, they found a plain in the land of Babylonia and settled there.

³They said to each other, "Let's make bricks and bake them to make them hard." So they used bricks instead of stones, and tar instead of mortar.⁴ Then they said to each other, "Let's build a city and a tower for ourselves, whose top will reach high into the sky. We will become famous. Then we will not be scattered over all the earth."

⁵The Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the people had built.⁶ The Lord said, "Now, these people are united, all speaking the same language. This is only the beginning of what they will do. They will be able to do anything they want."⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not be able to understand each other."

⁸So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.⁹ The place is called [Babel](#) since that is where the Lord confused the language of the whole world. So the Lord caused them to spread out from there over the whole world.

The Story of Shem's Family

¹⁰This is the family history of Shem. Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, his son Arphaxad was born.

¹¹After that, Shem lived 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

¹²When Arphaxad was 35 years old, his son Shelah was born. ¹³After that, Arphaxad lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

¹⁴When Shelah was 30 years old, his son Eber was born. ¹⁵After that, Shelah lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

¹⁶When Eber was 34 years old, his son Peleg was born. ¹⁷After that, Eber lived 430 years and had other sons and daughters.

¹⁸When Peleg was 30 years old, his son Reu was born. ¹⁹After that, Peleg lived 209 years and had other sons and daughters.

²⁰When Reu was 32 years old, his son Serug was born. ²¹After that, Reu lived 207 years and had other sons and daughters.

²²When Serug was 30 years old, his son Nahor was born. ²³After that, Serug lived 200 years and had other sons and daughters.

²⁴When Nahor was 29 years old, his son Terah was born. ²⁵After that, Nahor lived 119 years and had other sons and daughters.

²⁶After Terah was 70 years old, his sons Abram, Nahor, and Haran were born.

The Story of Terah's Family

²⁷This is the family history of Terah. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran was the father of Lot. ²⁸While his father, Terah, was still alive, Haran died in Ur in Babylonia, where he was born. ²⁹Abram and Nahor both married. Abram's wife was named Sarai, and Nahor's wife was named Milcah. She was the daughter of Haran, who was the father of both Milcah and Iscah. ³⁰Sarai was not able to have children.

³¹Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot (Haran's son), and his daughter-in-law Sarai (Abram's wife) and moved out of Ur of Babylonia. They had planned to go to the land of Canaan, but when they reached the city of Haran, they settled there.

³²Terah lived to be 205 years old, and then he died in Haran.

God Calls Abram

The Lord said to Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land I will show you.

²I will make you a great nation,
and I will bless you.

I will make you famous,
and you will be a blessing to others.

³I will bless those who bless you,
and I will place a curse on those who harm you.
And all the people on earth
will be blessed through you.”

⁴So Abram left Haran as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. At this time Abram was 75 years old. ⁵He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and everything they owned, as well as all the servants they had gotten in Haran. They set out from Haran, planning to go to the land of Canaan, and in time they arrived there.

⁶Abram traveled through that land as far as the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. The Canaanites were living in the land at that time. ⁷The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “I will give this land to your descendants.” So Abram built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. ⁸Then he traveled from Shechem to the mountain east of Bethel and set up his tent there. Bethel was to the west, and Ai was to the east. There Abram built another altar to the Lord and worshiped him. ⁹After this, he traveled on toward southern Canaan.

Abram Goes to Egypt

¹⁰At this time there was not much food in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt to live because there was so little food.

¹¹Just before they arrived in Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know you are a very beautiful woman. ¹²When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This woman is his wife.’ Then they will kill me but let you live. ¹³Tell them you are my sister so that things will go well with me and I may be allowed to live because of you.”

¹⁴When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was very beautiful. ¹⁵The Egyptian officers saw her and told the king of Egypt how beautiful she was. They took her to the king’s palace, and ¹⁶the king was kind to Abram because he thought Abram was her brother. He gave Abram sheep, cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

¹⁷But the Lord sent terrible diseases on the king and all the people in his house because of Abram’s wife Sarai. ¹⁸So the king sent for Abram and said, “What have you done to me? Why didn’t you tell me Sarai was your wife? ¹⁹Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’ so that I made her my wife? Now, here is your wife. Take her and leave!” ²⁰Then the king commanded his men to make Abram leave Egypt; so Abram and his wife left with everything they owned.

Abram and Lot Separate

So Abram, his wife, and Lot left Egypt, taking everything they owned, and traveled to southern Canaan. ²Abram was very rich in cattle, silver, and gold.

³He left southern Canaan and went back to Bethel where he had camped before, between Bethel and Ai, ⁴and where he had built an altar. So he worshiped the Lord there.

⁵During this time Lot was traveling with Abram, and Lot also had flocks, herds, and tents. ⁶Abram and Lot had so many animals that the land could not support both of them together, ⁷so Abram's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen began to argue. The Canaanites and the Perizzites were living in the land at this time.

⁸Abram said to Lot, "There should be no arguing between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, because we are brothers. ⁹We should separate. The whole land is there in front of you. If you go to the left, I will go to the right. If you go to the right, I will go to the left."

¹⁰Lot looked all around and saw the whole Jordan Valley and that there was much water there. It was like the Lord's garden, like the land of Egypt in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) ¹¹So Lot chose to move east and live in the Jordan Valley. In this way Abram and Lot separated. ¹²Abram lived in the land of Canaan, but Lot lived among the cities in the Jordan Valley, very near to Sodom. ¹³Now the people of Sodom were very evil and were always sinning against the Lord.

¹⁴After Lot left, the Lord said to Abram, “Look all around you—to the north and south and east and west. ¹⁵All this land that you see I will give to you and your descendants forever. ¹⁶I will make your descendants as many as the dust of the earth. If anyone could count the dust on the earth, he could count your people. ¹⁷Get up! Walk through all this land because I am now giving it to you.”

¹⁸So Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at the city of Hebron. There he built an altar to the Lord.

Life Lessons

Genesis 12:1–20

Situation

God promised Abram that many nations would come from his descendants. Abram believed God and obediently moved to an unknown land.

Observation

Although old, Abram left his comfortable life in Ur with only the Lord’s word as a guide. The life changes that he experienced were undoubtedly difficult, but he persevered through the difficult times.

Inspiration

A man once found a cocoon of an Emperor moth and kept it with the purpose of watching the beautiful creature emerge. Finally the day came and it began to struggle through the small opening at one end of the cocoon. The struggle continued for hours, but the moth could never force its body beyond a certain

point.

Finally believing that something was wrong and that the opening should have been larger, the man took a pair of scissors and carefully clipped the restraining threads. The moth emerged easily, and crawled out onto the windowsill. Its body was large and swollen, its wings small and shriveled. He supposed that in a few hours the wings would develop into the beautiful objects that he had expected. But it did not happen. The moth that should have been a thing of great beauty free to float and fly, spent its short life dragging around the swollen body and shriveled wings.

The constricting threads and the struggle necessary to pass through the tiny opening had been God's method of forcing fluids from the body into the wings. The "merciful" snip of the threads was the most cruel thing possible.

Often God lets us struggle rather than stepping in like a big brother to do our fighting for us. No doubt he could make it all so easy and every moment of life so pleasant. But as we struggle, becoming exhausted almost beyond endurance, changes occur in us which could not happen otherwise: the "fluids" expand our wings, and in time we can fly. Cut the struggle short at some crucial point and we are crippled forever ... or until God gives another opportunity for struggle that will do what the first aborted struggle should have been allowed to do. (From *Temptation: Help for Struggling Christians* by Charles Durham)

Application

Are you experiencing a painful restriction on your lifestyle right now: a broken relationship, a betrayal of trust, a budget squeeze, some debilitating illness, jail time or some other discipline from the Lord? Can you see the plan God may have for you, turning evil into good—as he did for Abraham? Face your struggle courageously and patiently; God may be using it to prepare you for his promised land.

Exploration

Obedient Faith—[Genesis 22:2–3](#); [Deuteronomy 26:16](#); [Joshua 1:8](#); [11:15](#); [1 Samuel 15:22](#); [John 14:31](#); [Acts 5:29](#).

Lot Is Captured

Now Amraphel was king of Babylonia, Arioch was king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer was king of Elam, and Tidal was king of Goiim. ²All these kings went to war against several other kings: Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela. (Bela is also called Zoar.)

³These kings who were attacked united their armies in the Valley of Siddim (now the Dead Sea). ⁴They had served Kedorlaomer for twelve years, but in the thirteenth year, they all turned against him. ⁵Then in the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings with him came and defeated the Rephaites in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, and the Emites in Shaveh Kiriathaim. ⁶They also defeated the Horites in the mountains of Edom to El Paran (near the desert). ⁷Then they turned back and went to En Mishpat (that is, Kadesh). They defeated all the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who lived in Hazazon Tamar.

⁸At that time the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela went out to fight in the Valley of Siddim. (Bela is called Zoar.) ⁹They fought against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Babylonia, and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings fighting against five. ¹⁰There were many tar pits in the Valley of Siddim. When the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and their armies ran away, some of the soldiers fell into the tar pits, but the others ran away to the mountains.

¹¹Now Kedorlaomer and his armies took everything the people of Sodom and Gomorrah owned, including their food. ¹²They took Lot, Abram's nephew who was living in Sodom, and everything he owned. Then they left. ¹³One of the men who was not captured went to Abram, the Hebrew, and told him what had happened. At that time Abram was camped near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite. Mamre was a brother of Eshcol and Aner, and they had all made an agreement to help Abram.

Abram Rescues Lot

¹⁴When Abram learned that Lot had been captured, he called out his 318 trained men who had been born in his camp. He led the men and chased the enemy all the way to the town of Dan. ¹⁵That night he divided his men into groups, and they made a surprise attack against the enemy. They chased them all the way to Hobah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶Then Abram brought back everything the enemy had stolen, the women and the other people, and Lot, and everything Lot owned.

¹⁷After defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, Abram went home. As he was returning, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (now called King's Valley).

¹⁸Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was a priest for God Most High ¹⁹and blessed Abram, saying,

“Abram, may you be blessed by God Most High,
the God who made heaven and earth.

²⁰And we praise God Most High,
who has helped you to defeat your enemies.”

Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything he had brought back from the battle.

²¹The king of Sodom said to Abram, “You may keep all these things for yourself. Just give me my people who were captured.”

²²But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I make a promise to the Lord, the God Most High, who made heaven and earth. ²³I promise that I will not keep anything that is yours. I will not keep even a thread or a sandal strap so that you cannot say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ ²⁴I will keep nothing but the food my young men have eaten. But give Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre their share of what we won, because they went with me into battle.”

God's Agreement with Abram

After these things happened, the Lord spoke his word to Abram in a vision: "Abram, don't be afraid. I will defend you, and I will give you a great reward."

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: Grace Before the Cross

Abram was far from perfect. There were times when he trusted the Egyptians before he trusted God. He even lied, telling Pharaoh that his wife was his sister. But Abram made one decision that changed his eternal life: He "believed God, and God accepted [Abram's] faith, and that faith made him right with God" ([Romans 4:3](#)).

Here is a man justified by faith before his circumcision (v. [10](#)), before the law (v. [13](#)), before Moses and the Ten Commandments. Here is a man justified by faith before the cross! The sin-covering blood of Calvary extends as far into the past as it does into the future.

Abraham is not the only Old Testament hero to cast himself upon God's grace... . We must not see grace as a provision made after the law had failed. Grace was offered *before* the law was revealed. Indeed, grace was offered before man was created! "You were bought, not with something that ruins like gold or silver, but with the precious blood of Christ,

who was like a pure and perfect lamb. Christ was chosen before the world was made, but he was shown to the world in these last times for your sake” ([1 Peter 1:18–20](#)). (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

²But Abram said, “Lord God, what can you give me? I have no son, so my slave Eliezer from Damascus will get everything I own after I die.” ³Abram said, “Look, you have given me no son, so a slave born in my house will inherit everything I have.”

⁴Then the Lord spoke his word to Abram: “He will not be the one to inherit what you have. You will have a son of your own who will inherit what you have.”

⁵Then God led Abram outside and said, “Look at the sky. There are so many stars you cannot count them. Your descendants also will be too many to count.”

⁶Abram believed the Lord. And the Lord accepted Abram’s faith, and that faith made him right with God.

⁷God said to Abram, “I am the Lord who led you out of Ur of Babylonia so that I could give you this land to own.”

⁸But Abram said, “Lord God, how can I be sure that I will own this land?”

⁹The Lord said to Abram, “Bring me a three-year-old cow, a three-year-old goat, a three-year-old male sheep, a dove, and a young pigeon.”

¹⁰Abram brought them all to God. Then Abram killed the animals and cut each of them into two pieces, laying each half opposite the other half. But he did not cut the birds in half.

¹¹Later, large birds flew down to eat the animals, but Abram chased them away.

¹²As the sun was going down, Abram fell into a deep sleep. While he was asleep, a very terrible darkness came. ¹³Then the Lord said to Abram, “You can be sure that your descendants will be strangers and travel in a land they don’t own. The

people there will make them slaves and be cruel to them for four hundred years.¹⁴ But I will punish the nation where they are slaves. Then your descendants will leave that land, taking great wealth with them.¹⁵ And you, Abram, will die in peace and will be buried at an old age.¹⁶ After your great-great-grandchildren are born, your people will come to this land again. It will take that long, because I am not yet going to punish the Amorites for their evil behavior.”

¹⁷After the sun went down, it was very dark. Suddenly a smoking firepot and a blazing torch [passed between the halves of the dead animals](#).¹⁸ So on that day the Lord made an agreement with Abram and said, “I will give to your descendants the land between the river of Egypt and the great river Euphrates.¹⁹ This is the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites,²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites,²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”

Life Lessons

[Genesis 13:1–14:24](#)

Situation

In response to God’s promise to give land and descendants, Abram’s family traveled from Haran through Canaan and Egypt ([Genesis 11:27–12:20](#)). God told them to avoid the land of Sodom, whose name became synonymous with gross sin ([Genesis 13:13](#); [18:16–19:29](#)). God would destroy that city, and Lot would barely escape.

Observation

Our decisions in life bear spiritual consequences.

Lot selfishly chose the lush Jordan Valley and got himself in trouble (captured by a gang of marauding kings). Abram was willing to take second choice and God blessed him.

Inspiration

Jim spent eight years in prison for murder. He was a drug dealer. In prison, Jim found a second chance in Christ. Now a minister, Jim often speaks to high school students about the decision to take drugs. “Don’t let anyone kid you,” he tells them. “Drugs are fun, drugs make you feel good, and getting high is fun. You know the beginning of drugs, and it’s fun. But I know the end of drugs... .” And then Jim tells them about the decisions that nearly ruined his life forever.

While most of us will never self-destruct in the way Jim did, we all face the choice of doing things that look like fun, but which result in a life of pain—divorce, financial disaster, disease, and relationship problems....

The big question for most of us: “Is life in the fast lane where God wants me to be?”

(From *The Man in the Mirror* by Patrick Morley)

Application

Would what you watch on television be popular in Sodom? Turn off shows that program you to lust or to enjoy violence. Rent movies carefully. We cannot serve God wholeheartedly and eagerly fulfill our sinful desires at the same time.

Exploration

Tests as Part of God’s Will—[Exodus 17:1-7](#);

Matthew 4:1–11; 1 Corinthians 10:1–13; 2 Timothy
2:14–3:9; Hebrews 4:12–16; James 1.

All Old Abe and Sarah had was a social-security check and a promise from heaven. But Abraham decided to trust the promise rather than focus on the problems. —Max Lucado (*In the Grip of Grace*)

Ishmael Is Born

Sarai, Abram's wife, had no children, but she had a slave girl from Egypt named Hagar. ²Sarai said to Abram, "Look, the Lord has not allowed me to have children, so have sexual relations with my slave girl. If she has a child, maybe I can have my own family through her."

Abram did what Sarai said. ³It was after he had lived ten years in Canaan that Sarai gave Hagar to her husband Abram. (Hagar was her slave girl from Egypt.)

⁴Abram had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When Hagar learned she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress Sarai badly. ⁵Then Sarai said to Abram, "This is your fault. I gave my slave girl to you, and when she became pregnant, she began to treat me badly. Let the Lord decide who is right—you or me."

⁶But Abram said to Sarai, "You are Hagar's mistress. Do anything you want to her." Then Sarai was hard on Hagar, and Hagar ran away.

⁷The angel of the Lord found Hagar beside a spring of water in the desert, by the road to Shur. ⁸The angel said, "Hagar, Sarai's slave girl, where have you come from? Where are you going?"

Hagar answered, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai."

⁹The angel of the Lord said to her, "Go home to your mistress and obey her." ¹⁰The angel also said, "I will give you so many descendants they cannot be counted."

¹¹The angel added,

“You are now pregnant,
and you will have a son.
You will name him [Ishmael](#),
because the Lord has heard your cries.
¹²Ishmael will be like a wild donkey.
He will be against everyone,
and everyone will be against him.
He will attack all his brothers.”

¹³The slave girl gave a name to the Lord who spoke to her:
“You are ‘God who sees me,’ ” because she said to herself,
“Have I really seen God who sees me?” ¹⁴So the well there,
between Kadesh and Bered, was called [Beer Lahai Roi](#).

¹⁵Hagar gave birth to a son for Abram, and Abram named
him Ishmael. ¹⁶Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar
gave birth to Ishmael.

Proof of the Agreement

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty. Obey me and do what is right. ²I will make an agreement between us, and I will make you the ancestor of many people.”

³Then Abram bowed facedown on the ground. God said to him, ⁴“I am making my agreement with you: I will make you the father of many nations. ⁵I am changing your name from [Abram](#) to [Abraham](#) because I am making you a father of many nations. ⁶I will give you many descendants. New nations will be born from you, and kings will come from you. ⁷And I will make an agreement between me and you and all your descendants from now on: I will be your God and the God of all your descendants. ⁸You live in the land of Canaan now as a stranger, but I will give you and your descendants all this land forever. And I will be the God of your descendants.”

⁹Then God said to Abraham, “You and your descendants must keep this agreement from now on. ¹⁰This is my agreement with you and all your descendants, which you must obey: Every male among you must be circumcised. ¹¹Cut away your foreskin to show that you are prepared to follow the agreement between me and you. ¹²From now on when a baby boy is eight days old, you will circumcise him. This includes any boy born among your people or any who is your slave, who is not one of your descendants. ¹³Circumcise every baby boy whether he is born in your family or bought as a slave. Your bodies will be marked to show that you are part of my agreement that lasts

forever. ¹⁴Any male who is not circumcised will be cut off from his people, because he has broken my agreement.”

Isaac—the Promised Son

¹⁵God said to Abraham, “I will change the name of [Sarai](#), your wife, to [Sarah](#). ¹⁶I will bless her and give her a son, and you will be the father. She will be the mother of many nations. Kings of nations will come from her.”

¹⁷Abraham bowed facedown on the ground and laughed. He said to himself, “Can a man have a child when he is a hundred years old? Can Sarah give birth to a child when she is ninety?” ¹⁸Then Abraham said to God, “Please let Ishmael be the son you promised.”

¹⁹God said, “No, Sarah your wife will have a son, and you will name him [Isaac](#). I will make my agreement with him to be an agreement that continues forever with all his descendants.

²⁰“As for Ishmael, I have heard you. I will bless him and give him many descendants. And I will cause their numbers to grow greatly. He will be the father of twelve great leaders, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹But I will make my agreement with Isaac, the son whom Sarah will have at this same time next year.” ²²After God finished talking with Abraham, God rose and left him.

²³Then Abraham gathered Ishmael, all the males born in his camp, and the slaves he had bought. So that day Abraham circumcised every man and boy in his camp as God had told him to do. ²⁴Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised. ²⁵And Ishmael, his son, was thirteen years old when he was circumcised. ²⁶Abraham and his son were

circumcised on the same day.²⁷ Also on that day all the men in Abraham's camp were circumcised, including all those born in his camp and all the slaves he had bought from other nations.

Life Lessons

Genesis 15:1–17:27

Situation

God promised descendants and land to the aging traveler, Abram. Despite God's promise to him, nagging doubt caused Abram to waver between shortsighted compromise and obedient faith.

Observation

God keeps his promises and rewards our obedient faith. When God promises to direct our paths, we can be confident he will carefully lead us.

Inspiration

I grew up in Southern California and my favorite activity was swimming. There was only one time I had to be rescued. When I was in ninth grade I went with some older friends to Tamarack State Beach near Oceanside, California, for a day of body-surfing. The waves were great that day. I decided to swim a little farther from shore in the hopes of catching some larger waves.

I was so intent on catching the waves I didn't notice that the waves were beginning to break in a pattern that can produce rip tides. As I was swimming farther out, I dove underneath a wave that was breaking right in front of me. Rather than immediately coming back up to the surface, I felt tremendous

pressure pushing my body down and pulling me out to sea. I had no idea what was happening. My feet touched the bottom. I tried to push myself up but couldn't. I was almost out of air and I panicked. I also prayed.

I forgot what I said to God but obviously He heard me. Suddenly I found myself on the surface of the water. I was exhausted and afraid it would happen again. I heard a voice shouting to me. I turned towards the voice to see a lifeguard throwing a life preserver and hung on for dear life. With the rope in one hand the lifeguard pulled me in.

When I made it to shore I was a bit embarrassed, but most of all I was grateful. The lifeguard said he had been watching me. He could see there was rip tide condition and knew I wasn't aware of it. Before I had gone under he was already swimming towards me to warn me and, if necessary, rescue me.

Over the years I've realized that living the Christian life is a lot like the experience I had that day. Even though I wasn't aware of it, the lifeguard had his eyes on me and knew I was moving into dangerous water. He was in the water before I needed him—just in case.

God is our lifeguard.... God's promises are like life preservers. They keep the soul from sinking into the sea of discouragement....

When your perspective becomes distorted and your problems begin to consume your entire field of vision, you need a perspective preserver. When it feels like God has deserted you and you begin to get

discouraged, you will find that God's promises will always pull you out and bring you back to safety.

(From Gary Oliver, "God Is a Promise Keeper" in *What Makes a Man*)

Application

Make a list of seven key promises to you from God's Word and commit them to memory, one a day for a week. Make one promise your motto for the week. Have confidence that God will do what he said. Use the promise to share your faith with someone.

Exploration

Justification by Faith—[Romans 4](#); [Galatians 3](#); [Hebrews 11](#).

The Three Visitors

Later, the Lord again appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre. Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent during the hottest part of the day. ²He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When Abraham saw them, he ran from his tent to meet them. He bowed facedown on the ground before them³and said, “Sir, if you think well of me, please stay awhile with me, your servant. ⁴I will bring some water so all of you can wash your feet. You may rest under the tree, ⁵and I will get some bread for you so you can regain your strength. Then you may continue your journey.”

The three men said, “That is fine. Do as you said.”

⁶Abraham hurried to the tent where Sarah was and said to her, “Hurry, prepare twenty quarts of fine flour, and make it into loaves of bread.” ⁷Then Abraham ran to his herd and took one of his best calves. He gave it to a servant, who hurried to kill it and to prepare it for food. ⁸Abraham gave the three men the calf that had been cooked and milk curds and milk. While they ate, he stood under the tree near them.

⁹The men asked Abraham, “Where is your wife Sarah?”

“There, in the tent,” said Abraham.

¹⁰Then the Lord said, “I will certainly return to you about this time a year from now. At that time your wife Sarah will have a son.”

Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent which was behind him. ¹¹Abraham and Sarah were very old. Since Sarah was past the age when women normally have children, ¹²she

laughed to herself, “My husband and I are too old to have a baby.”

¹³Then the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, ‘I am too old to have a baby’? ¹⁴Is anything too hard for the Lord? No! I will return to you at the right time a year from now, and Sarah will have a son.”

¹⁵Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, “I didn’t laugh.”

But the Lord said, “No. You did laugh.”

¹⁶Then the men got up to leave and started out toward Sodom. Abraham walked along with them a short time to send them on their way.

Abraham’s Bargain with God

¹⁷The Lord said, “Should I tell Abraham what I am going to do now? ¹⁸Abraham’s children will certainly become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹I have chosen him so he would command his children and his descendants to live the way the Lord wants them to, to live right and be fair. Then I, the Lord, will give Abraham what I promised him.”

²⁰Then the Lord said, “I have heard many complaints against the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. They are very evil. ²¹I will go down and see if they are as bad as I have heard. If not, I will know.”

²²So the men turned and went toward Sodom, but Abraham stood there before the Lord. ²³Then Abraham approached him and asked, “Do you plan to destroy the good people along with the evil ones? ²⁴What if there are fifty good people in that city? Will you still destroy it? Surely you will save the city for

the fifty good people living there. ²⁵Surely you will not destroy the good people along with the evil ones; then they would be treated the same. You are the judge of all the earth. Won't you do what is right?"

²⁶The Lord said, "If I find fifty good people in the city of Sodom, I will save the whole city because of them."

²⁷Then Abraham said, "Though I am only dust and ashes, I have been brave to speak to the Lord. ²⁸What if there are only forty-five good people in the city? Will you destroy the whole city for the lack of five good people?"

The Lord said, "If I find forty-five there, I will not destroy the city."

²⁹Again Abraham said to him, "If you find only forty good people there, will you destroy the city?"

The Lord said, "If I find forty, I will not destroy it."

³⁰Then Abraham said, "Lord, please don't be angry with me, but let me ask you this. If you find only thirty good people in the city, will you destroy it?"

He said, "If I find thirty good people there, I will not destroy the city."

³¹Then Abraham said, "I have been brave to speak to the Lord. But what if there are twenty good people in the city?"

He answered, "If I find twenty there, I will not destroy the city."

³²Then Abraham said, "Lord, please don't be angry with me, but let me bother you this one last time. What if you find ten there?"

He said, "If I find ten there, I will not destroy it."

³³When the Lord finished speaking to Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

Life Lessons

Genesis 18:1–20:18

Situation

God planned to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their many sins. Abraham pleaded with God for Sodom in order to save Lot's life. God completely punished the city but rescued Lot by sending two angels to escort him away.

Observation

God punishes sin but protects righteousness. God destroyed entire cities because the evil practiced in them was great.

Inspiration

Though God's people often forgot their God, God didn't forget them. He kept his word... . He could have given up. He could have turned his back. He could have walked away from the wretched mess, but he didn't.

He didn't give up.

When he became flesh and was the victim of an assassination attempt before he was two years old, he didn't give up.

When the people from his own home town tried to push him over a cliff, he didn't give up.

When his brothers ridiculed him, he didn't give up.

When he was accused of blaspheming God by people who didn't fear God, he didn't give up.

When Peter worshiped him at the supper and

cursed him at the fire, he didn't give up.

When people spat in his face, he didn't spit back. When the bystanders slapped him, he didn't slap them. When a whip ripped his sides, he didn't turn and command the awaiting angels to stuff that whip down that soldier's throat.

And when human hands fastened the divine hands to a cross with spikes, it wasn't the soldiers who held the hands of Jesus steady. It was God who held them steady. For those wounded hands were the same hands that had ... brought light into thick and dreadful darkness. They had come to do it again.

(From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

Application

Does the place where you live resemble Sodom? Stand against evil in your town or city. Be a voice for righteousness. Brainstorm with a friend how you can make a difference.

Exploration

God's Judgment—[Deuteronomy 7:2](#); [Judges 2:1–3](#); [1 Samuel 2:25](#); [1 Kings 22:34–38](#); [1 Chronicles 13:10–14](#).

The consequence of sin is not a bad day or a bad mood but a dead soul. The sign of a dead soul is clear: poisoned lips and cursing mouths, feet that lead to violence and eyes that don't see God. —Max Lucado (*In the Grip of Grace*)

Lot Leaves Sodom

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting near the city gate. When he saw them, he got up and went to them and bowed facedown on the ground. ²Lot said, “Sirs, please come to my house and spend the night. There you can wash your feet, and then tomorrow you may continue your journey.”

The angels answered, “No, we will spend the night in the city’s public square.”

³But Lot begged them to come, so they agreed and went to his house. Then Lot prepared a meal for them. He baked bread without yeast, and they ate it.

⁴Before bedtime, men both young and old and from every part of Sodom surrounded Lot’s house. ⁵They called to Lot, “Where are the two men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so we can have sexual relations with them.”

⁶Lot went outside to them, closing the door behind him. ⁷He said, “No, my brothers! Do not do this evil thing. ⁸Look! I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. I will give them to you, and you may do anything you want with them. But please don’t do anything to these men. They have come to my house, and I must protect them.”

⁹The men around the house answered, “Move out of the way!” Then they said to each other, “This man Lot came to our city as a stranger, and now he wants to tell us what to do!” They said to Lot, “We will do worse things to you than to them.” They started pushing him back and were ready to break down the door.

¹⁰But the two men staying with Lot opened the door, pulled him back inside the house, and then closed the door. ¹¹They struck those outside the door with blindness, so the men, both young and old, could not find the door.

¹²The two men said to Lot, “Do you have any other relatives in this city? Do you have any sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or any other relatives? If you do, tell them to leave now, ¹³because we are about to destroy this city. The Lord has heard of all the evil that is here, so he has sent us to destroy it.”

¹⁴So Lot went out and said to his future sons-in-law who were pledged to marry his daughters, “Hurry and leave this city! The Lord is about to destroy it!” But they thought Lot was joking.

¹⁵At dawn the next morning, the angels begged Lot to hurry. They said, “Go! Take your wife and your two daughters with you so you will not be destroyed when the city is punished.”

¹⁶But Lot delayed. So the two men took the hands of Lot, his wife, and his two daughters and led them safely out of the city. So the Lord was merciful to Lot and his family. ¹⁷After they brought them out of the city, one of the men said, “Run for your lives! Don’t look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Run to the mountains, or you will be destroyed.”

¹⁸But Lot said to one of them, “Sir, please don’t force me to go so far! ¹⁹You have been merciful and kind to me and have saved my life. But I can’t run to the mountains. The disaster will catch me, and I will die. ²⁰Look, that little town over there is not too far away. Let me run there. It’s really just a little town, and I’ll be safe there.”

²¹The angel said to Lot, “Very well, I will allow you to do this also. I will not destroy that town. ²²But run there fast, because I cannot destroy Sodom until you are safely in that town.” (That town is named Zoar, because it is little.)

Sodom and Gomorrah Are Destroyed

²³The sun had already come up when Lot entered Zoar. ²⁴The Lord sent a rain of burning sulfur down from the sky on Sodom and Gomorrah ²⁵and destroyed those cities. He also destroyed the whole Jordan Valley, everyone living in the cities, and even all the plants.

²⁶At that point Lot’s wife looked back. When she did, she became a pillar of salt.

²⁷Early the next morning, Abraham got up and went to the place where he had stood before the Lord. ²⁸He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and all the Jordan Valley and saw smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.

²⁹God destroyed the cities in the valley, but he remembered what Abraham had asked. So God saved Lot’s life, but he destroyed the city where Lot had lived.

Lot and His Daughters

³⁰Lot was afraid to continue living in Zoar, so he and his two daughters went to live in the mountains in a cave. ³¹One day the older daughter said to the younger, “Our father is old. Everywhere on the earth women and men marry, but there are no men around here for us to marry. ³²Let’s get our father drunk

and have sexual relations with him. We can use him to have children and continue our family.”

³³That night the two girls got their father drunk, and the older daughter went and had sexual relations with him. But Lot did not know when she lay down or when she got up.

³⁴The next day the older daughter said to the younger, “Last night I had sexual relations with my father. Let’s get him drunk again tonight so you can go and have sexual relations with him, too. In this way we can use our father to have children to continue our family.” ³⁵So that night they got their father drunk again, and the younger daughter went and had sexual relations with him. Again, Lot did not know when she lay down or when she got up.

³⁶So both of Lot’s daughters became pregnant by their father. ³⁷The older daughter gave birth to a son and named him Moab. He is the ancestor of all the Moabite people who are still living today. ³⁸The younger daughter also gave birth to a son and named him Ben-Ammi. He is the father of all the Ammonite people who are still living today.

Abraham Tricks Abimelech

Abraham left Hebron and traveled to southern Canaan where he stayed awhile between Kadesh and Shur. When he moved to Gerar, ²he told people that his wife Sarah was his sister. Abimelech king of Gerar heard this, so he sent some servants to take her. ³But one night God spoke to Abimelech in a dream and said, “You will die. The woman you took is married.”

⁴But Abimelech had not gone near Sarah, so he said, “Lord, would you destroy an innocent nation? ⁵Abraham himself told me, ‘This woman is my sister,’ and she also said, ‘He is my brother.’ I am innocent. I did not know I was doing anything wrong.”

⁶Then God said to Abimelech in the dream, “Yes, I know you did not realize what you were doing. So I did not allow you to sin against me and touch her. ⁷Give Abraham his wife back. He is a prophet. He will pray for you, and you will not die. But if you do not give Sarah back, you and all your family will surely die.”

⁸So early the next morning, Abimelech called all his officers and told them everything that had happened in the dream. They were very afraid. ⁹Then Abimelech called Abraham to him and said, “What have you done to us? What wrong did I do against you? Why did you bring this trouble to my kingdom? You should not have done these things to me. ¹⁰What were you thinking that caused you to do this?”

¹¹Then Abraham answered, “I thought no one in this place respected God and that someone would kill me to get Sarah.

¹²And it is true that she is my sister. She is the daughter of my father, but she is not the daughter of my mother. ¹³When God told me to leave my father's house and wander in many different places, I told Sarah, 'You must do a special favor for me. Everywhere we go tell people I am your brother.' ”

¹⁴Then Abimelech gave Abraham some sheep, cattle, and male and female slaves. He also gave Sarah, Abraham's wife, back to him ¹⁵and said, “Look around you at my land. You may live anywhere you want.”

¹⁶Abimelech said to Sarah, “I gave your brother Abraham twenty-five pounds of silver to make up for any wrong that people may think about you. I want everyone to know that you are innocent.”

¹⁷Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his servant girls so they could have children. ¹⁸The Lord had kept all the women in Abimelech's house from having children as a punishment on Abimelech for taking Abraham's wife Sarah.

A Baby for Sarah

The Lord cared for Sarah as he had said and did for her what he had promised. ²Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. Everything happened at the time God had said it would. ³Abraham named his son Isaac, the son Sarah gave birth to. ⁴He circumcised Isaac when he was eight days old as God had commanded.

⁵Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born. ⁶And Sarah said, “God has made me [laugh](#). Everyone who hears about this will laugh with me. ⁷No one thought that I would be able to have Abraham’s child, but even though Abraham is old I have given him a son.”

Hagar and Ishmael Leave

⁸Isaac grew, and when he became old enough to eat food, Abraham gave a great feast. ⁹But Sarah saw Ishmael making fun of Isaac. (Ishmael was the son of Abraham by Hagar, Sarah’s Egyptian slave.) ¹⁰So Sarah said to Abraham, “Throw out this slave woman and her son. Her son should not inherit anything; my son Isaac should receive it all.”

¹¹This troubled Abraham very much because Ishmael was also his son. ¹²But God said to Abraham, “Don’t be troubled about the boy and the slave woman. Do whatever Sarah tells you. The descendants I promised you will be from Isaac. ¹³I will also make the descendants of Ishmael into a great nation because he is your son, too.”

¹⁴Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a leather bag full of water. He gave them to Hagar and sent her away. Carrying these things and her son, Hagar went and wandered in the desert of Beersheba.

¹⁵Later, when all the water was gone from the bag, Hagar put her son under a bush. ¹⁶Then she went away a short distance and sat down. She thought, “My son will die, and I cannot watch this happen.” She sat there and began to cry.

¹⁷God heard the boy crying, and God’s angel called to Hagar from heaven. He said, “What is wrong, Hagar? Don’t be afraid! God has heard the boy crying there. ¹⁸Help him up and take him by the hand. I will make his descendants into a great nation.”

¹⁹Then God showed Hagar a well of water. So she went to the well and filled her bag with water and gave the boy a drink.

²⁰God was with the boy as he grew up. Ishmael lived in the desert and became an archer. ²¹He lived in the Desert of Paran, and his mother found a wife for him in Egypt.

Abraham’s Bargain with Abimelech

²²Then Abimelech came with Phicol, the commander of his army, and said to Abraham, “God is with you in everything you do. ²³So make a promise to me here before God that you will be fair with me and my children and my descendants. Be kind to me and to this land where you have lived as a stranger—as kind as I have been to you.”

²⁴And Abraham said, “I promise.” ²⁵Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about Abimelech’s servants who had seized a well of water.

²⁶But Abimelech said, “I don’t know who did this. You never told me about this before today.”

²⁷Then Abraham gave Abimelech some sheep and cattle, and they made an agreement. ²⁸Abraham also put seven female lambs in front of Abimelech.

²⁹Abimelech asked Abraham, “Why did you put these seven female lambs by themselves?”

³⁰Abraham answered, “Accept these lambs from me to prove that you believe I dug this well.”

³¹So that place was called [Beersheba](#) because they made a promise to each other there.

³²After Abraham and Abimelech made the agreement at Beersheba, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, went back to the land of the Philistines.

³³Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba and prayed to the Lord, the God who lives forever. ³⁴And Abraham lived as a stranger in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

Life Lessons

Genesis 21:1–23:20

Situation

Even though Sarah doubted, God demonstrated his faithfulness by providing a son for her. God also took care of Hagar after she was forced to leave Abraham’s camp. God fulfilled his promises when conditions appeared hopeless.

Observation

God will fulfill his promises, no matter how difficult our problems. Even when we don’t know how

God will act, we must trust that he watches over us.

Inspiration

Consider the case of Sarai. She is in her golden years, but God promises her a son. She gets excited. She visits the maternity shop and buys a few dresses. She plans her shower and remodels her tent ... but no son. She eats a few birthday cakes and blows out a lot of candles ... still no son. She goes through a decade of wall calendars ... still no son....

Finally, fourteen years later, when Abram is pushing a century of years and Sarai ninety ... when Abram has stopped listening to Sarai's advice, and Sarai has stopped giving it ... when the wallpaper in the nursery is faded and the baby furniture is several seasons out of date ... when the topic of the promised child brings sighs and tears and long looks into a silent sky ... God pays them a visit and tells them they had better select a name for their new son.

Abram and Sarai have the same response: laughter. They laugh partly because it is too good to happen and partly because it might. They laugh because they have given up hope, and hope born anew is always funny before it is real....

They laugh because that is what you do when someone says he can do the impossible. They laugh a little at God, and a lot with God—for God is laughing, too. Then, with the smile still on his face, he gets busy doing what he does best—the unbelievable....

He changes their faith. He changes their names. He changes the number of their tax deductions. He changes the way they define the word “impossible.”

But most of all, he changes Sarah's attitude about trusting God. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

When you've made big mistakes and your life appears to be headed for shipwreck, who can help? Are there any promises more comforting than God's? When you feel anxious today, STOP. Pray: "God, I trust in your faithfulness to change both my attitude and my circumstances."

Exploration

God's Promises—[Genesis 9:8–17](#); [15:1–6](#); [50:24](#); [Exodus 6:6–8](#); [Joshua 21:43–45](#); [2 Peter 1:3–4](#).

God Tests Abraham

After these things God tested Abraham's faith. God said to him, "Abraham!"

And he answered, "Here I am."

²Then God said, "Take your only son, Isaac, the son you love, and go to the land of Moriah. Kill him there and offer him as a whole burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

³Abraham got up early in the morning and saddled his donkey. He took Isaac and two servants with him. After he cut the wood for the sacrifice, they went to the place God had told them to go. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey. My son and I will go over there and worship, and then we will come back to you."

⁶Abraham took the wood for the sacrifice and gave it to his son to carry, but he himself took the knife and the fire. So he and his son went on together.

⁷Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!"

Abraham answered, "Yes, my son."

Isaac said, "We have the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb we will burn as a sacrifice?"

⁸Abraham answered, "God will give us the lamb for the sacrifice, my son."

So Abraham and his son went on together ⁹and came to the place God had told him about. Abraham built an altar there. He laid the wood on it and then tied up his son Isaac and laid him

on the wood on the altar. ¹⁰Then Abraham took his knife and was about to kill his son.

¹¹But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham! Abraham!”

Abraham answered, “Yes.”

¹²The angel said, “Don’t kill your son or hurt him in any way. Now I can see that you trust God and that you have not kept your son, your only son, from me.”

¹³Then Abraham looked up and saw a male sheep caught in a bush by its horns. So Abraham went and took the sheep and killed it. He offered it as a whole burnt offering to God, and his son was saved. ¹⁴So Abraham named that place The Lord Provides. Even today people say, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”

¹⁵The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶and said, “The Lord says, ‘Because you did not keep back your son, your only son, from me, I make you this promise by my own name: ¹⁷I will surely bless you and give you many descendants. They will be as many as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, and they will capture the cities of their enemies. ¹⁸Through your descendants all the nations on the earth will be blessed, because you obeyed me.’”

¹⁹Then Abraham returned to his servants. They all traveled back to Beersheba, and Abraham stayed there.

²⁰After these things happened, someone told Abraham: “Your brother Nahor and his wife Milcah have children now.

²¹The first son is Uz, and the second is Buz. The third son is Kemuel (the father of Aram). ²²Then there are Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel.” ²³Bethuel became the father of

Rebekah. Milcah was the mother of these eight sons, and Nahor, Abraham's brother, was the father. ²⁴Also Nahor had four other sons by his slave woman Reumah. Their names were Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

Sarah Dies

Sarah lived to be one hundred twenty-seven years old.² She died in Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. Abraham was very sad and cried because of her.³ After a while he got up from the side of his wife's body and went to talk to the Hittites. He said,⁴ "I am only a stranger and a foreigner here. Sell me some of your land so that I can bury my dead wife."

⁵The Hittites answered Abraham, ⁶"Sir, you are a great leader among us. You may have the best place we have to bury your dead. You may have any of our burying places that you want, and none of us will stop you from burying your dead wife."

⁷Abraham rose and bowed to the people of the land, the Hittites.⁸ He said to them, "If you truly want to help me bury my dead wife here, speak to Ephron, the son of Zohar for me.⁹ Ask him to sell me the cave of Machpelah at the edge of his field. I will pay him the full price. You can be the witnesses that I am buying it as a burial place."

¹⁰Ephron was sitting among the Hittites at the city gate. He answered Abraham,¹¹ "No, sir. I will give you the land and the cave that is in it, with these people as witnesses. Bury your dead wife."

¹²Then Abraham bowed down before the Hittites.¹³ He said to Ephron before all the people, "Please let me pay you the full price for the field. Accept my money, and I will bury my dead there."

¹⁴Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵“Sir, the land is worth ten pounds of silver, but I won’t argue with you over the price. Take the land, and bury your dead wife.”

¹⁶Abraham agreed and paid Ephron in front of the Hittite witnesses. He weighed out the full price, ten pounds of silver, and they counted the weight as the traders normally did.

^{17–18}So Ephron’s field in Machpelah, east of Mamre, was sold. Abraham became the owner of the field, the cave in it, and all the trees that were in the field. The sale was made at the city gate, with the Hittites as witnesses. ¹⁹After this, Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre. (Mamre was later called Hebron in the land of Canaan.)

²⁰So Abraham bought the field and the cave in it from the Hittites to use as a burying place.

A Wife for Isaac

Abraham was now very old, and the Lord had blessed him in every way. ²Abraham said to his oldest servant, who was in charge of everything he owned, “[Put your hand under my leg.](#) ³Make a promise to me before the Lord, the God of heaven and earth. Don’t get a wife for my son from the Canaanite girls who live around here. ⁴Instead, go back to my country, to the land of my relatives, and get a wife for my son Isaac.”

⁵The servant said to him, “What if this woman does not want to return with me to this land? Then, should I take your son with me back to your homeland?”

⁶Abraham said to him, “No! Don’t take my son back there. ⁷The Lord, the God of heaven, brought me from the home of my father and the land of my relatives. And he promised me, ‘I will give this land to your descendants.’ The Lord will send his angel before you to help you get a wife for my son there. ⁸If the girl won’t come back with you, you will be free from this promise. But you must not take my son back there.” ⁹So the servant put his hand under his master’s leg and made a promise to Abraham about this.

¹⁰The servant took ten of Abraham’s camels and left, carrying with him many different kinds of beautiful gifts. He went to Northwest Mesopotamia to Nahor’s city. ¹¹In the evening, when the women come out to get water, he made the camels kneel down at the well outside the city.

¹²The servant said, “Lord, God of my master Abraham, allow me to find a wife for his son today. Please show this

kindness to my master Abraham. ¹³Here I am, standing by the spring, and the girls from the city are coming out to get water. ¹⁴I will say to one of them, 'Please put your jar down so I can drink.' Then let her say, 'Drink, and I will also give water to your camels.' If that happens, I will know she is the right one for your servant Isaac and that you have shown kindness to my master."

¹⁵Before the servant had finished praying, Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, came out of the city. (Bethuel was the son of Milcah and Nahor, Abraham's brother.) Rebekah was carrying her water jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶She was very pretty, a virgin; she had never had sexual relations with a man. She went down to the spring and filled her jar, then came back up. ¹⁷The servant ran to her and said, "Please give me a little water from your jar."

¹⁸Rebekah said, "Drink, sir." She quickly lowered the jar from her shoulder and gave him a drink. ¹⁹After he finished drinking, Rebekah said, "I will also pour some water for your camels." ²⁰So she quickly poured all the water from her jar into the drinking trough for the camels. Then she kept running to the well until she had given all the camels enough to drink.

²¹The servant quietly watched her. He wanted to be sure the Lord had made his trip successful. ²²After the camels had finished drinking, he gave Rebekah a gold ring weighing one-fifth of an ounce and two gold arm bracelets weighing about four ounces each. ²³He asked, "Who is your father? Is there a place in his house for me and my men to spend the night?"

²⁴Rebekah answered, "My father is Bethuel, the son of Milcah and Nahor." ²⁵Then she said, "And, yes, we have straw for your camels and a place for you to spend the night."

²⁶The servant bowed and worshiped the Lord ²⁷and said, “Blessed is the Lord, the God of my master Abraham. The Lord has been kind and truthful to him and has led me to my master’s relatives.”

²⁸Then Rebekah ran and told her mother’s family about all these things. ²⁹She had a brother named Laban, who ran out to Abraham’s servant, who was still at the spring. ³⁰Laban had heard what she had said and had seen the ring and the bracelets on his sister’s arms. So he ran out to the well, and there was the man standing by the camels at the spring. ³¹Laban said, “Sir, you are welcome to come in; you don’t have to stand outside. I have prepared the house for you and also a place for your camels.”

³²So Abraham’s servant went into the house. After Laban unloaded the camels and gave them straw and food, he gave water to Abraham’s servant so he and the men with him could wash their feet. ³³Then Laban gave the servant food, but the servant said, “I will not eat until I have told you why I came.”

So Laban said, “Then tell us.”

³⁴He said, “I am Abraham’s servant. ³⁵The Lord has greatly blessed my master in everything, and he has become a rich man. The Lord has given him many flocks of sheep, herds of cattle, silver and gold, male and female servants, camels, and horses. ³⁶Sarah, my master’s wife, gave birth to a son when she was old, and my master has given everything he owns to that son. ³⁷My master had me make a promise to him and said, ‘Don’t get a wife for my son from the Canaanite girls who live around here. ³⁸Instead, you must go to my father’s people and to my family. There you must get a wife for my son.’ ³⁹I said to my master, ‘What if the woman will not come back with me?’

⁴⁰But he said, ‘I serve the Lord, who will send his angel with you and will help you. You will get a wife for my son from my family and my father’s people. ⁴¹Then you will be free from the promise. But if they will not give you a wife for my son, you will be free from this promise.’

⁴²“Today I came to this spring. I said, ‘Lord, God of my master Abraham, please make my trip successful. ⁴³I am standing by this spring. I will wait for a young woman to come out to get water, and I will say, “Please give me water from your jar to drink.” ⁴⁴Then let her say, “Drink this water, and I will also get water for your camels.” By this I will know the Lord has chosen her for my master’s son.’

⁴⁵“Before I finished my silent prayer, Rebekah came out of the city with her water jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and got water. I said to her, ‘Please give me a drink.’ ⁴⁶She quickly lowered the jar from her shoulder and said, ‘Drink this. I will also get water for your camels.’ So I drank, and she gave water to my camels too. ⁴⁷When I asked her, ‘Who is your father?’ she answered, ‘My father is Bethuel son of Milcah and Nahor.’ Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms, ⁴⁸and I bowed my head and thanked the Lord. I praised the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, because he led me on the right road to get the granddaughter of my master’s brother for his son. ⁴⁹Now, tell me, will you be kind and truthful to my master? And if not, tell me so. Then I will know what I should do.”

⁵⁰Laban and Bethuel answered, “This is clearly from the Lord, and we cannot change what must happen. ⁵¹Rebekah is yours. Take her and go. Let her marry your master’s son as the Lord has commanded.”

⁵²When Abraham's servant heard these words, he bowed facedown on the ground before the Lord. ⁵³Then he gave Rebekah gold and silver jewelry and clothes. He also gave expensive gifts to her brother and mother. ⁵⁴The servant and the men with him ate and drank and spent the night there. When they got up the next morning, the servant said, "Now let me go back to my master."

⁵⁵Rebekah's mother and her brother said, "Let Rebekah stay with us at least ten days. After that she may go."

⁵⁶But the servant said to them, "Do not make me wait, because the Lord has made my trip successful. Now let me go back to my master."

⁵⁷Rebekah's brother and mother said, "We will call Rebekah and ask her what she wants to do." ⁵⁸They called her and asked her, "Do you want to go with this man now?"

She said, "Yes, I do."

⁵⁹So they allowed Rebekah and her nurse to go with Abraham's servant and his men. ⁶⁰They blessed Rebekah and said,

"Our sister, may you be the mother of thousands of people,
and may your descendants capture the cities of their enemies."

⁶¹Then Rebekah and her servant girls got on the camels and followed the servant and his men. So the servant took Rebekah and left.

⁶²At this time Isaac had left Beer Lahai Roi and was living in southern Canaan. ⁶³One evening when he went out to the field

to think, he looked up and saw camels coming. ⁶⁴Rebekah also looked and saw Isaac. Then she jumped down from the camel ⁶⁵and asked the servant, “Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?”

The servant answered, “That is my master.” So Rebekah covered her face with her veil.

⁶⁶The servant told Isaac everything that had happened. ⁶⁷Then Isaac brought Rebekah into the tent of Sarah, his mother, and she became his wife. Isaac loved her very much, and so he was comforted after his mother’s death.

Life Lessons

Genesis 24:1–25:18

Situation

Abraham obeyed God’s plan. Abraham might have married Isaac to a local girl or sent him back to his family’s land to find a wife. But Abraham obeyed God by selecting the right wife from the right spot. Abraham’s loyal servant discerned God’s will and found the right wife—Rebekah, a woman of good heart and determination.

Observation

In God’s will we find successful living. God’s way may be harder than the world’s way—but he rewards obedience!

Inspiration

If you want God’s will, give Him your total self—a living sacrifice—and that means your body and your thoughts, your mind, which He can renew from within, if you let Him. . . .

The guidance of God's Word is primary, basic. It's interesting to note that many of us say we are interested in God's will, but we balk at checking our plans and habits against the plain teaching of the Bible. How can you say you are seeking God's will, if you don't know what the Bible says? This is like going to someone for advice, but not letting him talk. You actually want him to agree with everything you say....

The witness of the Holy Spirit comes as you walk in the Spirit. Prayer is vital here. It's unfortunate that we have made "I'll have to pray about it" something of a cliché. Maybe we should change the phrase to "I will talk with God about it." With God, not at God. Some prayer lists sound like Christmas lists. Others sound like assignments that God should carry out because we are "so spiritual, so deserving."...

Take a look at outward circumstances LAST....

But suppose you feel you have the Word and the Spirit lined up fairly well. How do you evaluate or act upon circumstances? This can be intriguing, exciting. For one thing you have to act in faith on what you already know. Is it evident that there are certain actions that would be worth taking? Some people call this "trying different doors." Sometimes God will slam shut every door but the one He wants you to walk through. You may have to try several doors to learn which is the right one.

No, God's will doesn't drop out of the blue in a special delivery letter. But He has written to you—in His Word. He will talk to you, with the inner witness

of His Spirit. And He will guide you as you weigh outward circumstances.

You can be “very religious” about these three checkpoints ... or you can use them like a Christian, in faith, trust, and commitment. Then you will see from your own experience how God’s ways will really satisfy you. (From *How to Be a Christian Without Being Religious* by Fritz Ridenour)

Application

As you read the Bible, ask God to show you how your plans, goals, and directions conform to his will. Ask him to reveal to you areas where you have strayed from his leading. Consult with other Christians. Ask them for help in thinking through how the Bible applies to your situation.

Exploration

God’s Will—[Exodus 40:16](#); [Nehemiah 9:23](#); [Psalm 16:7–8](#); [Micah 6:8](#); [Acts 21:13–14](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:3](#); [5:16–18](#).

Abraham's Family

Abraham married again, and his new wife was Keturah.²She gave birth to Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.³Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. Dedan's descendants were the people of Assyria, Letush, and Leum.⁴The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah.⁵Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac.⁶But before Abraham died, he did give gifts to the sons of his other wives, then sent them to the East to be away from Isaac.

⁷Abraham lived to be one hundred seventy-five years old.⁸He breathed his last breath and died at an old age, after a long and satisfying life.⁹His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron east of Mamre. (Ephron was the son of Zohar the Hittite.)¹⁰So Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah in the same field that he had bought from the Hittites.¹¹After Abraham died, God blessed his son Isaac. Isaac was now living at Beer Lahai Roi.

¹²This is the family history of Ishmael, Abraham's son. (Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian servant, was Ishmael's mother.)

¹³These are the names of Ishmael's sons in the order they were born: Nebaioth, the first son, then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam,

¹⁴Mishma, Dumah, Massa, ¹⁵Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah.¹⁶These were Ishmael's sons, and these are the names of the tribal leaders listed according to their settlements and camps.¹⁷Ishmael lived one hundred thirty-seven years and then breathed his last breath and died.¹⁸His descendants lived

from Havilah to Shur, which is east of Egypt stretching toward Assyria. They often attacked the descendants of his brothers.

Life Lessons

Genesis 25:19–34

Situation

Rebekah gave birth to Jacob and Esau. Before they were even born, the boys were hostile to each other. Conflict between the two intensified throughout their lives. Eventually Esau threatened to kill Jacob.

Observation

When Esau sold his rights as the firstborn son to Jacob for a bowl of vegetable soup, further dissension grew up between the brothers. Jacob later stole Esau's last remaining firstborn privilege: the blessing.

Inspiration

Anger. It's easy to define: the noise of the soul. *Anger.* The unseen irritant of the heart. *Anger.* The relentless invader of silence....

The louder it gets the more desperate we become....

Some of you are thinking, Easy for you to say, Max, sitting there in your office ... You ought to try living with my wife. Or, You ought to have to cope with my past. Or, You ought to raise my kids. You don't know how my ex has mistreated me. You don't have any idea how hard my life has been. And you're right, I don't. But I have a very clear idea how

miserable your future will be unless you deal with your anger.

X-ray the world of the vengeful and behold the tumor of bitterness: black, menacing, malignant. Carcinoma of the spirit. Its fatal fibers creep around the edge of the heart and ravage it. Yesterday you can't alter, but your reaction to yesterday you can. The past you cannot change, but your response to your past you can. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

Application

Anger. Does it describe how you react? Do you have a reputation for your temper? For your grudge? Are you known for desiring revenge? Ask God to help you change your response to past hurts.

Exploration

Forgiving Others—[Genesis 33:1–11](#); [45:5–15](#); [50:15–21](#); [1 Samuel 24:8–12](#); [26](#); [Luke 23:33–34](#); [Acts 7:59–60](#); [2 Timothy 4:16](#).

The key to forgiving others is to quit focusing on what they did to you and start focusing on what God did for you. —Max Lucado (*In the Grip of Grace*)

Isaac's Family

¹⁹This is the family history of Isaac. Abraham had a son named Isaac. ²⁰When Isaac was forty years old, he married Rebekah, who came from Northwest Mesopotamia. She was Bethuel's daughter and the sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹Isaac's wife could not have children, so Isaac prayed to the Lord for her. The Lord heard Isaac's prayer, and Rebekah became pregnant.

²²While she was pregnant, the babies struggled inside her. She asked, "Why is this happening to me?" Then she went to get an answer from the Lord.

²³The Lord said to her,

"Two nations are in your body,
and two groups of people will be taken from you.
One group will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger."

²⁴When the time came, Rebekah gave birth to twins. ²⁵The first baby was born red. Since his skin was like a hairy robe, he was named [Esau](#). ²⁶When the second baby was born, he was holding on to Esau's heel, so that baby was named [Jacob](#). Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.

²⁷When the boys grew up, Esau became a skilled hunter. He loved to be out in the fields. But Jacob was a quiet man and

stayed among the tents. ²⁸Isaac loved Esau because he hunted the wild animals that Isaac enjoyed eating. But Rebekah loved Jacob.

²⁹One day Jacob was boiling a pot of vegetable soup. Esau came in from hunting in the fields, weak from hunger. ³⁰So Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red soup, because I am weak with hunger.” (That is why people call him Edom.)

³¹But Jacob said, “You must sell me your rights as the firstborn son.”

³²Esau said, “I am almost dead from hunger. If I die, all of my father’s wealth will not help me.”

³³But Jacob said, “First, promise me that you will give it to me.” So Esau made a promise to Jacob and sold his part of their father’s wealth to Jacob. ³⁴Then Jacob gave Esau bread and vegetable soup, and he ate and drank, and then left. So Esau showed how little he cared about his rights as the firstborn son.

Isaac Lies to Abimelech

Now there was a time of hunger in the land, besides the time of hunger that happened during Abraham's life. So Isaac went to the town of Gerar to see Abimelech king of the Philistines. ²The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, "Don't go down to Egypt, but live in the land where I tell you to live. ³Stay in this land, and I will be with you and bless you. I will give you and your descendants all these lands, and I will keep the oath I made to Abraham your father. ⁴I will give you many descendants, as hard to count as the stars in the sky, and I will give them all these lands. Through your descendants all the nations on the earth will be blessed. ⁵I will do this because your father Abraham obeyed me. He did what I said and obeyed my commands, my teachings, and my rules."

⁶So Isaac stayed in Gerar. ⁷His wife Rebekah was very beautiful, and the men of that place asked Isaac about her. Isaac said, "She is my sister," because he was afraid to tell them she was his wife. He thought they might kill him so they could have her.

⁸Isaac lived there a long time. One day as Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out his window, he saw Isaac holding his wife Rebekah tenderly. ⁹Abimelech called for Isaac and said, "This woman is your wife. Why did you say she was your sister?"

Isaac said to him, "I was afraid you would kill me so you could have her."

¹⁰Abimelech said, "What have you done to us? One of our men might have had sexual relations with your wife. Then we

would have been guilty of a great sin.”

¹¹So Abimelech warned everyone, “Anyone who touches this man or his wife will be put to death.”

Isaac Becomes Rich

¹²Isaac planted seed in that land, and that year he gathered a great harvest. The Lord blessed him very much, ¹³and he became rich. He gathered more wealth until he became a very rich man. ¹⁴He had so many slaves and flocks and herds that the Philistines envied him. ¹⁵So they stopped up all the wells the servants of Isaac’s father Abraham had dug. (They had dug them when Abraham was alive.) The Philistines filled those wells with dirt. ¹⁶And Abimelech said to Isaac, “Leave our country because you have become much more powerful than we are.”

¹⁷So Isaac left that place and camped in the Valley of Gerar and lived there. ¹⁸Long before this time Abraham had dug many wells, but after he died, the Philistines filled them with dirt. So Isaac dug those wells again and gave them the same names his father had given them. ¹⁹Isaac’s servants dug a well in the valley, from which a spring of water flowed. ²⁰But the herdsmen of Gerar argued with them and said, “This water is ours.” So Isaac named that well Argue because they argued with him. ²¹Then his servants dug another well. When the people also argued about it, Isaac named that well Fight. ²²He moved from there and dug another well. No one argued about this one, so he named it Room Enough. Isaac said, “Now the Lord has made room for us, and we will be successful in this land.”

²³From there Isaac went to Beersheba. ²⁴The Lord appeared

to him that night and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham. Don’t be afraid, because I am with you. I will bless you and give you many descendants because of my servant Abraham.”²⁵ So Isaac built an altar and worshiped the Lord there. He also made a camp there, and his servants dug a well.

²⁶ Abimelech came from Gerar to see Isaac. He brought with him Ahuzzath, who advised him, and Phicol, the commander of his army. ²⁷ Isaac asked them, “Why have you come to see me? You were my enemy and forced me to leave your country.”

²⁸ They answered, “Now we know that the Lord is with you. Let us swear an oath to each other. Let us make an agreement with you ²⁹ that since we did not hurt you, you will not hurt us. We were good to you and sent you away in peace. Now the Lord has blessed you.”

³⁰ So Isaac prepared food for them, and they all ate and drank. ³¹ Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them away, and they left in peace.

New Life in Christ

Isaac said, “She is my sister,” because he was afraid to tell them [Rebekah] was his wife.—[Genesis 26:7](#)

Telling the Truth

Are you in a dilemma, wondering if you should tell the truth or not? The question to ask in such moments is, Will God bless my deceit? Will he, who hates lies, bless a strategy built on lies? Will the Lord, who loves the truth, bless the business of falsehoods? Will God honor the career of the

manipulator? Will God come to the aid of the cheater? Will God bless my dishonesty?

I don't think so. Examine your heart. Ask yourself some tough questions.

Am I being completely honest with my spouse and children? Are my relationships marked by candor? What about my work or school environment? Am I honest in my dealings? Am I a trustworthy student? An honest taxpayer? A reliable witness at work?

Do you tell the truth ... always?

If not, start today. Don't wait until tomorrow. The ripple of today's lie is tomorrow's wave and next year's flood. Start today. Be just like Jesus. Tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Question: Are you telling the truth—the *whole* truth—to your friends and family? Is your life an open statement of truth?

For more on ["New Life in Christ."](#)

³²That day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug, saying, "We found water in that well." ³³So Isaac named it [Shibah](#) and that city is called Beersheba even now.

³⁴When Esau was forty years old, he married two Hittite women—Judith daughter of Beerli and Basemath daughter of Elon. ³⁵These women brought much sorrow to Isaac and Rebekah.

Life Lessons

Genesis 26:1–35

Situation

Despite God's clear promise to Isaac, he lacked faith. But through his encounter with Abimelech he learned to trust that God would protect him, provide for him, and fulfill his promise.

Observation

God protects and provides for people who follow him. Even though we may doubt, God's faithfulness does not waver.

Inspiration

Faith is a vital, life-changing, and creative power in human experience. It is belief in and intellectual assent to valid doctrine and acceptance of a sound theological position. But even more, faith is an in-depth assurance, a profound certainty that God will actually do what, in the Bible, He says He will do. The promises of Holy Scripture I personally believe to be

true, without any doubt whatsoever.

So the reason for my strong faith is that the Bible teaches faith. Faith has demonstrated its validity in all kinds of circumstances in my life. As I have believed and practiced faith in God and in Jesus Christ, the most wonderful things have happened: peace, joy, and victory. Moreover, other people with deep faith, known to me, have experienced, unmistakably, the power of God operating in their lives. As a result, my own faith in faith as the power of God in action has become ever more certain. . . .

The Bible tells us that by faith we can move mountains of difficulty and trouble. “Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove: and nothing shall be impossible for you.” This means no superficial or a soft kind of faith, but instead the kind that makes and keeps us “Strong and of good courage.” It must be real, deep, positive faith. The sturdy, faith-believing, wonder-working New Testament tells us, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

(From *The Positive Power of Jesus Christ* by Norman Vincent Peale)

Application

What causes you to feel anxious? Bills? Boss? School? Work project? Pray when these situations arise. Believe that God will be faithful to you.

Exploration

Trusting God—[Matthew 6:33–34](#); [2 Corinthians 4:16–18](#); [Hebrews 11:1](#).

If you'll remember, deceit was the first tool out of the devil's bag. In the Garden of Eden, Satan didn't discourage Eve. He didn't seduce her. He didn't sneak up on her. He just lied to her. —Max Lucado (*Just Like Jesus*)

Jacob Tricks Isaac

When Isaac was old, his eyesight was poor, so he could not see clearly. One day he called his older son Esau to him and said, "Son."

Esau answered, "Here I am."

²Isaac said, "I am old and don't know when I might die. ³So take your bow and arrows and go hunting in the field for an animal for me to eat. ⁴When you prepare the tasty food that I love, bring it to me, and I will eat. Then I will bless you before I die." ⁵So Esau went out in the field to hunt.

Rebekah was listening as Isaac said this to his son Esau. ⁶She said to her son Jacob, "Listen, I heard your father saying to your brother Esau, ⁷'Kill an animal and prepare some tasty food for me to eat. Then I will bless you in the presence of the Lord before I die.'⁸ So obey me, my son, and do what I tell you. ⁹Go out to our goats and bring me two of the best young ones. I will prepare them just the way your father likes them. ¹⁰Then you will take the food to your father, and he will bless you before he dies."

¹¹But Jacob said to his mother Rebekah, "My brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am smooth! ¹²If my father touches me, he will know I am not Esau. Then he will not bless me but will place a curse on me because I tried to trick him."

¹³So Rebekah said to him, "If your father puts a curse on you, I will accept the blame. Just do what I said and go, get the goats for me."

¹⁴So Jacob went out and got two goats and brought them to

his mother, and she cooked them in the special way Isaac enjoyed. ¹⁵She took the best clothes of her older son Esau that were in the house and put them on the younger son Jacob. ¹⁶She also took the skins of the goats and put them on Jacob's hands and neck. ¹⁷Then she gave Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made.

¹⁸Jacob went in to his father and said, "Father."

And his father said, "Yes, my son. Who are you?"

¹⁹Jacob said to him, "I am Esau, your first son. I have done what you told me. Now sit up and eat some meat of the animal I hunted for you. Then bless me."

²⁰But Isaac asked his son, "How did you find and kill the animal so quickly?"

Jacob answered, "Because the Lord your God helped me to find it."

²¹Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near so I can touch you, my son. Then I will know if you are really my son Esau."

²²So Jacob came near to Isaac his father. Isaac touched him and said, "Your voice sounds like Jacob's voice, but your hands are hairy like the hands of Esau." ²³Isaac did not know it was Jacob, because his hands were hairy like Esau's hands, so Isaac blessed him. ²⁴Isaac asked, "Are you really my son Esau?"

Jacob answered, "Yes, I am."

²⁵Then Isaac said, "Bring me the food, and I will eat it and bless you." So Jacob gave him the food, and he ate. Jacob gave him wine, and he drank. ²⁶Then Isaac said to him, "My son, come near and kiss me." ²⁷So Jacob went to his father and kissed him. When Isaac smelled Esau's clothes, he blessed him and said,

“The smell of my son
is like the smell of the field
that the Lord has blessed.

²⁸May God give you plenty of rain
and good soil
so that you will have plenty of grain and new wine.

²⁹May nations serve you
and peoples bow down to you.
May you be master over your brothers,
and may your mother’s sons bow down to you.
May everyone who curses you be cursed,
and may everyone who blesses you be blessed.”

³⁰Isaac finished blessing Jacob. Then, just as Jacob left his father Isaac, Esau came in from hunting. ³¹He also prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. He said, “Father, rise and eat the food that your son killed for you and then bless me.”

³²Isaac asked, “Who are you?”

He answered, “I am your son—your firstborn son—Esau.”

³³Then Isaac trembled greatly and said, “Then who was it that hunted the animals and brought me food before you came? I ate it, and I blessed him, and it is too late now to take back my blessing.”

³⁴When Esau heard the words of his father, he let out a loud and bitter cry. He said to his father, “Bless me—me, too, my father!”

³⁵But Isaac said, “Your brother came and tricked me. He has taken your blessing.”

³⁶Esau said, “Jacob is the right name for him. He has tricked

me these two times. He took away my share of everything you own, and now he has taken away my blessing.” Then Esau asked, “Haven’t you saved a blessing for me?”

³⁷Isaac answered, “I gave Jacob the power to be master over you, and all his brothers will be his servants. And I kept him strong with grain and new wine. There is nothing left to give you, my son.”

³⁸But Esau continued, “Do you have only one blessing, Father? Bless me, too, Father!” Then Esau began to cry out loud.

³⁹Isaac said to him,

“You will live far away from the best land,
far from the rain.

⁴⁰You will live by using your sword,
and you will be a slave to your brother.
But when you struggle,
you will break free from him.”

⁴¹After that Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing from Isaac. He thought to himself, “My father will soon die, and I will be sad for him. Then I will kill Jacob.”

⁴²Rebekah heard about Esau’s plan to kill Jacob. So she sent for Jacob and said to him, “Listen, your brother Esau is comforting himself by planning to kill you. ⁴³So, my son, do what I say. My brother Laban is living in Haran. Go to him at once! ⁴⁴Stay with him for a while, until your brother is not so angry. ⁴⁵In time, your brother will not be angry, and he will forget what you did to him. Then I will send a servant to bring you back. I don’t want to lose both of my sons on the same day.”

⁴⁶Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I am tired of Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of these Hittite women here in this land, I want to die.”

Life Lessons

Genesis 27:1–28:9

Situation

After Jacob obtained Esau’s birthright, their mother, Rebekah, helped Jacob trick his father into giving him his brother’s blessing, too.

Observation

When people choose to hurt others, God disciplines. God seeks, through his discipline, to save his children from eternal harm.

Inspiration

As a Christian, I most certainly believe in punishment. Biblical justice demands that individuals be held accountable. Throughout the history of ancient Israel, to break God’s law was to invite swift, specific, and certain punishment. When a law was broken, the resulting imbalance could be righted only when the transgressor was punished and thus made to “pay” for his wrong.

Though modern sociologists take offense at this elemental concept of retribution, it is essential. If justice means getting one’s due, then justice is denied when deserved punishment is not received. And ultimately this undermines one’s role as a moral, responsible human being....

In this Biblical sense, punishment is not only just,

it is very often redemptive—to the offender, the victim, and society at large. (From *The God of Stones and Spiders* by Charles Colson)

Application

Never discipline in anger, but always desire the best for the other person. If you are disciplined, take it joyfully. Then thank the individual for having your best interests in mind.

Exploration

God's Discipline—[Psalm 94:12–13](#); [119:67](#); [Proverbs 3:11–12](#); [Jeremiah 46:28](#).

God follows us. He pursues us until we finally see him as our Father, even if it takes all the days of our lives. —Max Lucado (*Traveling Light*)

Jacob Searches for a Wife

Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and commanded him, “You must not marry a Canaanite woman.²Go to the house of Bethuel, your mother’s father, in Northwest Mesopotamia. Laban, your mother’s brother, lives there. Marry one of his daughters.³May God Almighty bless you and give you many children, and may you become a group of many peoples.⁴May he give you and your descendants the blessing of Abraham so that you may own the land where you are now living as a stranger, the land God gave to Abraham.”⁵So Isaac sent Jacob to Northwest Mesopotamia, to Laban the brother of Rebekah. Bethuel the Aramean was the father of Laban and Rebekah, and Rebekah was the mother of Jacob and Esau.

⁶Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him to Northwest Mesopotamia to find a wife there. He also learned that Isaac had commanded Jacob not to marry a Canaanite woman⁷and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Northwest Mesopotamia.⁸So Esau saw that his father Isaac did not want his sons to marry Canaanite women.⁹Now Esau already had wives, but he went to Ishmael son of Abraham, and he married Mahalath, Ishmael’s daughter. Mahalath was the sister of Nebaioth.

Jacob’s Dream at Bethel

¹⁰Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran.¹¹When he came to a place, he spent the night there because the sun had set. He

found a stone and laid his head on it to go to sleep. ¹²Jacob dreamed that there was a ladder resting on the earth and reaching up into heaven, and he saw angels of God going up and coming down the ladder. ¹³Then Jacob saw the Lord standing above the ladder, and he said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your grandfather, and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are now sleeping. ¹⁴Your descendants will be as many as the dust of the earth. They will spread west and east, north and south, and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. ¹⁵I am with you and will protect you everywhere you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

¹⁶Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, but I did not know it." ¹⁷He was afraid and said, "This place frightens me! It is surely the house of God and the gate of heaven."

¹⁸Jacob rose early in the morning and took the stone he had slept on and set it up on its end. Then he poured olive oil on the top of it. ¹⁹At first, the name of that city was Luz, but Jacob named it [Bethel](#).

²⁰Then Jacob made a promise. He said, "I want God to be with me and to protect me on this journey. I want him to give me food to eat and clothes to wear. ²¹so I will be able to return in peace to my father's house. If the Lord does these things, he will be my God. ²²This stone which I have set up on its end will be the house of God. And I will give God one-tenth of all he gives me."

Life Lessons

Genesis 28:10–30:43

Situation

Jacob left his home and started a four hundred-mile trip north to Haran to search for a wife. Jacob married, secured work, and had twelve sons.

Observation

Jacob's wives knew that children were one way that God blesses his people. The meaning of many of the children's names reflect this understanding: "Judah" means "praise"; "Gad" means "lucky"; "Asher" means "happy"; "Zebulun" means "honor." More than merely status symbols, these children became the patriarchs of Israel.

Inspiration

Scripture clearly teaches that children are blessed gifts from the Lord. God designed them to be a blessing. They are supposed to be a joy. They are a benediction from the Lord to grace our lives with fulfillment, meaning, happiness, and satisfaction. Parenthood is God's gift to us.

This is true even in a fallen world, infected with the curse of sin. In the midst of all that's evil, children are tokens of God's lovingkindness. They are living proof that God's mercy extends even to fallen, sinful creatures ...

Throughout Scripture we find a running theme that highlights children as blessings from the hand of a loving and merciful God. This becomes evident, for example, in the contest between Leah and Rachel for Jacob's affection ...

Throughout this tale of the parents who gave birth to the various tribes of God's chosen people, one thing is clear: All parties understood that children signified the blessings of the Lord. (From *Successful Christian Parenting* by John MacArthur)

Application

Do you view children as a blessing or a hassle? What's your attitude when you hear children cry during church or when they get underfoot in the store? Catch yourself during the times when children frustrate you and remember that the even the smallest children are gifts from God.

Exploration

Discouragement—[Deuteronomy 1:9](#); [Joshua 1:9](#); [1 Samuel 1:10–18](#); [Psalms 62:5](#); [Proverbs 13:12](#); [Ephesians 3:13](#); [James 5:13–18](#).

God does everything just right and on time, but people can never completely understand what he is doing. —Max Lucado (*A Gentle Thunder*)

Jacob Arrives in Northwest Mesopotamia

Then Jacob continued his journey and came to the land of the people of the East. ²He looked and saw a well in the field and three flocks of sheep lying nearby, because they drank water from this well. A large stone covered the mouth of the well. ³When all the flocks would gather there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well and water the sheep. Then they would put the stone back in its place.

⁴Jacob said to the shepherds there, “My brothers, where are you from?”

They answered, “We are from Haran.”

⁵Then Jacob asked, “Do you know Laban, grandson of Nahor?”

They answered, “We know him.”

⁶Then Jacob asked, “How is he?”

They answered, “He is well. Look, his daughter Rachel is coming now with his sheep.”

⁷Jacob said, “But look, it is still the middle of the day. It is not time for the sheep to be gathered for the night, so give them water and let them go back into the pasture.”

⁸But they said, “We cannot do that until all the flocks are gathered. Then we will roll away the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep.”

⁹While Jacob was talking with the shepherds, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, because it was her job to care for the sheep. ¹⁰When Jacob saw Laban’s daughter Rachel and Laban’s sheep, he went to the well and rolled the stone from its

mouth and watered Laban's sheep. Now Laban was the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's mother. ¹¹Then Jacob kissed Rachel and cried. ¹²He told her that he was from her father's family and that he was the son of Rebekah. So Rachel ran home and told her father.

¹³When Laban heard the news about his sister's son Jacob, he ran to meet him. Laban hugged him and kissed him and brought him to his house, where Jacob told Laban everything that had happened.

¹⁴Then Laban said, "You are my own flesh and blood."

Jacob Is Tricked

Jacob stayed there a month. ¹⁵Then Laban said to Jacob, "You are my relative, but it is not right for you to work for me without pay. What would you like me to pay you?"

¹⁶Now Laban had two daughters. The older was Leah, and the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was very beautiful. ¹⁸Jacob loved Rachel, so he said to Laban, "Let me marry your younger daughter Rachel. If you will, I will work seven years for you."

¹⁹Laban said, "It would be better for her to marry you than someone else, so stay here with me." ²⁰So Jacob worked for Laban seven years so he could marry Rachel. But they seemed like just a few days to him because he loved Rachel very much.

²¹After seven years Jacob said to Laban, "Give me Rachel so that I may marry her. The time I promised to work for you is over."

²²So Laban gave a feast for all the people there. ²³That evening he brought his daughter Leah to Jacob, and they had

sexual relations.²⁴(Laban gave his slave girl Zilpah to his daughter to be her servant.)²⁵In the morning when Jacob saw that he had had sexual relations with Leah, he said to Laban, “What have you done to me? I worked hard for you so that I could marry Rachel! Why did you trick me?”

²⁶Laban said, “In our country we do not allow the younger daughter to marry before the older daughter.²⁷But complete the full week of the marriage ceremony with Leah, and I will give you Rachel to marry also. But you must serve me another seven years.”

²⁸So Jacob did this, and when he had completed the week with Leah, Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.²⁹(Laban gave his slave girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.)³⁰So Jacob had sexual relations with Rachel also, and Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. Jacob worked for Laban for another seven years.

Jacob's Family Grows

³¹When the Lord saw that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, he made it possible for Leah to have children, but not Rachel.

³²Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him [Reuben](#), because she said, “The Lord has seen my troubles. Surely now my husband will love me.”

³³Leah became pregnant again and gave birth to another son. She named him [Simeon](#) and said, “The Lord has heard that I am not loved, so he has given me this son.”

³⁴Leah became pregnant again and gave birth to another son. She named him [Levi](#) and said, “Now, surely my husband will be close to me, because I have given him three sons.”

³⁵Then Leah gave birth to another son. She named him [Judah](#), because she said, “Now I will praise the Lord.” Then Leah stopped having children.

When Rachel saw that she was not having children for Jacob, she envied her sister Leah. She said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I’ll die!”² Jacob became angry with her and said, “Can I do what only God can do? He is the one who has kept you from having children.”

³Then Rachel said, “Here is my slave girl Bilhah. Have sexual relations with her so she can give birth to a child for me. Then I can have my own family through her.”

⁴So Rachel gave Bilhah, her slave girl, to Jacob as a wife, and he had sexual relations with her. ⁵She became pregnant and gave Jacob a son. ⁶Rachel said, “God has judged me innocent. He has listened to my prayer and has given me a son,” so she named him [Dan](#).

⁷Bilhah became pregnant again and gave Jacob a second son. ⁸Rachel said, “I have struggled hard with my sister, and I have won.” So she named that son [Naphtali](#).

⁹Leah saw that she had stopped having children, so she gave her slave girl Zilpah to Jacob as a wife. ¹⁰When Zilpah had a son, ¹¹Leah said, “I am lucky,” so she named him [Gad](#). ¹²Zilpah gave birth to another son, ¹³and Leah said, “I am very happy! Now women will call me happy,” so she named him [Asher](#).

¹⁴During the wheat harvest Reuben went into the field and found some [mandrake](#) plants and brought them to his mother Leah. But Rachel said to Leah, “Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.”

¹⁵Leah answered, “You have already taken away my husband, and now you are trying to take away my son’s mandrakes.”

But Rachel answered, “If you will give me your son’s

mandrakes, you may sleep with Jacob tonight.”

¹⁶When Jacob came in from the field that night, Leah went out to meet him. She said, “You will have sexual relations with me tonight because I have paid for you with my son’s mandrakes.” So Jacob slept with her that night.

¹⁷Then God answered Leah’s prayer, and she became pregnant again. She gave birth to a fifth son ¹⁸and said, “God has given me what I paid for, because I gave my slave girl to my husband.” So Leah named her son [Issachar](#).

¹⁹Leah became pregnant again and gave birth to a sixth son. ²⁰She said, “God has given me a fine gift. Now surely Jacob will honor me, because I have given him six sons,” so she named him [Zebulun](#). ²¹Later Leah gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.

²²Then God remembered Rachel and answered her prayer, making it possible for her to have children. ²³When she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, she said, “God has taken away my shame,” ²⁴and she named him [Joseph](#). Rachel said, “I wish the Lord would give me another son.”

Jacob Tricks Laban

²⁵After the birth of Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Now let me go to my own home and country. ²⁶Give me my wives and my children and let me go. I have earned them by working for you, and you know that I have served you well.”

²⁷Laban said to him, “If I have pleased you, please stay. I know the Lord has blessed me because of you. ²⁸Tell me what I should pay you, and I will give it to you.”

²⁹Jacob answered, “You know that I have worked hard for

you, and your flocks have grown while I cared for them.
³⁰When I came, you had little, but now you have much. Every time I did something for you, the Lord blessed you. But when will I be able to do something for my own family?"

³¹Laban asked, "Then what should I give you?"

Jacob answered, "I don't want you to give me anything. Just do this one thing, and I will come back and take care of your flocks. ³²Today let me go through all your flocks. I will take every speckled or spotted sheep, every black lamb, and every spotted or speckled goat. That will be my pay. ³³In the future you can easily see if I am honest. When you come to look at my flocks, if I have any goat that isn't speckled or spotted or any lamb that isn't black, you will know I stole it."

³⁴Laban answered, "Agreed! We will do what you ask."

³⁵But that day Laban took away all the male goats that had streaks or spots, all the speckled and spotted female goats (all those that had white on them), and all the black sheep. He told his sons to watch over them. ³⁶Then he took these animals to a place that was three days' journey away from Jacob. Jacob took care of all the flocks that were left.

³⁷So Jacob cut green branches from poplar, almond, and plane trees and peeled off some of the bark so that the branches had white stripes on them. ³⁸He put the branches in front of the flocks at the watering places. When the animals came to drink, they also mated there, ³⁹so the flocks mated in front of the branches. Then the young that were born were streaked, speckled, or spotted. ⁴⁰Jacob separated the young animals from the others, and he made them face the streaked and dark animals in Laban's flock. Jacob kept his animals separate from Laban's. ⁴¹When the stronger animals in the

flock were mating, Jacob put the branches before their eyes so they would mate near the branches.⁴² But when the weaker animals mated, Jacob did not put the branches there. So the animals born from the weaker animals were Laban's, and those born from the stronger animals were Jacob's.⁴³ In this way Jacob became very rich. He had large flocks, many male and female servants, camels, and donkeys.

Life Lessons

Genesis 31:1–33:20

Situation

God commanded Jacob to return to his homeland after years of being mistreated by his father-in-law Laban. Jacob nervously prepared for his meeting with his brother, Esau, whom he'd wronged years ago. God turned Esau's heart to be reconciled with his brother.

Observation

God led Jacob through challenging trials and tests that increased his faith. Jacob realized that this deliverance from Esau's anger was of God.

Inspiration

A couple of weeks after I returned home [from a men's conference where I spoke on the topic of anger] I received this letter from a man named Harold Staub.

Max, Thank you so much for speaking on forgiveness at Promise Keepers in Syracuse, NY, on June 7 and 8. I was there. Just want you to know I went home, talked to my wife on many subjects about forgiveness—the best two weeks of my life. You see, she went home to be with the Lord on June 24, totally forgiven. How wonderful is his love. Thank you so very much.

When we called Harold to ask his permission to print his letter, he shared the touching details of his final days with his wife. He didn't know she was near

death, nor did she. He did know, however, that some unresolved issues lay between them. Upon arriving home, he went to her, knelt before her and asked forgiveness for anything he'd ever done. The gesture opened a floodgate of emotions and the two talked late into the night. The initial effort at reconciliation continued for two weeks. The marriage enjoyed a depth not yet known. When Harold's wife died suddenly of an embolism, he was shocked. But he was ready and now he is at peace.

What about you? Would you like some peace? Then quit giving your neighbor such a hassle. Want to enjoy God's generosity? Then let others enjoy yours. Would you like assurance that God forgives you? I think you know what you need to do. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Application

What keeps you from reconciling with family and friends on earth? Base your ability to forgive on God's reconciling you to himself through Jesus Christ. An inability to forgive will hinder your relationship with God and others. Take the steps that will provide you with inner peace.

Exploration

Persistence—[Matthew 7:7-8](#); [Luke 11:8](#);
[Philippians 3:12-14](#); [Colossians 4:2](#).

Jacob Runs Away

One day Jacob heard Laban's sons talking. They said, "Jacob has taken everything our father owned, and in this way he has become rich."² Then Jacob noticed that Laban was not as friendly as he had been before.³ The Lord said to Jacob, "Go back to the land where your ancestors lived, and I will be with you."

⁴So Jacob told Rachel and Leah to meet him in the field where he kept his flocks.⁵ He said to them, "I have seen that your father is not as friendly with me as he used to be, but the God of my father has been with me.⁶ You both know that I have worked as hard as I could for your father,⁷ but he cheated me and changed my pay ten times. But God has not allowed your father to harm me.⁸ When Laban said, 'You can have all the speckled animals as your pay,' all the animals gave birth to speckled young ones. But when he said, 'You can have all the streaked animals as your pay,' all the flocks gave birth to streaked babies.⁹ So God has taken the animals away from your father and has given them to me.

¹⁰"I had a dream during the season when the flocks were mating. I saw that the only male goats who were mating were streaked, speckled, or spotted.¹¹ The angel of God spoke to me in that dream and said, 'Jacob!' I answered, 'Yes!' ¹²The angel said, 'Look! Only the streaked, speckled, or spotted male goats

are mating. I have seen all the wrong things Laban has been doing to you. ¹³I am the God who appeared to you at Bethel, where you poured olive oil on the stone you set up on end and where you made a promise to me. Now I want you to leave here and go back to the land where you were born.’ ”

¹⁴Rachel and Leah answered Jacob, “Our father has nothing to give us when he dies. ¹⁵He has treated us like strangers. He sold us to you, and then he spent all of the money you paid for us. ¹⁶God took all this wealth from our father, and now it belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you to do.”

¹⁷So Jacob put his children and his wives on camels, ¹⁸and they began their journey back to Isaac, his father, in the land of Canaan. All the flocks of animals that Jacob owned walked ahead of them. He carried everything with him that he had gotten while he lived in Northwest Mesopotamia.

¹⁹While Laban was gone to cut the wool from his sheep, Rachel stole the idols that belonged to him. ²⁰And Jacob tricked Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was leaving. ²¹Jacob and his family left quickly, crossed the Euphrates River, and traveled toward the mountains of Gilead.

²²Three days later Laban learned that Jacob had run away, ²³so he gathered his relatives and began to chase him. After seven days Laban found him in the mountains of Gilead. ²⁴That night God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream and said, “Be careful! Do not say anything to Jacob, good or bad.”

The Search for the Stolen Idols

²⁵So Laban caught up with Jacob. Now Jacob had made his

camp in the mountains, so Laban and his relatives set up their camp in the mountains of Gilead.²⁶ Laban said to Jacob, “What have you done? You cheated me and took my daughters as if you had captured them in a war.²⁷ Why did you run away secretly and trick me? Why didn’t you tell me? Then I could have sent you away with joy and singing and with the music of tambourines and harps.²⁸ You did not even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters goodbye. You were very foolish to do this!²⁹ I have the power to harm you, but last night the God of your father spoke to me and warned me not to say anything to you, good or bad.³⁰ I know you want to go back to your home, but why did you steal my idols?”

³¹ Jacob answered Laban, “I left without telling you, because I was afraid you would take your daughters away from me.³² If you find anyone here who has taken your idols, that person will be killed! Your relatives will be my witnesses. You may look for anything that belongs to you and take anything that is yours.” (Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen Laban’s idols.)

³³ So Laban looked in Jacob’s tent, in Leah’s tent, and in the tent where the two slave women stayed, but he did not find his idols. When he left Leah’s tent, he went into Rachel’s tent.

³⁴ Rachel had hidden the idols inside her camel’s saddle and was sitting on them. Although Laban looked through the whole tent, he did not find them.

³⁵ Rachel said to her father, “Father, don’t be angry with me. I am not able to stand up before you because I am having my monthly period.” So Laban looked through the camp, but he did not find his idols.

³⁶ Then Jacob became very angry and said, “What wrong

have I done? What law have I broken to cause you to chase me? ³⁷You have looked through everything I own, but you have found nothing that belongs to you. If you have found anything, show it to everyone. Put it in front of your relatives and my relatives, and let them decide which one of us is right. ³⁸I have worked for you now for twenty years. During all that time none of the lambs and kids died during birth, and I have not eaten any of the male sheep from your flocks. ³⁹Any time an animal was killed by wild beasts, I did not bring it to you, but made up for the loss myself. You made me pay for any animal that was stolen during the day or night. ⁴⁰In the daytime the sun took away my strength, and at night I was cold and could not sleep. ⁴¹I worked like a slave for you for twenty years—the first fourteen to get your two daughters and the last six to earn your flocks. During that time you changed my pay ten times. ⁴²But the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, was with me. Otherwise, you would have sent me away with nothing. But he saw the trouble I had and the hard work I did, and last night he corrected you.”

Jacob and Laban's Agreement

⁴³Laban said to Jacob, “These girls are my daughters. Their children belong to me, and these flocks are mine. Everything you see here belongs to me, but I can do nothing to keep my daughters and their children. ⁴⁴Let us make an agreement, and let us set up a pile of stones to remind us of it.”

⁴⁵So Jacob took a large rock and set it up on its end. ⁴⁶He told his relatives to gather rocks, so they took the rocks and piled them up; then they ate beside the pile. ⁴⁷Laban named

that place in his language A Pile to Remind Us, and Jacob gave the place the same name in Hebrew.

⁴⁸Laban said to Jacob, “This pile of rocks will remind us of the agreement between us.” That is why the place was called A Pile to Remind Us. ⁴⁹It was also called [Mizpah](#), because Laban said, “Let the Lord watch over us while we are separated from each other. ⁵⁰Remember that God is our witness even if no one else is around us. He will know if you harm my daughters or marry other women. ⁵¹Here is the pile of rocks that I have put between us and here is the rock I set up on end. ⁵²This pile of rocks and this rock set on end will remind us of our agreement. I will never go past this pile to hurt you, and you must never come to my side of them to hurt me. ⁵³Let the God of Abraham, who is the God of Nahor and the God of their fathers, punish either of us if we break this agreement.”

So Jacob made a promise in the name of the God whom his father Isaac worshiped. ⁵⁴Then Jacob killed an animal and offered it as a sacrifice on the mountain, and he invited his relatives to share in the meal. After they finished eating, they spent the night on the mountain. ⁵⁵Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them, and then he left to return home.

Jacob Meets Esau

When Jacob also went his way, the angels of God met him.²When he saw them, he said, “This is the camp of God!” So he named that place [Mahanaim](#).

³Jacob’s brother Esau was living in the area called Seir in the country of Edom. Jacob sent messengers to Esau,⁴telling them, “Give this message to my master Esau: ‘This is what Jacob, your servant, says: I have lived with Laban and have remained there until now. ⁵I have cattle, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants. I send this message to you and ask you to accept us.’ ”

⁶The messengers returned to Jacob and said, “We went to your brother Esau. He is coming to meet you and has four hundred men with him.”

⁷Then Jacob was very afraid and worried. He divided the people who were with him and all the flocks, herds, and camels into two camps. ⁸Jacob thought, “Esau might come and destroy one camp, but the other camp can run away and be saved.”

⁹Then Jacob said, “God of my father Abraham! God of my father Isaac! Lord, you told me to return to my country and my family. You said that you would treat me well. ¹⁰I am not worthy of the kindness and continual goodness you have shown me. The first time I traveled across the Jordan River, I had only my walking stick, but now I own enough to have two camps. ¹¹Please save me from my brother Esau. I am afraid he will come and kill all of us, even the mothers with the children. ¹²You said to me, ‘I will treat you well and will make your children as many

as the sand of the seashore. There will be too many to count.’ ”

¹³Jacob stayed there for the night and prepared a gift for Esau from what he had with him: ¹⁴two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred female sheep and twenty male sheep, ¹⁵thirty female camels and their young, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys, and ten male donkeys. ¹⁶Jacob gave each separate flock of animals to one of his servants and said to them, “Go ahead of me and keep some space between each herd.” ¹⁷Jacob gave them their orders. To the servant with the first group of animals he said, “My brother Esau will come to you and ask, ‘Whose servant are you? Where are you going and whose animals are these?’” ¹⁸Then you will answer, ‘They belong to your servant Jacob. He sent them as a gift to you, my master Esau, and he also is coming behind us.’ ”

¹⁹Jacob ordered the second servant, the third servant, and all the other servants to do the same thing. He said, “Say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. ²⁰Say, ‘Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.’ ” Jacob thought, “If I send these gifts ahead of me, maybe Esau will forgive me. Then when I see him, perhaps he will accept me.” ²¹So Jacob sent the gifts to Esau, but he himself stayed that night in the camp.

Jacob Wrestles with God

²²During the night Jacob rose and crossed the Jabbok River at the crossing, taking with him his two wives, his two slave girls, and his eleven sons. ²³He sent his family and everything he had across the river. ²⁴So Jacob was alone, and a man came and wrestled with him until the sun came up. ²⁵When the man saw

he could not defeat Jacob, he struck Jacob's hip and put it out of joint. ²⁶Then he said to Jacob, "Let me go. The sun is coming up."

But Jacob said, "I will let you go if you will bless me."

²⁷The man said to him, "What is your name?"

And he answered, "Jacob."

²⁸Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob. Your name will now be [Israel](#), because you have wrestled with God and with people, and you have won."

²⁹Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name."

But the man said, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed Jacob there.

³⁰So Jacob named that place [Peniel](#), saying, "I have seen God face to face, but my life was saved." ³¹Then the sun rose as he was leaving that place, and Jacob was limping because of his leg. ³²So even today the people of Israel do not eat the muscle that is on the hip joint of animals, because Jacob was touched there.

Jacob Shows His Bravery

Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and with him were four hundred men. So Jacob divided his children among Leah, Rachel, and the two slave girls.² Jacob put the slave girls with their children first, then Leah and her children behind them, and Rachel and Joseph last.³ Jacob himself went out in front of them and bowed down flat on the ground seven times as he was walking toward his brother.

⁴But Esau ran to meet Jacob and put his arms around him and hugged him. Then Esau kissed him, and they both cried. ⁵When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he asked, “Who are these people with you?”

Jacob answered, “These are the children God has given me. God has been good to me, your servant.”

⁶Then the two slave girls and their children came up to Esau and bowed down flat on the earth before him. ⁷Leah and her children also came up to Esau and also bowed down flat on the earth. Last of all, Joseph and Rachel came up to Esau, and they, too, bowed down flat before him.

⁸Esau said, “I saw many herds as I was coming here. Why did you bring them?”

Jacob answered, “They were to please you, my master.”

⁹But Esau said, “I already have enough, my brother. Keep what you have.”

¹⁰Jacob said, “No! Please! If I have pleased you, then accept the gift I give you. I am very happy to see your face again. It is like seeing the face of God, because you have

accepted me. ¹¹So I beg you to accept the gift I give you. God has been very good to me, and I have more than I need.” And because Jacob begged, Esau accepted the gift.

¹²Then Esau said, “Let us be going. I will travel with you.”

¹³But Jacob said to him, “My master, you know that the children are weak. And I must be careful with my flocks and their young ones. If I force them to go too far in one day, all the animals will die. ¹⁴So, my master, you go on ahead of me, your servant. I will follow you slowly and let the animals and the children set the speed at which we travel. I will meet you, my master, in Edom.”

¹⁵So Esau said, “Then let me leave some of my people with you.”

“No, thank you,” said Jacob. “I only want to please you, my master.” ¹⁶So that day Esau started back to Edom. ¹⁷But Jacob went to Succoth, where he built a house for himself and shelters for his animals. That is why the place was named [Succoth](#).

¹⁸Jacob left Northwest Mesopotamia and arrived safely at the city of Shechem in the land of Canaan. There he camped east of the city. ¹⁹He bought a part of the field where he had camped from the sons of Hamor father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver. ²⁰He built an altar there and named it after God, the God of Israel.

Dinah Is Attacked

At this time Dinah, the daughter of Leah and Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. ²When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of the land, saw her, he took her and forced her to have sexual relations with him. ³Shechem fell in love with Dinah, and he spoke kindly to her. ⁴He told his father, Hamor, “Please get this girl for me so I can marry her.”

⁵Jacob learned how Shechem had disgraced his daughter, but since his sons were out in the field with the cattle, Jacob said nothing until they came home. ⁶While he waited, Hamor father of Shechem went to talk with Jacob.

⁷When Jacob’s sons heard what had happened, they came in from the field. They were very angry that Shechem had done such a wicked thing to Israel. It was wrong for him to have sexual relations with Jacob’s daughter; a thing like this should not be done.

⁸But Hamor talked to Dinah’s brothers and said, “My son Shechem is deeply in love with Dinah. Please let him marry her. ⁹Marry our people. Give your women to our men as wives and take our women for your men as wives. ¹⁰You can live in the same land with us. You will be free to own land and to trade here.”

¹¹Shechem also talked to Jacob and to Dinah’s brothers and said, “Please accept my offer. I will give anything you ask. ¹²Ask as much as you want for the payment for the bride, and I will give it to you. Just let me marry Dinah.”

¹³Jacob’s sons answered Shechem and his father with lies,

because Shechem had disgraced their sister Dinah.¹⁴The brothers said to them, “We cannot allow you to marry our sister, because you are not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us.¹⁵But we will allow you to marry her if you do this one thing: Every man in your town must be circumcised like us.¹⁶Then your men can marry our women, and our men can marry your women, and we will live in your land and become one people.¹⁷If you refuse to be circumcised, we will take Dinah and leave.”

¹⁸What they asked seemed fair to Hamor and Shechem.¹⁹So Shechem quickly went to be circumcised because he loved Jacob’s daughter.

Now Shechem was the most respected man in his family.²⁰So Hamor and Shechem went to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying,²¹“These people want to be friends with us. So let them live in our land and trade here. There is enough land for all of us. Let us marry their women, and we can let them marry our women.²²But we must agree to one thing: All our men must be circumcised as they are. Then they will agree to live in our land, and we will be one people.²³If we do this, their cattle and their animals will belong to us. Let us do what they say, and they will stay in our land.”²⁴All the people who had come to the city gate heard this. They agreed with Hamor and Shechem, and every man was circumcised.

²⁵Three days later the men who were circumcised were still in pain. Two of Jacob’s sons, Simeon and Levi (Dinah’s brothers), took their swords and made a surprise attack on the city, killing all the men there.²⁶They killed Hamor and his son Shechem and then took Dinah out of Shechem’s house and

left.²⁷ Jacob's sons came upon the dead bodies and stole everything that was in the city, to pay them back for what Shechem had done to their sister.²⁸ So the brothers took the flocks, herds, and donkeys, and everything in the city and in the fields.²⁹ They took every valuable thing the people owned, even their wives and children and everything in the houses.

³⁰ Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have caused me a lot of trouble. Now the Canaanites and the Perizzites who live in the land will hate me. Since there are only a few of us, if they join together to attack us, my people and I will be destroyed."

³¹ But the brothers said, "We will not allow our sister to be treated like a prostitute."

Life Lessons

Genesis 34:1–36:43

Situation

Even though Shechem's rape of Dinah was wrong, Simeon and Levi over reacted and sinned. Consequently, God told Jacob to move to Bethel and Hebron.

Observation

In the middle of life's continuing problems and challenges, God reminded Jacob of his new name, Israel. Through this reminder, God shows he is faithful to his promises. God's promises set believers apart.

Inspiration

On the basis of the counseling I do, I would say

that the two greatest problems among Christians are a lack of understanding their position in Christ and a lack of knowing God as their Father. They have no family image; therefore, they feel cut off from other family members—members of the Body of Christ, as well as feeling alienated from God. Our fellowship is made solid only as we renew our thinking about God. What grief it must bring to God's heart for us to cast an image on Him that is not true.

A man can be a teacher without being a father, but a true father will be a teacher. A man can be a lord without being a father, but a true father will be a good director of the home. A man can be a good provider without being a good father, but a true father will be a provider. It all fits. That is what motivates God—the delight in being a great father to His children on earth! What a joy to God's heart when we respond as Jesus did when He was in Gethsemane. It was as if He said, "I know it's going to hurt, but You are my Father, and I know You will be everything that I need. I will trust You."

In my own family the greatest times with my children have been crazy times that only a family could enjoy. Times when we just go outdoors and tumble through the leaves with each other. Times when my son Johnny and I have played the whole evening away with some small creative object. Times when my sons and I just grab each other and hang on each other's neck. Teachers and pupils do not do that; neither do sergeants and privates. There have been times when my little Ann, who is now nine, and I

have gone on dates together. We come home with hearts so full of love for each other and so full of laughter that the joy of the Lord is our strength for days afterward. There have been times when we as a family sing at the top of our lungs. Only fathers take time for such activities.

God made us to enjoy Him... God is our Father, and we are to enjoy Him forever. The family concept in heaven will be perfect in every way. Heaven on earth is the ability to bring that concept to our own hearts, friends, and churches. (Is your church characterized by a sense of family, or is it an army or a classroom?) What a comfort to enjoy God like that! I can act as a child and treat Him as a father. I am free to fail, free to speak what is a concern to me, free to be myself, free from fear, free from guilt. (From *The God You Can Know* by Dan DeHaan)

Application

Have you been wronged or harmed and responded, “I’m going to get even if it’s the last thing I do!” Each time you remember the hurt, consciously turn to God for his justice and comfort. When resentment enters your mind today, say a quick silent prayer: “Not a chance! God, you are my father. Take over; I’ll follow.”

Exploration

Revenge—[Judges 15](#); [2 Samuel 3:26–29](#); [Matthew 5:38–45](#); [Romans 12:17–21](#); [1 Peter 3:9](#).

Jacob in Bethel

God said to Jacob, “Go to the city of Bethel and live there. Make an altar to the God who appeared to you there when you were running away from your brother Esau.”

²So Jacob said to his family and to all who were with him, “Put away the foreign gods you have, and make yourselves clean, and change your clothes.” ³We will leave here and go to Bethel. There I will build an altar to God, who has helped me during my time of trouble. He has been with me everywhere I have gone.” ⁴So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had, and the earrings they were wearing, and he hid them under the great tree near the town of Shechem. ⁵Then Jacob and his sons left there. But God caused the people in the nearby cities to be afraid, so they did not follow them. ⁶And Jacob and all the people who were with him went to Luz, which is now called Bethel, in the land of Canaan. ⁷There Jacob built an altar and named the place Bethel, after God, because God had appeared to him there when he was running from his brother.

⁸Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died and was buried under the oak tree at Bethel, so they named that place Oak of Crying.

Jacob’s New Name

⁹When Jacob came back from Northwest Mesopotamia, God appeared to him again and blessed him. ¹⁰God said to him, “Your name is Jacob, but you will not be called Jacob any longer. Your new name will be Israel.” So he called him Israel.

¹¹God said to him, “I am God Almighty. Have many children and grow in number as a nation. You will be the ancestor of many nations and kings. ¹²The same land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you and your descendants.” ¹³Then God left him. ¹⁴Jacob set up a stone on edge in that place where God had talked to him, and he poured a drink offering and olive oil on it to make it special for God. ¹⁵And Jacob named the place Bethel.

Rachel Dies Giving Birth

¹⁶Jacob and his group left Bethel. Before they came to Ephrath, Rachel began giving birth to her baby, ¹⁷but she was having much trouble. When Rachel’s nurse saw this, she said, “Don’t be afraid, Rachel. You are giving birth to another son.” ¹⁸Rachel gave birth to the son, but she herself died. As she lay dying, she named the boy Son of My Suffering, but Jacob called him [Benjamin](#).

¹⁹Rachel was buried on the road to Ephrath, a district of Bethlehem, ²⁰and Jacob set up a rock on her grave to honor her. That rock is still there. ²¹Then [Israel](#) continued his journey and camped just south of Migdal Eder.

²²While Israel was there, Reuben had sexual relations with Israel’s slave woman Bilhah, and Israel heard about it.

The Family of Israel

Jacob had twelve sons. ²³He had six sons by his wife Leah: Reuben, his first son, then Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and

Zebulun.

²⁴He had two sons by his wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.

²⁵He had two sons by Rachel's slave girl Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali.

²⁶And he had two sons by Leah's slave girl Zilpah: Gad and Asher.

These are Jacob's sons who were born in Northwest Mesopotamia.

²⁷Jacob went to his father Isaac at Mamre near Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac had lived. ²⁸Isaac lived one hundred eighty years. ²⁹So Isaac breathed his last breath and died when he was very old, and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

Esau's Family

This is the family history of Esau (also called Edom).²Esau married women from the land of Canaan: Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite; and Oholibamah daughter of Anah, the son of Zibeon the Hivite;³and Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, the sister of Nebaioth.

⁴Adah gave birth to Eliphaz for Esau. Basemath gave him Reuel,⁵and Oholibamah gave him Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. These were Esau's sons who were born in the land of Canaan.

⁶Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the people who lived with him, his herds and other animals, and all the belongings he had gotten in Canaan, and he went to a land away from his brother Jacob.⁷Esau's and Jacob's belongings were becoming too many for them to live in the same land. The land where they had lived could not support both of them, because they had too many herds.⁸So Esau lived in the mountains of Edom. (Esau is also named Edom.)⁹This is the family history of Esau. He is the ancestor of the Edomites, who live in the mountains of Edom.

¹⁰Esau's sons were Eliphaz, son of Adah and Esau, and Reuel, son of Basemath and Esau.

¹¹Eliphaz had five sons: Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. ¹²Eliphaz also had a slave woman named Timna, and Timna and Eliphaz gave birth to Amalek. These were Esau's grandsons by his wife Adah.

¹³Reuel had four sons: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These were Esau's grandsons by his wife Basemath.

¹⁴Esau's third wife was Oholibamah the daughter of Anah. (Anah was the son of Zibeon.) Esau and Oholibamah gave birth to Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

¹⁵These were the leaders that came from Esau: Esau's first son was Eliphaz. From him came these leaders: Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz, ¹⁶Korah, Gatam, and Amalek. These were the leaders that came from Eliphaz in the land of Edom. They were the grandsons of Adah.

¹⁷Esau's son Reuel was the father of these leaders: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These were the leaders that came from Reuel in the land of Edom. They were the grandsons of Esau's wife Basemath.

¹⁸Esau's wife Oholibamah gave birth to these leaders: Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. These are the leaders that came from Esau's wife Oholibamah the daughter of Anah. ¹⁹These were the sons of Esau (also called Edom), and these were their leaders.

²⁰These were the sons of Seir the Horite, who were living in the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, ²¹Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. These sons of Seir were the leaders of the Horites in Edom.

²²The sons of Lotan were Hori and Homam. (Timna was Lotan's sister.)

²³The sons of Shobal were Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam.

²⁴The sons of Zibeon were Aiah and Anah. Anah is the man who found the hot springs in the desert while he was caring for his father's donkeys.

²⁵The children of Anah were Dishon and Oholibamah daughter of Anah.

²⁶The sons of Dishon were Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Keran.

²⁷The sons of Ezer were Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan.

²⁸The sons of Dishan were Uz and Aran.

²⁹These were the names of the Horite leaders: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, ³⁰Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan.

These men were the leaders of the Horite families who lived in the land of Edom.

³¹These are the kings who ruled in the land of Edom before the Israelites ever had a king:

³²Bela son of Beor was the king of Edom. He came from the city of Dinhabah.

³³When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah became king. Jobab was from Bozrah.

³⁴When Jobab died, Husham became king. He was from the land of the Temanites.

³⁵When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad, who had defeated Midian in the country of Moab, became king. Hadad was from the city of Avith.

³⁶When Hadad died, Samlah became king. He was from Masrekah.

³⁷When Samlah died, Shaul became king. He was from Rehoboth on the Euphrates River.

³⁸When Shaul died, Baal-Hanan son of Acbor became king.

³⁹When Baal-Hanan son of Acbor died, Hadad became king. He was from the city of Pau. His wife's name was Mehetabel daughter of Matred, who was the daughter of Me-Zahab.

⁴⁰These Edomite leaders, listed by their families and regions, came from Esau. Their names were Timna, Alvah,

Jetheth, ⁴¹Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, ⁴²Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, ⁴³Magdiel, and Iram. They were the leaders of Edom. (Esau was the father of the Edomites.) The area where each of these families lived was named after that family.

Life Lessons

Genesis 37:1–36

Situation

Joseph, naïve and boastful, told his brothers of a dream that portrayed his superiority. Worse, his father Jacob showed him favoritism by giving Joseph a special robe. His brothers were jealous of him and plotted to kill him. But Reuben and Judah rescued Joseph, who was sold as a slave instead.

Observation

Although we don't want to admit it, we are by nature self-centered and self-serving. Even a cursory glance at the local newspaper reveals how jealousy can lead to death. We see these motives at work in the world all around us.

Inspiration

Resting at the end of this trail of thoughts is the deadly briefcase of envy....

Who is his victim? Anyone who has more than he has. More karats, more horsepower, more office space, more church members. Jealousy sets her crosshairs on the one who has more. "You want things, but you do not have them. So you are ready to kill and are jealous of other people, but still you cannot get what you want" ([James 4:2](#)).

Honestly, Max, I would never do that. I would never kill.

With a rifle, maybe not. But with your tongue? With your glare? Your gossip? "Jealousy," informs

[Proverbs 6:34](#), will make you “very angry.” Are your sights set on someone? If so, be careful; “jealousy will rot your bones” ([Proverbs 14:30](#)).

Need a deterrent for envy? An antidote for jealousy? ... Rather than bemoan what you don’t have, rejoice in the abundant cup you do. “My cup overflows with blessings” ([Psalm 23:5](#), NLT) ...

The last thing we need to worry about is not having enough. Our cup overflows with blessings.

Let me ask a question—a crucial question. If focusing on our diminishing items leads to envy, what would happen if we focused on the unending items? If awareness of what we don’t have creates jealousy, is it possible that an awareness of our abundance will lead to contentment? Let’s give it a try and see what happens. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

Application

Take an inventory of what you don’t have that is causing you jealousy or envy. Then ask yourself if that item is really a necessity or a luxury. Next, take an inventory of what you *do* have. Ask God to give you a heart of thanksgiving that will lead to contentment.

Exploration

God’s Mysterious Actions—Esther [4–8](#); [Job 1–3](#); [42](#); [Jonah 1–4](#); [Philippians 1](#); [Hebrews 11–12](#).

Joseph the Dreamer

Jacob lived in the land of Canaan, where his father had lived.

²This is the family history of Jacob:

Joseph was a young man, seventeen years old. He and his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives, cared for the flocks. Joseph gave his father bad reports about his brothers. ³Since Joseph was born when his father [Israel](#) was old, Israel loved him more than his other sons. He made Joseph a special robe with long sleeves. ⁴When Joseph's brothers saw that their father loved him more than he loved them, they hated their brother and could not speak to him politely.

⁵One time Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him even more. ⁶Joseph said, "Listen to the dream I had. ⁷We were in the field tying bundles of wheat together. My bundle stood up, and your bundles of wheat gathered around it and bowed down to it."

⁸His brothers said, "Do you really think you will be king over us? Do you truly think you will rule over us?" His brothers hated him even more because of his dreams and what he had said.

⁹Then Joseph had another dream, and he told his brothers about it also. He said, "Listen, I had another dream. I saw the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing down to me."

¹⁰Joseph also told his father about this dream, but his father scolded him, saying, "What kind of dream is this? Do you

really believe that your mother, your brothers, and I will bow down to you?" ¹¹Joseph's brothers were jealous of him, but his father thought about what all these things could mean.

¹²One day Joseph's brothers went to Shechem to graze their father's flocks. ¹³Israel said to Joseph, "Go to Shechem where your brothers are grazing the flocks."

Joseph answered, "I will go."

¹⁴His father said, "Go and see if your brothers and the flocks are all right. Then come back and tell me." So Joseph's father sent him from the Valley of Hebron.

When Joseph came to Shechem, ¹⁵a man found him wandering in the field and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

¹⁶Joseph answered, "I am looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing the flocks?"

¹⁷The man said, "They have already gone. I heard them say they were going to Dothan." So Joseph went to look for his brothers and found them in Dothan.

Joseph Sold into Slavery

¹⁸Joseph's brothers saw him coming from far away. Before he reached them, they made a plan to kill him. ¹⁹They said to each other, "Here comes that dreamer. ²⁰Let's kill him and throw his body into one of the wells. We can tell our father that a wild animal killed him. Then we will see what will become of his dreams."

²¹But Reuben heard their plan and saved Joseph, saying, "Let's not kill him. ²²Don't spill any blood. Throw him into this well here in the desert, but don't hurt him!" Reuben planned to

save Joseph later and send him back to his father. ²³So when Joseph came to his brothers, they pulled off his robe with long sleeves ²⁴and threw him into the well. It was empty, and there was no water in it.

²⁵While Joseph was in the well, the brothers sat down to eat. When they looked up, they saw a group of Ishmaelites traveling from Gilead to Egypt. Their camels were carrying spices, balm, and myrrh.

²⁶Then Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and hide his death? ²⁷Let's sell him to these Ishmaelites. Then we will not be guilty of killing our own brother. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." And the other brothers agreed. ²⁸So when the Midianite traders came by, the brothers took Joseph out of the well and sold him to the Ishmaelites for eight ounces of silver. And the Ishmaelites took him to Egypt.

²⁹When Reuben came back to the well and Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes to show he was upset. ³⁰Then he went back to his brothers and said, "The boy is not there! What shall I do?" ³¹The brothers killed a goat and dipped Joseph's robe in its blood. ³²Then they brought the long-sleeved robe to their father and said, "We found this robe. Look it over carefully and see if it is your son's robe."

³³Jacob looked it over and said, "It is my son's robe! Some savage animal has eaten him. My son Joseph has been torn to pieces!" ³⁴Then Jacob tore his clothes and put on rough cloth to show that he was upset, and he continued to be sad about his son for a long time. ³⁵All of his sons and daughters tried to comfort him, but he could not be comforted. He said, "I will be sad about my son until the day I die." So Jacob cried for his

son Joseph.

³⁶Meanwhile the Midianites who had bought Joseph had taken him to Egypt. There they sold him to Potiphar, an officer to the king of Egypt and captain of the palace guard.

Life Lessons

Genesis 38:1–30

Situation

Onan and Judah shirked their moral responsibilities to produce a child by Tamar and preserve her husband's line.

Observation

Trusting God is critical—especially when it is difficult to do so. Sometimes trusting in God's help and timing seems to fight against our own interests and aspirations. Still, obeying and trusting God yields his blessing.

Inspiration

All my life, I just wanted to be a mother. Every year I received only one Christmas gift that truly counted: a doll. Not a Barbie doll or a fashion doll, but a baby doll...

At thirty-five I married. I had waited, determined not to make a mistake, and though I had dated some very sharp, attractive men, it was only when Will Anderson appeared that I knew the right man had come... . Will and I decided we wanted to try for a baby right away... . Now we shared a common dream...

Somehow, though, I thought the dream of having a baby would be easier to attain [than running a marathon]. That the hardest part had been waiting so many years for the right man to be my husband. But I quickly learned the word “infertility.” Strictly

speaking, of course, I was not infertile. I could become pregnant all right, but each time I would miscarry during the first few weeks. During one year I was hospitalized eight times with pregnancy-related problems....

In this situation, no matter what medication, what shots, what torment I subjected my body to through surgeries and other procedures, I could not make a baby. I was completely stripped and broken. And I was suddenly empty enough of myself to see God in a way I had never seen Him before. (From *Open Adoption* by Ann Kiemel Anderson)

Application

Are you waiting patiently for God to work out his loving plan? Instead of trying to “make things happen,” trust God’s timing and submit your dreams to him.

Exploration

Relying on God—[Psalm 32:10](#); [37:3](#); [Proverbs 3:5](#); [John 14:1](#); [Romans 9:33](#).

Judah and Tamar

About that time, Judah left his brothers and went to stay with a man named Hirah in the town of Adullam. ²There Judah met a Canaanite girl, the daughter of a man named Shua, and married her. Judah had sexual relations with her, ³and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, whom Judah named Er. ⁴Later she gave birth to another son and named him Onan. ⁵Still later she had another son and named him Shelah. She was at Kezib when this third son was born.

⁶Judah chose a girl named Tamar to be the wife of his first son Er. ⁷But Er, Judah's oldest son, did what the Lord said was evil, so the Lord killed him. ⁸Then Judah said to Er's brother Onan, "[Go and have sexual relations with your dead brother's wife.](#) It is your duty to provide children for your brother in this way."

⁹But Onan knew that the children would not belong to him, so when he was supposed to have sexual relations with Tamar he did not complete the sex act. This made it impossible for Tamar to become pregnant and for Er to have descendants. ¹⁰The Lord was displeased by this wicked thing Onan had done, so the Lord killed Onan also. ¹¹Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Go back to live in your father's house, and don't marry until my young son Shelah grows up." Judah was afraid that Shelah also would die like his brothers. So Tamar returned to her father's home.

¹²After a long time Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. After Judah had gotten over his sorrow, he went to Timnah to his men who were cutting the wool from his sheep. His friend Hirah from Adullam went with him. ¹³Tamar learned that Judah, her father-in-law, was going to Timnah to cut the wool from his sheep. ¹⁴So she took off the clothes that showed she was a widow and covered her face with a veil to hide who she was. Then she sat down by the gate of Enaim on the road to Timnah. She did this because Judah's younger son Shelah had grown up, but Judah had not made plans for her to marry him.

¹⁵When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, because she had covered her face with a veil. ¹⁶So Judah went to her and said, "Let me have sexual relations with you." He did not know that she was Tamar, his daughter-in-law.

She asked, "What will you give me if I let you have sexual relations with me?"

¹⁷Judah answered, "I will send you a young goat from my flock."

She answered, "First give me something to keep as a deposit until you send the goat."

¹⁸Judah asked, "What do you want me to give you as a deposit?"

Tamar answered, "Give me your seal and its cord, and give me your walking stick." So Judah gave these things to her. Then Judah and Tamar had sexual relations, and Tamar became pregnant. ¹⁹When Tamar went home, she took off the veil that covered her face and put on the clothes that showed she was a widow.

²⁰Judah sent his friend Hirah with the young goat to find the woman and get back his seal and the walking stick he had

given her, but Hirah could not find her. ²¹He asked some of the people at the town of Enaim, “Where is the prostitute who was here by the road?”

They answered, “There has never been a prostitute here.”

²²So he went back to Judah and said, “I could not find the woman, and the people who lived there said, ‘There has never been a prostitute here.’ ”

²³Judah said, “Let her keep the things. I don’t want people to laugh at us. I sent her the goat as I promised, but you could not find her.”

²⁴About three months later someone told Judah, “Tamar, your daughter-in-law, is guilty of acting like a prostitute, and now she is pregnant.”

Then Judah said, “Bring her out and let her be burned to death.”

²⁵When the people went to bring Tamar out, she sent a message to her father-in-law that said, “The man who owns these things has made me pregnant. Look at this seal and its cord and this walking stick, and tell me whose they are.”

²⁶Judah recognized them and said, “She is more in the right than I. She did this because I did not give her to my son Shelah as I promised.” And Judah did not have sexual relations with her again.

²⁷When the time came for Tamar to give birth, there were twins in her body. ²⁸While she was giving birth, one baby put his hand out. The nurse tied a red string on his hand and said, “This baby came out first.” ²⁹But he pulled his hand back in, so the other baby was born first. The nurse said, “So you are able to break out first,” and they named him [Perez](#). ³⁰After this, the baby with the red string on his hand was born, and they named

him Zerah.

Life Lessons

Genesis 39:1–40:23

Situation

Even though Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, God used the situation to bless Joseph. First, an Egyptian officer entrusted his household to Joseph. When Joseph rejected the sexual advances of the officer's wife, she falsely accused Joseph of rape and had him jailed. Again, even in prison, God developed Joseph's character.

Observation

In order to experience God's power, leaders must often endure hardship. Then they emerge to make their contribution.

Inspiration

[A] leader must prepare for leadership in the same way Jesus prepared: by being willing to suffer.

The words almost sound strange to modern ears. What do we know, in this wonderful country, of suffering? As a nation we have never known real want... . There have been, of course, earthquakes, floods ... illness. There are riots and strikes and crimes. Violent death threatens us on the highways, in the cities... .

To suffer simply means "to bear under." A leader is [someone] who does not groan under burdens, but takes them—and with a dash of humor. He knows how to keep his mouth shut about his difficulties and how to live a day at a time, doing quietly what needs

doing at the moment.

... [D]on't do it alone. Perhaps I seem to be belaboring the point, but lest the "rules" for leadership appear impossibly supernatural, we need to recall constantly that it is Christ who calls us; it is Christ who enables us; it is Christ who promises His presence and His strength. Who did He call to be disciples? Weren't they quite ordinary men? None was outstanding, so far as we know, before his call to discipleship. It was not unusual gifts or an unusual spirituality or any position of temporal success already gained that drew Jesus' attention to them. He spent a night in prayer to His Father, prior to the decision, and then, in accord with the Father's will, issued the call. I pray ... that you (and others who may read this) will answer the call to be willing to suffer in order to lead, to be last in order to be first. (From *The Mark of a Man* by Elisabeth Elliot)

Application

God often develops leaders through humility and suffering. If you have a position of leadership, realize that suffering and success both come with the job. Both build character and ability. Take heart in the examples of Joseph and Jesus, two leaders who rose above suffering to lead and to love. Accept your problems today as opportunities for growth.

Exploration

God's Presence at All Times—[Genesis 28:15](#); [Exodus 33:14](#); [Deuteronomy 20:1](#); [Isaiah 43:2](#); [Matthew 18:20](#); [28:20](#).

Joseph Is Sold to Potiphar

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. An Egyptian named Potiphar was an officer to the king of Egypt and the captain of the palace guard. He bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.²The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man. He lived in the house of his master, Potiphar the Egyptian.

³Potiphar saw that the Lord was with Joseph and that the Lord made Joseph successful in everything he did.⁴So Potiphar was very happy with Joseph and allowed him to be his personal servant. He put Joseph in charge of the house, trusting him with everything he owned.⁵When Joseph was put in charge of the house and everything Potiphar owned, the Lord blessed the people in Potiphar's house because of Joseph. And the Lord blessed everything that belonged to Potiphar, both in the house and in the field.⁶So Potiphar left Joseph in charge of everything he owned and was not concerned about anything except the food he ate.

Joseph Is Put into Prison

Now Joseph was well built and handsome.⁷After some time the wife of Joseph's master began to desire Joseph, and one day she said to him, "Have sexual relations with me."

⁸But Joseph refused and said to her, “My master trusts me with everything in his house. He has put me in charge of everything he owns. ⁹There is no one in his house greater than I. He has not kept anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How can I do such an evil thing? It is a sin against God.”

¹⁰The woman talked to Joseph every day, but he refused to have sexual relations with her or even spend time with her.

¹¹One day Joseph went into the house to do his work as usual and was the only man in the house at that time. ¹²His master's wife grabbed his coat and said to him, “Come and have sexual relations with me.” But Joseph left his coat in her hand and ran out of the house.

¹³When she saw that Joseph had left his coat in her hands and had run outside, ¹⁴she called to the servants in her house and said, “Look! This Hebrew slave was brought here to shame us. He came in and tried to have sexual relations with me, but I screamed. ¹⁵My scream scared him and he ran away, but he left his coat with me.” ¹⁶She kept his coat until her husband came home, ¹⁷and she told him the same story. She said, “This Hebrew slave you brought here came in to shame me! ¹⁸When he came near me, I screamed. He ran away, but he left his coat.”

¹⁹When Joseph's master heard what his wife said Joseph had done, he became very angry. ²⁰So Potiphar arrested Joseph and put him into the prison where the king's prisoners were put. And Joseph stayed there in the prison.

²¹But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him kindness and caused the prison warden to like Joseph. ²²The prison warden chose Joseph to take care of all the prisoners, and he was responsible for whatever was done in the prison. ²³The

warden paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's care because the Lord was with Joseph and made him successful in everything he did.

Joseph Interprets Two Dreams

After these things happened, two of the king's officers displeased the king—the man who served wine to the king and the king's baker. ²The king became angry with his officer who served him wine and his baker, ³so he put them in the prison of the captain of the guard, the same prison where Joseph was kept. ⁴The captain of the guard put the two prisoners in Joseph's care, and they stayed in prison for some time.

⁵One night both the king's officer who served him wine and the baker had a dream. Each had his own dream with its own meaning. ⁶When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw they were worried. ⁷He asked the king's officers who were with him, "Why do you look so unhappy today?"

⁸The two men answered, "We both had dreams last night, but no one can explain their meaning to us."

Joseph said to them, "God is the only One who can explain the meaning of dreams. Tell me your dreams."

⁹So the man who served wine to the king told Joseph his dream. He said, "I dreamed I saw a vine, and ¹⁰on the vine were three branches. I watched the branches bud and blossom, and then the grapes ripened. ¹¹I was holding the king's cup, so I took the grapes and squeezed the juice into the cup. Then I gave it to the king."

¹²Then Joseph said, "I will explain the dream to you. The three branches stand for three days. ¹³Before the end of three days the king will free you, and he will allow you to return to your work. You will serve the king his wine just as you did

before. ¹⁴But when you are free, remember me. Be kind to me, and tell the king about me so I can get out of this prison. ¹⁵I was taken by force from the land of the Hebrews, and I have done nothing here to deserve being put in prison.”

¹⁶The baker saw that Joseph’s explanation of the dream was good, so he said to him, “I also had a dream. I dreamed there were three bread baskets on my head. ¹⁷In the top basket were all kinds of baked food for the king, but the birds were eating this food out of the basket on my head.”

¹⁸Joseph answered, “I will tell you what the dream means. The three baskets stand for three days. ¹⁹Before the end of three days, the king will cut off your head! He will hang your body on a pole, and the birds will eat your flesh.”

²⁰Three days later, on his birthday, the king gave a feast for all his officers. In front of his officers, he released from prison the chief officer who served his wine and the chief baker. ²¹The king gave his chief officer who served wine his old position, and once again he put the king’s cup of wine into the king’s hand. ²²But the king hanged the baker on a pole. Everything happened just as Joseph had said it would, ²³but the officer who served wine did not remember Joseph. He forgot all about him.

Life Lessons

Genesis 41:1–57

Situation

The chief officer finally remembered that Joseph was able to interpret dreams. Joseph not only interpreted the king's dream, but he also advised Pharaoh how to plan for the upcoming years of famine. As a result, he became the second in command (v. [40](#)).

Observation

Joseph had spent thirteen years in slavery, probably wondering if he would ever be able to get out. Sometimes God's plans differ from ours.

Inspiration

This is how Jesus chose to view the storm that came his way: necessary turbulence in the plan of God. Where others saw gray skies, Jesus saw a divine order. His suffering was necessary to fulfill prophecy, and his sacrifice was necessary to fulfill the law.

Wouldn't you love to have a hope-filled heart? Wouldn't you love to see the world through the eyes of Jesus? Where we see unanswered prayer, Jesus saw answered prayer. Where we see the absence of God, Jesus saw the plan of God. Note especially [[Matthew 26](#)] verse [53](#): "Surely you know I could ask my Father, and he would give me more than twelve armies of angels." Of all the treasures Jesus saw in the trash, this is most significant. He saw his father. He saw his father's presence in the problem. Twelve

armies of angels were within his sight.

Sure, Max, but Jesus was God. He could see the unseen. He had eyes for heaven and a vision for the supernatural. I can't see the way he saw.

Not yet maybe, but don't underestimate God's power. He can change the way you look at life....

God never promises to remove us from our struggles. He does promise, however, to change the way we look at them. The apostle Paul dedicates a paragraph to listing trash bags: troubles, problems, sufferings, hunger, nakedness, danger, and violent death. These are the very dumpsters of difficulty we hope to escape. Paul, however, states their value. "In all these things we have full victory through God" ([Romans 8:35-37](#)). We'd prefer another preposition. We'd opt for "*apart* from all these things," or, "*away* from all these things," or even, "*without* all these things." But Paul says, "*in*" all these things. The solution is not to avoid trouble but to change the way we see our troubles.

God can correct your vision. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you need to change the way you look at your problems? Try to look at them from God's perspective and divine order. Thank God that he is always present with you!

Exploration

Dreams/Visions—[Deuteronomy 18:21-22](#); [Daniel 2:26-30](#); [Matthew 1:20-24](#); [Acts 10:1-20](#).

The King's Dreams

Two years later the king dreamed he was standing on the bank of the Nile River. ²He saw seven fat and beautiful cows come up out of the river, and they stood there, eating the grass. ³Then seven more cows came up out of the river, but they were thin and ugly. They stood beside the seven beautiful cows on the bank of the Nile. ⁴The seven thin and ugly cows ate the seven beautiful fat cows. Then the king woke up. ⁵The king slept again and dreamed a second time. In his dream he saw seven full and good heads of grain growing on one stalk. ⁶After that, seven more heads of grain sprang up, but they were thin and burned by the hot east wind. ⁷The thin heads of grain ate the seven full and good heads. Then the king woke up again, and he realized it was only a dream. ⁸The next morning the king was troubled about these dreams, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. The king told them his dreams, but no one could explain their meaning to him.

⁹Then the chief officer who served wine to the king said to him, "Now I remember something I promised to do, but I forgot about it. ¹⁰There was a time when you were angry with the baker and me, and you put us in prison in the house of the captain of the guard. ¹¹In prison we each had a dream on the same night, and each dream had a different meaning. ¹²A young Hebrew man, a servant of the captain of the guard, was in the

prison with us. When we told him our dreams, he explained their meanings to us. He told each man the meaning of his dream, and ¹³things happened exactly as he said they would: I was given back my old position, and the baker was hanged.”

¹⁴So the king called for Joseph. The guards quickly brought him out of the prison, and he shaved, put on clean clothes, and went before the king.

¹⁵The king said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, but no one can explain its meaning to me. I have heard that you can explain a dream when someone tells it to you.”

¹⁶Joseph answered the king, “I am not able to explain the meaning of dreams, but God will do this for the king.”

¹⁷Then the king said to Joseph, “In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile River. ¹⁸I saw seven fat and beautiful cows that came up out of the river and ate the grass. ¹⁹Then I saw seven more cows come out of the river that were thin and lean and ugly—the worst looking cows I have seen in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰And these thin and ugly cows ate the first seven fat cows, ²¹but after they had eaten the seven cows, no one could tell they had eaten them. They looked just as thin and ugly as they did in the beginning. Then I woke up.

²²“I had another dream. I saw seven full and good heads of grain growing on one stalk. ²³Then seven more heads of grain sprang up after them, but these heads were thin and ugly and were burned by the hot east wind. ²⁴Then the thin heads ate the seven good heads. I told this dream to the magicians, but no one could explain its meaning to me.”

Joseph Tells the Dreams’ Meaning

²⁵Then Joseph said to the king, “Both of these dreams mean the same thing. God is telling you what he is about to do. ²⁶The seven good cows stand for seven years, and the seven good heads of grain stand for seven years. Both dreams mean the same thing. ²⁷The seven thin and ugly cows stand for seven years, and the seven thin heads of grain burned by the hot east wind stand for seven years of hunger. ²⁸This will happen as I told you. God is showing the king what he is about to do. ²⁹You will have seven years of good crops and plenty to eat in all the land of Egypt. ³⁰But after those seven years, there will come seven years of hunger, and all the food that grew in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. The time of hunger will eat up the land. ³¹People will forget what it was like to have plenty of food, because the hunger that follows will be so great. ³²You had two dreams which mean the same thing. This shows that God has firmly decided that this will happen, and he will make it happen soon.

³³“So let the king choose a man who is very wise and understanding and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴And let the king also appoint officers over the land, who should take one-fifth of all the food that is grown during the seven good years. ³⁵They should gather all the food that is produced during the good years that are coming, and under the king’s authority they should store the grain in the cities and guard it. ³⁶That food should be saved to use during the seven years of hunger that will come on the land of Egypt. Then the people in Egypt will not die during the seven years of hunger.”

Joseph Is Made Ruler over Egypt

³⁷This seemed like a very good idea to the king, and all his officers agreed. ³⁸And the king asked them, “Can we find a better man than Joseph to take this job? God’s spirit is truly in him!”

³⁹So the king said to Joseph, “God has shown you all this. There is no one as wise and understanding as you are, so ⁴⁰I will put you in charge of my palace. All the people will obey your orders, and only I will be greater than you.”

⁴¹Then the king said to Joseph, “Look! I have put you in charge of all the land of Egypt.” ⁴²Then the king took off from his own finger his ring with the royal seal on it, and he put it on Joseph’s finger. He gave Joseph fine linen clothes to wear, and he put a gold chain around Joseph’s neck. ⁴³The king had Joseph ride in the second royal chariot, and people walked ahead of his chariot calling, “Bow down!” By doing these things, the king put Joseph in charge of all of Egypt.

⁴⁴The king said to him, “I am the king, and I say that no one in all the land of Egypt may lift a hand or a foot without your permission.” ⁴⁵The king gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah. He also gave Joseph a wife named Asenath, who was the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. So Joseph traveled through all the land of Egypt.

⁴⁶Joseph was thirty years old when he began serving the king of Egypt. And he left the king’s court and traveled through all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁷During the seven good years, the crops in the land grew well. ⁴⁸And Joseph gathered all the food which was produced in Egypt during those seven years of good crops and stored the food in the cities. In every city he stored grain that had been grown in the fields around that city.

⁴⁹Joseph stored much grain, as much as the sand of the

seashore—so much that he could not measure it.

⁵⁰Joseph's wife was Asenath daughter of Potiphera, the priest of On. Before the years of hunger came, Joseph and Asenath had two sons. ⁵¹Joseph named the first son [Manasseh](#) and said, "God has made me forget all the troubles I have had and all my father's family." ⁵²Joseph named the second son [Ephraim](#) and said, "God has given me children in the land of my troubles."

⁵³The seven years of good crops came to an end in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁴Then the seven years of hunger began, just as Joseph had said. In all the lands people had nothing to eat, but in Egypt there was food. ⁵⁵The time of hunger became terrible in all of Egypt, and the people cried to the king for food. He said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph and do whatever he tells you."

⁵⁶The hunger was everywhere in that part of the world. And Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain to the people of Egypt, because the time of hunger became terrible in Egypt. ⁵⁷And all the people in that part of the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain because the hunger was terrible everywhere in that part of the world.

The Dreams Come True

Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, so he said to his sons, “Why are you just sitting here looking at one another? ²I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy grain for us to eat, so that we will live and not die.”

³So ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. ⁴But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, with them, because he was afraid that something terrible might happen to him. ⁵Along with many other people, the sons of [Israel](#) went to Egypt to buy grain, because the people in the land of Canaan were also hungry.

⁶Now Joseph was governor over Egypt. He was the one who sold the grain to people who came to buy it. So Joseph’s brothers came to him and bowed facedown on the ground before him. ⁷When Joseph saw his brothers, he knew who they were, but he acted as if he didn’t know them. He asked unkindly, “Where do you come from?”

They answered, “We have come from the land of Canaan to buy food.”

⁸Joseph knew they were his brothers, but they did not know who he was. ⁹And Joseph remembered his dreams about his brothers bowing to him. He said to them, “You are spies! You came to learn where the nation is weak!”

¹⁰But his brothers said to him, “No, my master. We come as your servants just to buy food. ¹¹We are all sons of the same father. We are honest men, not spies.”

¹²Then Joseph said to them, “No! You have come to learn

where this nation is weak!”

¹³And they said, “We are ten of twelve brothers, sons of the same father, and we live in the land of Canaan. Our youngest brother is there with our father right now, and our other brother is gone.”

¹⁴But Joseph said to them, “I can see I was right! You are spies! ¹⁵But I will give you a way to prove you are telling the truth. As surely as the king lives, you will not leave this place until your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶One of you must go and get your brother. The rest of you will stay here in prison. We will see if you are telling the truth. If not, as surely as the king lives, you are spies.” ¹⁷Then Joseph put them all in prison for three days.

¹⁸On the third day Joseph said to them, “I am a God-fearing man. Do this and I will let you live: ¹⁹If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison while the rest of you go and carry grain back to feed your hungry families. ²⁰Then bring your youngest brother back here to me. If you do this, I will know you are telling the truth, and you will not die.”

The brothers agreed to this. ²¹They said to each other, “We are being punished for what we did to our brother. We saw his trouble, and he begged us to save him, but we refused to listen. That is why we are in this trouble now.”

²²Then Reuben said to them, “I told you not to harm the boy, but you refused to listen to me. So now we are being punished for what we did to him.”

²³When Joseph talked to his brothers, he used an interpreter, so they did not know that Joseph understood what they were saying. ²⁴Then Joseph left them and cried. After a short time he went back and spoke to them. He took Simeon

and tied him up while the other brothers watched.²⁵ Joseph told his servants to fill his brothers' bags with grain and to put the money the brothers had paid for the grain back in their bags. The servants were also to give them what they would need for their trip back home. And the servants did this.

It isn't the circumstance that matters; it is God in the circumstance. It isn't the words; it is God speaking them.

—Max Lucado (*A Gentle Thunder*)

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: Restorer of Hope

Your Shepherd knows that you were not made for this place. He knows you are not equipped for this place. So he has come to guide you out.

He has come to restore your soul. He is the perfect one to do so.

He has the right vision... . He also has the right direction... . But most of all, he is the right person, for he is our God. Who knows the jungle better than the One who made it? And who knows the pitfalls of the path better than the One who has walked it? ... So rather than give us an answer, Jesus gives us a far greater gift. He gives us himself.

Does he remove the jungle? No, the vegetation is still thick.

Does he purge the predators? No, danger still lurks.

Jesus doesn't give us hope by changing the jungle; he restores our hope by giving us himself. And he promised to stay until the very end. "I will be

with you always, even until the end of this age”
([Matthew 28:20](#)).

We need that reminder. We all need that reminder.
For all of us need hope...

And though you don't need your hope restored today, you may tomorrow. And you need to know to whom to turn.

Or perhaps you do need hope today. You know you were not made for this place. You know you are not equipped. You want someone to lead you out.

If so, call out for your Shepherd. He knows your voice. And he's just waiting for your request. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

²⁶So the brothers put the grain on their donkeys and left. ²⁷When they stopped for the night, one of the brothers opened his sack to get food for his donkey. Then he saw his money in the top of the sack. ²⁸He said to the other brothers, “The money I paid for the grain has been put back. Here it is in my sack!”

The brothers were very frightened. They said to each other, “What has God done to us?”

The Brothers Return to Jacob

²⁹The brothers went to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan and told him everything that had happened. ³⁰They said, “The master of that land spoke unkindly to us. He accused us of spying on his country, ³¹but we told him that we were honest men, not spies. ³²We told him that we were ten of twelve brothers—sons of one father. We said that one of our brothers was gone and that our youngest brother was with our father in Canaan.

³³“Then the master of the land said to us, ‘Here is a way I can know you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain to feed your hungry families, and go. ³⁴And bring your youngest brother to me so I will know you are not spies but honest men. Then I will give you back your brother whom you leave with me, and you can move about freely in our land.’ ”

³⁵As the brothers emptied their sacks, each of them found his money in his sack. When they and their father saw it, they

were afraid.

³⁶Their father Jacob said to them, “You are robbing me of all my children. Joseph is gone, Simeon is gone, and now you want to take Benjamin away, too. Everything is against me.”

³⁷Then Reuben said to his father, “You may put my two sons to death if I don’t bring Benjamin back to you. Trust him to my care, and I will bring him back to you.”

³⁸But Jacob said, “I will not allow Benjamin to go with you. His brother is dead, and he is the only son left from my wife Rachel. I am afraid something terrible might happen to him during the trip to Egypt. Then I would be sad until the day I die.”

Life Lessons

Genesis 42:1–43:34

Situation

Severe famine afflicted Palestine. But under Joseph’s guidance, Egypt stored enough food for itself and other nations. Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy food.

Observation

Joseph’s brothers bowed before him in submission, fulfilling the dream God had given Joseph many years before. God’s Word always comes true.

Inspiration

Abraham, or Abram as he was known at the time, was finding God’s promises about as easy to swallow as a chicken bone. The promise? That his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. The

problem? No son. “No problem,” came God’s response.

Abram looked over at his wife Sarah as she shuffled by in her gown and slippers with the aid of a walker. The chicken bone stuck for a few minutes but eventually slid down his throat.

Just as he was turning away to invite Sarah to a candlelight dinner he heard promise number two.

“Abram”

“Yes, Lord.”

“All this land will be yours.”

Imagine God telling you that your children will someday own Fifth Avenue, and you will understand Abram’s hesitation.

“On that one, Father, I need a little help.”

And a little help was given.

It’s a curious scene.

Twilight. The sky is a soft blue ceiling with starry diamonds. The air is cool. The animals in the pasture are quiet. The trees are silhouettes. Abram dozes under a tree. His sleep is fitful.

It’s as if God is allowing Abram’s doubt to run its course. In his dreams Abram is forced to face the lunacy of it all. The voices of doubt speak convincingly.

How do I know God is with me?

What if this is all a hoax?

How do you know that is God who is speaking?

The thick and dreadful darkness of doubt....

God had told Abram to take three animals, cut them in half, and arrange the halves facing each other.

To us the command is mysterious. To Abram, it wasn't. He'd seen the ceremony before. He'd participated in it. He'd sealed many covenants by walking through the divided carcasses and stating, "May what has happened to these animals happen also to me if I fail to uphold my word."

That is why his heart must have skipped a beat when he saw the lights in the darkness passing between the carcasses. The soft golden glow from the coals in the fire pot and the courageous flames from the torch. What did they mean?

The invisible God had drawn near to make his immovable promise. "To your descendants I give this land."

And though God's people often forgot their God, God didn't forget them. He kept his word. The land became theirs.

God didn't give up. He never gives up. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

Application

Study the Bible to find God's promises to you. Thank God for each one you find. Let the promises teach you that God never gives up on you. God stands faithfully behind his promises. Let your faith increase!

Exploration

Promises Fulfilled—[Joshua 21:43–45](#); [1 Kings 8:20–24](#); [Hebrews 6:13–15](#); [11:11](#); [2 Peter 3:8–10](#).

The Brothers Go Back to Egypt

Still no food grew in the land of Canaan.²When Jacob's family had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, Jacob said to them, "Go to Egypt again and buy a little more grain for us to eat."

³But Judah said to Jacob, "The governor of that country strongly warned us, 'If you don't bring your brother back with you, you will not be allowed to see me.'⁴If you will send Benjamin with us, we will go down and buy food for you.⁵But if you refuse to send Benjamin, we will not go. The governor of that country warned us that we would not see him if we didn't bring Benjamin with us."

⁶[Israel](#) said, "Why did you tell the man you had another brother? You have caused me a lot of trouble."

⁷The brothers answered, "He questioned us carefully about ourselves and our family. He asked us, 'Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother?'" We just answered his questions. How could we know he would ask us to bring our other brother to him?"

⁸Then Judah said to his father Jacob, "Send Benjamin with me, and we will go at once so that we, you, and our children may live and not die.⁹I will guarantee you that he will be safe, and I will be personally responsible for him. If I don't bring him back to you, you can blame me all my life.¹⁰If we had not wasted all this time, we could have already made two trips."

¹¹Then their father Jacob said to them, "If it has to be that way, then do this: Take some of the best foods in our land in

your packs. Give them to the man as a gift: some balm, some honey, spices, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. ¹²Take twice as much money with you this time, and take back the money that was returned to you in your sacks last time. Maybe it was a mistake. ¹³And take Benjamin with you. Now leave and go to the man. ¹⁴I pray that God Almighty will cause the governor to be merciful to you and that he will allow Simeon and Benjamin to come back with you. If I am robbed of my children, then I am robbed of them!”

¹⁵So the brothers took the gifts. They also took twice as much money as they had taken the first time, and they took Benjamin. They hurried down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.

¹⁶When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the servant in charge of his house, “Bring those men into my house. Kill an animal and prepare a meal. Those men will eat with me today at noon.” ¹⁷The servant did as Joseph told him and brought the men to Joseph’s house.

¹⁸The brothers were afraid when they were brought to Joseph’s house and thought, “We were brought here because of the money that was put in our sacks on the first trip. He wants to attack us, make us slaves, and take our donkeys.”

¹⁹So the brothers went to the servant in charge of Joseph’s house and spoke to him at the door of the house. ²⁰They said, “Master, we came here once before to buy food. ²¹While we were going home, we stopped for the night and when we opened our sacks each of us found all his money in his sack. We brought that money with us to give it back to you. ²²And we have brought more money to pay for the food we want to buy this time. We don’t know who put that money in our

sacks.”

²³But the servant answered, “It’s all right. Don’t be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, must have put the money in your sacks. I got the money you paid me for the grain last time.” Then the servant brought Simeon out to them.

²⁴The servant led the men into Joseph’s house and gave them water, and they washed their feet. Then he gave their donkeys food to eat. ²⁵The men prepared their gift to give to Joseph when he arrived at noon, because they had heard they were going to eat with him there.

²⁶When Joseph came home, the brothers gave him the gift they had brought into the house and bowed down to the ground in front of him. ²⁷Joseph asked them how they were doing. He said, “How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still alive?”

²⁸The brothers answered, “Your servant, our father, is well. He is still alive.” And they bowed low before Joseph to show him respect.

²⁹When Joseph saw his brother Benjamin, who had the same mother as he, Joseph asked, “Is this your youngest brother you told me about?” Then he said to Benjamin, “God be good to you, my son!” ³⁰Then Joseph hurried off because he had to hold back the tears when he saw his brother Benjamin. So Joseph went into his room and cried there. ³¹Then he washed his face and came out. He controlled himself and said, “Serve the meal.”

³²So they served Joseph at one table, his brothers at another table, and the Egyptians who ate with him at another table. This was because Egyptians did not like Hebrews and never ate with them. ³³Joseph’s brothers were seated in front of

him in order of their ages, from oldest to youngest. They looked at each other because they were so amazed.³⁴ Food from Joseph's table was taken to them, but Benjamin was given five times more food than the others. Joseph's brothers ate and drank freely with him.

Life Lessons

Genesis 44:1–45:28

Situation

Joseph tested his brothers' sincerity before he revealed himself to them. He realized that they were genuinely sorry for their sinful plot to get rid of him.

Observation

Joseph exemplified God's forgiveness. We, too, must learn not to harbor a grudge.

Inspiration

Our Savior kneels down and gazes upon the darkest acts of our lives. But rather than recoil in horror, he reaches out in kindness and says, "I can clean that if you want." And from the basin of his grace, he scoops a palm full of mercy and washes away our sin.

But that's not all he does. Because he lives in us, you and I can do the same. Because he has forgiven us, we can forgive others. Because he has a forgiving heart, we can have a forgiving heart. We can have a heart like his.

"If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash each other's feet. I did this as an example so that you should do as I have done for you" ([John 13:14–15](#)).

Jesus washes our feet for two reasons. The first is to give us mercy; the second is to give us a message, and that message is simply this: Jesus offers unconditional grace; we are to offer unconditional

grace. The mercy of Christ preceded our mistakes; our mercy must precede the mistakes of others. Those in the circle of Christ had no doubt of his love; those in our circles should have no doubts about ours.

What does it mean to have a heart like his? It means to kneel as Jesus knelt, touching the grimy parts of the people we are stuck with and washing away their unkindnesses with kindness. Or as Paul wrote, “Be kind and loving to each other, and forgive each other just as God forgave you in Christ” ([Ephesians 4:32](#)).

“But, Max,” you are saying, “I’ve done nothing wrong. I’m not the one who cheated. I’m not the one who lied. I’m not the guilty party here.” Perhaps you aren’t. But neither was Jesus. Of all the men in that room, only one was worthy of having his feet washed. And he was the one who washed the feet. The one worthy of being served, served others. The genius of Jesus’ example is that the burden of bridgebuilding falls on the strong one, not on the weak one. The one who is innocent is the one who makes the gesture.

And you know what happens? More often than not, if the one in the right volunteers to wash the feet of the one in the wrong, both parties get on their knees. Don’t we all think we are right? Hence we wash each other’s feet.

Please understand. Relationships don’t thrive because the guilty are punished but because the innocent are merciful. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

What person seems impossible for you to forgive? What keeps you from fully forgiving the one who hurt you? God's love outweighs any harmful experience. Will you obey God and forgive?

Exploration

Forgiveness—[Hosea 3:1–2](#); [Matthew 18:21–35](#); [Luke 15:11–32](#); [Romans 5:8](#).

Joseph Sets a Trap

Then Joseph gave a command to the servant in charge of his house. He said, “Fill the men’s sacks with as much grain as they can carry, and put each man’s money into his sack with the grain.”²Put my silver cup in the sack of the youngest brother, along with his money for the grain.” The servant did what Joseph told him.

³At dawn the brothers were sent away with their donkeys. ⁴They were not far from the city when Joseph said to the servant in charge of his house, “Go after the men. When you catch up with them, say, ‘Why have you paid back evil for good?’ ⁵The cup you have stolen is the one my master uses for drinking and for explaining dreams. You have done a very wicked thing!’ ”

⁶So the servant caught up with the brothers and said to them what Joseph had told him to say.

⁷But the brothers said to the servant, “Why do you say these things? We would not do anything like that! ⁸We brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money we found in our sacks. So surely we would not steal silver or gold from your master’s house. ⁹If you find that silver cup in the sack of one of us, then let him die, and we will be your slaves.”

¹⁰The servant said, “We will do as you say, but only the man who has taken the cup will become my slave. The rest of you may go free.”

¹¹Then every brother quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. ¹²The servant searched the sacks, going from the oldest brother to the youngest, and found the cup in Benjamin's sack. ¹³The brothers tore their clothes to show they were afraid. Then they put their sacks back on the donkeys and returned to the city.

¹⁴When Judah and his brothers went back to Joseph's house, Joseph was still there, so the brothers bowed facedown on the ground before him. ¹⁵Joseph said to them, "What have you done? Didn't you know that a man like me can learn things by signs and dreams?"

¹⁶Judah said, "Master, what can we say? And how can we show we are not guilty? God has uncovered our guilt, so all of us will be your slaves, not just Benjamin."

¹⁷But Joseph said, "I will not make you all slaves! Only the man who stole the cup will be my slave. The rest of you may go back safely to your father."

¹⁸Then Judah went to Joseph and said, "Master, please let me speak plainly to you, and please don't be angry with me. I know that you are as powerful as the king of Egypt himself. ¹⁹When we were here before, you asked us, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' ²⁰And we answered you, 'We have an old father. And we have a younger brother, who was born when our father was old. This youngest son's brother is dead, so he is the only one of his mother's children left alive, and our father loves him very much.' ²¹Then you said to us, 'Bring that brother to me. I want to see him.' ²²And we said to you, 'That young boy cannot leave his father, because if he leaves him, his father would die.' ²³But you said to us, 'If you don't bring your youngest brother, you will not be allowed to see me

again.’ ²⁴So we went back to our father and told him what you had said.

²⁵“Later, our father said, ‘Go again and buy us a little more food.’ ²⁶We said to our father, ‘We cannot go without our youngest brother. Without our youngest brother, we will not be allowed to see the governor.’ ²⁷Then my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife Rachel gave me two sons. ²⁸When one son left me, I thought, “Surely he has been torn apart by a wild animal,” and I haven’t seen him since. ²⁹Now you want to take this son away from me also. But something terrible might happen to him, and I would be miserable until the day I die.’ ³⁰Now what will happen if we go home to our father without our youngest brother? He is so important in our father’s life that ³¹when our father sees the young boy is not with us, he will die. And it will be our fault. We will cause the great sorrow that kills our father.

³²“I gave my father a guarantee that the young boy would be safe. I said to my father, ‘If I don’t bring him back to you, you can blame me all my life.’ ³³So now, please allow me to stay here and be your slave, and let the young boy go back home with his brothers. ³⁴I cannot go back to my father if the boy is not with me. I couldn’t stand to see my father that sad.”

Joseph Reveals Who He Is

Joseph could not control himself in front of his servants any longer, so he cried out, "Have everyone leave me." When only the brothers were left with Joseph, he told them who he was. ²Joseph cried so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and the people in the king's palace heard about it. ³He said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But the brothers could not answer him, because they were very afraid of him.

⁴So Joseph said to them, "Come close to me." When the brothers came close to him, he said to them, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold as a slave to go to Egypt. ⁵Now don't be worried or angry with yourselves because you sold me here. God sent me here ahead of you to save people's lives. ⁶No food has grown on the land for two years now, and there will be five more years without planting or harvest. ⁷So God sent me here ahead of you to make sure you have some descendants left on earth and to keep you alive in an amazing way. ⁸So it was not you who sent me here, but God. God has made me the highest officer of the king of Egypt. I am in charge of his palace, and I am the master of all the land of Egypt.

⁹"So leave quickly and go to my father. Tell him, 'Your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all Egypt. Come down to me quickly. ¹⁰Live in the land of Goshen where you will be near me. Your children, your grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all that you have will also be near me. ¹¹I will care for you during the next five years of hunger so that you

and your family and all that you have will not starve.’

¹²“Now you can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that the one speaking to you is really Joseph. ¹³So tell my father about how powerful I have become in Egypt. Tell him about everything you have seen. Now hurry and bring him back to me.” ¹⁴Then Joseph hugged his brother Benjamin and cried, and Benjamin cried also. ¹⁵And Joseph kissed all his brothers and cried as he hugged them. After this, his brothers talked with him.

¹⁶When the king of Egypt and his officers learned that Joseph’s brothers had come, they were very happy. ¹⁷So the king said to Joseph, “Tell your brothers to load their animals and go back to the land of Canaan ¹⁸and bring their father and their families back here to me. I will give them the best land in Egypt, and they will eat the best food we have here. ¹⁹Tell them to take some wagons from Egypt for their children and their wives and to bring their father back also. ²⁰Tell them not to worry about bringing any of their things with them, because we will give them the best of what we have in Egypt.”

²¹So the sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them wagons as the king had ordered and food for their trip. ²²He gave each brother a change of clothes, but he gave Benjamin five changes of clothes and about seven and one-half pounds of silver. ²³Joseph also sent his father ten donkeys loaded with the best things from Egypt and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and other food for his father on his trip back. ²⁴Then Joseph told his brothers to go. As they were leaving, he said to them, “Don’t quarrel on the way home.”

²⁵So the brothers left Egypt and went to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. ²⁶They told him, “Joseph is still alive and

is the ruler over all the land of Egypt.” Their father was shocked and did not believe them.²⁷ But when the brothers told him everything Joseph had said, and when Jacob saw the wagons Joseph had sent to carry him back to Egypt, he felt better.²⁸ [Israel](#) said, “Now I believe you. My son Joseph is still alive, and I will go and see him before I die.”

Life Lessons

Genesis 46:1–47:27

Situation

At the invitation of Joseph, Jacob and his family moved to Egypt. When they settled, Joseph arranged for them to receive the best land for their herds.

Observation

Jacob was reassured that God would not abandon him in Egypt. Yes, he was going to a foreign land with people who did not understand or know God. But God's reassuring words reminded Jacob that no matter where he went, God remained with him. The same is true for us. No matter what difficulty we face, God remains a faithful friend.

Inspiration

I am a giving God. I am neither cruel nor vindictive, as is common with man. Do not think of Me as a human being with human failings.

You can trust Me because I am not limited by your feelings, your ideas, your thoughts. I am bigger than these. I am bigger than any person's interpretation of Me.

I always prevail. People may lose, nations may lose, even churches may lose, but I never lose.

I will not lose you.

Hold fast to Me as I hold fast to you. Trust Me. Understand that even when you find it difficult to trust, I am with you.

Be as a little child, and trust. (From *His Thoughts*)

Toward Me by Marie Chapian)

Application

Where is the most mundane place you will travel today? Remember: God is with you everywhere. Take comfort in that no matter where you go, his presence goes, too.

Exploration

God's Presence—[Genesis 28:15](#); [Exodus 33:14](#); [Psalm 16:8](#); [145:18](#); [Isaiah 43:2](#).

Jacob Goes to Egypt

So [Israel](#) took all he had and started his trip. He went to Beersheba, where he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.² During the night God spoke to Israel in a vision and said, “Jacob, Jacob.”

And Jacob answered, “Here I am.”

³Then God said, “I am God, the God of your father. Don’t be afraid to go to Egypt, because I will make your descendants a great nation there. ⁴I will go to Egypt with you, and I will bring you out of Egypt again. Joseph’s own hands will close your eyes when you die.”

⁵Then Jacob left Beersheba. The sons of Israel loaded their father, their children, and their wives in the wagons the king of Egypt had sent. ⁶They also took their farm animals and everything they had gotten in Canaan. So Jacob went to Egypt with all his descendants—⁷his sons and grandsons, his daughters and granddaughters. He took all his family to Egypt with him.

Jacob’s Family

⁸Now these are the names of the children of Israel who went into Egypt (Jacob and his descendants).

Reuben was Jacob’s first son. ⁹Reuben’s sons were

Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.

¹⁰Simeon's sons were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar, and Shaul (Simeon's son by a Canaanite woman).

¹¹Levi's sons were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

¹²Judah's sons were Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but Er and Onan had died in the land of Canaan). Perez's sons were Hezron and Hamul.

¹³Issachar's sons were Tola, Puah, Jashub, and Shimron.

¹⁴Zebulun's sons were Sered, Elon, and Jahleel.

¹⁵These are the sons of Leah and Jacob born in Northwest Mesopotamia, in addition to his daughter Dinah. There were thirty-three persons in this part of Jacob's family.

¹⁶Gad's sons were Zephon, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli.

¹⁷Asher's sons were Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah, and their sister was Serah. Beriah's sons were Heber and Malkiel.

¹⁸These are Jacob's sons by Zilpah, the slave girl whom Laban gave to his daughter Leah. There were sixteen persons in this part of Jacob's family.

¹⁹The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁰In Egypt, Joseph became the father of Manasseh and Ephraim by his wife Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On.

²¹Benjamin's sons were Bela, Beker, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard.

²²These are the sons of Jacob by his wife Rachel. There were fourteen persons in this part of Jacob's family.

²³Dan's son was Hushim.

²⁴Naphtali's sons were Jahziel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem.

²⁵These are Jacob's sons by Bilhah, the slave girl whom

Laban gave to his daughter Rachel. There were seven persons in this part of Jacob's family.

²⁶So the total number of Jacob's direct descendants who went to Egypt was sixty-six, not counting the wives of Jacob's sons. ²⁷Joseph had two sons born in Egypt, so the total number in the family of Jacob in Egypt was seventy.

Jacob Arrives in Egypt

²⁸Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to see Joseph in Goshen. When Jacob and his people came into the land of Goshen, ²⁹Joseph prepared his chariot and went to meet his father Israel in Goshen. As soon as Joseph saw his father, he hugged him, and cried there for a long time.

³⁰Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now I am ready to die, because I have seen your face and I know you are still alive."

³¹Joseph said to his brothers and his father's family, "I will go and tell the king you are here. I will say, 'My brothers and my father's family have left the land of Canaan and have come here to me. ³²They are shepherds and take care of farm animals, and they have brought their flocks and their herds and everything they own with them.' ³³When the king calls you, he will ask, 'What work do you do?' ³⁴This is what you should tell him: 'We, your servants, have taken care of farm animals all our lives. Our ancestors did the same thing.' Then the king will allow you to settle in the land of Goshen, away from the Egyptians, because they don't like to be near shepherds."

Life Lessons

[Genesis 47:28–48:22](#)

Situation

Jacob was ill and near death, so Joseph brought his two sons—Jacob’s grandchildren—to the family patriarch for a formal blessing.

Observation

Jewish patriarchs blessed their children. This action models how parents should appreciate their children today. Parents should communicate each child’s high value and special strengths.

Inspiration

Looking to modern-day Jewish homes and practices, the blessing is still an important concept in many orthodox families. At many Shabat (Sabbath) services, the parents are to bring their children in the congregation forward to receive their blessing. Acting on behalf of the parents, the rabbi will lay his hand on the head of each child and repeat words like these, “May God bless you and make you as Ephraim and Manasseh.”

This blessing originally comes from [Genesis 48:20](#), where Jacob was blessing Joseph’s two sons—Jacob’s *grandchildren*... . Even today, centuries later, in synagogues and in Jewish homes, this blessing is a favorite for parents to use with their children.

While studying how the blessing is given in modern Jewish homes, we had the privilege of

speaking with several rabbis. In our interviews, we discovered that bestowing a family blessing is considered an important vehicle for communicating a sense of identity, meaning, love, and acceptance. In fact, in many orthodox homes, a weekly blessing is given by the father to each of his children. With the ceremonial candles lit, a time of blessing begins.

Sharing special meals; kissing, hugging, or the laying on of hands; creating a word picture or using one of the Scriptures to praise a child; even asking God to provide a special future for each child are common elements of blessing children in orthodox homes today.

While the blessing is an ancient practice, it still holds important keys to granting genuine acceptance. From a blessing to the firstborn to special words of love and acceptance for each child, the blessing remains a part of Jewish family life today. For Christian parents who have the hope and reality of Jesus, the Messiah, and His love, their blessing can be even more powerful. (From *The Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent)

Application

Given the significance of the blessing in Jewish homes, consider how you could extend the blessing to your children—and their children—so that they grow up convinced of God’s steadfast love. Begin this week with meaningful touch, spoken words, and symbolic gestures that say, “I love you.”

Exploration

Blessing Children—[Genesis 12:2–3](#); [27:1–41](#); [49:1–](#)

28; Deuteronomy 21:15–17; Mark 10:13–16; Romans 9:6–13.

Jacob Settles in Goshen

Joseph went in to the king and said, “My father and my brothers have arrived from Canaan with their flocks and herds and everything they own. They are now in the land of Goshen.”² Joseph chose five of his brothers to introduce to the king.

³The king said to the brothers, “What work do you do?”

And they said to him, “We, your servants, are shepherds, just as our ancestors were.”⁴ They said to the king, “We have come to live in this land, because there is no grass in the land of Canaan for our animals to eat, and the hunger is terrible there. So please allow us to live in the land of Goshen.”

⁵Then the king said to Joseph, “Your father and your brothers have come to you,⁶ and you may choose any place in Egypt for them to live. Give your father and your brothers the best land; let them live in the land of Goshen. And if any of them are skilled shepherds, put them in charge of my sheep and cattle.”

⁷Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob and introduced him to the king, and Jacob blessed the king.

⁸Then the king said to Jacob, “How old are you?”

⁹Jacob said to him, “My life has been spent wandering from place to place. It has been short and filled with trouble—only one hundred thirty years. My ancestors lived much longer than I.”¹⁰ Then Jacob blessed the king and left.

¹¹Joseph obeyed the king and gave his father and brothers the best land in Egypt, near the city of Rameses. ¹²And Joseph gave his father, his brothers, and everyone who lived with them the food they needed.

Joseph Buys Land for the King

¹³The hunger became worse, and since there was no food anywhere in the land, Egypt and Canaan became very poor.

¹⁴Joseph collected all the money that was to be found in Egypt and Canaan. People paid for the grain they were buying, and he brought that money to the king's palace. ¹⁵After some time, when the people in Egypt and Canaan had no money left, they went to Joseph and said, "Please give us food. Our money is gone, and if we don't eat, we will die here in front of you."

¹⁶Joseph answered, "Since you have no money, give me your farm animals, and I will give you food in return." ¹⁷So people brought their farm animals to Joseph, and he gave them food in exchange for their horses, sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys. And he kept them alive by trading food for their farm animals that year.

¹⁸The next year the people came to Joseph and said, "You know we have no money left, and all our animals belong to you. We have nothing left except our bodies and our land.

¹⁹Surely both we and our land will die here in front of you. Buy us and our land in exchange for food, and we will be slaves to the king, together with our land. Give us seed to plant so that we will live and not die, and the land will not become a desert."

²⁰So Joseph bought all the land in Egypt for the king. Every Egyptian sold Joseph his field, because the hunger was very

great. So the land became the king's, ²¹and Joseph made the people slaves from one end of Egypt to the other. ²²The only land he did not buy was the land the priests owned. They did not need to sell their land because the king paid them for their work. So they had money to buy food.

²³Joseph said to the people, "Now I have bought you and your land for the king, so I will give you seed and you can plant your fields. ²⁴At harvest time you must give one-fifth to the king. You may keep four-fifths for yourselves to use as seed for the field and as food for yourselves, your families, and your children."

²⁵The people said, "You have saved our lives. If you like, we will become slaves of the king."

²⁶So Joseph made a law in Egypt, which continues today: One-fifth of everything from the land belongs to the king. The only land the king did not get was the priests' land.

"Don't Bury Me in Egypt"

²⁷The Israelites continued to live in the land of Goshen in Egypt. There they got possessions and had many children and grew in number.

²⁸[Jacob](#) lived in Egypt seventeen years, so he lived to be one hundred forty-seven years old. ²⁹When Israel knew he soon would die, he called his son Joseph to him and said to him, "If you love me, [put your hand under my leg](#). Promise me you will not bury me in Egypt. ³⁰When I die, carry me out of Egypt, and bury me where my ancestors are buried."

Joseph answered, "I will do as you say."

³¹Then Jacob said, "Promise me." And Joseph promised him

that he would do this. Then Israel worshiped as he leaned on the top of his walking stick.

Blessings for Manasseh and Ephraim

Some time later Joseph learned that his father was very sick, so he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim and went to his father. ²When Joseph arrived, someone told [Jacob](#), “Your son Joseph has come to see you.” Jacob was weak, so he used all his strength and sat up on his bed.

³Then Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me there. ⁴He said to me, ‘I will give you many children. I will make you the father of many peoples, and I will give your descendants this land forever.’ ⁵Your two sons, who were born here in Egypt before I came, will be counted as my own sons. Ephraim and Manasseh will be my sons just as Reuben and Simeon are my sons. ⁶But if you have other children, they will be your own, and their land will be part of the land given to Ephraim and Manasseh. ⁷When I came from Northwest Mesopotamia, Rachel died in the land of Canaan, as we were traveling toward Ephrath. This made me very sad, and I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath.” (Today Ephrath is Bethlehem.) ⁸Then Israel saw Joseph’s sons and said, “Who are these boys?”

⁹Joseph said to his father, “They are my sons that God has given me here in Egypt.”

Israel said, “Bring your sons to me so I may bless them.”

¹⁰At this time Israel’s eyesight was bad because he was old. So Joseph brought the boys close to him, and Israel kissed the boys and put his arms around them. ¹¹He said to Joseph, “I thought I would never see you alive again, and now God has

let me see you and also your children.”¹² Then Joseph moved his sons off Israel’s lap and bowed facedown to the ground.¹³ He put Ephraim on his right side and Manasseh on his left. (So Ephraim was near Israel’s left hand, and Manasseh was near Israel’s right hand.) Joseph brought the boys close to Israel.¹⁴ But Israel crossed his arms and put his right hand on the head of Ephraim, who was younger. He put his left hand on the head of Manasseh, the firstborn son.¹⁵ And Israel blessed Joseph and said,

“My ancestors Abraham and Isaac served our God,
and like a shepherd God has led me all my life.

¹⁶He was the Angel who saved me from all my troubles.
Now I pray that he will bless these boys.

May my name be known through these boys,
and may the names of my ancestors Abraham and
Isaac be known through them.

May they have many descendants
on the earth.”

¹⁷When Joseph saw that his father put his right hand on Ephraim’s head, he didn’t like it. So he took hold of his father’s hand, wanting to move it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head.¹⁸ Joseph said to his father, “You are doing it wrong, Father. Manasseh is the firstborn son. Put your right hand on his head.”

¹⁹But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. Manasseh will be great and have many descendants. But his younger brother will be greater, and his descendants will be enough to make a nation.”

²⁰So Israel blessed them that day and said,

“When a blessing is given in Israel, they will say:
‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.’ ”
In this way he made Ephraim greater than Manasseh.

²¹Then Israel said to Joseph, “Look at me; I am about to die. But God will be with you and will take you back to the land of your fathers. ²²I have given you something that I did not give your brothers—the land of Shechem that I took from the Amorite people with my sword and my bow.”

Life Lessons

Genesis 49:1–33

Situation

In previous chapters Joseph played an instrumental role in saving Egypt from the famine. In the process he revealed his identity to his brothers and called his father to join them in Egypt. As the entire family was reunited, Jacob delivered a final blessing to each of his sons.

Observation

Jacob reflected upon the lives of his sons and described what they could expect in the future.

Inspiration

Try to write through your life. In his fine autobiographies, Frederick Buechner advises us to listen to our lives, to seek those patterns and rhythms of meaning that we often miss in the living of life but can discover on looking back. Our lives are filled with significance—if only we have eyes to see.

Tell stories. We love to hear stories because they are mostly about human beings surviving trouble. And we all need the encouragement that comes from discovering that others have been afflicted as we and have found a way to the other side. In stories are pain and struggle and failure, but also laughter and wisdom and grace. Your stories will have these things as much as anyone's, and you do not have to be good with words to tell them powerfully.

A final word of advice—write letters and tell

stories that are ultimately affirming. Don't settle scores or preach old sermons. Children are flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. Their lives are and will be difficult—as yours may have been—and they need all the encouragement they can get. They might also need a kick in the seat, but there are many ways to give them that. Speak to them words of encouragement and love. They will learn, thereby, to speak such words to others.

In writing on what you care about to those you love, you will enrich the world eternally. (From *Letters to My Children* by Daniel Taylor)

Application

Write a letter or note to someone you love. Tell that person a story of what God is doing in your life. Express appreciation for what that person has done in your life.

Exploration

Blessings—[Genesis 27:25–29](#); [Deuteronomy 33](#); [Joshua 14:13](#). Teaching Children—[Deuteronomy 4:9](#); [6:6–9](#); [Psalms 78:5–7](#); [Proverbs 22:6](#); [Isaiah 28:9](#).

Jacob Blesses His Sons

Then Jacob called his sons to him. He said, “Come here to me, and I will tell you what will happen to you in the future.

²“Come together and listen, sons of Jacob.
Listen to Israel, your father.”

³“Reuben, my first son, you are my strength.
Your birth showed I could be a father.
You have the highest position among my sons,
and you are the most powerful.

⁴But you are uncontrolled like water,
so you will no longer lead your brothers.
This is because you got into your father’s bed
and shamed me by having sexual relations with my
slave girl.

⁵“Simeon and Levi are brothers
who used their swords to do violence.

⁶I will not join their secret talks,
and I will not meet with them to plan evil.
They killed men because they were angry,
and they crippled oxen just for fun.

⁷May their anger be cursed, because it is too violent.
May their violence be cursed, because it is too cruel.

I will divide them up among the tribes of Jacob
and scatter them through all the tribes of Israel.

⁸“Judah, your brothers will praise you.
You will grab your enemies by the neck,
and your brothers will bow down to you.

⁹Judah is like a young lion.
You have returned from killing, my son.
Like a lion, he stretches out and lies down to rest,
and no one is brave enough to wake him.

¹⁰Kings will come from Judah’s family;
someone from Judah will always be on the throne.
Judah will rule until Shiloh comes,
and the nations will obey him.

¹¹He ties his donkey to a grapevine,
his young donkey to the best branch.
He can afford to use wine to wash his clothes
and the best wine to wash his robes.

¹²His eyes are dark like the color of wine,
and his teeth are as white as the color of milk.

¹³“Zebulun will live near the sea.
His shore will be a safe place for ships,
and his land will reach as far as Sidon.

¹⁴“Issachar is like a strong donkey
who lies down while carrying his load.

¹⁵When he sees his resting place is good
and how pleasant his land is,
he will put his back to the load
and become a slave.

¹⁶“Dan will rule his own people
like the other tribes in Israel.

¹⁷Dan will be like a snake by the side of the road,
a dangerous snake lying near the path.
That snake bites a horse’s leg,
and the rider is thrown off backward.

¹⁸“Lord, I wait for your salvation.

¹⁹“Robbers will attack Gad,
but he will defeat them and drive them away.

²⁰“Asher’s land will grow much good food;
he will grow food fit for a king.

²¹“Naphtali is like a female deer that runs free,
that has beautiful fawns.

²²“Joseph is like a grapevine that produces much fruit,
a healthy vine watered by a spring,
whose branches grow over the wall.

²³Archers attack him violently
and shoot at him angrily,

²⁴but he aims his bow well.

His arms are made strong.

He gets his power from the Mighty God of Jacob
and his strength from the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.

²⁵Your father’s God helps you.

God Almighty blesses you.

He blesses you with rain from above,
with water from springs below,
with many babies born to your wives,

and many young ones born to your animals.

²⁶The blessings of your father are greater than the blessings of the oldest mountains, greater than the good things of the long-lasting hills. May these blessings rest on the head of Joseph, on the forehead of the one who was separated from his brothers.

²⁷“Benjamin is like a hungry wolf.

In the morning he eats what he has caught, and in the evening he divides what he has taken.”

²⁸These are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them. He gave each son the blessing that was right for him. ²⁹Then Israel gave them a command and said, “I am about to die. Bury me with my ancestors in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite. ³⁰That cave is in the field of Machpelah east of Mamre in the land of Canaan. Abraham bought the field and cave from Ephron the Hittite for a burying place. ³¹Abraham and Sarah his wife are buried there. Isaac and Rebekah his wife are buried there, and I buried my wife Leah there. ³²The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittite people.” ³³After Jacob finished talking to his sons, he lay down. He put his feet back on the bed, took his last breath, and died.

Life Lessons

Genesis 50:1–26

Situation

Jacob died. Joseph mourned. His brothers feared Joseph's long smothered revenge would break out upon them. But Joseph forgave.

Observation

We face obstacles every day. We can have confidence, though, that through every struggle, God will help and guide us.

Inspiration

Judgment is God's job.

Revenge is irreverent.

Joseph understands that. Rather than get even, he reveals his identity and has his father and the rest of the family brought to Egypt.

But then Jacob dies and the moment of truth comes. The brothers go to Joseph and plead for mercy.

“Your father gave this command before he died... ‘Tell Joseph to forgive you’” ([Genesis 50:16–17](#)).

Joseph's response? “When Joseph received the message, he cried” ([Genesis 50:17](#)). “What more do I have to do?” his tears implore. “I've given you a home. I've provided for your families. Why do you still mistrust my grace?”

May I restate the obvious? Revenge belongs to God!

Why? The answer is found in the second part of

Joseph's statement: "You meant to hurt me, but God turned your evil into good to save the lives of many people, which is being done" (v. [20](#)).

Forgiveness comes easier with a wide-angle lens. Joseph uses one to get the whole picture.

It always helps to see the big picture... . (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

Application

To forgive, what rights must you give up? What sense of personal revenge must you release to God's control? Put these feelings behind you. Be like Joseph ... forgive!

Exploration

Forgiveness—[Psalm 103:12](#); [Matthew 6:14–15](#); [Romans 12:17–21](#); [Hebrews 10:17](#); [1 John 1:9](#).

Jacob's Burial

When Jacob died, Joseph hugged his father and cried over him and kissed him. ²He commanded the doctors who served him to prepare his father's body, so the doctors prepared Jacob's body to be buried. ³It took the doctors forty days to prepare his body (the usual time it took). And the Egyptians had a time of sorrow for Jacob that lasted seventy days.

⁴When this time of sorrow had ended, Joseph spoke to the king's officers and said, "If you think well of me, please tell this to the king: ⁵'When my father was near death, I made a promise to him that I would bury him in a cave in the land of Canaan, in a burial place that he cut out for himself. So please let me go and bury my father, and then I will return.' "

⁶The king answered, "Keep your promise. Go and bury your father."

⁷So Joseph went to bury his father. All the king's officers, the older leaders, and all the leading men of Egypt went with Joseph. ⁸Everyone who lived with Joseph and his brothers went with him, as well as everyone who lived with his father. They left only their children, their flocks, and their herds in the land of Goshen. ⁹They went with Joseph in chariots and on horses. It was a very large group.

¹⁰When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan River, they cried loudly and bitterly for his father. Joseph's time of sorrow continued for seven days. ¹¹The

people that lived in Canaan saw the sadness at the threshing floor of Atad and said, “Those Egyptians are showing great sorrow!” So now that place is named Sorrow of the Egyptians.

¹²So Jacob’s sons did as their father commanded. ¹³They carried his body to the land of Canaan and buried it in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre. Abraham had bought this cave and field from Ephron the Hittite to use as a burial place. ¹⁴After Joseph buried his father, he returned to Egypt, along with his brothers and everyone who had gone with him to bury his father.

The Brothers Fear Joseph

¹⁵After Jacob died, Joseph’s brothers said, “What if Joseph is still angry with us? We did many wrong things to him. What if he plans to pay us back?” ¹⁶So they sent a message to Joseph that said, “Your father gave this command before he died. ¹⁷He said to us, ‘You have done wrong and have sinned and done evil to Joseph. Tell Joseph to forgive you, his brothers.’ So now, Joseph, we beg you to forgive our wrong. We are the servants of the God of your father.” When Joseph received the message, he cried.

¹⁸And his brothers went to him and bowed low before him and said, “We are your slaves.”

¹⁹Then Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Can I do what only God can do? ²⁰You meant to hurt me, but God turned your evil into good to save the lives of many people, which is being done. ²¹So don’t be afraid. I will take care of you and your children.” So Joseph comforted his brothers and spoke kind words to them.

²²Joseph continued to live in Egypt with all his father's family. He died when he was one hundred ten years old. ²³During Joseph's life Ephraim had children and grandchildren, and Joseph's son Manasseh had a son named Makir. Joseph accepted Makir's children as his own.

The Death of Joseph

²⁴Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will take care of you. He will lead you out of this land to the land he promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." ²⁵Then Joseph had the sons of Israel make a promise. He said, "Promise me that you will carry my bones with you out of Egypt."

²⁶Joseph died when he was one hundred ten years old. Doctors prepared his body for burial, and then they put him in a coffin in Egypt.

Bdellium and onyx Bdellium is an expensive, sweet-smelling resin like myrrh, and onyx is a gem.

Adam This is the name of the first man. It also means “humans,” including men and women.

Eve This name sounds like the Hebrew word meaning “alive.”

Cain This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “I have given birth.”

Nod This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “wander.”

Seth This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “to give.”

Noah This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “rest.”

Ararat The ancient land of Urartu, an area in Eastern Turkey.

Kittim His descendants were the people of Cyprus.

Mizraim This is another name for Egypt.

Peleg This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “divided.”

Babel This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “confused.”

passed ... animals This showed that God sealed the agreement between himself and Abram.

Ishmael The Hebrew words for “Ishmael” and “has heard” sound similar.

Beer Lahai Roi This means “the well of the Living One who sees me.”

Abram This name means “honored father.”

Abraham The end of the Hebrew word for “Abraham” sounds like the beginning of the Hebrew word for “many.”

Sarai An Aramaic name meaning “princess.”

Sarah A Hebrew name meaning “princess.”

Isaac The Hebrew words for “he laughed” (v. [17](#)) and

“Isaac” sound the same.

Zoar This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “little.”

laugh The Hebrew words for “he laughed” and “Isaac” sound the same.

Beersheba This name means “well of the promise” or “well of seven.”

Put ... leg This showed that a person would keep the promise.

Esau This name may mean “hairy.”

Jacob This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “heel.” “Grabbing someone’s heel” is a Hebrew saying for tricking someone.

Edom This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “red.”

rights ... son Usually the firstborn son had a high rank in the family. The firstborn son usually became the new head of the family.

Shibah This name sounds like the Hebrew words for “seven” and “promise.”

Jacob This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “heel.” “Grabbing someone’s heel” is a Hebrew saying for tricking someone.

Bethel This name means “house of God.”

Reuben This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “he has seen my troubles.”

Simeon This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “has heard.”

Levi This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “be close to.”

Judah This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “praise.”

Dan This name means “he has judged.”

Naphtali This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “my

struggle.”

Gad This name may mean “lucky.”

Asher This name may mean “happy.”

mandrake A plant which was believed to cause a woman to become pregnant.

Issachar This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “paid for.”

Zebulun This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “honor.”

Joseph This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “he adds.”

Mizpah This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “watch.”

Mahanaim This name means “two camps.”

Israel This name means “he wrestles with God.”

Peniel This name means “the face of God.”

Succoth This name means “shelters.”

Benjamin This name means “right-hand son” or “favorite son.”

Israel Also called Jacob.

Israel Also called Jacob.

Go ... wife It was a custom in Israel that if a man died without children, one of his brothers would marry the widow. If a child was born, it would be considered the dead man’s child.

seal ... cord A seal was used like a rubber stamp, and people ran a string through it to tie around the neck. They wrote a contract, folded it, put wax or clay on the contract, and pressed the seal onto it as a signature.

Perez This name means “breaking out.”

Manasseh This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “made me forget.”

Ephraim This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “given me children.”

Israel Also called Jacob.

Israel Also called Jacob.

Israel Also called Jacob.

Jacob Also called Israel.

put ... leg This showed that a person would keep a promise.

The Book of Exodus

Introduction

What follows is the greatest scene in the Book of Exodus.

Risky claim, you say? Exodus is one startling scene after another. Burning bushes, dividing seas, manna falling, quail scampering. The plagues, the slaves, the king of Egypt, and the fire. How could they be ranked?

Do we dare isolate one moment as the greatest?

Yes, we do.

We turn to the Hebrew slaves and stand silently as they perform an act of faith. A brush is dipped into a bowl of lamb's blood and streaked over the doorpost. Do it, they were told, and the angel of death will pass over. They obeyed. And death took an alternate route.

That's the peak of Exodus. Exodus is a book of deliverance. Liberation from slavery. The blood on the doorpost reminds us, however, that it wasn't Moses who set them free. It was God. The blood on the doorpost reminds us of blood smeared on another post.

Blood of another lamb.

The Lamb of God.

Because of his blood, we, too, are free.

About This Book

Author:

Moses

Date Written:

c. 1500 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- Within a worst case scenario, God raised up Moses, leader of the Hebrews.
- Against the king of Egypt and his armies, God prevailed.
- God cared for his people and provided for their needs.
- God provided the Ten Commandments so that his people would know how to live in relationship with him and each other.

Key Verse:

“So now if you obey me and keep my agreement, you will be my own possession, chosen from all nations” ([Exodus 19:5](#)).

Contents:

1. God Brings His People Out of Egypt [1:1–14:31](#)
2. The Hebrews’ Journey [15:1–19:25](#)
3. God Gives His Laws [20:1–23:33](#)
4. God Explains Worship in the Holy Tent [24:1–40:38](#)

Life Lessons

Exodus 1:1–4:31

Situation

Moses, who saved the Hebrews from bondage, was born and raised under extraordinary circumstances. Son of a Hebrew slave, he became a member of the Egyptian royal family. Later he became an outcast to the Egyptians and fled to the desert, where God prepared him for his future role.

Observation

God's plans for us contain a lot of surprises. God leads and provides the means to reach his goals.

Inspiration

Consider the rod of Moses. By this time in his life, Moses had been a shepherd as long as he had been a prince, and he'd grown accustomed to it. Herding sheep wasn't as lively as living with Egyptian royalty, but it had its moments, especially the moment God spoke to him through a burning bush that didn't burn up. God announced that Moses was his man to deliver the Israelites. Moses wasn't convinced he was the one for the job. God said that who Moses was didn't matter; what mattered was who God was. And God set out to demonstrate.

"Moses," spoke the voice from the bush, "throw down your staff."

Moses, who had walked this mountain for forty years, was not comfortable with the command.

"God, you know a lot about a lot of things, but

you may not know that out here, well, you just don't go around throwing down your staff. You never know when ...”

“Throw it down, Moses.”

Moses threw it down. The rod became a snake, and Moses began to run.

“Moses!”

The old shepherd stopped.

“Pick up the snake.”

Moses peered over his shoulder, first at the snake and then the bush, and then he gave the most courageous response he could muster.

“What?”

“Pick up the snake ... by the tail.” (God had to be smiling at this point.)

“God, I don't mean to object. I mean, you know a lot of things, but out here in the desert, well, you don't pick up snakes too often, and you *never* pick up snakes by the tail.”

“Moses!”

“Yessir.”

Just as Moses' hand touched the squirmy scales of the snake, it hardened. And Moses lifted up the rod. The same rod he would lift up in Pharaoh's court. The same rod he would lift up to divide the water and guide two million people through a desert. The rod that would remind Moses that if God can make a stick become a snake, then become a stick again—then perhaps he can do something with stubborn hearts and a stiff-necked people.

Perhaps he can do something with the common.

(From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

Have you ever been in a hopeless position at work, school, or home? Have you felt trapped and powerless to act? Remember, God hears our needs and answers prayers in the manner that will help us, serve his will, and often surprise us. Trust God in prayer right now for special guidance today.

Exploration

Plans—[Genesis 45:4–8](#); [Matthew 2:16–23](#); [Mark 1:2–3](#); [1 Corinthians 2:7](#).

Jacob's Family Grows Strong

When [Jacob](#) went to Egypt, he took his sons, and each son took his own family with him. These are the names of the sons of Israel: ²Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, ³Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, ⁴Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. ⁵There was a total of seventy people who were descendants of Jacob. Jacob's son Joseph was already in Egypt.

⁶Some time later, Joseph and his brothers died, along with all the people who had lived at that same time. ⁷But the people of Israel had many children, and their number grew greatly. They became very strong, and the country of Egypt was filled with them.

Trouble for the People of Israel

⁸Then a new king began to rule Egypt, who did not know who Joseph was. ⁹This king said to his people, "Look! The people of Israel are too many and too strong for us to handle! ¹⁰If we don't make plans against them, the number of their people will grow even more. Then if there is a war, they might join our enemies and fight us and escape from the country!"

¹¹So the Egyptians made life hard for the Israelites. They put slave masters over them, who forced the Israelites to build the cities Pithom and Rameses as supply centers for the king.

¹²But the harder the Egyptians forced the Israelites to work, the more the Israelites grew in number and spread out. So the Egyptians became very afraid of them¹³and demanded even more of them. ¹⁴They made their lives bitter. They forced the Israelites to work hard to make bricks and mortar and to do all kinds of work in the fields. The Egyptians were not merciful to them in all their painful work.

¹⁵Two Hebrew nurses, named Shiphrah and Puah, helped the Israelite women give birth to their babies. The king of Egypt said to the nurses, ¹⁶“When you are helping the Hebrew women give birth to their babies, watch! If the baby is a girl, let her live, but if it is a boy, kill him!” ¹⁷But the nurses feared God, so they did not do as the king told them; they let all the boy babies live. ¹⁸Then the king of Egypt sent for the nurses and said, “Why did you do this? Why did you let the boys live?”

¹⁹The nurses said to him, “The Hebrew women are much stronger than the Egyptian women. They give birth to their babies before we can get there.” ²⁰God was good to the nurses. And the Hebrew people continued to grow in number, so they became even stronger. ²¹Because the nurses feared God, he gave them families of their own.

²²So the king commanded all his people, “Every time a boy is born to the Hebrews, you must throw him into the Nile River, but let all the girl babies live.”

Baby Moses

Now a man from the family of Levi married a woman who was also from the family of Levi. ²She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw how wonderful the baby was, she hid him for three months. ³But after three months she was not able to hide the baby any longer, so she got a basket made of reeds and covered it with tar so that it would float. She put the baby in the basket. Then she put the basket among the tall stalks of grass at the edge of the Nile River. ⁴The baby's sister stood a short distance away to see what would happen to him.

⁵Then the daughter of the king of Egypt came to the river to take a bath, and her servant girls were walking beside the river. When she saw the basket in the tall grass, she sent her slave girl to get it. ⁶The king's daughter opened the basket and saw the baby boy. He was crying, so she felt sorry for him and said, "This is one of the Hebrew babies."

⁷Then the baby's sister asked the king's daughter, "Would you like me to go and find a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby for you?"

⁸The king's daughter said, "Go!" So the girl went and got the baby's own mother.

⁹The king's daughter said to the woman, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took her baby and nursed him. ¹⁰When the child grew older, the woman took him to the king's daughter, and she adopted the baby as her own son. The king's daughter named him Moses, because she had pulled him out of the water.

Moses Tries to Help

¹¹Moses grew and became a man. One day he visited his people and saw that they were forced to work very hard. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew man, one of Moses' own people. ¹²Moses looked all around and saw that no one was watching, so he killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand.

¹³The next day Moses returned and saw two Hebrew men fighting each other. He said to the one that was in the wrong, "Why are you hitting one of your own people?"

¹⁴The man answered, "Who made you our ruler and judge? Are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"

Moses was afraid and thought, "Now everyone knows what I did."

¹⁵When the king heard what Moses had done, he tried to kill him. But Moses ran away from the king and went to live in the land of Midian. There he sat down near a well.

Moses in Midian

¹⁶There was a priest in Midian who had seven daughters. His daughters went to that well to get water to fill the water troughs for their father's flock. ¹⁷Some shepherds came and chased the girls away, but Moses defended the girls and watered their flock.

¹⁸When they went back to their father [Reuel](#), he asked them, "Why have you come home early today?"

¹⁹The girls answered, "The shepherds chased us away, but an Egyptian defended us. He got water for us and watered our

flock.”

²⁰He asked his daughters, “Where is this man? Why did you leave him? Invite him to eat with us.”

²¹Moses agreed to stay with Jethro, and he gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses to be his wife. ²²Zipporah gave birth to a son. Moses named him Gershom, because Moses was a stranger in a land that was not his own.

²³After a long time, the king of Egypt died. The people of Israel groaned, because they were forced to work very hard. When they cried for help, God heard them. ²⁴God heard their cries, and he remembered the agreement he had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵He saw the troubles of the people of Israel, and he was concerned about them.

The Burning Bush

One day Moses was taking care of Jethro's flock. (Jethro was the priest of Midian and also Moses' father-in-law.) When Moses led the flock to the west side of the desert, he came to Sinai, the mountain of God.² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire coming out of a bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire, but it was not burning up.³ So he said, "I will go closer to this strange thing. How can a bush continue burning without burning up?"

⁴When the Lord saw Moses was coming to look at the bush, God called to him from the bush, "Moses, Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

⁵Then God said, "Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground. ⁶I am the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷The Lord said, "I have seen the troubles my people have suffered in Egypt, and I have heard their cries when the Egyptian slave masters hurt them. I am concerned about their pain,⁸ and I have come down to save them from the Egyptians. I will bring them out of that land and lead them to a good land with lots of room—a fertile land. It is the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. ⁹I have heard the cries of the people of Israel, and I have seen the way the Egyptians have made life hard for them.

¹⁰So now I am sending you to the king of Egypt. Go! Bring my

people, the Israelites, out of Egypt!”

¹¹But Moses said to God, “I am not a great man! How can I go to the king and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?”

¹²God said, “I will be with you. This will be the proof that I am sending you: After you lead the people out of Egypt, all of you will worship me on this mountain.”

¹³Moses said to God, “When I go to the Israelites, I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers sent me to you.’ What if the people say, ‘What is his name?’ What should I tell them?”

¹⁴Then God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. When you go to the people of Israel, tell them, ‘I AM sent me to you.’”

¹⁵God also said to Moses, “This is what you should tell the people: ‘The Lord is the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He sent me to you.’ This will always be my name, by which people from now on will know me.

¹⁶“Go and gather the older leaders and tell them this: ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me. He said, I care about you, and I have seen what has happened to you in Egypt. ¹⁷I promised I would take you out of your troubles in Egypt. I will lead you to the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites—a fertile land.’

¹⁸“The older leaders will listen to you. And then you and the older leaders of Israel will go to the king of Egypt and tell him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, appeared to us. Let us travel three days into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God.’

¹⁹“But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go. Only a great power will force him to let you go, ²⁰so I will use

my great power against Egypt. I will strike Egypt with all the miracles that will happen in that land. After I do that, he will let you go.²¹ I will cause the Egyptians to think well of the Israelites. So when you leave, they will give gifts to your people.²² Each woman should ask her Egyptian neighbor and any Egyptian woman living in her house for gifts—silver, gold, and clothing. You should put those gifts on your children when you leave Egypt. In this way you will take with you the riches of the Egyptians.”

Proof for Moses

Then Moses answered, “What if the people of Israel do not believe me or listen to me? What if they say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you’?”

²The Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?”

Moses answered, “It is my walking stick.”

³The Lord said, “Throw it on the ground.”

So Moses threw it on the ground, and it became a snake. Moses ran from the snake, ⁴but the Lord said to him, “Reach out and grab the snake by its tail.” When Moses reached out and took hold of the snake, it again became a stick in his hand.

⁵The Lord said, “This is so that the Israelites will believe that the Lord appeared to you. I am the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

⁶Then the Lord said to Moses, “Put your hand inside your coat.” So Moses put his hand inside his coat. When he took it out, it was white with a skin disease.

⁷Then he said, “Now put your hand inside your coat again.” So Moses put his hand inside his coat again. When he took it out, his hand was healthy again, like the rest of his skin.

⁸Then the Lord said, “If the people do not believe you or pay attention to the first miracle, they may believe you when you show them this second miracle. ⁹After these two miracles, if they still do not believe or listen to you, take some water from the Nile River and pour it on the dry ground. The water will become blood when it touches the ground.”

¹⁰But Moses said to the Lord, “Please, Lord, I have never

been a skilled speaker. Even now, after talking to you, I cannot speak well. I speak slowly and can't find the best words."

¹¹Then the Lord said to him, "Who made a person's mouth? And who makes someone deaf or not able to speak? Or who gives a person sight or blindness? It is I, the Lord. ¹²Now go! I will help you speak, and I will teach you what to say."

¹³But Moses said, "Please, Lord, send someone else."

¹⁴The Lord became angry with Moses and said, "Your brother Aaron, from the family of Levi, is a skilled speaker. He is already coming to meet you, and he will be happy when he sees you. ¹⁵You will speak to Aaron and tell him what to say. I will help both of you to speak and will teach you what to do. ¹⁶Aaron will speak to the people for you. You will tell him what God says, and he will speak for you. ¹⁷Take your walking stick with you, and use it to do the miracles."

Moses Returns to Egypt

¹⁸Moses went back to Jethro, his father-in-law, and said to him, "Let me go back to my people in Egypt. I want to see if they are still alive."

Jethro said to Moses, "Go! I wish you well."

¹⁹While Moses was still in Midian, the Lord said to him, "Go back to Egypt, because the men who wanted to kill you are dead now."

²⁰So Moses took his wife and his sons, put them on a donkey, and started back to Egypt. He took with him the walking stick of God.

²¹The Lord said to Moses, "When you get back to Egypt, do all the miracles I have given you the power to do. Show

them to the king of Egypt. But I will make the king very stubborn, and he will not let the people go.²² Then say to the king, ‘This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son.²³ I told you to let my son go so he may worship me. But you refused to let Israel go, so I will kill your firstborn son.’”

²⁴As Moses was on his way to Egypt, he stopped at a resting place for the night. The Lord met him there and tried to kill him.²⁵ But Zipporah took a flint knife and circumcised her son. Taking the skin, she touched Moses’ feet with it and said to him, “You are a bridegroom of blood to me.”²⁶ She said, “You are a bridegroom of blood,” because she had to circumcise her son. So the Lord let Moses alone.

²⁷Meanwhile the Lord said to Aaron, “Go out into the desert to meet Moses.” When Aaron went, he met Moses at Sinai, the mountain of God, and kissed him.²⁸ Moses told Aaron everything the Lord had said to him when he sent him to Egypt. He also told him about the miracles which the Lord had commanded him to do.

²⁹Moses and Aaron gathered all the older leaders of the Israelites,³⁰ and Aaron told them everything that the Lord had told Moses. Then Moses did the miracles for all the people to see,³¹ and the Israelites believed. When they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their troubles, they bowed down and worshiped him.

Life Lessons

Exodus 5:1–6:27

Situation

Moses demanded that Pharaoh release the Hebrews so they could worship God. But Pharaoh refused and made the Hebrews work even harder. The discouraged Hebrews almost turned their backs on God. Moses asked God for help, and God assured him the Hebrews would leave Egypt.

Observation

When Moses complained to God, God answered him by reminding him about his character. God identifies himself as “Yahweh” four times in [6:2–8](#) (translated here as “the Lord”).

Inspiration

The Israelites considered the name too holy to be spoken by human lips. Whenever they needed to say *Yahweh*, they substituted the word *Adonai*, which means “Lord.” If the name needed to be written, the scribes would take a bath before they wrote it and destroy the pen afterward.

God never gives a definition of the word *Yahweh*, and Moses never requests one. Many scholars wish he had, for the study of the name has raised some healthy discussions.

The name “I AM” sounds strikingly close to the Hebrew word “to be”—*havah*. It’s quite possibly a combination of the present tense form (I am) and the causative tense (I cause to be). Yahweh, then, seems

to mean “I AM” and “I cause.” God is the “One who is” and the “One who causes.”

Why is that important? Because we need a big God. And if God is the “One who is,” then he is an unchanging God.

Think about it. Do you know anyone who goes around saying, “I am”? Neither do I. When we say “I am,” we always add another word. “I am *happy*.” “I am *sad*.” “I am *strong*.” “I am *Max*.” God, however, starkly states, “I AM” and adds nothing else.

“You are what?” we want to ask. “I AM,” he replies. God needs no descriptive word because he never changes. God is what he is. He is what he has always been. His immutability motivated the psalmist to declare, “But you never change” ([Psalm 102:27](#)). The writer is saying, “You are the One who is. You never change.” Yahweh is an unchanging God. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

Application

The fact that God is an unchanging God should affect the way you worship and approach him. Look for ways this week that you can praise such a great God.

Exploration

Unchangeableness of God—[Exodus 3:14](#); [Numbers 23:19](#); [Malachi 3:6](#); [John 8:58](#); [James 1:17](#).

Moses and Aaron Before the King

After Moses and Aaron talked to the people, they went to the king of Egypt and said, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Let my people go so they may hold a feast for me in the desert.’”

²But the king of Egypt said, “Who is the Lord? Why should I obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go.”

³Then Aaron and Moses said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us travel three days into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God. If we don’t do this, he may kill us with a disease or in war.”

⁴But the king said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Go back to your jobs!

⁵There are very many Hebrews, and now you want them to quit working!”

⁶That same day the king gave a command to the slave masters and foremen. ⁷He said, “Don’t give the people straw to make bricks as you used to do. Let them gather their own straw. ⁸But they must still make the same number of bricks as they did before. Do not accept fewer. They have become lazy, and that is why they are asking me, ‘Let us go to offer sacrifices to our God.’ ⁹Make these people work harder and keep them busy; then they will not have time to listen to the lies of Moses.”

¹⁰So the slave masters and foremen went to the Israelites and said, "This is what the king says: I will no longer give you straw. ¹¹Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it. But you must make as many bricks as you made before." ¹²So the people went everywhere in Egypt looking for dry stalks to use for straw. ¹³The slave masters kept forcing the people to work harder. They said, "You must make just as many bricks as you did when you were given straw." ¹⁴The king's slave masters had made the Israelite foremen responsible for the work the people did. The Egyptian slave masters beat these men and asked them, "Why aren't you making as many bricks as you made in the past?"

¹⁵Then the Israelite foremen went to the king and complained, "Why are you treating us, your servants, this way? ¹⁶You give us no straw, but we are commanded to make bricks. Our slave masters beat us, but it is your own people's fault."

¹⁷The king answered, "You are lazy! You don't want to work! That is why you ask to leave here and make sacrifices to the Lord. ¹⁸Now, go back to work! We will not give you any straw, but you must make just as many bricks as you did before."

¹⁹The Israelite foremen knew they were in trouble, because the king had told them, "You must make just as many bricks each day as you did before." ²⁰As they were leaving the meeting with the king, they met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them. ²¹So they said to Moses and Aaron, "May the Lord punish you. You caused the king and his officers to hate us. You have given them an excuse to kill us."

Moses Complains to God

²²Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Lord, why have you brought this trouble on your people? Is this why you sent me here? ²³I went to the king and said what you told me to say, but ever since that time he has made the people suffer. And you have done nothing to save them.”

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Now you will see what I will do to the king of Egypt. I will use my great power against him, and he will let my people go. Because of my power, he will force them out of his country.”

²Then God said to Moses, “I am the Lord. ³I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the name God Almighty, but they did not know me by my name, the Lord. ⁴I also made my agreement with them to give them the land of Canaan. They lived in that land, but it was not their own. ⁵Now I have heard the cries of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are treating as slaves, and I remember my agreement. ⁶So tell the people of Israel that I say to them, ‘I am the Lord. I will save you from the hard work the Egyptians force you to do. I will make you free, so you will not be slaves to the Egyptians. I will free you by my great power, and I will punish the Egyptians terribly. ⁷I will make you my own people, and I will be your God. You will know that I am the Lord your God, the One who saves you from the hard work the Egyptians force you to do. ⁸I will lead you to the land that I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give you that land to own. I am the Lord.’”

⁹So Moses told this to the Israelites, but they would not listen to him. They were discouraged, and their slavery was hard.

¹⁰Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹¹“Go tell the king of Egypt that he must let the Israelites leave his land.”

¹²But Moses answered, “The Israelites will not listen to me, so surely the king will not listen to me either. I am not a good speaker.”

¹³But the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them orders about the Israelites and the king of Egypt. He

commanded them to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

Families of Israel

¹⁴These are the leaders of the families of Israel:

Israel's first son, Reuben, had four sons: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. These are the family groups of Reuben.

¹⁵Simeon's sons were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. These are the family groups of Simeon.

¹⁶Levi lived one hundred thirty-seven years. These are the names of his sons according to their family history: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

¹⁷Gershon had two sons, Libni and Shimei, with their families.

¹⁸Kohath lived one hundred thirty-three years. The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

¹⁹The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi.

These are the family groups of Levi, according to their family history.

²⁰Amram married his father's sister Jochebed, who gave birth to Aaron and Moses. Amram lived one hundred thirty-seven years.

²¹Izhar's sons were Korah, Nepheg, and Zicri.

²²Uzziel's sons were Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri.

²³Aaron married Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab and the sister of Nahshon. Elisheba gave birth to Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

²⁴The sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph. These are the family groups of the Korahites.

²⁵Eleazar son of Aaron married a daughter of Putiel, and she gave birth to Phinehas.

These are the leaders of the family groups of the Levites.

²⁶This was the Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, “Lead the people of Israel out of Egypt by their divisions.”

²⁷Aaron and Moses are the ones who talked to the king of Egypt and told him to let the Israelites leave Egypt.

God Repeats His Call to Moses

²⁸The Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt ²⁹and said, “I am the Lord. Tell the king of Egypt everything I tell you.”

³⁰But Moses answered, “I am not a good speaker. The king will not listen to me.”

Life Lessons

Exodus 6:28–8:32

Situation

The Lord assured Moses that he would punish Egypt terribly and bring the Israelites out of the land in order to prove that he was the Lord. Although he thought he could not persuade Pharaoh, Moses saw that with God, nothing is impossible.

Observation

After the plague of flies, Pharaoh suggested two compromises. The Israelites could sacrifice to their God in Egypt, but not in the desert. And they could sacrifice—but only a short distance into the wilderness. Both were unacceptable, and Moses refused to compromise and make a deal with Pharaoh.

Inspiration

[Similarly, [Proverbs 5:22](#)] could just as easily be applied to a Christian who deliberately chooses to disobey his Lord. And instead of seeing the error of his way, he stays in a state of carnality, which grieves the Spirit of God living within him. Carnality occurs when a believer deliberately operates in the strength of his or her own will ... stubbornly refusing to acknowledge wrong and choosing to walk contrary to the teaching of Scripture. The promptings of God's Spirit are ignored as disobedience becomes a lifestyle. Choosing to live like that is like getting caught in a whirlpool. The wickedness intensifies. It gets more treacherous as he goes deeper into it. Like the

prodigal son, he winds up in misery and filth. (From *Wisdom for the Way* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Have you ever found yourself adjusting your beliefs to go along with the world's values, "making deals" with God? The Lord wants our obedience above everything else.

Exploration

Compromise with the World—[1 Corinthians 1:26–31](#); [2 Corinthians 7:10](#); [James 1:27](#); [1 John 2:15–17](#).

Rebellion results in thorns. —Max Lucado (*He Chose the Nails*)

The Lord said to Moses, “I have made you like God to the king of Egypt, and your brother Aaron will be like a prophet for you. ²Tell Aaron your brother everything that I command you, and let him tell the king of Egypt to let the Israelites leave his country. ³But I will make the king stubborn. I will do many miracles in Egypt, ⁴but he will still refuse to listen. So then I will punish Egypt terribly, and I will lead my divisions, my people the Israelites, out of that land. ⁵I will punish Egypt with my power, and I will bring the Israelites out of that land. Then they will know I am the Lord.”

⁶Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded them. ⁷Moses was eighty years old and Aaron was eighty-three when they spoke to the king.

Aaron's Walking Stick Becomes a Snake

⁸The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ⁹“Moses, when the king asks you to do a miracle, tell Aaron to throw his walking stick down in front of the king, and it will become a snake.”

¹⁰So Moses and Aaron went to the king as the Lord had commanded. Aaron threw his walking stick down in front of the king and his officers, and it became a snake.

¹¹So the king called in his wise men and his magicians, and with their tricks the Egyptian magicians were able to do the

same thing. ¹²They threw their walking sticks on the ground, and their sticks became snakes. But Aaron's stick swallowed theirs. ¹³Still the king was stubborn and refused to listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.

The Water Becomes Blood

¹⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, "The king is being stubborn and refuses to let the people go. ¹⁵In the morning the king will go out to the Nile River. Go meet him by the edge of the river, and take with you the walking stick that became a snake. ¹⁶Tell him: The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you. He said, 'Let my people go worship me in the desert.' Until now you have not listened. ¹⁷This is what the Lord says: 'This is how you will know that I am the Lord. I will strike the water of the Nile River with this stick in my hand, and the water will change into blood. ¹⁸Then the fish in the Nile will die, and the river will begin to stink. The Egyptians will not be able to drink the water from the Nile.'"

¹⁹The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron: 'Take the walking stick in your hand and stretch your hand over the rivers, canals, ponds, and pools in Egypt.' The water will become blood everywhere in Egypt, both in wooden buckets and in stone jars."

²⁰So Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded. In front of the king and his officers, Aaron raised his walking stick and struck the water in the Nile River. So all the water in the Nile changed into blood. ²¹The fish in the Nile died, and the river began to stink, so the Egyptians could not drink water from it. Blood was everywhere in the land of Egypt.

²²Using their tricks, the magicians of Egypt did the same thing. So the king was stubborn and refused to listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said. ²³The king turned and went into his palace and ignored what Moses and Aaron had done. ²⁴The Egyptians could not drink the water from the Nile, so all of them dug along the bank of the river, looking for water to drink.

The Frogs

²⁵Seven days passed after the Lord changed the Nile River.

Then the Lord told Moses, “Go to the king of Egypt and tell him, ‘This is what the Lord says: Let my people go to worship me.²If you refuse, I will punish Egypt with frogs.³The Nile River will be filled with frogs. They will come up into your palace, into your bedroom, on your bed, into the houses of your officers, and onto your people. They will come into your ovens and into your baking pans.⁴The frogs will jump all over you, your people, and your officers.’”

⁵Then the Lord said to Moses, “Tell Aaron to hold his walking stick in his hand over the rivers, canals, and ponds. Make frogs come up out of the water onto the land of Egypt.”

⁶So Aaron held his hand over all the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up out of the water and covered the land of Egypt.⁷The magicians used their tricks to do the same thing, so even more frogs came up onto the land of Egypt.

⁸The king called for Moses and Aaron and said, “Pray to the Lord to take the frogs away from me and my people. I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the Lord.”

⁹Moses said to the king, “Please set the time when I should pray for you, your people, and your officers. Then the frogs will leave you and your houses and will remain only in the Nile.”

¹⁰The king answered, “Tomorrow.”

Moses said, “What you want will happen. By this you will know that there is no one like the Lord our God.¹¹The frogs will leave you, your houses, your officers, and your people. They will remain only in the Nile.”

¹²After Moses and Aaron left the king, Moses asked the Lord about the frogs he had sent to the king.¹³And the Lord did as Moses asked. The frogs died in the houses, in the yards,

and in the fields. ¹⁴The Egyptians put them in piles, and the whole country began to stink. ¹⁵But when the king saw that they were free of the frogs, he became stubborn again. He did not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.

The Gnats

¹⁶Then the Lord said to Moses, “Tell Aaron to raise his walking stick and strike the dust on the ground. Then everywhere in Egypt the dust will change into gnats.” ¹⁷They did this, and when Aaron raised the walking stick that was in his hand and struck the dust on the ground, everywhere in Egypt the dust changed into gnats. The gnats got on the people and animals. ¹⁸Using their tricks, the magicians tried to do the same thing, but they could not make the dust change into gnats. The gnats remained on the people and animals. ¹⁹So the magicians told the king that the power of God had done this. But the king was stubborn and refused to listen to them, just as the Lord had said.

The Flies

²⁰The Lord told Moses, “Get up early in the morning, and meet the king of Egypt as he goes out to the river. Tell him, ‘This is what the Lord says: Let my people go so they can worship me. ²¹If you don’t let them go, I will send swarms of flies into your houses. The flies will be on you, your officers, and your people. The houses of Egypt will be full of flies, and they will be all over the ground, too. ²²But I will not treat the Israelites the same as the Egyptian people. There will not be any flies in

the land of Goshen, where my people live. By this you will know that I, the Lord, am in this land. ²³I will treat my people differently from your people. This miracle will happen tomorrow.”

²⁴So the Lord did as he had said, and great swarms of flies came into the king’s palace and his officers’ houses. All over Egypt flies were ruining the land. ²⁵The king called for Moses and Aaron and told them, “Offer sacrifices to your God here in this country.”

²⁶But Moses said, “It wouldn’t be right to do that, because the Egyptians hate the sacrifices we offer to the Lord our God. If they see us offering sacrifices they hate, they will throw stones at us and kill us. ²⁷Let us make a three-day journey into the desert. We must offer sacrifices to the Lord our God there, as the Lord told us to do.”

²⁸The king said, “I will let you go so that you may offer sacrifices to the Lord your God in the desert, but you must not go very far away. Now go and pray for me.”

²⁹Moses said, “I will leave and pray to the Lord, and he will take the flies away from you, your officers, and your people tomorrow. But do not try to trick us again. Do not stop the people from going to offer sacrifices to the Lord.”

³⁰So Moses left the king and prayed to the Lord, ³¹and the Lord did as he asked. He removed the flies from the king, his officers, and his people so that not one fly was left. ³²But the king became stubborn again and did not let the people go.

Life Lessons

Exodus 9:1–10:29

Situation

Moses began to reveal the majesty of God through individual miracles and plagues. The first four plagues turned the Nile to blood and infested the country with frogs, gnats, and flies. Though the entire country of Egypt suffered these plagues, the king refused to free the Israelites.

Observation

Pride makes us stubborn. Not only is pride unattractive, it can be ruinous (like it was to Pharaoh).

Inspiration

You've heard of God's children referred to as sheep. It isn't a bad picture, all things considered. The image conjures up visions of green pastures, still waters, and a gentle Shepherd, keeping watch over the flock.

But He also refers to us as mules. Sometimes, I think that's a better analogy.

Don't be like a balky mule! Don't be stubborn when God speaks. Don't continually fight and resist Him. Don't keep running away from Him so that He can't speak to you. Don't force Him to lasso you before you'll let Him draw near.

Why do we resist such a magnificent God who loves us? It makes no sense!

(From *Wisdom for the Way* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

What are some ways your pride has kept you from God? Has it ever ruined you? Acknowledge your bent toward independence, and ask the Lord to rid you of your self-reliance.

Exploration

Pride—[Proverbs 8:13](#); [16:18](#); [Mark 7:20–23](#); [1 John 2:16](#).

The framer of our destiny is familiar with our denseness. God knows we sometimes miss the signs. Maybe that's why he gave us so many. —Max Lucado (*He Chose the Nails*)

The Disease on the Farm Animals

Then the Lord told Moses, “Go to the king of Egypt and tell him, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go to worship me.² If you refuse to let them go and continue to hold them,³ the Lord will punish you. He will send a terrible disease on your farm animals that are in the fields. He will cause your horses, donkeys, camels, cattle, goats, and sheep to become sick.⁴ But the Lord will treat Israel’s animals differently from the animals of Egypt. None of the animals that belong to the Israelites will die.⁵ The Lord has set tomorrow as the time he will do this in the land.’”⁶ The next day the Lord did as he promised. All the farm animals in Egypt died, but none of the animals belonging to Israelites died.⁷ The king sent people to see what had happened to the animals of Israel, and they found that not one of them had died. But the king was still stubborn and did not let the people go.

The Boils

⁸The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Fill your hands with

ashes from a furnace. Moses, throw the ashes into the air in front of the king of Egypt. ⁹The ashes will spread like dust through all the land of Egypt. They will cause boils to break out and become sores on the skin of people and animals everywhere in the land.”

¹⁰So Moses and Aaron took ashes from a furnace and went and stood before the king. Moses threw ashes into the air, which caused boils to break out and become sores on people and animals. ¹¹The magicians could not stand before Moses, because all the Egyptians had boils, even the magicians. ¹²But the Lord made the king stubborn, so he refused to listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.

The Hail

¹³Then the Lord said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning and go to the king of Egypt. Tell him, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go to worship me. ¹⁴If you don’t, this time I will punish you, your officers, and your people, with all my power. Then you will know there is no one in the whole land like me. ¹⁵By now I could have used my power and caused a terrible disease that would have destroyed you and your people from the earth. ¹⁶But I have let you live for this reason: to show you my power so that my name will be talked about in all the earth. ¹⁷You are still against my people and do not want to let them go. ¹⁸So at this time tomorrow, I will send a terrible hailstorm, the worst in Egypt since it became a nation. ¹⁹Now send for your animals and whatever you have in the fields, and bring them into a safe place. The hail will fall on every person or animal that is still in the fields. If they have not

been brought in, they will die.””²⁰Some of the king’s officers respected the word of the Lord and hurried to bring their slaves and animals inside.²¹But others ignored the Lord’s message and left their slaves and animals in the fields.

²²The Lord told Moses, “Raise your hand toward the sky. Then the hail will start falling in all the land of Egypt. It will fall on people, animals, and on everything that grows in the fields of Egypt.”²³When Moses raised his walking stick toward the sky, the Lord sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the earth. So he caused hail to fall upon the land of Egypt.²⁴There was hail, and lightning flashed as it hailed—the worst hailstorm in Egypt since it had become a nation.²⁵The hail destroyed all the people and animals that were in the fields in all the land of Egypt. It also destroyed everything that grew in the fields and broke all the trees in the fields.²⁶The only place it did not hail was in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived.

²⁷The king sent for Moses and Aaron and told them, “This time I have sinned. The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.”²⁸Pray to the Lord. We have had enough of God’s thunder and hail. I will let you go; you do not have to stay here any longer.”

²⁹Moses told the king, “When I leave the city, I will raise my hands to the Lord in prayer, and the thunder and hail will stop. Then you will know that the earth belongs to the Lord.”³⁰But I know that you and your officers do not yet fear the Lord God.”

³¹The flax was in bloom, and the barley had ripened, so these crops were destroyed.³²But both wheat crops ripen later, so they were not destroyed.

³³Moses left the king and went outside the city. He raised his hands to the Lord, and the thunder and hail stopped. The rain also stopped falling to the ground. ³⁴When the king saw that the rain, hail, and thunder had stopped, he sinned again, and he and his officers became stubborn. ³⁵So the king became stubborn and refused to let the Israelites go, just as the Lord had said through Moses.

The Locusts

The Lord said to Moses, “Go to the king of Egypt. I have made him and his officers stubborn so I could show them my powerful miracles.² I also did this so you could tell your children and your grandchildren how I was hard on the Egyptians. Tell them about the miracles I did among them so that all of you will know that I am the Lord.”

³So Moses and Aaron went to the king and told him, “This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: ‘How long will you refuse to be sorry for what you have done? Let my people go to worship me. ⁴If you refuse to let my people go, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country. ⁵They will cover the land so that no one will be able to see the ground. They will eat anything that was left from the hailstorm and the leaves from every tree growing in the field. ⁶They will fill your palaces and all your officers’ houses, as well as the houses of all the Egyptians. There will be more locusts than your fathers or ancestors have ever seen—more than there have been since people began living in Egypt.’” Then Moses turned and walked away from the king.

⁷The king’s officers asked him, “How long will this man make trouble for us? Let the Israelites go to worship the Lord their God. Don’t you know that Egypt is ruined?”

⁸So Moses and Aaron were brought back to the king. He said to them, “Go and worship the Lord your God. But tell me, just who is going?”

⁹Moses answered, “We will go with our young and old people, our sons and daughters, and our flocks and herds,

because we are going to have a feast to honor the Lord.”

¹⁰The king said to them, “The Lord will really have to be with you if ever I let you and all of your children leave Egypt. See, you are planning something evil! ¹¹No! Only the men may go and worship the Lord, which is what you have been asking for.” Then the king forced Moses and Aaron out of his palace.

¹²The Lord told Moses, “Raise your hand over the land of Egypt, and the locusts will come. They will spread all over the land of Egypt and will eat all the plants the hail did not destroy.”

¹³So Moses raised his walking stick over the land of Egypt, and the Lord caused a strong wind to blow from the east. It blew across the land all that day and night, and when morning came, the east wind had brought the locusts. ¹⁴Swarms of locusts covered all the land of Egypt and settled everywhere. There were more locusts than ever before or after, ¹⁵and they covered the whole land so that it was black. They ate everything that was left after the hail—every plant in the field and all the fruit on the trees. Nothing green was left on any tree or plant anywhere in Egypt.

¹⁶The king quickly called for Moses and Aaron. He said, “I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. ¹⁷Now forgive my sin this time. Pray to the Lord your God, and ask him to stop this punishment that kills.”

¹⁸Moses left the king and prayed to the Lord. ¹⁹So the Lord changed the wind. He made a very strong wind blow from the west, and it blew the locusts away into the Red Sea. Not one locust was left anywhere in Egypt. ²⁰But the Lord caused the king to be stubborn again, and he did not let the Israelites go.

The Darkness

²¹Then the Lord told Moses, “Raise your hand toward the sky, and darkness will cover the land of Egypt. It will be so dark you will be able to feel it.” ²²Moses raised his hand toward the sky, and total darkness was everywhere in Egypt for three days. ²³No one could see anyone else, and no one could go anywhere for three days. But the Israelites had light where they lived.

²⁴Again the king of Egypt called for Moses. He said, “All of you may go and worship the Lord. You may take your women and children with you, but you must leave your flocks and herds here.”

²⁵Moses said, “You must let us have animals to use as sacrifices and burnt offerings, because we have to offer them to the Lord our God. ²⁶So we must take our animals with us; not a hoof will be left behind. We have to use some of the animals to worship the Lord our God. We won’t know exactly what we will need to worship the Lord until we get there.”

²⁷But the Lord made the king stubborn again, so he refused to let them go. ²⁸Then he told Moses, “Get out of here, and don’t come again! The next time you see me, you will die.”

²⁹Then Moses told the king, “I’ll do what you say. I will not come to see you again.”

Life Lessons

Exodus 11:1–12:50

Situation

In this passage, nine of the ten plagues in Egypt had already occurred. Pharaoh, despite the pleadings of Moses, refused to give in. God told the Israelites to prepare the Passover, which would protect his people from the final plague.

Observation

God did not protect the Israelites because they were better than the Egyptians, but because they were his people. God gives grace to his followers—whether through the blood of a lamb or the blood of *the* Lamb, Jesus—not based on merit but on his lovingkindness.

Inspiration

“God was in Christ, making peace between the world and himself... Christ had no sin, but God made him become sin so that in Christ we could become right with God” ([2 Corinthians 5:19, 21](#)).

The perfect record of Jesus was given to you, and your imperfect record was given to Christ. Jesus was “not guilty, but he suffered for those who are guilty to bring you to God” ([1 Peter 3:18](#)). As a result, God’s holiness is honored and his children are forgiven.

By his perfect life Jesus fulfilled the commands of the law. By his death he satisfied the demands of sin. Jesus suffered not like a sinner, but as a sinner. Why else would he cry, “My God, my God, why have you

rejected me” ([Matthew 27:46](#))?

Ponder the achievement of God. He doesn’t condone our sin; nor does he compromise his standard. He doesn’t ignore our rebellion; nor does he relax his demands. Rather than dismiss our sin he assumes our sin and, incredibly, sentences himself. God’s holiness is honored. Our sin is punished. And we are redeemed. God is still God. The wages of sin is still death. And we are made perfect.

That’s right, perfect. “With one sacrifice he made perfect forever those who are being made holy” ([Hebrews 10:14](#)).

God justifies (makes perfect) then sanctifies (makes holy). God does what we cannot do so we can be what we dare not dream, perfect before God. He justly justifies the unjust. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Application

God has given grace to you—an unconditional gift. Receive it and accept it. Look for opportunities to be “graceful” to those around you.

Exploration

Grace—[Exodus 33:19](#); [Proverbs 3:34](#); [Romans 3:23–24](#); [5:15–17](#); [Ephesians 2:8](#).

The Death of the Firstborn

Now the Lord had told Moses, “I have one more way to punish the king and the people of Egypt. After this, the king will send all of you away from Egypt. When he does, he will force you to leave completely. ²Tell the men and women of Israel to ask their neighbors for things made of silver and gold.” ³The Lord had caused the Egyptians to respect the Israelites, and both the king’s officers and the Egyptian people considered Moses to be a great man.

⁴So Moses said to the king, “This is what the Lord says: ‘About midnight tonight I will go through all Egypt. ⁵Every firstborn son in the land of Egypt will die—from the firstborn son of the king, who sits on his throne, to the firstborn of the slave girl grinding grain. Also the firstborn farm animals will die. ⁶There will be loud outcries everywhere in Egypt, worse than any time before or after this. ⁷But not even a dog will bark at the Israelites or their animals.’ Then you will know that the Lord treats Israel differently from Egypt. ⁸All your officers will come to me. They will bow facedown to the ground before me and say, ‘Leave and take all your people with you.’ After that, I will leave.” Then Moses very angrily left the king.

⁹The Lord had told Moses, “The king will not listen to you and Aaron so that I may do many miracles in the land of Egypt.” ¹⁰Moses and Aaron did all these great miracles in front of the king. But the Lord made him stubborn, and the king

would not let the Israelites leave his country.

The First Passover

The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²“This month will be the beginning of months, the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man must get one lamb for the people in his house. ⁴If there are not enough people in his house to eat a whole lamb, he must share it with his closest neighbor, considering the number of people. There must be enough lamb for everyone to eat. ⁵The lamb must be a one-year-old male that has nothing wrong with it. This animal can be either a young sheep or a young goat. ⁶Take care of the animals until the fourteenth day of the month. On that day all the people of the community of Israel will kill them in the evening before dark. ⁷The people must take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. ⁸On this night they must roast the lamb over a fire. They must eat it with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. ⁹Do not eat the lamb raw or boiled in water. Roast the whole lamb over a fire—with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰You must not leave any of it until morning, but if any of it is left over until morning, you must burn it with fire.

¹¹“This is the way you must eat it: You must be fully dressed as if you were going on a trip. You must have your sandals on and your walking stick in your hand. You must eat it in a hurry; this is the Lord’s Passover.

¹²“That night I will go through the land of Egypt and kill all

the firstborn animals and people in the land of Egypt. I will also punish all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. ¹³But the blood will be a sign on the houses where you are. When I see the blood, I will pass over you. Nothing terrible will hurt you when I punish the land of Egypt.

¹⁴“You are always to remember this day and celebrate it with a feast to the Lord. Your descendants are to honor the Lord with this feast from now on. ¹⁵For this feast you must eat bread made without yeast for seven days. On the first day, you are to remove all the yeast from your houses. No one should eat any yeast for the full seven days of the feast, or that person will be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶You are to have holy meetings on the first and last days of the feast. You must not do any work on these days; the only work you may do is to prepare your meals. ¹⁷You must celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because on this very day I brought your divisions of people out of Egypt. So all of your descendants must celebrate this day. This is a law that will last from now on. ¹⁸In the first month of the year you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. ¹⁹For seven days there must not be any yeast in your houses. Anybody who eats yeast during this time, either an Israelite or non-Israelite, must be cut off from the community of Israel. ²⁰During this feast you must not eat anything made with yeast. You must eat only bread made without yeast wherever you live.”

²¹Then Moses called all the older leaders of Israel together and told them, “Get the animals for your families and kill the lamb for the Passover. ²²Take a branch of the hyssop plant, dip it into the bowl filled with blood, and then wipe the blood on

the sides and tops of the doorframes. No one may leave that house until morning.²³ When the Lord goes through Egypt to kill the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the sides and tops of the doorframes, and he will pass over that house. He will not let the one who brings death come into your houses and kill you.

New Life in Christ

“When I see the blood, I will pass over you.”—[Exodus 12:13](#)

The Blood of Christ

“But one of the soldiers stuck his spear into Jesus’ side, and at once blood and water came out” ([John 19:34](#)). Even a casual student of Scripture notes the connection between blood and mercy. As far back as the son of Adam, worshipers knew “Sins cannot be forgiven without blood” ([Hebrews 9:22](#))... . With a field as his temple and the ground as his altar, Abel became the first to do what millions would imitate. He offered a blood sacrifice for sin... .

Those who followed suit for a long line: Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Samson, Saul, David ... But the line ended at the cross. What Abel sought to accomplish in the field, God achieved with his Son. What Abel began, Christ completed... .

What needed to be paid was paid. What had to be done was done. Innocent blood was required. Innocent blood was offered, once and for all time... .

As a result of “being saved” (the work of the blood), what do we do? We obey God “with deep

reverence” and shrink back “from all that might displease him” [[Philippians 2:12–13](#), TLB]. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Question: What steps can you take today to learn obedience?

For more on [“New Life in Christ.”](#)

²⁴“You must keep this command as a law for you and your descendants from now on. ²⁵Do this when you go to the land the Lord has promised to give you. ²⁶When your children ask you, ‘Why are we doing these things?’ ²⁷you will say, ‘This is the Passover sacrifice to honor the Lord. When we were in Egypt, the Lord passed over the houses of Israel, and when he killed the Egyptians, he saved our homes.’” Then the people bowed down and worshiped the Lord. ²⁸They did just as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron.

²⁹At midnight the Lord killed all the firstborn sons in the land of Egypt—from the firstborn of the king who sat on the throne to the firstborn of the prisoner in jail. Also, all the firstborn farm animals died. ³⁰The king, his officers, and all the Egyptians got up during the night because someone had died in every house. So there was a loud outcry everywhere in Egypt.

Israel Leaves Egypt

³¹During the night the king called for Moses and Aaron and said, “Get up and leave my people. You and your people may do as you have asked; go and worship the Lord. ³²Take all of your flocks and herds as you have asked, and go. And also bless me.” ³³The Egyptians also asked the Israelites to hurry and leave, saying, “If you don’t leave, we will all die!”

³⁴So the people took their dough before the yeast was added. They wrapped the bowls for making dough in clothing and carried them on their shoulders. ³⁵The Israelites did what

Moses told them to do and asked their Egyptian neighbors for things made of silver and gold and for clothing.³⁶ The Lord caused the Egyptians to think well of them, and the Egyptians gave the people everything they asked for. So the Israelites took rich gifts from them.

³⁷The Israelites traveled from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men walking, not including the women and children.³⁸ Many other people who were not Israelites went with them, as well as a large number of sheep, goats, and cattle.³⁹ The Israelites used the dough they had brought out of Egypt to bake loaves of bread without yeast. The dough had no yeast in it, because they had been rushed out of Egypt and had no time to get food ready for their trip.

⁴⁰The people of Israel had lived in Egypt for four hundred thirty years;⁴¹ on the very day the four hundred thirty years ended, the Lord's divisions of people left Egypt.⁴² That night the Lord kept watch to bring them out of Egypt, and so on this same night the Israelites are to keep watch to honor the Lord from now on.

⁴³The Lord told Moses and Aaron, "Here are the rules for Passover: No foreigner is to eat the Passover.⁴⁴ If someone buys a slave and circumcises him, the slave may eat the Passover.⁴⁵ But neither a person who lives for a short time in your country nor a hired worker may eat it.

⁴⁶"The meal must be eaten inside a house; take none of the meat outside the house. Don't break any of the bones.⁴⁷ The whole community of Israel must take part in this feast.⁴⁸ A foreigner who lives with you may share in the Lord's Passover if all the males in his house become circumcised. Then, since he will be like a citizen of Israel, he may share in the meal. But a

man who is not circumcised may not eat the Passover meal.
⁴⁹The same rules apply to an Israelite born in the country or to a foreigner living there.”

⁵⁰So all the Israelites did just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron. ⁵¹On that same day the Lord led the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions.

Life Lessons

Exodus 13:1–15:21

Situation

The Israelites left Egypt. As they journeyed toward Israel, God chose to lead them through a longer route—a route that protected, trained, and tested them.

Observation

God can see needs and hazards we can't. He works to meet our needs and protect us. We must trust that his way is best.

Inspiration

Is this really true? Does God lead His children in this way? I want to listen with you to that which the Holy Spirit has to tell us about guidance, for this is sometimes a problem for me, as for many people. There are many who say, "I never hear anything when asking for guidance."

But then my question is, "Do you listen?" Sometimes we have to wait for the Lord, but this waiting can be a blessing in itself, if we do it in the presence of the Lord. Our quiet time is helpful for this.

If you want to hear God's voice clearly and you are uncertain, then remain in His presence until He changes this uncertainty. Often much can happen during this waiting for the Lord. Sometimes He changes pride into humility; doubt into faith and peace; sometimes lust into purity. The Lord can and will do it.

We must also understand that sometimes the silence of the Lord is His way of letting us grow, just as a mother allows her child to fall and get up again when he is learning to walk. If at times God allows a conflict, it may be His way of training us. (From *Not I but Christ* by Corrie ten Boom)

Application

Do you get impatient with God when he takes you the longer route? Accept the path he has placed you on. Be content with God's purpose in your life. Encourage others who are dissatisfied in their own circumstances to do the same.

Exploration

Guidance—[Psalm 48:14](#); [139:9–10](#); [Isaiah 30:21](#); [42:16](#); [John 16:13](#).

The key question in life is not “How strong am I?” but rather “How strong is God?” Focus on his strength, not yours. Occupy yourself with the nature of God, not the size of your biceps. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

The Law of the Firstborn

Then the Lord said to Moses,²“Give every firstborn male to me. Every firstborn male among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal.”

³Moses said to the people, “Remember this day, the day you left Egypt. You were slaves in that land, but the Lord with his great power brought you out of it. You must not eat bread made with yeast. ⁴Today, in the month of Abib, you are leaving Egypt. ⁵The Lord will lead you to the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites, and Jebusites. This is the land he promised your ancestors he would give you, a fertile land. There you must celebrate this feast during the first month of every year. ⁶For seven days you must eat bread made without yeast, and on the seventh day there will be a feast to honor the Lord. ⁷So for seven days you must not eat any bread made with yeast. There must be no bread made with yeast anywhere in your land. ⁸On that day you should tell your son: ‘We are having this feast because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ ⁹This feast will help you remember, like a mark on your hand or a reminder on your forehead. This feast

will remind you to speak the Lord's teachings, because the Lord used his great power to bring you out of Egypt.¹⁰ So celebrate this feast every year at the right time.

¹¹"And when the Lord takes you into the land of the Canaanites, the land he promised to give you and your ancestors,¹² you must give him every firstborn male. Also every firstborn male animal must be given to the Lord.¹³ Buy back every firstborn donkey by offering a lamb. But if you don't want to buy the donkey back, then break its neck. You must buy back from the Lord every firstborn of your sons.

¹⁴"From now on when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you will answer, 'With his great power, the Lord brought us out from Egypt, the land where we were slaves.¹⁵ The king of Egypt was stubborn and refused to let us leave. But the Lord killed every firstborn male in Egypt, both human and animal. That is why I sacrifice every firstborn male animal to the Lord, and that is why I buy back each of my firstborn sons from the Lord.'¹⁶ This feast is like a mark on your hand and a reminder on your forehead to help you remember that the Lord brought us out of Egypt with his great power."

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: Our Redeemer and Deliverer

Think about the first time you ever saw him. Think about your first encounter with Christ. Robe yourself in that moment. Resurrect the relief. Recall the purity. Summon forth the passion. Can you remember?

I can. 1965. A red-headed ten-year-old with a tornado of freckles sits in a Bible class on a

Wednesday night. What I remember of the class are scenes—school desks with initials carved in them. A blackboard. A dozen or so kids, some listening, some not. A teacher wearing a suit coat too tight to button around his robust belly.

He is talking about Jesus. He is explaining the cross. I know I had heard it before, but that night I heard it for sure. “You can’t save yourself, you need a savior.” I can’t explain why it connected that night as opposed to another, but it did. He simply articulated what I was beginning to understand—I was lost—and he explained what I needed—a redeemer. From that night on, my heart belonged to Jesus.

Many would argue that a ten-year-old is too young for such a decision. And they may be right. All I know is that I never made a more earnest decision in my life. I didn’t know much about God, but what I knew was enough. I knew I wanted to go to heaven. And I knew I couldn’t do it alone.

No one had to tell me to be happy. No one had to tell me to tell others. They couldn’t keep me quiet. I told all my friends at school. I put a bumper sticker on my bicycle. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

The Way Out of Egypt

¹⁷When the king sent the people out of Egypt, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was the shortest way. God said, “If they have to fight, they might change their minds and go back to Egypt.” ¹⁸So God led them through the desert toward the Red Sea. The Israelites were dressed for fighting when they left the land of Egypt.

¹⁹Moses carried the bones of Joseph with him, because before Joseph died, he had made the Israelites promise to do this. He had said, “When God saves you, remember to carry my bones with you out of Egypt.”

²⁰The Israelites left Succoth and camped at Etham, on the edge of the desert. ²¹The Lord showed them the way; during the day he went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud, and during the night he was in a pillar of fire to give them light. In this way they could travel during the day or night. ²²The pillar of cloud was always with them during the day, and the pillar of fire was always with them at night.

Then the Lord said to Moses, ²“Tell the Israelites to turn back to Pi Hahiroth and to camp between Migdol and the Red Sea. Camp across from Baal Zephon, on the shore of the sea. ³The king will think, ‘The Israelites are lost, trapped by the desert.’ ⁴I will make the king stubborn again so he will chase after them, but I will defeat the king and his army. This will bring honor to me, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.” The Israelites did just as they were told.

The King Chases the Israelites

⁵When the king of Egypt was told that the Israelites had left, he and his officers changed their minds about them. They said, “What have we done? We have let the Israelites leave. We have lost our slaves!” ⁶So the king prepared his war chariot and took his army with him. ⁷He took six hundred of his best chariots, together with all the other chariots of Egypt, each with an officer in it. ⁸The Lord made the king of Egypt stubborn, so he chased the Israelites, who were leaving victoriously. ⁹The Egyptians—with all the king’s horses, chariot drivers, and army—chased the Israelites. They caught up with them while they were camped by the Red Sea, near Pi Hahiroth and Baal Zephon.

¹⁰When the Israelites saw the king and his army coming after them, they were very frightened and cried to the Lord for help. ¹¹They said to Moses, “What have you done to us? Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in the desert? There were plenty of graves for us in Egypt. ¹²We told you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone; we will stay and serve the Egyptians.’ Now we will die in the desert.”

¹³But Moses answered, “Don’t be afraid! Stand still and you will see the Lord save you today. You will never see these Egyptians again after today. ¹⁴You only need to remain calm; the Lord will fight for you.”

¹⁵Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Command the Israelites to start moving. ¹⁶Raise your walking stick and hold it over the sea so that the sea will split and the people can cross it on dry land. ¹⁷I will make the Egyptians stubborn so they will chase the Israelites, but I will be honored when I defeat the king and all of his chariot drivers and chariots. ¹⁸When I defeat the king, his chariot drivers, and chariots, the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.”

¹⁹Now the angel of God that usually traveled in front of Israel’s army moved behind them. Also, the pillar of cloud moved from in front of the people and stood behind them. ²⁰So the cloud came between the Egyptians and the Israelites. This made it dark for the Egyptians but gave light to the Israelites. So the cloud kept the two armies apart all night.

²¹Then Moses held his hand over the sea. All that night the Lord drove back the sea with a strong east wind, making the sea become dry ground. The water was split, ²²and the Israelites went through the sea on dry land, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

²³Then all the king’s horses, chariots, and chariot drivers followed them into the sea. ²⁴When morning came, the Lord looked down from the pillar of cloud and fire at the Egyptian army and made them panic. ²⁵He kept the wheels of the chariots from turning, making it hard to drive the chariots. The Egyptians shouted, “Let’s get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them and against Egypt.”

²⁶Then the Lord told Moses, “Hold your hand over the sea so that the water will come back over the Egyptians, their chariots, and chariot drivers.” ²⁷So Moses raised his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its place. The Egyptians tried to run from it, but the Lord swept them away into the sea. ²⁸The water returned, covering the chariots, chariot drivers, and all the king’s army that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

²⁹But the Israelites crossed the sea on dry land, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. ³⁰So that day the Lord saved the Israelites from the Egyptians, and the Israelites saw the Egyptians lying dead on the seashore. ³¹When the Israelites saw the great power the Lord had used against the Egyptians, they feared the Lord, and they trusted him and his servant Moses.

The Song of Moses

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:

“I will sing to the Lord,
because he is worthy of great honor.
He has thrown the horse and its rider
into the sea.

²The Lord gives me strength and makes me sing;
he has saved me.

He is my God,
and I will praise him.
He is the God of my fathers,
and I will honor him.

³The Lord is a warrior;
the Lord is his name.

⁴The chariots and soldiers of the king of Egypt
he has thrown into the sea.

The king's best officers
are drowned in the Red Sea.

⁵The deep waters covered them,
and they sank to the bottom like a rock.

⁶Your right hand, Lord,
is amazingly strong.
Lord, your right hand
broke the enemy to pieces.

⁷In your great victory
you destroyed those who were against you.
Your anger destroyed them,

like fire burning straw.

⁸Just a blast of your breath,

and the waters piled up.

The moving water stood like a wall;

the deep waters became solid in the middle of the sea.

⁹“The enemy bragged,

‘I’ll chase them and catch them.

I’ll take all their riches;

I’ll take all I want.

I’ll pull out my sword,

and my hand will destroy them.’

¹⁰But you blew on them with your breath

and covered them with the sea.

They sank like lead

in the raging water.

¹¹“Are there any gods like you, Lord?

There are no gods like you.

You are wonderfully holy,

amazingly powerful,

a worker of miracles.

¹²You reached out with your right hand,

and the earth swallowed our enemies.

¹³You keep your loving promise

and lead the people you have saved.

With your strength you will guide them

to your holy place.

¹⁴“The other nations will hear this and tremble with
fear;

terror will take hold of the Philistines.

¹⁵The leaders of the tribes of Edom will be very frightened;

the powerful men of Moab will shake with fear;
the people of Canaan will lose all their courage.

¹⁶Terror and horror will fall on them.

When they see your strength,
they will be as still as a rock.

They will be still until your people pass by, Lord.

They will be still until the people you have taken as
your own pass by.

¹⁷You will lead your people and place them
on your very own mountain,
the place that you, Lord, made for yourself to live,
the temple, Lord, that your hands have made.

¹⁸The Lord will be king forever!"

¹⁹The horses, chariot drivers, and chariots of the king of Egypt went into the sea, and the Lord covered them with water from the sea. But the Israelites walked through the sea on dry land. ²⁰Then Aaron's sister Miriam, a prophetess, took a tambourine in her hand. All the women followed her, playing tambourines and dancing. ²¹Miriam told them:

"Sing to the Lord,
because he is worthy of great honor;
he has thrown the horse and its rider
into the sea."

Life Lessons

Exodus 15:22–17:7

Situation

For centuries the Israelites had lived on fertile farm land in Goshen. What a contrast the desert was to this previous comfort. With no way to provide for themselves, the Israelites complained to God. He performed daily miracles to provide water and food for them. Manna appeared in flake form with the morning dew. The Israelites ground it like grain and cooked with it.

Observation

The Israelites focused on physical needs, but God focused on their need to learn to trust him. The Israelites could not conquer the desert, but climate was not a problem for God. He sustained, tested, and encouraged them in a perfect way.

Inspiration

In order to reach the destination, we have to say no to some requests.

Can you imagine the outcome if a parent honored each request of each child during a trip? We'd inch our bloated bellies from one ice-cream store to the next. Our priority would be popcorn and our itinerary would read like a fast-food menu. "Go to the Cherry Malt and make a right. Head north until you find the Chili Cheeseburger. Stay north for 1,300 calories and bear left at the Giant Pizza. When you see the two-for-one Chili Dog Special, take the Pepto-Bismol Turnpike east for five convenience stores. At the sixth toilet ..."

Can you imagine the chaos if a parent indulged every indulgence?

Can you imagine the chaos if God indulged each of ours?

No is a necessary word to take on a trip. Destination has to reign over Dairy Deluxe Ice Cream Sundae.

“For God has not *destined* us [italics mine] to the terrors of judgment, but to the full attainment of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” [[1 Thessalonians 5:9](#), NEB].

Note God’s destiny for your life. Salvation.

God’s overarching desire is that you reach that destiny. His itinerary includes stops that encourage your journey. He frowns on stops that deter you. When his sovereign plan and your earthly plan collide, a decision must be made. Who’s in charge of this journey?

If God must choose between your earthly satisfaction and your heavenly salvation, which do you hope he chooses?

Me, too. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

What needs prompt you to pray today? Give these needs specifically to God. Pray about each one and don’t worry. Trust that God, who created you, knows how to meet your needs.

Exploration

God Provides—[Matthew 6:25](#); [14:18–21](#); [Luke 12:22–31](#); [1 Corinthians 1:9](#); [Philippians 4:19](#); [1 Peter](#)

5.7.

Bitter Water Becomes Good

²²Moses led the Israelites away from the Red Sea into the Desert of Shur. They traveled for three days in the desert but found no water. ²³Then they came to Marah, where there was water, but they could not drink it because it was too bitter. (That is why the place was named [Marah](#).) ²⁴The people grumbled to Moses and asked, “What will we drink?”

²⁵So Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When Moses threw the tree into the water, the water became good to drink.

There the Lord gave the people a rule and a law to live by, and there he tested their loyalty to him. ²⁶He said, “You must obey the Lord your God and do what he says is right. If you obey all his commands and keep his rules, I will not bring on you any of the sicknesses I brought on the Egyptians. I am the Lord who heals you.”

²⁷Then the people traveled to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees. So the people camped there near the water.

The People Demand Food

The whole Israelite community left Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which was between Elim and Sinai; they arrived there on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had left Egypt.

²Then the whole Israelite community grumbled to Moses and Aaron in the desert. ³They said to them, "It would have been better if the Lord had killed us in the land of Egypt. There we had meat to eat and all the food we wanted. But you have brought us into this desert to starve us to death."

⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will cause food to fall like rain from the sky for all of you. Every day the people must go out and gather what they need for that day. I want to see if the people will do what I teach them. ⁵On the sixth day of each week, they are to gather twice as much as they gather on other days. Then they are to prepare it."

⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites: "This evening you will know that the Lord is the one who brought you out of Egypt. ⁷Tomorrow morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard you grumble against him. We are nothing, so you are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord." ⁸And Moses said, "Each evening the Lord will give you meat to eat, and every morning he will give you all the bread you want, because he has heard you grumble against him. You are not grumbling against Aaron and me, because we are nothing; you are grumbling against the Lord."

⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, "Speak to the whole community of the Israelites, and say to them, 'Meet together in the presence of the Lord, because he has heard your

grumbings.”

¹⁰While Aaron was speaking to the whole community of the Israelites, they looked toward the desert. There the glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud.

¹¹The Lord said to Moses, ¹²“I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel. So tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and every morning you will eat all the bread you want. Then you will know I am the Lord your God.’”

¹³That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. ¹⁴When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost were on the desert ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they asked each other, “What is it?” because they did not know what it was.

So Moses told them, “This is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. ¹⁶The Lord has commanded, ‘Each one of you must gather what he needs, about two quarts for every person in your family.’”

¹⁷So the people of Israel did this; some people gathered much, and some gathered little. ¹⁸Then they measured it. The person who gathered more did not have too much, nor did the person who gathered less have too little. Each person gathered just as much as he needed.

¹⁹Moses said to them, “Don’t keep any of it to eat the next day.” ²⁰But some of the people did not listen to Moses and kept part of it to eat the next morning. It became full of worms and began to stink, so Moses was angry with those people.

²¹Every morning each person gathered as much food as he needed, but when the sun became hot, it melted away.

²²On the sixth day the people gathered twice as much food—four quarts for every person. When all the leaders of the

community came and told this to Moses, ²³he said to them, “This is what the Lord commanded, because tomorrow is the Sabbath, the Lord’s holy day of rest. Bake what you want to bake, and boil what you want to boil today. Save the rest of the food until tomorrow morning.”

²⁴So the people saved it until the next morning, as Moses had commanded, and none of it began to stink or have worms in it. ²⁵Moses told the people, “Eat the food you gathered yesterday. Today is a Sabbath, the Lord’s day of rest; you will not find any out in the field today. ²⁶You should gather the food for six days, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day. On that day there will not be any food on the ground.”

²⁷On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather food, but they couldn’t find any. ²⁸Then the Lord said to Moses, “How long will you people refuse to obey my commands and teachings? ²⁹Look, the Lord has made the Sabbath a day of rest for you. So on the sixth day he will give you enough food for two days, but on the seventh day each of you must stay where you are. Do not go anywhere.” ³⁰So the people rested on the seventh day.

³¹The people of Israel called the food manna. It was like small white seeds and tasted like wafers made with honey.

³²Then Moses said, “The Lord said, ‘Save two quarts of this food for your descendants. Then they can see the food I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt.’”

³³Moses told Aaron, “Take a jar and fill it with two quarts of manna. Then place it before the Lord, and save it for your descendants.” ³⁴So Aaron did what the Lord had commanded Moses. He put the jar of manna in front of the Agreement to

keep it safe.³⁵The Israelites ate manna for forty years, until they came to the land where they settled—the edge of the land of Canaan.³⁶The measure they used for the manna was two quarts, or one-tenth of an [ephah](#).

Water from a Rock

The whole Israelite community left the Desert of Sin and traveled from place to place, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water there for the people to drink. ²So they quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.”

Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why are you testing the Lord?”

³But the people were very thirsty for water, so they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Was it to kill us, our children, and our farm animals with thirst?”

⁴So Moses cried to the Lord, “What can I do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me to death.”

⁵The Lord said to Moses, “Go ahead of the people, and take some of the older leaders of Israel with you. Carry with you the walking stick that you used to strike the Nile River. Now go! ⁶I will stand in front of you on a rock at Mount Sinai. Hit that rock with the stick, and water will come out of it so that the people can drink.” Moses did these things as the older leaders of Israel watched. ⁷He named that place [Massah](#), because the Israelites tested the Lord when they asked, “Is the Lord with us or not?” He also named it [Meribah](#), because they quarreled.

Life Lessons

[Exodus 17:8–18:27](#)

Situation

The Amalekites, descendants from Esau, hated the Israelites. God gave Moses victory against this enemy. After the victory, Moses was visited by his father-in-law, Jethro.

Observation

Moses knew that the Israelites required God's help if they were going to survive the Amalekites' attack. Moses relied on God's power and gave him credit for victory. Both large and small challenges are opportunities to rely on God for strength.

Inspiration

He is also Jehovah-nissi, the Lord my banner. In the heat of battle, soldiers feared getting separated from their army. For that reason a banner was carried into the conflict, and if a fighter found himself alone, the raised flag would signal safety. When the Amalekites (the big bad guys) attacked the Israelites (the little good guys), Moses went up on the mountain and prayed. As long as his hands were up, the Israelites prevailed. But when his hands were down, the Amalekites won. Moses was no dummy—he kept his hands up. The Israelites won, the Amalekites ran, and Moses built an altar for God and chiseled a new name on a stone—Jehovah-nissi—the Lord my banner (see [Exodus 17:8–16](#)).

There are just a few of the names of God, which describe his character. Study them, for in a given day, you may need each one of them. Let me show you what I mean.

When you are confused about the future, go to your Jehovah-raah, your caring shepherd. When you

are anxious about provision, talk to Jehovah-jireh, the Lord who provides. Are your challenges too great? Seek the help of Jehovah-shalom, the Lord is peace. Is your body sick? Are your emotions weak? Jehovah-rophe, the Lord who heals you, will see you now. Do you feel like a soldier stranded behind enemy lines? Take refuge in Jehovah-nissi, the Lord my banner.

Meditating on the names of God reminds you of the character of God. Take these names and bury them in your heart. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Application

Meditate on the character of God by reviewing the names of God. Think about how each characteristic can provide you with ongoing strength and power.

Exploration

Names of God—[Genesis 22:8](#); [48:15](#); [Exodus 15:26](#); [17:8–16](#); [Judges 6:24](#).

The Amalekites Fight Israel

⁸At Rephidim the Amalekites came and fought the Israelites.

⁹So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some men and go and fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill, holding the walking stick of God in my hands.”

¹⁰Joshua obeyed Moses and went to fight the Amalekites, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went to the top of the hill. ¹¹As long as Moses held his hands up, the Israelites would win the fight, but when Moses put his hands down, the Amalekites would win. ¹²Later, when Moses’ arms became tired, the men put a large rock under him, and he sat on it. Then Aaron and Hur held up Moses’ hands—Aaron on one side and Hur on the other. They kept his hands steady until the sun went down.

¹³So Joshua defeated the Amalekites in this battle.

¹⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write about this battle in a book so people will remember. And be sure to tell Joshua, because I will completely destroy the Amalekites from the earth.”

¹⁵Then Moses built an altar and named it The Lord Is My Banner. ¹⁶Moses said, “I lifted my hands toward the Lord’s throne. The Lord will fight against the Amalekites forever.”

Jethro Visits Moses

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was the priest of Midian. He heard about everything that God had done for Moses and his people, the Israelites, and how the Lord had led the Israelites out of Egypt.² Now Moses had sent his wife Zipporah to Jethro, his father-in-law,³ along with his two sons. The first son was named [Gershom](#), because when he was born, Moses said, "I am a stranger in a foreign country."⁴ The other son was named [Eliezer](#), because when he was born, Moses said, "The God of my father is my help. He saved me from the king of Egypt."

⁵So Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Moses' wife and his two sons and went to Moses. He was camped in the desert near the mountain of God. ⁶Jethro had sent a message ahead to Moses that said, "I, Jethro, your father-in-law, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons."

⁷So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. After the two men asked about each other's health, they went into Moses' tent. ⁸Moses told his father-in-law everything the Lord had done to the king and the Egyptians to help Israel. He told about all the problems they had faced along the way and how the Lord had saved them.

⁹Jethro was very happy to hear all the good things the Lord had done for Israel when he had saved them from the Egyptians. ¹⁰He said, "Praise the Lord. He has saved you from the Egyptians and their king, and he has saved the people from the power of the Egyptians. ¹¹Now I know the Lord is greater

than all gods, because he did this to those who looked down on Israel.”¹²Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, gave a whole burnt offering and other sacrifices to God. Aaron and all the older leaders of Israel came to Moses’ father-in-law to eat the holy meal together before God.

¹³The next day Moses solved disagreements among the people, and the people stood around him from morning until night.¹⁴When Moses’ father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he asked, “What is all this you are doing for the people? Why are you the only one to solve disagreements? All the people are standing around you from morning until night!”

¹⁵Then Moses said to his father-in-law, “It is because the people come to me for God’s help in solving their disagreements.¹⁶When people have a disagreement, they come to me, and I decide who is right. I tell them God’s laws and teachings.”

¹⁷Moses’ father-in-law said to him, “You are not doing this right.¹⁸You and the people who come to you will get too tired. This is too much work for you; you can’t do it by yourself.¹⁹Now listen to me, and I will give you some advice. I want God to be with you. You must speak to God for the people and tell him about their disagreements.²⁰Warn them about the laws and teachings, and teach them the right way to live and what they should do.²¹But choose some capable men from among the people—men who respect God, who can be trusted, and who will not change their decisions for money. Make these men officers over the people, to rule over groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.²²Let these officers solve the disagreements among the people all the time. They can bring

the hard cases to you, but they can decide the simple cases themselves. That will make it easier for you, because they will share the work with you.²³ If you do this as God commands you, then you will be able to do your job, and all the people will go home with their disagreements solved.”

²⁴So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said.²⁵ He chose capable men from all the Israelites and made them leaders over the people; they were officers over groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.²⁶ These officers solved disagreements among the people all the time. They brought the hard cases to Moses, but they decided the simple cases themselves.

²⁷So Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro went back to his own home.

Life Lessons

Exodus 19:1–25

Situation

After God rescued the Israelites from the Egyptians, he led them into the Sinai Desert. Only God was able to keep them alive. He fed them and took care of them. Then God called for a huge prayer meeting, where he would come down to Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

Observation

When they needed him the most, God revealed his presence.

Inspiration

Why do all those great stories of miraculous answers to prayer come from African villages or obscure Chinese provinces? Why does it appear that God is visibly active only in the mission field? A skeptic may assume that providential drama gets added as the stories are passed along from hinterland to American Sunday school. A bigger reason, I think, is that God is most active when we are reaching out most. He stretches out when we stretch out.

Think about the classic examples. Why did George Müller report a book full of answers to specific prayer in complacent Victorian England? He was seeking to meet the needs of two thousand orphans. Why could Hudson Taylor in remotest China report such inspiring experiences about receiving just the funds or personnel needed without

ever making an appeal to any human being? He was stretching out to share the gospel where it had not been shared before. Why did God's smuggler, Brother Andrew, have such an abundance of dramatic responses to his petitions? He was given completely to a mission: taking Bibles behind the iron curtain. God is most active in the thick of it. (From *If Only God Would Answer* by Steven Mosley)

Application

Over what situation in your life do you feel you have lost control? When you stop trying to run your life in your own strength, you are ready to witness God's power. Watch how he comes through for you.

Exploration

God Provides—[Genesis 22:8, 14](#); [Psalms 68:10](#); [Isaiah 43:20](#); [Jonah 1:17](#); [4:6-8](#).

Israel Camps at Sinai

Exactly three months after the Israelites had left Egypt, they reached the Desert of Sinai. ²When they left Rephidim, they came to the Desert of Sinai and camped in the desert in front of the mountain. ³Then Moses went up on the mountain to God. The Lord called to him from the mountain and said, “Say this to the family of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ⁴‘Every one of you has seen what I did to the people of Egypt. You saw how I carried you out of Egypt, as if on eagle’s wings. And I brought you here to me. ⁵So now if you obey me and keep my agreement, you will be my own possession, chosen from all nations. Even though the whole earth is mine, ⁶you will be my kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ You must tell the Israelites these words.”

⁷So Moses went down and called the older leaders of the people together. He told them all the words the Lord had commanded him to say. ⁸All the people answered together, “We will do everything he has said.” Then Moses took their answer back to the Lord.

⁹And the Lord said to Moses, “I will come to you in a thick cloud and speak to you. The people will hear me speaking with you and will always trust you.” Then Moses told the Lord what the people had said.

¹⁰The Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and have them spend today and tomorrow preparing themselves. They must

wash their clothes ¹¹and be ready by the day after tomorrow. On that day I, the Lord, will come down on Mount Sinai, and all the people will see me. ¹²But you must set a limit around the mountain that the people are not to cross. Tell them not to go up on the mountain and not to touch the foot of it. Anyone who touches the mountain must be put to death ¹³with stones or shot with arrows. No one is allowed to touch him. Whether it is a person or an animal, he will not live. But the trumpet will make a long blast, and only then may the people go up on the mountain.”

¹⁴After Moses went down from the mountain to the people, he made them prepare themselves for service to God, and they washed their clothes. ¹⁵Then Moses said to the people, “Be ready in three days. Do not have sexual relations during this time.”

¹⁶On the morning of the third day, there was thunder and lightning with a thick cloud on the mountain. There was a very loud blast from a trumpet, and all the people in the camp trembled. ¹⁷Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord came down on it in fire. The smoke rose from the mountain like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain shook wildly. ¹⁹The sound from the trumpet became louder. Then Moses spoke, and the voice of God answered him.

²⁰When the Lord came down on top of Mount Sinai, he called Moses to come up to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. ²¹The Lord said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people that they must not force their way through to see me. If they do, many of them will die. ²²Even the priests, who

may come near me, must first prepare themselves. If they don't, I, the Lord, will punish them."

²³Moses told the Lord, "The people cannot come up on Mount Sinai, because you yourself told us, 'Set a limit around the mountain, and set it apart as holy.'"

²⁴The Lord said to him, "Go down and bring Aaron up with you, but don't allow the priests or the people to force their way through. They must not come up to the Lord, or I will punish them."

²⁵So Moses went down to the people and told them these things.

The Ten Commandments

Then God spoke all these words: ²“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt where you were slaves.

³“You must not have any other gods except me.

⁴“You must not make for yourselves an idol that looks like anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the water below the land. ⁵You must not worship or serve any idol, because I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. If you hate me, I will punish your children, and even your grandchildren and great-grandchildren. ⁶But I show kindness to thousands who love me and obey my commands.

⁷“You must not use the name of the Lord your God thoughtlessly; the Lord will punish anyone who misuses his name.

⁸“Remember to keep the Sabbath holy. ⁹Work and get everything done during six days each week, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a day of rest to honor the Lord your God. On that day no one may do any work: not you, your son or daughter, your male or female slaves, your animals, or the foreigners living in your cities. ¹¹The reason is that in six days the Lord made everything—the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. On the seventh day he rested. So the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

¹²“Honor your father and your mother so that you will live a long time in the land that the Lord your God is going to give you.

¹³“You must not murder anyone.

¹⁴“You must not be guilty of adultery.

¹⁵“You must not steal.

¹⁶“You must not tell lies about your neighbor.

¹⁷“You must not want to take your neighbor’s house. You must not want his wife or his male or female slaves, or his ox or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

¹⁸When the people heard the thunder and the trumpet, and when they saw the lightning and the smoke rising from the mountain, they shook with fear and stood far away from the mountain. ¹⁹Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself, and we will listen. But don’t let God speak to us, or we will die.”

²⁰Then Moses said to the people, “Don’t be afraid, because God has come to test you. He wants you to respect him so you will not sin.”

²¹The people stood far away from the mountain while Moses went near the dark cloud where God was. ²²Then the Lord told Moses to say these things to the Israelites: “You yourselves have seen that I talked with you from heaven. ²³You must not use gold or silver to make idols for yourselves; do not worship these gods in addition to me.

²⁴“Make an altar of dirt for me, and sacrifice on it your whole burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and your cattle. Worship me in every place that I choose, and I will come and bless you. ²⁵If you use stones to make an altar for me, don’t use stones that you have shaped with tools. When you use any tools on them, you make them unsuitable for use in worship. ²⁶And you must not go up to my altar on steps, or people will be able to see under your clothes.”

Life Lessons

Exodus 20:1–26

Situation

God formed a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. The Ten Commandments changed history, giving us timeless truths and clear moral standards.

Observation

God demands total devotion. The Ten Commandments govern the relationship between God and those who love him.

Inspiration

Only 297 words are required to sum up in English all of God's moral law in the Ten Commandments. God distilled it even more when He said, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" ([Matthew 22:37–39](#)). Only sixty-five words make up the definitive teaching on prayer—the Lord's prayer—in [Matthew 6:9–13](#).

Man doesn't have that capacity for essential brevity. There once was a government study to regulate the price of cabbage that ran over twenty-six thousand words!

Thank God for the provision of His profound Word.

(From *Truth for Today* by John MacArthur)

Application

Who has kept the Ten Commandments perfectly? To seek forgiveness, the Israelites offered animal

sacrifices. But God provided a better way through Jesus Christ's sacrifice.

Exploration

God's Law—[Psalm 119:12–24](#); [Matthew 5:17–19](#);
[Luke 16:16–17](#); [1 John 3:19–24](#).

Laws for Living

Then God said to Moses, “These are the laws for living that you will give to the Israelites:

²“If you buy a Hebrew slave, he will serve you for six years. In the seventh year you are to set him free, and he will have to pay nothing. ³If he is not married when he becomes your slave, he must leave without a wife. But if he is married when he becomes your slave, he may take his wife with him. ⁴If the slave’s master gives him a wife, and she gives birth to sons or daughters, the woman and her children will belong to the master. When the slave is set free, only he may leave.

⁵“But if the slave says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children, and I don’t want to go free,’ ⁶then the slave’s master must take him to God. The master is to take him to a door or doorframe and punch a hole through the slave’s ear using a sharp tool. Then the slave will serve that master all his life.

⁷“If a man sells his daughter as a slave, the rules for setting her free are different from the rules for setting the male slaves free. ⁸If the master wanted to marry her but then decided he was not pleased with her, he must let one of her close relatives buy her back. He has no right to sell her to foreigners, because he has treated her unfairly. ⁹If the man who bought her promises to let the woman marry his son, he must treat her as a daughter. ¹⁰If the man who bought her marries another woman, he must not keep his first wife from having food or clothing or sexual relations. ¹¹If he does not give her these three things, she may go free, and she owes him no money.

Laws About Injuries

¹²“Anyone who hits a person and kills him must be put to death. ¹³But if a person kills someone accidentally, God allowed that to happen, so the person must go to a place I will choose. ¹⁴But if someone plans and murders another person on purpose, put him to death, even if he has run to my altar for safety.

¹⁵“Anyone who hits his father or his mother must be put to death.

¹⁶“Anyone who kidnaps someone and either sells him as a slave or still has him when he is caught must be put to death.

¹⁷“Anyone who says cruel things to his father or mother must be put to death.

¹⁸“If two men argue, and one hits the other with a rock or with his fist, the one who is hurt but not killed might have to stay in bed. ¹⁹Later if he is able to get up and walk around outside with his walking stick, the one who hit him is not to be punished. But he must pay the injured man for the loss of his time, and he must support the injured man until he is completely healed.

²⁰“If a man beats his male or female slave with a stick, and the slave dies on the spot, the owner must be punished. ²¹But if the slave gets well after a day or two, the owner will not be punished since the slave belongs to him.

²²“Suppose two men are fighting and hit a pregnant woman, causing the baby to come out. If there is no further injury, the man who caused the accident must pay money—whatever amount the woman’s husband says and the court allows. ²³But if there is further injury, then the punishment that must be paid

is life for life, ²⁴eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵burn for burn, wound for wound, and bruise for bruise.

²⁶“If a man hits his male or female slave in the eye, and the eye is blinded, the man is to free the slave to pay for the eye.

²⁷If a master knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, the man is to free the slave to pay for the tooth.

²⁸“If a man’s bull kills a man or woman, you must kill that bull by throwing stones at it, and you should not eat the bull. But the owner of the bull is not guilty. ²⁹However, suppose the bull has hurt people in the past and the owner, though warned, did not keep it in a pen. Then if it kills a man or woman, the bull must be stoned to death, and the owner must also be put to death. ³⁰But if the family of the dead person accepts money, the one who owned the bull may buy back his life, but he must pay whatever is demanded. ³¹Use this same law if the bull kills a person’s son or daughter. ³²If the bull kills a male or female slave, the owner must pay the master the price for a new slave, or twelve ounces of silver, and the bull must also be stoned to death.

³³“If a man takes the cover off a pit, or digs a pit and does not cover it, and another man’s ox or donkey comes and falls into it, ³⁴the owner of the pit must pay the owner of the animal for the loss. The dead animal will belong to the one who pays.

³⁵“If a man’s bull kills another man’s bull, they must sell the bull that is alive. Both men will get half of the money and half of the bull that was killed. ³⁶But if a person’s bull has hurt other animals in the past and the owner did not keep it in a pen, that owner must pay bull for bull, and the dead animal is his.

Life Lessons

Exodus 21:1–22:31

Situation

After giving the Ten Commandments, God showed his people how to apply them in everyday matters. This section talks about worship, the care of servants and those physically injured, slaves, thieves, property and morality.

Observation

God provides guidelines for his people so their moral life will be pleasing to him.

Inspiration

Holiness doesn't seek to be odd. Holiness seeks to be like God.

You want to make a difference in your world? Live a holy life: Be faithful to your spouse. Be the one at the office who refuses to cheat. Be the neighbor who acts neighborly. Be the employee who does the work and doesn't complain. Pay your bills. Do your part and enjoy life. Don't speak one message and live another.

Note the last line of Paul's words in [1 Thessalonians 4:11–12](#): "Do all you can to live a peaceful life. Take care of your own business, and do your own work as we have already told you. If you do, then people who are not believers will respect you."

A peaceful life leads nonbelievers to respect believers. What if John [the Baptist's] life had not

matched his words? What if he'd preached repentance and lived in immorality? What if he'd called for holiness and yet had a reputation for dishonesty? If John's life had not matched his words, his message would have fallen on deaf ears.

So will ours.

People are watching the way we act more than they are listening to what we say.

Saint Francis of Assisi once invited a young monk to accompany him to town to preach. The novice was honored at the opportunity. The two set out for the city, then walked up and down the main street, then several side streets. They chatted with peddlers and greeted the citizens. After some time they returned by another route to the abbey.

The younger man reminded Francis of his original intent. "You have forgotten, Father, that we went to town to preach."

"My son," he replied, "we have preached. We have been seen by many. Our behavior was closely watched. Our attitudes were closely measured. Our words have been overheard. It was by thus that we preached our morning sermon." (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do a self-examination: Do the moral guidelines that God gives you make a difference in your behavior? In your relationships with friends and acquaintances? Does your life match your words?

Exploration

Righteousness—[Psalm 1](#); [Matthew 5:17–20](#); [15:1–](#)

11; Romans 13:10; James 1:19–27.

Property Laws

“If a man steals a bull or a sheep and kills or sells it, he must pay back five bulls for the one bull he stole and four sheep for the one sheep he stole.

²⁻⁴“The robber who is caught must pay back what he stole. If he owns nothing, he must be sold as a slave to pay for what he stole. If the stolen animal is found alive with the robber, he must give the owner two animals for every animal he stole, whether it was a bull, donkey, or sheep.

“If a thief is killed while breaking into a house at night, the one who killed him is not guilty of murder. But if this happens during the day, he is guilty of murder.

⁵“If a man lets his farm animal graze in his field or vineyard, and it wanders into another man’s field or vineyard, the owner of the animal must pay back the loss from the best of his crop.

⁶“Suppose a man starts a fire that spreads through the thornbushes to his neighbor’s field. If the fire burns his neighbor’s growing grain or grain that has been stacked, or if it burns his whole field, the person who started the fire must pay for what was burned.

⁷“Suppose a man gives his neighbor money or other things to keep for him and those things are stolen from the neighbor’s house. If the thief is caught, he must pay back twice as much as he stole. ⁸But if the thief is never found, the owner of the house must make a promise before God that he has not stolen

his neighbor's things.

⁹“Suppose two men disagree about who owns something—whether ox, donkey, sheep, clothing, or something else that is lost. If each says, ‘This is mine,’ each man must bring his case to God. God’s judges will decide who is guilty, and that person must pay the other man twice as much as the object is worth.

¹⁰“Suppose a man asks his neighbor to keep his donkey, ox, sheep, or some other animal for him, and that animal dies, gets hurt, or is taken away, without anyone seeing what happened.

¹¹That neighbor must promise before the Lord that he did not harm or kill the other man’s animal, and the owner of the animal must accept his promise made before God. The neighbor does not have to pay the owner for the animal. ¹²But if the animal was stolen from the neighbor, he must pay the owner for it. ¹³If wild animals killed it, the neighbor must bring the body as proof, and he will not have to pay for the animal that was killed.

¹⁴“If a man borrows an animal from his neighbor, and it gets hurt or dies while the owner is not there, the one who borrowed it must pay the owner for the animal. ¹⁵But if the owner is with the animal, the one who borrowed it does not have to pay. If the animal was rented, the rental price covers the loss.

Laws and Relationships

¹⁶“Suppose a man finds a woman who is not pledged to be married and has never had sexual relations with a man. If he tricks her into having sexual relations with him, he must give her family the payment to marry her, and she will become his wife. ¹⁷But if her father refuses to allow his daughter to marry him, the man must still give the usual payment for a bride who

has never had sexual relations.

¹⁸“Put to death any woman who does evil magic.

¹⁹“Put to death anyone who has sexual relations with an animal.

²⁰“Destroy completely any person who makes a sacrifice to any god except the Lord.

²¹“Do not cheat or hurt a foreigner, because you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.

²²“Do not cheat a widow or an orphan. ²³If you do, and they cry out to me for help, I certainly will hear their cry. ²⁴And I will be very angry and kill you in war. Then your wives will become widows, and your children will become orphans.

²⁵“If you lend money to one of my people who is poor, do not treat him as a moneylender would. Charge him nothing for using your money. ²⁶If your neighbor gives you his coat as a promise for the money he owes you, you must give it back to him by sunset, ²⁷because it is the only cover to keep his body warm. He has nothing else to sleep in. If he cries out to me for help, I will listen, because I am merciful.

²⁸“You must not speak against God or curse a leader of your people.

²⁹“Do not hold back your offering from the first of your harvest and the first wine that you make. Also, you must give me your firstborn sons. ³⁰You must do the same with your bulls and your sheep. Let the firstborn males stay with their mothers for seven days, and on the eighth day you must give them to me.

³¹“You are to be my holy people. You must not eat the meat of any animal that has been killed by wild animals. Instead, give it to the dogs.

Laws About Fairness

“You must not tell lies. If you are a witness in court, don’t help a wicked person by telling lies.

²“You must not do wrong just because everyone else is doing it. If you are a witness in court, you must not ruin a fair trial. You must not tell lies just because everyone else is. ³If a poor person is in court, you must not take his side just because he is poor.

⁴“If you see your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering away, you must return it to him. ⁵If you see that your enemy’s donkey has fallen because its load is too heavy, do not leave it there. You must help your enemy get the donkey back on its feet.

⁶“You must not be unfair to a poor person when he is in court. ⁷You must not lie when you accuse someone in court. Never allow an innocent or honest person to be put to death as punishment, because I will not treat guilty people as if they were innocent.

⁸“You must not accept money from a person who wants you to lie in court, because such money will not let you see what is right. Such money makes good people tell lies.

⁹“You must not mistreat a foreigner. You know how it feels to be a foreigner, because you were foreigners in Egypt.

Laws for the Sabbath

¹⁰“For six years you are to plant and harvest crops on your land. ¹¹Then during the seventh year, do not plow or plant your

land. If any food grows there, allow the poor people to have it, and let the wild animals eat what is left. You should do the same with your vineyards and your orchards of olive trees.

¹²“You should work six days a week, but on the seventh day you must rest. This lets your ox and your donkey rest, and it also lets the slave born in your house and the foreigner be refreshed.

¹³“Be sure to do all that I have said to you. You must not even say the names of other gods; those names must not come out of your mouth.

Three Yearly Feasts

¹⁴“Three times each year you must hold a feast to honor me.

¹⁵You must celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the way I commanded you. For seven days you must eat bread that is made without yeast at the set time during the month of Abib, the month when you came out of Egypt. No one is to come to worship me without bringing an offering.

¹⁶“You must celebrate the Feast of Weeks. Offer to God the first things you harvest from the crops you planted in your fields.

“You must celebrate the Feast of Shelters in the fall, when you gather all the crops from your fields.

¹⁷“So three times during every year all your males must come to worship the Lord God.

¹⁸“You must not offer animal blood along with anything that has yeast in it.

“You must not save any of the fat from the sacrifice for the next day.

¹⁹“You must bring the best of the firstfruits of your land to the [Holy Tent](#) of the Lord your God.

“You must not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk.

God Will Help Israel

²⁰“I am sending an angel ahead of you, who will protect you as you travel. He will lead you to the place I have prepared. ²¹Pay attention to the angel and obey him. Do not turn against him; he will not forgive such turning against him because my power is in him. ²²If you listen carefully to all he says and do everything that I tell you, I will be an enemy to your enemies. I will fight all who fight against you. ²³My angel will go ahead of you and take you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites, and I will destroy them.

²⁴“You must not bow down to their gods or worship them. You must not live the way those people live. You must destroy their idols, breaking into pieces the stone pillars they use in worship. ²⁵If you worship the Lord your God, I will bless your bread and your water. I will take away sickness from you. ²⁶None of your women will have her baby die before it is born, and all women will have children. I will allow you to live long lives.

²⁷“I will make your enemies afraid of me. I will confuse any people you fight against, and I will make all your enemies run away from you. ²⁸I will send terror ahead of you that will force the Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites out of your way. ²⁹But I will not force all those people out in only one year. If I did, the land would become a desert and the wild animals would

become too many for you.³⁰ Instead, I will force those people out slowly, until there are enough of you to take over the land.

³¹“I will give you the land from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the desert to the Euphrates River. I will give you power over the people who now live in the land, and you will force them out ahead of you.³² You must not make an agreement with those people or with their gods.³³ You must not let them live in your land, or they will make you sin against me. If you worship their gods, you will be caught in a trap.”

Life Lessons

Exodus 23:1–24:18

Situation

God gave the Israelites guidelines for their relationships with each other and with him. These guidelines set Israel apart from the other nations. God also gave a special ceremony that confirmed the agreement between God and his people. In the ceremony blood from animals symbolized forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God.

Observation

God’s people ought to obey the standards that God lays out. One part of this is remembering their special relationship with him.

Inspiration

The Bible makes clear ... that unquestioning acceptance of and obedience to Jesus’ authority is the foundation of the Christian life. Everything else rests upon this. It also provides the key to understanding what is for many the great mystery of

Christianity: faith.

Saving faith—that by which we are justified, made right with God—is a gift of God; and, yes, it involves a rational process as well since it comes from hearing the Word of God... . “All right,” the struggling Christian may say, “but practically speaking, how does my faith become real? How do I get that vibrant, strong faith of Christian maturity?”

That’s where obedience comes in. For maturing faith—faith which deepens and grows as we live our Christian life—is not just knowledge, but knowledge acted upon. It is not just belief, but belief lived out—practiced. James said we are to be doers of the Word, not just hearers. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor martyred in a Nazi concentration camp, succinctly stated this crucial interrelationship: “Only he who believes is obedient; only he who is obedient believes.”

This may sound like a circular proposition, but many things are—in truth and in practice. Think of learning how to swim. We are told what to do. We gingerly enter the water, launch out, and promptly forget everything we’ve been told. We flail about, splashing frantically, gasping and sinking. Finally, usually at the point of utter despair, we capture for a moment the sensation of staying afloat. Realizing it is possible, we remember our instructions and begin to follow them. They work. Like learning to balance a bicycle or mastering a foreign language, faith is a state of mind that grows out of our actions, just as it governs them.

So obedience is the key to real faith. (From *Loving God* by Charles Colson)

Application

God makes several agreements with his people throughout the Bible, concluding with a new covenant in Christ. Communion reminds us that in this covenant, God forgives our sins through Christ. When you participate in communion, do not participate lightly. Be humbled by God's grace to you.

Exploration

Guidance of Holy Spirit—[1 Kings 18:12](#); [Psalms 143:10](#); [Isaiah 48:16](#); [63:14](#); [John 16:13](#); [Acts 16:6-7](#); [Romans 8:14](#).

God and Israel Make Their Agreement

The Lord told Moses, “You, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the older leaders of Israel must come up to me and worship me from a distance.² Then Moses alone must come near me; the others must not come near. The rest of the people must not come up the mountain with Moses.”

³Moses told the people all the Lord’s words and laws for living. Then all of the people answered out loud together, “We will do all the things the Lord has said.”⁴ So Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. And he got up early the next morning and built an altar near the bottom of the mountain. He set up twelve stones, one stone for each of the twelve tribes of Israel.⁵ Then Moses sent young Israelite men to offer whole burnt offerings and to sacrifice young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord.⁶ Moses put half of the blood of these animals in bowls, and he sprinkled the other half of the blood on the altar.⁷ Then he took the Book of the Agreement and read it so the people could hear him. And they said, “We will do everything that the Lord has said; we will obey.”

⁸Then Moses took the blood from the bowls and sprinkled it on the people, saying, “This is the blood that begins the Agreement, the Agreement which the Lord has made with you about all these words.”

⁹Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the older leaders of Israel went up the mountain¹⁰ and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was a surface that looked as if it were paved with blue sapphire stones, and it was as clear as the sky!

¹¹These leaders of the Israelites saw God, but God did not destroy them. Then they ate and drank together.

God Promises Moses the Stone Tablets

¹²The Lord said to Moses, “Come up the mountain to me. Wait there, and I will give you two stone tablets. On these are the teachings and the commands I have written to instruct the people.”

¹³So Moses and his helper Joshua set out, and Moses went up to Sinai, the mountain of God. ¹⁴Moses said to the older leaders, “Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone who has a disagreement with others can take it to them.”

Moses Meets with God

¹⁵When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it.

¹⁶The glory of the Lord came down on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from inside the cloud. ¹⁷To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a fire burning on top of the mountain. ¹⁸Then Moses went into the cloud and went higher up the mountain. He was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

Life Lessons

Exodus 25:1–27:21

Situation

God provided precise instructions for building the Holy Tent. Detailed instructions for making the Ark, the table, and the lampstand demonstrated his transcendence above the common everyday features of the world. The Ark's portable nature represented God's desire to be with the Israelites wherever they traveled.

Observation

Throughout the Bible, God provides ways for his people to have fellowship with him.

Inspiration

We stream to the fellowship of our church to worship; there in that place, at that mountain of God, we are built up, established, equipped, encouraged, challenged....

I know that when I'm among the assembled people that God is here in our midst. The King is here seeking to rule in our hearts right now. So this concept that where two or three are gathered, there He is in our midst is a powerful truth. It challenges us because sometimes when we gather for worship, we simply go through the motions. I know I've done that a number of times, and others have told me they have done the same. But I remind myself and others that whenever the people of God gather in a theater, in an arena, or in a church for worship, God is there.

That's why I often say in an opening prayer "Lord, we don't take lightly the fact that You're here." I don't want to come into the presence of the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Creator and Redeemer of the universe in a nonchalant, casual, and impertinent way. No, I want to come before God in all humility recognizing I am a mere creature and He is holiness. He is the Creator. (From *In This Sanctuary* by Twila Paris)

Application

The diligence and care with which the Israelites built the Holy Tent demonstrated their reverence for God. How do you show your reverence for him? Make your life a pure temple of faith that honors God in every action. What can you do today to tell God, "I want to honor you in all my plans"?

Exploration

Reverence—[Psalm 34:9](#); [Proverbs 1:7](#); [8:13](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:13](#); [1 Peter 1:17](#).

Gifts for the Lord

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Tell the Israelites to bring me gifts. Receive for me the gifts each person wants to give. ³These are the gifts that you should receive from them: gold, silver, bronze; ⁴blue, purple, and red thread; fine linen, goat hair, ⁵sheepskins that are dyed red; fine leather; acacia wood; ⁶olive oil to burn in the lamps; spices for sweet-smelling incense, and the special olive oil poured on a person’s head to make him a priest; ⁷onyx stones, and other jewels to be put on the holy vest and the chest covering.

⁸“The people must build a holy place for me so that I can live among them. ⁹Build this Holy Tent and everything in it by the plan I will show you.

The Ark of the Agreement

¹⁰“Use acacia wood and build an Ark forty-five inches long, twenty-seven inches wide, and twenty-seven inches high. ¹¹Cover the Ark inside and out with pure gold, and put a gold strip all around it. ¹²Make four gold rings for the Ark and attach them to its four feet, two rings on each side. ¹³Then make poles from acacia wood and cover them with gold. ¹⁴Put the poles through the rings on the sides of the Ark, and use these poles to carry it. ¹⁵These poles must always stay in the rings of the

Ark. Do not take them out.¹⁶Then put in the Ark the Agreement which I will make with you.

¹⁷“Then make a lid of pure gold for the Ark; this is the mercy seat. Make it forty-five inches long and twenty-seven inches wide.¹⁸Then hammer gold to make two creatures with wings, and put one on each end of the lid.¹⁹Attach one creature on one end of the lid and the other creature on the other end. Make them to be one piece with the lid at the ends.²⁰The creatures’ wings should be spread upward, covering the lid, and the creatures are to face each other across the lid.²¹Put this lid on top of the Ark, and put in the Ark the Agreement which I will make with you.²²I will meet with you there, above the lid between the two winged creatures on the Ark of the Agreement. There I will give you all my commands for the Israelites.

The Table

²³“Make a table out of acacia wood, thirty-six inches long, eighteen inches wide, and twenty-seven inches high.²⁴Cover it with pure gold, and put a gold strip around it.²⁵Make a frame three inches high that stands up all around the edge, and put a gold strip around it.²⁶Then make four gold rings. Attach them to the four corners of the table where the four legs are.²⁷Put the rings close to the frame around the top of the table, because they will hold the poles for carrying it.²⁸Make the poles out of acacia wood, cover them with gold, and carry the table with these poles.²⁹Make the plates and bowls for the table, as well as the jars and cups, out of pure gold. They will be used for pouring out the drink offerings.³⁰On this table put

the bread that shows you are in my presence so that it is always there in front of me.

The Lampstand

³¹“Hammer pure gold to make a lampstand. Its base, stand, flower-like cups, buds, and petals must all be joined together in one piece. ³²The lampstand must have six branches going out from its sides—three on one side and three on the other. ³³Each branch must have three cups shaped like almond flowers on it. Each cup must have a bud and a petal. Each of the six branches going out from the lampstand must be the same. ³⁴And there must be four more cups made like almond flowers on the lampstand itself. These cups must also have buds and petals. ³⁵Put a bud under each pair of branches that goes out from the lampstand. Each of the six branches going out from the lampstand must be the same. ³⁶The branches, buds, and lampstand must be made of one piece, hammered out of pure gold.

³⁷“Then make seven small oil lamps and put them on the lampstand so that they give light to the area in front of it. ³⁸The wick trimmers and trays must be made of pure gold. ³⁹Use seventy-five pounds of pure gold to make the lampstand and everything with it. ⁴⁰Be very careful to make them by the plan I showed you on the mountain.

The Holy Tent

“Make for the Holy Tent ten curtains of fine linen and blue, purple, and red thread. Have a skilled craftsman sew designs of creatures with wings on the pieces of cloth. ²Make each curtain the same size—forty-two feet long and six feet wide. ³Sew five curtains together for one set, and sew the other curtains together for the second set. ⁴Make loops of blue cloth on the edge of the end curtain of one set, and do the same for the end curtain of the other set. ⁵Make fifty loops on the end curtain of the first set and fifty loops on the end curtain of the second set. These loops must be opposite each other. ⁶And make fifty gold hooks to join the two sets of curtains so that the Holy Tent is one piece.

⁷“Then make another tent that will cover the Holy Tent, using eleven curtains made from goat hair. ⁸All these curtains must be the same size—forty-five feet long and six feet wide. ⁹Sew five of the curtains together into one set. Then sew the other six curtains together into the second set. Fold the sixth curtain double over the front of the Tent. ¹⁰Make fifty loops down the edge of the end curtain of one set, and do the same for the end curtain of the other set. ¹¹Then make fifty bronze hooks and put them in the loops to join the tent together so that the covering is one piece. ¹²Let the extra half piece of cloth hang over the back of the Holy Tent. ¹³There will be eighteen inches hanging over the sides of the Holy Tent, to protect it. ¹⁴Make a covering for the Holy Tent from sheepskins colored red, and over that make a covering from fine leather.

¹⁵“Use acacia wood to make upright frames for the Holy Tent. ¹⁶Each frame must be fifteen feet long and twenty-seven inches wide, ¹⁷with two pegs side by side. Every frame must be made the same way. ¹⁸Make twenty frames for the south side of the Holy Tent. ¹⁹Each frame must have two silver bases to go under it, a peg fitting into each base. You must make forty silver bases for the frames. ²⁰Make twenty more frames for the north side of the Holy Tent ²¹and forty silver bases for them—two bases for each frame. ²²You must make six frames for the rear or west end of the Holy Tent ²³and two frames for each corner at the rear. ²⁴The two frames are to be doubled at the bottom and joined at the top with a metal ring. Both corner frames must be made this way. ²⁵So there will be a total of eight frames at the rear of the Tent, and there will be sixteen silver bases—two bases under each frame.

²⁶“Make crossbars of acacia wood to connect the upright frames of the Holy Tent. Make five crossbars to hold the frames together on one side ²⁷and five to hold the frames together on the other side. Also make five crossbars to hold the frames together on the west end, at the rear. ²⁸The middle crossbar is to be set halfway up the frames, and it is to run along the entire length of each side and rear. ²⁹Make gold rings on the sides of the frames to hold the crossbars, and cover the frames and the crossbars with gold. ³⁰Set up the Holy Tent by the plan shown to you on the mountain.

³¹“Make a curtain of fine linen and blue, purple, and red thread, and have a skilled craftsman sew designs of creatures with wings on it. ³²Hang the curtain by gold hooks on four posts of acacia wood that are covered with gold, and set them in four silver bases. ³³Hang the curtain from the hooks in the

roof, and put the Ark of the Agreement containing the two stone tablets behind it. This curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. ³⁴Put the lid on the Ark of the Agreement in the Most Holy Place.

³⁵“Outside the curtain, put the table on the north side of the Holy Tent. Put the lampstand on the south side of the Holy Tent across from the table.

The Entrance of the Holy Tent

³⁶“Then, for the entrance of the Tent, make a curtain with fine linen and blue, purple, and red thread. Someone who can sew well is to sew designs on it. ³⁷Make five posts of acacia wood covered with gold. Make gold hooks for them on which to hang the curtain, and make five bronze bases for them.

The Altar for Burnt Offerings

¹“Make an altar of acacia wood, four and one-half feet high. It should be square—seven and one-half feet long and seven and one-half feet wide. ²Make each of the four corners of the altar stick out like a horn, in such a way that the corners with their horns are all one piece. Then cover the whole altar with bronze.

³“Use bronze to make all the tools and dishes that will be used on the altar: the pots to remove the ashes, the shovels, the bowls for sprinkling blood, the meat forks, and the pans for carrying the burning wood.

⁴“Make a large bronze screen to hold the burning wood, and put a bronze ring at each of the four corners of it. ⁵Put the screen inside the altar, under its rim, halfway up from the bottom.

⁶“Make poles of acacia wood for the altar, and cover them with bronze. ⁷Put the poles through the rings on both sides of the altar to carry it. ⁸Make the altar out of boards and leave the inside hollow. Make it as you were shown on the mountain.

The Courtyard of the Holy Tent

⁹“Make a wall of curtains to form a courtyard around the Holy Tent. The south side should have a wall of fine linen curtains one hundred fifty feet long. ¹⁰Hang the curtains with silver hooks and bands on twenty bronze posts with twenty bronze bases. ¹¹The north side must also be one hundred fifty feet

long. Hang its curtains on silver hooks and bands on twenty bronze posts with twenty bronze bases.

¹²“The west end of the courtyard must have a wall of curtains seventy-five feet long, with ten posts and ten bases on that wall. ¹³The east end of the courtyard must also be seventy-five feet long. ¹⁴On one side of the entry, there is to be a wall of curtains twenty-two and one-half feet long, held up by three posts on three bases. ¹⁵On the other side of the entry, there is also to be a wall of curtains twenty-two and one-half feet long, held up by three posts on three bases.

¹⁶“The entry to the courtyard is to be a curtain thirty feet wide, made of fine linen with blue, purple, and red thread. Someone who can sew well is to sew designs on it. It is to be held up by four posts on four bases. ¹⁷All the posts around the courtyard must have silver bands and hooks and bronze bases. ¹⁸The courtyard must be one hundred fifty feet long and seventy-five feet wide, with a wall of curtains around it seven and one-half feet high, made of fine linen. The bases in which the posts are set must be bronze. ¹⁹All the things used in the Holy Tent and all the tent pegs for the Holy Tent and the wall around the courtyard must be made of bronze.

Oil for the Lamp

²⁰“Command the people of Israel to bring you pure olive oil, made from pressed olives, to keep the lamps on the lampstand burning. ²¹Aaron and his sons must keep the lamps burning before the Lord from evening till morning. This will be in the Meeting Tent, outside the curtain which is in front of the Ark. The Israelites and their descendants must obey this rule from

now on.

Life Lessons

Exodus 28:1–29:46

Situation

God instructed Aaron and his sons to become the first Temple priests. These priests ministered to the people's spiritual needs and represented them before God.

Observation

Priests became mediators between God and the people. The priest carried God's wisdom to the people and the people's needs to God.

Inspiration

Each of us must see ourselves as ministers of the gospel. We don't simply attend church, consuming a religious product. Rather, our whole understanding of ourselves as members of the Body is directed toward being equipped to serve effectively in our vocation and our community—wherever God places us.

Many Christians have a bifurcated view of life: Faith is over here in this compartment, and the rest of life—work, family, leisure time, and everything else—is over there.

Like the young woman who stopped me in an airport recently, “Mr. Colson, I so admire the work that Prison Fellowship is doing. I'm a believer; I wish that I could be in full-time Christian service like you.”

“What is it you do?” I asked.

“Well, I'm still in school,” she said. “I'm finishing up my doctoral work in molecular biology. I had

planned to teach full time. I love it. But lately I've realized I should do more for the Lord. My parents were missionaries. I'm thinking of going to Brazil as a missionary."

"You are in a tremendous position to be a missionary right where you are!" I said adamantly. "How many Christians are there who are molecular biologists? The university needs people like you!"

She looked relieved, even excited, as it sank in: She was a missionary right where she was.

There are thousands of Christians who suffer from this same kind of false understanding of the glory of vocation, and a parallel misunderstanding of how God places particular people in particular places in every arena to be salt and accomplish His preserving, flavoring purposes....

In seventeenth-century London, as Reformation thinking about the church's influences in society was making itself felt in the city, someone painted a billboard with a picture, among others, of a tailor, a cook, a porter, a blacksmith, and a saddle-maker. The inscription read: "These tradesmen are preachers in the city of London, 1647."

Who are the preachers of America ... ?

Each of us, as we infiltrate the arena in which God has placed us. (From *The Body* by Charles Colson)

Application

Because of Christ, we are all priests. How are you ministering to others? Pray with someone, find a way to encourage them. Be on the alert should God bring someone along your path today. Don't get so caught

up in your agenda that you miss the needs in front of you.

Exploration

Priests—[Exodus 19:4–6](#); [1 Chronicles 23:28–32](#);
[John 16:23–27](#).

The blood of Christ does not cover your sins, conceal your sins, postpone your sins, or diminish your sins. It takes away your sins, once and for all time. —Max Lucado (*He Chose the Nails*)

Clothes for the Priests

“Tell your brother Aaron to come to you, along with his sons Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Separate them from the other Israelites to serve me as priests.² Make holy clothes for your brother Aaron to give him honor and beauty.³ Tell all the skilled craftsmen to whom I have given wisdom to make special clothes for Aaron—clothes to show that he belongs to me so that he may serve me as a priest.⁴ These are the clothes they must make: a chest covering, a holy vest, an outer robe, a woven inner robe, a turban, and a cloth belt. The craftsmen must make these holy clothes for your brother Aaron and his sons. Then they may serve me as priests.⁵ The craftsmen must use gold and blue, purple and red thread, and fine linen.

The Holy Vest

⁶“Use gold and blue, purple and red thread, and fine linen to make the holy vest; skilled craftsmen are to make it.⁷ At each top corner of this holy vest there will be a pair of shoulder straps tied together over each shoulder.

⁸“The craftsmen will very carefully weave a belt on the holy vest that is made with the same materials—gold and blue, purple and red thread, and fine linen.

⁹“Take two onyx stones and write the names of the twelve sons of Israel on them, ¹⁰six on one stone and six on the other. Write the names in order, from the oldest son to the youngest.

¹¹Carve the names of the sons of Israel on these stones in the same way a person carves words and designs on a seal. Put gold around the stones to hold them on the holy vest. ¹²Then put the two stones on the two straps of the holy vest as reminders of the twelve sons of Israel. Aaron is to wear their names on his shoulders in the presence of the Lord as reminders of the sons of Israel. ¹³Make two gold pieces to hold the stones ¹⁴and two chains of pure gold, twisted together like a rope. Attach the chains to the two gold pieces that hold the stones.

The Chest Covering

¹⁵“Make a chest covering to help in making decisions. The craftsmen should make it as they made the holy vest, using gold and blue, purple and red thread, and fine linen. ¹⁶The chest covering must be square—nine inches long and nine inches wide—and folded double to make a pocket. ¹⁷Put four rows of beautiful gems on the chest covering: The first row must have a ruby, topaz, and yellow quartz; ¹⁸the second must have turquoise, a sapphire, and an emerald; ¹⁹the third must have a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; ²⁰the fourth must have a chrysolite, an onyx, and a jasper. Put gold around these jewels to attach them to the chest covering. ²¹There must be

twelve jewels on the chest covering—one jewel for each of the names of the sons of Israel. Carve the name of one of the twelve tribes on each of the stones as you would carve a seal.

²²“Make chains of pure gold, twisted together like rope, for the chest covering. ²³Make two gold rings and put them on the two upper corners of the chest covering. ²⁴Attach the two gold chains to the two rings at the upper corners of the chest covering. ²⁵Attach the other ends of the two chains to the two gold pieces on the shoulder straps in the front of the holy vest.

²⁶“Make two gold rings and put them at the two lower corners of the chest covering, on the inside edge next to the holy vest. ²⁷Make two more gold rings and attach them to the bottom of the shoulder straps in the front of the holy vest. Put them close to the seam above the woven belt of the holy vest. ²⁸Join the rings of the chest covering to the rings of the holy vest with blue ribbon, connecting it to the woven belt so the chest covering will not swing out from the holy vest.

²⁹“When Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will wear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart, on the chest covering that helps in making decisions. This will be a continual reminder before the Lord. ³⁰And put the Urim and Thummim inside the chest covering so that they will be on Aaron’s heart when he goes before the Lord. They will help in making decisions for the Israelites. So Aaron will always carry them with him when he is before the Lord.

³¹“Make the outer robe to be worn under the holy vest, using only blue cloth. ³²Make a hole in the center for Aaron’s head, with a woven collar around the hole so it will not tear. ³³Make balls like pomegranates of blue, purple, and red thread, and hang them around the bottom of the outer robe with gold

bells between them. ³⁴All around the bottom of the outer robe there should be a gold bell and a pomegranate ball, a gold bell and a pomegranate ball. ³⁵Aaron must wear this robe when he serves as priest. The ringing of the bells will be heard when he enters and leaves the Holy Place before the Lord so that Aaron will not die.

³⁶“Make a strip of pure gold and carve these words on it as you would carve a seal: ‘Holy to the Lord.’ ³⁷Use blue ribbon to tie it to the turban; put it on the front of the turban. ³⁸Aaron must wear this on his forehead. In this way, he will be blamed if anything is wrong with the gifts of the Israelites. Aaron must always wear this on his head so the Lord will accept the gifts of the people.

³⁹“Make the woven inner robe of fine linen, and make the turban of fine linen also. Make the cloth belt with designs sewn on it. ⁴⁰Also make woven inner robes, cloth belts, and headbands for Aaron’s sons, to give them honor and beauty. ⁴¹Put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, and pour olive oil on their heads to appoint them as priests. Make them belong to me so they may serve me as priests.

⁴²“Make for them linen underclothes to cover them from the waist to the upper parts of the legs. ⁴³Aaron and his sons must wear these underclothes when they enter the Meeting Tent and anytime they come near the altar to serve as priests in the Holy Place. If they do not wear these clothes, they will be guilty of wrong, and they will die. This will be a law that will last from now on for Aaron and all his descendants.

Appointing the Priests

“This is what you must do to appoint Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. Take one young bull and two male sheep that have nothing wrong with them.²Use fine wheat flour without yeast to make bread, cakes mixed with olive oil, and wafers brushed with olive oil.³Put these in one basket, and bring them along with the bull and two male sheep.⁴Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Meeting Tent and wash them with water.⁵Take the clothes and dress Aaron in the inner robe and the outer robe of the holy vest. Then put on him the holy vest and the chest covering, and tie the holy vest on him with its skillfully woven belt.⁶Put the turban on his head, and put the holy crown on the turban.⁷Take the special olive oil and pour it on his head to make him a priest.

⁸“Then bring his sons and put the inner robes on them.⁹Put the headbands on their heads, and tie cloth belts around their waists. Aaron and his descendants will be priests in Israel, according to a rule that will continue from now on. This is how you will appoint Aaron and his sons as priests.

¹⁰“Bring the bull to the front of the Meeting Tent, and Aaron and his sons must put their hands on the bull’s head.¹¹Then kill the bull before the Lord at the entrance to the Meeting Tent.¹²Use your finger to put some of the bull’s blood on the corners of the altar, and then pour the blood that is left at the bottom of the altar.¹³Take all the fat that covers the inner organs, as well as the best part of the liver, both kidneys, and the fat around them, and burn them on the altar.¹⁴Take the

bull's meat, skin, and intestines, and burn them outside the camp. This is an offering to take away sin.

¹⁵“Take one of the male sheep, and have Aaron and his sons put their hands on its head. ¹⁶Kill it, and take its blood and sprinkle it on all four sides of the altar. ¹⁷Then cut it into pieces and wash its inner organs and its legs, putting them with its head and its other pieces. ¹⁸Burn the whole sheep on the altar; it is a burnt offering made by fire to the Lord. Its smell is pleasing to the Lord.

Christ Through the Bible **Jesus: Our Very Own High Priest**

... Let me tell you who you are. In fact, let me *proclaim* who you are.

You are an heir of God and a co-heir with Christ.

You are eternal, like an angel.

You have a crown that will last forever.

You are a holy priest, a treasured possession.

You were chosen before the creation of the world. You are destined for “praise, fame, and honor, and you will be a holy people to the Lord your God” ([Deuteronomy 26:19](#)).

But more than any of the above—more significant than any title or position—is the simple fact that you are God’s child. “The Father has loved us so much that we are called children of God. And we really are his children” [[1 John 3:1](#)].

I love that last phrase! “We really are his children.” It’s as if John knew some of us would shake our heads and say, “Naw, not me. Mother

Teresa, maybe. Billy Graham, all right. But not me.” If those are your feelings, John added that phrase for you.

“We *really* are his children.”

As a result, if something is important to you, it’s important to God. . . .

So go ahead. Tell God what hurts. Talk to him. He won’t turn you away. He won’t think it’s silly. “For our high priest is able to understand our weaknesses. When he lived on earth, he was tempted in every way that we are, but he did not sin. Let us, then, feel very sure that we can come before God’s throne where there is grace” ([Hebrews 4:15–16](#), emphasis added). (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

^{19c}Take the other male sheep, and have Aaron and his sons put their hands on its head. ²⁰Kill it and take some of its blood. Put the blood on the bottom of the right ears of Aaron and his sons and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet. Then sprinkle the rest of the blood against all four sides of the altar. ²¹Take some of the blood from the altar, and mix it with the special oil used in appointing priests. Sprinkle this on Aaron and his clothes and on his sons and their clothes. This will show that Aaron and his sons and their clothes are given to my service.

^{22c}Then take the fat from the male sheep, the fat tail, and the fat that covers the inner organs. In addition, take the best part of the liver, both kidneys, and the fat around them, and the right thigh. (This is the male sheep to be used in appointing priests.)

^{23c}Then take the basket of bread that you made without yeast, which you put before the Lord. From it take a loaf of bread, a cake made with olive oil, and a wafer. ²⁴Put all of these in the hands of Aaron and his sons, and tell them to present them as an offering to the Lord. ²⁵Then take them from their hands and burn them on the altar with the whole burnt offering. This is an offering made by fire to the Lord; its smell is pleasing to the Lord. ²⁶Then take the breast of the male sheep used to appoint Aaron as priest, and present it before the Lord as an offering. This part of the animal will be your share. ²⁷Set aside the breast and the thigh of the sheep that were used to appoint Aaron and his sons as priests. These parts belong to them. ²⁸They are to be the regular share which the Israelites will always give to Aaron and his sons. It is the gift the Israelites

must give to the Lord from their fellowship offerings.

²⁹“The holy clothes made for Aaron will belong to his descendants so that they can wear these clothes when they are appointed as priests. ³⁰Aaron’s son, who will become high priest after Aaron, will come to the Meeting Tent to serve in the Holy Place. He is to wear these clothes for seven days.

³¹“Take the male sheep used to appoint priests and boil its meat in a place that is holy. ³²Then at the entrance of the Meeting Tent, Aaron and his sons must eat the meat of the sheep and the bread that is in the basket. ³³They should eat these offerings that were used to remove their sins and to make them holy when they were made priests. But no one else is to eat them, because they are holy things. ³⁴If any of the meat from that sheep or any of the bread is left the next morning, it must be burned. It must not be eaten, because it is holy.

³⁵“Do all these things that I commanded you to do to Aaron and his sons, and spend seven days appointing them. ³⁶Each day you are to offer a bull to remove the sins of Aaron and his sons so they will be given for service to the Lord. Make the altar ready for service to the Lord, and pour oil on it to make it holy. ³⁷Spend seven days making the altar ready for service to God and making it holy. Then the altar will become very holy, and anything that touches it must be holy.

The Daily Sacrifices

³⁸“Every day from now on, offer on the altar two lambs that are one year old. ³⁹Offer one lamb in the morning and the other in the evening before dark. ⁴⁰In the morning, when you offer the first lamb, offer also two quarts of fine flour mixed with one

quart of oil from pressed olives. Pour out a quart of wine as a drink offering. ⁴¹Offer the second lamb in the evening with the same grain offering and drink offering as you did in the morning. This is an offering made by fire to the Lord, and its smell is pleasing to him.

⁴²“You must burn these things as an offering to the Lord every day, from now on, at the entrance of the Meeting Tent before the Lord. When you make the offering, I, the Lord, will meet you there and speak to you. ⁴³I will meet with the people of Israel there, and that place will be holy because of my glory.

⁴⁴“So I will make the Meeting Tent and the altar holy; I will also make Aaron and his sons holy so they may serve me as priests. ⁴⁵I will live with the people of Israel and be their God. ⁴⁶And they will know that I am the Lord their God who led them out of Egypt so that I could live with them. I am the Lord their God.

Life Lessons

Exodus 30:1–38

Situation

God instructed Moses about the rituals of the Holy Tent, including burning incense, sacrificing, and anointing with oil.

Observation

God's specific instructions to Moses reminded the people of their pact with God. God demands faithfulness from his people.

Inspiration

The first Christians worshiped God and lived as a holy community, conforming their character to the demands of Christ rather than Caesar. They didn't purpose to turn the first-century world upside down. They did so because of *who* they were.

This character-oriented perspective is totally foreign to our achievement-oriented society, however, where we look at what people do rather than who they are... . Rarely do we hear believers say, "I decided to join this church because of its character as a holy community." Nor do most choose a church on the basis of its capacity to disciple and equip them for ministry.

Yet that should be our very first consideration. If the church is the Body, the holy presence of Christ in the world, its most fundamental task is to build communities of holy character. And the first priority of those communities is to disciple men and women to

maturity in Christ and then equip them to live their faith in every aspect of life and in every part of the world. (From *The Body* by Charles Colson)

Application

Rituals can be symbols of our relationship to God. We follow these practices to show our reverence for God, but they are never more important than faith.

Exploration

Faithfulness—[Numbers 12:7](#); [14:24](#); [1 Kings 19:18](#); [Nehemiah 7:2](#); [1 Corinthians 4:17](#); [Colossians 1:7](#).

Worship is the act of magnifying God. Enlarging our vision of him. Stepping into the cockpit to see where he sits and observe how he works. —Max Lucado (*Just Like Jesus*)

The Altar for Burning Incense

“Make an altar out of acacia wood for burning incense. ²Make it square—eighteen inches long and eighteen inches wide—and make it thirty-six inches high. The corners that stick out like horns must be one piece with the altar. ³Cover its top, its sides, and its corners with pure gold, and put a gold strip all around the altar. ⁴Make two gold rings beneath the gold strip on opposite sides of the altar, and slide poles through them to carry the altar. ⁵Make the poles from acacia wood and cover them with gold. ⁶Put the altar of incense in front of the curtain that is near the Ark of the Agreement, in front of the lid that covers that Ark. There I will meet with you.

⁷“Aaron must burn sweet-smelling incense on the altar every morning when he comes to take care of the oil lamps. ⁸He must burn incense again in the evening when he lights the lamps, so incense will burn before the Lord every day from now on. ⁹Do not use this altar for offering any other incense, or burnt offering, or any kind of grain offering, or drink offering. ¹⁰Once a year Aaron must make the altar ready for service to God by putting blood on its corners—the blood of the animal offered to remove sins. He is to do this once a year from now

on. This altar belongs completely to the Lord's service."

The Tax for the Meeting Tent

¹¹The Lord said to Moses, ¹²"When you count the people of Israel, every person must buy back his life from the Lord so that no terrible things will happen to the people when you number them. ¹³Every person who is counted must pay one-fifth of an ounce of silver. (This is set by using one-half of the Holy Place measure, which weighs two-fifths of an ounce.) This amount is a gift to the Lord. ¹⁴Every person who is counted and is twenty years old or older must give this amount to the Lord. ¹⁵A rich person must not give more than one-fifth of an ounce, and a poor person must not give less. You are paying this to the Lord to buy back your lives. ¹⁶Gather from the people of Israel this money paid to buy back their lives, and spend it on things for the service in the Meeting Tent. This payment will remind the Lord that the Israelites' lives have been bought back."

The Bronze Bowl

¹⁷The Lord said to Moses, ¹⁸"Make a bronze bowl, on a bronze stand, for washing. Put the bowl and stand between the Meeting Tent and the altar, and put water in the bowl. ¹⁹Aaron and his sons must wash their hands and feet with the water from this bowl. ²⁰Each time they enter the Meeting Tent they must wash with water so they will not die. Whenever they approach the altar to serve as priests and offer a sacrifice to the Lord by fire, ²¹they must wash their hands and their feet so

they will not die. This is a rule which Aaron and his descendants are to keep from now on.”

Oil for Appointing

²²Then the Lord said to Moses, ²³“Take the finest spices: twelve pounds of liquid myrrh, half that amount (that is, six pounds) of sweet-smelling cinnamon, six pounds of sweet-smelling cane, ²⁴and twelve pounds of cassia. Weigh all these by the Holy Place measure. Also take four quarts of olive oil, ²⁵and mix all these things like a perfume to make a holy olive oil. This special oil must be put on people and things to make them ready for service to God. ²⁶Put this oil on the Meeting Tent and the Ark of the Agreement, ²⁷on the table and all its dishes, on the lampstand and all its tools, and on the incense altar. ²⁸Also, put the oil on the altar for burnt offerings and on all its tools, as well as on the bowl and the stand under the bowl. ²⁹You will prepare all these things for service to God, and they will be very holy. Anything that touches these things must be holy.

³⁰“Put the oil on Aaron and his sons to give them for service to me, that they may serve me as priests. ³¹Tell the Israelites, ‘This is to be my holy olive oil from now on. It is to be put on people and things to make them ready for service to God. ³²Do not pour it on the bodies of ordinary people, and do not make perfume the same way you make this oil. It is holy, and you must treat it as holy. ³³If anyone makes perfume like it or puts it on someone who is not a priest, that person must be cut off from his people.’”

Incense

³⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, “Take these sweet-smelling spices: resin, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense. Be sure that you have equal amounts of each. ³⁵Make incense as a person who makes perfume would do. Add salt to it to keep it pure and holy. ³⁶Beat some of the incense into a fine powder, and put it in front of the Ark of the Agreement in the Meeting Tent, where I will meet with you. You must use this incense powder only for its very special purpose. ³⁷Do not make incense for yourselves the same way you make this incense. Treat it as holy to the Lord. ³⁸Whoever makes incense like this to use as perfume must be cut off from his people.”

Bezalel and Oholiab Help

Then the Lord said to Moses, ²“See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri from the tribe of Judah. (Uri was the son of Hur.) ³I have filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God and have given him the skill, ability, and knowledge to do all kinds of work. ⁴He is able to design pieces to be made from gold, silver, and bronze, ⁵to cut jewels and put them in metal, to carve wood, and to do all kinds of work. ⁶I have also chosen Oholiab son of Ahisamach from the tribe of Dan to work with Bezalel. I have given skills to all the craftsmen, and they will be able to make all these things I have commanded you: ⁷the Meeting Tent, the Ark of the Agreement, the lid that covers the Ark, and everything in the Tent. ⁸This includes the table and everything on it, the pure gold lampstand and everything with it, the altar of incense, ⁹the altar for burnt offerings and everything used with it, and the bowl and the stand under it. ¹⁰They will make the woven clothes and the holy clothes for Aaron and the clothes for his sons to wear when they serve as priests. ¹¹They will also make the special olive oil used in appointing people and things to the service of the Lord, and the sweet-smelling incense for the Holy Place.

“These workers will make all these things just as I have commanded you.”

The Day of Rest

¹²Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹³“Tell the Israelites, ‘You must

keep the rules about my Sabbaths, because they will be a sign between you and me from now on. In this way you will know that I, the Lord, make you holy.

¹⁴“Make the Sabbath a holy day. If anyone treats the Sabbath like any other day, that person must be put to death; anyone who works on the Sabbath day must be cut off from his people. ¹⁵There are six days for working, but the seventh day is a day of rest, a day holy for the Lord. Anyone who works during the Sabbath day must be put to death. ¹⁶The Israelites must remember the Sabbath day as an agreement between them and me that will continue from now on. ¹⁷The Sabbath day will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, because in six days I, the Lord, made the sky and the earth. On the seventh day I did not work; I rested.”

¹⁸When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two stone tablets with the Agreement written on them, written by the finger of God.

Life Lessons

Exodus 31:1–18

Situation

God commanded certain craftsmen to furnish the Holy Tent with ornate wood, gold, silver, and precious stones. Finally, God called the Israelites to honor the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship.

Observation

God has given each one certain talents, abilities, and spiritual gifts. We need to be faithful in using our gifts to honor him.

Inspiration

God's plan for us embraces more than merely the events or circumstances that happen to us. It also embraces that which He wants us to be and to do. The Scriptures teach that God places each believer in the Body of Christ as it pleases Him... Moreover, our spiritual gifts are generally consistent with the physical and mental abilities as well as the temperaments with which God created us... Just as we must trust God for who we are, we must also trust Him for what we are—whether it be an engineer or missionary, a homemaker or a nurse. If there is one area of life where the saying “the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence” applies, surely it is in the area of vocational calling and station in life. Someone has estimated that as many as eighty percent of our work force are dissatisfied with the jobs they are in. For many of us that may be due to a reluctance to be what God planned for us to be...

God is the God of society as well as the Church, and He determines the course of our lives in the natural realm as well as in the Church. He ordained days for plumbers just as much as He did for pastors.

That thought should give meaning to the most humdrum of vocations. In fact, no vocation should be considered humdrum if God has ordained it for us. (From *Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges)

Application

What specific abilities and gifts do you have? What would you say is your spiritual gift? Think of three ways you can use your gifts and abilities to

serve the church.

Exploration

Spiritual Gifts—[Romans 12:6–8](#); [1 Corinthians 12:1–11](#); [Ephesians 4:7–13](#).

The question is not, “How dare a loving God be angry?”
but rather, “How could a loving God feel anything less?”
—Max Lucado (*In the Grip of Grace*)

The People Make a Gold Calf

The people saw that a long time had passed and Moses had not come down from the mountain. So they gathered around Aaron and said, “Moses led us out of Egypt, but we don’t know what has happened to him. Make us gods who will lead us.”

²Aaron said to the people, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, sons, and daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” ³So all the people took their gold earrings and brought them to Aaron. ⁴He took the gold from the people and formed it with a tool and made a statue of a calf. Then the people said, “Israel, these are your gods who brought you out of the land of Egypt!”

⁵When Aaron saw all this, he built an altar before the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a special feast to honor the Lord.” ⁶The people got up early the next morning and offered whole burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. They sat down to eat and drink, and then they got up and sinned sexually.

⁷Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go down from this mountain, because your people, the people you brought out of the land of Egypt, have ruined themselves. ⁸They have quickly turned away from the things I commanded them to do. They have made for themselves a calf covered with gold, and they have worshiped it and offered sacrifices to it. They have said, ‘Israel, these are your gods who brought you out of Egypt.’”

⁹The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen these people, and I

know that they are very stubborn. ¹⁰So now do not stop me. I am so angry with them that I am going to destroy them. Then I will make you and your descendants a great nation.”

¹¹But Moses begged the Lord his God and said, “Lord, don’t let your anger destroy your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with your great power and strength. ¹²Don’t let the people of Egypt say, ‘The Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt for an evil purpose. He planned to kill them in the mountains and destroy them from the earth.’ So stop being angry, and don’t destroy your people. ¹³Remember the men who served you—Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. You promised with an oath to them and said, ‘I will make your descendants as many as the stars in the sky. I will give your descendants all this land that I have promised them, and it will be theirs forever.’” ¹⁴So the Lord changed his mind and did not destroy the people as he had said he might.

¹⁵Then Moses went down the mountain, and in his hands he had the two stone tablets with the Agreement on them. The commands were written on both sides of each stone, front and back. ¹⁶God himself had made the tablets, and God himself had written the commands on the tablets.

¹⁷When Joshua heard the sound of the people shouting, he said to Moses, “It sounds like war down in the camp.”

¹⁸Moses answered:

“It is not a shout of victory;
it is not a cry of defeat.
It is the sound of singing that I hear.”

¹⁹When Moses came close to the camp, he saw the gold calf and the dancing, and he became very angry. He threw

down the stone tablets that he was carrying and broke them at the bottom of the mountain.²⁰ Then he took the calf that the people had made and melted it in the fire. He ground it into powder. Then he threw the powder into the water and forced the Israelites to drink it.

²¹Moses said to Aaron, “What did these people do to you? Why did you cause them to do such a terrible sin?”

²²Aaron answered, “Don’t be angry, master. You know that these people are always ready to do wrong.²³ The people said to me, ‘Moses led us out of Egypt, but we don’t know what has happened to him. Make us gods who will lead us.’²⁴ So I told the people, ‘Take off your gold jewelry.’ When they gave me the gold, I threw it into the fire and out came this calf!”

²⁵Moses saw that the people were acting wildly. Aaron had let them get out of control and become fools in front of their enemies.²⁶ So Moses stood at the entrance to the camp and said, “Let anyone who wants to follow the Lord come to me.” And all the people from the family of Levi gathered around Moses.

²⁷Then Moses said to them, “The Lord, the God of Israel, says this: ‘Every man must put on his sword and go through the camp from one end to the other. Each man must kill his brother, his friend, and his neighbor.’”²⁸ The people from the family of Levi obeyed Moses, and that day about three thousand of the Israelites died.²⁹ Then Moses said, “Today you have been given for service to the Lord. You were willing to kill your own sons and brothers, and God has blessed you for this.”

³⁰The next day Moses told the people, “You have done a terrible sin. But now I will go up to the Lord. Maybe I can do

something so your sins will be removed.”³¹ So Moses went back to the Lord and said, “How terribly these people have sinned! They have made for themselves gods from gold.³² Now, please forgive them of this sin. If you will not, then erase my name from the book in which you have written the names of your people.”

³³ But the Lord told Moses, “I will erase from my book the names of the people who sin against me.”³⁴ So now, go. Lead the people where I have told you, and my angel will lead you. When the time comes to punish, I will punish them for their sin.”

³⁵ So the Lord caused terrible things to happen to the people because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “You and the people you brought out of Egypt must leave this place. Go to the land that I promised with an oath to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give that land to your descendants.’”² I will send an angel to lead you, and I will force these people out of the land: the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.³ Go up to a fertile land. But I will not go with you, because I might destroy you on the way, since you are such a stubborn people.”

⁴When the people heard this bad news, they became very sad, and none of them put on jewelry. ⁵This was because the Lord had said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites, ‘You are a stubborn people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I would destroy you. So take off all your jewelry, and I will decide what to do with you.’”⁶ So the people of Israel took off their jewelry at Mount Sinai.

The Meeting Tent

⁷Moses used to take a tent and set it up a long way outside the camp; he called it the “Meeting Tent.” Anyone who wanted to ask the Lord about something would go to the Meeting Tent outside the camp. ⁸Whenever Moses went out to the Tent, all the people would rise and stand at the entrances of their tents, watching him until he entered the Meeting Tent. ⁹When Moses went into the Tent, the pillar of cloud would always come down and stay at the entrance of the Tent while the Lord spoke with Moses. ¹⁰Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud at the entrance of the Tent, they stood and worshiped, each person at the entrance of his own tent.

¹¹The Lord spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but Moses' young helper, Joshua son of Nun, did not leave the Tent.

¹²Moses said to the Lord, "You have told me to lead these people, but you did not say whom you would send with me. You have said to me, 'I know you very well, and I am pleased with you.' ¹³If I have truly pleased you, show me your plans so that I may know you and continue to please you. Remember that this nation is your people."

¹⁴The Lord answered, "I myself will go with you, and I will give you victory."

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: A Personal Shepherd Provides His Presence and Rest

Years after David wrote [[Psalm 23](#)], another Bethlehem Shepherd would say: "There are many rooms in my Father's house; I would not tell you this if it were not true. I am going there to prepare a place for you. After I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am" ([John 14:2-3](#)).

Note the promises of Jesus. "I will come back and take you to be with me." He pledges to take us home. He does not delegate this task. He may send missionaries to teach you, angels to protect you, teachers to guide you, singers to inspire you, and physicians to heal you, but he sends no one to take you. He reserves this job for himself. "I will come

back and take you home.” He is your personal Shepherd. And he is personally responsible to lead you home. And because he is present when any of his sheep dies, you can say what David said, “I will not be afraid” [[Psalm 23:4](#)].

... And when God calls us into the deep valley of death, he will be with us. Dare we think that he would abandon us in the moment of death? Would a father force his child to swim the deep alone? Would the shepherd require his sheep to journey to the highlands alone? Of course not. Would God require his child to journey to eternity alone? Absolutely not! He is with you!

What God said to Moses, he says to you: “I myself will go with you”([Exodus 33:14](#)). (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

¹⁵Then Moses said to him, “If you yourself don’t go with us, then don’t send us away from this place. ¹⁶If you don’t go with us, no one will know that you are pleased with me and with your people. These people and I will be no different from any other people on earth.”

¹⁷Then the Lord said to Moses, “I will do what you ask, because I know you very well, and I am pleased with you.”

Moses Sees God’s Glory

¹⁸Then Moses said, “Now, please show me your glory.”

¹⁹The Lord answered, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will announce my name, the Lord, so you can hear it. I will show kindness to anyone to whom I want to show kindness, and I will show mercy to anyone to whom I want to show mercy. ²⁰But you cannot see my face, because no one can see me and live.

²¹“There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²²When my glory passes that place, I will put you in a large crack in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³Then I will take away my hand, and you will see my back. But my face must not be seen.”

Life Lessons

Exodus 32:1–34:35

Situation

God wrote the Ten Commandments, gave them to

Moses, and revealed his glory to Moses. Because Moses took so long to come down from the mountain, the people grew weary and built a new god for themselves, made of gold.

Observation

We will never be able to see all of God's glory on this earth.

Inspiration

Read carefully, very carefully, the following verses. Read to answer this question—what did Moses do in order to see God? ...

“There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes that place, I will put you in a large crack in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you will see my back. But my face must not be seen” ([Exodus 33:21–23](#)).

Did you see what Moses was to do? Neither did I. Did you note who did the work? So did I.

God did! God is active. God gave Moses a place to stand. God placed Moses in the crevice. God covered Moses with his hand. God passed by. And God revealed himself...

All Moses did was ask. But, oh, how he asked. All we can do is ask. But, oh, we must ask. For only in asking do we receive. And only in seeking do we find.

And (need I make the application?) God is the one who will equip us for our eternal moment in the Son. Hasn't he given us a rock, the Lord Jesus? Hasn't he given us a cleft, his grace? And hasn't he covered us with his hand, his pierced hand? (From *When God*

Whispers Your Name by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you know someone who rebels against God? Classmates? Colleagues? Neighbors? Intercede on behalf of these people today. Ask God to reveal himself to them and bring them into a relationship with him.

Exploration

God's Judgment—[Exodus 22:24](#); [Numbers 16:21](#); [Deuteronomy 9:19–20](#); [1 Samuel 2:25](#); [Psalms 106:23](#); [Jeremiah 14:20–21](#).

Let God be God. Let him bathe you in his glory so that both your breath and your troubles are sucked from your soul. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

Moses Gets New Stone Tablets

The Lord said to Moses, “Cut two more stone tablets like the first two, and I will write the same words on them that were on the first two stones which you broke.² Be ready tomorrow morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Stand before me there on the top of the mountain.³ No one may come with you or even be seen any place on the mountain. Not even the flocks or herds may eat grass near that mountain.”

⁴So Moses cut two stone tablets like the first ones. Then early the next morning he went up Mount Sinai, just as the Lord had commanded him, carrying the two stone tablets with him.⁵ Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with Moses, and the Lord called out his name: the Lord.

⁶The Lord passed in front of Moses and said, “I am the Lord. The Lord is a God who shows mercy, who is kind, who doesn’t become angry quickly, who has great love and faithfulness⁷ and is kind to thousands of people. The Lord forgives people for evil, for sin, and for turning against him, but he does not forget to punish guilty people. He will punish not only the guilty people, but also their children, their grandchildren, their great-grandchildren, and their great-great-grandchildren.”

⁸Then Moses quickly bowed to the ground and worshiped.⁹ He said, “Lord, if you are pleased with me, please go with us. I know that these are stubborn people, but forgive our evil and our sin. Take us as your own people.”

¹⁰Then the Lord said, “I am making this agreement with you.

I will do miracles in front of all your people—things that have never before been done for any other nation on earth—and the people with you will see my work. I, the Lord, will do wonderful things for you. ¹¹Obey the things I command you today, and I will force out the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites ahead of you. ¹²Be careful that you don't make an agreement with the people who live in the land where you are going, because it will bring you trouble. ¹³Destroy their altars, break their stone pillars, and cut down their Asherah idols. ¹⁴Don't worship any other god, because I, the Lord, the Jealous One, am a jealous God.

¹⁵“Be careful that you don't make an agreement with the people who live in that land. When they worship their gods, they will invite you to join them. Then you will eat their sacrifices. ¹⁶If you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters worship gods, they will lead your sons to do the same thing.

¹⁷“Do not make gods of melted metal.

¹⁸“Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days you must eat bread made without yeast as I commanded you. Do this during the month I have chosen, the month of Abib, because in that month you came out of Egypt.

¹⁹“The firstborn of every mother belongs to me, including every firstborn male animal that is born in your flocks and herds. ²⁰You may buy back a donkey by paying for it with a lamb, but if you don't want to buy back a donkey, you must break its neck. You must buy back all your firstborn sons.

“No one is to come before me without a gift.

²¹“You must work for six days, but on the seventh day you must rest—even during the planting season and the harvest

season.

²²“Celebrate the Feast of Weeks when you gather the first grain of the wheat harvest. And celebrate the Feast of Shelters in the fall.

²³“Three times each year all your males must come before the Lord God, the God of Israel. ²⁴I will force out nations ahead of you and expand the borders of your land. You will go before the Lord your God three times each year, and at that time no one will try to take your land from you.

²⁵“Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me with anything containing yeast, and do not leave any of the sacrifice of the Feast of Passover until the next morning.

²⁶“Bring the best first crops that you harvest from your ground to the Tent of the Lord your God.

“You must not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk.”

²⁷Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write down these words, because with these words I have made an agreement with you and Israel.”

²⁸Moses stayed there with the Lord forty days and forty nights, and during that time he did not eat food or drink water. And Moses wrote the words of the Agreement—the Ten Commandments—on the stone tablets.

The Face of Moses Shines

²⁹Then Moses came down from Mount Sinai, carrying the two stone tablets of the Agreement in his hands. But he did not know that his face was shining because he had talked with the Lord. ³⁰When Aaron and all the people of Israel saw that Moses’ face was shining, they were afraid to go near him. ³¹But

Moses called to them, so Aaron and all the leaders of the people returned to Moses, and he talked with them.³² After that, all the people of Israel came near him, and he gave them all the commands that the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai.

³³When Moses finished speaking to the people, he put a covering over his face. ³⁴Anytime Moses went before the Lord to speak with him, Moses took off the covering until he came out. Then Moses would come out and tell the Israelites what the Lord had commanded. ³⁵They would see that Moses' face was shining. So he would cover his face again until the next time he went in to speak with the Lord.

Rules About the Sabbath

Moses gathered all the Israelite community together and said to them, “These are the things the Lord has commanded you to do. ²You are to work for six days, but the seventh day will be a holy day, a Sabbath of rest to honor the Lord. Anyone who works on that day must be put to death. ³On the Sabbath day you must not light a fire in any of your houses.”

⁴Moses said to all the Israelites, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ⁵From what you have, take an offering for the Lord. Let everyone who is willing bring this offering to the Lord: gold, silver, bronze, ⁶blue, purple and red thread, and fine linen, goat hair ⁷and male sheepskins that are colored red. They may also bring fine leather, acacia wood, ⁸olive oil for the lamps, spices for the special olive oil used for appointing priests and for the sweet-smelling incense, ⁹onyx stones, and other jewels to be put on the holy vest and chest covering of the priests.

¹⁰“Let all the skilled workers come and make everything the Lord commanded: ¹¹the Holy Tent, its outer tent and its covering, the hooks, frames, crossbars, posts, and bases; ¹²the Ark of the Agreement, its poles, lid, and the curtain in front of it; ¹³the table, and its poles, all the things that go with the table, and the bread that shows we are in God’s presence; ¹⁴the lampstand for the light and all the things that go with it, the lamps, and olive oil for the light; ¹⁵the altar of incense and its poles, the special oil and the sweet-smelling incense, the curtain for the entrance of the Meeting Tent; ¹⁶the altar of

burnt offering and its bronze screen, its poles and all its tools, the bronze bowl and its base;¹⁷the curtains around the courtyard, their posts and bases, and the curtain at the entry to the courtyard;¹⁸the pegs of the Holy Tent and of the courtyard and their ropes;¹⁹the special clothes that the priest will wear in the Holy Place. These are the holy clothes for Aaron the priest and his sons to wear when they serve as priests.”

²⁰Then all the people of Israel went away from Moses. ²¹Everyone who wanted to give came and brought a gift to the Lord for making the Meeting Tent, all the things in the Tent, and the special clothes. ²²All the men and women who wanted to give brought gold jewelry of all kinds—pins, earrings, rings, and bracelets. They all presented their gold to the Lord. ²³Everyone who had blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen, and anyone who had goat hair or male sheepskins colored red or fine leather brought them to the Lord. ²⁴Everyone who could give silver or bronze brought that as a gift to the Lord, and everyone who had acacia wood to be used in the work brought it. ²⁵Every skilled woman used her hands to make the blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen, and they brought what they had made. ²⁶All the women who were skilled and wanted to help made thread of the goat hair. ²⁷The leaders brought onyx stones and other jewels to put on the holy vest and chest covering for the priest. ²⁸They also brought spices and olive oil for the sweet-smelling incense, the special oil, and the oil to burn in the lamps. ²⁹All the men and women of Israel who wanted to help brought gifts to the Lord for all the work the Lord had commanded Moses and the people to do.

³⁰Then Moses said to the Israelites, “Look, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri the son of Hur, from the tribe of

Judah. ³¹The Lord has filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God and has given him the skill, ability, and knowledge to do all kinds of work. ³²He is able to design pieces to be made of gold, silver, and bronze, ³³to cut stones and jewels and put them in metal, to carve wood, and to do all kinds of work. ³⁴Also, the Lord has given Bezalel and Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach from the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. ³⁵The Lord has given them the skill to do all kinds of work. They are able to cut designs in metal and stone. They can plan and sew designs in the fine linen with the blue, purple, and red thread. And they are also able to weave things.

Life Lessons

Exodus 35:1–38:31

Situation

Moses gave the Israelites instructions on how to build the Meeting Tent (Holy Tent). God designed each detail.

Observation

God, Master Architect, designed his house. Skilled people, such as Bezalel, worked to accomplish God's plans. They wanted to honor and please God by their efforts.

Inspiration

"The world is moved along not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker." (Helen Keller)

The story is told of a man who visited a stone

quarry and asked three of the workers what they were doing.

“Can’t you see?” said the first one irritably. “I’m cutting a stone.”

The second one replied, “I’m earning a hundred pounds a week.”

But the third put down his pick and thrust out his chest proudly. “I’m building a cathedral,” he said.

People view work in many different ways: as a necessary evil to keep bread on the table; as a means to a sizable bank account; as self-fulfillment and identity; as an economic obligation within society; as a means to a life of leisure.

Yet none of these represents an adequate view of work that provides ongoing or complete satisfaction for our labors. We are more than material beings, more than social beings, and more than cogs in the machinery of work.

We are, above all, spiritual beings, and as such we need to rediscover the moral and spiritual significance for every area and aspect of our lives, including our work.

Why, then, should we work?

Because work gives expression to our creative gifts and thus fulfills our need for meaning and purpose.

Because work is intrinsically good when done with the proper attitude and motive.

Because we are commanded to exercise stewardship over the earth, participating in the work of Creation in a way that glorifies God.

Because we are citizens of this earth and have certain responsibilities to our fellow citizen. (From *Why America Doesn't Work* by Charles Colson and Jack Eckerd)

Application

The next time you go to church, take a closer look. Ask the Lord to show you an area where you can serve. If you can't find one, ask your pastor. God receives glory when you help to build his church.

Exploration

God's Workmanship—[Genesis 1:31](#); [2 Corinthians 5:17](#); [Ephesians 2:8–10](#), [19–22](#); [Colossians 1:16](#); [Revelation 4:11](#). Godly Action—[Colossians 3:17](#), [23–24](#).

So Bezalel, Oholiab, and every skilled person will do the work the Lord has commanded, because he gave them the wisdom and understanding to do all the skilled work needed to build the Holy Tent.”

²Then Moses called Bezalel, Oholiab, and all the other skilled people to whom the Lord had given skills, and they came because they wanted to help with the work. ³They received from Moses everything the people of Israel had brought as gifts to build the Holy Tent. The people continued to bring gifts each morning because they wanted to. ⁴So all the skilled workers left the work they were doing on the Holy Tent, ⁵and they said to Moses, “The people are bringing more than we need to do the work the Lord commanded.”

⁶Then Moses sent this command throughout the camp: “No man or woman should make anything else as a gift for the Holy Tent.” So the people were kept from giving more, ⁷because what they had was already more than enough to do all the work.

The Holy Tent

⁸Then the skilled workers made the Holy Tent. They made the ten curtains of blue, purple, and red cloth, and they sewed designs of creatures with wings on the curtains. ⁹Each curtain was the same size—forty-two feet long and six feet wide. ¹⁰Five of the curtains were fastened together to make one set, and the other five were fastened together to make another set. ¹¹Then they made loops of blue cloth along the edge of the end curtain on the first set of five, and they did the same thing with the other set of five. ¹²There were fifty loops on one curtain and

fifty loops on the other curtain, with the loops opposite each other. ¹³They made fifty gold hooks to join the two curtains together so that the Holy Tent was joined together as one piece.

¹⁴Then the workers made another tent of eleven curtains made of goat hair, to put over the Holy Tent. ¹⁵All eleven curtains were the same size—forty-five feet long and six feet wide. ¹⁶The workers sewed five curtains together into one set and six together into another set. ¹⁷They made fifty loops along the edge of the outside curtain of one set and fifty loops along the edge of the outside curtain of the other set. ¹⁸Then they made fifty bronze rings to join the two sets of cloth together and make the tent one piece. ¹⁹They made two more coverings for the outer tent—one made of male sheepskins colored red and the other made of fine leather.

²⁰Then they made upright frames of acacia wood for the Holy Tent. ²¹Each frame was fifteen feet tall and twenty-seven inches wide, ²²and there were two pegs side by side on each one. Every frame of the Holy Tent was made this same way. ²³They made twenty frames for the south side of the Tent, ²⁴and they made forty silver bases that went under the twenty frames. There were two bases for every frame—one for each peg of each frame. ²⁵They also made twenty frames for the north side of the Holy Tent ²⁶and forty silver bases—two to go under each frame. ²⁷They made six frames for the rear or west end of the Holy Tent ²⁸and two frames for the corners at the rear of the Holy Tent. ²⁹These two frames were doubled at the bottom and joined at the top with a metal ring. They did this for each of these corners. ³⁰So there were eight frames and sixteen silver bases—two bases under each frame.

³¹Then they made crossbars of acacia wood to connect the upright frames of the Holy Tent. Five crossbars held the frames together on one side of the Tent, ³²and five held the frames together on the other side. Also, five crossbars held the frames together on the west end, at the rear of the Tent. ³³They made the middle crossbar run along the entire length of each side and rear of the Tent. It was set halfway up the frames. ³⁴They made gold rings on the sides of the frames to hold the crossbars, and they covered the frames and the crossbars with gold.

³⁵Then they made the curtain of blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen. A skilled craftsman sewed designs of creatures with wings on it. ³⁶They made four posts of acacia wood for it and covered them with gold. Then they made gold hooks for the posts, as well as four silver bases in which to set the posts. ³⁷For the entrance to the Tent, they made a curtain of blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen. A person who sewed well sewed designs on it. ³⁸Then they made five posts and hooks for it. They covered the tops of the posts and their bands with gold, and they made five bronze bases for the posts.

The Ark of the Agreement

Bezalel made the Ark of acacia wood; it was forty-five inches long, twenty-seven inches wide, and twenty-seven inches high. ²He covered it, both inside and out, with pure gold, and he put a gold strip around it. ³He made four gold rings for it and attached them to its four feet, with two rings on each side. ⁴Then he made poles of acacia wood and covered them with gold. ⁵He put the poles through the rings on each side of the Ark to carry it. ⁶Then he made a lid of pure gold that was forty-five inches long and twenty-seven inches wide. ⁷Then Bezalel hammered gold to make two creatures with wings and attached them to each end of the lid. ⁸He made one creature on one end of the lid and the other creature on the other end. He attached them to the lid so that it would be one piece. ⁹The creatures' wings were spread upward, covering the lid, and the creatures faced each other across the lid.

The Table

¹⁰Then he made the table of acacia wood; it was thirty-six inches long, eighteen inches wide, and twenty-seven inches high. ¹¹He covered it with pure gold and put a gold strip around it. ¹²He made a frame three inches high that stood up all around the edge, and he put a gold strip around it. ¹³Then he made four gold rings for the table and attached them to the four corners of the table where the four legs were. ¹⁴The rings were put close to the frame around the top of the table, because they

held the poles for carrying it. ¹⁵The poles for carrying the table were made of acacia wood and were covered with gold. ¹⁶He made of pure gold all the things that were used on the table: the plates, bowls, cups, and jars used for pouring the drink offerings.

The Lampstand

¹⁷Then he made the lampstand of pure gold, hammering out its base and stand. Its flower-like cups, buds, and petals were joined together in one piece with the base and stand. ¹⁸Six branches went out from the sides of the lampstand—three on one side and three on the other. ¹⁹Each branch had three cups shaped like almond flowers, and each cup had a bud and a petal. Each of the six branches going out from the lampstand was the same. ²⁰There were four more cups shaped like almond flowers on the lampstand itself, each with its buds and petals. ²¹Three pairs of branches went out from the lampstand. A bud was under the place where each pair was attached to the lampstand. Each of the six branches going out from the lampstand was the same. ²²The buds, branches, and lampstand were all one piece of pure, hammered gold. ²³He made seven pure gold lamps for this lampstand, and he made pure gold wick trimmers and trays. ²⁴He used about seventy-five pounds of pure gold to make the lampstand and all the things that go with it.

The Altar for Burning Incense

²⁵Then he made the altar of incense out of acacia wood. It was square—eighteen inches long and eighteen inches wide—and it was thirty-six inches high. Each corner that stuck out like a horn was joined into one piece with the altar. ²⁶He covered the top and all the sides and the corners with pure gold, and he put gold trim around the altar. ²⁷He made two gold rings and put them below the trim on opposite sides of the altar; these rings held the poles for carrying it. ²⁸He made the poles of acacia wood and covered them with gold.

²⁹Then he made the holy olive oil for appointing the priests and the pure, sweet-smelling incense. He made them like a person who mixes perfumes.

The Altar for Burnt Offerings

Then he built the altar for burnt offerings out of acacia wood. The altar was square—seven and one-half feet long and seven and one-half feet wide—and it was four and one-half feet high. ²He made each corner stick out like a horn so that the horns and the altar were joined together in one piece. Then he covered the altar with bronze. ³He made all the tools of bronze to use on the altar: the pots, shovels, bowls for sprinkling blood, meat forks, and pans for carrying the fire. ⁴He made a large bronze screen to hold the burning wood for the altar and put it inside the altar, under its rim, halfway up from the bottom. ⁵He made bronze rings to hold the poles for carrying the altar, and he put them at the four corners of the screen. ⁶Then he made poles of acacia wood and covered them with bronze. ⁷He put the poles through the rings on both sides of the altar, to carry it. He made the altar of boards and left the inside hollow.

The Bronze Bowl

⁸He made the bronze bowl for washing, and he built it on a bronze stand. He used the bronze from mirrors that belonged to the women who served at the entrance to the Meeting Tent.

The Courtyard of the Holy Tent

⁹Then he made a wall of curtains to form a courtyard around the Holy Tent. On the south side the curtains were one

hundred fifty feet long and were made of fine linen.¹⁰The curtains hung on silver hooks and bands, placed on twenty bronze posts with twenty bronze bases.¹¹On the north side the wall of curtains was also one hundred fifty feet long, and it hung on silver hooks and bands on twenty posts with twenty bronze bases.

¹²On the west side of the courtyard, the wall of curtains was seventy-five feet long. It was held up by silver hooks and bands on ten posts with ten bases.¹³The east side was also seventy-five feet long.¹⁴On one side of the entry there was a wall of curtains twenty-two and one-half feet long, held up by three posts and three bases.¹⁵On the other side of the entry there was also a wall of curtains twenty-two and one-half feet long, held up by three posts and three bases.¹⁶All the curtains around the courtyard were made of fine linen.¹⁷The bases for the posts were made of bronze. The hooks and the bands on the posts were made of silver, and the tops of the posts were covered with silver also. All the posts in the courtyard had silver bands.

¹⁸The curtain for the entry of the courtyard was made of blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen, sewn by a person who could sew well. The curtain was thirty feet long and seven and one-half feet high, the same height as the curtains around the courtyard.¹⁹It was held up by four posts and four bronze bases. The hooks and bands on the posts were made of silver, and the tops on the posts were covered with silver.²⁰All the tent pegs for the Holy Tent and for the curtains around the courtyard were made of bronze.

²¹This is a list of the materials used to make the Holy Tent, where the Agreement was kept. Moses ordered the Levites to

make this list, and Ithamar son of Aaron was in charge of keeping it.²²Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur of the tribe of Judah, made everything the Lord commanded Moses.²³Oholiab son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan helped him. He could cut designs into metal and stone; he was a designer and also skilled at sewing the blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen.

²⁴The total amount of gold used to build the Holy Tent was presented to the Lord. It weighed over 2,000 pounds, as set by the Holy Place measure.

²⁵The silver was given by the members of the community who were counted. It weighed 7,550 pounds, as set by the Holy Place measure.²⁶All the men twenty years old or older were counted. There were 603,550 men, and each man had to pay one-fifth of an ounce of silver, as set by the Holy Place measure.²⁷Of this silver, 7,500 pounds were used to make the one hundred bases for the Holy Tent and for the curtain—75 pounds of silver in each base.²⁸They used 50 pounds of silver to make the hooks for the posts and to cover the tops of the posts and to make the bands on them.

²⁹The bronze which was presented to the Lord weighed about 5,000 pounds.³⁰They used the bronze to make the bases at the entrance of the Meeting Tent, to make the altar and the bronze screen, and to make all the tools for the altar.³¹This bronze was also used to make bases for the wall of curtains around the courtyard and bases for curtains at the entry to the courtyard, as well as to make the tent pegs for the Holy Tent and the curtains that surrounded the courtyard.

Life Lessons

Exodus 39:1–40:38

Situation

Moses provided instructions about the priestly garments and other matters pertaining to worship and the Holy Tent.

Observation

Some people believe that outward appearance determines inner quality. With God, it is the other way around: outward appearance should reflect inner reality. The priestly garments reflected the holy character of the priests as they were in communion with a holy God.

Inspiration

“But clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and forget about satisfying your sinful self” ([Romans 13:14](#)).

“You were all baptized into Christ, and so you were all clothed with Christ. This means that you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus” ([Galatians 3:26–27](#)).

This clothing has nothing to do with dresses and jeans and suits. God’s concern is with our spiritual garment. He offers a heavenly robe that only heaven can see and only heaven can give. Listen to the words of Isaiah: “The Lord makes me very happy; all that I am rejoices in my God. He has covered me with clothes of salvation and wrapped me with a coat of goodness” ([Isaiah 61:10](#)).

Remember the words of the father when the prodigal son returned? He wanted his son to have new sandals, a new ring, and what else? New clothes. “Bring the best clothes and put them on him” ([Luke 15:22](#)). No son of his was going to be seen in shabby, muddy rags. The father wanted the son to have the best clothing available.

Your Father wants you to have the same.

Again, this discussion of clothing has nothing to do with what the store sells you. It has everything to do with what God gives you when you give your life to him.

(From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

Application

How much time do you take each day to make yourself look good? How much time do you take each day to develop your inner character? Knowing that God cares about your inner character, get up early and start your day in prayer.

Exploration

God and Clothes—[Matthew 6:28–30](#); [Romans 13:14](#); [Galatians 3:26–29](#); [1 Timothy 6:6–8](#).

Clothes for the Priests

They used blue, purple, and red thread to make woven clothes for the priests to wear when they served in the Holy Place. They made the holy clothes for Aaron as the Lord had commanded Moses.

²They made the holy vest of gold, and blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen. ³They hammered the gold into sheets and then cut it into long, thin strips. They worked the gold into the blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen. This was done by skilled craftsmen. ⁴They made the shoulder straps for the holy vest, which were attached to the top corners of the vest and tied together over each shoulder. ⁵The skillfully woven belt was made in the same way; it was joined to the holy vest as one piece. It was made of gold, and blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen, the way the Lord commanded Moses.

⁶They put gold around the onyx stones and then wrote the names of the sons of Israel on these gems, as a person carves words and designs on a seal. ⁷Then they attached the gems on the shoulder straps of the holy vest, as reminders of the twelve sons of Israel. This was done just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

⁸The skilled craftsmen made the chest covering like the holy vest; it was made of gold, and blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen. ⁹The chest covering was square—nine inches long and nine inches wide—and it was folded double to make a

pocket. ¹⁰Then they put four rows of beautiful jewels on it: In the first row there was a ruby, a topaz, and a yellow quartz; ¹¹in the second there was a turquoise, a sapphire, and an emerald; ¹²in the third there was a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; ¹³in the fourth there was a chrysolite, an onyx, and a jasper. Gold was put around these jewels to attach them to the chest covering, ¹⁴and the names of the sons of Israel were carved on these twelve jewels as a person carves a seal. Each jewel had the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

¹⁵They made chains of pure gold, twisted together like a rope, for the chest covering. ¹⁶The workers made two gold pieces and two gold rings. They put the two gold rings on the two upper corners of the chest covering. ¹⁷Then they put two gold chains in the two rings at the ends of the chest covering, ¹⁸and they fastened the other two ends of the chains to the two gold pieces. They attached these gold pieces to the two shoulder straps in the front of the holy vest. ¹⁹They made two gold rings and put them at the lower corners of the chest covering on the inside edge next to the holy vest. ²⁰They made two more gold rings on the bottom of the shoulder straps in front of the holy vest, near the seam, just above the woven belt of the holy vest. ²¹They used a blue ribbon and tied the rings of the chest covering to the rings of the holy vest, connecting it to the woven belt. In this way the chest covering would not swing out from the holy vest. They did all these things the way the Lord commanded.

²²Then they made the outer robe to be worn under the holy vest. It was woven only of blue cloth. ²³They made a hole in the center of the outer robe, with a woven collar sewn around it so it would not tear. ²⁴Then they made balls like pomegranates

of blue, purple, and red thread, and fine linen and hung them around the bottom of the outer robe.²⁵ They also made bells of pure gold and hung these around the bottom of the outer robe between the balls.²⁶ So around the bottom of the outer robe there was a bell and a pomegranate ball, a bell and a pomegranate ball. The priest wore this outer robe when he served as priest, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

²⁷They wove inner robes of fine linen for Aaron and his sons,²⁸ and they made turbans, headbands, and underclothes of fine linen.²⁹ Then they made the cloth belt of fine linen, and blue, purple, and red thread, and designs were sewn onto it, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

³⁰They made a strip of pure gold, which is the holy crown, and carved these words in the gold, as one might carve on a seal: "Holy to the Lord."³¹ Then they tied this flat piece to the turban with a blue ribbon, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

³²So all the work on the Meeting Tent was finished. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord had commanded Moses.³³ Then they brought the Holy Tent to Moses: the Tent and all its furniture, hooks, frames, crossbars, posts, and bases;³⁴ the covering made of male sheepskins colored red, the covering made of fine leather, and the curtain that covered the entrance to the Most Holy Place;³⁵ the Ark of the Agreement, its poles and lid;³⁶ the table, all its containers, and the bread that showed they were in God's presence;³⁷ the pure gold lampstand with its lamps in a row, all its tools, and the olive oil for the light;³⁸ the gold altar, the special olive oil used for appointing priests, the sweet-smelling incense, and the curtain that covered the entrance to the Tent;³⁹ the bronze altar and its screen, its poles and all its tools, the bowl and its stand;⁴⁰ the

curtains for the courtyard with their posts and bases, the curtain that covered the entry to the courtyard, the cords, pegs, and all the things in the Meeting Tent. ⁴¹They brought the clothes for the priests to wear when they served in the Holy Tent—the holy clothes for Aaron the priest and the clothes for his sons, which they wore when they served as priests.

⁴²The Israelites had done all this work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. ⁴³Moses looked closely at all the work and saw they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them.

Setting Up the Holy Tent

Then the Lord said to Moses:²“On the first day of the first month, set up the Holy Tent, which is the Meeting Tent. ³Put the Ark of the Agreement in it and hang the curtain in front of the Ark. ⁴Bring in the table and arrange everything on the table that should be there. Then bring in the lampstand and set up its lamps. ⁵Put the gold altar for burning incense in front of the Ark of the Agreement, and put the curtain at the entrance to the Holy Tent.

⁶“Put the altar of burnt offerings in front of the entrance of the Holy Tent, the Meeting Tent. ⁷Put the bowl between the Meeting Tent and the altar, and put water in it. ⁸Set up the courtyard around the Holy Tent, and put the curtain at the entry to the courtyard.

⁹“Use the special olive oil and pour it on the Holy Tent and everything in it, in order to give the Tent and all that is in it for service to the Lord. They will be holy. ¹⁰Pour the special oil on the altar for burnt offerings and on all its tools. Give the altar for service to God, and it will be very holy. ¹¹Then pour the special olive oil on the bowl and the base under it so that they will be given for service to God.

¹²“Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Meeting Tent, and wash them with water. ¹³Then put the holy clothes on Aaron. Pour the special oil on him, and give him for service to God so that he may serve me as a priest. ¹⁴Bring Aaron’s sons and put the inner robes on them. ¹⁵Pour the special oil on them in the same way that you appointed their father as priest

so that they may also serve me as priests. Pouring oil on them will make them a family of priests, they and their descendants from now on.”¹⁶ Moses did everything that the Lord commanded him.

¹⁷So the Holy Tent was set up on the first day of the first month during the second year after they left Egypt. ¹⁸When Moses set up the Holy Tent, he put the bases in place, and he put the frames on the bases. Next he put the crossbars through the rings of the frames and set up the posts. ¹⁹After that, Moses spread the cloth over the Holy Tent and put the covering over it, just as the Lord commanded.

²⁰Moses put the stone tablets that had the Agreement written on them into the Ark. He put the poles through the rings of the Ark and put the lid on it. ²¹Next he brought the Ark into the Tent and hung the curtain to cover the Ark, just as the Lord commanded him.

²²Moses put the table in the Meeting Tent on the north side of the Holy Tent in front of the curtain. ²³Then he put the bread on the table before the Lord, just as the Lord commanded him. ²⁴Moses put the lampstand in the Meeting Tent on the south side of the Holy Tent across from the table. ²⁵Then he put the lamps on the lampstand before the Lord, just as the Lord commanded him.

²⁶Moses put the gold altar for burning incense in the Meeting Tent in front of the curtain. ²⁷Then he burned sweet-smelling incense on it, just as the Lord commanded him. ²⁸Then he hung the curtain at the entrance to the Holy Tent.

²⁹He put the altar for burnt offerings at the entrance to the Holy Tent, the Meeting Tent, and offered a whole burnt offering and grain offerings on it, just as the Lord commanded

him.³⁰ Moses put the bowl between the Meeting Tent and the altar for burnt offerings, and he put water in it for washing.³¹ Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons used this water to wash their hands and feet.³² They washed themselves every time they entered the Meeting Tent and every time they went near the altar for burnt offerings, just as the Lord commanded Moses.

³³Then Moses set up the courtyard around the Holy Tent and the altar, and he put up the curtain at the entry to the courtyard. So Moses finished the work.

The Cloud over the Holy Tent

³⁴Then the cloud covered the Meeting Tent, and the glory of the Lord filled the Holy Tent.³⁵ Moses could not enter the Meeting Tent, because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the Holy Tent.

³⁶When the cloud rose from the Holy Tent, the Israelites would begin to travel,³⁷ but as long as the cloud stayed on the Holy Tent, they did not travel. They stayed in that place until the cloud rose.³⁸ So the cloud of the Lord was over the Holy Tent during the day, and there was a fire in the cloud at night. So all the Israelites could see the cloud while they traveled.

Jacob Also called Israel.

Moses The name “Moses” sounds like the Hebrew word for “to pull out.”

Reuel He was also called Jethro.

Gershom This name sounds like the Hebrew word meaning “a stranger there.”

I ... I AM The Hebrew words are like the name “Yahweh.” This Hebrew name for God, usually called “Lord,” shows that God always lives and is always with his people.

Marah This name means “bitter.”

ephah An ephah was a measure that equaled twenty quarts.

Massah This name is the Hebrew word for “testing.”

Meribah This name is the Hebrew word for “quarrel.”

Gershom This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “a stranger there.”

Eliezer This name sounds like the Hebrew words “My God is my help.”

Holy Tent Literally, “house of the Lord your God.” See Exodus 25:9.

The Book of Leviticus

Introduction

Suppose your father grants you a piece of land. Free. You can farm it and make a living.

There is only one condition. You first have to get the rocks out. And so you work. For hours and days you work. With time, you see the task is too great. There's just no way you can do it.

You give up.

Then your father says you've done enough. "I have another plot of land for you," he explains. "This time the stones are gone."

"Who removed them?"

"I did."

You go to the acreage and find his promise to be true. The stones are gone, and you are left to farm. And so you sow in gratitude.

Nice story, Max, but what does this have to do with Leviticus?

The Book of Leviticus is the deed to the farm. A rocky farm given by God to his children ... laden with stones. Heavied with tasks. Loaded with rocky rules and regulations.

Three months after their deliverance, the children of Israel spent a year at the base of Mt. Sinai. They were nomadic people in a barren land. Suddenly forced to live together, suddenly forced to travel together, they needed guidelines for hygiene and health. They needed rules for worship and community. For that reason, God gave them Leviticus. A practical guide for community and worship. But for us, it serves a still higher purpose. Leviticus reminds us that God takes

holiness seriously.

Any person who tries to be holy is soon convinced he can't. There are too many rules. Too many rocks to remove. We need help. We need a Savior. "In other words, the law was our guardian leading us to Christ so that we could be made right with God through faith" ([Galatians 3:24](#)).

Holiness is what God desires. But holiness is what we cannot achieve. Just like the son couldn't remove the rocks, so we can't remove our sins.

But just like the father surprised the son, so our Father surprises us. He removed the rocks for us.

About This Book

Author:

Moses

Date Written:

1500–1450 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- God gave instructions for the offerings and sacrifices and the priests who will administrate them.
- Through Moses, God gave the people guidelines for keeping their camps safe, sanitary, and functional.
- God taught the people about various feasts that will remind them of his provision and goodness.

Key Verse:

"Be my holy people. Be holy because I am the Lord your God" ([Leviticus 20:7](#)).

Contents:

1. The Priests and the Sacrifices [1:1–10:20](#)
2. Sanitation and Health [11:1–15:33](#)
3. Ceremonial, Civil, and Moral Laws [16:1–22:33](#)
4. Feasts, Festivals, and Tithes [23:1–27:34](#)

Life Lessons

Leviticus 1:1–6:7

Situation

Blood sacrifices had great significance. Blood offered an atonement for sin, but its incompleteness required the perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ. The sacrifices in these chapters taught the Israelites how to worship God through personal commitment.

Observation

God's people must revere him, commit themselves to his laws, and show sincere dedication to him.

Inspiration

Stories from the underground church in [the former Soviet Union] never fail to jolt us awake. I came across another one just this past week. A house church received one copy of Gospel by Luke, the only scripture most of these Christians had ever seen. They tore it into small sections and distributed them among the body of believers. Their plan was to memorize the portion they had been given, then on the next Lord's Day they would meet and redistribute the scriptural sections.

On Sunday these believers arrived inconspicuously in small groups throughout the day so as not to arouse the suspicion of KGB informers. By dusk they were all safely inside, windows closed and doors locked. They began by singing a hymn quietly but with deep emotion. Suddenly, the door was pushed open and in walked two soldiers with

loaded automatic weapons at the ready. One shouted, “All right—everybody line up against the wall. If you wish to renounce your commitment to Jesus Christ, leave now!”

Two or three quickly left, then another. After a few more seconds, two more.

“This is your last chance. Either turn against your faith in Christ,” he ordered, “or stay and suffer the consequences.”

Another left. Finally, two more in embarrassed silence, their faces covered, slipped out into the night. No one else moved. Parents with small children trembling beside them looked down reassuringly. They fully expected to be gunned down or, at best, to be imprisoned.

After a few moments of complete silence, the other soldier closed the door, looked back at those who stood against the wall and said, “Keep your hands up—but this time in praise to our Lord Jesus Christ, brothers and sisters. We, too, are Christians. We were sent to another house church several weeks ago to a group of believers—”

The other soldier interrupted, “... but, instead, we were converted! We have learned by experience, however, that unless people are willing to die for their faith, they cannot be fully trusted.”

In segments of the world where Bibles are plentiful and churches are protected, faith can run awfully shallow. Commitment can stay rather lukewarm. Eagles can learn to fly dangerously low. “What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly.”

(From *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

What difficult decisions could you face this week because of your faith? In what areas will you face ridicule? temptation? persecution? hard times? Ask God to give you courage and wisdom to face upcoming trials.

Exploration

Commitment—[Genesis 22:1–8](#); [Joshua 24:15](#); [2 Chronicles 15:14–15](#); [Matthew 16:24–25](#).

The Burnt Offering

The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the Meeting Tent, saying, ²“Tell the people of Israel: ‘When you bring an offering to the Lord, bring as your offering an animal from the herd or flock.

³“If the offering is a whole burnt offering from the herd, it must be a male that has nothing wrong with it. The person must take the animal to the entrance of the Meeting Tent so that the Lord will accept the offering. ⁴He must put his hand on the animal’s head, and the Lord will accept it to remove the person’s sin so he will belong to God. ⁵He must kill the young bull before the Lord, and Aaron’s sons, the priests, must bring its blood and sprinkle it on all sides of the altar at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. ⁶After that he will skin the animal and cut it into pieces. ⁷The priests, when they have put wood and fire on the altar, ⁸are to lay the head, the fat, and other pieces on the wood that is on the fire of the altar. ⁹The animal’s inner organs and legs must be washed with water. Then the priest must burn all the animal’s parts on the altar. It is a whole burnt offering, an offering made by fire, and its smell is pleasing to the Lord.

¹⁰“If the burnt offering is a sheep or a goat from the flock, it must be a male that has nothing wrong with it. ¹¹The person must kill the animal on the north side of the altar before the Lord, and Aaron’s sons, the priests, must sprinkle its blood on

all sides of the altar. ¹²The person must cut the animal into pieces, and the priest must lay them, with the head and fat, on the wood that is on the fire of the altar. ¹³The person must wash the animal's inner organs and legs with water, and then the priest must burn all its parts on the altar. It is a whole burnt offering, an offering made by fire, and its smell is pleasing to the Lord.

¹⁴“If the whole burnt offering for the Lord is a bird, it must be a dove or a young pigeon. ¹⁵The priest will bring it to the altar and pull off its head, which he will burn on the altar; the bird's blood must be drained out on the side of the altar. ¹⁶The priest must remove the bird's [crop](#) and its contents and throw them on the east side of the altar, where the ashes are. ¹⁷Then he must tear the bird open by its wings without dividing it into two parts. He must burn the bird on the altar, on the wood which is on the fire. It is a whole burnt offering, an offering made by fire, and its smell is pleasing to the Lord.

The Grain Offering

“When anyone offers a grain offering to the Lord, it must be made from fine flour. The person must pour oil on it, put incense on it,² and then take it to Aaron’s sons, the priests. The priest must take a handful of the fine flour and oil and all the incense, and burn it on the altar as a memorial portion. It is an offering made by fire, and its smell is pleasing to the Lord.³ The rest of the grain offering will belong to Aaron and the priests; it is a most holy part of the offerings made by fire to the Lord.

⁴“If you bring a grain offering that was baked in the oven, it must be made from fine flour. It may be loaves made without yeast and mixed with oil, or it may be wafers made without yeast that have oil poured over them.⁵ If your grain offering is cooked on a griddle, it must be made, without yeast, of fine flour mixed with oil.⁶ Crumble it and pour oil over it; it is a grain offering.⁷ If your grain offering is cooked in a pan, it must be made from fine flour and oil.⁸ Bring the grain offering made of these things to the Lord. Give it to the priest, and he will take it to the altar.⁹ He will take out the memorial portion from the grain offering and burn it on the altar, as an offering made by fire. Its smell is pleasing to the Lord.¹⁰ The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and the priests. It is a most holy part of the offerings made to the Lord by fire.

¹¹“Every grain offering you bring to the Lord must be made without yeast, because you must not burn any yeast or honey in an offering made by fire to the Lord.¹² You may bring yeast

and honey to the Lord as an offering from the first harvest, but they must not be burned on the altar as a pleasing smell. ¹³You must also put salt on all your grain offerings. Salt stands for your agreement with God that will last forever; do not leave it out of your grain offering. You must add salt to all your offerings.

¹⁴“If you bring a grain offering from the first harvest to the Lord, bring crushed heads of new grain roasted in the fire. ¹⁵Put oil and incense on it; it is a grain offering. ¹⁶The priest will burn the memorial portion of the crushed grain and oil, with the incense on it. It is an offering by fire to the Lord.

The Fellowship Offering

“If a person’s fellowship offering to the Lord is from the herd, it may be a male or female, but it must have nothing wrong with it. ²The person must put his hand on the animal’s head and kill it at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. Then Aaron’s sons, the priests, must sprinkle the blood on all sides of the altar. ³From the fellowship offering he must make a sacrifice by fire to the Lord. He must offer the fat of the animal’s inner organs (both the fat that is in them and that covers them), ⁴both kidneys with the fat that is on them near the lower back muscle, and the best part of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. ⁵Then the priests will burn these parts on the altar, on the whole burnt offering that is on the wood of the fire. It is an offering made by fire, and its smell is pleasing to the Lord.

⁶“If a person’s fellowship offering to the Lord is a lamb or a goat, it may be a male or female, but it must have nothing wrong with it. ⁷If he offers a lamb, he must bring it before the Lord ⁸and put his hand on its head. Then he must kill the animal in front of the Meeting Tent, and the priests must sprinkle its blood on all sides of the altar. ⁹From the fellowship offering the person must make a sacrifice by fire to the Lord. He must bring the fat, the whole fat tail cut off close to the backbone, the fat of the inner organs (both the fat that is in them and that covers them), ¹⁰both kidneys with the fat that is on them, near the lower back muscle, and the best part of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. ¹¹Then the priest will burn these parts on the altar as food; it will be an offering

made by fire to the Lord.

¹²“If a person’s offering is a goat, he must offer it before the Lord ¹³and put his hand on its head. Then he must kill it in front of the Meeting Tent, and the priests must sprinkle its blood on all sides of the altar. ¹⁴From this offering the person must make a sacrifice by fire to the Lord. He must offer all the fat of the goat’s inner organs (both the fat that is in them and that covers them), ¹⁵both kidneys with the fat that is on them near the lower back muscle, and the best part of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. ¹⁶The priest will burn these parts on the altar as food. It is an offering made by fire, and its smell is pleasing to the Lord. All the fat belongs to the Lord.

¹⁷“This law will continue for people from now on, wherever you live: You must not eat any fat or blood.”

The Sin Offering

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Tell the people of Israel this: ‘When a person sins by accident and does some things the Lord has commanded not to be done, that person must do these things:

³“If the appointed priest sins so that he brings guilt on the people, then he must offer a young bull to the Lord, one that has nothing wrong with it, as a sin offering for the sin he has done. ⁴He will bring the bull to the entrance of the Meeting Tent in front of the Lord, put his hand on its head, and kill it before the Lord. ⁵Then the appointed priest must bring some of the bull’s blood into the Meeting Tent. ⁶The priest is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the Lord in front of the curtain of the Most Holy Place. ⁷The priest must also put some of the blood on the corners of the altar of incense that stands before the Lord in the Meeting Tent. The rest of the blood he must pour out at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering, which is at the entrance of the Meeting Tent. ⁸He must remove all the fat from the bull of the sin offering—the fat on and around the inner organs, ⁹both kidneys with the fat that is on them near the lower back muscle, and the best part of the liver which he will remove with the kidneys. ¹⁰(He must do this in the same way the fat is removed from the bull of the fellowship offering.) Then the priest must burn the animal parts on the altar of burnt offering. ¹¹But the priest must carry off the skin of the bull and all its meat, along with the rest of the bull—its head, legs, intestines, and other inner organs. ¹²He must take it outside the camp to the special clean place where

the ashes are poured out. He must burn it on a wood fire on the pile of ashes.

¹³“If the whole nation of Israel sins accidentally without knowing it and does something the Lord has commanded not to be done, they are guilty. ¹⁴When they learn about the sin they have done, they must offer a young bull as a sin offering and bring it before the Meeting Tent. ¹⁵The older leaders of the group of people must put their hands on the bull’s head before the Lord, and it must be killed before the Lord. ¹⁶Then the appointed priest must bring some of the bull’s blood into the Meeting Tent. ¹⁷Dipping his finger in the blood, he must sprinkle it seven times before the Lord in front of the curtain. ¹⁸Then he must put some of the blood on the corners of the altar that is before the Lord in the Meeting Tent. The priest must pour out the rest of the blood at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering, which is at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. ¹⁹He must remove all the fat from the animal and burn it on the altar; ²⁰he will do the same thing with this bull that he did with the first bull of the sin offering. In this way the priest removes the sins of the people so they will belong to the Lord and be forgiven. ²¹Then the priest must carry the bull outside the camp and burn it, just as he did with the first bull. This is the sin offering for the whole community.

²²“If a ruler sins by accident and does something the Lord his God has commanded must not be done, he is guilty. ²³When he learns about his sin, he must bring a male goat that has nothing wrong with it as his offering. ²⁴The ruler must put his hand on the goat’s head and kill it in the place where they kill the whole burnt offering before the Lord; it is a sin offering. ²⁵The priest must take some of the blood of the sin offering on

his finger and put it on the corners of the altar of burnt offering. He must pour out the rest of the blood at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering.²⁶ He must burn all the goat's fat on the altar in the same way he burns the fat of the fellowship offerings. In this way the priest removes the ruler's sin so he belongs to the Lord, and the Lord will forgive him.

²⁷“If any person in the community sins by accident and does something which the Lord has commanded must not be done, he is guilty.²⁸ When the person learns about his sin, he must bring a female goat that has nothing wrong with it as an offering for his sin.²⁹ He must put his hand on the animal's head and kill it at the place of the whole burnt offering.³⁰ Then the priest must take some of the goat's blood on his finger and put it on the corners of the altar of burnt offering. He must pour out the rest of the goat's blood at the bottom of the altar.³¹ Then the priest must remove all the goat's fat in the same way the fat is removed from the fellowship offerings. He must burn it on the altar as a smell pleasing to the Lord. In this way the priest will remove that person's sin so he will belong to the Lord, and the Lord will forgive him.

³²“If this person brings a lamb as his offering for sin, he must bring a female that has nothing wrong with it.³³ He must put his hand on the animal's head and kill it as a sin offering in the place where the whole burnt offering is killed.³⁴ The priest must take some of the blood from the sin offering on his finger and put it on the corners of the altar of burnt offering. He must pour out the rest of the lamb's blood at the bottom of the altar.³⁵ Then the priest must remove all the lamb's fat in the same way that the lamb's fat is removed from the fellowship offerings. He must burn the pieces on the altar on top of the

offerings made by fire for the Lord. In this way the priest will remove that person's sins so he will belong to the Lord, and the Lord will forgive him.

Don't trust your conscience. Trust the cross. The blood has been spilt and the veil has been split. You are welcome in God's presence. —Max Lucado (*He Chose the Nails*)

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The Lamb of God

The annual event always drew a crowd. The priest would solemnly ascend the temple steps, cradling in his arms a lamb. As the people waited outside, he would pass through the great curtain and enter the Holy of Holies. He would kill the lamb upon the altar and pray that the blood would appease God. The sins would be rolled back. And the people would sigh with relief.

A great curtain hung as a reminder of the distance between God and man. It was like a deep chasm that no one could breach. Man on his island ... quarantined because of sin.

God could have left it like that. He could have left the people isolated. He could have washed his hands of the whole mess. He could have turned back, tossed in the towel, and started over on another planet. He *could* have, you know.

But he didn't.

God himself breached the chasm. In the darkness of an eclipsed sun, he and a Lamb stood in the Holy of Holies. He laid the Lamb on the altar. Not the lamb

of a priest or a Jew or a shepherd, but the Lamb of God. The angels hushed as the blood of the Sufficient Sacrifice began to fall on the golden altar. Where had dripped the blood of lambs, now dripped the blood of life.

“Behold the Lamb of God.”

And then it happened. God turned and looked one last time at the curtain.

“No more.” And it was torn ... from top to bottom. Ripped in two.

“No more!”

“No more lambs!”

“No more curtain!”

“No more sacrifices!”

“No more separation!”

And the sun came out. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

Special Types of Accidental Sins

“If a person is ordered to tell in court what he has seen or what he knows and he does not tell the court, he is guilty of sin.

²“Or someone might touch something unclean, such as the dead body of an unclean wild animal or an unclean farm animal or an unclean crawling animal. Even if he does not know that he touched it, he will still be unclean and guilty of sin.

³“Someone might touch human uncleanness—anything that makes someone unclean—and not know it. But when he learns about it, he will be guilty.

⁴“Or someone might make a promise before the Lord without thinking. It might be a promise to do something bad or something good; it might be about anything. Even if he forgets about it, when he remembers, he will be guilty.

⁵“When anyone is guilty of any of these things, he must tell how he sinned. ⁶He must bring an offering to the Lord as a penalty for sin; it must be a female lamb or goat from the flock. The priest will perform the acts to remove that person’s sin so he will belong to the Lord.

⁷“But if the person cannot afford a lamb, he must bring two doves or two young pigeons to the Lord as the penalty for his sin. One bird must be for a sin offering, and the other must be for a whole burnt offering. ⁸He must bring them to the priest, who will first offer the one for the sin offering. He will pull the bird’s head from its neck, but he will not pull it completely off. ⁹He must sprinkle the blood from the sin offering on the side of the altar, and then he must pour the rest of the blood at the

bottom of the altar; it is a sin offering. ¹⁰Then the priest must offer the second bird as a whole burnt offering, as the law says. In this way the priest will remove the person's sin so he will belong to the Lord, and the Lord will forgive him.

¹¹“If the person cannot afford two doves or two pigeons, he must bring about two quarts of fine flour as an offering for sin. He must not put oil or incense on the flour, because it is a sin offering. ¹²He must bring the flour to the priest. The priest will take a handful of the flour as a memorial offering and burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made by fire to the Lord; it is a sin offering. ¹³In this way the priest will remove the person's sins so he will belong to the Lord, and the Lord will forgive him. What is left of the sin offering belongs to the priest, like the grain offering.”

The Penalty Offering

¹⁴The Lord said to Moses, ¹⁵“If a person accidentally sins and does something against the holy things of the Lord, he must bring from the flock a male sheep that has nothing wrong with it. This will be his penalty offering to the Lord. Its value in silver must be correct as set by the Holy Place measure. It is a penalty offering. ¹⁶That person must pay for the sin he did against the holy thing, adding one-fifth to its value. Then he must give it all to the priest. In this way the priest will remove the person's sin so he will belong to the Lord, by using the male sheep as the penalty offering. And the Lord will forgive the person.

¹⁷“If a person sins and does something the Lord has commanded not to be done, even if he does not know it, he is

still guilty. He is responsible for his sin. ¹⁸He must bring the priest a male sheep from the flock, one that has nothing wrong with it and that is worth the correct amount. It will be a penalty offering. Though the person sinned without knowing it, with this offering the priest will remove the sin so the person will belong to the Lord, and the Lord will forgive him. ¹⁹The person is guilty of doing wrong, so he must give the penalty offering to the Lord.”

The Lord said to Moses, ²“A person might sin against the Lord by doing one of these sins: He might lie about what happened to something he was taking care of for someone else, or he might lie about a promise he made. He might steal something or cheat someone. ³He might find something that had been lost and then lie about it. He might make a promise before the Lord about something and not mean it, or he might do some other sin. ⁴If he does any of these things, he is guilty of sin. He must bring back whatever he stole or whatever he took by cheating. He must bring back the thing he took care of for someone else. He must bring back what he found and lied about ⁵or what he made a false promise about. He must pay the full price plus an extra one-fifth of the value of what he took. He must give the money to the true owner on the day he brings his penalty offering. ⁶He must bring his penalty to the priest—a male sheep from the flock, one that does not have anything wrong with it and that is worth the correct amount. It will be a penalty offering to the Lord. ⁷Then the priest will perform the acts to remove that person’s sin so he will belong to the Lord, and the Lord will forgive him for the sins that made him guilty.”

The Whole Burnt Offering

⁸The Lord said to Moses, ⁹“Give this command to Aaron and the priests: ‘These are the teachings about the whole burnt offering: The burnt offering must stay on the altar all night until morning, and the altar’s fire must be kept burning. ¹⁰The priest must put on his linen robe and linen underclothes next to his body. Then he will remove the ashes from the burnt offering on the altar and put them beside the altar. ¹¹Then he must take off

those clothes and put on others and carry the ashes outside the camp to a special clean place.¹² But the fire must be kept burning on the altar; it must not be allowed to go out. The priest must put more firewood on the altar every morning, place the whole burnt offering on the fire, and burn the fat of the fellowship offerings.¹³ The fire must be kept burning on the altar all the time; it must not go out.

The Grain Offering

¹⁴“These are the teachings about the grain offering: The priests must bring it to the Lord in front of the altar.¹⁵ The priest must take a handful of fine flour, with the oil and all of the incense on it, and burn the grain offering on the altar as a memorial offering to the Lord. Its smell is pleasing to him.¹⁶ Aaron and the priests may eat what is left, but it must be eaten without yeast in a holy place. They must eat it in the courtyard of the Meeting Tent.¹⁷ It must not be cooked with yeast. I have given it as their share of the offerings made to me by fire; it is most holy, like the sin offering and the penalty offering.¹⁸ Any male descendant of Aaron may eat it as his share of the offerings made to the Lord by fire, and this will continue from now on. Whatever touches these offerings shall become holy.”

¹⁹The Lord said to Moses,²⁰“This is the offering Aaron and the priests must bring to the Lord on the day they appoint Aaron as high priest: They must bring two quarts of fine flour for a continual grain offering, half of it in the morning and half in the evening.²¹ The fine flour must be mixed with oil and cooked on a griddle. Bring it when it is well mixed. Present the

grain offering that is broken into pieces, and it will be a smell that is pleasing to the Lord.²²One of the priests appointed to take Aaron's place as high priest must make the grain offering. It is a rule forever that the grain offering must be completely burned to the Lord.²³Every grain offering made by a priest must be completely burned; it must not be eaten."

The Sin Offering

²⁴The Lord said to Moses,²⁵"Tell Aaron and the priests: 'These are the teachings about the sin offering: The sin offering must be killed in front of the Lord in the same place the whole burnt offering is killed; it is most holy.²⁶The priest who offers the sin offering must eat it in a holy place, in the courtyard of the Meeting Tent.²⁷Whatever touches the meat of the sin offering must be holy, and if the blood is sprinkled on any clothes, you must wash them in a holy place.²⁸The clay pot the meat is cooked in must be broken, or if a bronze pot is used, it must be scrubbed and rinsed with water.²⁹Any male in a priest's family may eat the offering; it is most holy.³⁰But if the blood of the sin offering is taken into the Meeting Tent and used to remove sin in the Holy Place, that sin offering must be burned with fire. It must not be eaten.

The Penalty Offering

“These are the teachings about the penalty offering, which is most holy:²The penalty offering must be killed where the whole burnt offering is killed. Then the priest must sprinkle its blood on all sides of the altar. ³He must offer all the fat from the penalty offering—the fat tail, the fat that covers the inner organs, ⁴both kidneys with the fat that is on them near the lower back muscle, and the best part of the liver, which is to be removed with the kidneys. ⁵The priest must burn all these things on the altar as an offering made by fire to the Lord. It is a penalty offering. ⁶Any male in a priest’s family may eat it. It is most holy, so it must be eaten in a holy place.

⁷“The penalty offering is like the sin offering in that the teachings are the same for both. The priest who offers the sacrifice to remove sins will get the meat for food. ⁸The priest who offers the burnt offering may also have the skin from it. ⁹Every grain offering that is baked in an oven, cooked on a griddle, or baked in a dish belongs to the priest who offers it. ¹⁰Every grain offering, either dry or mixed with oil, belongs to the priests, and all priests will share alike.

The Fellowship Offering

¹¹“These are the teachings about the fellowship offering a person may offer to the Lord: ¹²If he brings the fellowship offering to show his thanks, he should also bring loaves of bread made without yeast that are mixed with oil, wafers made

without yeast that have oil poured over them, and loaves of fine flour that are mixed with oil. ¹³He must also offer loaves of bread made with yeast along with his fellowship offering, which he gives to show thanks. ¹⁴One of each kind of offering will be for the Lord; it will be given to the priest who sprinkles the blood of the fellowship offering. ¹⁵When the fellowship offering is given to thank the Lord, the meat from it must be eaten the same day it is offered; none of it must be left until morning.

¹⁶“If a person brings a fellowship offering just to give a gift to God or because of a special promise to him, the sacrifice should be eaten the same day he offers it. If there is any left, it may be eaten the next day. ¹⁷If any meat from this sacrifice is left on the third day, it must be burned up. ¹⁸Any meat of the fellowship offering eaten on the third day will not be accepted, nor will the sacrifice count for the person who offered it. It will become unclean, and anyone who eats the meat will be guilty of sin.

¹⁹“People must not eat meat that touches anything unclean; they must burn this meat with fire. Anyone who is clean may eat other meat. ²⁰But if anyone is unclean and eats the meat from the fellowship offering that belongs to the Lord, he must be cut off from his people.

²¹“If anyone touches something unclean—uncleanness that comes from people, from an animal, or from some hated thing—touching it will make him unclean. If he then eats meat from the fellowship offering that belongs to the Lord, he must be cut off from his people.”

²²The Lord said to Moses, ²³“Tell the people of Israel: ‘You must not eat any of the fat from cattle, sheep, or goats. ²⁴If an

animal is found dead or torn by wild animals, you may use its fat for other things, but you must not eat it.²⁵ If someone eats fat from an animal offering made by fire to the Lord, he must be cut off from his people.²⁶ No matter where you live, you must not eat blood from any bird or animal.²⁷ Anyone who eats blood must be cut off from his people.”

The Priests' Share

²⁸The Lord said to Moses,²⁹ “Tell the people of Israel: ‘If someone brings a fellowship offering to the Lord, he must give part of it as his sacrifice to the Lord.³⁰ He must carry that part of the gift in his own hands as an offering made by fire to the Lord. He must bring the fat and the breast of the animal to the priest, to be presented to the Lord as the priests' share.³¹ Then the priest must burn the fat on the altar, but the breast of the animal will belong to Aaron and the priests.³² You must also give the right thigh from the fellowship offering to the priest as a gift;³³ it will belong to the priest who offers the blood and fat of the fellowship offering.³⁴ I have taken the breast and the thigh from the fellowship offerings of the Israelites, and I have given these parts to Aaron and the priests as their share for all time from the Israelites.’”

³⁵This is the portion that belongs to Aaron and his sons from the offerings made by fire to the Lord. They were given this share on the day they were presented to the Lord as priests.³⁶ On the day the Lord appointed the priests, he commanded Israel to give this share to them, and it is to be given to the priests as their share from now on.

³⁷These are the teachings about the whole burnt offering,

the grain offering, the sin offering, the penalty offering, the offering for the appointment of priests, and the fellowship offering.³⁸ The Lord gave these teachings to Moses on Mount Sinai on the day he commanded the Israelites to bring their offerings to the Lord in the Sinai Desert.

Life Lessons

Leviticus 6:8–10:20

Situation

The priests were the official communicators between God and man. God ordained priests as full-time spiritual leaders.

Observation

When God calls and ordains spiritual leaders, they have a special responsibility to live obediently as they walk close to him.

Inspiration

Let's take a look at the important balance between natural and spiritual leadership. A leader, obviously, must have some God-given natural qualities that cause others to respond to his or her influence. At the same time, the Christian leader must possess a marked degree of Spirit-directed, humble devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ ... lest he fall into the category of a self-appointed, ambitious creature who simply loves the spotlight. It is upon this point I want to camp for a few minutes.

Dr. A. W. Tozer wrote:

A true and safe leader is likely to be one who has no desire to lead, but is forced into a position of

leadership by the inward pressure of the Holy Spirit and the press of the external situation. Such were Moses and David and the Old Testament prophets. I think there was hardly a great leader from Paul to the present day but was drafted by the Holy Spirit for the task, and commissioned by the Lord of the Church to fill a position he had little heart for. I believe it might be accepted as a fairly reliable rule of thumb that the man who is ambitious to lead is disqualified as a leader.

Spiritual leaders, you see, are not made by majority vote or ecclesiastical decisions, by conferences or synods. Only God can make them!

For not from the east, nor from the west,

Nor from the desert comes exaltation;

But God is the Judge;

He puts down one, and exalts another ([Psalm 75:6-7](#)).

This means, then, that God makes it His responsibility to prepare, nurture, train, and promote certain people to places of leadership. That's His business, not ours.

(From *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Christ desires all believers to be priests and therefore spiritual leaders. He wants us to live holy and obedient lives. Which areas of your life are less than totally dependent on him? Write down three ways you can pursue holiness before God and start practicing them.

Exploration

Leadership—[Numbers 27:15–17](#); [1 Chronicles 28:1](#).

Aaron and His Sons Appointed

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Bring Aaron and his sons and their clothes, the special olive oil used in appointing people and things to the service of the Lord, the bull of the sin offering and the two male sheep, and the basket of bread made without yeast. ³Then gather the people together at the entrance to the Meeting Tent.” ⁴Moses did as the Lord commanded him, and the people met together at the entrance to the Meeting Tent.

⁵Then Moses spoke to the people and said, “This is what the Lord has commanded to be done.” ⁶Bringing Aaron and his sons forward, Moses washed them with water. ⁷He put the inner robe on Aaron and tied the cloth belt around him. Then Moses put the outer robe on him and placed the holy vest on him. He tied the skillfully woven belt around him so that the holy vest was tied to Aaron. ⁸Then Moses put the chest covering on him and put the Urim and the Thummim in the chest covering. ⁹He also put the turban on Aaron’s head. He put the strip of gold, the holy crown, on the front of the turban, as the Lord commanded him to do.

¹⁰Then Moses put the special oil on the Holy Tent and everything in it, making them holy for the Lord. ¹¹He sprinkled some oil on the altar seven times, sprinkling the altar and all its tools and the large bowl and its base. In this way he made them holy for the Lord. ¹²He poured some of the special oil on Aaron’s head to make Aaron holy for the Lord. ¹³Then Moses brought Aaron’s sons forward. He put the inner robes on them, tied cloth belts around them, and put headbands on them, as

the Lord had commanded him.

¹⁴Then Moses brought the bull for the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons put their hands on its head. ¹⁵Moses killed the bull, took the blood, and with his finger put some of it on all the corners of the altar, to make it pure. Then he poured out the rest of the blood at the bottom of the altar. In this way he made it holy and ready for service to God. ¹⁶Moses took all the fat from the inner organs of the bull, the best part of the liver, and both kidneys with the fat that is on them, and he burned them on the altar. ¹⁷But he took the bull's skin, its meat, and its intestines and burned them in a fire outside the camp, as the Lord had commanded him.

¹⁸Next Moses brought the male sheep of the burnt offering, and Aaron and his sons put their hands on its head. ¹⁹Then Moses killed it and sprinkled the blood on all sides of the altar. ²⁰He cut the male sheep into pieces and burned the head, the pieces, and the fat. ²¹He washed the inner organs and legs with water and burned the whole sheep on the altar as a burnt offering made by fire to the Lord; its smell was pleasing to the Lord. Moses did these things as the Lord had commanded him.

²²Then Moses brought the other male sheep, the one used in appointing Aaron and his sons as priests, and Aaron and his sons put their hands on its head. ²³Then Moses killed the sheep and put some of its blood on the bottom of Aaron's right ear, some on the thumb of Aaron's right hand, and some on the big toe of his right foot. ²⁴Then Moses brought Aaron's sons close to the altar. He put some of the blood on the bottom of their right ears, some on the thumbs of their right hands, and some on the big toes of their right feet. Then he sprinkled blood on all sides of the altar. ²⁵He took the fat, the fat tail, all

the fat on the inner organs, the best part of the liver, both kidneys with their fat, and the right thigh. ²⁶From the basket of bread made without yeast that is put before the Lord each day, Moses took a loaf of bread, a loaf made with oil, and a wafer. He put these pieces of bread on the fat and right thigh of the male sheep. ²⁷All these things he put in the hands of Aaron and his sons and presented them as an offering before the Lord. ²⁸Then Moses took them from their hands and burned them on the altar on top of the burnt offering. So this was the offering for appointing Aaron and his sons as priests. It was an offering made by fire to the Lord, and its smell was pleasing to him. ²⁹Moses also took the breast and presented it as an offering before the Lord. It was Moses' share of the male sheep used in appointing the priests, as the Lord had commanded him.

³⁰Moses took some of the special oil and some of the blood which was on the altar, and he sprinkled them on Aaron and Aaron's clothes and on Aaron's sons and their clothes. In this way Moses made Aaron, his clothes, his sons, and their clothes holy for the Lord.

³¹Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "I gave you a command, saying, 'Aaron and his sons will eat these things.' So take the meat and basket of bread from the offering for appointing priests. Boil the meat at the door of the Meeting Tent, and eat it there with the bread. ³²If any of the meat or bread is left, burn it. ³³The time of appointing will last seven days; you must not go outside the entrance of the Meeting Tent until that time is up. Stay there until the time of your appointing is finished. ³⁴The Lord commanded the things that were done today to remove your sins so you will belong to

him. ³⁵You must stay at the entrance of the Meeting Tent day and night for seven days. If you don't obey the Lord's commands, you will die. The Lord has given me these commands."

Christ Through the Bible

Christ: The Perfect Priest

When we see Christ, what will we see?

We will see the perfect priest. "He was dressed in a long robe and had a gold band around his chest" ([Revelation 1:13](#)). The first readers of this message knew the significance of the robe and band. Jesus is wearing the clothing of a priest. A priest presents people to God and God to people.

You have known other priests. There have been others in your life, whether clergy or not, who sought to bring you to God. But they, too, needed a priest. Some needed a priest more than you did. They, like you, were sinful. Not so with Jesus. "Jesus is the kind of high priest we need. He is holy, sinless, pure, not influenced by sinners, and he is raised above the heavens" ([Hebrews 7:26](#)).

Jesus is the perfect priest.

He is also pure and purifying: "His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like flames of fire" ([Revelation 1:14](#)).

What would a person look like if he had never sinned? If no worry wrinkled his brow and no anger shadowed his eyes? If no bitterness snarled his lips and no selfishness bowed his smile? If a person had

never sinned, how would he appear? We'll know when we see Jesus. What John saw that Sunday on Patmos was absolutely spotless. He was reminded of the virgin wool of sheep and the untouched snow of winter.

And John was also reminded of fire. Others saw the burning bush, the burning altar, the fiery furnace, or the fiery chariots, but John saw the fiery eyes. And in those eyes he saw a purging blaze which will burn the bacteria of sin and purify the soul. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

³⁶So Aaron and his sons did everything the Lord had commanded through Moses.

Aaron and His Sons Offer Sacrifices

On the eighth day after the time of appointing, Moses called for Aaron and his sons and for the older leaders of Israel. ²He said to Aaron, “Take a bull calf and a male sheep that have nothing wrong with them, and offer them to the Lord. The calf will be a sin offering, and the male sheep will be a whole burnt offering. ³Tell the people of Israel, ‘Take a male goat for a sin offering and a calf and a lamb for a whole burnt offering; each must be one year old, and it must have nothing wrong with it. ⁴Also take a bull and a male sheep for fellowship offerings, along with a grain offering mixed with oil. Offer all these things to the Lord, because the Lord will appear to you today.’”

⁵So all the people came to the front of the Meeting Tent, bringing the things Moses had commanded them to bring, and they stood before the Lord. ⁶Moses said, “You have done what the Lord commanded, so you will see the Lord’s glory.”

⁷Then Moses told Aaron, “Go to the altar and offer sin offerings and whole burnt offerings. Do this to remove your sins and the people’s sins so you will belong to God. Offer the sacrifices for the people and perform the acts to remove their sins for them so they will belong to the Lord, as the Lord has commanded.”

⁸So Aaron went to the altar and killed the bull calf as a sin offering for himself. ⁹Then his sons brought the blood to him, and he dipped his finger in the blood and put it on the corners of the altar. He poured out the rest of the blood at the bottom of the altar. ¹⁰Aaron took the fat, the kidneys, and the best part

of the liver from the sin offering and burned them on the altar, in the way the Lord had commanded Moses.¹¹ The meat and skin he burned outside the camp.

¹²Then Aaron killed the animal for the whole burnt offering. His sons brought the blood to him, and he sprinkled it on all sides of the altar.¹³ As they gave him the pieces and head of the burnt offering, Aaron burned them on the altar.¹⁴ He also washed the inner organs and the legs of the burnt offering and burned them on top of the burnt offering on the altar.

¹⁵Then Aaron brought the offering that was for the people. He took the goat of the people's sin offering and killed it and offered it for the sin offering, just as he had done the first sin offering.

¹⁶Then Aaron brought the whole burnt offering and offered it in the way that the Lord had commanded.¹⁷ He also brought the grain offering to the altar. He took a handful of the grain and burned it on the altar, in addition to the morning's burnt offering.

¹⁸Aaron also killed the bull and the male sheep as the fellowship offerings for the people. His sons brought him the blood, and he sprinkled it on all sides of the altar.¹⁹ Aaron's sons also brought to Aaron the fat of the bull and the male sheep—the fat tail, the fat covering the inner organs, the kidneys, and the best part of the liver.²⁰ Aaron's sons put them on the breasts of the bull and the sheep. Then Aaron burned these fat parts on the altar.²¹ He presented the breasts and the right thigh before the Lord as the priests' share of the offering, as Moses had commanded.

²²Then Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them. When he had finished offering the sin offering,

the burnt offering, and the fellowship offering, he stepped down from the altar.

²³Moses and Aaron went into the Meeting Tent. Then they came out and blessed the people, and the Lord's glory came to all the people. ²⁴Fire came out from the Lord and burned up the burnt offering and fat on the altar. When the people saw this, they shouted with joy and bowed facedown on the ground.

God Destroys Nadab and Abihu

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their pans for burning incense, put fire in them, and added incense; but they did not use the special fire Moses had commanded them to use in the presence of the Lord.² So fire came down from the Lord and destroyed Nadab and Abihu, and they died in front of the Lord.³ Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord was speaking about when he said,

‘I must be respected as holy
by those who come near me;
before all the people
I must be given honor.’”

So Aaron did not say anything about the death of his sons.

⁴Aaron's uncle Uzziel had two sons named Mishael and Elzaphan. Moses said to them, "Come here and pick up your cousins' bodies. Carry them outside the camp away from the front of the Holy Place."⁵ So Mishael and Elzaphan obeyed Moses and carried the bodies of Nadab and Abihu, still clothed in the special priest's inner robes, outside the camp.

⁶Then Moses said to Aaron and his other sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, "Don't show sadness by tearing your clothes or leaving your hair uncombed. If you do, you will die, and the Lord will be angry with all the people. All the people of Israel, your relatives, may cry loudly about the Lord burning Nadab and Abihu,⁷ but you must not even leave the Meeting Tent. If you go out of the entrance, you will die, because the Lord has

appointed you to his service.” So Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar obeyed Moses.

⁸Then the Lord said to Aaron, ⁹“You and your sons must not drink wine or beer when you go into the Meeting Tent. If you do, you will die. This law will continue from now on. ¹⁰You must keep what is holy separate from what is not holy; you must keep what is clean separate from what is unclean. ¹¹You must teach the people all the laws that the Lord gave to them through Moses.”

¹²Moses said to Aaron and his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, “Eat the part of the grain offering that is left from the sacrifices offered by fire to the Lord, but do not add yeast to it. Eat it near the altar because it is most holy. ¹³You must eat it in a holy place, because this part of the offerings made by fire to the Lord belongs to you and your sons. I have been commanded to tell you this.

¹⁴“Also, you and your sons and daughters may eat the breast and thigh of the fellowship offering that was presented to the Lord. You must eat them in a clean place; they are your share of the fellowship offerings given by the Israelites. ¹⁵The people must bring the fat from their animals that was part of the offering made by fire, and they must present it to the Lord along with the thigh and the breast of the fellowship offering. They will be the regular share of the offerings for you and your children, as the Lord has commanded.”

¹⁶Moses looked for the goat of the sin offering, but it had already been burned up. So he became very angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s remaining sons. He said, ¹⁷“Why didn’t you eat that goat in a holy place? It is most holy, and the Lord gave it to you to take away the guilt of the people, to remove

their sins so they will belong to the Lord. ¹⁸You didn't bring the goat's blood inside the Holy Place. You were supposed to eat the goat in a holy place, as I commanded!"

¹⁹But Aaron said to Moses, "Today they brought their sin offering and burnt offering before the Lord, but these terrible things have still happened to me! Do you think the Lord would be any happier if I ate the sin offering today?" ²⁰When Moses heard this, he was satisfied.

Rules About What May Be Eaten

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ²“Tell the Israelites this: ‘These are the land animals you may eat: ³You may eat any animal that has split hoofs completely divided and that chews the cud.

⁴“Some animals only chew the cud or only have split hoofs, and you must not eat them. The camel chews the cud but does not have a split hoof; it is unclean for you. ⁵The rock badger chews the cud but does not have a split hoof; it is unclean for you. ⁶The rabbit chews the cud but does not have a split hoof; it is unclean for you. ⁷Now the pig has a split hoof that is completely divided, but it does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. ⁸You must not eat the meat from these animals or even touch their dead bodies; they are unclean for you.

⁹“Of the animals that live in the sea or in a river, if the animal has fins and scales, you may eat it. ¹⁰But whatever lives in the sea or in a river and does not have fins and scales—including the things that fill the water and all other things that live in it—you should hate. ¹¹You must not eat any meat from them or even touch their dead bodies, because you should hate them. ¹²You must hate any animal in the water that does not have fins and scales.

¹³“Also, these are the birds you are to hate. They are hateful and should not be eaten. You must not eat eagles, vultures, black vultures, ¹⁴kites, any kind of falcon, ¹⁵any kind of raven, ¹⁶horned owls, screech owls, sea gulls, any kind of hawk, ¹⁷little owls, cormorants, great owls, ¹⁸white owls, desert

owls, ospreys, ¹⁹storks, any kind of heron, hoopoes, or bats.

²⁰“Don’t eat insects that have wings and walk on all four feet; they also are to be hated.

²¹“But you may eat certain insects that have wings and walk on four feet. You may eat those that have legs with joints above their feet so they can jump. ²²These are the insects you may eat: all kinds of locusts, winged locusts, crickets, and grasshoppers. ²³But all other insects that have wings and walk on four feet you are to hate. ²⁴Those insects will make you unclean, and anyone who touches the dead body of one of these insects will become unclean until evening. ²⁵Anyone who picks up one of these dead insects must wash his clothes and be unclean until evening.

²⁶“Some animals have split hoofs, but the hoofs are not completely divided; others do not chew the cud. They are unclean for you, and anyone who touches the dead body of one of these animals will become unclean. ²⁷Of all the animals that walk on four feet, the animals that walk on their paws are unclean for you. Anyone who touches the dead body of one of these animals will become unclean until evening. ²⁸Anyone who picks up their dead bodies must wash his clothes and be unclean until evening; these animals are unclean for you.

²⁹“These crawling animals are unclean for you: moles, rats, all kinds of great lizards, ³⁰geckos, crocodiles, lizards, sand reptiles, and chameleons. ³¹These crawling animals are unclean for you; anyone who touches their dead bodies will be unclean until evening.

³²“If an unclean animal dies and falls on something, that item will also become unclean. This includes anything made from wood, cloth, leather, or rough cloth, regardless of its use.

Whatever the animal falls on must be washed with water and be unclean until evening; then it will become clean again.³³ If the dead, unclean animal falls into a clay bowl, anything in the bowl will become unclean, and you must break the bowl.³⁴ If water from the unclean clay bowl gets on any food, that food will become unclean.³⁵ If any dead, unclean animal falls on something, it becomes unclean. If it is a clay oven or a clay baking pan, it must be broken into pieces. These things will be unclean; they are unclean for you.

³⁶“A spring or well that collects water will stay clean, but anyone who touches the dead body of any unclean animal will become unclean.³⁷ If a dead, unclean animal falls on a seed to be planted, that seed is still clean.³⁸ But if you put water on some seeds and a dead, unclean animal falls on them, they are unclean for you.

³⁹“Also, if an animal which you use for food dies, anyone who touches its body will be unclean until evening.⁴⁰ Anyone who eats meat from this animal's dead body must wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. Anyone who picks up the animal's dead body must wash his clothes and be unclean until evening.

⁴¹“Every animal that crawls on the ground is to be hated; it must not be eaten.⁴² You must not eat any of the animals that crawl on the ground, including those that crawl on their stomachs, that walk on all four feet, or on many feet. They are to be hated.⁴³ Do not make yourself unclean by these animals; you must not become unclean by them.⁴⁴ I am the Lord your God. Keep yourselves holy for me because I am holy. Don't make yourselves unclean with any of these crawling animals.⁴⁵ I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt to be your God;

you must be holy because I am holy.

⁴⁶“These are the teachings about all of the cattle, birds, and other animals on earth, as well as the animals in the sea and those that crawl on the ground. ⁴⁷These teachings help people know the difference between unclean animals and clean animals; they help people know which animals may be eaten and which ones must not be eaten.”

Life Lessons

Leviticus 11:1–15:33

Situation

God set forth his laws for purity. They included food, childbirth, skin diseases, and bodily fluids.

Observation

Failure to obey these regulations was considered sin. While following God's laws did provide good hygienic results, they also separated the pure and clean from the impure and unclean. Israel was to be distinct from the pagan nations surrounding them. We make decisions daily that may not be popular but may be proper.

Inspiration

Anchor your convictions to the Word of God to help present crises from occurring in your life. When facing tough decisions, employ dogged and determined prayer and thinking grounded in the Word.

Do what is right this week, whatever it is, whatever comes down the path, whatever problems and dilemmas you face—just do what's right. Maybe

no one else is doing what's right, but you do what's right. You be honest. You take a stand. You be true. After all, regardless of what you do, God does what is right: he saves you with his grace.

Never let your decisions be made on the basis of the blowings of the winds of opinion and popularity.

The majority is not always right. If the majority had ruled, the children of Israel never would have left Egypt. They would have voted to stay in bondage. If the majority had ruled, David never would have fought Goliath. His brothers would have voted for him to stay with the sheep. What's the point? You must listen to your own heart.

God says you're on your way to becoming a disciple when you can keep a clear head and a pure heart.

Do you ever wonder if everything will turn out right as long as you do everything right? Do you ever try to do something right and yet nothing seems to turn out like you planned? Take heart—when people do what is right, God remembers. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, “Decisions”)

Application

What decisions do you need to make today? Before you make your choice, consider which options would most honor God.

Exploration

Purity—[Psalm 24:4](#); [Matthew 5:8](#); [Philippians 4:6–8](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:1–8](#); [Titus 1:15](#); [2:5](#).

Rules for New Mothers

The Lord said to Moses,²“Tell the people of Israel this: ‘If a woman gives birth to a son, she will become unclean for seven days, as she is unclean during her monthly period.³On the eighth day the boy must be circumcised.⁴Then it will be thirty-three days before she becomes clean from her loss of blood. She must not touch anything that is holy or enter the Holy Tent until her time of cleansing is finished.⁵But if she gives birth to a daughter, the mother will be unclean for two weeks, as she is unclean during her monthly period. It will be sixty-six days before she becomes clean from her loss of blood.

⁶“After she has a son or daughter and her days of cleansing are over, the new mother must bring certain sacrifices to the Meeting Tent. She must give the priest at the entrance a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a dove or young pigeon for a sin offering.⁷He will offer them before the Lord to make her clean so she will belong to the Lord again; then she will be clean from her loss of blood. These are the teachings for a woman who gives birth to a boy or girl.

⁸“If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and one for a sin offering. In this way the priest will make her clean so she will belong to the Lord again, and she will be clean.”

Rules About Skin Diseases

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ²“Someone might have on his skin a swelling or a rash or a bright spot. If the sore looks like a harmful skin disease, the person must be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of Aaron’s sons, the priests. ³The priest must look at the sore on the person’s skin. If the hair in the sore has become white, and the sore seems deeper than the person’s skin, it is a harmful skin disease. When he has finished looking at the person, the priest must announce that the person is unclean.

⁴“If there is a white spot on a person’s skin, but the spot does not seem deeper than the skin, and if the hair from the spot has not turned white, the priest must separate that person from other people for seven days. ⁵On the seventh day the priest must look at the person again. If he sees that the sore has not changed and it has not spread on the skin, the priest must keep the person separated for seven more days. ⁶On the seventh day the priest must look at the person again. If the sore has faded and has not spread on the skin, the priest must announce that the person is clean. The sore is only a rash. The person must wash his clothes, and he will become clean again.

⁷“But if the rash spreads again after the priest has announced him clean, the person must come again to the priest. ⁸The priest must look at him, and if the rash has spread on the skin, the priest must announce that the person is unclean; it is a harmful skin disease.

⁹“If a person has a harmful skin disease, he must be

brought to the priest,¹⁰ and the priest must look at him. If there is a white swelling in the skin, and the hair has become white, and the skin looks raw in the swelling,¹¹ it is a harmful skin disease. It is one he has had for a long time. The priest must announce that the person is unclean. He will not need to separate that person from other people, because everyone already knows that the person is unclean.

¹²“If the skin disease spreads all over a person’s body, covering his skin from his head to his feet, as far as the priest can see, the priest must look at the person’s whole body. ¹³If the priest sees that the disease covers the whole body and has turned all of the person’s skin white, he must announce that the person is clean.

¹⁴“But when the person has an open sore, he is unclean. ¹⁵When the priest sees the open sore, he must announce that the person is unclean. The open sore is not clean; it is a harmful skin disease. ¹⁶If the open sore becomes white again, the person must come to the priest. ¹⁷The priest must look at him, and if the sores have become white, the priest must announce that the person with the sores is clean. Then he will be clean.

¹⁸“Someone may have a boil on his skin that is healed. ¹⁹If in the place where the boil was, there is a white swelling or a bright red spot, this place on the skin must be shown to the priest. ²⁰And the priest must look at it. If the spot seems deeper than the skin and the hair on it has become white, the priest must announce that the person is unclean. The spot is a harmful skin disease that has broken out from inside the boil. ²¹But if the priest looks at the spot and there are no white hairs in it and the spot is not deeper than the skin and it has faded,

the priest must separate the person from other people for seven days.²² If the spot spreads on the skin, the priest must announce that the person is unclean; it is a disease that will spread.²³ But if the bright spot does not spread or change, it is only the scar from the old boil. Then the priest must announce that the person is clean.

²⁴“When a person gets a burn on his skin, if the open sore becomes white or red,²⁵ the priest must look at it. If the white spot seems deeper than the skin and the hair at that spot has become white, it is a harmful skin disease. The disease has broken out in the burn, and the priest must announce that the person is unclean. It is a harmful skin disease.²⁶ But if the priest looks at the spot and there is no white hair in the bright spot, and the spot is no deeper than the skin and has faded, the priest must separate the person from other people for seven days.²⁷ On the seventh day the priest must look at him again. If the spot has spread on the skin, the priest must announce that the person is unclean. It is a harmful skin disease.²⁸ But if the bright spot has not spread on the skin but has faded, it is the swelling from the burn. The priest must announce that the person is clean, because the spot is only a scar from the burn.

²⁹“When a man or a woman gets a sore on the scalp or on the chin,³⁰ a priest must look at the sore. If it seems deeper than the skin and the hair around it is thin and yellow, the priest must announce that the person is unclean. It is an itch, a harmful skin disease of the head or chin.³¹ But if the priest looks at it and it does not seem deeper than the skin and there is no black hair in it, the priest must separate the person from other people for seven days.³² On the seventh day the priest must look at the sore. If it has not spread, and there are no

yellow hairs growing in it, and the sore does not seem deeper than the skin,³³ the person must shave himself, but he must not shave the sore place. The priest must separate that person from other people for seven more days.³⁴ On the seventh day the priest must look at the sore. If it has not spread on the skin and it does not seem deeper than the skin, the priest must announce that the person is clean. So the person must wash his clothes and become clean.³⁵ But if the sore spreads on the skin after the person has become clean,³⁶ the priest must look at him again. If the sore has spread on the skin, the priest doesn't need to look for the yellowish hair; the person is unclean.³⁷ But if the priest thinks the sore has stopped spreading, and black hair is growing in it, the sore has healed. The person is clean, and the priest must announce that he is clean.

³⁸“When a man or a woman has white spots on the skin,³⁹ a priest must look at them. If the spots on the skin are dull white, the disease is only a harmless rash. That person is clean.

⁴⁰“When anyone loses hair from his head and is bald, he is clean.⁴¹ If he loses hair from the front of his head and has a bald forehead, he is clean.⁴² But if there is a red-white sore on his bald head or forehead, it is a skin disease breaking out in those places.⁴³ A priest must look at that person. If the swelling of the sore on his bald head or forehead is red-white, like a skin disease that spreads,⁴⁴ that person has a skin disease. He is unclean. The priest must announce that the person is unclean because of the sore on his head.

⁴⁵“If a person has a skin disease that spreads, he must warn other people by shouting, ‘Unclean, unclean!’ His clothes must be torn at the seams, he must let his hair stay uncombed, and

he must cover his mouth.⁴⁶ That person will be unclean the whole time he has the disease; he is unclean. He must live alone outside the camp.

Rules About Mildew

⁴⁷“Clothing might have mildew on it. It might be clothing made of linen or wool⁴⁸ (either woven or knitted), or of leather, or something made from leather. ⁴⁹If the mildew in the clothing, leather, or woven or knitted material is green or red, it is a spreading mildew. It must be shown to the priest. ⁵⁰The priest must look at the mildew, and he must put that piece of clothing in a separate place for seven days. ⁵¹On the seventh day he must look at the mildew again. If the mildew has spread on the cloth (either woven or knitted) or the leather, no matter what the leather was used for, it is a mildew that destroys; it is unclean. ⁵²The priest must burn the clothing. It does not matter if it is woven or knitted, wool or linen, or made of leather, because the mildew is spreading. It must be burned.

⁵³“If the priest sees that the mildew has not spread in the cloth (either knitted or woven) or leather, ⁵⁴he must order the people to wash that piece of leather or cloth. Then he must separate the clothing for seven more days. ⁵⁵After the piece with the mildew has been washed, the priest must look at it again. If the mildew still looks the same, the piece is unclean, even if the mildew has not spread. You must burn it in fire; it does not matter if the mildew is on one side or the other.

⁵⁶“But when the priest looks at that piece of leather or cloth, the mildew might have faded after the piece has been washed. Then the priest must tear the mildew out of the piece of leather

or cloth (either woven or knitted).⁵⁷ But if the mildew comes back to that piece of leather or cloth (either woven or knitted), the mildew is spreading. And whatever has the mildew must be burned with fire.⁵⁸ When the cloth (either woven or knitted) or the leather is washed and the mildew is gone, it must be washed again; then it will be clean.

⁵⁹“These are the teachings about mildew on pieces of cloth (either woven or knitted) or leather, to decide if they are clean or unclean.”

Rules for Cleansing from Skin Diseases

The Lord said to Moses, ²“These are the teachings for the time at which people who had a harmful skin disease are made clean.

“The person shall be brought to the priest, ³and the priest must go outside the camp and look at the one who had the skin disease. If the skin disease is healed, ⁴the priest will command that two living, clean birds, a piece of cedar wood, a piece of red string, and a hyssop plant be brought for cleansing the person with the skin disease.

⁵“The priest must order one bird to be killed in a clay bowl containing fresh water. ⁶Then he will take the living bird, the piece of cedar wood, the red string, and the hyssop; all these he will dip into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. ⁷The priest will sprinkle the blood seven times on the person being cleansed from the skin disease. He must announce that the person is clean and then go to an open field and let the living bird go free.

⁸“The person to be cleansed must wash his clothes, shave off all his hair, and bathe in water. Then he will be clean and may go into the camp, though he must stay outside his tent for the first seven days. ⁹On the seventh day he must shave off all his hair—the hair from his head, his beard, his eyebrows, and the rest of his hair. He must wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and he will be clean.

¹⁰“On the eighth day the person who had the skin disease must take two male lambs that have nothing wrong with them and a year-old female lamb that has nothing wrong with it. He

must also take six quarts of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering and two-thirds of a pint of olive oil. ¹¹The priest who is to announce that the person is clean must bring him and his sacrifices before the Lord at the entrance of the Meeting Tent. ¹²The priest will take one of the male lambs and offer it with the olive oil as a penalty offering; he will present them before the Lord as an offering. ¹³Then he will kill the male lamb in the holy place, where the sin offering and the whole burnt offering are killed. The penalty offering is like the sin offering—it belongs to the priest and it is most holy.

^{14c}The priest will take some of the blood of the penalty offering and put it on the bottom of the right ear of the person to be made clean. He will also put some of it on the thumb of the person's right hand and on the big toe of the person's right foot. ¹⁵Then the priest will take some of the oil and pour it into his own left hand. ¹⁶He will dip a finger of his right hand into the oil that is in his left hand, and with his finger he will sprinkle some of the oil seven times before the Lord. ¹⁷The priest will put some oil from his hand on the bottom of the right ear of the person to be made clean, some on the thumb of the person's right hand, and some on the big toe of the person's right foot. The oil will go on these places on top of the blood for the penalty offering. ¹⁸He will put the rest of the oil that is in his left hand on the head of the person to be made clean. In this way the priest will make that person clean so he can belong to the Lord again.

^{19c}Next the priest will offer the sin offering to make that person clean so he can belong to the Lord again. After this the priest will kill the animal for the whole burnt offering, ²⁰and he will offer the burnt offering and grain offering on the altar. In

this way he will make that person clean so he can belong to the Lord again.

²¹“But if the person is poor and unable to afford these offerings, he must take one male lamb for a penalty offering. It will be presented to the Lord to make him clean so he can belong to the Lord again. The person must also take two quarts of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering. He must also take two-thirds of a pint of olive oil²² and two doves or two young pigeons, which he can afford. One bird is for a sin offering and the other for a whole burnt offering.²³ On the eighth day the person will bring them for his cleansing to the priest at the entrance of the Meeting Tent, before the Lord.

²⁴The priest will take the lamb for the penalty offering and the oil, and he will present them as an offering before the Lord.

²⁵Then he will kill the lamb of the penalty offering, take some of its blood, and put it on the bottom of the right ear of the person to be made clean. The priest will put some of this blood on the thumb of the person's right hand and some on the big toe of the person's right foot.²⁶ He will also pour some of the oil into his own left hand.²⁷ Then with a finger of his right hand, he will sprinkle some of the oil from his left hand seven times before the Lord.²⁸ The priest will take some of the oil from his hand and put it on the bottom of the right ear of the person to be made clean. He will also put some of it on the thumb of the person's right hand and some on the big toe of the person's right foot. The oil will go on these places on top of the blood from the penalty offering.²⁹ The priest must put the rest of the oil that is in his hand on the head of the person to be made clean, to make him clean so he can belong to the Lord again.

³⁰Then the priest will offer one of the doves or young pigeons,

which the person can afford.³¹ He must offer one of the birds for a sin offering and the other for a whole burnt offering, along with the grain offering. In this way the priest will make the person clean so he can belong to the Lord again; he will become clean.

³²“These are the teachings for making a person clean after he has had a skin disease, if he cannot afford the regular sacrifices for becoming clean.”

Rules for Cleaning Mildew

³³The Lord also said to Moses and Aaron, ³⁴“I am giving the land of Canaan to your people. When they enter that land, if I cause mildew to grow in someone’s house in that land, ³⁵the owner of that house must come and tell the priest. He should say, ‘I have seen something like mildew in my house.’ ³⁶Then the priest must order the people to empty the house before he goes in to look at the mildew. This is so he will not have to say that everything in the house is unclean. After this, the priest will go in to look at it. ³⁷He will look at the mildew, and if the mildew on the walls of the house is green or red and goes into the wall’s surface, ³⁸he must go out and close up the house for seven days. ³⁹On the seventh day the priest must come back and check the house. If the mildew has spread on the walls of the house, ⁴⁰the priest must order the people to tear out the stones with the mildew on them. They should throw them away, at a certain unclean place outside the city. ⁴¹Then the priest must have all the inside of the house scraped. The people must throw away the plaster they scraped off the walls, at a certain unclean place outside the city. ⁴²Then the owner

must put new stones in the walls, and he must cover the walls with new clay plaster.

⁴³“Suppose a person has taken away the old stones and plaster and put in new stones and plaster. If mildew again appears in his house, ⁴⁴the priest must come back and check the house again. If the mildew has spread in the house, it is a mildew that destroys things; the house is unclean. ⁴⁵Then the owner must tear down the house, remove all its stones, plaster, and wood, and take them to the unclean place outside the city. ⁴⁶Anyone who goes into that house while it is closed up will be unclean until evening. ⁴⁷Anyone who eats in that house or lies down there must wash his clothes.

⁴⁸“Suppose after new stones and plaster have been put in a house, the priest checks it again and the mildew has not spread. Then the priest will announce that the house is clean, because the mildew is gone.

⁴⁹“Then, to make the house clean, the priest must take two birds, a piece of cedar wood, a piece of red string, and a hyssop plant. ⁵⁰He will kill one bird in a clay bowl containing fresh water. ⁵¹Then he will take the bird that is still alive, the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the red string, and he will dip them into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. The priest will sprinkle the blood on the house seven times. ⁵²He will use the bird’s blood, the fresh water, the live bird, the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the red string to make the house clean. ⁵³He will then go to an open field outside the city and let the living bird go free. This is how the priest makes the house clean and ready for service to the Lord.”

⁵⁴These are the teachings about any kind of skin disease, ⁵⁵mildew on pieces of cloth or in a house, ⁵⁶swellings, rashes, or

bright spots on the skin;⁵⁷ they help people decide when things are unclean and when they are clean. These are the teachings about all these kinds of diseases.

Rules About a Person's Body

The Lord also said to Moses and Aaron,²“Say to the people of Israel: ‘When a fluid comes from a person’s body, the fluid is unclean.³It doesn’t matter if the fluid flows freely or if it is blocked from flowing; the fluid will make him unclean. This is the way the fluid makes him unclean:

⁴“If the person who discharges the body fluid lies on a bed, that bed becomes unclean, and everything he sits on becomes unclean.⁵Anyone who touches his bed must wash his clothes and bathe in water, and the person will be unclean until evening.⁶Whoever sits on something that the person who discharges the fluid sat on must wash his clothes and bathe in water; he will be unclean until evening.⁷Anyone who touches the person who discharges the body fluid must wash his clothes and bathe in water; he will be unclean until evening.

⁸“If the person who discharges the body fluid spits on someone who is clean, that person must wash his clothes and bathe in water; he will be unclean until evening.⁹Everything on which the person who is unclean sits when riding will become unclean.¹⁰Anyone who touches something that was under him will be unclean until evening. And anyone who carries these things must wash his clothes and bathe in water; he will be unclean until evening.

¹¹“If the person who discharges a body fluid has not washed his hands in water and touches another person, that person must wash his clothes and bathe in water; he will be unclean until evening.

¹²“If a person who discharges a body fluid touches a clay bowl, that bowl must be broken. If he touches a wooden bowl, that bowl must be washed in water.

¹³“When a person who discharges a body fluid is made clean, he must count seven days for himself for his cleansing. He must wash his clothes and bathe his body in fresh water, and he will be clean. ¹⁴On the eighth day he must take two doves or two young pigeons before the Lord at the entrance of the Meeting Tent. He will give the two birds to the priest. ¹⁵The priest will offer the birds, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. And the priest will make that person clean so he can belong to the Lord again.

¹⁶“If semen goes out from a man, he must bathe in water; he will be unclean until evening. ¹⁷If the fluid gets on any clothing or leather, it must be washed with water; it will be unclean until evening.

¹⁸“If a man has sexual relations with a woman and semen comes out, both people must bathe in water; they will be unclean until evening.

Rules About a Woman's Body

¹⁹“When a woman has her monthly period, she is unclean for seven days; anyone who touches her will be unclean until evening. ²⁰Anything she lies on during this time will be unclean, and everything she sits on during this time will be unclean. ²¹Anyone who touches her bed must wash his clothes and bathe in water; that person will be unclean until evening. ²²Anyone who touches something she has sat on must wash his clothes and bathe in water; that person will be unclean until

evening.²³It does not matter if the person touched the woman's bed or something she sat on; he will be unclean until evening.

²⁴“If a man has sexual relations with a woman and her monthly period touches him, he will be unclean for seven days; every bed he lies on will be unclean.

²⁵“If a woman has a loss of blood for many days and it is not during her regular monthly period, or if she continues to have a loss of blood after her regular period, she will be unclean, as she is during her monthly period. She will be unclean for as long as she continues to bleed.²⁶Any bed she lies on during all the time of her bleeding will be like her bed during her regular monthly period. Everything she sits on will be unclean, as during her regular monthly period.

²⁷“Whoever touches those things will be unclean and must wash his clothes and bathe in water; he will be unclean until evening.²⁸When the woman becomes clean from her bleeding, she must wait seven days, and after this she will be clean.²⁹Then on the eighth day she must take two doves or two young pigeons and bring them to the priest at the entrance of the Meeting Tent.³⁰The priest must offer one bird for a sin offering and the other for a whole burnt offering. In this way the priest will make her clean so she can belong to the Lord again.

³¹“So you must warn the people of Israel to stay separated from things that make them unclean. If you don't warn the people, they might make my Holy Tent unclean, and then they would have to die!”

³²These are the teachings for the person who discharges a body fluid and for the man who becomes unclean from [semen](#)

coming out of his body.³³ These are the teachings for the woman who becomes unclean from her monthly period, for a man or woman who has a discharge, and for a man who becomes unclean by having sexual relations with a woman who is unclean.

Life Lessons

Leviticus 16:1–17:16

Situation

The Day of Atonement was the holiest day for the Israelites. The ceremonies included the sin offering of a bull for the high priest and his household, the sin offering of two goats for the people, and the ritual of sending a goat into the wilderness.

Observation

The number of sins atoned for by the Day of Atonement is staggering. The sin offering cleansed the place of God's dwelling from the pollution of the people's sins.

Inspiration

What prevents people from being rightly related to God? Sin. And if heaven promises a right relationship with God, what is missing in heaven? You got it, baby. Sin. Heaven will be sin-free. Both death and sin will be things of the past.

Is this a big deal? I think so... Can you imagine a world minus sin? Have you done anything recently because of sin?

At the very least, you've complained. You've worried. You've grumbled. You've hoarded when you should have shared. You've turned away when you should have helped. You've second-guessed, and you've covered up. But you won't do that in heaven.

Because of sin, you've snapped at the ones you love and argued with the ones you cherish. You have

felt ashamed, guilty, bitter. You have ulcers, sleepless nights, cloudy days, and a pain in the neck. But you won't have those in heaven.

Because of sin, the young are abused and the elderly forgotten. Because of sin, God is cursed and drugs are worshiped. Because of sin, the poor have less and the affluent want more. Because of sin, babies have no daddies and husbands have no wives. But in heaven, sin will have no power; in fact, sin will have no presence. There will be no sin.

Sin has sired a thousand heartaches and broken a million promises. Your addiction can be traced back to sin. Your mistrust can be traced back to sin. Bigotry, robbery, adultery—all because of sin. But in heaven, all of this will end.

Can you imagine a world without sin? If so, you can imagine heaven. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

Application

Don't let sin get you down. If you've repented of your sins, you can accept God's forgiveness. So thank him for his mercy and move on.

Exploration

Christ's Death for Sin—[Romans 4:25](#); [1 Corinthians 15:3](#); [1 Peter 2:24](#); [1 John 2:2](#); [3:5](#).

The Day of Cleansing

Now two of Aaron's sons had died while offering incense to the Lord, and after that time the Lord spoke to Moses.²The Lord said to him, "Tell your brother Aaron that there are times when he cannot go behind the curtain into the Most Holy Place where the Ark is. If he goes in when I appear in a cloud over the lid on the Ark, he will die.

³"This is how Aaron may enter the Most Holy Place: Before he enters, he must offer a bull for a sin offering and a male sheep for a whole burnt offering.⁴He must put on the holy linen inner robe, with the linen underclothes next to his body. His belt will be the cloth belt, and he will wear the linen turban. These are holy clothes, so he must bathe his body in water before he puts them on.

⁵"Aaron must take from the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and one male sheep for a burnt offering.⁶Then he will offer the bull for the sin offering for himself to remove sins from him and his family so they will belong to the Lord.

⁷"Next Aaron will take the two goats and bring them before the Lord at the entrance to the Meeting Tent.⁸He will throw lots for the two goats—one will be for the Lord and the other for the goat that removes sin.⁹Then Aaron will take the goat that was chosen for the Lord by throwing the lot, and he will offer it as a sin offering.¹⁰The other goat, which was chosen by

lot to remove the sin, must be brought alive before the Lord. The priest will use it to perform the acts that remove Israel's sin so they will belong to the Lord. Then this goat will be sent out into the desert as a goat that removes sin.

¹¹“Then Aaron will offer the bull as a sin offering for himself, to remove the sins from him and his family so they will belong to the Lord; he will kill the bull for the sin offering for himself. ¹²Then he must take a pan full of burning coals from the altar before the Lord and two handfuls of sweet incense that has been ground into powder. He must bring it into the room behind the curtain. ¹³He must put the incense on the fire before the Lord so that the cloud of incense will cover the lid on the Ark. Then when Aaron comes in, he will not die. ¹⁴Also, he must take some of the blood from the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the lid; with his finger he will sprinkle the blood seven times in front of the lid.

¹⁵“Then Aaron must kill the goat of the sin offering for the people and bring its blood into the room behind the curtain. He must do with the goat's blood as he did with the bull's blood, sprinkling it on the lid and in front of the lid. ¹⁶Because the people of Israel have been unclean, Aaron will perform the acts to make the Most Holy Place ready for service to the Lord. Then it will be clean from the sins and crimes of the Israelites. He must also do this for the Meeting Tent, because it stays in the middle of unclean people. ¹⁷When Aaron makes the Most Holy Place ready for service to the Lord, no one is allowed in the Meeting Tent until he comes out. So Aaron will perform the acts to remove sins from himself, his family, and all the people of Israel, so they will belong to the Lord. ¹⁸Afterward he will go out to the altar that is before the Lord and will make it ready for

service to the Lord. Aaron will take some of the bull's blood and some of the goat's blood and put it on the corners of the altar on all sides. ¹⁹Then, with his finger, he will sprinkle some of the blood on the altar seven times to make the altar holy for the Lord and clean from all the sins of the Israelites.

²⁰“When Aaron has finished making the Most Holy Place, the Meeting Tent, and the altar ready for service to the Lord, he will offer the living goat. ²¹He will put both his hands on the head of the living goat, and he will confess over it all the sins and crimes of Israel. In this way Aaron will put the people's sins on the goat's head. Then he will send the goat away into the desert, and a man who has been appointed will lead the goat away. ²²So the goat will carry on itself all the people's sins to a lonely place in the desert. The man who leads the goat will let it loose there.

²³“Then Aaron will enter the Meeting Tent and take off the linen clothes he had put on before he went into the Most Holy Place; he must leave these clothes there. ²⁴He will bathe his body in water in a holy place and put on his regular clothes. Then he will come out and offer the whole burnt offering for himself and for the people, to remove sins from himself and the people so they will belong to the Lord. ²⁵Then he will burn the fat of the sin offering on the altar.

²⁶“The person who led the goat, the goat to remove sins, into the desert must wash his clothes and bathe his body in water. After that, he may come back into the camp.

²⁷“The bull and the goat for the sin offerings, whose blood was brought into the Most Holy Place to make it ready for service to the Lord, must be taken outside the camp; the animals' skins, bodies, and intestines will be burned in the fire.

²⁸Then the one who burns them must wash his clothes and bathe his body in water. After that, he may come back into the camp.

²⁹“This law will always continue for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month, you must not eat and you must not do any work. The travelers or foreigners living with you must not work either. ³⁰It is on this day that the priests will make you clean so you will belong to the Lord again. All your sins will be removed. ³¹This is a very important day of rest for you, and you must not eat. This law will continue forever.

³²“The priest appointed to take his father’s place, on whom the oil was poured, will perform the acts for making things ready for service to the Lord. He must put on the holy linen clothes ³³and make the Most Holy Place, the Meeting Tent, and the altar ready for service to the Lord. He must also remove the sins of the priests and all the people of Israel so they will belong to the Lord. ³⁴That law for removing the sins of the Israelites so they will belong to the Lord will continue forever. You will do these things once a year.”

So they did the things the Lord had commanded Moses.

Offering Sacrifices

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Speak to Aaron, his sons, and all the people of Israel. Tell them: ‘This is what the Lord has commanded. ³If an Israelite kills an ox, a lamb, or a goat either inside the camp or outside it, ⁴when he should have brought the animal to the entrance of the Meeting Tent as a gift to the Lord in front of the Lord’s Holy Tent, he is guilty of killing. He has killed, and he must be cut off from the people. ⁵This rule is so people will bring their sacrifices, which they have been sacrificing in the open fields, to the Lord. They must bring those animals to the Lord at the entrance of the Meeting Tent; they must bring them to the priest and offer them as fellowship offerings. ⁶Then the priest will sprinkle the blood from those animals on the Lord’s altar near the entrance of the Meeting Tent. And he will burn the fat from those animals on the altar, as a smell pleasing to the Lord. ⁷They must not offer any more sacrifices to their goat idols, which they have chased like prostitutes. These rules will continue for people from now on.’

⁸“Tell the people this: ‘If any citizen of Israel or foreigner living with you offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, ⁹that person must take his sacrifice to the entrance of the Meeting Tent to offer it to the Lord. If he does not do this, he must be cut off from the people.

¹⁰“I will be against any citizen of Israel or foreigner living with you who eats blood. I will cut off that person from the people. ¹¹This is because the life of the body is in the blood, and I have given you rules for pouring that blood on the altar

to remove your sins so you will belong to the Lord. It is the blood that removes the sins, because it is life. ¹²So I tell the people of Israel this: “None of you may eat blood, and no foreigner living among you may eat blood.”

¹³“If any citizen of Israel or foreigner living among you catches a wild animal or bird that can be eaten, that person must pour the blood on the ground and cover it with dirt. ¹⁴If blood is still in the meat, the animal’s life is still in it. So I give this command to the people of Israel: “Don’t eat meat that still has blood in it, because the animal’s life is in its blood. Anyone who eats blood must be cut off.”

¹⁵“If a person, either a citizen or a foreigner, eats an animal that died by itself or was killed by another animal, he must wash his clothes and bathe in water. He will be unclean until evening; then he will be clean. ¹⁶If he does not wash his clothes and bathe his body, he will be guilty of sin.”

Rules About Sexual Relations

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Tell the people of Israel: ‘I am the Lord your God. ³In the past you lived in Egypt, but you must not do what was done in that country. And you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their customs. ⁴You must obey my rules and follow them. I am the Lord your God. ⁵Obey my laws and rules; a person who obeys them will live because of them. I am the Lord.

⁶“You must never have sexual relations with your close relatives. I am the Lord.

⁷“You must not shame your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; do not have sexual relations with her. ⁸You must not have sexual relations with your father’s wife; that would shame your father.

⁹“You must not have sexual relations with your sister, either the daughter of your father or your mother. It doesn’t matter if she was born in your house or somewhere else.

¹⁰“You must not have sexual relations with your son’s daughter or your daughter’s daughter; that would bring shame on you.

¹¹“If your father and his wife have a daughter, she is your sister. You must not have sexual relations with her.

¹²“You must not have sexual relations with your father’s sister; she is your father’s close relative. ¹³You must not have sexual relations with your mother’s sister; she is your mother’s close relative. ¹⁴You must not have sexual relations with the

wife of your father's brother, because this would shame him. She is your aunt.

¹⁵“You must not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law; she is your son's wife. Do not have sexual relations with her.

¹⁶“You must not have sexual relations with your brother's wife. That would shame your brother.

¹⁷“You must not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter. And do not have sexual relations with this woman's granddaughter, either the daughter of her son or her daughter; they are her close relatives. It is evil to do this.

¹⁸“While your wife is still living, you must not take her sister as another wife. Do not have sexual relations with her.

¹⁹“You must not go near a woman to have sexual relations with her during her monthly period, when she is unclean.

²⁰“You must not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and make yourself unclean with her.

²¹“You must not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, because this would show that you do not respect your God. I am the Lord.

²²“You must not have sexual relations with a man as you would a woman. That is a hateful sin.

²³“You must not have sexual relations with an animal and make yourself unclean with it. Also a woman must not have sexual relations with an animal; it is not natural.

²⁴“Don't make yourself unclean by any of these wrong things. I am forcing nations out of their countries because they did these sins, and I am giving their land to you. ²⁵The land has become unclean, and I punished it for its sins, so the land is throwing out those people who live there.

²⁶“You must obey my laws and rules, and you must not do any of these hateful sins. These rules are for the citizens of Israel and for the people who live with you. ²⁷The people who lived in the land before you did all these hateful things and made the land unclean. ²⁸If you do these things, you will also make the land unclean, and it will throw you out as it threw out the nations before you. ²⁹Anyone who does these hateful sins must be cut off from the people. ³⁰Keep my command not to do these hateful sins that were done by the people who lived in the land before you. Don’t make yourself unclean by doing them. I am the Lord your God.”

Life Lessons

Leviticus 18:1–20:27

Situation

God was leading the Israelites from one pagan culture (Egypt) to another (Canaan). God wanted the people to follow his guidelines for sexual practices. He wanted them to abhor the sexual sins of the pagan cultures.

Observation

To obey God means fulfilling our sexual desires only with our spouse, as God intends.

Inspiration

Perhaps it is clear to you already that the strongest protection a marriage can have against adultery is in the *attitude* of the partners toward the marriage and toward each other. No one—absolutely no one, male or female—who has vowed faithfulness

to another human deserves sexual satisfaction outside the marriage bond. Yet self-centered adulterers have justified their sin by the premise that sexual satisfaction is somehow their right—because God made them this way and they can't help it; because the world makes so much of sexual experience; because they don't receive enough "loving" from their spouses.

But in fact, the marriage vow subordinates one's individual satisfactions in all areas to one's marital partner—declaring publicly that sex is less important than one's spouse, less important than the health of the relationship. Sexual satisfaction is no longer a right, but a *blessing*, a gift of the relationship to its partners. This attitude, then—that the health of the relationship is infinitely more important than one's own desires, and that the sweet fulfillment of one's desires is an undeserved bounty within that relationship—not only closes the door to adulteries, but abolishes the door and the thought altogether.

He who worships anything of himself is a candidate for extramarital sex. His marriage is vulnerable. His desires have become his privileges. So long as he is his own god, he feels himself free to obey nothing and no one *but* himself.

But he who takes seriously his declared commitment to the mutual relationship with his spouse, will guard the marriage even against the assaults of his own desires. His attitude sensitizes him, making him careful, wary, and aware. He will be able to identify as threats those desires that are

purely personal and merely self-satisfying. He will recognize them already when they are weak and small, before they grow monstrous and demanding; and then he will not nurse them to size, but, while he can, cut them off and quench them.

(From *As for Me and My House* by Walter Wangerin, Jr.)

Application

The world promotes sex without restrictions as the key to happiness. Avoid that lie. Eliminate its deceitful influence. Build solid friendships and an active social life on a foundation of sexual purity. If you are married, renew your commitment to your spouse.

Exploration

Sexual Purity—[Exodus 20:14](#); [Deuteronomy 23:17](#); [Proverbs 23:26–28](#); [Romans 13:13–14](#); [1 Corinthians 6:15–20](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:3–5](#).

Other Laws

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Tell all the people of Israel: ‘I am the Lord your God. You must be holy because I am holy.

³“You must respect your mother and father, and you must keep my Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God.

⁴“Do not worship idols or make statues or gods for yourselves. I am the Lord your God.

⁵“When you sacrifice a fellowship offering to the Lord, offer it in such a way that will be accepted. ⁶You may eat it the same day you offer it or on the next day. But if any is left on the third day, you must burn it up. ⁷If any of it is eaten on the third day, it is unclean, and it will not be accepted. ⁸Anyone who eats it then will be guilty of sin, because he did not respect the holy things that belong to the Lord. He must be cut off from the people.

⁹“When you harvest your crops on your land, do not harvest all the way to the corners of your fields. If grain falls onto the ground, don’t gather it up. ¹⁰Don’t pick all the grapes in your vineyards, and don’t pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. You must leave those things for poor people and for people traveling through your country. I am the Lord your God.

¹¹“You must not steal. You must not cheat people, and you must not lie to each other. ¹²You must not make a false promise by my name, or you will show that you don’t respect your God. I am the Lord.

¹³“You must not cheat your neighbor or rob him. You must not keep a hired worker’s salary all night until morning. ¹⁴You

must not curse a deaf person or put something in front of a blind person to make him fall. But you must respect your God. I am the Lord.

¹⁵“Be fair in your judging. You must not show special favor to poor people or great people, but be fair when you judge your neighbor. ¹⁶You must not spread false stories against other people, and you must not do anything that would put your neighbor’s life in danger. I am the Lord.

¹⁷“You must not hate your fellow citizen in your heart. If your neighbor does something wrong, tell him about it, or you will be partly to blame. ¹⁸Forget about the wrong things people do to you, and do not try to get even. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. I am the Lord.

¹⁹“Obey my laws. You must not mate two different kinds of cattle or sow your field with two different kinds of seed. You must not wear clothing made from two different kinds of material mixed together.

²⁰“If a man has sexual relations with a slave girl of another man, but this slave girl has not been bought or given her freedom, there must be punishment. But they are not to be put to death, because the woman was not free. ²¹The man must bring a male sheep as his penalty offering to the Lord at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. ²²The priest will offer the sheep as a penalty offering before the Lord for the man’s sin, to remove the sins of the man so he will belong to the Lord. Then he will be forgiven for his sin.

²³“In the future, when you enter your country, you will plant many kinds of trees for food. After planting a tree, wait three years before using its fruit. ²⁴In the fourth year the fruit from the tree will be the Lord’s, a holy offering of praise to him.

²⁵Then in the fifth year, you may eat the fruit from the tree. The tree will then produce more fruit for you. I am the Lord your God.

²⁶“You must not eat anything with the blood in it.

“You must not try to tell the future by signs or black magic.

²⁷“You must not cut the hair on the sides of your heads or cut the edges of your beard. ²⁸You must not cut your body to show sadness for someone who died or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord.

²⁹“Do not dishonor your daughter by making her become a prostitute. If you do this, the country will be filled with all kinds of sin.

³⁰“Obey the laws about Sabbaths, and respect my Most Holy Place. I am the Lord.

³¹“Do not go to mediums or fortune-tellers for advice, or you will become unclean. I am the Lord your God.

³²“Show respect to old people; stand up in their presence. Show respect also to your God. I am the Lord.

³³“Do not mistreat foreigners living in your country, ³⁴but treat them just as you treat your own citizens. Love foreigners as you love yourselves, because you were foreigners one time in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

³⁵“Do not cheat when you measure the length or weight or amount of something. ³⁶Your weights and balances should weigh correctly, with your weighing baskets the right size and your jars holding the right amount of liquid. I am the Lord your God. I brought you out of the land of Egypt.

³⁷“Remember all my laws and rules, and obey them. I am the Lord.”

Warnings About Various Sins

The Lord said to Moses, ²“You must also tell the people of Israel these things: ‘If a person in your country gives one of his children to Molech, that person must be killed. It doesn’t matter if he is a citizen or a foreigner living in Israel; you must throw stones at him and kill him. ³I will be against him and cut him off from his people, because he gave his children to Molech. He showed that he did not respect my holy name, and he made my Holy Place unclean. ⁴The people of the community might ignore that person and not kill the one who gave his children to Molech. ⁵But I will be against him and his family, and I will cut him off from his people. I will do this to anyone who follows him in being unfaithful to me by worshiping Molech.

⁶“I will be against anyone who goes to mediums and fortune-tellers for advice, because that person is being unfaithful to me. So I will cut him off from his people.

⁷“Be my holy people. Be holy because I am the Lord your God. ⁸Remember and obey my laws. I am the Lord, and I have made you holy.

⁹“Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death. He has cursed his father or mother, so he has brought his own death on himself.

Punishments for Sexual Sins

¹⁰“If a man has sexual relations with his neighbor’s wife, both

the man and the woman are guilty of adultery and must be put to death. ¹¹If a man has sexual relations with his father's wife, he has shamed his father, and both the man and his father's wife must be put to death. They have brought it on themselves.

¹²“If a man has sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, both of them must be put to death. What they have done is not natural. They have brought their own deaths on themselves.

¹³“If a man has sexual relations with another man as a man does with a woman, these two men have done a hateful sin. They must be put to death. They have brought it on themselves.

¹⁴“If a man has sexual relations with both a woman and her mother, this is evil. The people must burn that man and the two women in fire so that your people will not be evil.

¹⁵“If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he must be put to death. You must also kill the animal. ¹⁶If a woman approaches an animal and has sexual relations with it, you must kill the woman and the animal. They must be put to death. They have brought it on themselves.

¹⁷“It is shameful for a brother to marry his sister, the daughter of either his father or his mother, and to have sexual relations with her. In front of everyone they must both be cut off from their people. The man has shamed his sister, and he is guilty of sin.

¹⁸“If a man has sexual relations with a woman during her monthly period, both the woman and the man must be cut off from their people. They sinned because they showed the source of her blood.

¹⁹“Do not have sexual relations with your mother's sister or your father's sister, because that would shame a close

relative. Both of you are guilty of this sin.

²⁰“If a man has sexual relations with his uncle’s wife, he has shamed his uncle. That man and his uncle’s wife will die without children; they are guilty of sin.

²¹“It is unclean for a man to marry his brother’s wife. That man has shamed his brother, and they will have no children.

²²“Remember all my laws and rules, and obey them. I am leading you to your own land, and if you obey my laws and rules, that land will not throw you out. ²³I am forcing out ahead of you the people who live there. Because they did all these sins, I have hated them. Do not live the way those people lived.

²⁴“I have told you that you will get their land, which I will give to you as your very own; it is a fertile land. I am the Lord your God, and I have set you apart from other people and made you my own. ²⁵So you must treat clean animals and birds differently from unclean animals and birds. Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these unclean birds or animals or things that crawl on the ground, which I have made unclean for you. ²⁶So you must be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from other people to be my own.

²⁷“A man or woman who is a medium or a fortune-teller must be put to death. You must stone them to death; they have brought it on themselves.”

God invites us to see his face so he can change ours. He uses our uncovered faces to display his glory. The transformation isn't easy. —Max Lucado (*Just Like Jesus*)

How Priests Must Behave

The Lord said to Moses, “Tell these things to Aaron’s sons, the priests: ‘A priest must not make himself unclean by touching a dead person.² But if the dead person was one of his close relatives, he may touch him. The priest may make himself unclean if the dead person is his mother or father, son or daughter, brother or³ unmarried sister who is close to him because she has no husband. The priest may make himself unclean for her if she dies.⁴ But a priest must not make himself unclean if the dead person was only related to him by marriage.

⁵“Priests must not shave their heads, or shave off the edges of their beards, or cut their bodies.⁶ They must be holy to their God and show respect for God’s name, because they present the offerings made by fire to the Lord, which is the food of their God. So they must be holy.

New Life in Christ

The Lord Is Holy

[Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name ...] This phrase is a petition, not a proclamation. A request, not an announcement. Hallowed *be* your name. We enter the chapel and

beseech, “Be hallowed, Lord.” Do whatever it takes to be holy in my life. Take your rightful place on the throne. Exalt yourself. Magnify yourself. Glorify yourself. You be Lord, and I’ll be quiet.

The word “hallowed” comes from the word “holy,” and the word “holy” means “to separate.” The ancestry of the term can be traced back to an ancient word which means “to cut.” To be holy, then, is to be a cut above the norm, superior, extraordinary... . The Holy One dwells on a different level from the rest of us. What frightens us does not frighten him. What troubles us does not trouble him.

I’m more a landlubber than a sailor, but I’ve puttered around in a bass boat enough to know the secret for finding land in a storm... . You don’t aim at another boat. You certainly don’t stare at the waves. You set your sights on an object unaffected by the wind—a light on the shore—and go straight toward it. The light is unaffected by the storm.

By seeking God ... , you do the same. When you set your eyes on our God, you focus on one “a cut above” any storm life may bring. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Question How can you focus your eyes on the holiness of the Lord?

For more on [“New Life in Christ.”](#)

⁷“A priest must not marry an unclean prostitute or a divorced woman, because he is holy to his God. ⁸Treat him as holy, because he offers up the food of your God. Think of him as holy; I am the Lord who makes you holy, and I am holy.

⁹“If a priest’s daughter makes herself unclean by becoming a prostitute, she shames her father. She must be burned with fire.

¹⁰“The high priest, who was chosen from among his brothers, had the special olive oil poured on his head. He was also appointed to wear the priestly clothes. So he must not show his sadness by letting his hair go uncombed or tearing his clothes. ¹¹He must not go into a house where there is a dead body. He must not make himself unclean, even if it is for his own father or mother. ¹²The high priest must not go out of the Holy Place, because if he does and becomes unclean, he will make God’s Holy Place unclean. The special oil used in appointing priests was poured on his head to separate him from the rest of the people. I am the Lord.

¹³“The high priest must marry a woman who is a virgin. ¹⁴He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman, or a prostitute. He must marry a virgin from his own people ¹⁵so the people will respect his children as his own. I am the Lord. I have set the high priest apart for his special job.”

¹⁶The Lord said to Moses, ¹⁷“Tell Aaron: ‘If any of your descendants have something wrong with them, they must never come near to offer the special food of their God.

¹⁸Anyone who has something wrong with him must not come near: blind men, crippled men, men with damaged faces, deformed men, ¹⁹men with a crippled foot or hand,

²⁰hunchbacks, dwarfs, men who have something wrong with their eyes, men who have an itching disease or a skin disease, or men who have damaged sex glands.

²¹“If one of Aaron’s descendants has something wrong with him, he cannot come near to make the offerings made by fire to the Lord. He has something wrong with him; he cannot offer the food of his God. ²²He may eat the most holy food and also the holy food. ²³But he may not go through the curtain into the Most Holy Place, and he may not go near the altar, because he has something wrong with him. He must not make my Holy Place unfit. I am the Lord who makes these places holy.”

²⁴So Moses told these things to Aaron, Aaron’s sons, and all the people of Israel.

Life Lessons

Leviticus 21:1–22:33

Situation

God gave instructions to Moses about the priesthood and sacrifices, and gave a code of moral principles.

Observation

Those who serve God must be totally dedicated, because he deserves only the best.

Inspiration

Purity, even purity of heart, is the main thing to be aimed at. We need to be made clean within through the Spirit and the Word, and then we shall be clean without consecration and obedience. Here is a close

connection between the affections and the understanding: if we love evil we cannot understand that which is good. If the heart is foul, the eye will be dim. How can those men see a holy God who love unholy things?

What a privilege it is to see God here! A glimpse of Him is Heaven below! In Christ Jesus the pure in heart behold the Father. We see Him, His truth, His love, His purpose, His sovereignty, His covenant character, yea, we see Himself in Christ. But this is only apprehended as sin is kept out of the heart. Only those who aim at godliness can cry, "Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord." The desire of Moses, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," can only be fulfilled in us as we purify ourselves from all iniquity. We shall "see him as he is"; and "every one that has this hope in him purifieth himself." The enjoyment of present fellowship and the hope of the beatific vision are urgent motives for purity of heart and life. Lord, make us pure in heart, that we may see Thee!

(From *Faith's Checkbook* by Charles H. Spurgeon)

Application

To arrive at holiness we must trust in Jesus Christ, who has become our great sacrifice. Every area of our lives must be placed in subjection to his lordship, every decision made with him taken into account, and every word honoring to him. Believe in him today and so begin the adventure of faith, hope, and love.

Exploration

Holiness—[Leviticus 20:7–8](#); [Isaiah 6:3](#); [Hebrews](#)

7:26; 1 Peter 1:15–16.

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Tell Aaron and his sons: ‘The people of Israel will give offerings to me. These offerings are holy, and they are mine, so you must respect them to show that you respect my holy name. I am the Lord.’ ³Say to them: ‘If any one of your descendants from now on is unclean and comes near the offerings that the Israelites made holy for me, that person must be cut off from appearing before me. I am the Lord.

⁴“If one of Aaron’s descendants has a harmful skin disease, or if he discharges a body fluid, he cannot eat the holy offerings until he becomes clean. He could also become unclean from touching a dead body, from his own [semen](#), ⁵from touching any unclean crawling animal, or from touching an unclean person (no matter what made the person unclean). ⁶Anyone who touches those things will become unclean until evening. That person must not eat the holy offerings unless he washes with water. ⁷He will be clean only after the sun goes down. Then he may eat the holy offerings; the offerings are his food.

⁸“If a priest finds an animal that died by itself or that was killed by some other animal, he must not eat it. If he does, he will become unclean. I am the Lord.

⁹“If the priests keep all the rules I have given, they will not become guilty; if they are careful, they will not die. I am the Lord who has made them holy. ¹⁰Only people in a priest’s family may eat the holy offering. A visitor staying with the priest or a hired worker must not eat it. ¹¹But if the priest buys a slave with his own money, that slave may eat the holy offerings; slaves who were born in his house may also eat his food. ¹²If a priest’s daughter marries a person who is not a priest, she must not eat any of the holy offerings. ¹³But if the

priest's daughter becomes widowed or divorced, with no children to support her, and if she goes back to her father's house where she lived as a child, she may eat some of her father's food. But only people from a priest's family may eat this food.

¹⁴“If someone eats some of the holy offering by mistake, that person must pay back the priest for that holy food, adding another one-fifth of the price of that food.

¹⁵“When the Israelites give their holy offerings to the Lord, the priest must not treat these holy things as though they were not holy. ¹⁶The priests must not allow those who are not priests to eat the holy offerings. If they do, they cause the ones who eat the holy offerings to become guilty, and they will have to pay for it. I am the Lord, who makes them holy.”

¹⁷The Lord said to Moses, ¹⁸“Tell Aaron and his sons and all the people of Israel: ‘A citizen of Israel or a foreigner living in Israel might want to bring a whole burnt offering, either for some special promise he has made or for a special gift he wants to give to the Lord. ¹⁹If he does, he must bring a male animal that has nothing wrong with it—a bull, a sheep, or a goat—so it might be accepted for him. ²⁰He must not bring an animal that has something wrong with it, or it will not be accepted for him.

²¹“If someone brings a fellowship offering to the Lord, either as payment for a special promise the person has made or as a special gift the person wants to give the Lord, it might be from the herd or from the flock. But it must be healthy, with nothing wrong with it, so that it will be accepted. ²²You must not offer to the Lord any animal that is blind, that has broken bones or is crippled, that has running sores or any sort of skin disease. You must not offer any animals like these on the altar

as an offering by fire to the Lord.

²³“If an ox or lamb is smaller than normal or is not perfectly formed, you may give it as a special gift to the Lord; it will be accepted. But it will not be accepted as payment for a special promise you have made.

²⁴“If an animal has bruised, crushed, torn, or cut sex glands, you must not offer it to the Lord. You must not do this in your own land, ²⁵and you must not take such animals from foreigners as sacrifices to the Lord. Because the animals have been hurt in some way and have something wrong with them, they will not be accepted for you.”

²⁶The Lord said to Moses, ²⁷“When an ox, a sheep, or a goat is born, it must stay seven days with its mother. But from the eighth day on, this animal will be accepted as a sacrifice by fire to the Lord. ²⁸But you must not kill the animal and its mother on the same day, either an ox or a sheep.

²⁹“If you want to offer some special offering of thanks to the Lord, you must do it in a way that pleases him. ³⁰You must eat the whole animal that same day and not leave any of the meat for the next morning. I am the Lord.

³¹“Remember my commands and obey them; I am the Lord. ³²Show respect for my holy name. You Israelites must remember that I am holy; I am the Lord, who has made you holy. ³³I brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord.”

Life Lessons

Leviticus 23:1–25:55

Situation

God established several holidays that symbolized the Israelites' special relationship with him. He also gave rules that governed interpersonal relationships.

Observation

Special holidays remind us of the past. Feasts help renew our commitment. In the New Testament, the celebration of the Lord's Supper reminds us of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross for our sins and calls us to renewed commitment.

Inspiration

A party was the last thing Mary Magdalene expected as she approached the tomb on that Sunday morning. The last few days had brought nothing to celebrate. The Jews could celebrate—Jesus was out of the way. The soldiers could celebrate—their work was done. But Mary couldn't celebrate. To her the last few days had brought nothing but tragedy...

A gray sky gives way to gold as she walks up the narrow trail. As she rounds the final bend, she gasps. The rock in front of the grave is pushed back.

"Someone took the body." She runs to awaken Peter and John. They rush to see for themselves. She tries to keep up with them but can't.

Peter comes out of the tomb bewildered and John comes out believing, but Mary just sits in front of it weeping. The two men go home and leave her alone

with her grief.

But something tells her she is not alone. Maybe she hears a noise. Maybe she hears a whisper. Or maybe she just hears her own heart tell her to take a look for herself.

Whatever the reason, she does. She stoops down, sticks her head into the hewn entrance and waits for her eyes to adjust to the dark.

“Why are you crying?” She sees what looks to be a man, but he’s white—radiantly white. He is one of two lights on either end of the vacant slab. Two candles blazing on an altar.

“Why are you crying?” An uncommon question to be asked in a cemetery. In fact, the question is rude. That is, unless the questioner knows something the questionee doesn’t....

“Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

He doesn’t leave her wondering long, just long enough to remind us that he loves to surprise us. He waits for us to despair of human strength and then intervenes with heavenly. God waits for us to give up and then—surprise!

And listen to the surprise as Mary’s name is spoken by a man she loved—a man she had buried.

“Miriam.”

God appearing at the strangest of places... .
“Miriam,” he said softly, “surprise!”

Mary was shocked. It’s not often you hear your name spoken by an eternal tongue. But when she did, she recognized it. And when she did, she responded

correctly. She worshiped him.

The scene had all the elements of a surprise party—secrecy, wide eyes, amazement, gratitude. But this celebration is timid in comparison with the one that is being planned for the future. It will be similar to Mary's but a lot bigger. Many more graves will open. Many more names will be called. Many more knees will bow. And many more seekers will celebrate.

It's going to be some party. I plan to make sure my name is on the guest list. How about you? (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

Application

Approach this Sunday as a real holiday. Celebrate it with all your heart. Remember the past. Renew for the future. Jesus is risen! God has conquered death! Be glad.

Exploration

Celebrations—[Exodus 20:8–11](#); [Numbers 36:4](#); [1 Corinthians 5:7](#); [16:8](#).

God doesn't get angry because he doesn't get his way. He gets angry because disobedience always results in self-destruction. —Max Lucado (*In the Grip of Grace*)

Special Holidays

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Tell the people of Israel: ‘You will announce the Lord’s appointed feasts as holy meetings. These are my special feasts.

The Sabbath

³“There are six days for you to work, but the seventh day will be a special day of rest. It is a day for a holy meeting; you must not do any work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your homes.

The Passover and Unleavened Bread

⁴“These are the Lord’s appointed feasts, the holy meetings, which you will announce at the times set for them. ⁵The Lord’s Passover is on the fourteenth day of the first month, beginning at twilight. ⁶The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the fifteenth day of the same month. You will eat bread made without yeast for seven days. ⁷On the first day of this feast you will have a holy meeting, and you must not do any work. ⁸For seven days you will bring an offering made by fire to the

Lord. There will be a holy meeting on the seventh day, and on that day you must not do any regular work.”

The First of the Harvest

⁹The Lord said to Moses, ¹⁰“Tell the people of Israel: ‘You will enter the land I will give you and gather its harvest. At that time you must bring the first bundle of grain from your harvest to the priest. ¹¹The priest will present the bundle before the Lord, and it will be accepted for you; he will present the bundle on the day after the Sabbath.

¹²“On the day when you present the bundle of grain, offer a male lamb, one year old, that has nothing wrong with it, as a burnt offering to the Lord. ¹³You must also offer a grain offering—four quarts of fine flour mixed with olive oil as an offering made by fire to the Lord; its smell will be pleasing to him. You must also offer a quart of wine as a drink offering. ¹⁴Until the day you bring your offering to your God, do not eat any new grain, roasted grain, or bread made from new grain. This law will always continue for people from now on, wherever you live.

The Feast of Weeks

¹⁵“Count seven full weeks from the morning after the Sabbath. (This is the Sabbath that you bring the bundle of grain to present as an offering.) ¹⁶On the fiftieth day, the first day after the seventh week, you will bring a new grain offering to the Lord. ¹⁷On that day bring two loaves of bread from your homes to be presented as an offering. Use yeast and four quarts of

flour to make those loaves of bread; they will be your gift to the Lord from the first wheat of your harvest.

¹⁸“Offer with the bread one young bull, two male sheep, and seven male lambs that are one year old and have nothing wrong with them. Offer them with their grain offerings and drink offerings, as a burnt offering to the Lord. They will be an offering made by fire, and the smell will be pleasing to the Lord.

¹⁹You must also offer one male goat for a sin offering and two male, one-year-old lambs as a fellowship offering.

²⁰“The priest will present the two lambs as an offering before the Lord, along with the bread from the first wheat of the harvest. They are holy to the Lord, and they will belong to the priest. ²¹On that same day you will call a holy meeting; you must not do any work that day. This law will continue for you from now on, wherever you live.

²²“When you harvest your crops on your land, do not harvest all the way to the corners of your field. If grain falls onto the ground, don’t gather it up. Leave it for poor people and foreigners in your country. I am the Lord your God.”

The Feast of Trumpets

²³Again the Lord said to Moses, ²⁴“Tell the people of Israel: ‘On the first day of the seventh month you must have a special day of rest, a holy meeting, when you blow the trumpet for a special time of remembering. ²⁵Do not do any work, and bring an offering made by fire to the Lord.’”

The Day of Cleansing

²⁶The Lord said to Moses, ²⁷“The Day of Cleansing will be on the tenth day of the seventh month. There will be a holy meeting, and you will give up eating and bring an offering made by fire to the Lord. ²⁸Do not do any work on that day, because it is the Day of Cleansing. On that day the priests will go before the Lord and perform the acts to make you clean so you will belong to the Lord.

²⁹“Anyone who refuses to give up food on this day must be cut off from the people. ³⁰If anyone works on this day, I will destroy that person from among the people. ³¹You must not do any work at all; this law will continue for people from now on wherever you live. ³²It will be a special day of rest for you, and you must not eat. You will start this special day of rest on the evening after the ninth day of the month, and it will continue from that evening until the next evening.”

The Feast of Shelters

³³Again the Lord said to Moses, ³⁴“Tell the people of Israel: ‘On the fifteenth day of the seventh month is the Feast of Shelters. This feast to the Lord will continue for seven days. ³⁵There will be a holy meeting on the first day; do not do any work. ³⁶You will bring an offering made by fire to the Lord each day for seven days. On the eighth day you will have another holy meeting, and you will bring an offering made by fire to the Lord. This will be a holy meeting; do not do any work.

³⁷“(“These are the Lord’s special feasts, when there will be holy meetings and when you bring offerings made by fire to the Lord. You will bring whole burnt offerings, grain offerings, sacrifices, and drink offerings—each at the right time. ³⁸These

offerings are in addition to those for the Lord's Sabbath days, in addition to offerings you give as payment for special promises, and in addition to special offerings you want to give to the Lord.)³⁹“So on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered in the crops of the land, celebrate the Lord's festival for seven days. You must rest on the first day and the eighth day.⁴⁰On the first day you will take good fruit from the fruit trees, as well as branches from palm trees, poplars, and other leafy trees. You will celebrate before the Lord your God for seven days.⁴¹Celebrate this festival to the Lord for seven days each year. This law will continue from now on; you will celebrate it in the seventh month.⁴²Live in shelters for seven days. All the people born in Israel must live in shelters⁴³so that all your descendants will know I made Israel live in shelters during the time I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.”

⁴⁴So Moses told the people of Israel about all of the Lord's appointed feast days.

The Lampstand and the Holy Bread

The Lord said to Moses,²“Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from crushed olives. That oil is for the lamps so that these lamps may never go out.³Aaron will keep the lamps burning in the Meeting Tent from evening until morning before the Lord; this is in front of the curtain of the Ark of the Agreement. This law will continue from now on.⁴Aaron must always keep the lamps burning on the lampstands of pure gold before the Lord.

⁵“Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread with it, using four quarts of flour for each loaf.⁶Put them in two rows on the golden table before the Lord, six loaves in each row.⁷Put pure incense on each row as the memorial portion to take the place of the bread. It is an offering made by fire to the Lord.⁸Every Sabbath day Aaron will put the bread in order before the Lord, as an agreement with the people of Israel that will continue forever.⁹That bread will belong to Aaron and his sons. They will eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of the offerings made by fire to the Lord. That bread is their share forever.”

The Man Who Cursed God

¹⁰Now there was a son of an Israelite woman and an Egyptian father who was walking among the Israelites. A fight broke out in the camp between him and an Israelite.¹¹The son of the Israelite woman began cursing and speaking against the Lord,

so the people took him to Moses. (The mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri from the family of Dan.) ¹²The people held him as a prisoner while they waited for the Lord's command to be made clear to them.

¹³Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹⁴“Take the one who spoke against me outside the camp. Then all the people who heard him must put their hands on his head, and all the people must throw stones at him and kill him. ¹⁵Tell the people of Israel this: ‘If anyone curses his God, he is guilty of sin. ¹⁶Anyone who speaks against the Lord must be put to death; all the people must kill him by throwing stones at him. Foreigners must be punished just like the people born in Israel; if they speak against the Lord, they must be put to death.

¹⁷“Whoever kills another person must be put to death. ¹⁸Whoever kills an animal that belongs to another person must give that person another animal to take its place. ¹⁹And whoever causes an injury to a neighbor must receive the same kind of injury in return: ²⁰Broken bone for broken bone, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Anyone who injures another person must be injured in the same way in return. ²¹Whoever kills another person's animal must give that person another animal to take its place. But whoever kills another person must be put to death.

²²“The law will be the same for the foreigner as for those from your own country. I am the Lord your God.”

²³Then Moses spoke to the people of Israel, and they took the person who had cursed outside the camp and killed him by throwing stones at him. So the people of Israel did as the Lord had commanded Moses.

The Time of Rest for the Land

The Lord said to Moses at Mount Sinai, ²“Tell the people of Israel this: ‘When you enter the land I will give you, let it have a special time of rest, to honor the Lord. ³You may plant seed in your field for six years, and you may trim your vineyards for six years and bring in their fruits. ⁴But during the seventh year, you must let the land rest. This will be a special time to honor the Lord. You must not plant seed in your field or trim your vineyards. ⁵You must not cut the crops that grow by themselves after harvest, or gather the grapes from your vines that are not trimmed. The land will have a year of rest.

⁶“You may eat whatever the land produces during that year of rest. It will be food for your men and women servants, for your hired workers, and for the foreigners living in your country. ⁷It will also be food for your cattle and the wild animals of your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

The Year of Jubilee

⁸“Count off seven groups of seven years, or forty-nine years. During that time there will be seven years of rest for the land. ⁹On the Day of Cleansing, you must blow the horn of a male sheep; this will be on the tenth day of the seventh month. You must blow the horn through the whole country. ¹⁰Make the fiftieth year a special year, and announce freedom for all the people living in your country. This time will be called [Jubilee](#).

You will each go back to your own property, each to your own family and family group. ¹¹The fiftieth year will be a special time for you to celebrate. Don't plant seeds, or harvest the crops that grow by themselves, or gather grapes from the vines that are not trimmed. ¹²That year is Jubilee; it will be a holy time for you. You may eat only the crops that come from the field. ¹³In the year of Jubilee you each must go back to your own property.

¹⁴“If you sell your land to your neighbor, or if you buy land from your neighbor, don't cheat each other. ¹⁵If you want to buy your neighbor's land, count the number of years since the last Jubilee, and use that number to decide the right price. If your neighbor sells the land to you, count the number of years left for harvesting crops, and use that number to decide the right price. ¹⁶If there are many years, the price will be high. But if there are only a few years, lower the price, because your neighbor is really selling only a few crops to you. ¹⁷You must not cheat each other, but you must respect your God. I am the Lord your God.

¹⁸“Remember my laws and rules, and obey them so that you will live safely in the land. ¹⁹The land will give good crops to you, and you will eat as much as you want and live safely in the land.

²⁰“But you might ask, “If we don't plant seeds or gather crops, what will we eat the seventh year?” ²¹I will send you such a great blessing during the sixth year that the land will produce enough crops for three years. ²²When you plant in the eighth year, you will still be eating from the old crop; you will eat the old crop until the harvest of the ninth year.

Property Laws

²³“The land really belongs to me, so you can’t sell it for all time. You are only foreigners and travelers living for a while on my land. ²⁴People might sell their land, but it must always be possible for the family to get its land back. ²⁵If a person in your country becomes very poor and sells some land, then close relatives must come and buy it back. ²⁶If there is not a close relative to buy the land back, but if the person makes enough money to be able to buy it back, ²⁷the years must be counted since the land was sold. That number must be used to decide how much the first owner should pay back the one who bought it. Then the land will belong to the first owner again. ²⁸But if there is not enough money to buy it back, the one who bought it will keep it until the year of Jubilee. During that celebration, the land will go back to the first owner’s family.

²⁹“If someone sells a home in a walled city, for a full year after it is sold, the person has the right to buy it back. ³⁰But if the owner does not buy back the house before a full year is over, it will belong to the one who bought it and to his future sons. The house will not go back to the first owner at Jubilee. ³¹But houses in small towns without walls are like open country; they can be bought back, and they must be returned to their first owner at Jubilee.

³²“The Levites may always buy back their houses in the cities that belong to them. ³³If someone buys a house from a Levite, that house in the Levites’ city will again belong to the Levites in the Jubilee. This is because houses in Levite cities belong to the people of Levi; the Israelites gave these cities to them. ³⁴Also the fields and pastures around the Levites’ cities

cannot be sold, because those fields belong to the Levites forever.

Rules for Slave Owners

³⁵“If anyone from your country becomes too poor to support himself, help him to live among you as you would a stranger or foreigner. ³⁶Do not charge him any interest on money you loan to him, but respect your God; let the poor live among you. ³⁷Don’t lend him money for interest, and don’t try to make a profit from the food he buys. ³⁸I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give the land of Canaan to you and to become your God.

³⁹“If anyone from your country becomes very poor and sells himself as a slave to you, you must not make him work like a slave. ⁴⁰He will be like a hired worker and a visitor with you until the year of Jubilee. ⁴¹Then he may leave you, take his children, and go back to his family and the land of his ancestors. ⁴²This is because the Israelites are my servants, and I brought them out of slavery in Egypt. They must not become slaves again. ⁴³You must not rule this person cruelly, but you must respect your God.

⁴⁴“Your men and women slaves must come from other nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. ⁴⁵Also you may buy as slaves children from the families of foreigners living in your land. These child slaves will belong to you, ⁴⁶and you may even pass them on to your children after you die; you can make them slaves forever. But you must not rule cruelly over your own people, the Israelites.

⁴⁷“Suppose a foreigner or visitor among you becomes rich.

If someone in your country becomes so poor that he has to sell himself as a slave to the foreigner living among you or to a member of the foreigner's family, ⁴⁸the poor person has the right to be bought back and become free. One of his relatives may buy him back: ⁴⁹His uncle, his uncle's son, or any one of his close relatives may buy him back. Or, if he gets enough money, he may pay the money to free himself.

⁵⁰“He and the one who bought him must count the time from when he sold himself up to the next year of Jubilee. Use that number to decide the price, because the person really only hired himself out for a certain number of years. ⁵¹If there are still many years before the year of Jubilee, the person must pay back a large part of the price. ⁵²If there are only a few years left until Jubilee, the person must pay a small part of the first price. ⁵³But he will live like a hired person with the foreigner every year; don't let the foreigner rule cruelly over him.

⁵⁴“Even if no one buys him back, at the year of Jubilee, he and his children will become free. ⁵⁵This is because the people of Israel are servants to me. They are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

Life Lessons

Leviticus 26:1–27:34

Situation

God, through Moses, presented blessings as a reward for obedience and cursings as a punishment for habitual sin. This led the people to confess and reiterate their devotion to God with vows and tithes.

Observation

God sets boundaries for our own good. We suffer when we break them. We must respond to his love so that we will not have to face his discipline.

Inspiration

I once owned a ewe... . She was one of the most attractive sheep that ever belonged to me. Her body was beautifully proportioned. She had a strong constitution and an excellent coat of wool. Her head was clean, alert, well-set with bright eyes. She bore sturdy lambs that matured rapidly.

But in spite of all these attributes, she had one pronounced fault. She was restless—discontented—a fence crawler.

So much so that I came to call her “Mrs. Gad-about.”

This one ewe produced more problems for me than almost all the rest of the flock combined.

No matter what field or pasture the sheep were in, she would search all along the fences or shoreline (we lived by the sea) looking for a loophole she could crawl through and start to feed on the other side.

It was not that she lacked pasturage. My fields were my joy and delight. No sheep in the district had better grazing.

With "Mrs. Gad-about" it was an ingrained habit. She was simply never contented with things as they were. Often when she had forced her way through some such spot in a fence or found a way around the end of the wire at low tide on the beaches, she would end up feeding on bare, brown, burned-up pasturage of a most inferior sort.

But she never learned her lesson and continued to fence crawl time after time.

Now it would have been bad enough if she was the only one who did this. It was a sufficient problem to find her and bring her back. But the further point was that she taught her lambs the same tricks. They simply followed her example and soon were as skilled at escaping as their mother.

Even worse, however, was the example she set for other sheep. In a short time she began to lead others over the same holes and over the same dangerous paths down by the sea.

After putting up with her perverseness for a summer I finally came to the conclusion that to save the rest of the flock from becoming unsettled, she would have to go. I could not allow one obstinate, discontented ewe to ruin the whole ranch operation.

It was a difficult decision to make, for I loved her in the same way I loved the rest. Her strength and beauty and alertness were a delight to the eye.

But one morning I took the killing knife in hand

and butchered her. Her career of fence crawling was cut short. It was the only solution to the dilemma.

She was a sheep, who in spite of all that I had done to give her the very best care—still wanted something else.

(From *A Shepherd Looks at [Psalm 23](#)* by Phillip Keller)

Application

Consider all that God has done for you in redeeming you from sin's captivity and providing you with blessing. In what areas do you overstep God's boundaries? Consider the consequences. Stop in your tracks. Flee from tempting circumstances. Return to the Lord, the Good Shepherd.

Exploration

On Blessing and Cursing—[Deuteronomy 11](#); [Ezekiel 14:12–21](#).

Rewards for Obeying God

“Don’t make idols for yourselves or set up statues or memorials. Don’t put stone statues in your land to bow down to, because I am the Lord your God.

²“Remember my Sabbaths, and respect my Holy Place. I am the Lord.

³“If you remember my laws and commands and obey them, ⁴I will give you rains at the right season; the land will produce crops, and the trees of the field will produce their fruit. ⁵Your threshing will continue until the grape harvest, and your grape harvest will continue until it is time to plant. Then you will have plenty to eat and live safely in your land. ⁶I will give peace to your country; you will lie down in peace, and no one will make you afraid. I will keep harmful animals out of your country, and armies will not pass through it.

⁷“You will chase your enemies and defeat them, killing them with your sword. ⁸Five of you will chase a hundred men; a hundred of you will chase ten thousand men. You will defeat your enemies and kill them with your sword.

⁹“Then I will show kindness to you and let you have many children; I will keep my agreement with you. ¹⁰You will have enough crops to last for more than a year. When you harvest the new crops, you will have to throw out the old ones to make room for them. ¹¹Also I will place my Holy Tent among you,

and I will not turn away from you. ¹²I will walk with you and be your God, and you will be my people. ¹³I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves. I broke the heavy weights that were on your shoulders and let you walk proudly again.

Punishment for Not Obeying God

¹⁴“But if you do not obey me and keep all my commands, ¹⁵and if you turn away from my rules and hate my laws, refusing to obey all my commands, you have broken our agreement. ¹⁶As a result, I will do this to you: I will cause terrible things to happen to you. I will cause you to have disease and fever that will destroy your eyes and slowly kill you. You will not have success when you plant your seed, and your enemy will eat your crops. ¹⁷I will be against you, and your enemies will defeat you. These people who hate you will rule over you, and you will run away even when no one is chasing you.

¹⁸“If after all this you still do not obey me, I will punish you seven times more for your sins. ¹⁹I will break your great pride, and I will make the [sky like iron and the earth like bronze](#). ²⁰You will work hard, but it will not help. Your land will not grow any crops, and your trees will not give their fruit.

²¹“If you still turn against me and refuse to obey me, I will beat you seven times harder. The more you sin, the more you will be punished. ²²I will send wild animals to attack you, and they will take your children away from you and destroy your cattle. They will make you so few in number the roads will be empty.

²³“If you don’t learn your lesson after all these things, and

if you still turn against me, ²⁴I will also turn against you. I will punish you seven more times for your sins. ²⁵You broke my agreement, and I will punish you. I will bring armies against you, and if you go into your cities for safety, I will cause diseases to spread among you so that your enemy will defeat you. ²⁶There will be very little bread to eat; ten women will be able to cook all your bread in one oven. They will measure each piece of bread, and you will eat, but you will still be hungry.

²⁷“If you still refuse to listen to me and still turn against me, ²⁸I will show my great anger; I will punish you seven more times for your sins. ²⁹You will eat the bodies of your sons and daughters. ³⁰I will destroy your places where gods are worshiped and cut down your incense altars. I will pile your dead bodies on the lifeless forms of your idols. I will hate you. ³¹I will destroy your cities and make your holy places empty, and I will not smell the pleasing smell of your offerings. ³²I will make the land empty so that your enemies who come to live in it will be shocked at it. ³³I will scatter you among the nations, and I will pull out my sword and destroy you. Your land will become empty, your cities a waste. ³⁴When you are taken to your enemy’s country, your land will finally get its rest. It will enjoy its time of rest all the time it lies empty. ³⁵During the time the land is empty, it will have the rest you should have given it while you lived in it.

³⁶“Those of you who are left alive will lose their courage in the land of their enemies. They will be frightened by the sound of a leaf being blown by the wind. They will run as if someone were chasing them with a sword, and they will fall even when no one is chasing them. ³⁷They will fall over each other, as if someone were chasing them with a sword, even though no one

is chasing them. You will not be strong enough to stand up against your enemies.³⁸ You will die among other nations and disappear in your enemies' countries.³⁹ So those who are left alive will rot away in their enemies' countries because of their sins. They will also rot away because of their ancestors' sins.

There Is Always Hope

⁴⁰“But maybe the people will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors; maybe they will admit they turned against me and sinned against me,⁴¹ which made me turn against them and send them into the land of their enemies. If these disobedient people are sorry for what they did and accept punishment for their sin,⁴² I will remember my agreement with Jacob, my agreement with Isaac, and my agreement with Abraham, and I will remember the land.⁴³ The land will be left empty by its people, and it will enjoy its time of rest as it lies bare without them. Then those who are left alive will accept the punishment for their sins. They will learn that they were punished because they hated my laws and refused to obey my rules.⁴⁴ But even though this is true, I will not turn away from them when they are in the land of their enemies. I will not hate them so much that I completely destroy them and break my agreement with them, because I am the Lord their God.⁴⁵ For their good I will remember the agreement with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt so I could become their God; the other nations saw these things. I am the Lord.”

⁴⁶These are the laws, rules, and teachings the Lord made between himself and the Israelites through Moses at Mount Sinai.

Promises Are Important

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Speak to the people of Israel and tell them: ‘If someone makes a special promise to give a person as a servant to the Lord by paying a price that is the same value as that person, ³the price for a man twenty to sixty years old is about one and one-fourth pounds of silver. (You must use the measure as set by the Holy Place.) ⁴The price for a woman twenty to sixty years old is about twelve ounces of silver. ⁵The price for a man five to twenty years old is about eight ounces of silver; for a woman it is about four ounces of silver. ⁶The price for a baby boy one month to five years old is about two ounces of silver; for a baby girl the price is about one and one-half ounces of silver. ⁷The price for a man sixty years old or older is about six ounces of silver; for a woman it is about four ounces of silver.

⁸“If anyone is too poor to pay the price, bring him to the priest, and the priest will set the price. The priest will decide how much money the person making the vow can afford to pay.

Gifts to the Lord

⁹“Some animals may be used as sacrifices to the Lord. If someone promises to bring one of these to the Lord, it will become holy. ¹⁰That person must not try to put another animal in its place or exchange it, a good animal for a bad one, or a bad animal for a good one. If this happens, both animals will

become holy.

¹¹“Unclean animals cannot be offered as sacrifices to the Lord, and if someone brings one of them to the Lord, that animal must be brought to the priest. ¹²The priest will decide a price for the animal, according to whether it is good or bad; as the priest decides, that is the price for the animal. ¹³If the person wants to buy back the animal, an additional one-fifth must be added to the price.

Value of a House

¹⁴“If a person gives a house as holy to the Lord, the priest must decide its value, according to whether the house is good or bad; as the priest decides, that is the price for the house. ¹⁵But if the person who gives the house wants to buy it back, an additional one-fifth must be added to the price. Then the house will belong to that person again.

Value of Land

¹⁶“If a person gives some family property to the Lord, the value of the fields will depend on how much seed is needed to plant them. It will cost about one and one-fourth pounds of silver for each six bushels of barley seed needed. ¹⁷If the person gives a field at the year of Jubilee, its value will stay at what the priest has decided. ¹⁸But if the person gives the field after the Jubilee, the priest must decide the exact price by counting the number of years to the next year of Jubilee. Then he will subtract that number from its value. ¹⁹If the person who gave the field wants to buy it back, one-fifth must be added to

that price, and the field will belong to the first owner again.

²⁰“If the person does not buy back the field, or if it is sold to someone else, the first person cannot ever buy it back. ²¹When the land is released at the year of Jubilee, it will become holy to the Lord, like land specially given to him. It will become the property of the priests.

²²“If someone gives to the Lord a field he has bought, which is not a part of his family land, ²³the priest must count the years to the next Jubilee. He must decide the price for the land, and the price must be paid on that day. Then that land will be holy to the Lord. ²⁴At the year of Jubilee, the land will go back to its first owner, to the family who sold the land.

²⁵“You must use the measure as set by the Holy Place in paying these prices; it weighs two-fifths of an ounce.

Value of Animals

²⁶“If an animal is the first one born to its parent, it already belongs to the Lord, so people may not give it again. If it is a cow or a sheep, it is the Lord’s. ²⁷If the animal is unclean, the person must buy it back for the price set by the priest, and the person must add one-fifth to that price. If it is not bought back, the priest must sell it for the price he had decided.

²⁸“There is a special kind of gift that people set apart to give to the Lord; it may be a person, animal, or field from the family property. That gift cannot be bought back or sold. Every special kind of gift is most holy to the Lord.

²⁹“If anyone is given for the purpose of being destroyed, he cannot be bought back; he must be put to death.

³⁰“One-tenth of all crops belongs to the Lord, including the

crops from fields and the fruit from trees. That one-tenth is holy to the Lord.³¹ If a person wants to get back that tenth, one-fifth must be added to its price.

³²“The priest will take every tenth animal from a person’s herd or flock, and it will be holy to the Lord.³³ The owner should not pick out the good animals from the bad or exchange one animal for another. If that happens, both animals will become holy; they cannot be bought back.”

³⁴These are the commands the Lord gave to Moses at Mount Sinai for the people of Israel.

crop A small bag inside a bird's throat. When a bird eats, its food goes into this part first. There, the food is made soft before it goes into the stomach.

semen A man's body fluid by which he can make a woman pregnant.

semen A man's body fluid by which he can make a woman pregnant.

semen A man's body fluid by which he can make a woman pregnant.

Jubilee This word comes from the Hebrew word for a horn of a male sheep.

sky ... bronze This means the sky will give no rain and the earth will produce no crops.

[The Book of Numbers](#)

Introduction

Every life is a pilgrimage.

Every person is on a journey.

Every journey has its challenges.

The Book of Numbers is a travel diary. Two million ex-slaves weaving their way through a desert. The trip from Egypt to the Promised Land can be made in less than 11 days ([Deuteronomy 1:2](#)). It took the Israelites thirty-eight years.

What they should have done, they didn't. And what they didn't do, they should have. So God decided they needed some time to rethink a few things.

He took them the long way.

Maybe you're on a detour in your journey. Things seem slow. Road seems dark. Maybe God is wanting to teach you a few things. Pay attention.

You don't want to spend thirty-eight years missing the point.

About This Book

Author:

Moses

Date Written:

1500–1450 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- When the Hebrews arrived at the border, they

failed to trust God to keep his promise.

- Because of their lack of faith the Hebrews wandered miserably through the wilderness.
- When at last they returned to the border, the next Hebrew generation followed God as their parents had not.

Key Verse:

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘How long will these people ignore me? How long will they not believe me in spite of the miracles I have done among them?’”

([Numbers 14:11](#)).

Contents:

1. The Hebrews Are Numbered and Organized to Enter the Land [1:1–10:36](#)
2. Rebellion After Rebellion [11:1–17:13](#)
3. The Priests Are Instructed [18:1–19:22](#)
4. The New Journey Begins [20:1–25:18](#)
5. One More Census [26:1–27:65](#)
6. A New Leader and a New Life [28:1–36:13](#)

Life Lessons

Numbers 1:1–2:34

Situation

God directed Moses and others to take a census of the Israelites and to organize the tribes for specific duties.

Observation

Moses counted all of God's people and assigned certain people to lead in worship. Each role helped to shape the community.

Inspiration

Jonathan Edwards was one man who made a difference. Born in 1703, he was perhaps the most brilliant mind America ever produced. A pastor, writer, and later, president of Princeton, he and his wife had eleven children. Of his known male descendants:

- More than 300 became pastors, missionaries, or theological professors;

- 120 were professors at various universities;

- 110 became attorneys;

- 60 were prominent authors;

- 30 were judges;

- 14 served as president of universities and colleges;

- 3 served in the U.S. Congress, and

- one became vice-president of the United States.

Jonathan Edwards ... was just one man, but he positively affected hundreds and even thousands of

his descendants after his death....

The destiny of those future generations is in your hands. The choices you make with your family today will determine the quality of life in your family tree for generations to come. That's why one man can make a difference.

(From *Point Man* by Steve Farrar)

Application

You can make a difference in the lives of your children and grandchildren by serving God and dedicating your children to his service. The next time your family comes together, share about the “point people” who have most affected your life for the Lord. Help instill a vision for service in the kingdom of God. Then share with your children how they can pass along that vision.

Exploration

Influencing Future Generations—[Genesis 17](#); [Numbers 26](#); [Joshua 24](#); [1 Kings 8](#).

The People of Israel Are Counted

The Lord spoke to Moses in the Meeting Tent in the Desert of Sinai. This was on the first day of the second month in the second year after the Israelites left Egypt. He said to Moses:

²“You and Aaron must count all the people of Israel by families and family groups, listing the name of each man.³You and Aaron must count every man twenty years old or older who will serve in the army of Israel, and list them by their divisions.

⁴One man from each tribe, the leader of his family, will help you.

⁵These are the names of the men who will help you:

-
- from the tribe of Reuben—Elizur son of Shedeur;
- ⁶from the tribe of Simeon—Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai;
- ⁷from the tribe of Judah—Nahshon son of Amminadab;
- ⁸from the tribe of Issachar—Nethanel son of Zuar;
- ⁹from the tribe of Zebulun—Eliab son of Helon;
- ¹⁰from the tribe of Ephraim son of Joseph—Elishama son of Ammihud;
- from the tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph—Gamaliel son of Pedahzur;
- ¹¹from the tribe of Benjamin—Abidan son of Gideoni;
- ¹²from the tribe of Dan—Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai;

- ¹³from the tribe of Asher—Pagiel son of Ocran;
- ¹⁴from the tribe of Gad—Eliasaph son of Deuel;
- ¹⁵from the tribe of Naphtali—Ahira son of Enan.”

¹⁶These were the men chosen from the people to be leaders of their tribes, the heads of Israel’s family groups.

¹⁷Moses and Aaron took these men who had been picked ¹⁸and called all the people of Israel together on the first day of the second month. Then the people were listed by their families and family groups, and all the men who were twenty years old or older were listed by name. ¹⁹Moses did exactly what the Lord had commanded and listed the people while they were in the Desert of Sinai.

²⁰The tribe of Reuben, the first son born to Israel, was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. ²¹The tribe of Reuben totaled 46,500 men.

²²The tribe of Simeon was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. ²³The tribe of Simeon totaled 59,300 men.

²⁴The tribe of Gad was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. ²⁵The tribe of Gad totaled 45,650 men.

²⁶The tribe of Judah was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups. ²⁷The tribe of Judah totaled 74,600 men.

²⁸The tribe of Issachar was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were

listed by name with their families and family groups.²⁹The tribe of Issachar totaled 54,400 men.

³⁰The tribe of Zebulun was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups.³¹The tribe of Zebulun totaled 57,400 men.

³²The tribe of Ephraim, a son of Joseph, was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups.

³³The tribe of Ephraim totaled 40,500 men.

³⁴The tribe of Manasseh, also a son of Joseph, was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups.³⁵The tribe of Manasseh totaled 32,200 men.

³⁶The tribe of Benjamin was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups.³⁷The tribe of Benjamin totaled 35,400 men.

³⁸The tribe of Dan was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups.³⁹The tribe of Dan totaled 62,700 men.

⁴⁰The tribe of Asher was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups.⁴¹The tribe of Asher totaled 41,500 men.

⁴²The tribe of Naphtali was counted; all the men twenty years old or older who were able to serve in the army were listed by name with their families and family groups.⁴³The tribe of Naphtali totaled 53,400 men.

⁴⁴Moses, Aaron, and the twelve leaders of Israel, one from each of the families, counted these men. ⁴⁵Every man of Israel twenty years old or older who was able to serve in the army was counted and listed with his family. ⁴⁶The total number of men was 603,550.

⁴⁷The families from the tribe of Levi were not listed with the others, because ⁴⁸the Lord had told Moses: ⁴⁹“Do not count the tribe of Levi or include them with the other Israelites. ⁵⁰Instead put the Levites in charge of the Holy Tent of the Agreement and everything that is with it. They must carry the Holy Tent and everything in it, and they must take care of it and make their camp around it. ⁵¹Any time the Holy Tent is moved, the Levites must take it down, and any time it is set up, the Levites must do it. Anyone else who goes near the Holy Tent will be put to death. ⁵²The Israelites will make their camps in separate divisions, each family near its flag. ⁵³But the Levites must make their camp around the Holy Tent of the Agreement so that I will not be angry with the Israelites. The Levites will take care of the Holy Tent of the Agreement.”

⁵⁴So the Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses.

The Camp Arrangement

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: ²“The Israelites should make their camps around the Meeting Tent, but they should not camp too close to it. They should camp under their family flag and banners.”

³The camp of Judah will be on the east side, where the sun rises, and they will camp by divisions there under their flag. The leader of the people of Judah is Nahshon son of Amminadab. ⁴There are 74,600 men in his division.

⁵Next to them the tribe of Issachar will camp. The leader of the people of Issachar is Nethanel son of Zuar. ⁶There are 54,400 men in his division.

⁷Next is the tribe of Zebulun. The leader of the people of Zebulun is Eliab son of Helon. ⁸There are 57,400 men in his division.

⁹There are a total of 186,400 men in the camps of Judah and its neighbors, in all their divisions. They will be the first to march out of camp.

¹⁰The divisions of the camp of Reuben will be on the south side, where they will camp under their flag. The leader of the people of Reuben is Elizur son of Shedeur. ¹¹There are 46,500 men in his division.

¹²Next to them the tribe of Simeon will camp. The leader of the people of Simeon is Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai. ¹³There are 59,300 men in his division.

¹⁴Next is the tribe of Gad. The leader of the people of Gad is Eliasaph son of Deuel. ¹⁵There are 45,650 men in his division.

¹⁶There are a total of 151,450 men in the camps of Reuben and its neighbors, in all their divisions. They will be the second group to march out of camp.

¹⁷When the Levites march out with the Meeting Tent, they will be in the middle of the other camps. The tribes will march out in the same order as they camp, each in its place under its flag.

¹⁸The divisions of the camp of Ephraim will be on the west side, where they will camp under their flag. The leader of the people of Ephraim is Elishama son of Ammihud. ¹⁹There are 40,500 men in his division.

²⁰Next to them the tribe of Manasseh will camp. The leader of the people of Manasseh is Gamaliel son of Pedahzur. ²¹There are 32,200 men in his division.

²²Next is the tribe of Benjamin. The leader of the people of Benjamin is Abidan son of Gideon. ²³There are 35,400 men in his division.

²⁴There are a total of 108,100 men in the camps of Ephraim and its neighbors, in all their divisions. They will be the third group to march out of camp.

²⁵The divisions of the camp of Dan will be on the north side, where they will camp under their flag. The leader of the people of Dan is Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai. ²⁶There are 62,700 men in his division.

²⁷Next to them the tribe of Asher will camp. The leader of the people of Asher is Pagiel son of Ocran. ²⁸There are 41,500 men in his division.

²⁹Next is the tribe of Naphtali. The leader of the people of Naphtali is Ahira son of Enan. ³⁰There are 53,400 men in his division.

³¹There are 157,600 men in the camps of Dan and its neighbors. They will be the last to march out of camp, and they will travel under their own flag.

³²These are the Israelites who were counted by families. The total number of Israelites in the camps, counted by divisions, is 603,550. ³³Moses obeyed the Lord and did not count the Levites among the other people of Israel.

³⁴So the Israelites obeyed everything the Lord commanded Moses. They camped under their flags and marched out by families and family groups.

Aaron's Family, the Priests

This is the family history of Aaron and Moses at the time the Lord talked to Moses on Mount Sinai.

²Aaron had four sons: Nadab, the oldest, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ³These were the names of Aaron's sons, who were appointed to serve as priests. ⁴But Nadab and Abihu died in the presence of the Lord when they offered the wrong kind of fire before the Lord in the Desert of Sinai. They had no sons. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests during the lifetime of their father Aaron.

⁵The Lord said to Moses, ⁶"Bring the tribe of Levi and present them to Aaron the priest to help him. ⁷They will help him and all the Israelites at the Meeting Tent, doing the work in the Holy Tent. ⁸The Levites must take care of everything in the Meeting Tent and serve the people of Israel by doing the work in the Holy Tent. ⁹Give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; of all the Israelites, the Levites are given completely to him. ¹⁰Appoint Aaron and his sons to serve as priests, but anyone else who comes near the holy things must be put to death."

¹¹The Lord also said to Moses, ¹²"I am choosing the Levites from all the Israelites to take the place of all the firstborn children of Israel. The Levites will be mine, ¹³because the firstborn are mine. When you were in Egypt, I killed all the firstborn children of the Egyptians and took all the firstborn of Israel to be mine, both animals and children. They are mine. I am the Lord."

¹⁴The Lord again said to Moses in the Desert of Sinai,

¹⁵“Count the Levites by families and family groups. Count every male one month old or older.” ¹⁶So Moses obeyed the Lord and counted them all.

¹⁷Levi had three sons, whose names were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

¹⁸The Gershonite family groups were Libni and Shimei.

¹⁹The Kohathite family groups were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

²⁰The Merarite family groups were Mahli and Mushi.

These were the family groups of the Levites.

²¹The family groups of Libni and Shimei belonged to Gershon; they were the Gershonite family groups. ²²The number that was counted was 7,500 males one month old or older. ²³The Gershonite family groups camped on the west side, behind the Holy Tent. ²⁴The leader of the families of Gershon was Eliasaph son of Lael. ²⁵In the Meeting Tent the Gershonites were in charge of the Holy Tent, its covering, the curtain at the entrance to the Meeting Tent, ²⁶the curtains in the courtyard, the curtain at the entry to the courtyard around the Holy Tent and the altar, the ropes, and all the work connected with these items.

²⁷The family groups of Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel belonged to Kohath; they were the Kohathite family groups. ²⁸They had 8,600 males one month old or older, and they were responsible for taking care of the Holy Place. ²⁹The Kohathite family groups camped south of the Holy Tent. ³⁰The leader of the Kohathite families was Elizaphan son of Uzziel. ³¹They were responsible for the Ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the tools of the Holy Place which they were to use, the curtain, and all the work connected with these items. ³²The main leader of

the Levites was Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, who was in charge of all those responsible for the Holy Place.

³³The family groups of Mahli and Mushi belonged to Merari; they were the Merarite family groups. ³⁴The number that was counted was 6,200 males one month old or older.

³⁵The leader of the Merari families was Zuriel son of Abihail, and they were to camp north of the Holy Tent. ³⁶The Merarites were responsible for the frames of the Holy Tent, the braces, the posts, the bases, and all the work connected with these items. ³⁷They were also responsible for the posts in the courtyard around the Holy Tent and their bases, tent pegs, and ropes.

³⁸Moses, Aaron, and his sons camped east of the Holy Tent, toward the sunrise, in front of the Meeting Tent. They were responsible for the Holy Place for the Israelites. Anyone else who came near the Holy Place was to be put to death.

³⁹Moses and Aaron counted the Levite men by their families, as the Lord commanded, and there were 22,000 males one month old or older.

Levites Take the Place of the Firstborn Sons

⁴⁰The Lord said to Moses, "Count all the firstborn sons in Israel one month old or older, and list their names. ⁴¹Take the Levites for me instead of the firstborn sons of Israel; take the animals of the Levites instead of the firstborn animals from the rest of Israel. I am the Lord."

⁴²So Moses did what the Lord commanded and counted all the firstborn sons of the Israelites. ⁴³When he listed all the firstborn sons one month old or older, there were 22,273 names.

⁴⁴The Lord also said to Moses, ⁴⁵“Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn sons of the Israelites, and take the animals of the Levites instead of the animals of the other people. The Levites are mine. I am the Lord. ⁴⁶Since there are 273 more firstborn sons than Levites, ⁴⁷collect two ounces of silver for each of the 273 sons. Use the measure as set by the Holy Place, which is two-fifths of an ounce. ⁴⁸Give the silver to Aaron and his sons as the payment for the 273 Israelites.”

⁴⁹So Moses collected the money for the people the Levites could not replace. ⁵⁰From the firstborn of the Israelites, he collected thirty-five pounds of silver, using the measure set by the Holy Place. ⁵¹Moses obeyed the command of the Lord and gave the silver to Aaron and his sons.

Life Lessons

Numbers 3:1–5:31

Situation

God established the Levites as the tribe responsible for providing priests and caring for the Meeting Tent. God gave different tribes specific responsibilities to meet certain needs. Anyone entering the sanctuary other than Moses and Aaron or his sons was punished by death.

Observation

The Old Testament agreement (or covenant) between God and his people required special intermediaries—the priests. Now, Christ is the only intermediary needed for forgiveness of sins. We can go straight to him ourselves.

Inspiration

The crowd is waiting outside the temple in silence. The signal has already been given. The high priest has gone into the Holy of Holies and, for the only time in the year allowed, has spoken the sacred name of God. At that signal the Jews assembled outside in the courtyard fall to their faces in respect and fear, since the priest and presumably the temple will be destroyed if he has spoken “the name” with impure lips.

The crowd awaits the high priest’s return to the front of the temple with the announcement that the sacrifice has been accepted and that full forgiveness has been granted. The sacrifice he offers is for his sins and for the sins of the people. If he returns, all is well. If he does not return, the crowd outside will know that he has been struck down in the temple and they will remain guilty, unclean, hopeless. He is their only hope.

In the book of Hebrews, the writer presents Jesus as our High Priest. The high priest in the Old Testament offered up blood that was “not his own,” a lifeless sacrifice, but Jesus offered His own blood. His sacrifice was better because it was a living sacrifice, which was offered “once for all,” not every year. And unlike the high priest, who served only for a specific period of time, Jesus’ is an eternal priesthood (the order of Melchizedek).

Even as Jesus is our High Priest, so we are in the same position as those early Israelites. We wait expectantly, but without fear, for our High Priest’s

return, for “He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.” The relief the children of Israel had at seeing their high priest return is nothing in comparison to the relief we will have at seeing the clouds roll back and Jesus, our High Priest, appear again. (From *Immanuel* by Michael Card)

Application

Under the old agreement, only the priests could approach God. Today, all who believe in Christ can approach God as members of the priesthood. Are you fully enjoying this privilege with God? Be thankful for Christ’s sacrifice which gives direct access to God at all times. Use the freedom often. Pray today for people who need help, for political leaders who need wisdom.

Exploration

Relationship with God—[Genesis 28:10–15](#); [Exodus 19:20–24](#); [Deuteronomy 10:16–17](#); [Romans 8:34](#); [Hebrews 4:14–16](#); [10:11–14](#).

The Jobs of the Kohath Family

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ²“Count the Kohathites among the Levites by family groups and families. ³Count the men from thirty to fifty years old, all who come to serve in the Meeting Tent.

⁴“The Kohathites are responsible for the most holy things in the Meeting Tent. ⁵When the Israelites are ready to move, Aaron and his sons must go into the Holy Tent, take down the curtain, and cover the Ark of the Agreement with it. ⁶Over this they must put a covering made from fine leather, then spread the solid blue cloth over that, and put the poles in place.

⁷“Then they must spread a blue cloth over the table for the bread that shows a person is in God’s presence. They must put the plates, pans, bowls, and the jars for drink offerings on the table; they must leave the bread that is always there on the table. ⁸Then they must put a red cloth over all of these things, cover everything with fine leather, and put the poles in place.

⁹“With a blue cloth they must cover the lampstand, its lamps, its wick trimmers, its trays, and all the jars for the oil used in the lamps. ¹⁰Then they must wrap everything in fine leather and put all these things on a frame for carrying them.

¹¹“They must spread a blue cloth over the gold altar, cover it with fine leather, and put the poles in place.

¹²“They must gather all the things used for serving in the Holy Place and wrap them in a blue cloth. Then they must cover that with fine leather and put these things on a frame for carrying them.

¹³“They must clean the ashes off the bronze altar and spread a purple cloth over it. ¹⁴They must gather all the things used for serving at the altar—the pans for carrying the fire, the meat forks, the shovels, and the bowls—and put them on the bronze altar. Then they must spread a covering of fine leather over it and put the poles in place.

¹⁵“When the Israelites are ready to move, and when Aaron and his sons have covered the holy furniture and all the holy things, the Kohathites may go in and carry them away. In this way they won’t touch the holy things and die. It is the Kohathites’ job to carry the things that are in the Meeting Tent.

¹⁶“Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, will be responsible for the Holy Tent and for everything in it, for all the holy things it has: the oil for the lamp, the sweet-smelling incense, the continual grain offering, and the oil used to appoint priests and things to the Lord’s service.”

¹⁷The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ¹⁸“Don’t let the Kohathites be cut off from the Levites. ¹⁹Do this for the Kohathites so that they may go near the Most Holy Place and not die: Aaron and his sons must go in and show each Kohathite what to do and what to carry. ²⁰The Kohathites must not enter and look at the holy things, even for a second, or they will die.”

The Jobs of the Gershon Family

²¹The Lord said to Moses, ²²“Count the Gershonites by families and family groups. ²³Count the men from thirty to fifty years old, all who have a job to do in the Meeting Tent.

²⁴“This is what the Gershonite family groups must do and what they must carry. ²⁵They must carry the curtains of the Holy Tent, the Meeting Tent, its covering, and its outer covering made from fine leather. They must also carry the curtains for the entrance to the Meeting Tent, ²⁶the curtains of the courtyard that go around the Holy Tent and the altar, the curtain for the entry to the courtyard, the ropes, and all the things used with the curtains. They must do everything connected with these things. ²⁷Aaron and his sons are in charge of what the Gershonites do or carry; you tell them what they are responsible for carrying. ²⁸This is the work of the Gershonite family group at the Meeting Tent. Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest, will direct their work.

The Jobs of the Merari Family

²⁹“Count the Merarite families and family groups. ³⁰Count the men from thirty to fifty years old, all who work at the Meeting Tent. ³¹It is their job to carry the following as they serve in the Meeting Tent: the frames of the Holy Tent, the crossbars, the posts, and bases, ³²in addition to the posts that go around the courtyard, their bases, tent pegs, ropes, and everything that is used with the poles around the courtyard. Tell each man exactly what to carry. ³³This is the work the Merarite family group will do for the Meeting Tent. Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest, will direct their work.”

The Levite Families

³⁴Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel counted the

Kohathites by families and family groups,³⁵ the men from thirty to fifty years old who were to work at the Meeting Tent.³⁶ There were 2,750 men in the family groups.³⁷ This was the total of the Kohath family groups who worked at the Meeting Tent, whom Moses and Aaron counted as the Lord had commanded Moses.

³⁸Also, the Gershonites were counted by families and family groups,³⁹ the men from thirty to fifty years old who were given work at the Meeting Tent.⁴⁰ The families and family groups had 2,630 men.⁴¹ This was the total of the Gershon family groups who worked at the Meeting Tent, whom Moses and Aaron counted as the Lord had commanded.

⁴²Also, the men in the families and family groups of the Merari family were counted,⁴³ the men from thirty to fifty years old who were to work at the Meeting Tent.⁴⁴ The family groups had 3,200 men.⁴⁵ This was the total of the Merari family groups, whom Moses and Aaron counted as the Lord had commanded Moses.

⁴⁶So Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel counted all the Levites by families and family groups.⁴⁷ They counted the men from thirty to fifty who were given work at the Meeting Tent and who carried the Tent.⁴⁸ The total number of these men was 8,580.⁴⁹ Each man was counted as the Lord had commanded Moses; each man was given his work and told what to carry as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Rules About Cleanliness

The Lord said to Moses,²“Command the Israelites to send away from camp anyone with a harmful skin disease. Send away anyone who gives off body fluid or who has become unclean by touching a dead body. ³Send both men and women outside the camp so that they won’t spread the disease there, where I am living among you.” ⁴So Israel obeyed the Lord’s command and sent those people outside the camp. They did just as the Lord had told Moses.

Paying for Doing Wrong

⁵The Lord said to Moses, ⁶“Tell the Israelites: ‘When a man or woman does something wrong to another person, that is really sinning against the Lord. That person is guilty ⁷and must admit the wrong that has been done. The person must fully pay for the wrong that has been done, adding one-fifth to it, and giving it to the person who was wronged. ⁸But if that person is dead and does not have any close relatives to receive the payment, the one who did wrong owes the Lord and must pay the priest. In addition, the priest must sacrifice a male sheep to remove the wrong so that the person will belong to the Lord. ⁹When an Israelite brings a holy gift, it should be given to the priest. ¹⁰No one has to give these holy gifts, but if someone does give them, they belong to the priest.’”

Suspicious Husbands

¹¹Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹²“Tell the Israelites: ‘A man’s wife might be unfaithful to him ¹³and have sexual relations with another man. Her sin might be kept hidden from her husband so that he does not know about the wrong she did. Perhaps no one saw it, and she wasn’t caught. ¹⁴But if her husband has feelings of jealousy and suspects she has sinned—whether she has or not— ¹⁵he should take her to the priest. The husband must also take an offering for her of two quarts of barley flour. He must not pour oil or incense on it, because this is a grain offering for jealousy, an offering of remembrance. It is to find out if she is guilty.

¹⁶“The priest will bring in the woman and make her stand before the Lord. ¹⁷He will take some holy water in a clay jar, and he will put some dirt from the floor of the Holy Tent into the water. ¹⁸The priest will make the woman stand before the Lord, and he will loosen her hair. He will hand her the offering of remembrance, the grain offering for jealousy; he will hold the bitter water that brings a curse. ¹⁹The priest will make her take an oath and ask her, “Has another man had sexual relations with you? Have you been unfaithful to your husband? If you haven’t, this bitter water that brings a curse won’t hurt you. ²⁰But if you have been unfaithful to your husband and have had sexual relations with a man besides him”— ²¹the priest will then put on her the curse that the oath will bring—“the Lord will make the people curse and reject you. He will make your stomach get big, and he will make your body unable to give birth to another baby. ²²This water that brings a curse will go inside you and make your body unable to give birth to another baby.”

“The woman must say, ‘I agree.’”

²³“The priest should write these curses on a scroll, wash the words off into the bitter water, ²⁴and make the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse. If she is guilty, the water will make her sick. ²⁵Then the priest will take the grain offering for jealousy from her. He will present it before the Lord and bring it to the altar. ²⁶He will take a handful of the grain, which is a memorial offering, and burn it on the altar. After that he will make the woman drink the water ²⁷to see if she is not pure and if she has sinned against her husband. When it goes into her, if her stomach gets big so that she is not able to have another baby, her people will reject her. ²⁸But if the woman has not sinned, she is pure. She is not guilty, and she will be able to have babies.

²⁹“So this is the teaching about jealousy. This is what to do when a woman does wrong and is unfaithful while she is married to her husband. ³⁰It also should be done if the man gets jealous because he suspects his wife. The priest will have her stand before the Lord, and he will do all these things, just as the teaching commands. ³¹In this way the husband can be proven correct, and the woman will suffer if she has done wrong.”

Life Lessons

Numbers 6:1-27

Situation

God established the Nazirite vow to form a small group who would serve God. The restrictions (abstaining from wine, cutting or shaving hair, and touching a dead body) were intended to keep a Nazirite's life holy and clean.

Observation

The Nazirites followed special rules to be closer in mind and spirit to God. They provide examples for us of dedication to God. Religious rules should only be followed by people who have a sincere heart.

Inspiration

The leading religious party members of the day quickly labeled Jesus an adversary because He had the capacity to do the one thing that terrified them most: expose the inner person. They were reasonably good people, but they put a premium on decorating the exterior of life with words, robes, and rituals and camouflaging the interior of life where the scenery was spoiled.

But others were actually drawn to Him because they sensed an overriding safety in being transparent with Him. Instead of heaping shame upon them as others did, He gave grace. That's it: self-disclosure always resulted in grace in the presence of Jesus. And grace meant reclamation from spoiledness. Grace meant a new start....

A powerful example of this is Zacchaeus, the Jericho tax collector who climbed a tree to be above the crowd and get a glimpse of Jesus. Why did the Lord stop and choose to visit at Zacchaeus's house that day? It's clear that He saw what no one else could see: the man known for his exploitation of people was ready to acknowledge the inner spoiledness that, in this case, was out-and-out greed. The grace of Christ was drawn to the openness of the sinner.

What is the point of all this? That Christ-following always involves exposure and renovation of the inner life. And not just a small part of the inner life, but an ever-enlarging section of it.

(From *Christ Followers in the Real World* by Gordon MacDonald)

Application

We do not need to become Nazirites to serve Christ. Follow God's Word and pray for God's wisdom so you can better serve him in your family and work. Find a way to say to someone today, "God cares about you."

Exploration

Dedication to Service—[1 Chronicles 6:31](#); [2 Chronicles 7:4-5](#); [Luke 9:62](#); [Romans 12:1-2](#).

Rules for the Nazirites

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Tell the Israelites: ‘If men or women want to promise to belong to the Lord in a special way, they will be called Nazirites. ³During this time, they must not drink wine or beer, or vinegar made from wine or beer. They must not even drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. ⁴While they are Nazirites, they must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, even the seeds or the skin.

⁵“During the time they have promised to belong to the Lord, they must not cut their hair. They must be holy until this special time is over. They must let their hair grow long. ⁶During their special time of belonging to the Lord, Nazirites must not go near a dead body. ⁷Even if their own father, mother, brother, or sister dies, they must not touch them, or they will become unclean. They must still keep their promise to belong to God in a special way. ⁸While they are Nazirites, they belong to the Lord in a special way.

⁹“If they are next to someone who dies suddenly, their hair, which was part of their promise, has been made unclean. So they must shave their head seven days later to be clean. ¹⁰Then on the eighth day, they must bring two doves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. ¹¹The priest will offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering. This removes sin so they will belong to the Lord. (They had sinned because they were near a dead body.) That

same day they will again promise to let their hair grow¹² and give themselves to the Lord for another special time. They must bring a male lamb a year old as a penalty offering. The days of the special time before don't count, because they became unclean during their first special time.

¹³“This is the teaching for the Nazirites. When the promised time is over, they must go to the entrance of the Meeting Tent¹⁴ and give their offerings to the Lord. They must offer a year-old male lamb that has nothing wrong with it, as a burnt offering, a year-old female lamb that has nothing wrong with it, as a sin offering, and a male sheep that has nothing wrong with it, for a fellowship offering.¹⁵ They must also bring the grain offerings and drink offerings that go with them. And they must bring a basket of bread made without yeast, loaves made with fine flour mixed with oil, and wafers made without yeast spread with oil.

¹⁶“The priest will give these offerings to the Lord and make the sin offering and the burnt offering.¹⁷ Then he will kill the male sheep as a fellowship offering to the Lord; along with it, he will present the basket of bread made without yeast, the grain offering, and the drink offering.

¹⁸“The Nazirites must go to the entrance of the Meeting Tent and shave off their hair that they grew for their promise. The hair will be put in the fire that is under the sacrifice of the fellowship offering.

¹⁹“After the Nazirites cut off their hair, the priest will give them a boiled shoulder from the male sheep. From the basket he will also give a loaf and a wafer, both made without yeast.²⁰ Then the priest will present them to the Lord. They are holy and belong to the priest. Also, he is to present the breast and

the thigh from the male sheep. After that, the Nazirites may drink wine.

²¹“This is the teaching for the Nazirites who make a promise. Everyone who makes the Nazirite promise must give all of these gifts to the Lord. If they promised to do more, they must keep their promise, according to the teaching of the Nazirites.”

The Priests' Blessings

²²The Lord said to Moses, ²³“Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you should bless the Israelites. Say to them:

²⁴“May the Lord bless you and keep you.

²⁵May the Lord show you his kindness
and have mercy on you.

²⁶May the Lord watch over you
and give you peace.”

²⁷“So Aaron and his sons will bless the Israelites with my name, and I will bless them.”

Life Lessons

Numbers 7:1–9:14

Situation

Moses consecrated and anointed the completed place of worship. The people brought gifts and offerings for the Meeting Tent.

Observation

In order to truly know God, we must worship him.

Inspiration

The Bible tells us that God speaks to us in four different ways.

God reveals himself in nature.

Psalms 19 describes this kind of revelation... .

Romans 1:20 also speaks of the revelation of God in nature... . Anyone who has seen nature knows enough about God to seek him out.

... Although this is a true revelation, it doesn't tell us anything of God's moral character. More important, it doesn't tell us anything of his love... .

God reveals himself in history.

In the Old Testament, God spoke to people personally and intervened in a miraculous way by altering the rules of nature. For example, in delivering the Jews from Egypt, he revealed his character and his moral law. He delivered the Israelites from bondage so they would follow him and obey his commandments.

The chief revelation of God in history is Jesus Christ... . In Jesus Christ we discover things about

God we don't learn from nature. We learn that God is a person, that God is loving. Above all we find the way of salvation through Christ's death and resurrection.

God reveals himself in the Bible.

God's written revelation is crucial because whatever we say about God is based on his revelation in the Bible. The Bible is the record of what God has done, focusing on what he has done through Jesus Christ. The Old Testament anticipates Christ's coming. The four Gospels detail his earthly ministry. The Epistles and the other books of the New Testament explain the rest of the Bible for our benefit. More than nature and history, the Bible leads us to seek God.

God reveals himself through the Holy Spirit.

Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit a person experiences rebirth. This is the most personal form of God's revelation. Without the Spirit, we cannot understand spiritual things... . But the Holy Spirit makes us alive in Christ. He gives us a new nature. He gives us a new capacity to see God in nature and history and to read the Bible with new understanding.

A non-Christian will attend a Bible study, but nothing makes sense. Then suddenly something clicks and it becomes clear. The Holy Spirit has revealed to him in a personal way that Jesus Christ is God and that Jesus Christ is the Savior. He can now see what he couldn't see before. The person has been born again through the work of the Holy Spirit. (From

“God Speaks to Us Today” by James Boice in *Practical Christianity*)

Application

What rituals, symbols, or observances in your church tell you about God or help you worship? Are there some that you don't understand? Take time to find out what they mean. Let them be God's message for you.

Exploration

Public Worship—[Psalm 95:6](#); [John 4:23–24](#); [Acts 2:42–47](#); [Hebrews 10:25](#).

The Holy Tent

When Moses finished setting up the Holy Tent, he gave it for service to the Lord by pouring olive oil on the Tent and on everything used in it. He also poured oil on the altar and all its tools to prepare them for service to the Lord.² Then the leaders of Israel made offerings. These were the heads of the families, the leaders of each tribe who counted the people.³ They brought to the Lord six covered carts and twelve oxen—each leader giving an ox, and every two leaders giving a cart. They brought these to the Holy Tent.

⁴The Lord said to Moses,⁵“Accept these gifts from the leaders and use them in the work of the Meeting Tent. Give them to the Levites as they need them.”

⁶So Moses accepted the carts and the oxen and gave them to the Levites.⁷ He gave two carts and four oxen to the Gershonites, which they needed for their work.⁸ Then Moses gave four carts and eight oxen to the Merarites, which they needed for their work. Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest, directed the work of all of them.⁹ Moses did not give any oxen or carts to the Kohathites, because their job was to carry the holy things on their shoulders.

¹⁰When the oil was poured on the altar, the leaders brought their offerings to it to give it to the Lord’s service; they presented them in front of the altar.¹¹ The Lord told Moses, “Each day one leader must bring his gift to make the altar ready

for service to me.”

¹²⁻⁸³Each of the twelve leaders brought these gifts. Each leader brought one silver plate that weighed about three and one-fourth pounds, and one silver bowl that weighed about one and three-fourths pounds. These weights were set by the Holy Place measure. The bowl and the plate were filled with fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering. Each leader also brought a large gold dish that weighed about four ounces and was filled with incense.

In addition, each of the leaders brought one young bull, one male sheep, and one male lamb a year old for a burnt offering; one male goat for a sin offering; and two oxen, five male sheep, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old for a fellowship offering.

On the first day Nahshon son of Amminadab brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Judah.

On the second day Nethanel son of Zuar brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Issachar.

On the third day Eliab son of Helon brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Zebulun.

On the fourth day Elizur son of Shedeur brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Reuben.

On the fifth day Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Simeon.

On the sixth day Eliasaph son of Deuel brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Gad.

On the seventh day Elishama son of Ammihud brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Ephraim.

On the eighth day Gamaliel son of Pedahzur brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Manasseh.

On the ninth day Abidan son of Gideoni brought his gifts.

He was the leader of the tribe of Benjamin.

On the tenth day Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Dan.

On the eleventh day Pagiel son of Ocran brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Asher.

On the twelfth day Ahira son of Enan brought his gifts. He was the leader of the tribe of Naphtali.

⁸⁴So these were the gifts from the Israelite leaders when oil was poured on the altar and it was given for service to the Lord: twelve silver plates, twelve silver bowls, and twelve gold dishes. ⁸⁵Each silver plate weighed about three and one-fourth pounds, and each bowl weighed about one and three-fourths pounds. All the silver plates and silver bowls together weighed about sixty pounds according to a weight set by the Holy Place measure. ⁸⁶The twelve gold dishes filled with incense weighed four ounces each, according to the weight set by the Holy Place measure. Together the gold dishes weighed about three pounds. ⁸⁷The total number of animals for the burnt offering was twelve bulls, twelve male sheep, and twelve male lambs a year old. There was also a grain offering, and there were twelve male goats for a sin offering. ⁸⁸The total number of animals for the fellowship offering was twenty-four bulls, sixty male sheep, sixty male goats, and sixty male lambs a year old. All these offerings were for giving the altar to the service of the Lord after the oil had been poured on it.

⁸⁹When Moses went into the Meeting Tent to speak with the Lord, he heard the Lord speaking to him. The voice was coming from between the two gold creatures with wings that were above the lid of the Ark of the Agreement. In this way the Lord spoke with him.

The Lampstand

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Speak to Aaron and tell him, ‘Put the seven lamps where they can light the area in front of the lampstand.’”

³Aaron did this, putting the lamps so they lighted the area in front of the lampstand; he obeyed the command the Lord gave Moses. ⁴The lampstand was made from hammered gold, from its base to the flowers. It was made exactly the way the Lord had showed Moses.

The Levites Are Given to God

⁵The Lord said to Moses, ⁶“Take the Levites away from the other Israelites and make them clean. ⁷This is what you should do to make them clean: Sprinkle the cleansing water on them, and have them shave their bodies and wash their clothes so they will be clean. ⁸They must take a young bull and the grain offering of flour mixed with oil that goes with it. Then take a second young bull for a sin offering. ⁹Bring the Levites to the front of the Meeting Tent, and gather all the Israelites around. ¹⁰When you bring the Levites before the Lord, the Israelites should [put their hands on them](#). ¹¹Aaron will present the Levites before the Lord as an offering presented from the Israelites. Then the Levites will be ready to do the work of the Lord.

¹²“The Levites will put their hands on the bulls’ heads—one bull will be a sin offering to the Lord, and the other will be

a burnt offering, to remove the sins of the Levites so they will belong to the Lord. ¹³Make the Levites stand in front of Aaron and his sons and present the Levites as an offering to the Lord. ¹⁴In this way you must set apart the Levites from the other Israelites; the Levites will be mine.

¹⁵“Make the Levites pure, and present them as an offering so that they may come to work at the Meeting Tent. ¹⁶They will be given completely to me from the Israelites; I have taken them for myself instead of the firstborn of every Israelite woman. ¹⁷All the firstborn in Israel—people or animals—are mine. When I killed all the firstborn in Egypt, I set the firstborn in Israel aside for myself. ¹⁸But I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn in Israel. ¹⁹From all the Israelites I have given the Levites to Aaron and his sons so that they may serve the Israelites at the Meeting Tent. They will help remove the Israelites’ sins so they will belong to the Lord and so that no disaster will strike the Israelites when they approach the Holy Place.”

²⁰So Moses, Aaron, and all the Israelites obeyed and did with the Levites what the Lord commanded Moses. ²¹The Levites made themselves clean and washed their clothes. Then Aaron presented them as an offering to the Lord. He also removed their sins so they would be pure. ²²After that, the Levites came to the Meeting Tent to work, and Aaron and his sons told them what to do. They did with the Levites what the Lord commanded Moses.

²³The Lord said to Moses, ²⁴“This command is for the Levites. Everyone twenty-five years old or older must come to the Meeting Tent, because they all have jobs to do there. ²⁵At the age of fifty, they must retire from their jobs and not work

again.²⁶ They may help their fellow Levites with their work at the Meeting Tent, but they must not do the work themselves. This is the way you are to give the Levites their jobs.”

The Passover Is Celebrated

The Lord spoke to Moses in the Desert of Sinai in the first month of the second year after the Israelites left Egypt. He said,²“Tell the Israelites to celebrate the Passover at the appointed time.³That appointed time is the fourteenth day of this month at twilight; they must obey all the rules about it.”

⁴So Moses told the Israelites to celebrate the Passover,⁵and they did; it was in the Desert of Sinai at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses.

⁶But some of the people could not celebrate the Passover on that day because they were unclean from touching a dead body. So they went to Moses and Aaron that day and ⁷said to Moses, “We are unclean because of touching a dead body. But why should we be kept from offering gifts to the Lord at this appointed time? Why can’t we join the other Israelites?”

⁸Moses said to them, “Wait, and I will find out what the Lord says about you.”

⁹Then the Lord said to Moses,¹⁰“Tell the Israelites this: ‘If you or your descendants become unclean because of a dead body, or if you are away on a trip during the Passover, you must still celebrate the Lord’s Passover. ¹¹But celebrate it at twilight on the fourteenth day of the second month. Eat the lamb with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. ¹²Don’t leave any of it until the next morning or break any of its bones. When you celebrate the Passover, follow all the rules.

¹³Anyone who is clean and is not away on a trip but does not

eat the Passover must be cut off from the people. That person did not give an offering to the Lord at the appointed time and must be punished for the sin.

¹⁴““Foreigners among you may celebrate the Lord’s Passover, but they must follow all the rules. You must have the same rules for foreigners as you have for yourselves.””

Life Lessons

Numbers 9:15–10:10

Situation

God guided the Israelites in the wilderness with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The cloud and fire moved according to God’s will. When they moved, the people moved; where they stopped, the people stopped.

Observation

When we follow God’s guidance, we please him. Although his plan may not always be clear to us, we must follow.

Inspiration

Does God guide? Yes. Most times, I believe, he guides in subtle ways, by feeding ideas into our minds, speaking through a nagging sensation of dissatisfaction, inspiring us to choose better than we otherwise would have done, bringing to the surface hidden dangers of temptation, and perhaps by rearranging certain circumstances.

... Sociologist Bronislaw Malinowski suggested a distinction between magic and religion. Magic, he said, is when we manipulate the deities so that they

perform our wishes; religion is when we subject ourselves to the will of the deities. True guidance cannot resemble magic, a way for God to give us shortcuts and genie bottles. It must, rather, fall under Malinowski's definition of religion. If so, it will occur in the context of a committed relationship between a Christian and God.

... A picture is being painted, for me, for all who are called the sons and daughters of God. Yet it does not take shape until enough time passes for me to stand up and look back on what colors and designs have been laid down. If I saw the pattern in advance, a sort of schema for "paint-by-numbers," that would leave no room for faith. And, besides, God does not paint numbers. (From *Guidance: Making Sense of God's Direction* by Philip Yancey)

Application

How easily do you change direction? Are you willing to adapt to God's will? Ask God to make his plans for you clear and to move you toward his will for the future.

Exploration

Guidance—[Exodus 15:13](#); [Psalms 23:1–4](#); [Isaiah 58:11](#).

The Cloud Above the Tent

¹⁵On the day the Holy Tent, the Tent of the Agreement, was set up, a cloud covered it. From dusk until dawn the cloud above the Tent looked like fire. ¹⁶The cloud stayed above the Tent, and at night it looked like fire. ¹⁷When the cloud moved from its place over the Tent, the Israelites moved, and wherever the cloud stopped, the Israelites camped. ¹⁸So the Israelites moved at the Lord's command, and they camped at his command. While the cloud stayed over the Tent, they remained camped. ¹⁹Sometimes the cloud stayed over the Tent for a long time, but the Israelites obeyed the Lord and did not move. ²⁰Sometimes the cloud was over it only a few days. At the Lord's command the people camped, and at his command they moved. ²¹Sometimes the cloud stayed only from dusk until dawn; when the cloud lifted the next morning, the people moved. When the cloud lifted, day or night, the people moved. ²²The cloud might stay over the Tent for two days, a month, or a year. As long as it stayed, the people camped, but when it lifted, they moved. ²³At the Lord's command the people camped, and at his command they moved. They obeyed the Lord's order that he commanded through Moses.

The Silver Trumpets

The Lord said to Moses,²“Make two trumpets of hammered silver, and use them to call the people together and to march out of camp.³When both trumpets are blown, the people should gather before you at the entrance to the Meeting Tent.⁴If you blow only one trumpet, the leaders, the heads of the family groups of Israel, should meet before you.⁵When you loudly blow the trumpets, the tribes camping on the east should move.⁶When you loudly blow them again, the tribes camping on the south should move; the loud sound will tell them to move.⁷When you want to gather the people, blow the trumpets, but don’t blow them as loudly.

⁸“Aaron’s sons, the priests, should blow the trumpets. This is a law for you and your descendants from now on.⁹When you are fighting an enemy who attacks you in your own land, blow the trumpets loudly. The Lord your God will take notice of you and will save you from your enemies.¹⁰Also blow your trumpets at happy times and during your feasts and at New Moon festivals. Blow them over your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, because they will help you remember your God. I am the Lord your God.”

The Israelites Move Camp

¹¹The cloud lifted from the Tent of the Agreement on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year.¹²So the Israelites moved from the Desert of Sinai and continued until

the cloud stopped in the Desert of Paran.¹³ This was their first time to move, and they did it as the Lord had commanded Moses.

¹⁴The divisions from the camp of Judah moved first under their flag. Nahshon son of Amminadab was the commander.¹⁵ Nathanel son of Zuar was over the division of the tribe of Issachar.¹⁶ Eliab son of Helon was over the division of the tribe of Zebulun.¹⁷ Then the Holy Tent was taken down, and the Gershonites and Merarites, who carried it, moved next.

¹⁸Then came the divisions from the camp of Reuben under their flag, and Elizur son of Shedeur was the commander.¹⁹ Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai was over the division of the tribe of Simeon.²⁰ Eliasaph son of Deuel was over the division of the tribe of Gad.²¹ Then came the Kohathites, who carried the holy things; the Holy Tent was to be set up before they arrived.

²²Next came the divisions from the camp of Ephraim under their flag, and Elishama son of Ammihud was the commander.²³ Gamaliel son of Pedahzur was over the division of the tribe of Manasseh,²⁴ and Abidan son of Gideoni was over the division of the tribe of Benjamin.

²⁵The last ones were the rear guard for all the tribes. These were the divisions from the camp of Dan under their flag, and Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai was the commander.²⁶ Pagiel son of Ocran was over the division of the tribe of Asher;²⁷ Ahira son of Enan was over the division of the tribe of Naphtali.²⁸ This was the order the Israelite divisions marched in when they moved.

²⁹Hobab was the son of [Reuel the Midianite](#), who was Moses' father-in-law. Moses said to Hobab, "We are moving

to the land the Lord promised to give us. Come with us and we will be good to you, because the Lord has promised good things to Israel.”

³⁰But Hobab answered, “No, I will not go. I will go back to my own land where I was born.”

³¹But Moses said, “Please don’t leave us. You know where we can camp in the desert, and you can be our guide. ³²Come with us. We will share with you all the good things the Lord gives us.” ³³So they left the mountain of the Lord and traveled for three days. The Ark of the Lord’s Agreement went in front of the people for those three days, as they looked for a place to camp. ³⁴The Lord’s cloud was over them during the day when they left their camp.

³⁵When the Ark left the camp, Moses said,

“Rise up, Lord!
Scatter your enemies:
make those who hate you run from you.”

³⁶And when the Ark was set down, Moses said,

“Return, Lord,
to the thousands of people of Israel.”

Life Lessons

Numbers 10:11–11:35

Situation

Approximately two years had passed since the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. During this

time at Mount Sinai, God gave them the Meeting Tent, ceremonial and ritual laws, and travel instructions. Then they traveled from Mount Sinai into the wilderness of Paran en route to the Promised Land. When they faced many hardships, they forgot about God's provision and protection and began to curse and complain. God punished them for their lack of faith.

Observation

We show the same lack of faith when we think we can do as much (or more) than Almighty God. Such a lack of faith shows that we really don't know how to trust God.

Inspiration

We take a look at the money in our pockets and it says, "In God we trust." Trust Him to do what? Keep us free from invasion? Make us prosperous? Sustain our position of world power and leadership? Revolutionary soldiers used to say, "Trust in God but keep your powder dry." Yet as a nation today we are much more self-reliant (keeping our powder dry) than we are God-reliant (trusting in Him).

Here's a direct question: "Can you trust God?" There are two ways to look at that question. Can you *trust* God? That is, is He dependable in times of need? Will He do what He says? Or secondly, we might ask, "Can *you* trust God?" Do *you* have such a relationship with Him and such confidence in Him that you believe He is with you always even though you do not see any evidence of His presence and power? (From *Wisdom for the Way* by Charles

Swindoll)

Application

Do you find it hard to trust God when things are going poorly? Or is it harder when things are going well because you're more self-sufficient? Consider the areas in your life where you are having a hard time trusting God right now. Pray for wisdom to trust God in that specific situation.

Exploration

Trust—[Psalm 20:7](#); [Proverbs 3:5](#); [16:20](#); [Romans 4:5](#); [10:11](#); [1 Peter 2:6](#).

Fire from the Lord

Now the people complained to the Lord about their troubles, and when he heard them, he became angry. Then fire from the Lord burned among the people at the edge of the camp.²The people cried out to Moses, and when he prayed to the Lord, the fire stopped burning.³So that place was called [Taberah](#), because the Lord's fire had burned among them.

Seventy Older Leaders Help Moses

⁴Some troublemakers among them wanted better food, and soon all the Israelites began complaining. They said, "We want meat! ⁵We remember the fish we ate for free in Egypt. We also had cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. ⁶But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"

⁷The manna was like small white seeds. ⁸The people would go to gather it, and then grind it in handmills, or crush it between stones. After they cooked it in a pot or made cakes with it, it tasted like bread baked with olive oil. ⁹When the dew fell on the camp each night, so did the manna.

¹⁰Moses heard every family crying as they stood in the entrances of their tents. Then the Lord became very angry, and Moses got upset. ¹¹He asked the Lord, "Why have you brought me, your servant, this trouble? What have I done wrong that you made me responsible for all these people? ¹²I am not the father of all these people, and I didn't give birth to them. So why do you make me carry them to the land you

promised to our ancestors? Must I carry them in my arms as a nurse carries a baby? ¹³Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep crying to me, ‘We want meat!’ ¹⁴I can’t take care of all these people alone. It is too much for me. ¹⁵If you are going to continue doing this to me, then kill me now. If you care about me, put me to death, and then I won’t have any more troubles.”

¹⁶The Lord said to Moses, “Bring me seventy of Israel’s older leaders, men that you know are leaders among the people. Bring them to the Meeting Tent, and have them stand there with you. ¹⁷I will come down and speak with you there. I will take some of the Spirit that is in you, and I will give it to them. They will help you care for the people so that you will not have to care for them alone.

¹⁸“Tell the people this: ‘Make yourselves holy for tomorrow, and you will eat meat. You cried to the Lord, “We want meat! We were better off in Egypt!” So now the Lord will give you meat to eat. ¹⁹You will eat it not for just one, two, five, ten, or even twenty days, ²⁰but you will eat that meat for a whole month. You will eat it until it comes out your nose, and you will grow to hate it. This is because you have rejected the Lord, who is with you. You have cried to him, saying, “Why did we ever leave Egypt?”’”

²¹Moses said, “Lord, here are six hundred thousand people standing around me, and you say, ‘I will give them enough meat to eat for a month!’ ²²If we killed all the flocks and herds, that would not be enough. If we caught all the fish in the sea, that would not be enough.”

²³But the Lord said to Moses, “Do you think I’m weak? Now you will see if I can do what I say.”

²⁴So Moses went out to the people and told them what the Lord had said. He gathered seventy of the older leaders together and had them stand around the Tent. ²⁵Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to Moses. The Lord took some of the Spirit Moses had, and he gave it to the seventy leaders. With the Spirit in them, they prophesied, but just that one time.

²⁶Two men named Eldad and Medad were also listed as leaders, but they did not go to the Tent. They stayed in the camp, but the Spirit was also given to them, and they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷A young man ran to Moses and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."

²⁸Joshua son of Nun said, "Moses, my master, stop them!" (Ever since he was a young boy, Joshua had been Moses' assistant.)

²⁹But Moses answered, "Are you jealous for me? I wish all the Lord's people could prophesy. I wish the Lord would give his Spirit to all of them!" ³⁰Then Moses and the leaders of Israel went back to the camp.

The Lord Sends Quail

³¹The Lord sent a strong wind from the sea, and it blew quail into the area all around the camp. The quail were about three feet deep on the ground, and there were quail a day's walk in any direction. ³²The people went out and gathered quail all that day, that night, and the next day. Everyone gathered at least sixty bushels, and they spread them around the camp. ³³But the Lord became very angry, and he gave the people a terrible sickness that came while the meat was still in their mouths. ³⁴So

the people named that place [Kibroth Hattaavah](#), because there they buried those who wanted other food.

³⁵From Kibroth Hattaavah the people went to stay at Hazeroth.

Life Lessons

Numbers 12:1-16

Situation

Jealousy caused Aaron and Miriam to speak out against Moses. God told them, however, that he spoke directly and openly with Moses. As a result, Aaron and Miriam received God's judgment.

Observation

A lack of contentment often leads to the problem of jealousy.

Inspiration

Are you hoping that a change in circumstances will bring a change in your attitude? If so, you are in prison, and you need to learn a secret of traveling light. What you have in your Shepherd is greater than what you don't have in life.

May I meddle for a moment? What is the one thing separating you from joy? How do you fill in this blank: "I will be happy when _____"? When I am healed. When I am promoted. When I am married. When I am single. When I am rich. How would you finish that statement?

Now, with your answer firmly in mind, answer this. If your ship never comes in, if your dream never comes true, if the situation never changes, could you be happy? If not, then you are sleeping in the cold cell of discontent. You are in prison. And you need to know what you have in your Shepherd.

You have a God who hears you, the power of love

behind you, the Holy Spirit within you, and all of heaven ahead of you. If you have the Shepherd, you have grace for every sin, direction for every turn, a candle for every corner, and an anchor for every storm. You have everything you need.

And who can take it from you? Can leukemia infect your salvation? Can bankruptcy impoverish your prayers? A tornado might take your earthly house, but will it touch your heavenly home?

And look at your position. Why clamor for prestige and power? Are you not already privileged to be part of the greatest work in history? ...

Paul says that “Serving God does make us very rich, if we are satisfied with what we have”([1 Timothy 6:6](#)). When we surrender to God the cumbersome sack of discontent, we don’t just give up something; we gain something. God replaces it with a lightweight, tailor-made, sorrow-resistant attaché of gratitude.

What will you gain with contentment? You may gain your marriage. You may gain precious hours with your children. You may gain your self-respect. You may gain joy. You may gain the faith to say, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

Application

Are you jealous of someone’s name? Position? Authority? Possessions? Family? Ask God to show how you can be content with the things that really matter.

Exploration

Jealousy—[Genesis 37:11](#); [1 Samuel 18:1–9](#);

Matthew 27:18; Acts 5:17; Romans 13:13; 1
Corinthians 13:4; 1 Timothy 6:4; 1 Peter 2:1.

Miriam and Aaron Speak Against Moses

Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife (he had married a Cushite). ²They said, “Is Moses the only one the Lord speaks through? Doesn’t he also speak through us?” And the Lord heard this.

³(Now Moses was very humble. He was the least proud person on earth.)

⁴So the Lord suddenly spoke to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam and said, “All three of you come to the Meeting Tent.” So they went. ⁵The Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance to the Tent. He called to Aaron and Miriam, and they both came near. ⁶He said, “Listen to my words:

When a prophet is among you,
I, the Lord, will show myself to him in visions;
I will speak to him in dreams.

⁷But this is not true with my servant Moses.
I trust him to lead all my people.

⁸I speak face to face with him—
clearly, not with hidden meanings.
He has even seen the form of the Lord.
You should be afraid
to speak against my servant Moses.”

⁹The Lord was very angry with them, and he left.

¹⁰When the cloud lifted from the Tent and Aaron turned toward Miriam, she was as white as snow; she had a skin disease. ¹¹Aaron said to Moses, “Please, my master, forgive us for our foolish sin. ¹²Don’t let her be like a baby who is born dead. (Sometimes a baby is born with half of its flesh eaten away.)”

¹³So Moses cried out to the Lord, “God, please heal her!”

¹⁴The Lord answered Moses, “If her father had spit in her face, she would have been shamed for seven days, so put her outside the camp for seven days. After that, she may come back.” ¹⁵So Miriam was put outside of the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until she came back.

¹⁶After that, the people left Hazeroth and camped in the Desert of Paran.

The Spies Explore Canaan

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Send men to explore the land of Canaan, which I will give to the Israelites. Send one leader from each tribe.”

³So Moses obeyed the Lord’s command and sent the Israelite leaders out from the Desert of Paran. ⁴These are their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zaccur; ⁵from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori; ⁶from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh; ⁷from the tribe of Issachar, Igal son of Joseph; ⁸from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun; ⁹from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti son of Raphu; ¹⁰from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel son of Sodi; ¹¹from the tribe of Manasseh (a tribe of Joseph), Gaddi son of Susi; ¹²from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel son of Gemalli; ¹³from the tribe of Asher, Sethur son of Michael; ¹⁴from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi son of Vophsi; ¹⁵from the tribe of Gad, Geuel son of Maki.

¹⁶These are the names of the men Moses sent to explore the land. (Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the new name Joshua.)

¹⁷Moses sent them to explore Canaan and said, “Go through southern Canaan and then into the mountains. ¹⁸See what the land looks like. Are the people who live there strong or weak? Are there a few or many? ¹⁹What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What about the towns they live in— are they open like camps, or do they have walls? ²⁰What about the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees there? Try to bring back some of the fruit from that land.” (It was the season for the first grapes.) ²¹So they went up and explored the land, from

the Desert of Zin all the way to Rehob by Lebo Hamath.²² They went through the southern area to Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak lived. (The city of Hebron had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.)²³ In the Valley of Eshcol, they cut off a branch of a grapevine that had one bunch of grapes on it and carried that branch on a pole between two of them. They also got some pomegranates and figs.²⁴ That place was called the Valley of [Eshcol](#), because the Israelites cut off the bunch of grapes there.²⁵ After forty days of exploring the land, the men returned to the camp.

²⁶ They came back to Moses and Aaron and all the Israelites at Kadesh, in the Desert of Paran. The men reported to them and showed everybody the fruit from the land.²⁷ They told Moses, "We went to the land where you sent us, and it is a fertile land! Here is some of its fruit."²⁸ But the people who live there are strong. Their cities are walled and very large. We even saw some Anakites there.²⁹ The Amalekites live in the southern area; the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the mountains; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan River."

³⁰ Then Caleb told the people near Moses to be quiet, and he said, "We should certainly go up and take the land for ourselves. We can certainly do it."

³¹ But the men who had gone with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are."³² And those men gave the Israelites a bad report about the land they explored, saying, "The land that we explored is too large to conquer. All the people we saw are very tall."³³ We saw the Nephilim people there. (The Anakites come from the Nephilim people.) We felt like grasshoppers, and we looked like

grasshoppers to them.”

Life Lessons

Numbers 13:1–14:45

Situation

The Promised Land flowed with milk and honey because of the abundance of figs, dates, and nuts there. But the land also contained many imposing cities with tall, thick walls.

Observation

Ten of the twelve spies discouraged the people from trying to conquer Canaan. Rather than trust in God’s promises, they looked at unfavorable military odds. Though God had promised to be faithful, his people did not believe him.

Inspiration

“Then Jesus took the loaves of bread, thanked God for them, and gave them to the people who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, giving as much as the people wanted” ([John 6:11](#)).

When the disciples didn’t pray, Jesus prayed. When the disciples didn’t see God, Jesus sought God. When the disciples were weak, Jesus was strong. When the disciples had no faith, Jesus had faith. He thanked God.

For what? The crowds? The pandemonium? The weariness? The faithless disciples? No, he thanked God for the basket of bread. He ignored the clouds and found the ray and thanked God for it.

Look what he does next. “Jesus divided the bread

and gave it to his followers, who gave it to the people” ([Matthew 14:19](#)).

Rather than punish the disciples, he employs them. There they go, passing out the bread they didn’t request, enjoying the answer to the prayer they didn’t even pray. If Jesus would have acted according to the faith of his disciples, the multitudes would have gone unfed. But he didn’t, and he doesn’t. God is true to us even when we forget him.

God’s blessings are dispensed according to the riches of his grace, not according to the depth of our faith. “If we are not faithful, he will still be faithful, because he cannot be false to himself” ([2 Timothy 2:13](#)).

Why is that important to know? So you won’t get cynical. Look around you. Aren’t there more mouths than bread? Aren’t there more wounds than physicians? Aren’t there more who need the truth than those who tell it? Aren’t there more churches asleep than churches afire?

So what do we do? Throw up our hands and walk away? Tell the world we can’t help them? That’s what the disciples wanted to do. Should we just give up on the church? ...

No, we don’t give up. We look up. We trust. We believe. And our optimism is not hollow. Christ has proven worthy. He has shown that he never fails, though there is nothing but failure in us....

God is faithful even when his children are not.

That’s what makes God, God. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

What “clouds” are there in your life that are keeping you from believing God? Commit your concerns to the Lord. Ask him to help you obey his leading despite any challenges you face.

Exploration

Faith—[Matthew 17:20–21](#); [Romans 10:17](#); [2 Corinthians 13:5](#); [Colossians 1:23](#); [1 Timothy 1:19](#); [2 Timothy 2:22](#); [Hebrews 11:1–6](#).

The People Complain Again

That night all the people in the camp began crying loudly. ²All the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron, and all the people said to them, “We wish we had died in Egypt or in this desert. ³Why is the Lord bringing us to this land to be killed with swords? Our wives and children will be taken away. We would be better off going back to Egypt.” ⁴They said to each other, “Let’s choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

⁵Then Moses and Aaron bowed facedown in front of all the Israelites gathered there. ⁶Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who had explored the land, tore their clothes. ⁷They said to all of the Israelites, “The land we explored is very good. ⁸If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land and give us that fertile land. ⁹Don’t turn against the Lord! Don’t be afraid of the people in that land! We will chew them up. They have no protection, but the Lord is with us. So don’t be afraid of them.”

¹⁰Then all the people talked about killing them with stones. But the glory of the Lord appeared at the Meeting Tent to all the Israelites. ¹¹The Lord said to Moses, “How long will these people ignore me? How long will they not believe me in spite of the miracles I have done among them? ¹²I will give them a terrible sickness and get rid of them. But I will make you into a great nation that will be stronger than they are.”

¹³Then Moses said to the Lord, “The Egyptians will hear about it! You brought these people from there by your great power, ¹⁴and the Egyptians will tell this to those who live in

this land. They have already heard about you, Lord. They know that you are with your people and that you were seen face to face. They know that your cloud stays over your people and that you lead your people with that cloud during the day and with fire at night. ¹⁵If you put these people to death all at once, the nations who have heard about your power will say, ¹⁶“The Lord was not able to bring them into the land he promised them. So he killed them in the desert.”

¹⁷“So show your strength now, Lord. Do what you said: ¹⁸“The Lord doesn’t become angry quickly, but he has great love. He forgives sin and law breaking. But the Lord never forgets to punish guilty people. When parents sin, he will also punish their children, their grandchildren, their great-grandchildren, and their great-great-grandchildren.” ¹⁹By your great love, forgive these people’s sin, just as you have forgiven them from the time they left Egypt until now.”

²⁰The Lord answered, “I have forgiven them as you asked. ²¹But, as surely as I live and as surely as my glory fills the whole earth, I make this promise: ²²All these men saw my glory and the miracles I did in Egypt and in the desert, but they disobeyed me and tested me ten times. ²³So not one of them will see the land I promised to their ancestors. No one who rejected me will see that land. ²⁴But my servant Caleb thinks differently and follows me completely. So I will bring him into the land he has already seen, and his children will own that land. ²⁵Since the Amalekites and the Canaanites are living in the valleys, leave tomorrow and follow the desert road toward the Red Sea.”

The Lord Punishes the People

²⁶The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ²⁷“How long will these evil people complain about me? I have heard the grumbling and complaining of these Israelites. ²⁸So tell them, ‘This is what the Lord says. I heard what you said, and as surely as I live, I will do those very things to you: ²⁹You will die in this desert. Every one of you who is twenty years old or older and who was counted with the people—all of you who complained against me—will die. ³⁰Not one of you will enter the land where I promised you would live; only Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun will go in. ³¹You said that your children would be taken away, but I will bring them into the land to enjoy what you refused. ³²As for you, you will die in this desert. ³³Your children will be shepherds here for forty years. Because you were not loyal, they will suffer until you lie dead in the desert. ³⁴For forty years you will suffer for your sins—a year for each of the forty days you explored the land. You will know me as your enemy.’ ³⁵I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will certainly do these things to all these evil people who have come together against me. So they will all die here in this desert.”

³⁶The men Moses had sent to explore the land had returned and spread complaints among all the people. They had given a bad report about the land. ³⁷The men who gave a very bad report died; the Lord killed them with a terrible sickness. ³⁸Only two of the men who explored the land did not die—Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh.

³⁹When Moses told these things to all the Israelites, they were very sad. ⁴⁰Early the next morning they started to go toward the top of the mountains, saying, “We have sinned. We

will go where the Lord told us.”

⁴¹But Moses said, “Why are you disobeying the Lord’s command? You will not win! ⁴²Don’t go, because the Lord is not with you and you will be beaten by your enemies. ⁴³You will run into the Amalekites and Canaanites, who will kill you with swords. You have turned away from the Lord, so the Lord will not be with you.”

⁴⁴But they were proud. They went toward the top of the mountains, but Moses and the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord did not leave the camp. ⁴⁵The Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in those mountains came down and attacked the Israelites and beat them back all the way to Hormah.

Rules About Sacrifices

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Speak to the Israelites and say to them, ‘When you enter the land that I am giving you as a home, ³give the Lord offerings made by fire. These may be from your herds or flocks, as a smell pleasing to the Lord. These may be burnt offerings or sacrifices for special promises, or as gifts to him, or as festival offerings. ⁴The one who brings the offering shall also give the Lord a grain offering. It should be two quarts of fine flour mixed with one quart of olive oil. ⁵Each time you offer a lamb as a burnt offering or sacrifice, also prepare a quart of wine as a drink offering.

⁶“If you are giving a male sheep, also prepare a grain offering of four quarts of fine flour mixed with one and one-fourth quarts of olive oil. ⁷Also prepare one and one-fourth quarts of wine as a drink offering. Its smell will be pleasing to the Lord.

⁸“If you prepare a young bull as a burnt offering or sacrifice, whether it is for a special promise or a fellowship offering to the Lord, ⁹bring a grain offering with the bull. It should be six quarts of fine flour mixed with two quarts of olive oil. ¹⁰Also bring two quarts of wine as a drink offering. This offering is made by fire, and its smell will be pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Prepare each bull or male sheep, lamb or young goat this way. ¹²Do this for every one of the animals you bring.

¹³“All citizens must do these things in this way, and the smell of their offerings by fire will be pleasing to the Lord.

¹⁴From now on if foreigners who live among you want to make

offerings by fire so the smell will be pleasing to the Lord, they must offer them the same way you do. ¹⁵The law is the same for you and for foreigners, and it will be from now on; you and the foreigners are alike before the Lord. ¹⁶The teachings and rules are the same for you and for the foreigners among you.”

¹⁷The Lord said to Moses, ¹⁸“Tell the Israelites: ‘You are going to another land, where I am taking you. ¹⁹When you eat the food there, offer part of it to the Lord. ²⁰Offer a loaf of bread from the first of your grain, which will be your offering from the threshing floor. ²¹From now on offer to the Lord the first part of your grain.

²²“Now what if you forget to obey any of these commands the Lord gave Moses? ²³These are the Lord’s commands given to you through Moses, which began the day the Lord gave them to you and will continue from now on. ²⁴If the people forget to obey one of these commands, all the people must offer a young bull as a burnt offering, a smell pleasing to the Lord. By law you must also give the grain offering and the drink offering with it, and you must bring a male goat as a sin offering.

²⁵“The priest will remove that sin for all the Israelites so they will belong to the Lord. They are forgiven, because they didn’t know they were sinning. For the wrong they did they brought offerings to the Lord, an offering by fire and a sin offering. ²⁶So all of the people of Israel and the foreigners living among them will be forgiven. No one meant to do wrong.

²⁷“If just one person sins without meaning to, a year-old female goat must be brought for a sin offering. ²⁸The priest will remove the sin of the person who sinned accidentally. He will remove it before the Lord, and the person will be forgiven.

²⁹The same teaching is for everyone who sins accidentally—for those born Israelites and for foreigners living among you.

³⁰“But anyone who sins on purpose is against the Lord and must be cut off from the people, whether it is someone born among you or a foreigner. ³¹That person has turned against the Lord’s word and has not obeyed his commands. Such a person must surely be cut off from the others. He is guilty.”

A Man Worked on the Sabbath

³²When the Israelites were still in the desert, they found a man gathering wood on the Sabbath day. ³³Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and all the people. ³⁴They held the man under guard, because they did not know what to do with him. ³⁵Then the Lord said to Moses, “The man must surely die. All the people must kill him by throwing stones at him outside the camp.” ³⁶So all the people took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the Lord commanded Moses.

The Tassels

³⁷The Lord said to Moses, ³⁸“Speak to the Israelites and tell them this: ‘Tie several pieces of thread together and attach them to the corners of your clothes. Put a blue thread in each one of these tassels. Wear them from now on. ³⁹You will have these tassels to look at to remind you of all the Lord’s commands. Then you will obey them and not be disloyal by

following what your bodies and eyes want.⁴⁰Then you will remember to obey all my commands, and you will be God's holy people.⁴¹I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord your God.”

Life Lessons

Numbers 15:1–41

Situation

God used tassels on garments as a visual reminder of his presence. Israel's religion contrasted with the pagan idol worship of other people in the land, worship led to self-centeredness and pride.

Observation

God still pointed his people toward the Promised Land, even after their rebellion in the desert. God has a purpose, and he will fulfill it. Follow him without grumbling.

Inspiration

God declares that He will faithfully remove the created things which can be shaken—the shakeable kingdom. Why? So that the unshakeable may remain. Created things give cultural Christianity its toehold. Created things defeat us and choke the Word—the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth ([Matthew 13:22](#)).

When we cross over the line and refuse Him who speaks, He will separate us from the created things—the idols, the shakeable kingdom—which dilute our devotion to Him. If we cannot remain obedient, if we cannot be holy, then He will discipline us for our own

good, “that we may share in his holiness.”...

Do not be alarmed if God shakes up your world. Though your first natural thought will disagree, it is a blessing. It is not a sign that you are unworthy—every one of us is unworthy. It is not a sign of hatred, but love. If He did not love you, He would let you completely self-destruct. As it is, He cleanses your life from sin....

When God disciplines you by removing created things, by shaking up your temporal kingdom, rejoice and be glad. Created things divide our affections from God and become competition to our devotion. They lure us into the wrong race. They consume our creativity and deflect our thoughts away from the Lord Jesus.

I became a cultural Christian. Created things became idols and divided me from complete, faithful devotion to our Lord. God removed most of the created things I accumulated. I built a shakeable kingdom, and God shook it. Words are inadequate to express the joy and gratitude I feel toward God for the wounds He faithfully inflicted. It may be the single greatest blessing of my spiritual pilgrimage. (From *Walking with Christ in the Details of Life* by Patrick M. Morley)

Application

What is your ideal day? Go ahead, dream a little. Does God have a place in it? If he is off to the side, you need realignment. Do something today to give God a greater share of your life.

Exploration

Objects of Hope—[Job 13:15](#); [Psalm 33:20–22](#);
[Isaiah 42:4](#); [Jeremiah 14:22](#); [Romans 4:17–18](#); [1](#)
[Timothy 6:17](#).

Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On

Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On turned against Moses. (Korah was the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi; Dathan and Abiram were brothers, the sons of Eliab; and On was the son of Peleth; Dathan, Abiram, and On were from the tribe of Reuben.)² These men gathered two hundred fifty other Israelite men, well-known leaders chosen by the community, and challenged Moses.³ They came as a group to speak to Moses and Aaron and said, “You have gone too far. All the people are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. So why do you put yourselves above all the people of the Lord?”

⁴When Moses heard this, he bowed facedown.⁵ Then he said to Korah and all his followers: “Tomorrow morning the Lord will show who belongs to him. He will bring the one who is holy near to him; he will bring to himself the person he chooses.⁶ So Korah, you and all your followers do this: Get some pans for burning incense.⁷ Tomorrow put fire and incense in them and take them before the Lord. He will choose the man who is holy. You Levites have gone too far.”

⁸Moses also said to Korah, “Listen, you Levites.⁹ The God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelites. He brought you near to himself to do the work in the Lord’s Holy Tent and to stand before all the Israelites and serve them. Isn’t that enough? ¹⁰He has brought you and all your fellow Levites near to himself, yet now you want to be priests.¹¹ You and your followers have joined together against the Lord. Your complaint is not against Aaron.”

¹²Then Moses called Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, but they said, “We will not come! ¹³You have brought us out of a fertile land to this desert to kill us, and now you want to order us around. ¹⁴You haven’t brought us into a fertile land; you haven’t given us any land with fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? No! We will not come!”

¹⁵Then Moses became very angry and said to the Lord, “Don’t accept their gifts. I have not taken anything from them, not even a donkey, and I have not done wrong to any of them.”

¹⁶Then Moses said to Korah, “You and all your followers must stand before the Lord tomorrow. And Aaron will stand there with you and them. ¹⁷Each of you must take your pan and put incense in it; present these two hundred fifty pans before the Lord. You and Aaron must also present your pans.” ¹⁸So each man got his pan and put burning incense in it and stood with Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. ¹⁹Korah gathered all his followers who were against Moses and Aaron, and they stood at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to everyone.

²⁰The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ²¹“Move away from these men so I can destroy them quickly.”

²²But Moses and Aaron bowed facedown and cried out, “God, you are the God over the spirits of all people. Please don’t be angry with this whole group. Only one man has really sinned.”

²³Then the Lord said to Moses, ²⁴“Tell everyone to move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.”

²⁵Moses stood and went to Dathan and Abiram; the older leaders of Israel followed him. ²⁶Moses warned the people,

“Move away from the tents of these evil men! Don’t touch anything of theirs, or you will be destroyed because of their sins.” ²⁷So they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram were standing outside their tents with their wives, children, and little babies.

²⁸Then Moses said, “Now you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things; it was not my idea. ²⁹If these men die a normal death—the way men usually die—then the Lord did not really send me. ³⁰But if the Lord does something new, you will know they have insulted the Lord. The ground will open and swallow them. They will be buried alive and will go to the place of the dead, and everything that belongs to them will go with them.”

³¹When Moses finished saying these things, the ground under the men split open. ³²The earth opened and swallowed them and all their families. All Korah’s men and everything they owned went down. ³³They were buried alive, going to the place of the dead, and everything they owned went with them. Then the earth covered them. They died and were gone from the community. ³⁴The people of Israel around them heard their screams and ran away, saying, “The earth will swallow us, too!”

³⁵Then a fire came down from the Lord and destroyed the two hundred fifty men who had presented the incense.

³⁶The Lord said to Moses, ³⁷“Tell Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, to take all the incense pans out of the fire. Have him scatter the coals a long distance away. But the incense pans are still holy. ³⁸Take the pans of these men who sinned and lost their lives, and hammer them into flat sheets that will be used to cover the altar. They are holy, because they were presented to

the Lord, and they will be a sign to the Israelites.”

³⁹So Eleazar the priest gathered all the bronze pans that had been brought by the men who were burned up. He had the pans hammered into flat sheets to put on the altar, ⁴⁰as the Lord had commanded him through Moses. These sheets were to remind the Israelites that only descendants of Aaron should burn incense before the Lord. Anyone else would die like Korah and his followers.

Aaron Saves the People

⁴¹The next day all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron and said, “You have killed the Lord’s people.”

⁴²When the people gathered to complain against Moses and Aaron, they turned toward the Meeting Tent, and the cloud covered it. The glory of the Lord appeared. ⁴³Then Moses and Aaron went in front of the Meeting Tent.

⁴⁴The Lord said to Moses, ⁴⁵“Move away from these people so I can destroy them quickly.” So Moses and Aaron bowed facedown.

⁴⁶Then Moses said to Aaron, “Get your pan, and put fire from the altar and incense in it. Hurry to the people and remove their sin. The Lord is angry with them; the sickness has already started.” ⁴⁷So Aaron did as Moses said. He ran to the middle of the people, where the sickness had already started among them. So Aaron offered the incense to remove their sin. ⁴⁸He stood between the dead and the living, and the sickness stopped there. ⁴⁹But 14,700 people died from that sickness, in addition to those who died because of Korah. ⁵⁰Then Aaron went back to Moses at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. The

terrible sickness had been stopped.

Life Lessons

Numbers 16:1–18:32

Situation

God directed the Israelites back into the desert for forty years because of disobedience and unbelief. The people resisted this tough directive. Some of the Levites became disgruntled with Moses' leadership. Korah, one of the Levites, led a disastrous rebellion.

Observation

Leaders deserve our respect and support, even during trying times. We must not take part in a rebellion or gossip against a leader.

Inspiration

Recently, my wife and I had the pleasure of spending an evening with former astronaut General Charles M. Duke. All of us in the room sat in rapt fascination as the man told of the *Apollo 16* mission to the moon, including some interesting tidbits related to driving "Rover," the lunar vehicle, and actually walking on the surface of the planet. We were full of questions which General Duke patiently and carefully answered one after another.

I asked, "Once you were there, weren't you free to make your own decisions and carry out some of your own experiments ... you know, sort of do as you pleased—maybe stay a little longer if you liked?" He smiled back, "Sure, Chuck, if we didn't want to return to earth!"

He then described the intricate plan, the exact and precise instructions, the essential discipline, the instant obedience that was needed right down to the split second. By the way, he said they had landed somewhat “heavy” when they touched down on the moon. He was referring to their fuel supply. They had plenty left. Guess how much. One minute. They landed with sixty seconds of fuel remaining. Talk about being exact! I got the distinct impression that a rebel spirit doesn’t fit inside a space suit. Whoever represents the United States in the space program must have an unconditional respect for authority.

(From *Strengthening Your Grip* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Today, show loyalty to God when the way is rough and the future less bright than you want. Stay loyal to our great leader, who surely knows the way home.

Exploration

Rebellion—[Numbers 12:1–15](#). Submission to Authority—[Romans 13:1–6](#); [Hebrews 13:17](#).

Aaron's Walking Stick Buds

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Speak to the people of Israel and get twelve walking sticks from them—one from the leader of each tribe. Write the name of each man on his stick, and ³on the stick from Levi, write Aaron's name. There must be one stick for the head of each tribe. ⁴Put them in the Meeting Tent in front of the Ark of the Agreement, where I meet with you. ⁵I will choose one man whose walking stick will begin to grow leaves; in this way I will stop the Israelites from always complaining against you.”

⁶So Moses spoke to the Israelites. Each of the twelve leaders gave him a walking stick—one from each tribe—and Aaron's walking stick was among them. ⁷Moses put them before the Lord in the Tent of the Agreement.

⁸The next day, when Moses entered the Tent, he saw that Aaron's stick (which stood for the family of Levi) had grown leaves. It had even budded, blossomed, and produced almonds. ⁹So Moses brought out to the Israelites all the walking sticks from the Lord's presence. They all looked, and each man took back his stick.

¹⁰Then the Lord said to Moses, “Put Aaron's walking stick back in front of the Ark of the Agreement. It will remind these people who are always turning against me to stop their complaining against me so they won't die.” ¹¹So Moses obeyed what the Lord commanded him.

¹²The people of Israel said to Moses, “We are going to die! We are destroyed. We are all destroyed! ¹³Anyone who even

comes near the Holy Tent of the Lord will die. Will we all die?”

The Work of the Priests and Levites

The Lord said to Aaron, “You, your sons, and your family are now responsible for any wrongs done against the Holy Place; you and your sons are responsible for any wrongs done against the priests.² Bring with you your fellow Levites from your tribe, and they will help you and your sons serve in the Tent of the Agreement.³ They are under your control, to do all the work that needs to be done in the Tent. But they must not go near the things in the Holy Place or near the altar. If they do, both you and they will die.⁴ They will join you in taking care of the Meeting Tent. They must do the work at the Tent, and no one else may come near you.

⁵“You must take care of the Holy Place and the altar so that I won’t become angry with the Israelites again.⁶ I myself chose your fellow Levites from among the Israelites as a gift given for you to the Lord, to work at the Meeting Tent.⁷ But only you and your sons may serve as priests. Only you may serve at the altar or go behind the curtain. I am giving you this gift of serving as a priest, and anyone else who comes near the Holy Place will be put to death.”

⁸Then the Lord said to Aaron, “I myself make you responsible for the offerings given to me. All the holy offerings that the Israelites give to me, I give to you and your sons as your share, your continual portion.⁹ Your share of the holy offerings is that part which is not burned. When the people bring me gifts as most holy offerings, whether they are grain or sin or penalty offerings, they will be set apart for you and your

sons.¹⁰ You must eat the offering in a most holy place. Any male may eat it, but you must respect it as holy.

¹¹“I also give you the offerings the Israelites present to me. I give these to you and your sons and daughters as your continual share. Anyone in your family who is clean may eat it.

¹²“And I give you all the best olive oil and all the best new wine and grain. This is what the Israelites give to me, the Lord, from the first crops they harvest.¹³ When they bring to the Lord all the first things they harvest, they will be yours. Anyone in your family who is clean may eat these things.

¹⁴“Everything in Israel that is given to the Lord is yours.¹⁵ The first one born to any family, whether people or animals, will be offered to the Lord. And that will be yours. But you must make a payment for every firstborn child and every firstborn animal that is unclean.¹⁶ When they are one month old, you must make a payment for them of two ounces of silver, as set by the Holy Place measure.

¹⁷“But you must not make a payment for the firstborn ox or sheep or goat. Those animals are holy. Sprinkle their blood on the altar and burn their fat as an offering made by fire. The smell is pleasing to the Lord.¹⁸ But the meat will be yours, just as the breast that is presented and the right thigh will be yours.¹⁹ Anything the Israelites present as holy gifts I, the Lord, give to you, your sons and daughters as your continual portion. This is a lasting [agreement of salt](#) before the Lord for you and your children forever.”

²⁰The Lord also said to Aaron, “You will not inherit any of the land, and you will not own any land among the other people. I will be yours. Out of all the Israelites, only you will inherit me.

²¹“When the people of Israel give me a tenth of what they make, I will give that tenth to the Levites. This is their payment for the work they do serving at the Meeting Tent. ²²But the other Israelites must never go near the Meeting Tent, or they will die for their sin. ²³Only the Levites should work in the Meeting Tent and be responsible for any sins against it. This is a rule from now on. The Levites will not inherit any land among the other Israelites, ²⁴but when the Israelites give a tenth of everything they make to me, I will give that tenth to the Levites as a reward. That is why I said about the Levites: ‘They will not inherit any land among the Israelites.’”

²⁵The Lord said to Moses, ²⁶“Speak to the Levites and tell them: ‘You will receive a tenth of everything the Israelites make, which I will give to you. But you must give a tenth of that back to the Lord. ²⁷I will accept your offering just as much as I accept the offerings from others, who give new grain or new wine. ²⁸In this way you will present an offering to the Lord as the other Israelites do. When you receive a tenth from the Israelites, you will give a tenth of that to Aaron, the priest, as the Lord’s share. ²⁹Choose the best and holiest part from what you are given as the portion you must give to the Lord.’”

³⁰“Say to the Levites: ‘When you present the best, it will be accepted as much as the grain and wine from the other people. ³¹You and your families may eat all that is left anywhere, because it is your pay for your work in the Meeting Tent. ³²And if you always give the best part to the Lord, you will never be guilty. If you do not sin against the holy offerings of the Israelites, you will not die.’”

The Offering for Cleansing

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ²“These are the teachings that the Lord commanded. Tell the Israelites to get a young red cow that does not have anything wrong with it and that has never been worked. ³Give the cow to Eleazar the priest; he will take it outside the camp and kill it. ⁴Then Eleazar the priest must put some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the Meeting Tent. ⁵The whole cow must be burned while he watches; the skin, the meat, the blood, and the intestines must all be burned. ⁶Then the priest must take a cedar stick, a hyssop branch, and a red string and throw them onto the burning cow. ⁷After the priest has washed himself and his clothes with water, he may come back into the camp, but he will be unclean until evening. ⁸The man who burns the cow must wash himself and his clothes in water; he will be unclean until evening.

⁹“Then someone who is clean will collect the ashes from the cow and put them in a clean place outside the camp. The Israelites will keep these ashes to use in the cleansing water, in a special ceremony to cleanse away sin. ¹⁰The man who collected the cow’s ashes must wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. This is a lasting rule for the Israelites and for the foreigners among them.

¹¹“Those who touch a dead person’s body will be unclean for seven days. ¹²They must wash themselves with the cleansing water on the third day and on the seventh day; then they will be clean. But if they do not wash themselves on the

third day and the seventh day, they cannot be clean. ¹³If those who touch a dead person's body stay unclean and go to the Lord's Holy Tent, it becomes unclean; they must be cut off from Israel. If the cleansing water is not sprinkled on them, they are unclean and will stay unclean.

¹⁴“This is the teaching about someone who dies in a tent: Anyone in the tent or anyone who enters it will be unclean for seven days. ¹⁵And every open jar or pot without a cover becomes unclean. ¹⁶If anyone is outside and touches someone who was killed by a sword or who died a natural death, or if anyone touches a human bone or a grave, that person will be unclean for seven days.

¹⁷“So you must use the ashes from the burnt offering to make that person clean again. Pour fresh water over the ashes into a jar. ¹⁸A clean person must take a hyssop branch and dip it into the water, and then he must sprinkle it over the tent and all its objects. He must also sprinkle the people who were there, as well as anyone who touched a bone, or the body of someone who was killed, or a dead person, or a grave. ¹⁹The person who is clean must sprinkle this water on the unclean people on the third day and on the seventh day. On the seventh day they will become clean. They must wash their clothes and take a bath, and they will be clean that evening. ²⁰If any who are unclean do not become clean, they must be cut off from the community. Since they were not sprinkled with the cleansing water, they stay unclean, and they could make the Lord's Holy Tent unclean. ²¹This is a lasting rule. Those who sprinkle the cleansing water must also wash their clothes, and anyone who touches the water will be unclean until evening. ²²Anything an unclean person touches becomes unclean, and

whoever touches it will be unclean until evening.”

Our Savior kneels down and gazes upon the darkest acts of our lives. But rather than recoil in horror, he reaches out in kindness and says, “I can clean that if you want.” — Max Lucado (*Just Like Jesus*)

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The One Who Purifies Our Hearts

The [oil] refinery does for petroleum and other products what your heart should do for you. It takes out the bad and utilizes the good.

We tend to think of the heart as the seat of emotion. We speak of “heartthrobs,” “heartaches,” and “broken hearts.”

But when Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart” [[Matthew 5:8](#)], he was speaking in a different context. To Jesus’ listeners, the heart was the totality of the inner person—the control tower, the cockpit. The heart was thought of as the seat of the character—the origin of desires, affections, perceptions, thoughts, reasoning, imagination, conscience, intentions, purpose, will, and faith.

Thus a proverb admonished, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” [[Proverbs 4:23](#), NIV].

To the Hebrew mind, the heart is a freeway cloverleaf where all emotions and prejudices and wisdom converge. It is a switch house that receives freight cars loaded with moods, dead emotions and convictions and puts them on the right track.

And just as low-grade oil or alloyed gasoline would cause you to question the performance of a refinery, evil acts and impure thoughts cause us to question the condition of our hearts... .

The heart is the center of the spiritual life. If the fruit of a tree is bad, you don't try to fix the fruit; you treat the roots. And if a person's actions are evil, it's not enough to change habits; you have to go deeper. You have to go to the heart of the problem, which is the problem of the heart....

And Jesus' statement rings true: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Note the order of this beatitude: first purify the heart, then you will see God. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

Life Lessons

Numbers 19:1–21:35

Situation

The Israelites returned to Kadesh thirty-seven years after the disappointing spy mission. Nearly all of the generation that left Egypt had died. Moses felt the people were ready for a fresh start toward the Promised Land.

Observation

God continued to be in control as he led his people, even to the extent of denying the leaders, Moses and Aaron, entrance into the Promised Land. When the people entered the land without these great men, God showed that his power does not depend on any dynamic leader.

Inspiration

Human nature begs to construct a picture of what we think God is like, a kind of spiritual box we can fit Him into. We want a fix on God. The how-to formulas are actually comforting—tangible evidence that things will work out the way we want them to.

The kind of disappointment or letdown that jars our faith, though, also causes the walls of that box to dissolve. The spiritual territory here is uncharted and sometimes frightening. Perhaps you took a wrong turn to arrive at such a place. You don't know what else lurks in the darkness. As one friend said,

“Suddenly, I realized that if the thing I feared had happened, then almost anything else was possible, too. I no longer felt safe.”

Can't I just return to the days when faith seemed sure and simple? Can't I just go back to where I was? These are natural questions to ask. We long for a Bible study or spiritual retreat or earnest effort or *something* that promises that old certainty. We long for faith to lose its tentative feel—to cease to feel like faith.

There is no going back, though. Our manageable belief system no longer works so well. The walls of the box begin to crumble. God often seems strangely absent, as though He has left us on our own to sort things out. Yet, in reality, what we are experiencing is this pain and confusion of letting go, not of God, but of the safe, secure, confines we built to house our concept of Him. God is not a concept to be mastered, a set of prescriptions we can control. He shows Himself to be much different than we thought—more loving, more exacting, more faithful.

(From *The Cleavers Don't Live Here Anymore* by Paula Rinehart)

Application

Do you have a major decision or important step of faith to take? What role have you let God play? Pray today that barriers to God's will in your life will be torn down. Be open to God's plan for you.

Exploration

God's Will—[Genesis 45:4–7](#); [50:19–20](#); [Isaiah 46:8–11](#); [Micah 6:8](#); [Matthew 25:34](#); [Ephesians 3:11](#); [1](#)

Thessalonians 4:3; 5:16–18.

Moses Disobeys God

In the first month all the people of Israel arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried.²There was no water for the people, so they came together against Moses and Aaron.³They argued with Moses and said, “We should have died in front of the Lord as our brothers did.⁴Why did you bring the Lord’s people into this desert? Are we and our animals to die here? ⁵Why did you bring us from Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain, figs, grapevines, or pomegranates, and there’s no water to drink!”

⁶So Moses and Aaron left the people and went to the entrance of the Meeting Tent. There they bowed facedown, and the glory of the Lord appeared to them.⁷The Lord said to Moses,⁸“Take your walking stick, and you and your brother Aaron should gather the people. Speak to that rock in front of them so that its water will flow from it. When you bring the water out from that rock, give it to the people and their animals.”

⁹So Moses took the stick from in front of the Lord, as he had said.¹⁰Moses and Aaron gathered the people in front of the rock, and Moses said, “Now listen to me, you who turn against God! Do you want us to bring water out of this rock?”

¹¹Then Moses lifted his hand and hit the rock twice with his stick. Water began pouring out, and the people and their animals drank it.

¹²But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe me, and because you did not honor me as holy

before the people, you will not lead them into the land I will give them.”

¹³These are the waters of [Meribah](#), where the Israelites argued with the Lord and where he showed them he was holy.

Edom Will Not Let Israel Pass

¹⁴From Kadesh, Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom. He said, “Your brothers, the Israelites, say to you: You know about all the troubles we have had, ¹⁵how our ancestors went down into Egypt and we lived there for many years. The people of Egypt were cruel to us and our ancestors, ¹⁶but when we cried out to the Lord, he heard us and sent us an angel to bring us out of Egypt.

“Now we are here at Kadesh, a town on the edge of your land. ¹⁷Please let us pass through your country. We will not touch any fields of grain or vineyards, and will not drink water from the wells. We will travel only along the king’s road, not turning right or left until we have passed through your country.”

¹⁸But the king of Edom answered: “You may not pass through here. If you try, I will come and meet you with swords.”

¹⁹The Israelites answered: “We will go along the main road, and if we or our animals drink any of your water, we will pay for it. We only want to walk through. That’s all.”

²⁰But he answered: “You may not pass through here.”

Then the Edomites went out to meet the Israelites with a large and powerful army. ²¹The Edomites refused to let them pass through their country, so the Israelites turned back.

Aaron Dies

²²All the Israelites moved from Kadesh to Mount Hor, ²³near the border of Edom. There the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ²⁴“Aaron will die. He will not enter the land that I’m giving to the Israelites, because you both acted against my command at the waters of Meribah. ²⁵Take Aaron and his son Eleazar up on Mount Hor, ²⁶and take off Aaron’s special clothes and put them on his son Eleazar. Aaron will die there; he will join his ancestors.”

²⁷Moses obeyed the Lord’s command. They climbed up Mount Hor, and all the people saw them go. ²⁸Moses took off Aaron’s clothes and put them on Aaron’s son Eleazar. Then Aaron died there on top of the mountain. Moses and Eleazar came back down the mountain, ²⁹and when all the people learned that Aaron was dead, everyone in Israel cried for him for thirty days.

War with the Canaanites

The Canaanite king of Arad lived in the southern area. When he heard that the Israelites were coming on the road to Atharim, he attacked them and captured some of them. ²Then the Israelites made this promise to the Lord: “If you will help us defeat these people, we will completely destroy their cities.” ³The Lord listened to the Israelites, and he let them defeat the Canaanites. The Israelites completely destroyed the Canaanites and their cities, so the place was named [Hormah](#).

The Bronze Snake

⁴The Israelites left Mount Hor and went on the road toward the Red Sea, in order to go around the country of Edom. But the people became impatient on the way ⁵and grumbled at God and Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in this desert? There is no bread and no water, and we hate this terrible food!”

⁶So the Lord sent them poisonous snakes; they bit the people, and many of the Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we grumbled at you and the Lord. Pray that the Lord will take away these snakes.” So Moses prayed for the people.

⁸The Lord said to Moses, “Make a bronze snake, and put it on a pole. When anyone who is bitten looks at it, that person will live.” ⁹So Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Then when a snake bit anyone, that person looked at the

bronze snake and lived.

The Journey to Moab

¹⁰The Israelites went and camped at Oboth. ¹¹They went from Oboth to Iye Abarim, in the desert east of Moab. ¹²From there they went and camped in the Zered Valley. ¹³From there they went and camped across the Arnon, in the desert just inside the Amorite country. The Arnon is the border between the Moabites and the Amorites. ¹⁴That is why the Book of the Wars of the Lord says:

“... and Waheb in Suphah, and the ravines,
the Arnon, ¹⁵and the slopes of the ravines
that lead to the settlement of Ar.
These places are at the border of Moab.”

¹⁶The Israelites went from there to Beer; a well is there where the Lord said to Moses, “Gather the people and I will give them water.”

¹⁷Then the Israelites sang this song:

“Pour out water, well!
Sing about it.
¹⁸Princes dug this well.
Important men made it.
With their scepters and poles, they dug it.”

Between his hand and the wood is a list. A long list. A list of our mistakes: our lusts and lies and greedy moments and prodigal years. A list of our sins. —Max Lucado (*He*

Chose the Nails)

The people went from the desert to Mattanah.¹⁹From Mattanah they went to Nahaliel and on to Bamoth.²⁰From Bamoth they went to the valley of Moab where the top of Mount Pisgah looks over the desert.

New Life in Christ

“When anyone who is bitten looks at [the bronze snake], that person will live.” —[Numbers 21:8](#)

Jesus Made Sin for Us

God assigned himself the task of balancing your account. You cannot deal with your own sins. “Only God can forgive sins” ([Mark 2:7](#)). Jesus is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” It’s not you! ([John 1:29](#))....

So what did he do? “God was in Christ, making peace between us and himself. In Christ, God did not hold the world guilty of its sins. And he gave us this message of peace.... Christ had no sin, but God made him become sin so that in Christ we could become right with God” ([2 Corinthians 5:19–21](#)).

Don’t miss what happened. He took your statement flowing with red ink and bad checks and put his name at the top. He took his statement, which listed a million deposits and not one withdrawal, and put your name at the top. He assumed your debt. You assumed his fortune. And that’s not all he did.

He also paid your penalty. If you are overdrawn at a bank, a fine must be paid. If you are overdrawn with God, a penalty must be paid as well. The fine at the

bank is a hassle. But the penalty from God is hell. Jesus not only balanced your account, he paid your penalty. He took your place and paid the price for your sins. “He changed places with us and put himself under that curse” ([Galatians 3:13](#)). (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Question: How have you responded to Christ becoming sin for you?

For more on [“New Life in Christ.”](#)

Israel Kills Sihon and Og

²¹The Israelites sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, saying, ²²“Let us pass through your country. We will not go through any fields of grain or vineyards, or drink water from the wells. We will travel only along the king’s road until we have passed through your country.”

²³But King Sihon would not let the Israelites pass through his country. He gathered his whole army together, and they marched out to meet Israel in the desert. At Jahaz they fought the Israelites. ²⁴Israel killed the king and captured his land from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River. They took the land as far as the Ammonite border, which was strongly defended. ²⁵Israel captured all the Amorite cities and lived in them, taking Heshbon and all the towns around it. ²⁶Heshbon was the city where Sihon, the Amorite king, lived. In the past he had fought with the king of Moab and had taken all the land as far as the Arnon.

²⁷That is why the poets say:

“Come to Heshbon
and rebuild it;
rebuild Sihon’s city.

²⁸A fire began in Heshbon;
flames came from Sihon’s city.
It destroyed Ar in Moab,
and it burned the Arnon highlands.

²⁹How terrible for you, Moab!

The people of Chemosh are ruined.
His sons ran away
and his daughters were captured
by Sihon, king of the Amorites.

³⁰But we defeated those Amorites.

We ruined their towns from Heshbon to Dibon,
and we destroyed them as far as Nophah, near
Medeba.”

³¹So Israel lived in the land of the Amorites.

³²After Moses sent spies to the town of Jazer, they
captured the towns around it, forcing out the Amorites who
lived there.

³³Then the Israelites went up the road toward Bashan. Og
king of Bashan and his whole army marched out to meet the
Israelites, and they fought at Edrei.

³⁴The Lord said to Moses, “Don’t be afraid of him. I will
hand him, his whole army, and his land over to you. Do to him
what you did to Sihon, the Amorite king who lived in
Heshbon.”

³⁵So the Israelites killed Og and his sons and all his army;
no one was left alive. And they took his land.

Balak Sends for Balaam

Then the people of Israel went to the plains of Moab, and they camped near the Jordan River across from Jericho.

²Balak son of Zippor saw everything the Israelites had done to the Amorites. ³And Moab was scared of so many Israelites; truly, Moab was terrified by them.

⁴The Moabites said to the older leaders of Midian, “These people will take everything around us like an ox eating grass.”

Balak son of Zippor was the king of Moab at this time. ⁵He sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor at Pethor, near the Euphrates River in his native land. Balak said, “A nation has come out of Egypt that covers the land. They have camped next to me, ⁶and they are too powerful for me. So come and put a curse on them. Maybe then I can defeat them and make them leave the area. I know that if you bless someone, the blessings happen, and if you put a curse on someone, it happens.”

⁷The older leaders of Moab and Midian went with payment in their hands. When they found Balaam, they told him what Balak had said.

⁸Balaam said to them, “Stay here for the night, and I will tell you what the Lord tells me.” So the Moabite leaders stayed with him.

⁹God came to Balaam and asked, “Who are these men with you?”

¹⁰Balaam said to God, “The king of Moab, Balak son of Zippor, sent them to me with this message: ¹¹“A nation has come out of Egypt that covers the land. So come and put a

curse on them, and maybe I can fight them and force them out of my land.””

¹²But God said to Balaam, “Do not go with them. Don’t put a curse on those people, because I have blessed them.”

¹³The next morning Balaam awoke and said to Balak’s leaders, “Go back to your own country; the Lord has refused to let me go with you.”

¹⁴So the Moabite leaders went back to Balak and said, “Balaam refused to come with us.”

¹⁵So Balak sent other leaders—this time there were more of them, and they were more important. ¹⁶They went to Balaam and said, “Balak son of Zippor says this: Please don’t let anything stop you from coming to me. ¹⁷I will pay you very well, and I will do what you say. Come and put a curse on these people for me.”

¹⁸But Balaam answered Balak’s servants, “King Balak could give me his palace full of silver and gold, but I cannot disobey the Lord my God in anything, great or small. ¹⁹You stay here tonight as the other men did, and I will find out what more the Lord tells me.”

²⁰That night God came to Balaam and said, “These men have come to ask you to go with them. Go, but only do what I tell you.”

Balaam’s Donkey Speaks

²¹Balaam got up the next morning and put a saddle on his donkey. Then he went with the Moabite leaders. ²²But God became angry because Balaam went, so the angel of the Lord stood in the road to stop Balaam. Balaam was riding his

donkey, and he had two servants with him. ²³When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a sword in his hand, the donkey left the road and went into the field. Balaam hit the donkey to force her back on the road.

²⁴Later, the angel of the Lord stood on a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. ²⁵Again the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, and she walked close to one wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he hit her again.

²⁶The angel of the Lord went ahead again and stood at a narrow place, too narrow to turn left or right. ²⁷When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam. This made him so angry that he hit her with his stick. ²⁸Then the Lord made the donkey talk, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to make you hit me three times?"

²⁹Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made me look foolish! I wish I had a sword in my hand! I would kill you right now!"

³⁰But the donkey said to Balaam, "I am your very own donkey, which you have ridden for years. Have I ever done this to you before?"

"No," Balaam said.

³¹Then the Lord let Balaam see the angel of the Lord, who was standing in the road with his sword drawn. Then Balaam bowed facedown on the ground.

³²The angel of the Lord asked Balaam, "Why have you hit your donkey three times? I have stood here to stop you, because what you are doing is wrong. ³³The donkey saw me and turned away from me three times. If she had not turned away, I would have killed you by now, but I would have let her live."

³⁴Then Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, “I have sinned; I did not know you were standing in the road to stop me. If I am wrong, I will go back.”

³⁵The angel of the Lord said to Balaam, “Go with these men, but say only what I tell you.” So Balaam went with Balak’s leaders.

³⁶When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at Ar in Moab, which was beside the Arnon, at the edge of his country. ³⁷Balak said to Balaam, “I had asked you before to come quickly. Why didn’t you come to me? I am able to reward you well.”

³⁸But Balaam answered, “I have come to you now, but I can’t say just anything. I can only say what God tells me to say.”

³⁹Then Balaam went with Balak to Kiriath Huzoth. ⁴⁰Balak offered cattle and sheep as a sacrifice and gave some meat to Balaam and the leaders with him.

⁴¹The next morning Balak took Balaam to Bamoth Baal; from there he could see the edge of the Israelite camp.

Life Lessons

Numbers 22:1–25:18

Situation

People in Old Testament times commonly believed in curses and blessings. Balak and the Moabites wanted the sorcerer, Balaam, to use his supposed influence with Israel’s God to curse the Israelites and halt their progress into Canaan.

Observation

God evaluates both motives and actions. Individuals' inner heart attitudes, such as Balaam's desire for power and money, will eventually be revealed no matter what outward disguise they use.

Inspiration

Character is what we truly are, compared with what we seem to be. You can appear to be generous even when your heart is that of a skinflint.

Character is different from piety. By piety, I mean a personal relationship with God. By character, I mean the quality of the person. Even so, they are certainly inseparable; God is quite interested in character, and there is something wrong if a pious person does not have a good moral character. . . .

When considering what makes for good moral character, the word *virtue* comes to mind. The ancient Greeks used the word to mean "excellence." I would like to consider the classic definition of virtue as part of our description of character.

In the Greek catalog, there were four cardinal virtues—four things that you should never leave home without. The first is *discernment*. Unless you are able to discern what is really going on in a situation, what people are feeling, and what is important, you will always make wrong decisions. My theory is that the greatest moral disputes of any age are differences not so much in moral theory as in the power of discernment. This virtue is the essence of Paul's advice: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test

and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" ([Romans 12:2](#)).

The second virtue is *courage*. It is the power to do well when the air is turbulent and the going gets tough. It is having the character to do well when things are tempting, when things are painful. It is easy to be a mother when a baby is cooing and gurgling over breakfast; it takes courage to be a mother when the child suffers from a terrible and incurable handicap. Courage is the power to do well in the face of a threat—to your life, to your security, to your future, to the things you hold dear. The Old Testament is a symphony of variations on the theme of courage.

Temperance is the third virtue. It means being in charge of your own life. To manage, to control, to be able to orchestrate all the stuff that is going on inside. Of course, by control of one's life, I do not mean that a Christian gallops ahead on his own, oblivious of Christ's lordship. A temperate person gives control to God, and in turn accepts genuine responsibility as a challenge from God. The temperate person does not let circumstances, substances, or other people control him. Like other gifts of the Spirit, temperance needs to be practiced, lest we lose it.

The fourth virtue is *justice*. The person of justice determines always to be fair and does not treat one person differently from another. It is rejecting questions such as Whose wheel is squeaking the loudest? or Who will reward me the most? The prophets called out for justice, stating God's case

against Israel: “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” ([Micah 6:8](#))... .

In the long run, God will not ask how happy you were. He will ask, What sort of person were you? (From “Basic Moral Characteristics” by Lewis Smedes in *Practical Christianity*)

Application

Which of these virtues do you most want to develop? Commit yourself during the next month to develop that virtue. Write a note to remind yourself of this goal. Put it on your mirror, in your locker, or car. Think about ways to develop virtue in your life.

Exploration

Heart and Ethics—[Deuteronomy 30:11–20](#); [1 Kings 8:57–58](#); [2 Chronicles 29:31](#); [Psalm 141:4](#); [Matthew 5:8](#); [6:21](#); [James 3:14](#).

Balaam's First Message

Balaam said to Balak, "Build me seven altars here, and prepare seven bulls and seven male sheep for me." ²Balak did what Balaam asked, and they offered a bull and a male sheep on each of the altars.

³Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your burnt offering and I will go. If the Lord comes to me, I will tell you whatever he shows me." Then Balaam went to a higher place.

⁴God came to Balaam there, and Balaam said to him, "I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered a bull and a male sheep on each altar."

⁵The Lord told Balaam what he should say. Then the Lord said, "Go back to Balak and give him this message."

⁶So Balaam went back to Balak. Balak and all the leaders of Moab were still standing beside his burnt offering ⁷when Balaam gave them this message:

"Balak brought me here from Aram;
the king of Moab brought me from the eastern mountains.

Balak said, 'Come, put a curse on the people of Jacob for me.

Come, call down evil on the people of Israel.'

⁸But God has not cursed them,
so I cannot curse them.

The Lord has not called down evil on them,
so I cannot call down evil on them.

⁹I see them from the top of the mountains;

I see them from the hills.
I see a people who live alone,
who think they are different from other nations.
¹⁰No one can number the many people of Jacob,
and no one can count a fourth of Israel.
Let me die like good men,
and let me end up like them!”

¹¹Balak said to Balaam, “What have you done to me? I brought you here to curse my enemies, but you have only blessed them!”

¹²But Balaam answered, “I must say what the Lord tells me to say.”

Balaam's Second Message

¹³Then Balak said to him, “Come with me to another place, where you can also see the people. But you can only see part of them, not all of them. Curse them for me from there.” ¹⁴So Balak took Balaam to the field of Zophim, on top of Mount Pisgah. There Balak built seven altars and offered a bull and a male sheep on each altar.

¹⁵So Balaam said to Balak, “Stay here by your burnt offering, and I will meet with God over there.”

¹⁶So the Lord came to Balaam and told him what to say. Then he said, “Go back to Balak and say such and such.”

¹⁷So Balaam went to Balak, where he and the leaders of Moab were standing beside his burnt offering. Balak asked him, “What did the Lord say?”

¹⁸Then Balaam gave this message:

“Stand up, Balak, and listen.
Hear me, son of Zippor.

¹⁹God is not a human being, and he will not lie.
He is not a human, and he does not change his mind.
What he says he will do, he does.
What he promises, he makes come true.

²⁰He told me to bless them,
so I cannot change the blessing.

²¹He has found no wrong in the people of Jacob;
he saw no fault in Israel.
The Lord their God is with them,
and they praise their King.

²²God brought them out of Egypt;
they are as strong as a wild ox.

²³No tricks will work on the people of Jacob,
and no magic will work against Israel.
People now say about them,
‘Look what God has done for Israel!’

²⁴The people rise up like a lioness;
they get up like a lion.
Lions don’t rest until they have eaten,
until they have drunk their enemies’ blood.”

²⁵Then Balak said to Balaam, “You haven’t cursed these people, so at least, don’t bless them!”

²⁶Balaam answered Balak, “I told you before that I can only do what the Lord tells me.”

Balaam’s Third Message

²⁷Then Balak said to Balaam, “Come, I will take you to another place. Maybe God will be pleased to let you curse them from there.” ²⁸So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, the mountain that looks over the desert.

²⁹Balaam told Balak, “Build me seven altars here and prepare for me seven bulls and seven male sheep.” ³⁰Balak did what Balaam asked, and he offered a bull and a male sheep on each altar.

Balaam saw that the Lord wanted to bless Israel, so he did not try to use any magic but looked toward the desert.² When Balaam saw the Israelites camped in their tribes, the Spirit of God took control of him,³ and he gave this message:

“This is the message of Balaam son of Beor,
the message of a man who sees clearly;

⁴this is the message of a man who hears the words of God.

I see a vision from the Almighty,
and my eyes are open as I fall before him.

⁵Your tents are beautiful, people of Jacob!
So are your homes, Israel!

⁶Your tents spread out like valleys,
like gardens beside a river.

They are like spices planted by the Lord,
like cedar trees growing by the water.

⁷Israel’s water buckets will always be full,
and their crops will have plenty of water.

Their king will be greater than Agag;
their kingdom will be very great.

⁸God brought them out of Egypt;
they are as strong as a wild ox.

They will defeat their enemies
and break their enemies’ bones;
they will shoot them with arrows.

⁹Like a lion, they lie waiting to attack;
like a lioness, no one would be brave enough to wake them.

Anyone who blesses you will be blessed,
and anyone who curses you will be cursed.”

¹⁰Then Balak was angry with Balaam, and he pounded his fist. He said to Balaam, “I called you here to curse my enemies, but you have continued to bless them three times. ¹¹Now go home! I said I would pay you well, but the Lord has made you lose your reward.”

¹²Balaam said to Balak, “When you sent messengers to me, I told them, ¹³‘Balak could give me his palace filled with silver and gold, but I still cannot go against the Lord’s commands. I could not do anything, good or bad, on my own, but I must say what the Lord says.’ ¹⁴Now I am going back to my own people, but I will tell you what these people will do to your people in the future.”

Balaam’s Final Message

¹⁵Then Balaam gave this message:

“This is the message of Balaam son of Beor,
the message of a man who sees clearly;

¹⁶this is the message of a man who hears the words of
God.

I know well the Most High God.
I see a vision from the Almighty,
and my eyes are open as I fall before him.

¹⁷I see someone who will come some day,
someone who will come, but not soon.

A star will come from Jacob;
a ruler will rise from Israel.
He will crush the heads of the Moabites
and smash the skulls of the sons of Sheth.

¹⁸Edom will be conquered;

his enemy Edom will be conquered,
but Israel will grow wealthy.

¹⁹A ruler will come from the descendants of Jacob
and will destroy those left in the city.”

²⁰Then Balaam saw Amalek and gave this message:

“Amalek was the most important nation,
but Amalek will be destroyed at last.”

²¹Then Balaam saw the Kenites and gave this message:

“Your home is safe,
like a nest on a cliff.

²²But you Kenites will be burned up;
Assyria will keep you captive.”

²³Then Balaam gave this message:

“No one can live when God does this.

²⁴Ships will sail from the shores of Cyprus
and defeat Assyria and Eber,
but they will also be destroyed.”

²⁵Then Balaam got up and returned home, and Balak also
went on his way.

Israel Worships Baal at Peor

While the people of Israel were still camped at Acacia, the men began sinning sexually with Moabite women.²The women invited them to their sacrifices to their gods, and the Israelites ate food there and worshiped these gods.³So the Israelites began to worship Baal of Peor, and the Lord was very angry with them.

⁴The Lord said to Moses, “Get all the leaders of the people and kill them in open daylight in the presence of the Lord. Then the Lord will not be angry with the people of Israel.”

⁵So Moses said to Israel’s judges, “Each of you must put to death your people who have become worshipers of Baal of Peor.”

⁶Moses and the Israelites were gathered at the entrance to the Meeting Tent, crying there. Then an Israelite man brought a Midianite woman to his brothers in plain sight of Moses and all the people. ⁷Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, so he left the meeting and got his spear. ⁸He followed the Israelite into his tent and drove his spear through both the Israelite man and the Midianite woman. Then the terrible sickness among the Israelites stopped.

⁹This sickness had killed twenty-four thousand people.

¹⁰The Lord said to Moses, ¹¹“Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has saved the Israelites from my anger. He hates sin as much as I do. Since he tried to save my honor among them, I will not kill them. ¹²So tell Phinehas that I am making my peace agreement with him. ¹³He and his

descendants will always be priests, because he had great concern for the honor of his God. He removed the sins of the Israelites so they would belong to God.”

¹⁴The Israelite man who was killed with the Midianite woman was named Zimri son of Salu. He was the leader of a family in the tribe of Simeon. ¹⁵And the name of the Midianite woman who was put to death was Cozbi daughter of Zur, who was the chief of a Midianite family.

¹⁶The Lord said to Moses, ¹⁷“The Midianites are your enemies, and you should kill them. ¹⁸They have already made you their enemies, because they tricked you at Peor and because of their sister Cozbi, the daughter of a Midianite leader. She was the woman who was killed when the sickness came because the people sinned at Peor.”

Life Lessons

Numbers 26:1–27:23

Situation

Israel needed a new census because everyone over age twenty at the previous census had died. Census-taking demonstrated that God was keeping his people united and organized.

Observation

From the appointment of Joshua as his successor to the taking of a new census, Moses demonstrated consistency in following God. Leaders today can learn from his example.

Inspiration

Two great problems in serving others are both problems of human nature, of focusing on our relationship with people instead of our relationship with Christ. The first problem is that people will expect too much of you; and the second, you will expect too much of them. Both of these problems are problems of unrealistic expectations. Expectations must be focused on Christ, not each other. He is the only One who will consistently not let us down.

The milk of human sympathy will undernourish your soul. No amount of human gratitude will properly compensate your effort to improve the human condition. When we focus on serving the person, we are inevitably disappointed. And what's more, we will disappoint them. Serving people for the sake of their gratitude is a guaranteed formula for

disappointment. Just when you begin to feel good about your labors, someone lets you down. Or, more likely, someone will expect too much from you and accuse you of letting them down. Either way, your destiny is to be terribly discouraged...

The key is the personal relationship with Christ. The focus must not be on serving others or on being served. The focus must be on Jesus, on becoming so absorbed in the relationship with Him that every other thing is a response to our relationship. We do not serve men; we serve God. Have no expectations of men. Focus on the personal relationship with Him, and there will be an overflow available for others.

Look to Christ alone for gratitude. If you serve Christ, then you will remember to look to Him for your approval, not to the milk of human sympathy. He will reward you for serving others; in fact, He is the reward.

When someone feels you let them down, you can surrender that relationship to Christ. You are serving Him only; He will give you the strength to serve that person more. You may want to flee from the ingratitude—the insatiable demands of other people—but Christ will empower you to be a servant if you take on His attitude. It can only come by devotion to the personal relationship.

The personal relationship with Christ is the oasis in the desert of human relations. When people begin to wear you down, let it remind you that you are not in the overflow. It is time to drink of Christ. (From *Walking with Christ in the Details of Life* by Patrick

Morley)

Application

Take a motivation inventory. Do you serve others for the praise you receive or for the pleasure of serving Christ? When you have an opportunity to serve, ask God to help you have the right motives. Ask yourself: *Why would I do this?*

Exploration

Steadfastness—[Psalm 37:31](#); [112:7](#); [125:1](#); [Colossians 2:5](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:15](#); [Hebrews 10:23](#).

The People Are Counted

After the great sickness, the Lord said to Moses and Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, ²“Count all the people of Israel by families. Count all the men who are twenty years old or older who will serve in the army of Israel.” ³Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke to the people on the plains of Moab near the Jordan River, across from Jericho. They said, ⁴“Count the men twenty years old or older, as the Lord commanded Moses.”

Here are the Israelites who came out of Egypt:

⁵The tribe of Reuben, the first son born to Israel, was counted. From Hanoch came the Hanochite family group; from Pallu came the Palluite family group; ⁶from Hezron came the Hezronite family group; from Carmi came the Carmite family group. ⁷These were the family groups of Reuben, and the total number of men was 43,730.

⁸The son of Pallu was Eliab, ⁹and Eliab’s sons were Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram were the leaders who turned against Moses and Aaron and followed Korah when he turned against the Lord. ¹⁰The earth opened up and swallowed them and Korah; they died at the same time the fire burned up the 250 men. This was a warning, ¹¹but the children of Korah did not die.

¹²These were the family groups in the tribe of Simeon: From Nemuel came the Nemuelite family group; from Jamin came the Jaminite family group; from Jakin came the Jakinite family

group; ¹³from Zerah came the Zerahite family group; from Shaul came the Shaulite family group. ¹⁴These were the family groups of Simeon, and the total number of men was 22,200.

¹⁵These were the family groups in the tribe of Gad: From Zephon came the Zephonite family group; from Haggi came the Haggite family group; from Shuni came the Shunite family group; ¹⁶from Ozni came the Oznite family group; from Eri came the Erite family group; ¹⁷from Arodi came the Arodite family group; from Areli came the Arelite family group. ¹⁸These were the family groups of Gad, and the total number of men was 40,500.

¹⁹Two of Judah's sons, Er and Onan, died in Canaan.

²⁰These were the family groups in the tribe of Judah: From Shelah came the Shelanite family group; from Perez came the Perezite family group; from Zerah came the Zerahite family group. ²¹These were the family groups from Perez: From Hezron came the Hezronite family group; from Hamul came the Hamulite family group. ²²These were the family groups of Judah, and the total number of men was 76,500.

²³These were the family groups in the tribe of Issachar: From Tola came the Tolaite family group; from Puah came the Puite family group; ²⁴from Jashub came the Jashubite family group; from Shimron came the Shimronite family group. ²⁵These were the family groups of Issachar, and the total number of men was 64,300.

²⁶These were the family groups in the tribe of Zebulun: From Sered came the Seredite family group; from Elon came the Elonite family group; from Jahleel came the Jahleelite family group. ²⁷These were the family groups of Zebulun, and the total number of men was 60,500.

²⁸These were the family groups of Joseph through Manasseh and Ephraim.

²⁹These were the family groups of Manasseh: From Makir came the Makirite family group (Makir was the father of Gilead); from Gilead came the Gileadite family group. ³⁰These were the family groups that came from Gilead: From Iezer came the Iezerite family group; from Helek came the Helekite family group; ³¹from Asriel came the Asrielite family group; from Shechem came the Shechemite family group; ³²from Shemida came the Shemidaite family group; from Hepher came the Hepherite family group. ³³(Zelophehad son of Hepher had no sons; he had only daughters, and their names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.) ³⁴These were the family groups of Manasseh, and the total number of men was 52,700.

³⁵These were the family groups in the tribe of Ephraim: From Shuthelah came the Shuthelahite family group; from Beker came the Bekerite family group; from Tahan came the Tahanite family group. ³⁶This was the family group from Shuthelah: From Eran came the Eranite family group. ³⁷These were the family groups of Ephraim, and the total number of men was 32,500. These are the family groups that came from Joseph.

³⁸These were the family groups in the tribe of Benjamin: From Bela came the Belaite family group; from Ashbel came the Ashbelite family group; from Ahiram came the Ahiramite family group; ³⁹from Shupham came the Shuphamite family group; from Hupham came the Huphamite family group. ⁴⁰These were the family groups from Bela through Ard and Naaman: From Ard came the Ardite family group; from Naaman came the Naamite family group. ⁴¹These were the family groups of Benjamin, and the total number of men was 45,600.

⁴²This was the family group in the tribe of Dan: From Shuham came the Shuhamite family group. That was the family of Dan,⁴³ and the total number of men in the Shuhamite family group of Dan was 64,400.

⁴⁴These were the family groups in the tribe of Asher: From Imnah came the Imnite family group; from Ishvi came the Ishvite family group; from Beriah came the Beriite family group.

⁴⁵These were the family groups that came from Beriah: From Heber came the Heberite family group; from Malkiel came the Malkielite family group.⁴⁶ (Asher also had a daughter named Serah.)⁴⁷ These were the family groups of Asher, and the total number of men was 53,400.

⁴⁸These were the family groups in the tribe of Naphtali: From Jahzeel came the Jahzeelite family group; from Guni came the Gunite family group;⁴⁹ from Jezer came the Jezerite family group; from Shillem came the Shillemite family group.⁵⁰ These were the family groups of Naphtali, and the total number of men was 45,400.

⁵¹So the total number of the men of Israel was 601,730.

⁵²The Lord said to Moses,⁵³ “Divide the land among these people by the number of names.⁵⁴ A large tribe will get more land, and a small tribe will get less land; the amount of land each tribe gets will depend on the number of its people.⁵⁵ Divide the land by drawing lots, and the land each tribe gets will be named for that tribe.⁵⁶ Divide the land between large and small groups by drawing lots.”

⁵⁷The tribe of Levi was also counted. These were the family groups of Levi: From Gershon came the Gershonite family group; from Kohath came the Kohathite family group; from Merari came the Merarite family group.⁵⁸ These also were

Levite family groups: the Libnite family group, the Hebronite family group, the Mahlite family group, the Mushite family group, and the Korahite family group. (Kohath was the ancestor of Amram, ⁵⁹whose wife was named Jochebed. She was from the tribe of Levi and she was born in Egypt. She and Amram had two sons, Aaron and Moses, and their sister Miriam. ⁶⁰Aaron was the father of Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ⁶¹But Nadab and Abihu died because they made an offering before the Lord with the wrong kind of fire.) ⁶²The total number of male Levites one month old or older was 23,000. But these men were not counted with the other Israelites, because they were not given any of the land among the other Israelites.

⁶³Moses and Eleazar the priest counted all these people. They counted the Israelites on the plains of Moab across the Jordan River from Jericho. ⁶⁴Moses and Aaron the priest had counted the Israelites in the Desert of Sinai, but no one Moses counted on the plains of Moab was in the first counting. ⁶⁵The Lord had told the Israelites they would all die in the desert, and the only two left were Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

Zelophehad's Daughters

Then the daughters of Zelophehad came near. Zelophehad was the son of Hephher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh. Zelophehad's daughters belonged to the family groups of Manasseh son of Joseph. The daughters' names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. ²They went to the entrance of the Meeting Tent and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders, and all the people. They said, ³"Our father died in the desert. He was not one of Korah's followers who came together against the Lord, but he died because of his own sin, and he had no sons. ⁴Our father's name will die out because he had no sons. Give us property among our father's relatives."

⁵So Moses brought their case to the Lord, ⁶and the Lord said to him, ⁷"The daughters of Zelophehad are right; they should certainly get what their father owned. Give them property among their father's relatives.

⁸"Tell the Israelites, 'If a man dies and has no son, then everything he owned should go to his daughter. ⁹If he has no daughter, then everything he owned should go to his brothers. ¹⁰If he has no brothers, then everything he owned should go to his father's brothers. ¹¹And if his father had no brothers, then everything he owned should go to the nearest relative in his family group. This should be a rule among the people of Israel, as the Lord has given this command to Moses.'"

Joshua Is the New Leader

¹²Then the Lord said to Moses, “Climb this mountain in the Abarim Mountains, and look at the land I have given to the Israelites. ¹³After you have seen it, you will die and join your ancestors as your brother Aaron did, ¹⁴because you both acted against my command in the Desert of Zin. You did not honor me as holy before the people at the waters of Meribah.” (This was at Meribah in Kadesh in the Desert of Zin.) ¹⁵Moses said to the Lord, ¹⁶“The Lord is the God of the spirits of all people. May he choose a leader for these people, ¹⁷who will go in and out before them. He must lead them out like sheep and bring them in; the Lord’s people must not be like sheep without a shepherd.”

¹⁸So the Lord said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, because my Spirit is in him. Put your hand on him, ¹⁹and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the people. Then give him his orders as they watch. ²⁰Let him share your honor so that all the Israelites will obey him. ²¹He must stand before Eleazar the priest, and Eleazar will get advice from the Lord by using the Urim. At his command all the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will all come in.”

²²Moses did what the Lord told him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the people, ²³and he put his hands on him and gave him orders, just as the Lord had told him.

Life Lessons

Numbers 28:1–30:16

Situation

God commanded the Israelites to remember him. To do this, he assigned daily, weekly, and monthly offerings, as well as five annual events: Passover, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Trumpets, Feast of Shelters, and the Day of Cleansing.

Observation

God wants his people to be thankful to him. We can honor him by giving regular offerings. This reminds us to keep him the first priority in our lives.

Inspiration

The renowned British educator, Edward Thring, said, “The mighty leisure hours with their occupations are all-powerful... . The mighty question of leisure hours ought to be the most important question of all, since it affects our character most... . Leisure hours are the hinge on which true education turns.” This eminent authority in the field of education had seen that noble character and authentic being come first; after that, as a second, the training of skill and strength. He had seen, too, that though a teacher can do much by high belief and true work to stimulate and to guide, every student has to develop his own character. It is in the leisure hours, when free from constraint and observation, that the student shows what is really uppermost within him... .

In spiritual life this is intensely true... . When the time of relaxation comes, and one is free to do exactly as one likes, many a student finds that the morning watch and its fellowship with God had not become so natural, so necessary for spiritual life and joy. Therefore, observance is not included with vacation pleasure... . The question of leisure hours is crucial. In them one turns freely and naturally to what he loves most. In them one proves and increases the power to keep what he has....

During vacation we are set free from the school laws under which we live during our stay there. But there are *other* laws: laws of morality, laws of health, from which there is no relaxation. Warn the student that the call to daily fellowship with God belongs not to the former but the latter category. As much as he needs during the vacation to daily eat and breathe, he needs to daily eat the bread and breathe the air of heaven.

Emphasize that the morning watch is not only a duty, but an unspeakable privilege and pleasure. Fellowship with God, abiding in Christ, loving the Word and meditating on it all the day are life and strength, health and gladness to the new nature. They should look upon them in this light, believe in the power of the new nature within, and act upon it. If they count it a joy, it will become a joy to them...

God has created and redeemed you that through you He may, as through the sun He illuminates the world, shine His light and life and love upon men. You need to be in communication with the fountain of

all light daily. Do not think of asking for a vacation relief from this communion, much less take it. Prize your vacation for the special opportunity of more fellowship with the Father and the Son. Don't allow it to become a snare, and exhaust all your energy in just keeping from losing ground. Prize the vacation as a blessed time for grace and victory over self and the world, of great increase of grace and strength, of being blessed and being made a blessing. (From *The Believer's Daily Renewal* by Andrew Murray)

Application

It takes time and effort to grow in our relationship with God. In what ways do you make God your daily priority? Think about the joy you have received from your growing friendship with the Lord; then decide how your daily worship needs to change to encourage a deeper and more joyful relationship with him.

Exploration

Life and Faith—[Deuteronomy 6:5–9](#); [Psalm 1:2; 5:3; 16:8](#); [Daniel 6:10](#); [John 4:24](#); [Romans 12:1](#); [Colossians 3:17](#); [1 Timothy 5:5](#); [1 Peter 2:5](#).

Daily Offerings

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Give this command to the Israelites. Tell them: ‘Bring me food offerings made by fire, for a smell that is pleasing to me, and be sure to bring them at the right time.’ ³Say to them, ‘These are the offerings you must bring to the Lord: two male lambs, a year old, as a burnt offering each day. They must have nothing wrong with them. ⁴Offer one lamb in the morning and the other lamb at twilight. ⁵Also bring a grain offering of two quarts of fine flour, mixed with one quart of oil from pressed olives. ⁶This is the daily burnt offering which began at Mount Sinai; its smell is pleasing to the Lord. ⁷Offer one quart of wine with each lamb as a drink offering; pour it out to the Lord at the Holy Place. ⁸Offer the second lamb at twilight. As in the morning, also give a grain offering and a drink offering. This offering is made by fire, and its smell is pleasing to the Lord.

Sabbath Offerings

⁹“On the Sabbath day you must give two male lambs, a year old, that have nothing wrong with them. Also give a drink offering and a grain offering; the grain offering must be four quarts of fine flour mixed with olive oil. ¹⁰This is the burnt offering for every Sabbath, in addition to the daily burnt

offering and drink offering.

Monthly Offerings

¹¹“On the first day of each month bring a burnt offering to the Lord. This will be two young bulls, one male sheep, and seven male lambs a year old, and they must have nothing wrong with them. ¹²Give a grain offering with each bull of six quarts of fine flour mixed with olive oil. Also give a grain offering with the male sheep. It must be four quarts of fine flour mixed with olive oil. ¹³And give a grain offering with each lamb of two quarts of fine flour mixed with olive oil. This is a burnt offering, and its smell is pleasing to the Lord. ¹⁴The drink offering with each bull will be two quarts of wine, with the male sheep it will be one and one-third quarts, and with each lamb it will be one quart of wine. This is the burnt offering that must be offered each month of the year. ¹⁵Besides the daily burnt offerings and drink offerings, bring a sin offering of one goat to the Lord.

The Passover

¹⁶“The Lord’s Passover will be on the fourteenth day of the first month. ¹⁷The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the fifteenth day of that month. For seven days, you may eat only bread made without yeast. ¹⁸Have a holy meeting on the first day of the festival, and don’t work that day. ¹⁹Bring to the Lord an offering made by fire, a burnt offering of two young bulls, one male sheep, and seven male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them. ²⁰With each bull give a grain offering of six quarts of fine flour mixed with olive oil. With the

male sheep it must be four quarts of fine flour mixed with oil. ²¹With each of the seven lambs, it must be two quarts of fine flour mixed with oil. ²²Bring one goat as a sin offering, to remove your sins so you will belong to God. ²³Bring these offerings in addition to the burnt offerings you give every morning. ²⁴So bring food for the offering made by fire each day for seven days, for a smell that is pleasing to the Lord. Do it in addition to the daily burnt offering and its drink offering. ²⁵On the seventh day have a holy meeting, and don't work that day.

The Feast of Weeks

²⁶“On the day of firstfruits when you bring new grain to the Lord during the Feast of Weeks, have a holy meeting. Don't work that day. ²⁷Bring this burnt offering to the Lord: two young bulls, one male sheep, and seven male lambs a year old. This smell is pleasing to the Lord. ²⁸Also, with each bull give a grain offering of six quarts of fine flour mixed with oil. With the male sheep, it must be four quarts of flour, ²⁹and with each of the seven lambs offer two quarts of flour. ³⁰Offer one male goat to remove your sins so you will belong to God. ³¹Bring these offerings and their drink offerings in addition to the daily burnt offering and its grain offering. The animals must have nothing wrong with them.

The Feast of Trumpets

“Have a holy meeting on the first day of the seventh month, and don’t work on that day. That is the day you blow the trumpets. ²Bring these burnt offerings as a smell pleasing to the Lord: one young bull, one male sheep, and seven male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them. ³With the bull give a grain offering of six quarts of fine flour mixed with oil. With the male sheep offer four quarts, ⁴and with each of the seven lambs offer two quarts. ⁵Offer one male goat for a sin offering to remove your sins so you will belong to God. ⁶These offerings are in addition to the monthly and daily burnt offerings. Their grain offerings and drink offerings must be done as you have been told. These offerings are made by fire to the Lord, and their smell is pleasing to him.

The Day of Cleansing

⁷“Have a holy meeting on the tenth day of the seventh month. On that day do not eat and do not work. ⁸Bring these burnt offerings as a smell pleasing to the Lord: one young bull, one male sheep, and seven male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them. ⁹With the bull give a grain offering of six quarts of fine flour mixed with oil. With the male sheep it must be four quarts, ¹⁰and with each of the seven lambs it must be two quarts. ¹¹Offer one male goat as a sin offering. This will be in addition to the sin offering which removes your sins, the daily burnt offering with its grain offering, and the drink

offerings.

The Feast of Shelters

¹²“Have a holy meeting on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, and do not work on that day. Celebrate a festival to the Lord for seven days. ¹³Bring these burnt offerings, made by fire, as a smell pleasing to the Lord: thirteen young bulls, two male sheep, and fourteen male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them. ¹⁴With each of the thirteen bulls offer a grain offering of six quarts of fine flour mixed with oil. With each of the two male sheep it must be four quarts, ¹⁵and with each of the fourteen lambs it must be two quarts. ¹⁶Offer one male goat as a sin offering in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain and drink offerings.

¹⁷“On the second day of this festival give an offering of twelve bulls, two male sheep, and fourteen male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them. ¹⁸Bring the grain and drink offerings for the bulls, sheep, and lambs, according to the number required. ¹⁹Offer one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain and drink offerings.

²⁰“On the third day offer eleven bulls, two male sheep, and fourteen male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them. ²¹Bring the grain and drink offerings for the bulls, sheep, and lambs, according to the number required. ²²Offer one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain and drink offerings.

²³“On the fourth day offer ten bulls, two male sheep, and fourteen male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong

with them.²⁴ Bring the grain and drink offerings for the bulls, sheep, and lambs, according to the number required.²⁵ Offer one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain and drink offerings.

²⁶“On the fifth day offer nine bulls, two male sheep, and fourteen male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them.²⁷ Bring the grain and drink offerings for the bulls, sheep, and lambs, according to the number required.²⁸ Offer one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain and drink offerings.

²⁹“On the sixth day offer eight bulls, two male sheep, and fourteen male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them.³⁰ Bring the grain and drink offerings for the bulls, sheep, and lambs, according to the number required.³¹ Offer one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain and drink offerings.

³²“On the seventh day offer seven bulls, two male sheep, and fourteen male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them.³³ Bring the grain and drink offerings for the bulls, sheep, and lambs, according to the number required.³⁴ Offer one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain and drink offerings.

³⁵“On the eighth day have a closing meeting, and do not work on that day.³⁶ Bring an offering made by fire, a burnt offering, as a smell pleasing to the Lord. Offer one bull, one male sheep, and seven male lambs a year old. They must have nothing wrong with them.³⁷ Bring the grain and drink offerings for the bull, the male sheep, and the lambs, according to the number required.³⁸ Offer one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain and drink

offerings.

³⁹“At your festivals you should bring these to the Lord: your burnt offerings, grain offerings, drink offerings and fellowship offerings. These are in addition to other promised offerings and special gifts you want to give to the Lord.”

⁴⁰Moses told the Israelites everything the Lord had commanded him.

Rules About Special Promises

Moses spoke with the leaders of the Israelite tribes. He told them these commands from the Lord.

²“If a man makes a promise to the Lord or says he will do something special, he must keep his promise. He must do what he said. ³If a young woman still living at home makes a promise to the Lord or pledges to do something special, ⁴and if her father hears about the promise or pledge and says nothing, she must do what she promised. She must keep her pledge. ⁵But if her father hears about the promise or pledge and does not allow it, then the promise or pledge does not have to be kept. Her father would not allow it, so the Lord will free her from her promise.

⁶“If a woman makes a pledge or a careless promise and then gets married, ⁷and if her husband hears about it and says nothing, she must keep her promise or the pledge she made. ⁸But if her husband hears about it and does not allow it, he cancels her pledge or the careless promise she made. The Lord will free her from keeping it.

⁹“If a widow or divorced woman makes a promise, she must do whatever she promised.

¹⁰“If a woman makes a promise or pledge while she is married, ¹¹and if her husband hears about it but says nothing and does not stop her, she must keep her promise or pledge. ¹²But if her husband hears about it and cancels it, she does not have to do what she said. Her husband has canceled it, so the Lord will free her from it. ¹³A woman’s husband may make her

keep or cancel any promise or pledge she has made. ¹⁴If he says nothing to her about it for several days, she must keep her promises. If he hears about them and says nothing, she must keep her promises. ¹⁵But if he cancels them long after he heard about them, he is responsible if she breaks her promise.”

¹⁶These are commands that the Lord gave to Moses for husbands and wives, and for fathers with daughters living at home.

Life Lessons

Numbers 31:1–54

Situation

The Midianites tried to turn the Israelites away from God. Because of this, the two nomadic nations became enemies despite their common heritage, for the Midianites were descendants of Abraham and his second wife.

Observation

God's purpose for destroying the Midianites was to keep the people of Israel free from sin and ungodly influences. God desired moral purity in his followers. Not only were sinful influences to be completely destroyed, but the spoils of war—blessings to the people—were to be purified as well.

Inspiration

As Christians we live a life that is different—morally excellent, ethically beautiful. It's called a holy life. And God honors that. Because it's like He is...

All of our Christian lives we have sung the old hymn "Take Time to Be Holy." Those words are true. It does take time to be holy. It certainly takes time to be mature. It takes time to cultivate a walk with the Lord that begins to flow naturally because the enemy is so much more assertive and powerful than we are ... and so creative, so full of new ideas on how to derail us and demoralize us.

We need to lock onto the power that comes from God's presence and invite Him to cleanse our

thoughts, to correct our foul speech, to forgive us completely, and make us holy vessels, who, like the winged seraphim, spend our days bringing glory to His holy name. (For *Wisdom for the Way* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

How have you seen God remove sin from your life? It may have felt unpleasant, unreasonable, or even unfair. Remember that whatever God allows into your life or withholds from you is in your best interest. Focus today on God's goal of making you like him—pure and holy.

Exploration

Holiness—[Leviticus 11:45](#); [Matthew 5:8](#); [1 Corinthians 1:30](#); [2 Corinthians 7:1](#); [Ephesians 5:27](#); [Titus 2:11–12](#); [Hebrews 12:14](#); [1 Peter 1:15–16](#); [2 Peter 3:14](#); [1 John 3:3](#).

Israel Attacks the Midianites

The Lord spoke to Moses and said,²“Pay back the Midianites for what they did to the Israelites; after that you will die.”

³So Moses said to the people, “Get some men ready for war. The Lord will use them to pay back the Midianites. ⁴Send to war a thousand men from each of the tribes of Israel.” ⁵So twelve thousand men got ready for war, a thousand men from each tribe. ⁶Moses sent those men to war; Phinehas son of Eleazar the priest was with them. He took with him the holy things and the trumpets for giving the alarm. ⁷They fought the Midianites as the Lord had commanded Moses, and they killed every Midianite man. ⁸Among those they killed were Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, who were the five kings of Midian. They also killed Balaam son of Beor with a sword.

⁹The Israelites captured the Midianite women and children, and they took all their flocks, herds, and goods. ¹⁰They burned all the Midianite towns where they had settled and all their camps, ¹¹but they took all the people and animals and goods. ¹²Then they brought the captives, the animals, and the goods back to Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the Israelites. Their camp was on the plains of Moab near the Jordan River, across from Jericho.

¹³Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the people went outside the camp to meet them. ¹⁴Moses was angry with

the army officers, the commanders over a thousand men, and those over a hundred men, who returned from war.

¹⁵He asked them, “Why did you let the women live? ¹⁶They were the ones who followed Balaam’s advice and turned the Israelites from the Lord at Peor. Then a terrible sickness struck the Lord’s people. ¹⁷Kill all the Midianite boys, and kill all the Midianite women who have had sexual relations. ¹⁸But save for yourselves the girls who have not had sexual relations with a man.

¹⁹“All you men who killed anyone or touched a dead body must stay outside the camp for seven days. On the third and seventh days you and your captives must make yourselves clean. ²⁰You must clean all your clothes and anything made of leather, goat hair, or wood.”

²¹Then Eleazar the priest said to the soldiers who had gone to war, “These are the teachings that the Lord gave to Moses: ²²Put any gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, or lead— ²³anything that will not burn—into the fire, and then it will be clean. But also purify those things with the cleansing water. Then they will be clean. If something cannot stand the fire, wash it with the water. ²⁴On the seventh day wash your clothes, and you will be clean. After that you may come into the camp.”

Dividing the Goods

²⁵The Lord said to Moses, ²⁶“You, Eleazar the priest, and the leaders of the family groups should take a count of the goods, the men, and the animals that were taken. ²⁷Then divide those possessions between the soldiers who went to war and the rest of the people. ²⁸From the soldiers who went to war, take a tax

for the Lord of one item out of every five hundred. This includes people, cattle, donkeys, or sheep.²⁹ Take it from the soldiers' half, and give it to Eleazar the priest as the Lord's share.³⁰ And from the people's half, take one item out of every fifty. This includes people, cattle, donkeys, sheep, or other animals. Give that to the Levites, who take care of the Lord's Holy Tent."³¹ So Moses and Eleazar did as the Lord commanded Moses.

³²There remained from what the soldiers had taken 675,000 sheep,³³ 72,000 cattle,³⁴ 61,000 donkeys,³⁵ and 32,000 women who had not had sexual relations with a man.³⁶ The soldiers who went to war got 337,500 sheep,³⁷ and they gave 675 of them to the Lord.³⁸ They got 36,000 cattle, and they gave 72 of them to the Lord.³⁹ They got 30,500 donkeys, and they gave 61 of them to the Lord.⁴⁰ They got 16,000 people, and they gave 32 of them to the Lord.⁴¹ Moses gave the Lord's share to Eleazar the priest, as the Lord had commanded him.

⁴²Moses separated the people's half from the soldiers' half.⁴³ The people got 337,500 sheep,⁴⁴ 36,000 cattle,⁴⁵ 30,500 donkeys,⁴⁶ and 16,000 people.⁴⁷ From the people's half Moses took one item out of every fifty for the Lord. This included the animals and the people. Then he gave them to the Levites, who took care of the Lord's Holy Tent. This was what the Lord had commanded Moses.

⁴⁸Then the officers of the army, the commanders of a thousand men and commanders of a hundred men, came to Moses.⁴⁹ They told Moses, "We, your servants, have counted our soldiers under our command, and not one of them is missing."⁵⁰ So we have brought the Lord a gift of the gold things that each of us found: arm bands, bracelets, signet

rings, earrings, and necklaces. These are to remove our sins so we will belong to the Lord.”

⁵¹So Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from them, which had been made into all kinds of objects. ⁵²The commanders of a thousand men and the commanders of a hundred men gave the Lord the gold, and all of it together weighed about 420 pounds; ⁵³each soldier had taken something for himself. ⁵⁴Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from the commanders of a thousand men and the commanders of a hundred men. Then they put it in the Meeting Tent as a memorial before the Lord for the people of Israel.

Life Lessons

Numbers 32:1–42

Situation

Three tribes asked to reside east rather than west of the Jordan in order to secure their flocks in simple livestock pens. The pens' four stone walls would be built tall enough to keep out predatory animals and thieves. Then the men of the tribes would be free to help the other nine tribes west of the Jordan.

Observation

The three tribes showed selfless effort in helping the other tribes west of the Jordan. We should help others finish a job, even if by doing so we receive no direct benefit.

Inspiration

Many people these days are accepting Christianity as an explanation of life, but they're not willing to accept it as a way of life... Christ calls us not only to accept an explanation, but to practice a way. That's tougher.

For one thing, it means meshing your life as closely as possible with other believers. No snobbery. No privileges. All together, sharing the same ideas (the apostles' doctrine), the same friends (fellowship), the same practices (breaking of bread), and the same religious habits (public prayers).

One of the young wives in our church was talking to me recently. She said, "Jerry and I have been praying over the passage that says if you have two

coats, to give to him who has none. We discovered that we're now over the median income of our church members, so we're two-coat people, and that gives us responsibility of caring for others."

I said to her, "Do you remember, Linda, several years ago when Jerry was going through seminary, you were the no-coat ones; and how often believers would lovingly slip you money, or put a bag of groceries in the back door?"

She said, "Oh, *yes!* How could we forget? And now that it's the other way, we've upped our church giving, and we're also looking for the ones who need our help. They're all around us, and the Lord has already pointed out the first one."

She named a single mother raising teenagers, and she told gleefully about a sneaky plan to meet one of her needs anonymously. I couldn't help being tickled because she was so tickled!

Sharing in the family of God is a sure sign of authenticity. I love it when we get so comfortable with each other that we can think, "I do believe Sharon would look better in this sweater than I do; I think I'll offer it to her!" It's not a matter of charity as we now use the word—it's not who's richer and who's poorer; it's charity in its old usage—just pure love in the Body! (From *Discipling One Another* by Anne Ortlund)

Application

In what ways are you a "two-coater"? Look for someone today with whom you can share some of your resources in Jesus' name.

Exploration

Generosity—[Psalm 15:5](#); [Proverbs 14:21](#); [Romans 13:8–10](#); [15:2](#); [James 2:8](#).

The Tribes East of the Jordan

The people of Reuben and Gad had large flocks and herds. When they saw that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were good for the animals,² they came to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and the leaders of the people.³⁻⁴ They said, “We, your servants, have flocks and herds. The Lord has captured for the Israelites a land that is good for animals—the land around Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon.⁵ If it pleases you, we would like this land to be given to us. Don’t make us cross the Jordan River.”

⁶Moses told the people of Gad and Reuben, “Shall your brothers go to war while you stay behind? ⁷You will discourage the Israelites from going over to the land the Lord has given them. ⁸Your ancestors did the same thing. I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to look at the land. ⁹They went as far as the Valley of Eshcol, and when they saw the land, they discouraged the Israelites from going into the land the Lord had given them. ¹⁰The Lord became very angry that day and made this promise: ¹¹‘None of the people who came from Egypt and who are twenty years old or older will see the land that I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These people have not followed me completely. ¹²Only Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun followed the Lord completely.’

¹³“The Lord was angry with Israel, so he made them wander in the desert for forty years. Finally all the people who had sinned against the Lord died, ¹⁴and now you are acting just like your ancestors! You sinful people are making the Lord even more angry with Israel. ¹⁵If you quit following him, it will add to their stay in the desert, and you will destroy all these people.”

¹⁶Then the Reubenites and Gadites came up to Moses and said, “We will build pens for our animals and cities for our children here. ¹⁷Then our children will be in strong, walled cities, safe from the people who live in this land. Then we will prepare for war. We will help the other Israelites get their land, ¹⁸and we will not return home until every Israelite has received his land. ¹⁹We won’t take any of the land west of the Jordan River; our part of the land is east of the Jordan.”

²⁰So Moses told them, “You must do these things. You must go before the Lord into battle ²¹and cross the Jordan River armed, until the Lord forces out the enemy. ²²After the Lord helps us take the land, you may return home. You will have done your duty to the Lord and Israel, and you may have this land as your own.

²³“But if you don’t do these things, you will be sinning against the Lord; know for sure that you will be punished for your sin. ²⁴Build cities for your children and pens for your animals, but then you must do what you promised.”

²⁵The Gadites and Reubenites said to Moses, “We are your servants, and we will do what you, our master, command. ²⁶Our children, wives, and all our cattle will stay in the cities of Gilead, ²⁷but we, your servants, will prepare for battle. We will go over and fight for the Lord, as you, our master, have said.”

²⁸So Moses gave orders about them to Eleazar the priest, to

Joshua son of Nun, and to the leaders of the tribes of Israel.
²⁹Moses said to them, “If the Gadites and Reubenites prepare for battle and cross the Jordan River with you, to go before the Lord and help you take the land, give them the land of Gilead for their own. ³⁰But if they do not go over armed, they will not receive it; their land will be in Canaan with you.”

³¹The Gadites and Reubenites answered, “We are your servants, and we will do as the Lord said. ³²We will cross over into Canaan and go before the Lord ready for battle. But our land will be east of the Jordan River.”

³³So Moses gave that land to the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and East Manasseh. (Manasseh was Joseph’s son.) That land had been the kingdom of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og, king of Bashan, as well as all the cities and the land around them.

³⁴The Gadites rebuilt the cities of Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, ³⁵Atroth Shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, ³⁶Beth Nimrah, and Beth Haran. These were strong, walled cities. And they built sheep pens.

³⁷The Reubenites rebuilt Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, ³⁸Nebo, Baal Meon, and Sibmah. They renamed Nebo and Baal Meon when they rebuilt them.

³⁹The descendants of Makir son of Manasseh went and captured Gilead and forced out the Amorites who were there. ⁴⁰So Moses gave Gilead to the family of Makir son of Manasseh, and they settled there. ⁴¹Jair son of Manasseh went out and captured the small towns there, and he called them the Towns of Jair. ⁴²Nobah went and captured Kenath and the small towns around it; then he named it Nobah after himself.

Israel's Journey from Egypt

These are the places the Israelites went as Moses and Aaron led them out of Egypt in divisions.²At the Lord's command Moses recorded the places they went, and these are the places they went.

³On the fifteenth day of the first month, the day after the Passover, the Israelites left Rameses and marched out boldly in front of all the Egyptians.⁴The Egyptians were burying their firstborn sons, whom the Lord had killed; the Lord showed that the gods of Egypt were false.

⁵The Israelites left Rameses and camped at Succoth.

⁶They left Succoth and camped at Etham, at the edge of the desert.

⁷They left Etham and went back to Pi Hahiroth, to the east of Baal Zephon, and camped near Migdol.

⁸They left Pi Hahiroth and walked through the sea into the desert. After going three days through the Desert of Etham, they camped at Marah.

⁹They left Marah and went to Elim; there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees where they camped.

¹⁰They left Elim and camped near the Red Sea.

¹¹They left the Red Sea and camped in the Desert of Sin.

¹²They left the Desert of Sin and camped at Dophkah.

¹³They left Dophkah and camped at Alush.

¹⁴They left Alush and camped at Rephidim, where the people had no water to drink.

¹⁵They left Rephidim and camped in the Desert of Sinai.

¹⁶They left the Desert of Sinai and camped at Kibroth Hattaavah.

¹⁷They left Kibroth Hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth.

¹⁸They left Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah.

¹⁹They left Rithmah and camped at Rimmon Perez.

²⁰They left Rimmon Perez and camped at Libnah.

²¹They left Libnah and camped at Rissah.

²²They left Rissah and camped at Kehelathah.

²³They left Kehelathah and camped at Mount Shepher.

²⁴They left Mount Shepher and camped at Haradah.

²⁵They left Haradah and camped at Makheloth.

²⁶They left Makheloth and camped at Tahath.

²⁷They left Tahath and camped at Terah.

²⁸They left Terah and camped at Mithcah.

²⁹They left Mithcah and camped at Hashmonah.

³⁰They left Hashmonah and camped at Moseroth.

³¹They left Moseroth and camped at Bene Jaakan.

³²They left Bene Jaakan and camped at Hor Haggidgad.

³³They left Hor Haggidgad and camped at Jotbathah.

³⁴They left Jotbathah and camped at Abronah.

³⁵They left Abronah and camped at Ezion Geber.

³⁶They left Ezion Geber and camped at Kadesh in the Desert of Zin.

³⁷They left Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, on the border of Edom. ³⁸Aaron the priest obeyed the Lord and went up Mount Hor. There he died on the first day of the fifth month in the fortieth year after the Israelites left Egypt. ³⁹Aaron was 123 years old when he died on Mount Hor.

⁴⁰The Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the southern

area of Canaan, heard that the Israelites were coming.

⁴¹The people left Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah.

⁴²They left Zalmonah and camped at Punon.

⁴³They left Punon and camped at Oboth.

⁴⁴They left Oboth and camped at Iye Abarim, on the border of Moab.

⁴⁵They left Iye Abarim and camped at Dibon Gad.

⁴⁶They left Dibon Gad and camped at Almon Diblathaim.

⁴⁷They left Almon Diblathaim and camped in the mountains of Abarim, near Nebo.

⁴⁸They left the mountains of Abarim and camped on the plains of Moab near the Jordan River across from Jericho.

⁴⁹They camped along the Jordan on the plains of Moab, and their camp went from Beth Jeshimoth to Abel Acacia.

⁵⁰On the plains of Moab by the Jordan River across from Jericho, the Lord spoke to Moses. He said, ⁵¹“Speak to the Israelites and tell them, ‘When you cross the Jordan River and go into Canaan, ⁵²force out all the people who live there. Destroy all of their carved statues and metal idols. Wreck all of their places of worship. ⁵³Take over the land and settle there, because I have given this land to you to own. ⁵⁴Throw lots to divide up the land by family groups, giving larger portions to larger family groups and smaller portions to smaller family groups. The land will be given as the lots decide; each tribe will get its own land.

⁵⁵“But if you don’t force those people out of the land, they will bring you trouble. They will be like sharp hooks in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will bring trouble to the land where you live. ⁵⁶Then I will punish you as I had planned to punish them.”

Life Lessons

Numbers 33:1–36:13

Situation

God ordered the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites because of their wickedness. God wished to prevent the Canaanites' sinful practices from affecting the Israelites.

Observation

Learn to avoid sinful practices. Don't rub shoulders with those hostile to God. They will have a negative effect on you.

Inspiration

Suppose you gave yourself to the Lord—to be wholly and altogether His, made and molded according to His own divine purpose, determined to follow Him wherever He may lead you. It is just at this point that you are faced with a new and very practical difficulty.

How are you to know the voice of the Good Shepherd, whom you have pledged to follow?

Many Christians live in constant doubt and confusion as to His will for them.

And this confusion is further compounded. Maybe there are certain "paths" into which God seems to be calling you, of which your friends disapprove—and it may be that these disapproving friends are older than yourself in the Christian life. You can hardly bear to disagree with them, or to see the distress on their faces.

The first thing you must do is to ask the Lord to help you quietly examine the motives of your heart. Be sure that you really have set your will to obey the Lord in every respect. If this is your purpose then, and your soul is merely waiting to know the will of God in order to consent to it, then you have done your part.

From this point, you can be certain that He will make His mind known to you and will guide you on the right paths, for “He calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out ... he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice” ([John 10:3-4](#))... And, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given him” ([James 1:5](#)).

Let no hint of doubt turn you from a steadfast faith in God’s willingness and ability to guide you.

Remember this though: Our God has all knowledge and all wisdom. Therefore it is very possible He may guide you into paths wherein He knows great blessings are awaiting you just around the next fearsome turn—paths on which, to our shortsighted human eyes, there seems to be only confusion and loss.

You must become settled on this spiritual fact: God’s thoughts are not like man’s thoughts, nor are His ways like our ways. He alone, who knows the end of things from their beginning, is able to determine what the results of any course of action may be.

(From “The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life” by

Hannah W. Smith in *Safe Within Your Love*)

Application

Do you keep a devotional journal? If not, try it for three weeks. Write down thoughts from your daily study or devotional time with God. If you already keep a journal, look back and read what God has been showing you recently.

Exploration

Listening—[Deuteronomy 5:1](#); [1 Kings 19:11–13](#); [Proverbs 1:23–28](#); [Mark 4:9](#); [Luke 6:49](#); [Hebrews 2:1–3](#).

The Borders of Canaan

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Give this command to the people of Israel: ‘You will soon enter Canaan and it will be yours. These shall be the borders: ³On the south you will get part of the Desert of Zin near the border of Edom. On the east side your southern border will start at the south end of the Dead Sea, ⁴cross south of Scorpion Pass, and go through the Desert of Zin and south of Kadesh Barnea. Then it will go to Hazar Addar and over to Azmon. ⁵From Azmon it will go to the brook of Egypt, and it will end at the Mediterranean Sea.

⁶“Your western border will be the Mediterranean Sea.

⁷“Your northern border will begin at the Mediterranean Sea and go to Mount Hor. ⁸From Mount Hor it will go to Lebo Hamath, and on to Zedad. ⁹Then the border will go to Ziphron, and it will end at Hazar Enan. This will be your northern border.

¹⁰“Your eastern border will begin at Hazar Enan and go to Shepham. ¹¹From Shepham the border will go east of Ain to Riblah and along the hills east of Lake Galilee. ¹²Then the border will go down along the Jordan River and end at the Dead Sea.

“These are the borders around your country.”

¹³So Moses gave this command to the Israelites: “This is the land you will receive. Throw lots to divide it among the nine and one-half tribes, because the Lord commanded that it should be theirs. ¹⁴The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh have already received their land. ¹⁵These two and one-half tribes received land east of the Jordan River, across

from Jericho.”

¹⁶Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹⁷“These are the men who will divide the land: Eleazar the priest and Joshua son of Nun.

¹⁸Also take one leader from each tribe to help divide the land.

¹⁹These are the names of the leaders: from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh; ²⁰from the tribe of Simeon, Shemuel son of Ammihud; ²¹from the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad son of Kislou; ²²from the tribe of Dan, Bukki son of Jogli; ²³from the tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph, Hanniel son of Ephod; ²⁴from the tribe of Ephraim son of Joseph, Kemuel son of Shiphtan; ²⁵from the tribe of Zebulun, Elizaphan son of Parnach; ²⁶from the tribe of Issachar, Paltiel son of Azzan; ²⁷from the tribe of Asher, Ahihud son of Shelomi; ²⁸from the tribe of Naphtali, Pedahel son of Ammihud.”

²⁹The Lord commanded these men to divide the land of Canaan among the Israelites.

The Levites' Towns

The Lord spoke to Moses on the plains of Moab across from Jericho by the Jordan River. He said, ²“Command the Israelites to give the Levites cities to live in from the land they receive. Also give the Levites the pastureland around these cities. ³Then the Levites will have cities where they may live and pastureland for their cattle, flocks, and other animals. ⁴The pastureland you give the Levites will extend fifteen hundred feet from the city wall. ⁵Also measure three thousand feet in each direction outside the city wall—three thousand feet east of the city, three thousand feet south of the city, three thousand feet west of the city, and three thousand feet north of the city, with the city in the center. This will be pastureland for the Levites' cities.

Cities of Safety

⁶“Six of the cities you give the Levites will be cities of safety. A person who accidentally kills someone may run to one of those cities for safety. You must also give forty-two other cities to the Levites; ⁷give the Levites a total of forty-eight cities and their pastures. ⁸The larger tribes of Israel must give more cities, and the smaller tribes must give fewer cities. Each tribe must give some of its cities to the Levites, but the number of cities they give will depend on the size of their land.”

⁹Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹⁰“Tell the Israelites these things: ‘When you cross the Jordan River and go into Canaan,

¹¹you must choose cities to be cities of safety, so that a person who accidentally kills someone may run to them for safety. ¹²There the person will be safe from the dead person's relative who has the duty of punishing the killer. He will not die before he receives a fair trial in court. ¹³The six cities you give will be cities of safety. ¹⁴Give three cities east of the Jordan River and three cities in Canaan as cities of safety. ¹⁵These six cities will be places of safety for citizens of Israel, as well as for foreigners and other people living with you. Any of these people who accidentally kills someone may run to one of these cities.

¹⁶“Anyone who uses an iron weapon to kill someone is a murderer. He must be put to death. ¹⁷Anyone who takes a rock and kills a person with it is a murderer. He must be put to death. ¹⁸Anyone who picks up a piece of wood and kills someone with it is a murderer. He must be put to death. ¹⁹A relative of the dead person must put the murderer to death; when they meet, the relative must kill the murderer. ²⁰A person might shove someone or throw something at someone and cause death. ²¹Or a person might hit someone with his hand and cause death. If it were done from hate, the person is a murderer and must be put to death. A relative of the dead person must kill the murderer when they meet.

²²“But a person might suddenly shove someone, and not from hatred. Or a person might accidentally throw something and hit someone. ²³Or a person might drop a rock on someone he couldn't see and kill that person. There was no plan to hurt anyone and no hatred for the one who was killed. ²⁴If that happens, the community must judge between the relative of the dead person and the killer, according to these rules. ²⁵They

must protect the killer from the dead person's relative, sending the killer back to the original city of safety, to stay there until the high priest dies (the high priest had the holy oil poured on him).

²⁶“Such a person must never go outside the limits of the city of safety. ²⁷If a relative of the dead person finds the killer outside the city, the relative may kill that person and not be guilty of murder. ²⁸The killer must stay in the city of safety until the high priest dies. After the high priest dies, the killer may go home.

²⁹“These laws are for you from now on, wherever you live.

³⁰“If anyone kills a person, the murderer may be put to death only if there are witnesses. No one may be put to death with only one witness.

³¹“Don't take money to spare the life of a murderer who should be put to death. A murderer must be put to death.

³²“If someone has run to a city of safety, don't take money to let the person go back home before the high priest dies.

³³“Don't let murder spoil your land. The only way to remove the sin of killing an innocent person is for the murderer to be put to death. ³⁴I am the Lord, and I live among the Israelites. I live in that land with you, so do not spoil it with murder.”

Land for Zelophehad's Daughters

The leaders of Gilead's family group went to talk to Moses and the leaders of the families of Israel. (Gilead was the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, the son of Joseph.) ²They said, "The Lord commanded you, our master, to give the land to the Israelites by throwing lots, and the Lord commanded you to give the land of Zelophehad, our brother, to his daughters. ³But if his daughters marry men from other tribes of Israel, then that land will leave our family, and the people of the other tribes will get that land. So we will lose some of our land. ⁴When the time of Jubilee comes for the Israelites, their land will go to the tribes of the people they marry; their land will be taken away from us, the land we received from our fathers."

⁵Then Moses gave the Israelites this command from the Lord: "These men from the tribe of Joseph are right. ⁶This is the Lord's command to Zelophehad's daughters: You may marry anyone you wish, as long as the person is from your own tribe. ⁷In this way the Israelites' land will not pass from tribe to tribe, and each Israelite will keep the land in the tribe that belonged to his ancestors. ⁸A woman who inherits her father's land may marry, but she must marry someone from her own tribe. In this way every Israelite will keep the land that belonged to his ancestors. ⁹The land must not pass from tribe to tribe, and each Israelite tribe will keep the land it received from its ancestors."

¹⁰Zelophehad's daughters obeyed the Lord's command to Moses.

¹¹So Zelophehad's daughters—Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah,

Milcah, and Noah—married their cousins, their father's relatives.¹² Their husbands were from the tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph, so their land stayed in their father's family group and tribe.

¹³These were the laws and commands that the Lord gave to the Israelites through Moses on the plains of Moab by the Jordan River, across from Jericho.

put ... them This showed that the people had a part in giving the Levites their special work.

Reuel the Midianite Also called Jethro.

Taberah This name means “burning.”

Kibroth Hattaavah This name in Hebrew means “graves of wanting.”

Eshcol This name in Hebrew means “bunch.”

agreement of salt The meaning is not clear, but Leviticus 2:13 says, “Salt stands for your agreement with God that will last forever.”

Meribah This name in Hebrew means “argument.”

Hormah This name in Hebrew means “completely destroyed.”

The Book of Deuteronomy

Introduction

If you've ever been a part of the following scene, you know you'll never forget it.

Inside the house is a quiet bedroom. Last spring's prom photo sits on the bedside table. A dried homecoming mum hangs from the bulletin board. Outside the house is a packed car. Both trunk and seat are full of clothes, books, and stereo. What was in the room is now in the car. The one who used to live in the room is about to drive the car ... to college.

Both parent and child are stunned by the moment. What happened to childhood? Who fast-forwarded the years? Why, just yesterday this child was filling the house with cartwheels and playdough—now look. He's so tall. She's such a beauty. The child is grown.

The grown child is equally stunned. The road ahead looks lonely and long. There is safety in these walls. Protection. Security. Those pleas for independence so recently voiced are unheard today. "Just say the word, Dad, I'll stay. Just ask me, Mom, I won't leave."

But Mom and Dad know better. They know that love releases the loved. They know the training is over. The last bell has rung. The class is dismissed, and the application has begun.

And so parent and child hesitate at the side of the car. There's no time to teach new truths. There's no time to instill values or lay foundations. There is only one word that can be said—*Remember*. Remember who loves you. Remember what matters. Remember what is right and what is wrong.

Remember.

In Deuteronomy God tells his children to *remember*.

Israel is about to make a transition. For forty years they have wandered. Now they are about to settle down in a new land. It's a time of transition. From Moses to Joshua. From the wilderness to the Promised Land. From nomads to farmers. From people with no land to people of the land.

God wants them to stay faithful. Stay distinctive. For forty days Moses teaches the words you are about to read. God repeats what he has already taught. *Deutero* means "second." *Nomos* means "law." Deuteronomy is a second hearing of the law.

God didn't want them to forget.

About This Book

Author:

Moses

Date Written:

1450–1405 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- Moses reminded the people how God had led, to strengthen their faith in the future.
- Moses reminded the people of their covenant with God, a covenant of faith and obedience.
- Moses reviewed God's laws.

Key Verse:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength" ([Deuteronomy 6:5](#)).

Contents:

1. Moses Remembered the Past [1:1–4:43](#)
2. What Does God Require? [4:44–26:19](#)
3. God's Covenant [27:1–30:20](#)
4. Moses' Goodbye and Joshua's Ordination
[31:1–34:12](#)

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 1:1–3:29

Situation

In Moab, Moses recounted the struggles and victories that God had given the Israelites while they wandered for forty years. This book reviews Israel's history and restates God's covenant with his people.

Observation

The Lord demonstrated his faithfulness to the Israelites by providing great leaders and a land for them. He also gave them his law to govern their religious, civil, and personal life.

Inspiration

The Lord's mercies never cease. The Lord's compassion never fails. The Lord's faithfulness never diminishes.

That defines God's immutability, which is a four-bit word for "He doesn't change." He has to remain faithful. Being immutable, He not only will not change in His faithfulness, He *cannot* change. He never cools off in His commitment to us. He never breaks a promise or loses enthusiasm. He stays near us when we are zealous for the truth, and He stays near us when we reject His counsel and deliberately disobey. He remains intimately involved in our lives whether we are giving Him praise in prayer or grieving Him by our actions. Whether we are running to Him or from Him, He remains faithful. His faithfulness is unconditional, unending, and unswerving. Nothing

we do can diminish it, and nothing we stop doing can increase it. It remains great. His immutability never diminishes. Mysterious though such incredible constancy may seem, it's true. (From *The Mystery of God's Will* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Set aside time this week for reflection. Write down as many examples as you can of how the Lord has led you and of the Lord's faithfulness. Start a journal of events as they occur. Share these examples, as you are able, with your loved ones. Also, use them to begin a conversation with an unbeliever as you recount God's faithfulness.

Exploration

God's Faithfulness—[1 Chronicles 16:14–18](#); [Psalms 103:14](#); [111:5](#); [Lamentations 3:19–26](#).

Moses Talks to the Israelites

This is the message Moses gave to all the people of Israel in the desert east of the Jordan River. They were in the desert area near Suph, between Paran and the towns of Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab.

²(The trip from Mount Sinai to Kadesh Barnea on the Mount Seir road takes eleven days.) ³Forty years after the Israelites had left Egypt, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses told the people of Israel everything the Lord had commanded him to tell them. ⁴This was after the Lord had defeated Sihon and Og. Sihon was king of the Amorite people and lived in Heshbon. Og was king of Bashan and lived in Ashteroth and Edrei.

⁵Now the Israelites were east of the Jordan River in the land of Moab, and there Moses began to explain what God had commanded. He said:

⁶The Lord our God spoke to us at Mount Sinai and said, “You have stayed long enough at this mountain. ⁷Get ready, and go to the mountain country of the Amorites, and to all the places around there—the Jordan Valley, the mountains, the western hills, the southern area, the seacoast, the land of Canaan, and Lebanon. Go as far as the great river, the Euphrates. ⁸See, I have given you this land, so go in and take it for yourselves. The Lord promised it to your ancestors—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants.”

Moses Appoints Leaders

⁹At that time I said, “I am not able to take care of you by myself. ¹⁰The Lord your God has made you grow in number so that there are as many of you as there are stars in the sky. ¹¹I pray that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, will give you a thousand times more people and do all the wonderful things he promised. ¹²But I cannot take care of your problems, your troubles, and your arguments by myself. ¹³So choose some men from each tribe—wise men who have understanding and experience—and I will make them leaders over you.”

¹⁴And you said, “That’s a good thing to do.”

¹⁵So I took the wise and experienced leaders of your tribes, and I made them your leaders. I appointed commanders over a thousand people, over a hundred people, over fifty people, and over ten people and made them officers over your tribes. ¹⁶Then I told your leaders, “Listen to the arguments between your people. Judge fairly between two Israelites or between an Israelite and a foreigner. ¹⁷When you judge, be fair to everyone; don’t act as if one person is more important than another, and don’t be afraid of anyone, because your decision comes from God. Bring the hard cases to me, and I will judge them.” ¹⁸At that time I told you everything you must do.

Spies Enter the Land

¹⁹Then, as the Lord our God commanded us, we left Mount Sinai and went toward the mountain country of the Amorite people. We went through that large and terrible desert you saw, and then we came to Kadesh Barnea. ²⁰I said to you, “You

have now come to the mountain country of the Amorites, to the land the Lord our God will give us. ²¹Look, here it is! Go up and take it. The Lord, the God of your ancestors, told you to do this, so don't be afraid and don't worry."

²²Then all of you came to me and said, "Let's send men before us to spy out the land. They can come back and tell us about the way we should go and the cities we will find."

²³I thought that was a good idea, so I chose twelve of your men, one for each tribe. ²⁴They left and went up to the mountains, and when they came to the Valley of Eshcol they explored it. ²⁵They took some of the fruit from that land and brought it down to us, saying, "It is a good land that the Lord our God is giving us."

Israel Refuses to Enter

²⁶But you refused to go. You would not obey the command of the Lord your God, ²⁷but grumbled in your tents, saying, "The Lord hates us. He brought us out of Egypt just to give us to the Amorites, who will destroy us. ²⁸Where can we go now? The spies we sent have made us afraid, because they said, 'The people there are stronger and taller than we are. The cities are big, with walls up to the sky. And we saw the Anakites there!'"

²⁹Then I said to you, "Don't be frightened; don't be afraid of those people. ³⁰The Lord your God will go ahead of you and fight for you as he did in Egypt; you saw him do it. ³¹And in the desert you saw how the Lord your God carried you, like one carries a child. And he has brought you safely all the way to this place."

³²But you still did not trust the Lord your God, even though ³³he had always gone before you to find places for you to camp. In a fire at night and in a cloud during the day, he showed you which way to go.

³⁴When the Lord heard what you said, he was angry and made an oath, saying, ³⁵“I promised a good land to your ancestors, but none of you evil people will see it. ³⁶Only Caleb son of Jephunneh will see it. I will give him and his descendants the land he walked on, because he followed the Lord completely.”

³⁷Because of you, the Lord was also angry with me and said, “You won’t enter the land either, ³⁸but your assistant, Joshua son of Nun, will enter it. Encourage him, because he will lead Israel to take the land for their own.

³⁹“Your little children that you said would be captured, who do not know right from wrong at this time, will go into the land. I will give the land to them, and they will take it for their own. ⁴⁰But you must turn around and follow the desert road toward the Red Sea.”

⁴¹Then you said to me, “We have sinned against the Lord, but now we will go up and fight, as the Lord our God commanded us.” Then all of you put on weapons, thinking it would be easy to go into the mountains.

⁴²But the Lord said to me, “Tell the people, ‘You must not go up there and fight. I will not be with you, and your enemies will defeat you.’”

⁴³So I told you, but you would not listen. You would not obey the Lord’s command. You were proud, so you went on up into the mountains, ⁴⁴and the Amorites who lived in those mountains came out and fought you. They chased you like

bees and defeated you from Edom to Hormah.⁴⁵ So you came back and cried before the Lord, but the Lord did not listen to you; he refused to pay attention to you.⁴⁶ So you stayed in Kadesh a long time.

Israel Wanders in the Desert

Then we turned around, and we traveled on the desert road toward the Red Sea, as the Lord had told me to do. We traveled through the mountains of Edom for many days.

²Then the Lord said to me, ³“You have traveled through these mountains long enough. Turn north ⁴and give the people this command: ‘You will soon go through the land that belongs to your relatives, the descendants of Esau who live in Edom. They will be afraid of you, but be very careful. ⁵Do not go to war against them. I will not give you any of their land—not even a foot of it, because I have given the mountains of Edom to Esau as his own. ⁶You must pay them in silver for any food you eat or water you drink.’”

⁷The Lord your God has blessed everything you have done; he has protected you while you traveled through this great desert. The Lord your God has been with you for the past forty years, and you have had everything you needed.

⁸So we passed by our relatives, the descendants of Esau who lived in Edom. We turned off the Jordan Valley road that comes from the towns of Elath and Ezion Geber and traveled along the desert road to Moab.

The Land of Ar

⁹Then the Lord said to me, “Don’t bother the people of Moab. Don’t go to war against them, because I will not give you any of their land as your own; I have given Ar to the descendants

of Lot as their own.”¹⁰(The Emites, who lived in Ar before, were strong people, and there were many of them. They were very tall, like the Anakites.¹¹The Emites were thought to be Rephaites, like the Anakites, but the Moabite people called them Emites.¹²The Horites also lived in Edom before, but the descendants of Esau forced them out and destroyed them, taking their place as Israel did in the land the Lord gave them as their own.)¹³And the Lord said to me, “Now get up and cross the Zered Valley.” So we crossed the valley.¹⁴It had been thirty-eight years from the time we left Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the Zered Valley. By then, all the fighting men from that time had died, as the Lord had promised would happen.¹⁵The Lord continued to work against them to remove them from the camp until they were all dead.

¹⁶When the last of those fighting men had died,¹⁷the Lord said to me,¹⁸“Today you will pass by Ar, on the border of Moab.¹⁹When you come near the people of Ammon, don’t bother them or go to war against them, because I will not give you any of their land as your own. I have given it to the descendants of Lot for their own.”

²⁰(That land was also thought to be a land of the Rephaites, because those people used to live there, but the Ammonites called them Zamzummites.²¹They were strong people, and there were many of them; they were very tall, like the Anakites. The Lord destroyed the Zamzummites, and the Ammonites forced them out of the land and took their place.²²The Lord did the same thing for the descendants of Esau, who lived in Edom, when he destroyed the Horites. The Edomites forced them out of the land and took their place, and they live there to this day.

²³The Cretan people came from Crete and destroyed the

Avvites, who lived in towns all the way to Gaza; the Cretans destroyed them and took their place.) Fighting the Amorites

²⁴The Lord said, “Get up and cross the Arnon Ravine. See, I am giving you the power to defeat Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and I am giving you his land. So fight against him and begin taking his land. ²⁵Today I will begin to make all the people in the world afraid of you. When they hear reports about you, they will shake with fear, and they will be terrified of you.”

²⁶I sent messengers from the desert of Kedemoth to Sihon king of Heshbon. They offered him peace, saying, ²⁷“If you let us pass through your country, we will stay on the road and not turn right or left. ²⁸We will pay you in silver for any food we eat or water we drink. We only want to walk through your country. ²⁹The descendants of Esau in Edom let us go through their land, and so did the Moabites in Ar. We want to cross the Jordan River into the land the Lord our God has given us.” ³⁰But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass, because the Lord your God had made him stubborn. The Lord wanted you to defeat Sihon, and now this has happened.

³¹The Lord said to me, “See, I have begun to give Sihon and his country to you. Begin taking the land as your own.”

³²Then Sihon and all his army came out and fought us at Jahaz, ³³but the Lord our God gave Sihon to us. We defeated him, his sons, and all his army. ³⁴We captured all his cities at that time and completely destroyed them, as well as the men, women, and children. We left no one alive. ³⁵But we kept the cattle and valuable things from the cities for ourselves. ³⁶We defeated Aroer on the edge of the Arnon Ravine, and we

defeated the town in the ravine, and even as far as Gilead. No town was too strong for us; the Lord our God gave us all of them. ³⁷But you did not go near the land of the Ammonites, on the shores of the Jabbok River, or the towns in the mountains, as the Lord our God had commanded.

The Battle at Bashan

When we turned and went up the road toward Bashan, Og king of Bashan and all his army came out to fight us at Edrei.²The Lord said to me, “Don’t be afraid of Og, because I will hand him, his whole army, and his land over to you. Do to him what you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon.”

³So the Lord our God gave us Og king of Bashan and all his army; we defeated them and left no one alive.⁴Then we captured all of Og’s cities, all sixty of them, and took the whole area of Argob, Og’s kingdom in Bashan. ⁵All these were strong cities, with high walls and gates with bars. And there were also many small towns with no walls.⁶We completely destroyed them, just like the cities of Sihon king of Heshbon. We killed all the men, women, and children,⁷but we kept all the cattle and valuable things from the cities for ourselves.

⁸So at that time we took the land east of the Jordan River, from the Arnon Ravine to Mount Hermon, from these two Amorite kings.⁹(Hermon is called Sirion by the Sidonian people, but the Amorites call it Senir.) ¹⁰We captured all the cities on the high plain and all of Gilead, and we took all of Bashan as far as Salecah and Edrei, towns in Og’s kingdom of Bashan. ¹¹(Only Og king of Bashan was left of the few Rephaites. His bed was made of iron, and it was more than thirteen feet long and six feet wide! It is still in the Ammonite city of Rabbah.) The Land Is Divided

¹²At that time we took this land to be our own. I gave the

people of Reuben and Gad the land from Aroer by the Arnon Ravine, as well as half of the mountain country of Gilead and the cities in it. ¹³To the people of East Manasseh I gave the rest of Gilead and all of Bashan, the kingdom of Og. (The area of Argob in Bashan was called the land of the Rephaites. ¹⁴Jair, a descendant of Manasseh, took the whole area of Argob, all the way to the border of the Geshurites and Maacathites. So that land was named for Jair, and even today Bashan is called the Towns of Jair.) ¹⁵I gave Gilead to Makir. ¹⁶I gave the Reubenites and the Gadites the land that begins at Gilead and goes from the Arnon Ravine (the middle of the Arnon is the border) to the Jabbok River, which is the Ammonite border. ¹⁷The border on the west was the Jordan River in the Jordan Valley, and it goes from Lake Galilee to the Dead Sea west of Mount Pisgah.

¹⁸At that time I gave you this command: "The Lord your God has given you this land as your own. Now your fighting men must take their weapons, and you must lead the other Israelites across the river. ¹⁹Your wives, your young children, and your cattle may stay here. I know you have many cattle, and they may stay here in the cities I have given you, ²⁰until the Lord also gives your Israelite relatives a place to rest. They will receive the land the Lord your God has given them on the other side of the Jordan River. After that, you may each return to the land I have given you."

²¹Then I gave this command to Joshua: "You have seen for yourself all that the Lord your God has done to these two kings. The Lord will do the same thing to all the kingdoms where you are going. ²²Don't be afraid of them, because the Lord your God will fight for you."

Moses Cannot Enter the Land

²³Then I begged the Lord: ²⁴“Lord God, you have begun to show me, your servant, how great you are. You have great strength, and no other god in heaven or on earth can do the powerful things you do. There is no other god like you. ²⁵Please let me cross the Jordan River so that I may see the good land by the Jordan. I want to see the beautiful mountains and Lebanon.”

²⁶But the Lord was angry with me because of you, and he would not listen to me. The Lord said to me, “That’s enough. Don’t talk to me anymore about it. ²⁷Climb to the top of Mount Pisgah and look west, north, south, and east. You can look at the land, but you will not cross the Jordan River. ²⁸Appoint Joshua and help him be brave and strong. He will lead the people across the river and give them the land that they are to inherit, but you can only look at it.” ²⁹So we stayed in the valley opposite Beth Peor.

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 4:1–43

Situation

After forty years of wandering in the desert, Moses carried out God's instructions to teach the people and prepare them to enter the Promised Land.

Observation

God loves his people with a jealous love that leaves no room for idolatry or other sin.

Inspiration

In the midst of playing baseball in the backyard, Jim's six-year-old son's best friend, and next door neighbor, came out of his house. "Dad, can I go play with Brad?" he asked. "But son, we're playing baseball. Don't you want to play with me?" Jim asked, not really wanting to hear the answer he knew was coming. "Nah, I'd rather play with Brad," his son replied, all too honestly. Jim had a rival for his son's affection, and he was a six-year-old.

As he struggled with that thought, knowing that he'd better get a handle on it because it was only going to escalate, he suddenly was reminded that God felt the same way about him. He jealously desires our affection and attention as well. It breaks his heart when we show more interest in cars, sports, newspapers, television, yard work, hobbies, books, and family activities than we do in reading his word and prayer. It saddens him when we are more committed to serving ourselves and pursuing our

own interests than we are in serving him.

If God were to examine your heart today, what rivals for his attention would he find? (From *A Dad's Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent)

Application

Idolatry makes anything but God the highest priority in life. Do you value your relationship with God more than anything else? Or have you allowed money, leisure, friendships—or anything else—to rule your life? Smash the idols in your life and make a fresh commitment to put God first. He alone is worthy of this position!

Exploration

God's Jealousy—[Exodus 20:4–6](#); [34:14](#); [Joshua 24:19–20](#).

Moses Tells Israel to Obey

Now, Israel, listen to the laws and commands I will teach you. Obey them so that you will live and so that you will go over and take the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving to you.²Don't add to these commands, and don't leave anything out, but obey the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.

³You have seen for yourselves what the Lord did at Baal Peor, how the Lord your God destroyed everyone among you who followed Baal in Peor.⁴But all of you who continued following the Lord your God are still alive today.

⁵Look, I have taught you the laws and rules the Lord my God commanded me. Now you can obey the laws in the land you are entering, in the land you will take.⁶Obey these laws carefully, in order to show the other nations that you have wisdom and understanding. When they hear about these laws, they will say, "This great nation of Israel is wise and understanding."⁷No other nation is as great as we are. Their gods do not come near them, but the Lord our God comes near when we pray to him.⁸And no other nation has such good teachings and commands as those I am giving to you today.

⁹But be careful! Watch out and don't forget the things you have seen. Don't forget them as long as you live, but teach them to your children and grandchildren.¹⁰Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Mount Sinai. He said to

me, “Bring the people together so I can tell them what I have to say. Then they will respect me as long as they live in the land, and they will teach these things to their children.” ¹¹When you came and stood at the bottom of the mountain, it blazed with fire that reached to the sky, and black clouds made it very dark. ¹²The Lord spoke to you from the fire. You heard the sound of words, but you did not see him; there was only a voice. ¹³The Lord told you about his Agreement, the Ten Commandments. He told you to obey them, and he wrote them on two stone tablets. ¹⁴Then the Lord commanded me to teach you the laws and rules that you must obey in the land you will take when you cross the Jordan River.

Laws About Idols

¹⁵Since the Lord spoke to you from the fire at Mount Sinai, but you did not see him, watch yourselves carefully! ¹⁶Don’t sin by making idols of any kind, and don’t make statues—of men or women, ¹⁷of animals on earth or birds that fly in the air, ¹⁸of anything that crawls on the ground, or of fish in the water below. ¹⁹When you look up at the sky, you see the sun, moon, and stars, and everything in the sky. But don’t bow down and worship them, because the Lord your God has made these things for all people everywhere. ²⁰But the Lord brought you out of Egypt, which tested you like a furnace for melting iron, and he made you his very own people, as you are now.

²¹The Lord was angry with me because of you, and he swore that I would not cross the Jordan River to go into the good land the Lord your God is giving you as your own. ²²I will die here in this land and not cross the Jordan, but you will

soon go across and take that good land.²³ Be careful. Don't forget the Agreement of the Lord your God that he made with you, and don't make any idols for yourselves, as the Lord your God has commanded you not to do.²⁴ The Lord your God is a jealous God, like a fire that burns things up.

²⁵ Even after you have lived in the land a long time and have had children and grandchildren, don't do evil things. Don't make any kind of idol, and don't do what the Lord your God says is evil, because that will make him angry.²⁶ If you do, I ask heaven and earth to speak against you this day that you will quickly be removed from this land that you are crossing the Jordan River to take. You will not live there long after that, but you will be completely destroyed.²⁷ The Lord will scatter you among the other nations. Only a few of you will be left alive, and those few will be in other nations where the Lord will send you.²⁸ There you will worship gods made by people, gods made of wood and stone, that cannot see, hear, eat, or smell.²⁹ But even there you can look for the Lord your God, and you will find him if you look for him with your whole being.³⁰ It will be hard when all these things happen to you. But after that you will come back to the Lord your God and obey him,³¹ because the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you. He will not forget the Agreement with your ancestors, which he swore to them.

The Lord Is Great

³² Nothing like this has ever happened before! Look at the past, long before you were even born. Go all the way back to when God made humans on the earth, and look from one end of

heaven to the other. Nothing like this has ever been heard of!
³³No other people have ever heard God speak from a fire and have still lived. But you have. ³⁴No other god has ever taken for himself one nation out of another. But the Lord your God did this for you in Egypt, right before your own eyes. He did it with tests, signs, miracles, war, and great sights, by his great power and strength.

³⁵He showed you things so you would know that the Lord is God, and there is no other God besides him. ³⁶He spoke to you from heaven to teach you. He showed you his great fire on earth, and you heard him speak from the fire. ³⁷Because the Lord loved your ancestors, he chose you, their descendants, and he brought you out of Egypt himself by his great strength. ³⁸He forced nations out of their land ahead of you, nations that were bigger and stronger than you were. The Lord did this so he could bring you into their land and give it to you as your own, and this land is yours today.

³⁹Know and believe today that the Lord is God. He is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other god!
⁴⁰Obeys his laws and commands that I am giving you today so that things will go well for you and your children. Then you will live a long time in the land that the Lord your God is giving to you forever.

Cities of Safety

⁴¹Moses chose three cities east of the Jordan River, ⁴²where a person who accidentally killed someone could go. If the person was not killed because of hatred, the murderer's life could be saved by running to one of these cities. ⁴³These were the cities:

Bezer in the desert high plain was for the Reubenites; Ramoth in Gilead was for the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan was for the Manassites.

The Laws Moses Gave

⁴⁴These are the teachings Moses gave to the people of Israel. ⁴⁵They are the rules, commands, and laws he gave them when they came out of Egypt. ⁴⁶They were in the valley near Beth Peor, east of the Jordan River, in the land of Sihon. Sihon king of the Amorites ruled in Heshbon and was defeated by Moses and the Israelites as they came out of Egypt. ⁴⁷The Israelites took his land and the land of Og king of Bashan, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River. ⁴⁸This land went from Aroer, on the edge of the Arnon Ravine, to Mount Hermon. ⁴⁹It included all the Jordan Valley east of the Jordan River, and it went as far as the Dead Sea below Mount Pisgah.

Life Lessons

[Deuteronomy 4:44–5:33](#)

Situation

Finally. The fortieth year of the Exodus from Egypt. Many Israelites had died since God gave the commandments at Mount Sinai. God held the entire nation responsible for obeying the commandments.

Observation

God longs for his people to abide by his stipulations, so that all will be well with them and the generations that follow them. It pleases him when his

people profess willingness to obey his commandments, but he knows their hearts will lead them to disobey.

Inspiration

You lose your temper. You lust. You fall. You take a drag. You buy a drink. You kiss the woman. You follow the crowd. You rationalize. You say yes. You sign your name. You forget who you are. You walk into her room. You look in the window. You break your promise. You buy the magazine. You lie. You covet. You stomp your feet and demand your way. You deny your Master.

It's David disrobing Bathsheba. It's Adam accepting the fruit from Eve. It's Abraham lying about Sarah. It's Peter denying that he ever knew Jesus. It's Noah, drunk and naked in his tent. It's Lot in bed with his own daughter. It's your worst nightmare. It's sudden. It's sin.

Satan numbs our awareness and short-circuits our self-control. We know what we are doing and yet can't believe that we are doing it. In the fog of weakness we want to stop but haven't the will to do so. We want to turn around, but our feet won't move. We want to run and, pitifully, we want to stay...

No one who is reading these words is free from the treachery of sudden sin. No one is immune to this trick of perdition. This demon of hell can scale the highest monastery wall, penetrate the deepest faith, and desecrate the purest home.

Some of you know exactly what I mean. You could write these words better than I, couldn't you? Some

of you, like me, have tumbled so often that the stench of Satan's breath is far from a novelty. You've asked for God's forgiveness so often that you worry that the well of mercy might run dry....

Romans chapter [7](#) is the Emancipation Proclamation for those of us who have a tendency to tumble. Look at verse [15](#): "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."

Sound familiar? Read on. Verses [18–19](#): "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing."

Man, that fellow has been reading my diary!

"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from the body of death?" (v. [24](#)).

Please, Paul, don't stop there! Is there no oasis in this barrenness of guilt? There is. Thank God and drink deeply as you read verse [25](#) and verse [1](#) of chapter 8: "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! ... Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Amen. There it is. You read it right. Underline it if you wish. For those in Christ there is *no* condemnation. Absolutely none. Claim the promise. Memorize the words. Accept the cleansing. Throw out the guilt. Praise the Lord. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

Every Christian has suffered from the guilt that comes after sin. Remember, Christ's forgiveness

covers every sin, every time. Don't let guilt drag you down after you have been forgiven. Believe it when he says you're forgiven!

Exploration

Confessing Sin—[Luke 15:11–32](#); [James 5:16](#); [1 John 1:8–10](#).

God has adopted you. God sought you, found you, signed the papers and took you home. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

The Ten Commandments

Moses called all the people of Israel together and said: Listen, Israel, to the commands and laws I am giving you today. Learn them and obey them carefully. ²The Lord our God made an Agreement with us at Mount Sinai. ³He did not make this Agreement with our ancestors, but he made it with us, with all of us who are alive here today. ⁴The Lord spoke to you face to face from the fire on the mountain. ⁵(At that time I stood between you and the Lord in order to tell you what the Lord said; you were afraid of the fire, so you would not go up on the mountain.) The Lord said: ⁶“I am the Lord your God; I brought you out of the land of Egypt where you were slaves.

⁷“You must not have any other gods except me.

⁸“You must not make for yourselves any idols or anything to worship that looks like something in the sky above or on the earth below or in the water below the land. ⁹You must not worship or serve any idol, because I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. If people sin against me and hate me, I will punish their children, even their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. ¹⁰But I will be very kind for a thousand lifetimes to those who love me and obey my commands.

¹¹“You must not use the name of the Lord your God thoughtlessly, because the Lord will punish anyone who uses his name in this way.

¹²“Keep the Sabbath as a holy day, as the Lord your God has commanded you. ¹³You may work and get everything done during six days each week, ¹⁴but the seventh day is a day of

rest to honor the Lord your God. On that day no one may do any work: not you, your son or daughter, your male or female slaves, your ox, your donkey, or any of your animals, or the foreigners living in your cities. That way your servants may rest as you do. ¹⁵Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there by his great power and strength. So the Lord your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day.

¹⁶“Honor your father and your mother as the Lord your God has commanded you. Then you will live a long time, and things will go well for you in the land that the Lord your God is going to give you.

¹⁷“You must not murder anyone.

¹⁸“You must not be guilty of adultery.

¹⁹“You must not steal.

²⁰“You must not tell lies about your neighbor.

²¹“You must not want to take your neighbor’s wife. You must not want to take your neighbor’s house or land, his male or female slaves, his ox or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

²²The Lord spoke these commands to all of you on the mountain in a loud voice out of the fire, the cloud, and the deep darkness; he did not say anything else. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets, and he gave them to me.

²³When you heard the voice from the darkness, as the mountain was blazing with fire, all your older leaders and leaders of your tribes came to me. ²⁴And you said, “The Lord our God has shown us his glory and majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a person can live even if God speaks to him. ²⁵But now, we will die! This

great fire will burn us up, and we will die if we hear the Lord our God speak anymore.²⁶ No human being has ever heard the living God speaking from a fire and still lived, but we have.²⁷ Moses, you go near and listen to everything the Lord our God says. Then you tell us what the Lord our God tells you, and we will listen and obey.”

²⁸The Lord heard what you said to me, and he said to me, “I have heard what the people said to you. Everything they said was good.²⁹ I wish their hearts would always respect me and that they would always obey my commands so that things would go well for them and their children forever!

³⁰“Go and tell the people to return to their tents,³¹ but you stay here with me so that I may give you all the commands, rules, and laws that you must teach the people to obey in the land I am giving them as their own.”

³²So be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you, and follow the commands exactly.³³ Live the way the Lord your God has commanded you so that you may live and have what is good and have a long life in the land you will take.

The Command to Love God

These are the commands, rules, and laws that the Lord your God told me to teach you to obey in the land you are crossing the Jordan River to take.²You, your children, and your grandchildren must respect the Lord your God as long as you live. Obey all his rules and commands I give you so that you will live a long time.³Listen, Israel, and carefully obey these laws. Then all will go well for you, and you will become a great nation in a fertile land, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

⁴Listen, people of Israel! The Lord our God is the only Lord.⁵Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.⁶Always remember these commands I give you today.⁷Teach them to your children, and talk about them when you sit at home and walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.⁸Write them down and tie them to your hands as a sign. Tie them on your forehead to remind you,⁹and write them on your doors and gates.

¹⁰The Lord your God will bring you into the land he promised to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he will give it to you. The land has large, growing cities you did not build,¹¹houses full of good things you did not buy, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees you did not plant. You will eat as much as you want.¹²But be careful! Do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt where you were slaves.

¹³Respect the Lord your God. You must worship him and

make your promises only in his name. ¹⁴Do not worship other gods as the people around you do, ¹⁵because the Lord your God is a jealous God. He is present with you, and if you worship other gods, he will become angry with you and destroy you from the earth. ¹⁶Do not test the Lord your God as you did at Massah. ¹⁷Be sure to obey the commands of the Lord your God and the rules and laws he has given you. ¹⁸Do what the Lord says is good and right so that things will go well for you. Then you may go in and take the good land the Lord promised to your ancestors. ¹⁹He will force all your enemies out as you go in, as the Lord has said.

²⁰In the future when your children ask you, “What is the meaning of the laws, commands, and rules the Lord our God gave us?” ²¹tell them, “We were slaves to the king of Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt by his great power. ²²The Lord showed us great and terrible signs and miracles, which he did to Egypt, the king, and his whole family. ²³The Lord brought us out of Egypt to lead us here and to give us the land he promised our ancestors. ²⁴The Lord ordered us to obey all these commands and to respect the Lord our God so that we will always do well and stay alive, as we are today. ²⁵The right thing for us to do is this: Obey all these rules in the presence of the Lord our God, as he has commanded.”

You Are God's People

The Lord your God will bring you into the land that you are entering and that you will have as your own. As you go in, he will force out these nations: the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites—seven nations that are stronger than you. ²The Lord your God will hand these nations over to you, and when you defeat them, you must destroy them completely. Do not make a peace treaty with them or show them any mercy. ³Do not marry any of them, or let your daughters marry their sons, or let your sons marry their daughters. ⁴If you do, those people will turn your children away from me, to begin serving other gods. Then the Lord will be very angry with you, and he will quickly destroy you. ⁵This is what you must do to those people: Tear down their altars, smash their holy stone pillars, cut down their Asherah idols, and burn their idols in the fire. ⁶You are holy people who belong to the Lord your God. He has chosen you from all the people on earth to be his very own.

New Life in Christ

Listen, people of Israel! The Lord our God is the only Lord.—[Deuteronomy 6:4](#)

Hearing God's Voice

It's not that we don't have ears; it's that we don't use them.

Scripture has always placed a premium on hearing God's voice. Indeed, the great command from God

through Moses began with the words, “Listen, people of Israel! The Lord our God is the only Lord”([Deuteronomy 6:4](#)). Nehemiah and his men were commended because they “listened carefully” to the book of the Law ([Nehemiah 8:3](#)). “Happy are those who listen to me” is the promise of [Proverbs 8:34](#). Jesus urges us to learn to listen like sheep. “The sheep listen to the voice of the shepherd. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out... . They follow him because they know his voice”([John 10:3-5](#)). Each of the seven churches in Revelation is addressed in the same manner: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Our ears, unlike our eyes, do not have lids. They are to remain open, but how easily they close. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Question: What is God telling you in his Scriptures?

For more on [“New Life in Christ.”](#)

⁷The Lord did not care for you and choose you because there were many of you—you are the smallest nation of all. ⁸But the Lord chose you because he loved you, and he kept his promise to your ancestors. So he brought you out of Egypt by his great power and freed you from the land of slavery, from the power of the king of Egypt. ⁹So know that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God. He will keep his agreement of love for a thousand lifetimes for people who love him and obey his commands. ¹⁰But he will pay back those people who hate him. He will destroy them, and he will not be slow to pay back those who hate him. ¹¹So be careful to obey the commands, rules, and laws I give you today.

¹²If you pay attention to these laws and obey them carefully, the Lord your God will keep his agreement and show his love to you, as he promised your ancestors. ¹³He will love and bless you. He will make the number of your people grow; he will bless you with children. He will bless your fields with good crops and will give you grain, new wine, and oil. He will bless your herds with calves and your flocks with lambs in the land he promised your ancestors he would give you. ¹⁴You will be blessed more than any other people. Every husband and wife will have children, and all your cattle will have calves. ¹⁵The Lord will take away all disease from you; you will not have the terrible diseases that were in Egypt, but he will give them to all the people who hate you. ¹⁶You must destroy all the people the Lord your God hands over to you. Do not feel sorry for them, and do not worship their gods, or they will trap you.

¹⁷You might say to yourselves, “Because these nations are stronger than we are, we can’t force them out.” ¹⁸But don’t be

afraid of them. Remember what the Lord your God did to all of Egypt and its king. ¹⁹You saw for yourselves the troubles, signs, and miracles he did, how the Lord's great power and strength brought you out of Egypt. The Lord your God will do the same thing to all the nations you now fear. ²⁰The Lord your God will also send terror among them so that even those who are alive and hiding from you will die. ²¹Don't be afraid of them, because the Lord your God is with you; he is a great God and people are afraid of him. ²²When the Lord your God forces those nations out of the land, he will do it little by little ahead of you. You won't be able to destroy them all at once; otherwise, the wild animals will grow too many in number. ²³But the Lord your God will hand those nations over to you, confusing them until they are destroyed. ²⁴The Lord will help you defeat their kings, and the world will forget who they were. No one will be able to stop you; you will destroy them all. ²⁵Burn up their idols in the fire. Do not wish for the silver and gold they have, and don't take it for yourselves, or you will be trapped by it. The Lord your God hates it. ²⁶Do not bring one of those hateful things into your house, or you will be completely destroyed along with it. Hate and reject those things; they must be completely destroyed.

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 6:1–7:26

Situation

God repeated these commands because of their importance. God wanted parents to teach his commandments to their children.

Observation

God gives parents the responsibility to teach his law to their children. This requires spending time with children daily and telling them about the commands of God.

Inspiration

Never underestimate the ponderings of a Christian parent. Never underestimate the power that comes when a parent pleads with God on behalf of a child. Who knows how many prayers are being answered right now because of the faithful ponderings of a parent ten or twenty years ago? God listens to thoughtful parents.

Praying for our children is a noble task. If what we are doing, in this fast-paced society, is taking us away from prayer time for our children, we're doing too much. There is nothing more special, more precious than that time that a parent spends struggling and pondering with God on behalf of a child.

It's not too late for the child who has brought only tears. Think of Jesus' parents; the mother who had to watch her son crucified saw her son raised from the dead. Though you may go to the grave wondering if your prayers will ever be answered, don't stop praying. God blesses faithfulness. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, "Parents")

Application

Spend time with your children, instructing them in the ways of God, modeling for them a Christ-centered lifestyle. Pray for your children daily. Pray that they

would know and follow the one and only true God.

Exploration

Commandments to Children—[Exodus 20:12](#);
[Proverbs 1:8](#); [3:1–3](#); [23:22](#); [Colossians 3:20](#).

You were intended to live in your Father's house. Any place less than his is insufficient. Any place far from his is dangerous. Only the home built for your heart can protect your heart. And your Father wants you to dwell *in* him. —
Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

Remember the Lord

Carefully obey every command I give you today. Then you will live and grow in number, and you will enter and take the land the Lord promised your ancestors. ²Remember how the Lord your God has led you in the desert for these forty years, taking away your pride and testing you, because he wanted to know what was in your heart. He wanted to know if you would obey his commands. ³He took away your pride when he let you get hungry, and then he fed you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had ever seen. This was to teach you that a person does not live by eating only bread, but by everything the Lord says. ⁴During these forty years, your clothes did not wear out, and your feet did not swell. ⁵Know in your heart that the Lord your God corrects you as a parent corrects a child.

⁶Obey the commands of the Lord your God, living as he has commanded you and respecting him. ⁷The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with rivers and pools of water, with springs that flow in the valleys and hills, ⁸a land that has wheat and barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil, and honey. ⁹It is a land where you will have plenty of food, where you will have everything you need, where the rocks are iron, and where you can dig copper out of the hills.

¹⁰When you have all you want to eat, then praise the Lord your God for giving you a good land. ¹¹Be careful not to forget the Lord your God so that you fail to obey his commands, laws, and rules that I am giving to you today. ¹²When you eat all you want and build nice houses and live in them, ¹³when your herds

and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase, when you have more of everything, ¹⁴then your heart will become proud. You will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, where you were slaves. ¹⁵He led you through the large and terrible desert that was dry and had no water, and that had poisonous snakes and stinging insects. He gave you water from a solid rock ¹⁶and manna to eat in the desert. Manna was something your ancestors had never seen. He did this to take away your pride and to test you, so things would go well for you in the end. ¹⁷You might say to yourself, “I am rich because of my own power and strength,” ¹⁸but remember the Lord your God! It is he who gives you the power to become rich, keeping the agreement he promised to your ancestors, as it is today.

¹⁹If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship them and bow down to them, I warn you today that you will be destroyed. ²⁰Just as the Lord destroyed the other nations for you, you can be destroyed if you do not obey the Lord your God.

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 8:1–9:29

Situation

The Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land. They had experienced important victories, enjoyed unprecedented prosperity, and achieved a homeland. But with these blessings came certain risks that the people would forget God, that they would lose their belief and develop false pride of self-achievement. To avoid these dangers the people had to remember their past and how God had helped them. That would keep them properly focused.

Observation

Remember God's protection and bountiful provisions. Let these memories keep you humble, thankful, and full of belief.

Inspiration

It is not unusual for persons in their early twenties to defect from their early teaching. The reasons are many. Perhaps their exposure to unbelief "took" better than their exposure to belief. This is often the case, for the Bible says, "The heart of man is deceitful above all things." The human heart is as prepared by sin to accept unbelief as faith. Some person they regard very highly has undoubtedly influenced their thinking; and for the time being they look on their early training as "bunk." As someone has said, "A little learning may take a man away from God, but full understanding will bring him back." Some of the

staunchest Christians I know are people who had periods in their life when they questioned the Bible, Christ, and God. But as they continued to examine the matter, there was overwhelming evidence that only “the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” (From *Day by Day with Billy Graham* by Joan W. Brown)

Application

How are your beliefs changing? Growing or dissolving? Maturing or disintegrating? Hang on to the elements in your life that promote growth. Cut off activities and relationships that cause you to sin and replace them with ones that help you grow.

Exploration

Unbelief—[Exodus 11:9–10](#); [Deuteronomy 9:23](#); [Romans 11:20](#); [Hebrews 3:19](#).

Nature is God's workshop. The sky is his resume. The universe is his calling card. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

The Lord Will Be with Israel

Listen, Israel. You will soon cross the Jordan River to go in and force out nations that are bigger and stronger than you. They have large cities with walls up to the sky. ²The people there are Anakites, who are strong and tall. You know about them, and you have heard it said: "No one can stop the Anakites." ³But today remember that the Lord your God goes in before you to destroy them like a fire that burns things up. He will defeat them ahead of you, and you will force them out and destroy them quickly, just as the Lord has said.

⁴After the Lord your God has forced those nations out ahead of you, don't say to yourself, "The Lord brought me here to take this land because I am so good." No! It is because these nations are evil that the Lord will force them out ahead of you. ⁵You are going in to take the land, not because you are good and honest, but because these nations are evil. That is why the Lord your God will force them out ahead of you, to keep his promise to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ⁶The Lord your God is giving you this good land to take as your own. But know this: It is not because you are good; you are a stubborn people.

Remember the Lord's Anger

⁷Remember this and do not forget it: You made the Lord your God angry in the desert. You would not obey the Lord from the day you left Egypt until you arrived here. ⁸At Mount Sinai you made the Lord angry—angry enough to destroy you. ⁹When I went up on the mountain to receive the stone tablets, the tablets with the Agreement the Lord had made with you, I stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights; I did not eat bread or drink water. ¹⁰The Lord gave me two stone tablets, which God had written on with his own finger. On them were all the commands that the Lord gave to you on the mountain out of the fire, on the day you were gathered there.

¹¹When the forty days and forty nights were over, the Lord gave me the two stone tablets, the tablets with the Agreement on them. ¹²Then the Lord told me, “Get up and go down quickly from here, because the people you brought out from Egypt are ruining themselves. They have quickly turned away from what I commanded and have made an idol for themselves.”

¹³The Lord said to me, “I have watched these people, and they are very stubborn! ¹⁴Get away so that I may destroy them and make the whole world forget who they are. Then I will make another nation from you that will be bigger and stronger than they are.”

¹⁵So I turned and came down the mountain that was burning with fire, and the two stone tablets with the Agreement were in my hands. ¹⁶When I looked, I saw you had sinned against the Lord your God and had made an idol in the shape of a calf. You had quickly turned away from what the Lord had told you to do. ¹⁷So I took the two stone tablets and threw

them down, breaking them into pieces right in front of you.

¹⁸Then I again bowed facedown on the ground before the Lord for forty days and forty nights; I did not eat bread or drink water. You had sinned by doing what the Lord said was evil, and you made him angry. ¹⁹I was afraid of the Lord's anger and rage, because he was angry enough with you to destroy you, but the Lord listened to me again. ²⁰And the Lord was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, but then I prayed for Aaron, too. ²¹I took that sinful calf idol you had made and burned it in the fire. I crushed it into a powder like dust and threw the dust into a stream that flowed down the mountain.

²²You also made the Lord angry at Taberah, Massah, and Kibroth Hattaavah.

²³Then the Lord sent you away from Kadesh Barnea and said, "Go up and take the land I have given you." But you rejected the command of the Lord your God. You did not trust him or obey him. ²⁴You have refused to obey the Lord as long as I have known you.

²⁵The Lord had said he would destroy you, so I threw myself down in front of him for those forty days and forty nights. ²⁶I prayed to the Lord and said, "Lord God, do not destroy your people, your own people, whom you freed and brought out of Egypt by your great power and strength. ²⁷Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Don't look at how stubborn these people are, and don't look at their sin and evil. ²⁸Otherwise, Egypt will say, 'It was because the Lord was not able to take his people into the land he promised them, and it was because he hated them that he took them into the desert to kill them.' ²⁹But they are your people, Lord, your own people, whom you brought out of Egypt with your great

power and strength.”

New Stone Tablets

At that time the Lord said to me, “Cut two stone tablets like the first ones and come up to me on the mountain. Also make a wooden Ark. ²I will write on the tablets the same words that were on the first tablets, which you broke, and you will put the new tablets in the Ark.”

³So I made the Ark out of acacia wood, and I cut out two stone tablets like the first ones. Then I went up on the mountain with the two tablets in my hands. ⁴The Lord wrote the same things on these tablets he had written before—the Ten Commandments that he had told you on the mountain from the fire, on the day you were gathered there. And the Lord gave them to me. ⁵Then I turned and came down the mountain; I put the tablets in the Ark I had made, as the Lord had commanded, and they are still there.

⁶(The people of Israel went from the wells of the Jaakanites to Moserah. Aaron died there and was buried; his son Eleazar became priest in his place. ⁷From Moserah they went to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah they went to Jotbathah, a place with streams of water. ⁸At that time the Lord chose the tribe of Levi to carry the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord. They were to serve the Lord and to bless the people in his name, which they still do today. ⁹That is why the Levites did not receive any land of their own; instead, they received the Lord himself as their gift, as the Lord your God told them.) ¹⁰I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights just like the first time, and the Lord listened to me this time also. He did not want

to destroy you. ¹¹The Lord said to me, “Go and lead the people so that they will go in and take the land I promised their ancestors.”

What the Lord Wants You to Do

¹²Now, Israel, this is what the Lord your God wants you to do: Respect the Lord your God, and do what he has told you to do. Love him. Serve the Lord your God with your whole being, ¹³and obey the Lord’s commands and laws that I am giving you today for your own good.

¹⁴The Lord owns the world and everything in it—the heavens, even the highest heavens, are his. ¹⁵But the Lord cared for and loved your ancestors, and he chose you, their descendants, over all the other nations, just as it is today. ¹⁶Give yourselves completely to serving him, and do not be stubborn any longer. ¹⁷The Lord your God is God of all gods and Lord of all lords. He is the great God, who is strong and wonderful. He does not take sides, and he will not be talked into doing evil. ¹⁸He helps orphans and widows, and he loves foreigners and gives them food and clothes. ¹⁹You also must love foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt. ²⁰Respect the Lord your God and serve him. Be loyal to him and make your promises in his name. ²¹He is the one you should praise; he is your God, who has done great and wonderful things for you, which you have seen with your own eyes. ²²There were only seventy of your ancestors when they went down to Egypt, and now the Lord your God has made you as many as the stars in the sky.

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 10:1–11:32

Situation

Moses continued to emphasize the requirements for a personal relationship with a holy God. He reminded the Israelites that God gave moral laws and that they were for their benefit. God set before Israel a blessing and a curse.

Observation

The Lord wants us to worship and praise him because the Lord has done great and wonderful things for us.

Inspiration

Praise is the highest occupation of any being. What happens when we praise the Father? We reestablish the proper chain of command; we recognize that the King is on the throne and that he has saved his people.

The whole purpose of coming before the King is to praise him, to live in recognition of his splendor. Praise—lifting up our heart and hands, exalting with our voices, singing his praises—is the occupation of those who dwell in the kingdom.

I believe that praise and prayer develop us for what we will do when we arrive in heaven. What's your picture of what you'll be doing there—sitting on a cloud? Polishing your halo? Playing your harp? That's not what you're going to be doing. You're going to be involved in the ongoing process of coreigning with God. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, "Praise")

Application

Israel was called to praise God because God had already fulfilled part of the promise he had made to the nation. Praise God by making a list of all the blessings he has given you. Then thank God for his work in your life.

Exploration

Praising God—[Psalm 138](#); [146–150](#); [Philippians 4:8](#); [Colossians 3:16–17](#); [James 5:13](#).

We are always in the presence of God. We never leave church. There is never a nonsacred moment! —Max Lucado (*Just Like Jesus*)

Great Things Israel Saw

Love the Lord your God and always obey his orders, rules, laws, and commands.²Remember today it was not your children who saw and felt the correction of the Lord your God. They did not see his majesty, his power, his strength,³ or his signs and the things he did in Egypt to the king and his whole country.⁴They did not see what he did to the Egyptian army, its horses and chariots, when he drowned them in the Red Sea as they were chasing you. The Lord ruined them forever.⁵They did not see what he did for you in the desert until you arrived here.⁶They did not see what he did to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab the Reubenite, when the ground opened up and swallowed them, their families, their tents, and everyone who stood with them in Israel.⁷It was you who saw all these great things the Lord has done.

⁸So obey all the commands I am giving you today so that you will be strong and can go in and take the land you are going to take as your own.⁹Then you will live a long time in the land that the Lord promised to give to your ancestors and their descendants, a fertile land.¹⁰The land you are going to take is not like Egypt, where you were. There you had to plant your seed and water it, like a vegetable garden, by using your feet.¹¹But the land that you will soon cross the Jordan River to take is a land of hills and valleys, a land that drinks rain from heaven.¹²It is a land the Lord your God cares for. His eyes are on it continually, and he watches it from the beginning of the year to the end.

¹³If you carefully obey the commands I am giving you today and love the Lord your God and serve him with your whole being, ¹⁴then he will send rain on your land at the right time, in the fall and spring, and you will be able to gather your grain, new wine, and oil. ¹⁵He will put grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will have plenty to eat.

¹⁶Be careful, or you will be fooled and will turn away to serve and worship other gods. ¹⁷If you do, the Lord will become angry with you and will shut the heavens so it will not rain. Then the land will not grow crops, and you will soon die in the good land the Lord is giving you. ¹⁸Remember my words with your whole being. Write them down and tie them to your hands as a sign; tie them on your foreheads to remind you. ¹⁹Teach them well to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ²⁰Write them on your doors and gates ²¹so that both you and your children will live a long time in the land the Lord promised your ancestors, as long as the skies are above the earth.

²²If you are careful to obey every command I am giving you to follow, and love the Lord your God, and do what he has told you to do, and are loyal to him, ²³then the Lord will force all those nations out of the land ahead of you, and you will take the land from nations that are bigger and stronger than you. ²⁴Everywhere you step will be yours. Your land will go from the desert to Lebanon and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea. ²⁵No one will be able to stop you. The Lord your God will do what he promised and will make the people afraid everywhere you go.

²⁶See, today I am letting you choose a blessing or a curse.

²⁷You will be blessed if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today. ²⁸But you will be cursed if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God. So do not disobey the commands I am giving you today, and do not worship other gods you do not know. ²⁹When the Lord your God brings you into the land you will take as your own, you are to announce the blessings from Mount Gerizim and the curses from Mount Ebal. ³⁰(These mountains are on the other side of the Jordan River, to the west, toward the sunset. They are near the great trees of Moreh in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Jordan Valley opposite Gilgal.) ³¹You will soon cross the Jordan River to enter and take the land the Lord your God is giving you. When you take it over and live there, ³²be careful to obey all the commands and laws I am giving you today.

The Place for Worship

These are the commands and laws you must carefully obey in the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. Obey them as long as you live in the land.²When you inherit the lands of these nations, you must completely destroy all the places where they serve their gods, on high mountains and hills and under every green tree.³Tear down their altars, smash their holy stone pillars, and burn their Asherah idols in the fire. Cut down their idols and destroy their names from those places.

⁴Don't worship the Lord your God that way, ⁵but look for the place the Lord your God will choose—a place among your tribes where he is to be worshiped. Go there, ⁶and bring to that place your burnt offerings and sacrifices; bring a tenth of what you gain and your special gifts; bring what you have promised and the special gifts you want to give the Lord, and bring the first animals born to your herds and flocks.

⁷There you will be together with the Lord your God. There you and your families will eat, and you will enjoy all the good things for which you have worked, because the Lord your God has blessed you.

⁸Do not worship the way we have been doing today, each person doing what he thinks is right. ⁹You have not yet come to a resting place, to the land the Lord your God will give you as your own. ¹⁰But soon you will cross the Jordan River to live in the land the Lord your God is giving you as your own, where he will give you rest from all your enemies and you will live in

safety. ¹¹Then the Lord your God will choose a place where he is to be worshiped. To that place you must bring everything I tell you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your offerings of a tenth of what you gain, your special gifts, and all your best things you promised to the Lord. ¹²There rejoice before the Lord your God. Everyone should rejoice: you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns who have no land of their own. ¹³Be careful that you don't sacrifice your burnt offerings just anywhere you please. ¹⁴Offer them only in the place the Lord will choose. He will choose a place in one of your tribes, and there you must do everything I am commanding you.

¹⁵But you may kill your animals in any of your towns and eat as much of the meat as you want, as if it were a deer or a gazelle; this is the blessing the Lord your God is giving you. Anyone, clean or unclean, may eat this meat, ¹⁶but do not eat the blood. Pour it out on the ground like water. ¹⁷Do not eat in your own towns what belongs to the Lord: one-tenth of your grain, new wine, or oil; the first animals born to your herds or flocks; whatever you have promised to give; the special gifts you want to give to the Lord, or any other gifts. ¹⁸Eat these things when you are together with the Lord your God, in the place the Lord your God chooses to be worshiped. Everyone must do this: you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns. Rejoice in the Lord your God's presence about the things you have worked for. ¹⁹Be careful not to forget the Levites as long as you live in the land.

²⁰When the Lord your God enlarges your country as he has promised, and you want some meat so you say, "I want some

meat,” you may eat as much meat as you want. ²¹If the Lord your God chooses a place where he is to be worshiped that is too far away from you, you may kill animals from your herds and flocks, which the Lord has given to you. I have commanded that you may do this. You may eat as much of them as you want in your own towns, ²²as you would eat gazelle or deer meat. Both clean and unclean people may eat this meat, ²³but be sure you don’t eat the blood, because the life is in the blood. Don’t eat the life with the meat. ²⁴Don’t eat the blood, but pour it out on the ground like water. ²⁵If you don’t eat it, things will go well for you and your children, because you will be doing what the Lord says is right.

²⁶Take your holy things and the things you have promised to give, and go to the place the Lord will choose. ²⁷Present your burnt offerings on the altar of the Lord your God, both the meat and the blood. The blood of your sacrifices should be poured beside the altar of the Lord your God, but you may eat the meat. ²⁸Be careful to obey all the rules I am giving you so that things will always go well for you and your children, and you will be doing what the Lord your God says is good and right.

²⁹You will enter the land and take it away from the nations that the Lord your God will destroy ahead of you. When you force them out and live in their land, ³⁰they will be destroyed for you, but be careful not to be trapped by asking about their gods. Don’t say, “How do these nations worship? I will do the same.” ³¹Don’t worship the Lord your God that way, because the Lord hates the evil ways they worship their gods. They even burn their sons and daughters as sacrifices to their gods!

³²Be sure to do everything I have commanded you. Do not

add anything to it, and do not take anything away from it.

Life Lessons

[Deuteronomy 12:1–13:18](#)

Situation

Moses continued to prepare the Israelites to inhabit their new land. He reminded them of the Ten Commandments, their special place in God's eyes, and all the wondrous blessings God would give them.

Observation

The Israelites demonstrated that worship of God must be free from idolatry. God even used false prophets in order to test God's people.

Inspiration

The most dangerous characteristic of false prophets is that they claim to be from God and to speak for Him. "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so" ([Jeremiah 5:31](#)).

Such leaders nearly always appear pleasant and positive. They like to be with Christians, and they know how to talk and act like believers.

False prophets usually exude sincerity and thereby more easily deceive others (see [2 Timothy 3:13](#)). But you can identify false teachers' true colors by noting what they do not talk much about. They usually don't deny basic doctrines such as Christ's deity and substitutionary atonement, the sinfulness of humanity, or unbelievers' going to hell. They simply *ignore* such "controversial" truths.

But whenever a false prophet is in your midst, you must not ignore his presence or the harmful effects of his heretical teaching. (From *Truth for Today* by John MacArthur)

Application

One of the best ways to avoid false teachers and their teachings is to know the Word of God. Apply yourself to reading and studying the Word of God daily.

Exploration

False Prophets—[Deuteronomy 18:22](#); [Jeremiah 14:13–16](#); [Matthew 7:15](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:6–9](#).

If anybody understands God's ardor for his children, it's someone who has rescued an orphan from despair, for that is what God has done for us. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

False Prophets

Prophets or those who tell the future with dreams might come to you and say they will show you a miracle or a sign.²The miracle or sign might even happen, and then they might say, “Let’s serve other gods” (gods you have not known) “and let’s worship them.”³But you must not listen to those prophets or dreamers. The Lord your God is testing you, to find out if you love him with your whole being.⁴Serve only the Lord your God. Respect him, keep his commands, and obey him. Serve him and be loyal to him.⁵The prophets or dreamers must be killed, because they said you should turn against the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt and saved you from the land where you were slaves. They tried to turn you from doing what the Lord your God commanded you to do. You must get rid of the evil among you.

⁶Someone might try to lead you to serve other gods—it might be your brother, your son or daughter, the wife you love, or a close friend. The person might say, “Let’s go and worship other gods.” (These are gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known,⁷gods of the people who live around you, either nearby or far away, from one end of the land to the other.)⁸Do not give in to such people. Do not listen or feel sorry for them, and do not let them go free or protect them.⁹You must put them to death. You must be the first one to start to kill them, and then everyone else must join in.¹⁰You must throw stones at them until they die, because they tried to turn you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the

land of Egypt, where you were slaves. ¹¹Then everyone in Israel will hear about this and be afraid, and no one among you will ever do such an evil thing again.

Cities to Destroy

¹²The Lord your God is giving you cities in which to live, and you might hear something about one of them. Someone might say ¹³that evil people have moved in among you. And they might lead the people of that city away from God, saying, “Let’s go and worship other gods.” (These are gods you have not known.) ¹⁴Then you must ask about it, looking into the matter and checking carefully whether it is true. If it is proved that a hateful thing has happened among you, ¹⁵you must kill with a sword everyone who lives in that city. Destroy the city completely and kill everyone in it, as well as the animals, with a sword. ¹⁶Gather up everything those people owned, and put it in the middle of the city square. Then completely burn the city and everything they owned as a burnt offering to the Lord your God. That city should never be rebuilt; let it be ruined forever. ¹⁷Don’t keep for yourselves any of the things found in that city, so the Lord will not be angry anymore. He will give you mercy and feel sorry for you, and he will make your nation grow larger, as he promised to your ancestors. ¹⁸You will have obeyed the Lord your God by keeping all his commands that I am giving to you today, and you will be doing what the Lord says is right.

God's Special People

You are the children of the Lord your God. When someone dies, do not cut yourselves or shave your heads to show your sadness. ²You are holy people, who belong to the Lord your God. He has chosen you from all the people on earth to be his very own.

³Do not eat anything the Lord hates. ⁴These are the animals you may eat: oxen, sheep, goats, ⁵deer, gazelle, roe deer, wild goats, ibex, antelope, and mountain sheep. ⁶You may eat any animal that has a split hoof and chews the cud, ⁷but you may not eat camels, rabbits, or rock badgers. These animals chew the cud, but they do not have split hoofs, so they are unclean for you. ⁸Pigs are also unclean for you; they have split hoofs, but they do not chew the cud. Do not eat their meat or touch their dead bodies.

⁹There are many things that live in the water. You may eat anything that has fins and scales, ¹⁰but do not eat anything that does not have fins and scales. It is unclean for you.

¹¹You may eat any clean bird. ¹²But do not eat these birds: eagles, vultures, black vultures, ¹³red kites, falcons, any kind of kite, ¹⁴any kind of raven, ¹⁵horned owls, screech owls, sea gulls, any kind of hawk, ¹⁶little owls, great owls, white owls, ¹⁷desert owls, ospreys, cormorants, ¹⁸storks, any kind of heron, the hoopoes, or bats.

¹⁹All insects with wings are unclean for you; do not eat them. ²⁰Other things with wings are clean, and you may eat them.

²¹Do not eat anything you find that is already dead. You may give it to a foreigner living in your town, and he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner. But you are holy people, who belong to the Lord your God.

Do not cook a baby goat in its mother's milk.

Giving One-Tenth

²²Be sure to save one-tenth of all your crops each year. ²³Take it to the place the Lord your God will choose where he is to be worshiped. There, where you will be together with the Lord, eat the tenth of your grain, new wine, and oil, and eat the animals born first to your herds and flocks. Do this so that you will learn to respect the Lord your God always. ²⁴But if the place the Lord will choose to be worshiped is too far away and he has blessed you so much you cannot carry a tenth, ²⁵exchange your one-tenth for silver. Then take the silver with you to the place the Lord your God shall choose. ²⁶Use the silver to buy anything you wish—cattle, sheep, wine, beer, or anything you wish. Then you and your family will eat and celebrate there before the Lord your God. ²⁷Do not forget the Levites in your town, because they have no land of their own among you.

²⁸At the end of every third year, everyone should bring one-tenth of that year's crop and store it in your towns. ²⁹This is for the Levites so they may eat and be full. (They have no land of their own among you.) It is also for strangers, orphans, and widows who live in your towns so that all of them may eat and be full. Then the Lord your God will bless you and all the work you do.

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 14:1–16:20

Situation

God prepared Israel to inhabit the Promised Land. Everything he told the Israelites was designed to protect them from forgetting God and turning to idolatry.

Observation

God gave the Israelites rules that helped them keep his priorities. The principles we follow today also help us keep perspectives right.

Inspiration

One of the celebrated heroes of our century has been Mohandas Gandhi, the Indian leader who sparked the flame of independence for his country. Those who have read his biography or who have seen his story so brilliantly told upon the screen are often impressed with the tranquil spirit that “India’s George Washington” displayed....

How could Gandhi maintain his private sense of order, his appropriate humility, and his base wisdom and judgment? How did he avoid losing his own identity and spirit of conviction as he moved between those enormous extremes? Where did the emotional and spiritual force come from?

Perhaps the beginning of an answer to those questions lies in Gandhi’s fascination with the simple spinning wheel. The wheel seems to have always been at the center of his life. Gandhi appears to have often returned from public exposure to his humble dwellings where he would, in Indian fashion, sit upon

the floor and engage in the simple act of spinning the wool from which his clothes were made....

Gandhi's spinning wheel was his center of gravity in life. It was the great leveler in his human experience. When he returned from the great public moments in his life, the spinning-wheel experience restored him to his proper sense of proportion, so that he was not falsely swelled with pride due to the cheers of the people....

Gandhi was by no means a Christian, but what he was doing at the wheel is an indispensable lesson for any healthy Christian. For he shows us what every man or woman who wants to move in a public world without being pressed into its mold needs to do. We, too, need the spinning-wheel experience—the ordering of our private worlds so that they are constantly restructured with strength and vitality....

When we come from an experience at the spinning wheel, where all is returned to proper proportion and value, the public world can be managed and properly touched. Relationships with family and friends, with business associates, neighbors and even enemies take on a new and healthier perspective. It becomes possible to forgive, to serve, to not seek vengeance, to be generous.

(From *Ordering Your Private World* by Gordon MacDonald)

Application

Remind yourself of what is important. Take a walk with your family. Send money to someone in need. Be a volunteer. Spend time worshiping God. Allow your

perspective to be refocused.

Exploration

Giving—[Deuteronomy 15:7](#); [Proverbs 25:21](#);
[Matthew 6:3](#); [Luke 12:33](#); [Romans 12:8](#); [2 Corinthians 9:7](#).

The Special Seventh Year

At the end of every seven years, you must tell those who owe you anything that they do not have to pay you back.²This is how you must do it: Everyone who has loaned money must cancel the loan and not make a neighbor or relative pay it back. This is the Lord's time for canceling what people owe.³You may make a foreigner pay what is owed to you, but you must not collect what another Israelite owes you.⁴But there should be no poor people among you, because the Lord your God will richly bless you in the land he is giving you as your own.⁵He will bless you if you obey the Lord your God completely, but you must be careful to obey all the commands I am giving you today.⁶The Lord your God will bless you as he promised, and you will lend to other nations, but you will not need to borrow from them. You will rule over many nations, but none will rule over you.

⁷If there are poor among you, in one of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be selfish or greedy toward them.⁸But give freely to them, and freely lend them whatever they need.⁹Beware of evil thoughts. Don't think, "The seventh year is near, the year to cancel what people owe." You might be mean to the needy and not give them anything. Then they will complain to the Lord about you, and he will find you guilty of sin.¹⁰Give freely to the poor person, and do not wish that you didn't have to give. The Lord your God will bless your work and everything you touch.

¹¹There will always be poor people in the land, so I command

you to give freely to your neighbors and to the poor and needy in your land.

Letting Slaves Go Free

¹²If one of your own people sells himself to you as a slave, whether it is a Hebrew man or woman, that person will serve you for six years. But in the seventh year you must let the slave go free. ¹³When you let slaves go, don't send them away without anything. ¹⁴Give them some of your flock, your grain, and your wine, giving to them as the Lord has given to you. ¹⁵Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and the Lord your God saved you. That is why I am commanding this to you today.

¹⁶But if your slave says to you, "I don't want to leave you," because he loves you and your family and has a good life with you, ¹⁷stick an [awl](#) through his ear into the door; he will be your slave for life. Also do this to a female slave.

¹⁸Do not think of it as a hard thing when you let your slaves go free. After all, they served you six years and did twice the work of a hired person. The Lord your God will bless you in everything you do.

Rules About Firstborn Animals

¹⁹Save all the first male animals born to your herds and flocks. They are for the Lord your God. Do not work the first calf born to your oxen, and do not cut off the wool from the first lamb born to your sheep. ²⁰Each year you and your family are to eat these animals in the presence of the Lord your God, in the

place he will choose to be worshiped. ²¹If an animal is crippled or blind or has something else wrong, do not sacrifice it to the Lord your God. ²²But you may eat that animal in your own town. Both clean and unclean people may eat it, as they would eat a gazelle or a deer. ²³But don't eat its blood; pour it out on the ground like water.

The Passover

Celebrate the Passover of the Lord your God during the month of Abib, because it was during Abib that he brought you out of Egypt at night. ²As the sacrifice for the Passover to the Lord your God, offer an animal from your flock or herd at the place the Lord will choose to be worshiped. ³Do not eat it with bread made with yeast. But for seven days eat bread made without yeast, the bread of suffering, because you left Egypt in a hurry. So all your life you will remember the time you left Egypt. ⁴There must be no yeast anywhere in your land for seven days. Offer the sacrifice on the evening of the first day, and eat all the meat before morning; do not leave it overnight.

⁵Do not offer the Passover sacrifice in just any town the Lord your God gives you, ⁶but offer it in the place he will choose to be worshiped. Offer it in the evening as the sun goes down, which is when you left Egypt. ⁷Roast the meat and eat it at the place the Lord your God will choose. The next morning go back to your tents. ⁸Eat bread made without yeast for six days. On the seventh day have a special meeting for the Lord your God, and do not work that day.

The Feast of Weeks

⁹Count seven weeks from the time you begin to harvest the grain, ¹⁰and then celebrate the Feast of Weeks for the Lord your God. Bring an offering as a special gift to him, giving to him just as he has blessed you. ¹¹Rejoice before the Lord your

God at the place he will choose to be worshiped. Everybody should rejoice: you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites in your town, the strangers, orphans, and widows living among you. ¹²Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and carefully obey all these laws.

The Feast of Shelters

¹³Celebrate the Feast of Shelters for seven days, after you have gathered your harvest from the threshing floor and winepress.

¹⁴Everybody should rejoice at your Feast: you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites, strangers, orphans, and widows who live in your towns.

¹⁵Celebrate the Feast to the Lord your God for seven days at the place he will choose, because the Lord your God will bless all your harvest and all the work you do, and you will be completely happy.

¹⁶All your men must come before the Lord three times a year to the place he will choose. They must come at these times: the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Shelters. No man should come before the Lord without a gift.

¹⁷Each of you must bring a gift that will show how much the Lord your God has blessed you.

Judges for the People

¹⁸Appoint judges and officers for your tribes in every town the Lord your God is giving you; they must judge the people fairly.

¹⁹Do not judge unfairly or take sides. Do not let people pay you to make wrong decisions, because that kind of payment makes

wise people seem blind, and it changes the words of good people.²⁰ Always do what is right so that you will live and always have the land the Lord your God is giving you.

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 16:21–18:22

Situation

Moses gave civil laws for ruling the nation. Even in this area, strict compliance with God's rules was necessary in order to avoid harsh punishment. Worshiping other gods would not be tolerated. The people were to comply with instructions from courts, kings, priests, and prophets. They were to be wary of kings who were tempted by wealth and power, and prophets whose predictions were not fulfilled.

Observation

God provided precise instructions to the Israelites for governing themselves and honoring the divine moral code.

Inspiration

As the Constitution is the highest law of the land, so the Bible is the highest law of God. For it is in the Bible that God sets forth His spiritual laws. It is in the Bible that God makes His enduring promises. It is in the Bible that God reveals the plan of redemption for the human race. . . .

The laws of our land find their genesis in the Ten Commandments. And Sir William Blackstone, the great English jurist, wrote: "The Bible has always been regarded as part of the Common Law of

England.”

Christianity finds all its doctrines stated in the Bible, and Christianity denies no part, nor attempts to add anything to the Word of God. While the Constitution of the United States may be amended from time to time, no amendment is ever necessary for the Bible. We truly believe that the men who wrote the Bible were guided by the Holy Spirit, both in the thoughts they expressed and in their choice of words. As Peter said, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

In setting down their forthright messages, biblical scribes have never attempted to gloss over the realities of life. The sins of the great and small are freely admitted, the weaknesses of human nature are acknowledged, and life in biblical times is recorded as it was lived. The startling thing is that the lives and motivations of these people who lived so long ago have such a modern flavor! As we read, the pages seem like mirrors held up before our own minds and hearts, reflecting our own prides and prejudices, our own failures and humiliations, our own sins and sorrows.

Truth is timeless. Truth does not differ from one age to another, from one people to another, from one geographical location to another. Men’s ideas may differ, men’s customs may change, men’s moral codes may vary, but the great all-prevailing Truth stands for time and eternity.

The message of Jesus Christ, our Savior, is the

story of the Bible—it is the story of salvation. Profound students of the Bible have traced the story of Jesus Christ from the beginning of the Old Testament, for He is the true theme of the Old as well as the New Testament.

The fact of Jesus Christ is the eternal message of the Bible. It is the story of life, peace, eternity, and heaven. The Bible has no hidden purpose. It has no need for special interpretation. It has a single, clear, bold message for every living being—the message of Christ and His offer of peace with God. (From *Peace with God* by Billy Graham)

Application

We like to rebel against laws when they limit our freedom. But God's law blesses us because it protects us and simplifies our decision-making. How do you view God's rules? If you view them as moral guideposts, your trail through life will have fewer twists and dead ends.

Exploration

God's Law—[Exodus 15:25](#); [Leviticus 19](#); [Galatians 2:15–16](#).

God Hates Idols

²¹Do not set up a wooden Asherah idol next to the altar you build for the Lord your God, ²²and do not set up holy stone pillars. The Lord your God hates them.

If an ox or sheep has something wrong with it, do not offer it as a sacrifice to the Lord your God. He would hate that.

²A man or woman in one of the towns the Lord gave you might be found doing something evil and breaking the Agreement. ³That person may have served other gods and bowed down to them or to the sun or moon or stars of the sky, which I have commanded should not be done. ⁴If someone has told you about it, you must look into the matter carefully. If it is true that such a hateful thing has happened in Israel, ⁵take the man or woman who has done the evil thing to the city gates and throw stones at that person until he dies. ⁶There must be two or three witnesses that it is true before the person is put to death; if there is only one witness, the person should not be put to death. ⁷The witnesses must be the first to throw stones at the person, and then everyone else will follow. You must get rid of the evil among you.

Courts of Law

⁸Some cases that come before you, such as murder, quarreling, or attack, may be too difficult to judge. Take these cases to the place the Lord your God will choose. ⁹Go to the priests who are Levites and to the judge who is on duty at that time. Ask them about the case, and they will decide. ¹⁰You must follow the decision they give you at the place the Lord your God will choose. Be careful to do everything they tell you. ¹¹Follow the teachings they give you, and do whatever they decide, exactly as they tell you. ¹²The person who does not show respect for the judge or priest who is there serving the Lord your God must be put to death. You must get rid of that evil from Israel.

¹³Then everyone will hear about this and will be afraid, and they will not show disrespect anymore.

Choosing a King

¹⁴When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, taking it as your own and living in it, you will say, “Let’s appoint a king over us like the nations all around us.” ¹⁵Be sure to appoint over you the king the Lord your God chooses. He must be one of your own people. Do not appoint as your king a foreigner who is not a fellow Israelite. ¹⁶The king must not have too many horses for himself, and he must not send people to Egypt to get more horses, because the Lord has told you, “Don’t return that way again.” ¹⁷The king must not have many wives, or his heart will be led away from God. He must not have too much silver and gold.

¹⁸When he becomes king, he should write a copy of the teachings on a scroll for himself, a copy taken from the priests and Levites. ¹⁹He should keep it with him all the time and read from it every day of his life. Then he will learn to respect the Lord his God, and he will obey all the teachings and commands. ²⁰He should not think he is better than his fellow Israelites, and he must not stop obeying the law in any way so that he and his descendants may rule the kingdom for a long time.

Shares for Priests and Levites

The priests are from the tribe of Levi, and that tribe will not receive a share of the land with the Israelites. They will eat the offerings made to the Lord by fire, which is their share.² They will not inherit any of the land like their brothers, but they will inherit the Lord himself, as he has promised them.

³When you offer a bull or sheep as a sacrifice, you must share with the priests, giving them the shoulder, the cheeks, and the inner organs.⁴ Give them the first of your grain, new wine, and oil, as well as the first wool you cut from your sheep.⁵ The Lord your God has chosen the priests and their descendants out of all your tribes to stand and serve the Lord always.

⁶If a Levite moves from one of your towns anywhere in Israel where he lives and comes to the place the Lord will choose, because he wants to serve the Lord there,⁷ he may serve the Lord his God. He will be like his fellow Levites who serve there before the Lord.⁸ They all will have an equal share of the food. That is separate from what he has received from the sale of family possessions.

Do Not Follow Other Nations

⁹When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, don't learn to do the hateful things the other nations do.

¹⁰Don't let anyone among you offer a son or daughter as a sacrifice in the fire. Don't let anyone use magic or witchcraft, or

try to explain the meaning of signs. ¹¹Don't let anyone try to control others with magic, and don't let them be mediums or try to talk with the spirits of dead people. ¹²The Lord hates anyone who does these things. Because the other nations do these things, the Lord your God will force them out of the land ahead of you. ¹³But you must be innocent in the presence of the Lord your God.

The Lord's Special Prophet

¹⁴The nations you will force out listen to people who use magic and witchcraft, but the Lord your God will not let you do those things. ¹⁵The Lord your God will give you a prophet like me, who is one of your own people. Listen to him. ¹⁶This is what you asked the Lord your God to do when you were gathered at Mount Sinai. You said, "Don't make us listen to the voice of the Lord our God again, and don't make us look at this terrible fire anymore, or we will die."

¹⁷So the Lord said to me, "What they have said is good. ¹⁸So I will give them a prophet like you, who is one of their own people. I will tell him what to say, and he will tell them everything I command. ¹⁹This prophet will speak for me; anyone who does not listen when he speaks will answer to me. ²⁰But if a prophet says something I did not tell him to say as though he were speaking for me, or if a prophet speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet must be killed."

²¹You might be thinking, "How can we know if a message is not from the Lord?" ²²If what a prophet says in the name of the Lord does not happen, it is not the Lord's message. That prophet was speaking his own ideas. Don't be afraid of him.

Cities of Safety

When the Lord your God gives you land that belongs to the other nations, nations that he will destroy, you will force them out and live in their cities and houses.² Then choose three cities in the middle of the land the Lord your God is giving you as your own.³ Build roads to these cities, and divide the land the Lord is giving you into three parts so that someone who kills another person may run to these cities.

⁴This is the rule for someone who kills another person and runs to one of these cities in order to save his life. But the person must have killed a neighbor without meaning to, not out of hatred.⁵ For example, suppose someone goes into the forest with a neighbor to cut wood and swings an ax to cut down a tree. If the ax head flies off the handle, hitting and killing the neighbor, the one who killed him may run to one of these cities to save his life.⁶ Otherwise, the dead person's relative who has the duty of punishing a murderer might be angry and chase him. If the city is far away, the relative might catch and kill the person, even though he should not be killed because there was no intent to kill his neighbor.⁷ This is why I command you to choose these three cities.

⁸⁻⁹Carefully obey all these laws I'm giving you today. Love the Lord your God, and always do what he wants you to do. Then the Lord your God will enlarge your land as he promised your ancestors, giving you the whole land he promised to them. After that, choose three more cities of safety¹⁰ so that innocent people will not be killed in your land, the land that the Lord your God is giving you as your own. By doing this you

will not be guilty of allowing the death of innocent people.

¹¹But if a person hates his neighbor and, after hiding and waiting, attacks and kills him and then runs to one of these cities for safety, ¹²the older leaders of his own city should send for the murderer. They should bring the person back from the city of safety and hand him over to the relative who has the duty of punishing the murderer. ¹³Show no mercy. You must remove from Israel the guilt of murdering innocent people so that things will go well for you.

¹⁴Do not move the stone that marks the border of your neighbor's land, which people long ago set in place. It marks what you inherit in the land the Lord your God is giving you as your own.

Rules About Witnesses

¹⁵One witness is not enough to accuse a person of a crime or sin. A case must be proved by two or three witnesses.

¹⁶If a witness lies and accuses a person of a crime, ¹⁷the two people who are arguing must stand in the presence of the Lord before the priests and judges who are on duty. ¹⁸The judges must check the matter carefully. The witness who is a liar, lying about a fellow Israelite, ¹⁹must be punished. He must be punished in the same way the other person would have been punished. You must get rid of the evil among you. ²⁰The rest of the people will hear about this and be afraid, and no one among you will ever do such an evil thing again. ²¹Show no mercy. A life must be paid for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot.

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 19:1–20:20

Situation

Moses gave the people of Israel God's laws for ruling the nation. God's law stressed issues of safety, justice, and dealing with conflict. God promised to go with them in battle.

Observation

The cities of safety were designated towns to which people who had killed a person by accident could flee. Murderers who intentionally killed someone were not protected in those cities. This is an Old Testament illustration of grace. Believers, as refugees from sin, have a place to turn to—Jesus Christ.

Inspiration

The first step in finding your place in God's plan is to see his mercy—instead of looking inside yourself, look up to him and reflect upon and understand his mercy. How great is the call of God!

God forgave us before we even asked it. He extended mercy to us before we even knew we needed it. Why? Because the God of mercy took pity on us—a band of creatures who are incapable of saving themselves without his gift of mercy. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, "Mercy")

Application

If you struggle with understanding God's mercy, reflect on where you would be today without God's grace. How have you experienced God as a place of safety? As a New Testament believer, you can now

come before God's throne where there is grace and mercy when you need it (see [Hebrews 4:16](#)).

Exploration

Mercy—[2 Samuel 24:14](#); [Matthew 18:33](#); [1 Corinthians 7:25](#); [James 5:11](#).

Laws for War

When you go to war against your enemies and you see horses and chariots and an army that is bigger than yours, don't be afraid of them. The Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, will be with you. ²The priest must come and speak to the army before you go into battle. ³He will say, "Listen, Israel! Today you are going into battle against your enemies. Don't lose your courage or be afraid. Don't panic or be frightened, ⁴because the Lord your God goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies and to save you."

⁵The officers should say to the army, "Has anyone built a new house but not given it to God? He may go home, because he might die in battle and someone else would get to give his house to God. ⁶Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? He may go home, because he might die in battle and someone else would enjoy his vineyard. ⁷Is any man engaged to a woman and not yet married to her? He may go home, because he might die in battle and someone else would marry her." ⁸Then the officers should also say, "Is anyone here afraid? Has anyone lost his courage? He may go home so that he will not cause others to lose their courage, too." ⁹When the officers finish speaking to the army, they should appoint commanders to lead it.

¹⁰When you march up to attack a city, first make them an offer of peace. ¹¹If they accept your offer and open their gates to you, all the people of that city will become your slaves and work for you. ¹²But if they do not make peace with you and

fight you in battle, you should surround that city. ¹³The Lord your God will give it to you. Then kill all the men with your swords, ¹⁴and you may take everything else in the city for yourselves. Take the women, children, and animals, and you may use these things the Lord your God gives you from your enemies. ¹⁵Do this to all the cities that are far away, that do not belong to the nations nearby.

¹⁶But leave nothing alive in the cities of the land the Lord your God is giving you. ¹⁷Completely destroy these people: the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded. ¹⁸Otherwise, they will teach you what they do for their gods, and if you do these hateful things, you will sin against the Lord your God.

¹⁹If you surround and attack a city for a long time, trying to capture it, do not destroy its trees with an ax. You can eat the fruit from the trees, but do not cut them down. These trees are not the enemy, so don't make war against them. ²⁰But you may cut down trees that you know are not fruit trees and use them to build devices to attack the city walls, until the city is captured.

A Person Found Murdered

Suppose someone is found murdered, lying in a field in the land the Lord your God is giving you as your own, and no one knows who killed the person.² Your older leaders and judges should go to where the body was found, and they should measure how far it is to the nearby cities.³ The older leaders of the city nearest the body must take a young cow that has never worked or worn a yoke,⁴ and they must lead her down to a valley that has never been plowed or planted, with a stream flowing through it. There they must break the young cow's neck.⁵ The priests, the sons of Levi, should come forward, because they have been chosen by the Lord your God to serve him and to give blessings in the Lord's name. They are the ones who decide cases of quarreling and attacks.⁶ Then all the older leaders of the city nearest the murdered person should wash their hands over the young cow whose neck was broken in the valley.⁷ They should declare: "We did not kill this person, and we did not see it happen."⁸ Lord, remove this sin from your people Israel, whom you have saved. Don't blame your people, the Israelites, for the murder of this innocent person." And so the murder will be paid for.⁹ Then you will have removed from yourselves the guilt of murdering an innocent person, because you will be doing what the Lord says is right.

Captive Women as Wives

¹⁰When you go to war against your enemies, the Lord will help you defeat them so that you will take them captive. ¹¹If you see a beautiful woman among the captives and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife. ¹²Bring her into your home, where she must shave her head and cut her nails ¹³and change the clothes she was wearing when you captured her. After she has lived in your house and cried for her parents for a month, you may marry her. You will be her husband, and she will be your wife. ¹⁴But if you are not pleased with her, you must let her go anywhere she wants. You must not sell her for money or make her a slave, because you have taken away her honor.

The Oldest Son

¹⁵A man might have two wives, one he loves and one he doesn't. Both wives might have sons by him. If the older son belongs to the wife he does not love, ¹⁶when that man wills his property to his sons he must not give the son of the wife he loves what belongs to the older son, the son of the wife he does not love. ¹⁷He must agree to give the older son two shares of everything he owns, even though the older son is from the wife he does not love. That son was the first to prove his father could have children, so he has the rights that belong to the older son.

Sons Who Refuse to Obey

¹⁸If someone has a son who is stubborn, who turns against his father and mother and doesn't obey them or listen when they correct him, ¹⁹his parents must take him to the older leaders at

the city gate.²⁰They will say to the leaders, “Our son is stubborn and turns against us. He will not obey us. He eats too much, and he is always drunk.”²¹Then all the men in his town must throw stones at him until he dies. Get rid of the evil among you, because then all the people of Israel will hear about this and be afraid.

Other Laws

²²If someone is guilty of a sin worthy of death, he must be put to death and his body displayed on a tree.²³But don’t leave his body hanging on the tree overnight; be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone whose body is displayed on a tree is cursed by God. You must not ruin the land the Lord your God is giving you as your own.

Christ Through the Bible

Christ Became a Curse for Us

Through the eyes of Scripture we see what others missed but what Jesus saw. “He cancelled the debt, which listed all the rules we failed to follow. He took away the record with its rules and nailed it to the cross”([Colossians 2:14](#)).

Between his hand and the wood there was a list. A long list. A list of our mistakes: our lusts and lies and greedy moments and prodigal years. A list of our sins.

Dangling from the cross is an itemized catalog of your sins. The bad decisions from last year. The bad

attitudes from last week. There, in broad daylight for all of heaven to see, is a list of your mistakes.

God ... penned a list of our faults. The list God has made, however, cannot be read. The words can't be deciphered. The mistakes are covered. The sins are hidden. Those at the top are hidden by his hand; those down the list are covered by his blood...

This is why he refused to close his fist. He saw the list! What kept him from resisting? This warrant, this tabulation of your failures. He knew the price of those sins was death. He knew the source of those sins was you, and since he couldn't bear the thought of eternity without you, he chose the nails.

The hand squeezing the handle was not a Roman infantryman.

The force behind the hammer was not an angry mob.

The verdict behind the death was not decided by jealous Jews.

Jesus himself chose the nails. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 21:1–22:30

Situation

Moses gave the people laws on incest, murder, adultery, fornication, inheritance, discipline of children, and social responsibilities.

Observation

God gave us principles that we should honor. The ones here regarding marriage related to premarital sexual purity.

Inspiration

The Bible is the story of two gardens. Eden and Gethsemane. In the first, Adam took a fall. In the second, Jesus took a stand. In the first, God sought Adam. In the second, Jesus sought God. In Eden, Adam hid from God. In Gethsemane, Jesus emerged from the tomb. In Eden, Satan led Adam to a tree that led to his death. From Gethsemane, Jesus went to a tree that led to our life.

Satan was never invited to the Garden of Eden. He did not belong there. He was not wanted there. He slithered as a snake into God's garden and infected God's children.

That's all he's done since. Hasn't he entered a few of your holy gardens?

We even call it "holy matrimony." The word "altar" implies the presence of God. Marriage was

God's idea. The first wedding occurred in the first garden. But that doesn't make any difference to the devil. He snakes his way into every home with one desire—to destroy.

Sexual intimacy is God's gift. Virginity is a rose plucked from the garden, given by God and intended to be shared with your forever partner. Satan mocks such loyalty. He is the father of incest and abuse. He is the author of immorality. He is the pimp of the garden.

We give sacred oaths and make solemn promises. We vow to be a good parent, a true companion, and a loyal friend. But Satan's head turns when he hears a pledge. "We'll see about that," the father of lies smirks.

In God's eyes, a child is holy. The innocence of youth, the freshness of childhood, the joy of an infant. There was never a moment when Jesus turned away a child. But there has never been a child Satan didn't despise. He was killing babies to kill Moses. He was destroying infants to destroy the Christ. His tactics haven't changed. Millions of babies are still aborted; thousands of children are abused. Jesus said of Satan, "He was a murderer from the beginning" ([John 8:44](#)).

Is there a realm untouched by Satan? Is there a place unscarred by his sword? The church? The government? Children? Purity? Promises?

And you! And me! We are called to be holy. We were made to be holy. Set apart for his good work. We are the prized flowers of the garden. But is there

one person who has not felt the foot of the intruder?

What Satan did in Eden, he does today. For that reason we need to know that what Jesus did in Gethsemane, he does today. He reclaims the holy. He will not long sit silent while Satan strip-mines the sacred. At the right moment Jesus stands and speaks. And when he stands and speaks, Satan stumbles and is silent.

(From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

Are there areas in your life that Satan has taken hold of that need to be reclaimed? Don't let anything or anyone stand in the way of your leading a holy life. If you feel like you're in bondage, get help. See a pastor, friend, or counselor. Let them hold you accountable in the pursuit of holiness.

Exploration

Shun Evil—[Psalm 34:14–16](#); [97:10](#); [Romans 12:9](#); [Colossians 3:5](#); [1 Peter 3:11](#).

If you see your fellow Israelite's ox or sheep wandering away, don't ignore it. Take it back to its owner. ²If the owner does not live close to you, or if you do not know who the owner is, take the animal home with you. Keep it until the owner comes looking for it; then give it back. ³Do the same thing if you find a donkey or coat or anything someone lost. Don't just ignore it.

⁴If you see your fellow Israelite's donkey or ox fallen on the road, don't ignore it. Help the owner get it up.

⁵A woman must not wear men's clothes, and a man must not wear women's clothes. The Lord your God hates anyone who does that.

⁶If you find a bird's nest by the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and the mother bird is sitting on the young birds or eggs, do not take the mother bird with the young birds. ⁷You may take the young birds, but you must let the mother bird go free. Then things will go well for you, and you will live a long time.

⁸When you build a new house, build a low wall around the edge of the [roof](#) so you will not be guilty if someone falls off the roof.

⁹Don't plant two different kinds of seeds in your vineyard. Otherwise, both crops will be ruined.

¹⁰Don't plow with an ox and a donkey tied together.

¹¹Don't wear clothes made of wool and linen woven together.

¹²Tie several pieces of thread together; then put these tassels on the four corners of your coat.

Marriage Laws

¹³If a man marries a girl and has sexual relations with her but then decides he does not like her, ¹⁴he might talk badly about her and give her a bad name. He might say, "I married this woman, but when I had sexual relations with her, I did not find that she was a virgin." ¹⁵Then the girl's parents must bring proof that she was a virgin to the older leaders at the city gate. ¹⁶The girl's father will say to the leaders, "I gave my daughter to this man to be his wife, but now he does not want her. ¹⁷This man has told lies about my daughter. He has said, 'I did not find your daughter to be a virgin,' but here is the proof that my daughter was a virgin." Then her parents are to show the sheet to the city leaders, ¹⁸and the leaders must take the man and punish him. ¹⁹They must make him pay about two and one-half pounds of silver to the girl's father, because the man has given an Israelite virgin a bad name. The girl will continue to be the man's wife, and he may not divorce her as long as he lives.

²⁰But if the things the husband said about his wife are true, and there is no proof that she was a virgin, ²¹the girl must be brought to the door of her father's house. Then the men of the town must put her to death by throwing stones at her. She has done a disgraceful thing in Israel by having sexual relations before she was married. You must get rid of the evil among you.

²²If a man is found having sexual relations with another man's wife, both the woman and the man who had sexual relations with her must die. Get rid of this evil from Israel.

²³If a man meets a virgin in a city and has sexual relations with her, but she is engaged to another man, ²⁴you must take both of them to the city gate and put them to death by throwing stones at them. Kill the girl, because she was in a city

and did not scream for help. And kill the man for having sexual relations with another man's wife. You must get rid of the evil among you.

²⁵But if a man meets an engaged girl out in the country and forces her to have sexual relations with him, only the man who had sexual relations with her must be put to death. ²⁶Don't do anything to the girl, because she has not done a sin worthy of death. This is like the person who attacks and murders a neighbor; ²⁷the man found the engaged girl in the country and she screamed, but no one was there to save her.

²⁸If a man meets a virgin who is not engaged to be married and forces her to have sexual relations with him and people find out about it, ²⁹the man must pay the girl's father about one and one-fourth pounds of silver. He must also marry the girl, because he has dishonored her, and he may never divorce her for as long as he lives.

³⁰A man must not marry his father's wife; he must not dishonor his father in this way.

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 23:1–25:19

Situation

God continued to give laws to his people. He wanted them to treat each other with respect.

Observation

God revealed his concern for families. For God's people, family responsibilities should be a higher priority than civil responsibilities.

Inspiration

I appeal to the young people: It is a very beautiful gift of God for a young man to love a young woman, and a young woman to love a young man, but you must love each other with a clean heart. The greatest gift you can give to each other on the day you get married is a pure heart—a virgin body, a virgin heart. And you need to pray for this purity.

A few weeks ago, two young people came to our house in Calcutta, and they offered me lots of money to feed our people (because we cook every day for 9,000 people). We asked them, "Where did you get this money?" And they said, "We were married two days ago. But we decided beforehand that we would not buy wedding clothes or have a wedding feast—we would give you the money instead." And again we asked, "But why are you doing this?" They answered, "We loved each other so much that we wanted to give something special to each other and begin our married life with a deep demonstration of

our love for each other.” It was wonderful to see the true love and respect these two young people had for each other.

And I repeat: Young people, especially nowadays when “love” is shown so easily in the streets, don’t belittle the gift of God. Give the love of a clean heart to each other, and keep yourselves for each other so that God may always be with you; for a clean heart will always see God. He loves a heart that is totally given to him. And my prayer is that you may grow in holiness through this love for each other. (From *Who Is for Life?* by Mother Theresa)

Application

If you are married, schedule regular time to spend with your spouse. Communicate often. Don’t let even good things take a higher priority. If you are not married, look for ways to serve others in your immediate family or your church family. Ask God to help you have a pure heart.

Exploration

Marriage—[Genesis 2:18–25](#); [24](#); [Song of Solomon 4:15](#); [5:2–8](#); [Hebrews 13:4](#).

The Lord's People

No man who has had part of his sex organ cut off may come into the meeting to worship the Lord.

²No one born to parents who were forbidden by law to marry may come into the meeting to worship the Lord. The descendants for ten generations may not come in either.

³No Ammonite or Moabite may come into the meeting to worship the Lord, and none of their descendants for ten generations may come in. ⁴This is because the Ammonites and Moabites did not give you bread and water when you came out of Egypt. And they hired Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor in Northwest Mesopotamia, to put a curse on you. ⁵But the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam. He turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you. ⁶Don't wish for their peace or success as long as you live.

⁷Don't hate Edomites; they are your close relatives. Don't hate Egyptians, because you were foreigners in their country. ⁸The great-grandchildren of these two peoples may come into the meeting to worship the Lord.

Keeping the Camp Clean

⁹When you are camped in time of war, keep away from unclean things. ¹⁰If a man becomes unclean during the night, he must

go outside the camp and not come back. ¹¹But when evening comes, he must wash himself, and at sunset he may come back into the camp.

¹²Choose a place outside the camp where people may go to relieve themselves. ¹³Carry a tent peg with you, and when you relieve yourself, dig a hole and cover up your dung. ¹⁴The Lord your God moves around through your camp to protect you and to defeat your enemies for you, so the camp must be holy. He must not see anything unclean among you so that he will not leave you.

Other Laws

¹⁵If an escaped slave comes to you, do not hand over the slave to his master. ¹⁶Let the slave live with you anywhere he likes, in any town he chooses. Do not mistreat him.

¹⁷No Israelite man or woman must ever become a temple prostitute. ¹⁸Do not bring a male or female prostitute's pay to the Temple of the Lord your God to pay what you have promised to the Lord, because the Lord your God hates prostitution.

¹⁹If you loan your fellow Israelites money or food or anything else, don't make them pay back more than you loaned them. ²⁰You may charge foreigners, but not fellow Israelites. Then the Lord your God will bless everything you do in the land you are entering to take as your own.

²¹If you make a promise to give something to the Lord your God, do not be slow to pay it, because the Lord your God demands it from you. Do not be guilty of sin. ²²But if you do not make the promise, you will not be guilty. ²³You must do

whatever you say you will do, because you chose to make the promise to the Lord your God.

²⁴If you go into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat as many grapes as you wish, but do not put any grapes into your basket. ²⁵If you go into your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick grain with your hands, but you must not cut down your neighbor's grain with your sickle.

A man might marry a woman but later decide she doesn't please him because he has found something bad about her. He writes out divorce papers for her, gives them to her, and sends her away from his house.² After she leaves his house, she goes and marries another man,³ but her second husband does not like her either. So he writes out divorce papers for her, gives them to her, and sends her away from his house. Or the second husband might die.⁴ In either case, her first husband who divorced her must not marry her again, because she has become unclean. The Lord would hate this. Don't bring this sin into the land the Lord your God is giving you as your own.

⁵A man who has just married must not be sent to war or be given any other duty. He should be free to stay home for a year to make his new wife happy.

⁶If someone owes you something, do not take his two stones for grinding grain—not even the upper one—in place of what he owes, because this is how the person makes a living.

⁷If someone kidnaps a fellow Israelite, either to make him a slave or sell him, the kidnapper must be killed. You must get rid of the evil among you.

⁸Be careful when someone has a skin disease. Do exactly what the priests, the Levites, teach you, being careful to do what I have commanded them.⁹ Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on your way out of Egypt.

¹⁰When you make a loan to your neighbors, don't go into their homes to get something in place of it.¹¹ Stay outside and let them go in and get what they promised you.¹² If a poor person gives you a coat to show he will pay the loan back, don't keep it overnight.¹³ Give the coat back at sunset, because your neighbor needs that coat to sleep in, and he will be

grateful to you. And the Lord your God will see that you have done a good thing.

¹⁴Don't cheat hired servants who are poor and needy, whether they are fellow Israelites or foreigners living in one of your towns. ¹⁵Pay them each day before sunset, because they are poor and need the money. Otherwise, they may complain to the Lord about you, and you will be guilty of sin.

¹⁶Parents must not be put to death if their children do wrong, and children must not be put to death if their parents do wrong. Each person must die for his own sin.

¹⁷Do not be unfair to a foreigner or an orphan. Don't take a widow's coat to make sure she pays you back. ¹⁸Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and the Lord your God saved you from there. That is why I am commanding you to do this.

¹⁹When you are gathering your harvest in the field and leave behind a bundle of grain, don't go back and get it. Leave it there for foreigners, orphans, and widows so that the Lord your God can bless everything you do. ²⁰When you beat your olive trees to knock the olives off, don't beat the trees a second time. Leave what is left for foreigners, orphans, and widows. ²¹When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, don't pick the vines a second time. Leave what is left for foreigners, orphans, and widows. ²²Remember that you were slaves in Egypt; that is why I am commanding you to do this.

If two people have an argument and go to court, the judges will decide the case. They will declare one person right and the other guilty. ²If the guilty person has to be punished with a beating, the judge will make that person lie down and be beaten in front of him. The number of lashes should match the crime. ³But don't hit a person more than forty times, because more than that would disgrace him before others.

⁴When an ox is working in the grain, do not cover its mouth to keep it from eating.

⁵If two brothers are living together, and one of them dies without having a son, his widow must not marry someone outside her husband's family. Her husband's brother must marry her, which is his duty to her as a brother-in-law. ⁶The first son she has counts as the son of the dead brother so that his name will not be forgotten in Israel.

⁷But if a man does not want to marry his brother's widow, she should go to the older leaders at the town gate. She should say, "My brother-in-law will not carry on his brother's name in Israel. He refuses to do his duty for me."

⁸Then the older leaders of the town must call for the man and talk to him. But if he is stubborn and says, "I don't want to marry her," ⁹the woman must go up to him in front of the leaders. She must take off one of his sandals and spit in his face and say, "This is for the man who won't continue his brother's family!" ¹⁰Then that man's family shall be known in Israel as the Family of the Unsandaled.

¹¹If two men are fighting and one man's wife comes to save her husband from his attacker, grabbing the attacker by his sex organs, ¹²you must cut off her hand. Show her no mercy.

¹³Don't carry two sets of weights with you, one heavy and

one light. ¹⁴Don't have two different sets of measures in your house, one large and one small. ¹⁵You must have true and honest weights and measures so that you will live a long time in the land the Lord your God is giving you. ¹⁶The Lord your God hates anyone who is dishonest and uses dishonest measures.

¹⁷Remember what the Amalekites did to you when you came out of Egypt. ¹⁸When you were tired and worn out, they met you on the road and attacked all those lagging behind. They were not afraid of God. ¹⁹When the Lord your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you as your own, you shall destroy any memory of the Amalekites on the earth. Do not forget!

The First Harvest

When you go into the land the Lord your God is giving you as your own, to take it over and live in it, ²you must take some of the first harvest of crops that grow from the land the Lord your God is giving you. Put the food in a basket and go to the place where the Lord your God will choose to be worshiped. ³Say to the priest on duty at that time, "Today I declare before the Lord your God that I have come into the land the Lord promised our ancestors that he would give us." ⁴The priest will take your basket and set it down in front of the altar of the Lord your God. ⁵Then you shall announce before the Lord your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt with only a few people, but they became a great, powerful, and large nation there. ⁶But the Egyptians were cruel to us, making us suffer and work very hard. ⁷So we prayed to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and he heard us. When he saw our trouble, hard work, and suffering, ⁸the Lord brought us out of Egypt with his great power and strength, using great terrors, signs, and miracles. ⁹Then he brought us to this place and gave us this fertile land. ¹⁰Now I bring part of the first harvest from this land that you, Lord, have given me." Place the basket before the Lord your God and bow down before him. ¹¹Then you and the Levites and foreigners among you should rejoice, because the Lord your God has given good things to you and your family.

¹²Bring a tenth of all your harvest the third year (the year to give a tenth of your harvest). Give it to the Levites, foreigners,

orphans, and widows so that they may eat in your towns and be full. ¹³Then say to the Lord your God, “I have taken out of my house the part of my harvest that belongs to God, and I have given it to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows. I have done everything you commanded me; I have not broken your commands, and I have not forgotten any of them. ¹⁴I have not eaten any of the holy part while I was in sorrow. I have not removed any of it while I was unclean, and I have not offered it for dead people. I have obeyed you, the Lord my God, and have done everything you commanded me. ¹⁵So look down from heaven, your holy home. Bless your people Israel and bless the land you have given us, which you promised to our ancestors—a fertile land.”

Obey the Lord's Commands

¹⁶Today the Lord your God commands you to obey all these rules and laws; be careful to obey them with your whole being. ¹⁷Today you have said that the Lord is your God, and you have promised to do what he wants you to do—to keep his rules, commands, and laws. You have said you will obey him. ¹⁸And today the Lord has said that you are his very own people, as he has promised you. But you must obey his commands. ¹⁹He will make you greater than all the other nations he made. He will give you praise, fame, and honor, and you will be a holy people to the Lord your God, as he has said.

Life Lessons

[Deuteronomy 26:1–19](#)

Situation

God reminded the Israelites how he had faithfully provided for all their needs. They were also instructed to give the first portion of each harvest to God, and he would bless them in the land.

Observation

God's Word reminds us to honor him by giving back a portion of what he has provided for us.

Inspiration

According to the dictionary, the original definition of tithe was one-tenth of the annual produce of one's land or of one's annual income. According to the Bible, that is merely the starting place of giving to the Lord. The Malachi passage refers to "tithes and offerings." One might say, then, that there is no offering until the tithe has been paid; it is the expected, minimum amount.

So a lot of people who practice this critical spiritual law give more than 10 percent of their income to the Lord's work. It's all His anyhow, they recognize... . Therefore, many people ignore any 10 percent cutoff and give out of the abundance of their provision. I know one New Jersey florist who had been thoroughly blessed by the Lord as he exercised the principles we are exploring in this book, and he frequently gave 90 percent of his annual income to the service of God. And the prosperity simply mounted. He was not able to outgive the Lord. That law is built into the kingdom. It never changes.

(From *The Secret Kingdom* by Pat Robertson)

Application

Do you give money to God's work regularly? Is there money set apart in your budget so that he gets the first cut from your paycheck? Rework your budget or create one that will allow you to give to God's work before anything else. God deserves our first fruits, not whatever is left at the end.

Exploration

Giving—[Proverbs 3:9; 11:24–25; Luke 6:38; 1 John 3:17–18.](#)

God lives with the self-assigned task of providing for his own, and so far, you've got to admit, he's done pretty well at the job. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

The Law Written on Stones

Then Moses, along with the older leaders of Israel, commanded the people, saying, “Keep all the commands I have given you today. ²Soon you will cross the Jordan River to go into the land the Lord your God is giving you. On that day set up some large stones and cover them with plaster. ³When you cross over, write all the words of these teachings on them. Then you may enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, a fertile land, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised. ⁴After you have crossed the Jordan River, set up these stones on Mount Ebal, as I command you today, and cover them with plaster. ⁵Build an altar of stones there to the Lord your God, but don’t use any iron tool to cut the stones; ⁶build the altar of the Lord your God with stones from the field. Offer burnt offerings on it to the Lord your God, ⁷and offer fellowship offerings there, and eat them and rejoice before the Lord your God. ⁸Then write clearly all the words of these teachings on the stones.”

Curses of the Law

⁹Then Moses and the Levites who were priests spoke to all Israel and said, “Be quiet, Israel. Listen! Today you have become the people of the Lord your God. ¹⁰Obey the Lord your God, and keep his commands and laws that I give you today.”

¹¹That day Moses also gave the people this command:

¹²When you cross the Jordan River, these tribes must stand

on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. ¹³And these tribes must stand on Mount Ebal to announce the curses: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

¹⁴The Levites will say to all the people of Israel in a loud voice:

¹⁵“Anyone will be cursed who makes an idol or statue and secretly sets it up, because the Lord hates the idols people make.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

¹⁶“Anyone will be cursed who dishonors his father or mother.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

¹⁷“Anyone will be cursed who moves the stone that marks a neighbor’s border.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

¹⁸“Anyone will be cursed who sends a blind person down the wrong road.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

¹⁹“Anyone will be cursed who is unfair to foreigners, orphans, or widows.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

²⁰“A man will be cursed who has sexual relations with his father’s wife, because it is a dishonor to his father.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

²¹“Anyone will be cursed who has sexual relations with an animal.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

²²“A man will be cursed who has sexual relations with his sister, whether she is his father’s daughter or his mother’s

daughter.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

²³“A man will be cursed who has sexual relations with his mother-in-law.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

²⁴“Anyone will be cursed who kills a neighbor secretly.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

²⁵“Anyone will be cursed who takes money to murder an innocent person.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

²⁶“Anyone will be cursed who does not agree with the words of these teachings and does not obey them.”

Then all the people will say, “Amen!”

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 27:1–28:68

Situation

The altar at Mount Ebal was to serve as a reminder of the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience.

Observation

Actions have consequences. Because the Israelites neglected to obey God, they fell into the hands of Assyria and Babylon.

Inspiration

The *partially surrendered life* may be Christian in spirit, but it is secular in practice. It may save one's soul, but it hardly leaves a noticeable ripple on one's lifestyle, life view, or the world and culture in which we live. Of what earthly value is Christianity if it leaves no indelible mark on one's lifestyle? It is of no value (in this life) to be Christian if you do not think Christianity—if you do not have a Christian life view.

We live in a broken generation. One doesn't need to be a rocket scientist to make this observation, but the obvious question, of course, is *Why?* Many think the answer is confusing, but it is not. It is found throughout the record of Scripture—it is *disobedience*. It is to lead a partially surrendered, or worse, an unsundered, unyielded life. How can we learn to be obedient? We must learn how to surrender, to submit to Christ in the details of daily life.

Over the past few decades, many of us started off on the wrong foot with Jesus Christ. It is the proposition that Jesus can be *Savior* without being *Lord*. It is the idea that one can *add* Christ, but not *subtract* sin. Many of us have merely added Christ to our lives as another interest in an already busy and otherwise overcrowded schedule. This sort of thinking has watered down the meaning of a personal relationship with Christ.

The problem is that we often seek the God we want, but do not know the God who is. Many men and women I have met express complete, utter frustration about leading this kind of defeated (sometimes counterfeit), partially surrendered life—the life of a cultural Christian.

How did this come about? The *low demands* of cultural Christianity have led to a *low response*—it has become the norm. But the Bible calls men and women to a *turning point*, to a radical, life-transforming change. This turning point is no mean challenge, but a full surrender to history's most ideal, most radical leader: the Lord Jesus Christ.

(From *Walking with Christ in the Details of Life* by Patrick Morley)

Application

God wants your life marked by obedience and integrity. How do you justify avoiding God? Because of money? Because some Christian has done you wrong? Because Sundays are for sports? Evaluate, adjust, and begin a fresh walk with God.

Exploration

Warnings—[Numbers 14:11–12](#); [20:12](#); [2 Kings 17:11–15](#); [Romans 11:19–21](#); [Hebrews 2:1–3](#); [10:37–38](#).

Blessings for Obeying

You must completely obey the Lord your God, and you must carefully follow all his commands I am giving you today. Then the Lord your God will make you greater than any other nation on earth. ²Obey the Lord your God so that all these blessings will come and stay with you:

³You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.

⁴Your children will be blessed, as well as your crops; your herds will be blessed with calves and your flocks with lambs.

⁵Your basket and your kitchen will be blessed.

⁶You will be blessed when you come in and when you go out.

⁷The Lord will help you defeat the enemies that come to fight you. They will attack you from one direction, but they will run from you in seven directions.

⁸The Lord your God will bless you with full barns, and he will bless everything you do. He will bless the land he is giving you.

⁹The Lord will make you his holy people, as he promised. But you must obey his commands and do what he wants you to do. ¹⁰Then everyone on earth will see that you are the Lord's people, and they will be afraid of you. ¹¹The Lord will make you rich: You will have many children, your animals will have many young, and your land will give good crops. It is the land that the Lord promised your ancestors he would give to you.

¹²The Lord will open up his heavenly storehouse so that the skies send rain on your land at the right time, and he will bless everything you do. You will lend to other nations, but you will not need to borrow from them. ¹³The Lord will make you like the head and not like the tail; you will be on top and not on bottom. But you must obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today, being careful to keep them. ¹⁴Do not disobey anything I command you today. Do exactly as I command, and do not follow other gods or serve them.

Curses for Disobeying

¹⁵But if you do not obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands and laws I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and stay:

¹⁶You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country.

¹⁷Your basket and your kitchen will be cursed.

¹⁸Your children will be cursed, as well as your crops; the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks will be cursed.

¹⁹You will be cursed when you go in and when you go out.

²⁰The Lord will send you curses, confusion, and punishment in everything you do. You will be destroyed and suddenly ruined because you did wrong when you left him.

²¹The Lord will give you terrible diseases and destroy you from the land you are going to take. ²²The Lord will punish you with disease, fever, swelling, heat, lack of rain, plant diseases, and mildew until you die. ²³The [sky above will be like bronze](#), and the ground below will be like iron. ²⁴The Lord will turn the rain

into dust and sand, which will fall from the skies until you are destroyed.

²⁵The Lord will help your enemies defeat you. You will attack them from one direction, but you will run from them in seven directions. And you will become a thing of horror among all the kingdoms on earth. ²⁶Your dead bodies will be food for all the birds and wild animals, and there will be no one to scare them away. ²⁷The Lord will punish you with boils like those the Egyptians had. You will have bad growths, sores, and itches that can't be cured. ²⁸The Lord will give you madness, blindness, and a confused mind. ²⁹You will have to feel around in the daylight like a blind person. You will fail in everything you do. People will hurt you and steal from you every day, and no one will save you.

³⁰You will be engaged to a woman, but another man will force her to have sexual relations with him. You will build a house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will not get its grapes. ³¹Your ox will be killed before your eyes, but you will not eat any of it. Your donkey will be taken away from you, and it will not be brought back. Your sheep will be given to your enemies, and no one will save you. ³²Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation, and you will grow tired looking for them every day, but there will be nothing you can do. ³³People you don't know will eat the crops your land and hard work have produced. You will be mistreated and abused all your life. ³⁴The things you see will cause you to go mad. ³⁵The Lord will give you sore boils on your knees and legs that cannot be cured, and they will go from the soles of your feet to the tops of your heads.

³⁶The Lord will send you and your king away to a nation

neither you nor your ancestors know, where you will serve other gods made of wood and stone.³⁷ You will become a hated thing to the nations where the Lord sends you; they will laugh at you and make fun of you.

³⁸You will plant much seed in your field, but your harvest will be small, because locusts will eat the crop.³⁹ You will plant vineyards and work hard in them, but you will not pick the grapes or drink the wine, because the worms will eat them.⁴⁰ You will have olive trees in all your land, but you will not get any olive oil, because the olives will drop off the trees.⁴¹ You will have sons and daughters, but you will not be able to keep them, because they will be taken captive.⁴² Locusts will destroy all your trees and crops.

⁴³The foreigners who live among you will get stronger and stronger, and you will get weaker and weaker.⁴⁴ Foreigners will lend money to you, but you will not be able to lend to them. They will be like the head, and you will be like the tail.

⁴⁵All these curses will come upon you. They will chase you and catch you and destroy you, because you did not obey the Lord your God and keep the commands and laws he gave you.⁴⁶ The curses will be signs and miracles to you and your descendants forever.⁴⁷ You had plenty of everything, but you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a pure heart,⁴⁸ so you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you. You will be hungry, thirsty, naked, and poor, and the Lord will put a load on you until he has destroyed you.

The Curse of an Enemy Nation

⁴⁹The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from

the end of the world, and it will swoop down like an eagle. You won't understand their language,⁵⁰ and they will look mean. They will not respect old people or feel sorry for the young.⁵¹ They will eat the calves from your herds and the harvest of your field, and you will be destroyed. They will not leave you any grain, new wine or oil, or any calves from your herds or lambs from your flocks. You will be ruined.⁵² That nation will surround and attack all your cities. You trust in your high, strong walls, but they will fall down. That nation will surround all your cities everywhere in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

⁵³Your enemy will surround you. Those people will make you starve so that you will eat your own babies, the bodies of the sons and daughters the Lord your God gave you.⁵⁴ Even the most gentle and kind man among you will become cruel to his brother, his wife whom he loves, and his children who are still alive.⁵⁵ He will not even give them any of the flesh of his children he is eating, because it will be all he has left. Your enemy will surround you and make you starve in all your cities.⁵⁶ The most gentle and kind woman among you, so gentle and kind she would hardly even walk on the ground, will be cruel to her husband whom she loves and to her son and daughter.⁵⁷ She will give birth to a baby, but she will plan to eat the baby and what comes after the birth itself. She will eat them secretly while the enemy surrounds the city. Those people will make you starve in all your cities.

⁵⁸Be careful to obey everything in these teachings that are written in this book. You must respect the glorious and wonderful name of the Lord your God,⁵⁹ or the Lord will give terrible diseases to you and your descendants. You will have

long and serious diseases, and long and miserable sicknesses. ⁶⁰He will give you all the diseases of Egypt that you dread, and the diseases will stay with you. ⁶¹The Lord will also give you every disease and sickness not written in this Book of the Teachings, until you are destroyed. ⁶²You people may have outnumbered the stars, but only a few of you will be left, because you did not obey the Lord your God. ⁶³Just as the Lord was once happy with you and gave you good things and made you grow in number, so then the Lord will be happy to ruin and destroy you, and you will be removed from the land you are entering to take as your own.

⁶⁴Then the Lord will scatter you among the nations—from one end of the earth to the other. There you will serve other gods of wood and stone, gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known. ⁶⁵You will have no rest among those nations and no place that is yours. The Lord will make your mind worried, your sight weak, and your soul sad. ⁶⁶You will live with danger and be afraid night and day. You will not be sure that you will live. ⁶⁷In the morning you will say, “I wish it were evening,” and in the evening you will say, “I wish it were morning.” Terror will be in your heart, and the things you have seen will scare you. ⁶⁸The Lord will send you back to Egypt in ships, even though I, Moses, said you would never go back to Egypt. And there you will try to sell yourselves as slaves to your enemies, but no one will buy you.

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 29:1–30:20

Situation

Moses summarized God's guidance and provision for the Israelites during the previous forty years. The adults who originally escaped from Egypt had all died in the desert, but God's agreement included their descendants. Many times throughout the Old Testament God renewed his agreement with them. Though all Israelites were invited to take part in God's agreement, only those who chose to obey the agreement received his blessings.

Observation

To choose against God brings emptiness and pain—death. To choose God brings blessings and fulfillment—life.

Inspiration

Do you remember when you said “yes” to Jesus? How long ago was it? A few months, maybe years? I said “yes” to the Lord in November 1964 when I was a teenager. But I also said “yes” to Him just the other day.

After a row with Ken, I escaped to the shopping mall with a friend to get my mind off the quarrel. While meandering past a sales rack of blouses, I could no longer contain my self-pity. I began sobbing right next to a couple of mannequins. I couldn't hide my face in a tissue, and my wheelchair was too big for me to escape behind several clothes racks. All I could

do was sit there, cry, and stare at the mannequins with the plastic smiles.

While wiping my eyes with the backside of my hand splint, I knew what I had to do. In between sobs, I said out loud what I've said so many times before, "Yes, Jesus, I choose You. I don't choose self-pity or resentment. I say 'yes' to You!"

Even though my face was still wet, my heart filled with peace. Nothing about my husband had changed. Shoppers on the other side of the store still picked through the racks ... teenagers still ambled by, giggling, and eating popcorn ... but *everything* was different because of my peaceful heart. Because I said "yes" to Jesus. (From *Diamonds in the Dust* by Joni Eareckson Tada)

Application

Have you made a commitment to God? He offers a relationship open to all people. Today, accept Jesus Christ as Lord of your life, then you can experience his promises.

Exploration

Commitment to God—[Joshua 24:15](#); [1 Kings 18:21](#); [2 Kings 23:3](#); [Matthew 19:27](#); [Mark 12:30](#); [Luke 9:23–24](#); [John 6:67–68](#); [Romans 12:1](#); [Philippians 3:8–9](#).

The Agreement in Moab

The Lord commanded Moses to make an agreement with the Israelites in Moab in addition to the agreement he had made with them at Mount Sinai. These are the words of that agreement.

²Moses called all the Israelites together and said to them:

You have seen everything the Lord did before your own eyes to the king of Egypt and to the king's leaders and to the whole country. ³With your own eyes you saw the great troubles, signs, and miracles. ⁴But to this day the Lord has not given you a mind that understands; you don't really understand what you see with your eyes or hear with your ears. ⁵I led you through the desert for forty years, and during that time neither your clothes nor sandals wore out. ⁶You ate no bread and drank no wine or beer. This was so you would understand that I am the Lord your God.

⁷When you came to this place, Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan came out to fight us, but we defeated them. ⁸We captured their land and gave it to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh to be their own.

⁹You must carefully obey everything in this agreement so that you will succeed in everything you do. ¹⁰Today you are all standing here before the Lord your God—your leaders and important men, your older leaders, officers, and all the other men of Israel, ¹¹your wives and children and the foreigners who

live among you, who chop your wood and carry your water.

¹²You are all here to enter into an agreement and a promise with the Lord your God, an agreement the Lord your God is making with you today. ¹³This will make you today his own people. He will be your God, as he told you and as he promised your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ¹⁴But I am not just making this agreement and its promises with you ¹⁵who are standing here before the Lord your God today, but also with those who are not here today.

¹⁶You know how we lived in Egypt and how we passed through the countries when we came here. ¹⁷You saw their hateful idols made of wood, stone, silver, and gold. ¹⁸Make sure no man, woman, family group, or tribe among you leaves the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. They would be to you like a plant that grows bitter, poisonous fruit.

¹⁹These are the kind of people who hear these curses but bless themselves, thinking, “We will be safe even though we continue doing what we want to do.” Those people may destroy all of your land, both wet and dry. ²⁰The Lord will not forgive them. His anger will be like a burning fire against those people, and all the curses written in this book will come on them. The Lord will destroy any memory of them on the earth. ²¹He will separate them from all the tribes of Israel for punishment. All the curses of the Agreement that are written in this Book of the Teachings will happen to them.

²²Your children who will come after you, as well as foreigners from faraway lands, will see the disasters that come to this land and the diseases the Lord will send on it. They will say, ²³“The land is nothing but burning cinders and salt.

Nothing is planted, nothing grows, and nothing blooms. It is like Sodom and Gomorrah, and Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord destroyed because he was very angry.”²⁴ All the other nations will ask, “Why has the Lord done this to the land? Why is he so angry?”

²⁵And the answer will be, “It is because the people broke the Agreement of the Lord, the God of their ancestors, which he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt.”²⁶ They went and served other gods and bowed down to gods they did not even know. The Lord did not allow that,²⁷ so he became very angry at the land and brought all the curses on it that are written in this book.²⁸ Since the Lord became angry and furious with them, he took them out of their land and put them in another land where they are today.”

²⁹There are some things the Lord our God has kept secret, but there are some things he has let us know. These things belong to us and our children forever so that we will do everything in these teachings.

The Israelites Will Return

When all these blessings and curses I have described happen to you, and the Lord your God has sent you away to other nations, think about these things. ²Then you and your children will return to the Lord your God, and you will obey him with your whole being in everything I am commanding you today. ³Then the Lord your God will give you back your freedom. He will feel sorry for you, and he will bring you back again from the nations where he scattered you. ⁴He may send you to the ends of the earth, but he will gather you and bring you back from there, ⁵back to the land that belonged to your ancestors. It will be yours. He will give you success, and there will be more of you than there were of your ancestors. ⁶The Lord your God will prepare you and your descendants to love him with your whole being so that you will live. ⁷The Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies, who hate you and are cruel to you. ⁸And you will again obey the Lord, keeping all his commands that I give you today. ⁹The Lord your God will make you successful in everything you do. You will have many children, your cattle will have many calves, and your fields will produce good crops, because the Lord will again be happy with you, just as he was with your ancestors. ¹⁰But you must obey the Lord your God by keeping all his commands and rules that are written in this Book of the Teachings. You must return to the Lord your God with your whole being.

Choose Life or Death

¹¹This command I give you today is not too hard for you; it is not beyond what you can do. ¹²It is not up in heaven. You do not have to ask, “Who will go up to heaven and get it for us so we can obey it and keep it?” ¹³It is not on the other side of the sea. You do not have to ask, “Who will go across the sea and get it? Who will tell it to us so we can keep it?” ¹⁴No, the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

¹⁵Look, today I offer you life and success, death and destruction. ¹⁶I command you today to love the Lord your God, to do what he wants you to do, and to keep his commands, his rules, and his laws. Then you will live and grow in number, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to take as your own.

¹⁷But if you turn away from the Lord and do not obey him, if you are led to bow and serve other gods, ¹⁸I tell you today that you will surely be destroyed. And you will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan River to enter and take as your own.

¹⁹Today I ask heaven and earth to be witnesses. I am offering you life or death, blessings or curses. Now, choose life! Then you and your children may live. ²⁰To choose life is to love the Lord your God, obey him, and stay close to him. He is your life, and he will let you live many years in the land, the land he promised to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 31:1–29

Situation

God instructed the Levites to read his laws to the people. Joshua took over the leadership from Moses.

Observation

God's Word benefits our lives. Because we need reminders to obey, we need to read the Bible and apply it often.

Inspiration

If we are to be Christians whose hearts beat and break with the rhythm of the heart of God, we must take on his whole Word wholeheartedly. That means reading the Bible, studying it, committing it to memory, allowing his words to dwell richly in our minds. It means understanding Scripture in its historic, classical context. It means accepting Christ as Savior and allowing his rule to permeate our thoughts, decisions, and actions.

If the church is to be the church in a darkening age, it must take its stand on the solid ground of biblical revelation and the historic confession of Christian truth. Another word for this is "orthodoxy" or "dogma." While it seems the dry and dusty stuff of theologians, dogma is actually the only bulwark that allows the church to both judge itself and stand fast against the currents of cultural trends. As surely as we yield the ground staked out for the church, the barbarians will advance to claim the terrain. (From

Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages by Charles Colson)

Application

Make God's Word a vital part of your day. Memorize a verse (try [Deuteronomy 31:6](#)) and think about it often.

Exploration

Scripture—[Deuteronomy 17:18–20](#); [Psalm 119:9–11](#); [Jeremiah 23:28](#); [Luke 4:1–13](#); [24:25–27](#); [2 Timothy 3:16–17](#); [2 Peter 1:20–21](#).

God is faithful even when his children are not. That's what makes God, God. —Max Lucado (*A Gentle Thunder*)

Joshua Takes Moses' Place

Then Moses went and spoke these words to all the Israelites: ²“I am now one hundred twenty years old, and I cannot lead you anymore. The Lord told me I would not cross the Jordan River; ³the Lord your God will lead you across himself. He will destroy those nations for you, and you will take over their land. Joshua will also lead you across, as the Lord has said. ⁴The Lord will do to those nations what he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, when he destroyed them and their land. ⁵The Lord will give those nations to you; do to them everything I told you. ⁶Be strong and brave. Don't be afraid of them and don't be frightened, because the Lord your God will go with you. He will not leave you or forget you.”

⁷Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in front of the people, “Be strong and brave, because you will lead these people into the land the Lord promised to give their ancestors, and help them take it as their own. ⁸The Lord himself will go before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forget you. Don't be afraid and don't worry.”

Moses Writes the Teachings

⁹So Moses wrote down these teachings and gave them to the priests and all the older leaders of Israel. (The priests are the sons of Levi, who carry the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord.)¹⁰⁻¹¹Then Moses commanded them: “Read these teachings for all Israel to hear at the end of every seven years, which is the year to cancel what people owe. Do it during the Feast of Shelters, when all the Israelites will come to appear before the Lord your God and stand at the place he will choose.¹²Gather all the people: the men, women, children, and foreigners living in your towns so that they can listen and learn to respect the Lord your God and carefully obey everything in this law. ¹³Since their children do not know this law, they must hear it. They must learn to respect the Lord your God for as long as they live in the land you are crossing the Jordan River to take for your own.”

The Lord Calls Moses and Joshua

¹⁴The Lord said to Moses, “Soon you will die. Get Joshua and come to the Meeting Tent so that I may command him.” So Moses and Joshua went to the Meeting Tent.

¹⁵The Lord appeared at the Meeting Tent in a cloud; the cloud stood over the entrance of the Tent. ¹⁶And the Lord said to Moses, “You will soon die. Then these people will not be loyal to me but will worship the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will leave me, breaking the Agreement I made with them. ¹⁷Then I will become very angry at them, and I will leave them. I will turn away from them, and they will be destroyed. Many terrible things will happen to them. Then they will say, ‘It is because God is not with us that these terrible

things are happening.’ ¹⁸I will surely turn away from them then, because they have done wrong and have turned to other gods.

¹⁹“Now write down this song and teach it to the Israelites. Then have them sing it, because it will be my witness against them. ²⁰When I bring them into the land I promised to their ancestors, a fertile land, they will eat as much as they want and get fat. Then they will turn to other gods and serve them. They will reject me and break my Agreement. ²¹Then when many troubles and terrible things happen to them, this song will testify against them, because the song will not be forgotten by their descendants. I know what they plan to do, even before I take them into the land I promised them.” ²²So Moses wrote down the song that day, and he taught it to the Israelites.

²³Then the Lord gave this command to Joshua son of Nun: “Be strong and brave, because you will lead the people of Israel to the land I promised them, and I will be with you.”

²⁴After Moses finished writing all the words of the teachings in a book, ²⁵he gave a command to the Levites, who carried the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord. ²⁶He said, “Take this Book of the Teachings and put it beside the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord your God. It must stay there as a witness against you. ²⁷I know how stubborn and disobedient you are. You have disobeyed the Lord while I am alive and with you, and you will disobey even more after I die! ²⁸Gather all the older leaders of your tribes and all your officers to me so that I may say these things for them to hear, and so that I may ask heaven and earth to testify against them. ²⁹I know that after I die you will become completely evil. You will turn away from the commands I have given you. Terrible things will happen to you in the future when you do what the Lord says is evil, and

you will make him angry with the idols you have made.”

Moses’ Song

³⁰And Moses spoke this whole song for all the people of Israel to hear:

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 31:30–32:52

Situation

Moses' death was near. He gave his last sermon in the form of a song. He reminded the people of their history and warned them not to repeat their mistakes but instead to trust the Lord. He prophesied their future disloyalty and punishment, as well as God's forgiveness and mercy.

Observation

We have no excuse for abandoning God. He protects, provides, and leads us like a shepherd. We must always put our faith and trust in him.

Inspiration

To know the will of God is the highest of all wisdom. Living in the center of God's will rules out all falseness of religion and puts the stamp of true sincerity upon our service to God. You can be miserable with much, if you are out of His will; but you can have peace in your heart with little, if you are in the will of God. You can be wretched with wealth and fame, out of His will; but you can have joy in obscurity, if you are in the will of God. You can have agony in good health, out of His will; but you can be happy in the midst of suffering, if you are in God's will. You can be miserable and defeated in the midst of acclaim, if you are out of His will; but you can be calm and at peace in the midst of persecution, as long as you are in the will of God. The Bible reveals that

God has a plan for every life, and that if we live in constant fellowship with Him, He will direct and lead us in the fulfillment of His plan. (From *Day by Day with Billy Graham* by Joan W. Brown)

Application

Plans rarely turn out as intended. Accidents happen. People move, die, or grow cold toward us. What is your anchor in a changing world? Thank God today for the immense security he provides. Take comfort in God's promises to you.

Exploration

Trust—[Psalm 62:5–8](#); [Proverbs 3:5–6](#); [Romans 3:21–28](#); [Hebrews 3:15–4:3](#).

The fruit of sin is thorns—spiny, prickly, cutting thorns.
—Max Lucado (*He Chose the Nails*)

Hear, heavens, and I will speak. Listen, earth, to what I say.

²My teaching will drop like rain;
my words will fall like dew.
They will be like showers on the grass;
they will pour down like rain on young plants.

³I will announce the name of the Lord.

Praise God because he is great!

⁴He is like a rock; what he does is perfect,
and he is always fair.

He is a faithful God who does no wrong,
who is right and fair.

⁵They have done evil against him.
To their shame they are no longer his children;
they are an evil and lying people.

⁶This is not the way to repay the Lord,
you foolish and unwise people.
He is your Father and Maker,
who made you and formed you.

⁷Remember the old days.
Think of the years already passed.
Ask your father and he will tell you;
ask your older leaders and they will inform you.

⁸God Most High gave the nations their lands,

dividing up the human race.
He set up borders for the people
and even numbered the Israelites.

⁹The Lord took his people as his share,
the people of Jacob as his very own.

¹⁰He found them in a desert,
a windy, empty land.
He surrounded them and brought them up,
guarding them as those he loved very much.

¹¹He was like an eagle building its nest
that flutters over its young.
It spreads its wings to catch them
and carries them on its feathers.

¹²The Lord alone led them,
and there was no foreign god helping him.

¹³The Lord brought them to the heights of the land
and fed them the fruit of the fields.
He gave them honey from the rocks,
bringing oil from the solid rock.

¹⁴There were milk curds from the cows and milk from
the flock;
there were fat sheep and goats.
There were sheep and goats from Bashan
and the best of the wheat.
You drank the juice of grapes.

¹⁵Israel grew fat and kicked;
they were fat and full and firm.
They left the God who made them

and rejected the Rock who saved them.

¹⁶They made God jealous with foreign gods
and angry with hateful idols.

¹⁷They made sacrifices to demons, not God,
to gods they had never known,
new gods from nearby,
gods your ancestors did not fear.

¹⁸You left God who is the Rock, your Father,
and you forgot the God who gave you birth.

¹⁹The Lord saw this and rejected them;
his sons and daughters had made him angry.

²⁰He said, "I will turn away from them
and see what will happen to them.

They are evil people,
unfaithful children.

²¹They used things that are not gods to make me
jealous

and worthless idols to make me angry.

So I will use those who are not a nation to make them
jealous;

I will use a nation that does not understand to make
them angry.

²²My anger has started a fire
that burns down to the place of the dead.
It will burn up the ground and its crops,
and it will set fire to the base of the mountains.

²³"I will pile troubles upon them
and shoot my arrows at them.

²⁴They will be starved and sick,

destroyed by terrible diseases.

I will send them vicious animals
and gliding, poisonous snakes.

²⁵In the streets the sword will kill;
in their homes there will be terror.
Young men and women will die,
and so will babies and gray-haired men.

²⁶I will scatter them as I said,
and no one will remember them.

²⁷But I didn't want their enemy to brag;
their enemy might misunderstand
and say, 'We have won!
The Lord has done none of this.'"

²⁸Israel has no sense;
they do not understand.

²⁹I wish they were wise and understood this;
I wish they could see what will happen to them.

³⁰One person cannot chase a thousand people,
and two people cannot fight ten thousand
unless their Rock has sold them,
unless the Lord has given them up.

³¹The rock of these people is not like our Rock;
our enemies agree to that.

³²Their vine comes from Sodom,
and their fields are like Gomorrah.
Their grapes are full of poison;
their bunches of grapes are bitter.

³³Their wine is like snake poison,
like the deadly poison of cobras.

³⁴“I have been saving this,
and I have it locked in my storehouses.

³⁵I will punish those who do wrong; I will repay them.
Soon their foot will slip,
because their day of trouble is near,
and their punishment will come quickly.”

³⁶The Lord will defend his people
and have mercy on his servants.
He will see that their strength is gone,
that nobody is left, slaves or free.

³⁷Then he will say, “Where are their gods?
Where is the rock they trusted?

³⁸Who ate the fat from their sacrifices,
and who drank the wine of their drink offerings?
Let those gods come to help you!
Let them protect you!

³⁹“Now you will see that I am the one God!
There is no god but me.
I send life and death;
I can hurt, and I can heal.
No one can escape from me.

⁴⁰I raise my hand toward heaven and make this
promise:

As surely as I live forever,

⁴¹I will sharpen my flashing sword,
and I will take it in my hand to judge.
I will punish my enemies
and pay back those who hate me.

⁴²My arrows will be covered with their blood;

my sword will eat their flesh.

The blood will flow from those who are killed and the captives.

The heads of the enemy leaders will be cut off.”

⁴³Be happy, nations, with his people,
because he will repay you for the blood of his servants.

He will punish his enemies,
and he will remove the sin of his land and people.

⁴⁴Moses came with Joshua son of Nun, and they spoke all the words of this song for the people to hear. ⁴⁵When Moses finished speaking these words to all Israel, ⁴⁶he said to them: “Pay careful attention to all the words I have said to you today, and command your children to obey carefully everything in these teachings. ⁴⁷These should not be unimportant words for you, but rather they mean life for you! By these words you will live a long time in the land you are crossing the Jordan River to take as your own.”

Moses Goes Up to Mount Nebo

⁴⁸The Lord spoke to Moses again that same day and said,
⁴⁹“Go up the Abarim Mountains, to Mount Nebo in the country of Moab, across from Jericho. Look at the land of Canaan that I am giving to the Israelites as their own. ⁵⁰On that mountain that you climb, you will die and join your ancestors, just as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and joined his ancestors.
⁵¹You both sinned against me at the waters of Meribah Kadesh

in the Desert of Zin, and you did not honor me as holy there among the Israelites.⁵² So now you will only look at the land from far away. You will not enter the land I am giving the people of Israel.”

Moses Blesses the People

Moses, the man of God, gave this blessing to the Israelites before he died. ²He said:

“The Lord came from Mount Sinai
and rose like the sun from Edom;
he showed his greatness from Mount Paran.
He came with thousands of angels
from the southern mountains.

³The Lord surely loves his people
and takes care of all those who belong to him.
They bow down at his feet,
and they are taught by him.

⁴Moses gave us the teachings
that belong to the people of Jacob.

⁵The Lord became king of Israel
when the leaders of the people gathered,
when the tribes of Israel came together.

⁶“Let the people of Reuben live and not die,
but let the people be few.”

⁷Moses said this about the people of Judah:
“Lord, listen to Judah’s prayer;
bring them back to their people.
They defend themselves with their hands.
Help them fight their enemies!”

⁸Moses said this about the people of Levi:

“Lord, your Thummim and Urim belong
to Levi, whom you love.

Lord, you tested him at Massah
and argued with him at the waters of Meribah.

⁹He said about his father and mother,
‘I don’t care about them.’

He did not treat his brothers as favorites
or give special favors to his children,
but he protected your word
and guarded your agreement.

¹⁰He teaches your laws to the people of Jacob
and your teachings to the people of Israel.
He burns incense before you
and makes whole burnt offerings on your altar.

¹¹Lord, make them strong;
be pleased with the work they do.
Defeat those who attack them,
and don’t let their enemies rise up again.”

¹²Moses said this about the people of Benjamin:

“The Lord’s loved ones will lie down in safety,
because he protects them all day long.
The ones he loves rest with him.”

¹³Moses said this about the people of Joseph:

“May the Lord bless their land with wonderful dew
from heaven,
with water from the springs below,
¹⁴with the best fruits that the sun brings,

and with the best fruits that the moon brings.

¹⁵Let the old mountains give the finest crops,
and let the everlasting hills give the best fruits.

¹⁶Let the full earth give the best fruits,
and let the Lord who lived in the burning bush be
pleased.

May these blessings rest on the head of Joseph,
on the forehead of the one who was blessed among his
brothers.

¹⁷Joseph has the majesty of a firstborn bull;
he is as strong as a wild ox.
He will stab other nations,
even those nations far away.
These are the ten thousands of Ephraim,
and these are the thousands of Manasseh.”

¹⁸Moses said this about the people of Zebulun:

“Be happy when you go out, Zebulun,
and be happy in your tents, Issachar.

¹⁹They will call the people to the mountain,
and there they will offer the right sacrifices.
They will do well from all that is in the sea,
and they will do well from the treasures hidden in the
sand on the shore.”

²⁰Moses said this about the people of Gad:

“Praise God who gives Gad more land!
Gad lives there like a lion,
who tears off arms and heads.

²¹They chose the best land for themselves.

They received a large share, like that given to an officer.

When the leaders of the people gathered,
the people of Gad did what the Lord said was right,
and they judged Israel fairly.”

²²Moses said this about the people of Dan:

“Dan is like a lion’s cub,
who jumps out of Bashan.”

²³Moses said this about the people of Naphtali:

“Naphtali enjoys special kindnesses,
and they are full of the Lord’s blessings.
Take as your own the west and south.”

²⁴Moses said this about the people of Asher:

“Asher is the most blessed of the sons;
let him be his brothers’ favorite.
Let him bathe his feet in olive oil.

²⁵Your gates will have locks of iron and bronze,
and you will be strong as long as you live.

²⁶“There is no one like the God of Israel,
who rides through the skies to help you,
who rides on the clouds in his majesty.

²⁷The everlasting God is your place of safety,
and his arms will hold you up forever.
He will force your enemy out ahead of you,

saying, ‘Destroy the enemy!’

²⁸The people of Israel will lie down in safety.

Jacob’s spring is theirs alone.

Theirs is a land full of grain and new wine,
where the skies drop their dew.

²⁹Israel, you are blessed!

No one else is like you,
because you are a people saved by the Lord.
He is your shield and helper,
your glorious sword.

Your enemies will be afraid of you,
and you will walk all over their holy places.”

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 33:1–34:12

Situation

Moses imparted his blessing shortly before his death. Before his death, the Lord allowed him to view the Promised Land. Though Moses was disciplined for his lack of obedience, he died in faith and in honor.

Observation

Moses was honored as the only man the Lord buried. The mourning time of 30 days exceeded the normal mourning time of 7 days.

Inspiration

We don’t like to say goodbye to those whom we love. Whether it be at a school or a cemetery, separation is tough. It is right for us to weep, but

there is no need for us to despair. They had pain here. They have no pain there. They struggled here. They have no struggles there. You and I might wonder why God took them home. But they don't. They understand. They are, at this very moment, at peace in the presence of God.

I had been ministering in San Antonio for less than a year when one of our members asked me to speak at the funeral of his mother. Her name was Ida Glossbrenner, but her friends called her Polly.

As the son and I planned the service, he told me a fascinating story about the final words his mother spoke. Mrs. Glossbrenner was unresponsive for the last few hours of her life. She never spoke a word. But moments before her death, she opened her eyes and stated in a clear voice, "My name is Ida Glossbrenner, but my friends call me Polly."

Meaningless words of hallucination? Perhaps. Or, perhaps more. Perhaps Ida was, well, maybe she was at the schoolhouse doors of heaven. Her body behind her. Her soul in the presence of God. And maybe she was getting acquainted.

I don't know. But I do know this. When it is cold on earth, we can take comfort in knowing that our loved ones are in the warm arms of God. And when Christ comes, we will hold them, too. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

Application

God wants us to be prepared for death. The first step we take is to receive him by faith. Then we are to live a life holy and pleasing unto him. Grief is normal

but, for the Christian, despair is not. What steps can you take today to help ensure that you die in faith and honor as Moses did.

Exploration

Christ's Victory Over Death—[1 Corinthians 15:24–26, 54–57](#); [2 Timothy 1:10](#); [Hebrews 2:14](#); [Revelation 1:18](#).

Moses Dies

Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Mount Pisgah, across from Jericho. From there the Lord showed him all the land from Gilead to Dan,²all of Naphtali and the lands of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea,³as well as the southern desert and the whole Valley of Jericho up to Zoar. (Jericho is called the city of palm trees.)⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, “This is the land I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I said to them, ‘I will give this land to your descendants.’ I have let you look at it, Moses, but you will not cross over there.”

⁵Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. ⁶He buried Moses in Moab in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but even today no one knows where his grave is. ⁷Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not weak, and he was still strong. ⁸The Israelites cried for Moses for thirty days, staying in the plains of Moab until the time of sadness was over.

⁹Joshua son of Nun was then filled with wisdom, because Moses had put his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to Joshua, and they did what the Lord had commanded Moses.

¹⁰There has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses. The Lord knew Moses face to face ¹¹and sent him to do signs and miracles in Egypt—to the king, to all his officers, and to the whole land of Egypt. ¹²Moses had great power, and he did great and wonderful things for all the Israelites to see.

awl A tool like a big needle with a handle at one end.

roof In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

sky ... bronze This means the sky will give no rain and the earth will produce no crops.

The Book of Joshua

Introduction

May I describe a few battles?

Let's say that you have a problem with a person—a rotten person. A scoundrel who has taken advantage of your kindness. Because of him you have less money, more headaches, and a bitter heart.

Let's also say that you've got the goods on this guy. Caught him. Aha! Red-handed. You can turn him in. Make a spectacle. Get even and get out. Give him what he deserves.

But something won't let you. A verse from your past tethers your heart. "Vengeance is mine," says the Lord. "I will repay."

Within you the battle rages. *Let vengeance be mine, Lord, you pray. Just once. Let me get even.* But the Word won't let you. And with time, you drop your fists to your side and just trust.

Here's another battle.

Let's say you have a problem with money. Every month you just barely make it. Each paycheck is spent before it's cashed. If just one month you could get a break. Just some cushion. That's all you need.

Poof, your prayer is answered. Unexpected bonus. An extra month's salary. Finally, some breathing room. First, pay off the credit card, next repay my sister, then get the bumper fixed and ... uh-oh-my giving. "Surely God doesn't want me to give 10 percent of the bonus? I mean, I give every month... . Surely, he'll understand if I use this for something else...."

But the words challenge faintly yet firmly, "Honor the Lord with the firstfruits of your labor... ." Within you the battle

rages. One side says, “Believe.” The other, “Be real.” Finally, a truce is called and a white flag is waved and a check is written and placed in the plate.

But even as you give, you confess, “Doesn’t make sense, but because you say so ...”

Let’s go one more. This time let’s really stretch it. Let’s say you are a general. A general in the Israeli army. Moses is dead, the Jordan has been crossed, the mantle passed, and you are wearing it.

God has promised that you will take Jericho. But as you look at the city, you have to wonder ... the walls are high. The people are armed. The challenge is great.

But God has a plan.

You can’t wait to hear it. “Surely, he’ll give us more soldiers, stronger weapons, mightier swords. His plan must include this and more.”

So you sit and listen as God explains. As he talks you are stunned, “What? Walk around the city seven times, blow some trumpets, and ... Wait a minute, God, this doesn’t make sense.”

The Book of Joshua is a book of battles. A book for soldiers. A book for people who would dare to win God’s way. What applied then, applies today. It is the faithful who conquer. Those who follow the strategy win, those who don’t —don’t.

About This Book

Author:

Joshua, except for the end which describes his death

Date Written:

1400–1350 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- The Hebrews crossed the border into Canaan because of their faith that God would give them the land.
- The Hebrews received God's blessing when they obeyed his laws.
- Joshua led his people by obeying God.

Key Verse:

“Always remember what is written in the Book of the Teachings. Study it day and night to be sure to obey everything that is written there. If you do this, you will be wise and successful in everything” ([Joshua 1:8](#)).

Contents:

1. Joshua Becomes Israel's Leader [1:1–18](#)
2. The Hebrews Conquer Canaan [2:1–12:24](#)
3. The Land Is Divided [13:1–22:34](#)
4. Joshua Says Goodbye [23:1–24:33](#)

Life Lessons

Joshua 1:1–2:24

Situation

The story of Joshua began after the death of Moses. God appointed Joshua to lead the Israelites across the Jordan River into the land of Canaan.

Observation

The Lord instructed Joshua to remember what was written in the Book of the Teachings. Wisdom and success come from obeying its commands.

Inspiration

We go to the Word of God for comfort, and when we do, the words pierce like a surgeon's scalpel, both cutting and healing. The Word of God cuts to the very place where thoughts and attitudes come together, at the juncture of soul and spirit, providing a healing that can be obtained in no other way on earth.

The Bible was provided for us as a vehicle to carry us so that we might be able to see Jesus Christ.

If you want to grow in the Word of God, become a person with a chisel and quarry the Word—look, explore, seek. Let the Word become your Word, and you will grow.

I challenge you to rediscover the Bible in your own life ... to regain the same hunger and enthusiasm you felt when you first heard the name of Jesus! (From *The Inspirational Bible*, “Bible”)

Application

Knowing, studying, and meditating on the Word of God is critical if you are to grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ. If you are not spending regular time in the Bible, ask yourself what changes you can make to your schedule to make that time a priority.

Exploration

Importance of the Scriptures—[Psalm 119:1–8](#); [John 10:35](#); [Acts 18:24](#); [Romans 15:4](#); [Hebrews 4:12](#); [1 Peter 1:23–25](#).

God's Command to Joshua

After Moses, the servant of the Lord, died, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant. ²The Lord said, "My servant Moses is dead. Now you and all these people go across the Jordan River into the land I am giving to the Israelites. ³I promised Moses I would give you this land, so I will give you every place you go in the land. ⁴All the land from the desert in the south to Lebanon in the north will be yours. All the land from the great river, the Euphrates, in the east, to the Mediterranean Sea in the west will be yours, too, including the land of the Hittites. ⁵No one will be able to defeat you all your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forget you.

⁶"Joshua, be strong and brave! You must lead these people so they can take the land that I promised their fathers I would give them. ⁷Be strong and brave. Be sure to obey all the teachings my servant Moses gave you. If you follow them exactly, you will be successful in everything you do. ⁸Always remember what is written in the Book of the Teachings. Study it day and night to be sure to obey everything that is written there. If you do this, you will be wise and successful in everything. ⁹Remember that I commanded you to be strong and brave. Don't be afraid, because the Lord your God will be with you everywhere you go."

Joshua's Orders to the People

¹⁰Then Joshua gave orders to the officers of the people: ¹¹“Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan River and take the land the Lord your God is giving you.’”

¹²Then Joshua said to the people of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh, ¹³“Remember what Moses, the servant of the Lord, told you. He said the Lord your God would give you rest and would give you this land. ¹⁴Now the Lord has given you this land east of the Jordan River. Your wives, children, and animals may stay here, but your fighting men must dress for war and cross the Jordan River ahead of your brothers to help them. ¹⁵The Lord has given you a place to rest and will do the same for your brothers. But you must help them until they take the land the Lord their God is giving them. Then you may return to your own land east of the Jordan River, the land that Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave you.”

¹⁶Then the people answered Joshua, “Anything you command us to do, we will do. Any place you send us, we will go. ¹⁷Just as we fully obeyed Moses, we will obey you. We ask only that the Lord your God be with you just as he was with Moses. ¹⁸Whoever refuses to obey your commands or turns against you will be put to death. Just be strong and brave!”

Spies Sent to Jericho

Joshua son of Nun secretly sent out two spies from Acacia and said to them, “Go and look at the land, particularly at the city of Jericho.”

So the men went to Jericho and stayed at the house of a prostitute named Rahab.

²Someone told the king of Jericho, “Some men from Israel have come here tonight to spy out the land.”

³So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: “Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house. They have come to spy out our whole land.”

⁴But the woman had hidden the two men. She said, “They did come here, but I didn’t know where they came from. ⁵In the evening, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don’t know where they went, but if you go quickly, maybe you can catch them.” ⁶(The woman had taken the men up to the [roof](#) and had hidden them there under stalks of flax that she had spread out.) ⁷So the king’s men went out looking for the spies on the road that leads to the crossings of the Jordan River. The city gate was closed just after the king’s men left the city.

⁸Before the spies went to sleep for the night, Rahab went up to the roof. ⁹She said to them, “I know the Lord has given this land to your people. You frighten us very much. Everyone living in this land is terribly afraid of you ¹⁰because we have heard how the Lord dried up the Red Sea when you came out of Egypt. We have heard how you destroyed Sihon and Og,

two Amorite kings who lived east of the Jordan. ¹¹When we heard this, we were very frightened. Now our men are afraid to fight you because the Lord your God rules the heavens above and the earth below! ¹²So now, promise me before the Lord that you will show kindness to my family just as I showed kindness to you. Give me some proof that you will do this. ¹³Allow my father, mother, brothers, sisters, and all of their families to live. Save us from death.”

¹⁴The men agreed and said, “It will be our lives for your lives if you don’t tell anyone what we are doing. When the Lord gives us the land, we will be kind and true to you.”

¹⁵The house Rahab lived in was built on the city wall, so she used a rope to let the men down through a window. ¹⁶She said to them, “Go into the hills so the king’s men will not find you. Hide there for three days. After the king’s men return, you may go on your way.”

¹⁷The men said to her, “You must do as we say. If not, we cannot be responsible for keeping this oath you have made us swear. ¹⁸When we return to this land, you must tie this red rope in the window through which you let us down. Bring your father, mother, brothers, and all your family into your house. ¹⁹If anyone leaves your house and is killed, it is his own fault. We cannot be responsible for him. If anyone in your house is hurt, we will be responsible. ²⁰But if you tell anyone about this, we will be free from the oath you made us swear.”

²¹Rahab answered, “I agree to this.” So she sent them away, and they left. Then she tied the red rope in the window.

²²The men left and went into the hills where they stayed for three days. The king’s men looked for them all along the road, but after three days, they returned to the city without finding

them. ²³Then the two men started back. They left the hills and crossed the river and came to Joshua son of Nun and told him everything that had happened to them. ²⁴They said, “The Lord surely has given us all of the land. All the people in that land are terribly afraid of us.”

Life Lessons

Joshua 3:1–5:12

Situation

As God guided the Israelites into the Promised Land he instructed them to purify themselves before crossing the Jordan River. In another powerful miracle, God stopped the Jordan River in flood stage so that the people easily crossed into Canaan. The Ark of the Agreement (Covenant) and the priests led this procession.

Observation

God guided the Israelites into the Promised Land as they continued to trust in him.

Inspiration

In reading carefully through the New Testament to see just what kind of an experience you can expect, I find that the New Testament sets forth only one. There is just one experience for which you can look—only one feeling you can expect—and that is the experience of faith. Believing is an experience as real as any experience, yet many are looking for something more—some dramatic sensation that will bring a physical thrill, while others look for some spectacular manifestation. Many have been told to look for such sensations, but the Bible says that a man is “justified by faith” and not by feeling. A man is saved by trusting in the finished work of Christ on the cross and not by physical excitement or religious ecstasy.

But you may say to me, “What about feeling? Is there no place in saving faith for any feeling?” Certainly there is room for feeling in saving faith, but we are not saved by it. Whatever feeling there may be is only the result of saving faith, but it in itself is not what does the saving! ...

Finally, someone may say, “I believe the historic facts of the gospel, but still I am not saved.” Perhaps so, for the faith that saves has one distinguishing quality—saving faith is a faith that produces obedience, it is a faith that brings about a way of life. Some have quite successfully imitated this way of life for a time, but for those who trust Christ for salvation, that faith brings about in them a desire to live out that inward experience of faith. It is a power that results in godly living and surrender. (From *Peace with God* by Billy Graham)

Application

What steps are you taking to fulfill God’s will? Often our efforts seem uncertain or risky. Put your trust in God to guide.

Exploration

Faith Defined—[Matthew 13:44](#); [Romans 10:9; 12:3](#); [Ephesians 3:16–17](#); [6:16](#); [1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8](#); [Hebrews 11:1](#); [Jude 20–21](#).

Crossing the Jordan

Early the next morning Joshua and all the Israelites left Acacia. They traveled to the Jordan River and camped there before crossing it.²After three days the officers went through the camp³and gave orders to the people: “When you see the priests and Levites carrying the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord your God, leave where you are and follow it.⁴That way you will know which way to go since you have never been here before. But do not follow too closely. Stay about a thousand yards behind the Ark.”

⁵Then Joshua told the people, “Make yourselves holy, because tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.”

⁶Joshua said to the priests, “Take the Ark of the Agreement and go ahead of the people.” So the priests lifted the Ark and carried it ahead of the people.

⁷Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Today I will begin to make you great in the opinion of all the Israelites so the people will know I am with you just as I was with Moses.”⁸Tell the priests who carry the Ark of the Agreement to go to the edge of the Jordan River and stand in the water.”

⁹Then Joshua said to the Israelites, “Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God.”¹⁰Here is proof that the living God is with you and that he will force out the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and

Jebusites. ¹¹The Ark of the Agreement with the Lord of the whole world will go ahead of you into the Jordan River. ¹²Now choose twelve men from among you, one from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹³The priests will carry the Ark of the Lord, the Master of the whole world, into the Jordan ahead of you. When they step into the water, it will stop. The river will stop flowing and will stand up in a heap.”

¹⁴So the people left the place where they had camped, and they followed the priests who carried the Ark of the Agreement across the Jordan River. ¹⁵During harvest the Jordan overflows its banks. When the priests carrying the Ark came to the edge of the river and stepped into the water, ¹⁶the water upstream stopped flowing. It stood up in a heap a great distance away at Adam, a town near Zarethan. The water flowing down to the Sea of Arabah (the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed the river near Jericho. ¹⁷The priests carried the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord to the middle of the river and stood there on dry ground. They waited there while all the people of Israel walked across the Jordan River on dry land.

Rocks to Remind the People

After all the people had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, ²“Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe. ³Tell them to get twelve rocks from the middle of the river, from where the priests stood. Carry the rocks and put them down where you stay tonight.”

⁴So Joshua chose one man from each tribe. Then he called the twelve men together ⁵and said to them, “Go out into the river where the Ark of the Lord your God is. Each of you bring back one rock, one for each tribe of Israel, and carry it on your shoulder. ⁶They will be a sign among you. In the future your children will ask you, ‘What do these rocks mean?’ ⁷Tell them the water stopped flowing in the Jordan when the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord crossed the river. These rocks will always remind the Israelites of this.”

⁸So the Israelites obeyed Joshua and carried twelve rocks from the middle of the Jordan River, one rock for each of the twelve tribes of Israel, just as the Lord had commanded Joshua. They carried the rocks with them and put them down where they made their camp. ⁹Joshua also put twelve rocks in the middle of the Jordan River where the priests had stood while carrying the Ark of the Agreement. These rocks are still there today.

¹⁰The priests carrying the Ark continued standing in the middle of the river until everything was done that the Lord had commanded Joshua to tell the people, just as Moses had told Joshua. The people hurried across the river. ¹¹After they

finished crossing the river, the priests carried the Ark of the Lord to the other side as the people watched.¹² The men from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh obeyed what Moses had told them. They were dressed for war, and they crossed the river ahead of the other people.¹³ About forty thousand soldiers prepared for war passed before the Lord as they marched across the river, going toward the plains of Jericho.

¹⁴That day the Lord made Joshua great in the opinion of all the Israelites. They respected Joshua all his life, just as they had respected Moses.

¹⁵Then the Lord said to Joshua,¹⁶“Command the priests to bring the Ark of the Agreement out of the river.”

¹⁷So Joshua commanded the priests, “Come up out of the Jordan.”

¹⁸Then the priests carried the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord out of the river. As soon as their feet touched dry land, the water began flowing again. The river again overflowed its banks, just as it had before they crossed.

¹⁹The people crossed the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month and camped at Gilgal, east of Jericho.²⁰ They carried with them the twelve rocks taken from the Jordan, and Joshua set them up at Gilgal.²¹ Then he spoke to the Israelites: “In the future your children will ask you, ‘What do these rocks mean?’²² Tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan River on dry land.’²³ The Lord your God caused the water to stop flowing until you finished crossing it, just as the Lord did to the Red Sea. He stopped the water until we crossed it.²⁴ The Lord did this so all people would know he has great power and so you would always respect the Lord your God.”

All the kings of the Amorites west of the Jordan and the Canaanite kings living by the Mediterranean Sea heard that the Lord dried up the Jordan River until the Israelites had crossed it. After that they were scared and too afraid to face the Israelites.

The Israelites Are Circumcised

²At that time the Lord said to Joshua, “Make knives from flint stones and circumcise the Israelites.” ³So Joshua made knives from flint stones and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.

⁴This is why Joshua circumcised the men: After the Israelites left Egypt, all the men old enough to serve in the army died in the desert on the way out of Egypt. ⁵The men who had come out of Egypt had been circumcised, but none of those who were born in the desert on the trip from Egypt had been circumcised. ⁶The Israelites had moved about in the desert for forty years. During that time all the fighting men who had left Egypt had died because they had not obeyed the Lord. So the Lord swore they would not see the land he had promised their ancestors to give them, a fertile land. ⁷Their sons took their places. But none of the sons born on the trip from Egypt had been circumcised, so Joshua circumcised them. ⁸After all the Israelites had been circumcised, they stayed in camp until they were healed.

⁹Then the Lord said to Joshua, “As slaves in Egypt you were ashamed, but today I have removed that shame.” So Joshua named that place Gilgal, which it is still named today.

¹⁰The people of Israel were camped at Gilgal on the plains of

Jericho. It was there, on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, they celebrated the Passover Feast. ¹¹The day after the Passover, the people ate food grown on that land: bread made without yeast and roasted grain. ¹²The day they ate this food, the manna stopped coming. The Israelites no longer got the manna from heaven. They ate the food grown in the land of Canaan that year.

¹³Joshua was near Jericho when he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and asked, “Are you a friend or an enemy?”

¹⁴The man answered, “I am neither. I have come as the commander of the Lord’s army.”

Then Joshua bowed facedown on the ground and asked, “Does my master have a command for me, his servant?”

¹⁵The commander of the Lord’s army answered, “Take off your sandals, because the place where you are standing is holy.” So Joshua did.

Life Lessons

Joshua 5:13–6:27

Situation

The commander of the Lord’s army appeared to Joshua, which showed Joshua that he didn’t have to bear the responsibility alone of conquering Jericho. After Jericho was taken, a curse was put on the city for anyone trying to rebuild it.

Observation

Rahab the prostitute and her family were spared by Joshua and his men because she had spared the

spies earlier. She is mentioned by the author of the Book of Hebrews as an example of faith ([11:31](#)) and by James as someone who demonstrated good works ([2:25](#)). She had a choice to make, and she chose to help the spies.

Inspiration

There are times when God sends thunder to stir us. There are times when God sends blessings to lure us. But then there are times when God sends nothing but silence as he honors us with the freedom to choose where we spend eternity.

And what an honor it is! In so many areas of life we have no choice. Think about it. You didn't choose your gender. You didn't choose your siblings. You didn't choose your race or place of birth.

Sometimes our lack of choices angers us. "It's not fair," we say. It's not fair that I was born in poverty or that I sing so poorly or that I run so slowly. But the scales of life were forever tipped on the side of fairness when God planted a tree in the Garden of Eden. All complaints were silenced when Adam and his descendants were given free will, the freedom to make whatever eternal choice we desire. Any injustice in this life is offset by the honor of choosing our destiny in the next.

Wouldn't you agree? Would you have wanted otherwise? Would you have preferred the opposite? You choose everything in this life, and he chooses where you spend the next? You choose the size of your nose, the color of your hair, and your DNA structure, and he chooses where you spend eternity?

Is that what you would prefer?

It would have been nice if God had let us order life like we order a meal. I'll take good health and a high IQ. I'll pass on the music skills, but give me a fast metabolism ... Would've been nice. But it didn't happen. When it came to your life on earth, you weren't given a voice or a vote.

But when it comes to life after death, you were. In my book that seems like a good deal. Wouldn't you agree?

Have we been given any greater privilege than that of choice? Not only does this privilege offset any injustice, the gift of free will can offset any mistakes.

Think about the thief who repented. Though we know little about him, we know this: He made some bad mistakes in life. He chose the wrong crowd, the wrong morals, the wrong behavior. But would you consider his life a waste? Is he spending eternity reaping the fruit of all the bad choices he made? No, just the opposite. He is enjoying the fruit of the one good choice he made. In the end all his bad choices were redeemed by a solitary good one.

You've made some bad choices in life, haven't you? You've chosen the wrong friends, maybe the wrong career, even the wrong spouse. You look back over your life and say, "If only ... if only I could make up for those bad choices." You can. One good choice for eternity offsets a thousand bad ones on earth.

The choice is yours.

(From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Application

Have you made some bad choices in your life? Confess any sins you may need to confess ... then make today a new beginning. Just like Rahab, you can leave behind your former life or behavior, and concentrate now on following the King of kings.

Exploration

Making Choices—[Deuteronomy 30:19–20](#); [Joshua 24:15](#); [1 Kings 18:21](#).

Because of God's grace we go from being people whose "throats are like open graves" ([Psalm 5:9](#)) to being participants of God's glory. We were washed up and put out; now we are called up and put in. —Max Lucado (*In the Grip of Grace*)

The Fall of Jericho

The people of Jericho were afraid because the Israelites were near. They closed the city gates and guarded them. No one went into the city, and no one came out.

²Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Look, I have given you Jericho, its king, and all its fighting men.” ³March around the city with your army once a day for six days. ⁴Have seven priests carry trumpets made from horns of male sheep and have them march in front of the Ark. On the seventh day march around the city seven times and have the priests blow the trumpets as they march. ⁵They will make one long blast on the trumpets. When you hear that sound, have all the people give a loud shout. Then the walls of the city will fall so the people can go straight into the city.”

⁶So Joshua son of Nun called the priests together and said to them, “Carry the Ark of the Agreement. Tell seven priests to carry trumpets and march in front of it.” ⁷Then Joshua ordered the people, “Now go! March around the city. The soldiers with weapons should march in front of the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord.”

⁸When Joshua finished speaking to the people, the seven priests began marching before the Lord. They carried the seven trumpets and blew them as they marched. The priests carrying the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord followed them. ⁹Soldiers with weapons marched in front of the priests, and armed men walked behind the Ark. The priests were blowing their trumpets. ¹⁰But Joshua had told the people not to give a

war cry. He said, “Don’t shout. Don’t say a word until the day I tell you. Then shout.” ¹¹So Joshua had the Ark of the Lord carried around the city one time. Then they went back to camp for the night.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The Commander of the Lord’s Army

An intriguing verse is found in [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#), “The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command.”

Have you ever wondered what that command will be? It will be the inaugural word of heaven. It will be the first audible message most have heard from God. It will be the word which closes one age and opens a new one.

I think I know what the command will be. I could very well be wrong, but I think the command which puts an end to the pains of the earth and initiates the joys of heaven will be two words:

“No more.”

The King of kings will raise his pierced hand and proclaim, “No more.”

The angels will stand and the Father will speak, “No more.”

Every person who lives and who ever lived will turn toward the sky and hear God announce, “No more.”

No more loneliness. No more tears. No more death. No more sadness. No more crying. No more pain.

As John sat on the Island of Patmos surrounded by sea and separated from friends he dreamt of the day when God would say, “No more.”

This same disciple who had heard Jesus speak these words of assurance over a half a century before now knew what they meant. I wonder if he could hear the voice of Jesus in his memory.

“The end will come.”

For those who live for this world, that’s bad news. But for those who live for the world to come, it’s an encouraging promise.

You’re on a land mine, my friend, and it’s only a matter of time: “For in this world you will have trouble... .” Next time you are tossed into a river as you ride the rapids of life, remember his words of assurance.

Those who endure will be saved. The gospel will be preached. The end will come.

You can count on it. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

¹²Early the next morning Joshua got up, and the priests carried the Ark of the Lord again. ¹³The seven priests carried the seven trumpets and marched in front of the Ark of the Lord, blowing their trumpets. Soldiers with weapons marched in front of them, and other soldiers walked behind the Ark of the Lord. All this time the priests were blowing their trumpets. ¹⁴So on the second day they marched around the city one time and then went back to camp. They did this every day for six days.

¹⁵On the seventh day they got up at dawn and marched around the city, just as they had on the days before. But on that day they marched around the city seven times. ¹⁶The seventh time around the priests blew their trumpets. Then Joshua gave the command: "Now, shout! The Lord has given you this city! ¹⁷The city and everything in it are to be destroyed as an offering to the Lord. Only Rahab the prostitute and everyone in her house should remain alive. They must not be killed, because Rahab hid the two spies we sent out. ¹⁸Don't take any of the things that are to be destroyed as an offering to the Lord. If you take them and bring them into our camp, you yourselves will be destroyed, and you will bring trouble to all of Israel. ¹⁹All the silver and gold and things made from bronze and iron belong to the Lord and must be saved for him."

²⁰When the priests blew the trumpets, the people shouted. At the sound of the trumpets and the people's shout, the walls fell, and everyone ran straight into the city. So the Israelites defeated that city. ²¹They completely destroyed with the sword every living thing in the city—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep, and donkeys.

²²Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land,

“Go into the prostitute’s house. Bring her out and bring out those who are with her, because of the promise you made to her.” ²³So the two men went into the house and brought out Rahab, her father, mother, brothers, and all those with her. They put all of her family in a safe place outside the camp of Israel.

²⁴Then Israel burned the whole city and everything in it, but they did not burn the things made from silver, gold, bronze, and iron. These were saved for the Lord. ²⁵Joshua saved Rahab the prostitute, her family, and all who were with her, because Rahab had helped the men he had sent to spy out Jericho. Rahab still lives among the Israelites today.

²⁶Then Joshua made this oath:

“Anyone who tries to rebuild this city of Jericho
will be cursed by the Lord.
The one who lays the foundation of this city
will lose his oldest son,
and the one who sets up the gates
will lose his youngest son.”

²⁷So the Lord was with Joshua, and Joshua became famous through all the land.

Life Lessons

Joshua 7:1-26

Situation

After dreaming of a homeland for forty years and tasting victory in Jericho, Israel suffered a stunning defeat at Ai. One man, Achan, stole plunder from Jericho and brought God's judgment on all the people. God helped Israel conquer Ai after the sinful man and his family were destroyed.

Observation

God insists on obedience to his commands no matter how small or strict they may seem. Only then can we enjoy his blessing.

Inspiration

Our greatest struggle is not in the realm of understanding the will of God; it's in the realm of *obeying* the God whose will it is. To be painfully honest, when you and I look back at our lives, we do not find ourselves puzzled and mystified about God's will nearly as much as we find ourselves stubborn and resistant to the One directing our steps. Our problem isn't that we don't know; our problem is that we *do* know but aren't willing to follow through.

That's the basic struggle of the Christian life. The clear truth of God is set before us time and time again. It's available to us, we read it, we hear it explained from the pulpit, in a Christian book, or on a Christian radio program, and we sense the Holy Spirit whispering, *Yes, this means you*. We understand Him

clearly, but we resist. When the chips are down, our tendency is to say, “I’ve got it planned another way.”

(From *Wisdom for the Way* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

God does not seek partial compliance with his instructions. We must obey him completely. Did you participate in a questionable activity during the last week? Was it sin? Evaluate honestly. If you are unsure, avoid the activity next time.

Exploration

Obedience—[Genesis 3:11–13; 17:1; 22:3; 2 Kings 23:4–8, 25; John 14:23–24; 2 John 1:6.](#)

Every broken heart, every unwanted child, every war and tragedy can be traced back to our rebellion against God.
—Max Lucado (*In the Grip of Grace*)

The Sin of Achan

But the Israelites did not obey the Lord. There was a man from the tribe of Judah named Achan. (He was the son of Carmi and grandson of Zabdi, who was the son of Zerah.) Because Achan kept some of the things that were to be given to the Lord, the Lord became very angry at the Israelites.

²Joshua sent some men from Jericho to Ai, which was near Beth Aven, east of Bethel. He told them, “Go to Ai and spy out the area.” So the men went to spy on Ai.

³Later they came back to Joshua and said, “There are only a few people in Ai, so we will not need all our people to defeat them. Send only two or three thousand men to fight. There is no need to send all of our people.” ⁴So about three thousand men went up to Ai, but the people of Ai beat them badly. ⁵The people of Ai killed about thirty-six Israelites and then chased the rest from the city gate all the way down to the canyon, killing them as they went down the hill. When the Israelites saw this, they lost their courage.

⁶Then Joshua tore his clothes in sorrow. He bowed facedown on the ground before the Ark of the Lord and stayed there until evening. The leaders of Israel did the same thing. They also threw dirt on their heads to show their sorrow. ⁷Then

Joshua said, “Lord God, you brought our people across the Jordan River. Why did you bring us this far and then let the Amorites destroy us? We would have been happy to stay on the other side of the Jordan. ⁸Lord, there is nothing I can say now. Israel has been beaten by the enemy. ⁹The Canaanites and all the other people in this country will hear about this and will surround and kill us all! Then what will you do for your own great name?”

¹⁰The Lord said to Joshua, “Stand up! Why are you down on your face? ¹¹The Israelites have sinned; they have broken the agreement I commanded them to obey. They took some of the things I commanded them to destroy. They have stolen and lied and have taken those things for themselves. ¹²That is why the Israelites cannot face their enemies. They turn away from the fight and run, because I have commanded that they be destroyed. I will not help you anymore unless you destroy everything as I commanded you.

¹³“Now go! Make the people holy. Tell them, ‘Set yourselves apart to the Lord for tomorrow. The Lord, the God of Israel, says some of you are keeping things he commanded you to destroy. You will never defeat your enemies until you throw away those things.

¹⁴“Tomorrow morning you must be present with your tribes. The Lord will choose one tribe to stand alone before him. Then the Lord will choose one family group from that tribe to stand before him. Then the Lord will choose one family from that family group to stand before him, person by person. ¹⁵The one who is keeping what should have been destroyed will himself be destroyed by fire. Everything he owns will be destroyed with him. He has broken the agreement with the Lord

and has done a disgraceful thing among the people of Israel!”

¹⁶Early the next morning Joshua led all of Israel to present themselves in their tribes, and the Lord chose the tribe of Judah. ¹⁷So the family groups of Judah presented themselves, and the Lord then chose the family group of Zerah. When all the families of Zerah presented themselves, the family of Zabdi was chosen. ¹⁸And Joshua told all the men in that family to present themselves. The Lord chose Achan son of Carmi. (Carmi was the son of Zabdi, who was the son of Zerah.) ¹⁹Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, tell the truth. Confess to the Lord, the God of Israel. Tell me what you did, and don’t try to hide anything from me.”

²⁰Achan answered, “It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I did: ²¹Among the things I saw was a beautiful coat from Babylonia and about five pounds of silver and more than one and one-fourth pounds of gold. I wanted these things very much for myself, so I took them. You will find them buried in the ground under my tent, with the silver underneath.”

²²So Joshua sent men who ran to the tent and found the things hidden there, with the silver. ²³The men brought them out of the tent, took them to Joshua and all the Israelites, and spread them out on the ground before the Lord. ²⁴Then Joshua and all the people led Achan son of Zerah to the Valley of Trouble. They also took the silver, the coat, the gold, Achan’s sons, daughters, cattle, donkeys, sheep, tent, and everything he owned. ²⁵Joshua said, “I don’t know why you caused so much trouble for us, but now the Lord will bring trouble to you.” Then all the people threw stones at Achan and his family until they died. Then the people burned them. ²⁶They piled

rocks over Achan's body, and they are still there today. That is why it is called the Valley of Trouble. After this the Lord was no longer angry.

Ai Is Destroyed

Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Don’t be afraid or give up. Lead all your fighting men to Ai. I will help you defeat the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. ²You will do to Ai and its king what you did to Jericho and its king. Only this time you may take all the wealth and keep it for yourselves. Now tell some of your soldiers to set up an ambush behind the city.”

³So Joshua led his whole army toward Ai. Then he chose thirty thousand of his best fighting men and sent them out at night. ⁴Joshua gave them these orders: “Listen carefully. You must set up an ambush behind the city. Don’t go far from it, but continue to watch and be ready. ⁵I and the men who are with me will march toward the city, and the men in the city will come out to fight us, just as they did before. Then we will turn and run away from them. ⁶They will chase us away from the city, thinking we are running away from them as we did before. When we run away, ⁷come out from your ambush and take the city. The Lord your God will give you the power to win. ⁸After you take the city, burn it. See to it! You have your orders.”

⁹Then Joshua sent them to wait in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai. But Joshua stayed the night with his people.

¹⁰Early the next morning Joshua gathered his men together. He and the older leaders of Israel led them up to Ai. ¹¹All of the soldiers who were with Joshua marched up to Ai and stopped in front of the city and made camp north of it. There was a valley between them and the city. ¹²Then Joshua chose about

five thousand men and set them in ambush in the area west of the city between Bethel and Ai. ¹³So the people took their positions; the main camp was north of the city, and the other men were hiding to the west. That night Joshua went down into the valley.

¹⁴Now when the king of Ai saw the army of Israel, he and his people got up early the next morning and hurried out to fight them. They went out to a place east of the city, but the king did not know soldiers were waiting in ambush behind the city. ¹⁵Joshua and all the men of Israel let the army of Ai push them back. Then they ran toward the desert. ¹⁶The men in Ai were called to chase Joshua and his men, so they left the city and went after them. ¹⁷All the men of Ai and Bethel chased the army of Israel. The city was left open; not a man stayed to protect it.

¹⁸Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Hold your spear toward Ai, because I will give you that city." So Joshua held his spear toward the city of Ai. ¹⁹When the Israelites who were in ambush saw this, they quickly came out of their hiding place and hurried toward the city. They entered the city, took control of it, and quickly set it on fire.

²⁰When the men of Ai looked back, they saw smoke rising from their city. At the same time the Israelites stopped running and turned against the men of Ai, who could not escape in any direction. ²¹When Joshua and all his men saw that the army had taken control of the city and saw the smoke rising from it, they stopped running and turned to fight the men of Ai. ²²The men who were in ambush also came out of the city to help with the fight. So the men of Ai were caught between the armies of Israel. None of the enemy escaped. The Israelites fought until

not one of the men of Ai was left alive, except ²³the king of Ai, and they brought him to Joshua.

A Review of the Fighting

²⁴During the fighting the army of Israel chased the men of Ai into the fields and desert and killed all of them. Then they went back to Ai and killed everyone there. ²⁵All the people of Ai died that day, twelve thousand men and women. ²⁶Joshua had held his spear toward Ai, as a sign to destroy the city, and did not draw it back until all the people of Ai were destroyed. ²⁷The people of Israel kept for themselves the animals and the other things the people of Ai had owned, as the Lord had commanded Joshua to do.

²⁸Then Joshua burned the city of Ai and made it a pile of ruins. And it is still like that today. ²⁹Joshua hanged the king of Ai on a tree and left him there until evening. At sunset Joshua told his men to take the king's body down from the tree and to throw it down at the city gate. Then they covered it with a pile of rocks, which is still there today.

³⁰Joshua built an altar for the Lord, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, as ³¹Moses, the Lord's servant, had commanded. Joshua built the altar as it was explained in the Book of the Teachings of Moses. It was made from uncut stones; no tool was ever used on them. On that altar the Israelites offered burnt offerings to the Lord and fellowship offerings. ³²There Joshua wrote the teachings of Moses on stones for all the people of Israel to see. ³³The older leaders, officers, judges, and all the Israelites were there; Israelites and non-Israelites were all standing around the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord in

front of the priests, the Levites who had carried the Ark. Half of the people stood in front of Mount Ebal, and half stood in front of Mount Gerizim. This was the way the Lord's servant Moses had earlier commanded the people to be blessed.

³⁴Then Joshua read all the words of the teachings, the blessings and the curses, exactly as they were written in the Book of the Teachings. ³⁵All the Israelites were gathered together—men, women, and children—along with the non-Israelites who lived among them. Joshua read every command that Moses had given.

Life Lessons

Joshua 8:1–35

Situation

After Achan's sin, Joshua carefully obeyed all of God's instructions. Joshua completely destroyed Ai and built an altar to the Lord.

Observation

After the defeat at Ai, the Israelites could have given up and retreated. But after judging Achan's crime, God gave Israel a second chance. As Israel confessed and turned from sin, God's favor was restored, and Israel won a great victory.

Inspiration

I would like to confess a fall. I've kept it secret long enough. I can't deny the stumble; nor can I dismiss the truth. I fell. There were witnesses to my slip. They can tell you. Graciously, they have told no one. Out of concern for my reputation, they kept the event a secret. But it has been a secret long enough.

The time has come for my mistake to be shared.

I lost my footing at a family camp.

My daughters and I chose to climb a wall—a simulated rock climb. The wall is made of wood with occasional rock-shaped fingerholds bolted into the surface. For safety, the climber wears a harness around his waist. The harness is attached to a rope that runs up through a pulley and then down into the hands of a guide who secures it as the climber climbs.

I gave it a go. What's a fifty-foot wall for a middle-aged author? I gave the guide the "thumbs-up" and began. The first half of the trip I did well. About midway, however, I began to get tired. These hands and feet are not accustomed to climbing.

With about twenty feet left to go, I honestly began to wonder if I would make it. I gave serious thought to telling the guide just to pull me up the rest of the way. My fingers were sore, and my legs were starting to tremble, and I was regretting every Big Mac I'd ever eaten, but the thought of surrender was lost in the cheers of my daughters who were already on the top.

"Come on, Dad. You can make it!"

So I gave it all I had. But all I had was not enough. My feet slipped, my hands slipped, and down I fell. I fell hard. But I didn't fall far. My guide had a firm hold on the rope. Because he was alert and because he was strong, my tumble lasted only a couple of seconds. I bounced and swung in the harness, suspended in midair. Everyone watching let out a sigh, and I gulped and resumed the climb.

Guess what I did when I made it to the top? Do you think I boasted? Do you think I bragged about conquering the wall? No way. I looked down at the one who kept me from falling. “Thanks, pal,” I told him. I didn’t pat myself on the back or raise my fist in triumph. I didn’t ask everybody if they’d seen what I did. I did the only thing that was right; I said thanks to the one who held me.

Would that all my tumbles were so simple. So brief. So harmless. They haven’t been. I’ve been known to let go of much more than imitation rocks. I’ve let go of promises and convictions. There have been times when my fingers slipped off the very stones of truth I treasure. And I can’t tell you how many times I’ve expected to hit the bottom only to find myself suspended in midair, secured by a pair of nail-pierced hands.

“Try again,” he urges. And so I resume.

You and I are on a great climb. The wall is high, and the stakes are higher. You took your first step the day you confessed Christ as the Son of God. He gave you his harness—the Holy Spirit. In your hands he placed a rope—his Word.

Your first steps were confident and strong, but with the journey came weariness, and with the height came fear. You lost your footing. You lost your focus. You lost your grip, and you fell. For a moment, which seemed like forever, you tumbled wildly. Out of control. Out of self-control. Disoriented. Dislodged. Falling.

But then the rope tightened, and the tumble

ceased. You hung in the harness and found it to be strong. You grasped the rope and found it to be true. You looked at your guide and found Jesus securing your soul. With a sheepish confession, you smiled at him and he smiled at you, and the journey resumed.

Now you are wiser. You have learned to go slowly. You are careful. You are cautious, but you are also confident. You trust the rope. You rely on the harness. And though you can't see your guide, you know him. You know he is strong. You know he is able to keep you from falling.

And you know you are only a few more steps from the top. So whatever you do, don't quit. Though your falls are great, his strength is greater. You will make it. You will see the summit. You will stand at the top. And when you get there, the first thing you'll do is join with all the others who have made the climb and sing this verse:

"God is strong and can help you not to fall. He can bring you before his glory without any wrong in you and can give you great joy. He is the only God, the One who saves us. To him be glory, greatness, power, and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord for all time past, now, and forever. Amen" ([Jude 24](#)).

(From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

Think of a time when you needed a second chance. How did it feel when you were given that opportunity? Remember, our God is a God of great mercy and grace, a God of third and fourth and fifth chances. Don't let your sins or your past keep you

from enjoying a strong relationship with him. Look to God to forgive you, to strengthen you, and to give you another chance.

Exploration

Restoration—[Psalm 19:7](#); [23:3](#); [Hebrews 12:12–13](#); [James 5:13–16](#); [1 Peter 2:24](#).

If your God is mighty enough to ignite the sun, could it be that he is mighty enough to light your path? —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

The Gibeonite Trickery

All the kings west of the Jordan River heard about these things: the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. They lived in the mountains and on the western hills and along the whole Mediterranean Sea coast. ²So all these kings gathered to fight Joshua and the Israelites.

³When the people of Gibeon heard how Joshua had defeated Jericho and Ai, ⁴they decided to trick the Israelites. They gathered old sacks and old leather wine bags that were cracked and mended, and they put them on the backs of their donkeys. ⁵They put old sandals on their feet and wore old clothes, and they took some dry, moldy bread. ⁶Then they went to Joshua in the camp near Gilgal.

The men said to Joshua and the Israelites, “We have traveled from a faraway country. Make a peace agreement with us.”

⁷The Israelites said to these Hivites, “Maybe you live near us. How can we make a peace agreement with you?”

⁸The Hivites said to Joshua, “We are your servants.”

But Joshua asked, “Who are you? Where do you come from?”

⁹The men answered, “We are your servants who have come from a far country, because we heard of the fame of the Lord your God. We heard about what he has done and everything he did in Egypt. ¹⁰We heard that he defeated the two kings of the Amorites from the east side of the Jordan River—Sihon

king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan who ruled in Ashtaroth. ¹¹So our older leaders and our people said to us, ‘Take food for your journey and go and meet the Israelites. Tell them, “We are your servants. Make a peace agreement with us.”’

¹²“Look at our bread. On the day we left home to come to you it was warm and fresh, but now it is dry and moldy. ¹³Look at our leather wine bags. They were new and filled with wine, but now they are cracked and old. Our clothes and sandals are worn out from the long journey.”

¹⁴The men of Israel tasted the bread, but they did not ask the Lord what to do. ¹⁵So Joshua agreed to make peace with the Gibeonites and to let them live. And the leaders of the Israelites swore an oath to keep the agreement.

¹⁶Three days after they had made the agreement, the Israelites learned that the Gibeonites lived nearby. ¹⁷So the Israelites went to where they lived and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath Jearim. ¹⁸But the Israelites did not attack those cities, because they had made a promise to them before the Lord, the God of Israel.

All the Israelites grumbled against the leaders. ¹⁹But the leaders answered, “We have given our promise before the Lord, the God of Israel, so we cannot attack them now. ²⁰This is what we must do. We must let them live. Otherwise, God’s anger will be against us for breaking the oath we swore to them. ²¹So let them live, but they will cut wood and carry water for our people.” So the leaders kept their promise to them.

²²Joshua called for the Gibeonites and asked, “Why did you lie to us? Your land was near our camp, but you told us you were from a far country. ²³Now, you will be placed under a

curse to be our slaves. You will have to cut wood and carry water for the house of my God.”

²⁴The Gibeonites answered Joshua, “We lied to you because we were afraid you would kill us. We heard that the Lord your God commanded his servant Moses to give you all of this land and to kill all the people who lived in it. That is why we did this.”²⁵Now you can decide what to do with us, whatever you think is right.”

²⁶So Joshua saved their lives by not allowing the Israelites to kill them,²⁷but he made the Gibeonites slaves. They cut wood and carried water for the Israelites, and they did it for the altar of the Lord—wherever he chose it to be. They are still doing this today.

The Sun Stands Still

At this time Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had defeated Ai and completely destroyed it, as he had also done to Jericho and its king. The king also learned that the Gibeonites had made a peace agreement with Israel and that they lived nearby.² Adoni-Zedek and his people were very afraid because of this. Gibeon was not a little town like Ai; it was a large city, as big as a city that had a king, and all its men were good fighters.³ So Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem sent a message to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish, and Debir king of Eglon. He begged them,⁴ “Come with me and help me attack Gibeon, which has made a peace agreement with Joshua and the Israelites.”

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: Authority and Power

There are many examples of Jesus' authority, but I'll just mention one of my favorites. Jesus and the disciples are in a boat crossing the sea of Galilee. A storm arises suddenly and what was placid becomes violent—monstrous waves rise out of the sea and slap the boat....

... The very storm which made the disciples panic made him drowsy. What put fear in their eyes put him to sleep. The boat was a tomb to the followers and a cradle to Christ. How could he sleep through the storm? Simple, he was in charge of it.

“Jesus stood up and commanded the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind stopped, and it became completely calm. Jesus said to his followers, ‘Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?’” ([Mark 4:39–40](#)).

Incredible. He doesn’t chant a mantra or wave a wand. No angels are called, no help is needed. The raging water becomes a stilled sea, instantly. Immediate calm. Not a ripple. Not a drop. Not a gust. In a moment the sea goes from a churning torrent to a peaceful pond. The reaction of the disciples? Read it in verse [41](#): “The followers were very afraid and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’” (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

⁵Then these five Amorite kings—the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon—gathered their armies, went to Gibeon, surrounded it, and attacked it.

⁶The Gibeonites sent this message to Joshua in his camp at Gilgal: “Don’t let us, your servants, be destroyed. Come quickly and help us! Save us! All the Amorite kings from the mountains have joined their armies and are fighting against us.”

⁷So Joshua marched out of Gilgal with his whole army, including his best fighting men. ⁸The Lord said to Joshua, “Don’t be afraid of those armies, because I will hand them over to you. None of them will be able to stand against you.”

⁹Joshua and his army marched all night from Gilgal for a surprise attack. ¹⁰The Lord confused those armies when Israel attacked, so Israel defeated them in a great victory at Gibeon. They chased them along the road going up to Beth Horon and killed men all the way to Azekah and Makkedah. ¹¹As they chased the enemy down the Beth Horon Pass to Azekah, the Lord threw large hailstones on them from the sky and killed them. More people were killed by the hailstones than by the Israelites’ swords.

¹²On the day that the Lord gave up the Amorites to the Israelites, Joshua stood before all the people of Israel and said to the Lord:

“Sun, stand still over Gibeon.
Moon, stand still over the Valley of Aijalon.”

¹³So the sun stood still,
and the moon stopped

until the people defeated their enemies.

These words are written in the Book of Jashar.

The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and waited to go down for a full day. ¹⁴That has never happened at any time before that day or since. That was the day the Lord listened to a human being. Truly the Lord was fighting for Israel!

¹⁵After this, Joshua and his army went back to the camp at Gilgal.

¹⁶During the fight the five kings ran away and hid in a cave near Makkedah, ¹⁷but someone found them hiding in the cave at Makkedah and told Joshua. ¹⁸So he said, “Cover the opening of the cave with large rocks. Put some men there to guard it, ¹⁹but don’t stay there yourselves. Continue chasing the enemy and attacking them from behind. Don’t let them get to their cities, because the Lord your God will hand them over to you.”

²⁰So Joshua and the Israelites killed the enemy, but a few were able to get back to their strong, walled cities. ²¹After the fighting, Joshua’s men came back safely to him at Makkedah. No one was brave enough to say a word against the Israelites.

²²Joshua said, “Move the rocks that are covering the opening of the cave and bring those five kings out to me.” ²³So Joshua’s men brought the five kings out of the cave—the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. ²⁴When they brought the five kings out to Joshua, he called for all his men. He said to the commanders of his army, “Come here! Put your feet on the necks of these kings.” So they came close and put their feet on their necks.

²⁵Joshua said to his men, “Be strong and brave! Don’t be afraid, because I will show you what the Lord will do to the

enemies you will fight in the future.”²⁶ Then Joshua killed the five kings and hung their bodies on five trees, where he left them until evening.

²⁷At sunset Joshua told his men to take the bodies down from the trees. Then they threw them into the same cave where they had been hiding and covered the opening of the cave with large rocks, which are still there today.

²⁸That day Joshua defeated Makkedah. He killed the king and completely destroyed all the people in that city as an offering to the Lord; no one was left alive. He did the same thing to the king of Makkedah that he had done to the king of Jericho.

Defeating Southern Cities

²⁹Joshua and all the Israelites traveled from Makkedah to Libnah and attacked it. ³⁰The Lord handed over the city and its king. They killed every person in the city; no one was left alive. And they did the same thing to that king that they had done to the king of Jericho.

³¹Then Joshua and all the Israelites left Libnah and went to Lachish, which they surrounded and attacked. ³²The Lord handed over Lachish on the second day. The Israelites killed everyone in that city just as they had done to Libnah. ³³During this same time Horam king of Gezer came to help Lachish, but Joshua also defeated him and his army; no one was left alive.

³⁴Then Joshua and all the Israelites went from Lachish to Eglon. They surrounded Eglon, attacked it, and ³⁵captured it the same day. They killed all its people and completely destroyed everything in it as an offering to the Lord, just as

they had done to Lachish.

³⁶Then Joshua and the Israelites went from Eglon to Hebron and attacked it, ³⁷capturing it and all the little towns near it. The Israelites killed everyone in Hebron; no one was left alive there. Just as they had done to Eglon, they completely destroyed the city and all its people as an offering to the Lord.

³⁸Then Joshua and the Israelites went back to Debir and attacked it. ³⁹They captured that city, its king, and all the little towns near it, completely destroying everyone in Debir as an offering to the Lord; no one was left alive there. Israel did to Debir and its king just as they had done to Libnah and its king, just as they had done to Hebron.

⁴⁰So Joshua defeated all the kings of the cities of these areas: the mountains, southern Canaan, the western hills, and the slopes. The Lord, the God of Israel, had told Joshua to completely destroy all the people as an offering to the Lord, so he left no one alive in those places. ⁴¹Joshua captured all the cities from Kadesh Barnea to Gaza, and from Goshen to Gibeon. ⁴²He captured all these cities and their kings on one trip, because the Lord, the God of Israel, was fighting for Israel.

⁴³Then Joshua and all the Israelites returned to their camp at Gilgal.

Life Lessons

Joshua 9:1–10:43

Situation

God did not promise the Israelites the land without giving them the strength to conquer it. God helped Joshua lead the people into possession of

their land.

Observation

God does not give us commands or lead us to decisions and leave us to fight the obstacles in our own strength. He strengthens us and guides us in every detail.

Inspiration

You get impatient with your own life, trying to master a habit or control a sin—and in your frustration begin to wonder where the power of God is. Be patient. God is using today's difficulties to strengthen you for tomorrow. He is *equipping* you. The God who makes things grow will help you bear fruit.

God did not leave you as an orphan. He says he will be with you always. All of us could use some more strength—who isn't trying to tackle an attitude or put away a bad habit or overcome guilt? We can't see the power, but it's real—we're not alone.

As long as we have hope, as long as we recognize that this world is not our home, as long as we recognize that someday all of our problems will be solved, that is where we will gather our strength. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, "Strength")

Application

If you are struggling right now with an attitude or bad habit, stop and focus on the promise of God's strength and his presence. As God did with the Israelites, he will go with you into battle and will equip you for whatever you may face this day. Remember that God is in charge and controls

everything.

Exploration

God's Strength for Us—[Exodus 15:2](#); [2 Samuel 22:33](#); [Psalm 28:8](#); [73:26](#); [81:1](#); [89:21](#).

Our obedience pulls the ropes which ring the bells in heaven's belfries. —Max Lucado (*Just Like Jesus*)

Defeating Northern Kings

When Jabin king of Hazor heard about all that had happened, he sent messages to Jobab king of Madon, to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Acshaph. ²He sent messages to the kings in the northern mountains and also to the kings in the Jordan Valley south of Lake Galilee and in the western hills. He sent a message to the king of Naphoth Dor in the west ³and to the kings of the Canaanites in the east and in the west. He sent messages to the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, and Jebusites in the mountains. Jabin also sent one to the Hivites, who lived below Mount Hermon in the area of Mizpah. ⁴So the armies of all these kings came together with their horses and chariots. There were as many soldiers as grains of sand on the seashore.

⁵All of these kings met together at the waters of Merom, joined their armies together into one camp, and made plans to fight against the Israelites.

⁶Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Don’t be afraid of them, because at this time tomorrow I will give them to you. You will cripple their horses and burn all their chariots.”

⁷So Joshua and his whole army surprised the enemy by attacking them at the waters of Merom. ⁸The Lord handed them over to Israel. They chased them to Greater Sidon, Misrephoth Maim, and the Valley of Mizpah in the east. Israel fought until none of the enemy was left alive. ⁹Joshua did what the Lord said to do; he crippled their horses and burned their chariots.

¹⁰Then Joshua went back and captured the city of Hazor and killed its king. (Hazor had been the leader of all the

kingdoms that fought against Israel.) ¹¹Israel killed everyone in Hazor, completely destroying them; no one was left alive. Then they burned Hazor itself.

¹²Joshua captured all of these cities, killed all of their kings, and completely destroyed everything in these cities. He did this just as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded.

¹³But the Israelites did not burn any cities that were built on their mounds, except Hazor; only that city was burned by Joshua. ¹⁴The people of Israel kept for themselves everything they found in the cities, including all the animals. But they killed all the people there; they left no one alive. ¹⁵Long ago the Lord had commanded his servant Moses to do this, and then Moses had commanded Joshua to do it. Joshua did everything the Lord had commanded Moses.

¹⁶So Joshua defeated all the people in the land. He had control of the mountains and the area of southern Canaan, all the areas of Goshen, the western hills, and the Jordan Valley. He controlled the mountains of Israel and all the hills near them. ¹⁷Joshua controlled all the land from Mount Halak near Edom to Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon, below Mount Hermon. Joshua also captured all the kings in the land and killed them. ¹⁸He fought against them for many years. ¹⁹The people of only one city in all the land had made a peace agreement with Israel—the Hivites living in Gibeon. All the other cities were defeated in war. ²⁰The Lord made those people stubborn so they would fight against Israel and he could completely destroy them without mercy. This is what the Lord had commanded Moses to do.

²¹Now Joshua fought the Anakites who lived in the mountains of Hebron, Debir, Anab, Judah, and Israel, and he

completely destroyed them and their towns.²² There were no Anakites left living in the land of the Israelites and only a few were left in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod.²³ Joshua took control of all the land of Israel as the Lord had told Moses to do long ago. He gave the land to Israel, because he had promised it to them. Then Joshua divided the land among the tribes of Israel, and there was peace in the land.

Life Lessons

Joshua 11:1–12:24

Situation

Joshua led Israel's army to many victories over the Canaanites. Though the Israelites were outnumbered, God is never outnumbered. He encouraged, supported, and brought victory to them. After seven years of campaigning, the Israelites destroyed the alliance of Canaanite tribes.

Observation

The world sees "victory" in a different light than the Bible does. The Bible sees victory as the finished work of Jesus Christ at Calvary and his resurrection. It has a future look and understanding.

Inspiration

Sometimes life doesn't seem fair, does it? Have you ever wondered why good people have to hurt? Why the innocent suffer? Often it seems that those who have been most battered by life seem to understand Jesus best, and his assurance finds its way into the darkest corners of life, because regardless of our circumstances, God meets our

needs. By surrendering to him, the ultimate victory is ours.

What is unique about the kingdom of God is that you are assured of victory. You have won! You are assured that you will someday stand before the face of God and see the King of kings. You are assured that someday you will enter a world where there will be no more pain, no more tears, nor more sorrow.

If you have no faith in the future, then you have no power in the present. If you have no faith in the life beyond this life, then your present life is going to be powerless. But if you believe in the future and are assured of victory, then there should be a dance in your step and a smile on your face. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, “Victory”)

Application

Do you believe that God has your best interests at heart? Recognize that you have been assured of victory, both in the future and in the present. Ask God for faith to believe him and his works.

Exploration

Victory—[Psalm 98:1](#); [Matthew 12:20](#); [1 Corinthians 15:54–55](#); [1 John 5:4](#).

God is for you. Had he a calendar, your birthday would be circled. —Max Lucado (*In the Grip of Grace*)

Kings Defeated by Israel

The Israelites took control of the land east of the Jordan River from the Arnon Ravine to Mount Hermon and all the land along the eastern side of the Jordan Valley. These lands belonged to the kings whom the Israelites defeated.

²Sihon king of the Amorites lived in the city of Heshbon and ruled the land from Aroer at the Arnon Ravine to the Jabbok River. His land started in the middle of the ravine, which was their border with the Ammonites. Sihon ruled over half the land of Gilead ³and over the eastern side of the Jordan Valley from Lake Galilee to the Dead Sea. And he ruled from Beth Jeshimoth south to the slopes of Pisgah.

⁴Og king of Bashan was one of the last of the Rephaites. He ruled the land in Ashtaroth and Edrei. ⁵He ruled over Mount Hermon, Salecah, and all the area of Bashan up to where the people of Geshur and Maacah lived. Og also ruled half the land of Gilead up to the border of Sihon king of Heshbon.

⁶The Lord's servant Moses and the Israelites defeated all these kings, and Moses gave that land to the tribes of Reuben and Gad and to East Manasseh as their own.

⁷Joshua and the Israelites also defeated kings in the land west of the Jordan River. He gave the people the land and divided it among the twelve tribes to be their own. It was between Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon and Mount Halak near Edom. ⁸This included the mountains, the western hills, the Jordan Valley, the slopes, the desert, and southern Canaan. This was the land where the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites had lived. The Israelites

defeated the king of each of the following cities: ⁹Jericho, Ai (near Bethel), ¹⁰Jerusalem, Hebron, ¹¹Jarmuth, Lachish, ¹²Eglon, Gezer, ¹³Debir, Geder, ¹⁴Hormah, Arad, ¹⁵Libnah, Adullam, ¹⁶Makkedah, Bethel, ¹⁷Tappuah, Hephher, ¹⁸Aphek, Lasharon, ¹⁹Madon, Hazor, ²⁰Shimron Meron, Acshaph, ²¹Taanach, Megiddo, ²²Kedesh, Jokneam in Carmel, ²³Dor (in Naphoth Dor), Goyim in Gilgal, and ²⁴Tirzah.

The total number of kings was thirty-one.

Land Still to Be Taken

When Joshua was very old, the Lord said to him, “Joshua, you have grown old, but there is still much land for you to take.

²This is what is left: the regions of Geshur and of the Philistines; ³the area from the Shihor River at the border of Egypt to Ekron in the north, which belongs to the Canaanites; the five Philistine leaders at Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron; the Avvites, ⁴who live south of the Canaanite land; ⁵the Gebalites, and the area of Lebanon east of Baal Gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo Hamath.

⁶“The Sidonians are living in the hill country from Lebanon to Misrephoth Maim, but I will force all of them out ahead of the Israelites. Be sure to remember this land when you divide the land among the Israelites, as I told you.

⁷“Now divide the land among the nine tribes and West Manasseh.”

Dividing the Land

⁸East Manasseh and the tribes of Reuben and Gad had received their land. The Lord’s servant Moses had given them the land east of the Jordan River. ⁹Their land started at Aroer at the Arnon Ravine and continued to the town in the middle of the ravine, and it included the whole plain from Medeba to Dibon. ¹⁰All the towns ruled by Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled in the city of Heshbon, were in that land. The land continued to the area where the Ammonites lived. ¹¹Gilead was

also there, as well as the area where the people of Geshur and Maacah lived, and all of Mount Hermon and Bashan as far as Salecah. ¹²All the kingdom of Og king of Bashan was in the land. Og was one of the last of the Rephaites, and in the past he ruled in Ashtaroth and Edrei. Moses had defeated them and had taken their land. ¹³Because the Israelites did not force out the people of Geshur and Maacah, they still live among the Israelites today.

¹⁴The tribe of Levi was the only one that did not get any land. Instead, they were given all the burned sacrifices made to the Lord, the God of Israel, as he had promised them.

¹⁵Moses had given each family group from the tribe of Reuben some land: ¹⁶Theirs was the land from Aroer near the Arnon Ravine to the town of Medeba, including the whole plain and the town in the middle of the ravine; ¹⁷Heshbon and all the towns on the plain: Dibon, Bamoth Baal, and Beth Baal Meon, ¹⁸Jahaz, Kedemoth, Mephaath, ¹⁹Kiriathaim, Sibmah, Zereth Shagar on the hill in the valley, ²⁰Beth Peor, the hills of Pisgah, and Beth Jeshimoth. ²¹So that land included all the towns on the plain and all the area that Sihon king of the Amorites had ruled from the town of Heshbon. Moses had defeated him along with the leaders of the Midianites, including Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba. All these leaders fought together with Sihon and lived in that country. ²²The Israelites killed many people during the fighting, including Balaam of Beor, who tried to use magic to tell the future. ²³The land given to Reuben stopped at the shore of the Jordan River. So the land given to the family groups of Reuben included all these towns and their villages that were listed.

²⁴This is the land Moses gave to the tribe of Gad, to all its

family groups: ²⁵the land of Jazer and all the towns of Gilead; half the land of the Ammonites that went as far as Aroer near Rabbah; ²⁶the area from Heshbon to Ramath Mizpah and Betonim; the area from Mahanaim to the land of Debir; ²⁷in the valley, Beth Haram, Beth Nimrah, Succoth, and Zaphon, the other land Sihon king of Heshbon had ruled east of the Jordan River and continuing to the end of Lake Galilee. ²⁸All this land went to the family groups of Gad, including all these towns and their villages.

²⁹This is the land Moses had given to East Manasseh. Half of all the family groups in the tribe of Manasseh were given this land: ³⁰The land started at Mahanaim and included all of Bashan and the land ruled by Og king of Bashan; all the towns of Jair in Bashan, sixty cities in all; ³¹half of Gilead, Ashtaroth, and Edrei, the cities where Og king of Bashan had ruled. All this went to the family of Makir son of Manasseh, and half of all his sons were given this land.

³²Moses had given this land to these tribes on the plains of Moab across the Jordan River east of Jericho. ³³But Moses had given no land to the tribe of Levi because the Lord, the God of Israel, promised that he himself would be the gift for the Levites.

Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the leaders of all the tribes of Israel decided what land to give to the people in the land of Canaan.²The Lord had commanded Moses long ago how he wanted the people to choose their land. The people of the nine-and-a-half tribes threw lots to decide which land they would receive.³Moses had already given the two-and-a-half tribes their land east of the Jordan River. But the tribe of Levi was not given any land like the others.⁴The sons of Joseph had divided into two tribes—Manasseh and Ephraim. The tribe of Levi was not given any land. It was given only some towns in which to live and pastures for its animals.⁵The Lord had told Moses how to give the land to the tribes of Israel, and the Israelites divided the land.

Caleb's Land

⁶One day some men from the tribe of Judah went to Joshua at Gilgal. Among them was Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite. He said to Joshua, "You remember what the Lord said at Kadesh Barnea when he was speaking to the prophet Moses about you and me.⁷Moses, the Lord's servant, sent me to look at the land where we were going. I was forty years old then. When I came back, I told Moses what I thought about the land.⁸The other men who went with me frightened the people, but I fully believed the Lord would allow us to take the land.⁹So that day Moses promised me, 'The land where you went will become your land, and your children will own it forever. I will give you that land because you fully believed in the Lord, my God.'

^{10c}Now then, the Lord has kept his promise. He has kept me

alive for forty-five years from the time he said this to Moses during the time we all wandered in the desert. Now here I am, eighty-five years old. ¹¹I am still as strong today as I was the day Moses sent me out, and I am just as ready to fight now as I was then. ¹²So give me the mountain country the Lord promised me that day long ago. Back then you heard that the Anakite people lived there and the cities were large and well protected. But now with the Lord helping me, I will force them out, just as the Lord said.”

¹³Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him the city of Hebron as his own. ¹⁴Hebron still belongs to the family of Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite because he had faith and obeyed the Lord, the God of Israel. ¹⁵(In the past it was called Kiriath Arba, named for Arba, the greatest man among the Anakites.)

After this there was peace in the land.

Life Lessons

Joshua 13:1–17:18

Situation

The twelve tribes of Israel divided the conquered lands according to God’s wishes. Joshua dismissed the army, leaving additional conquests as each tribe’s responsibility.

Observation

God rewards his people for following through on what he says. In these chapters, the Israelites were rewarded with a homeland.

Inspiration

God gives us “the real life” through His Son, Christ. And only through His Son. Please get that straight. That’s the basis of the gospel. That’s why Christ is the preeminent message—not good works, not positive thinking, not good books, not being widely traveled or earning a good education (as fine as all those things may be). Christ, and Christ alone, will give you the life of God, and He’s from outside this galaxy. He’s not within it....

Life from God is supernatural power now—not a vague force limited to a long time ago. You know, the greatest evidence of power is change. Take a trip to Hoover Dam and look at that massive amount of water; it’s really impressive. But you don’t say, “My! Look at that power.” What you see is not the greatest evidence of power. That’s just water going over a dam. If you want to see the evidence of power at Hoover Dam, you need to drive to a residential section in a nearby city that draws its source of electricity from the dam ... walk into a darkened room in the middle of the night and flip on the light. In one simple “click” you’ve got the greatest evidence of the power at that massive dam. It’s able to change darkness into light. It’s able to transform a cold house into a warm home.

Now, the wonderful news is that God dispenses His supernatural power to anyone who says, “I want it.” It doesn’t cost you a thing. You don’t have to see a film. You don’t have to visit a territory of the country. There are no Meccas. You don’t have to read a series of books. You don’t have to be on

probation for a year and a half. You don't have to keep going to a church to earn your way in. You don't have to pray a whole lot.... Whether you're the richest of the rich, the poorest of the poor, or anywhere between, all you have to do is take a gift. And the gift is the power of God, through faith in His Son. (From *Living on the Ragged Edge* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

What "promised lands" have you inherited in recent years: Studies completed? Relationships secured? Reflect on God's help. Thank him today. Stretch your faith for tomorrow.

Exploration

Promises—[Genesis 21:7](#); [Exodus 2:23–25](#); [Joshua 21:43–45](#); [23:14](#); [Psalm 119:65](#); [Hebrews 10:35–39](#).

Land for Judah

The land that was given to the tribe of Judah was divided among all the family groups. It went all the way to the Desert of Zin in the far south, at the border of Edom.

²The southern border of Judah's land started at the south end of the Dead Sea ³and went south of Scorpion Pass to Zin. From there it passed to the south of Kadesh Barnea and continued past Hezron to Addar. From Addar it turned and went to Karka. ⁴It continued to Azmon, the brook of Egypt, and then to the Mediterranean Sea. This was the southern border.

⁵The eastern border was the shore of the Dead Sea, as far as the mouth of the Jordan River.

The northern border started at the bay of the sea at the mouth of the Jordan River. ⁶Then it went to Beth Hoglah and continued north of Beth Arabah to the stone of Bohan son of Reuben. ⁷Then the northern border went through the Valley of Achor to Debir where it turned toward the north and went to Gilgal. Gilgal is across from the road that goes through Adummim Pass, on the south side of the ravine. The border continued to the waters of En Shemesh and stopped at En Rogel. ⁸Then it went through the Valley of Ben Hinnom, next to the southern side of the Jebusite city (which is called Jerusalem). There the border went to the top of the hill on the west side of Hinnom Valley, at the northern end of the Valley of Giants. ⁹From there it went to the spring of the waters of Nephtoah and then it went to the cities near Mount Ephron. There it turned and went toward Baalah, which is called Kiriath

Jearim.¹⁰At Baalah the border turned west and went toward Mount Seir. It continued along the north side of Mount Jearim (also called Kesalon) and came to Beth Shemesh. From there it went past Timnah¹¹to the hill north of Ekron. Then it turned toward Shikkeron and went past Mount Baalah and continued on to Jabneel, ending at the sea.

¹²The Mediterranean Sea was the western border. Inside these borders lived the family groups of Judah.

¹³The Lord had commanded Joshua to give Caleb son of Jephunneh part of the land in Judah, so he gave Caleb the town of Kiriath Arba, also called Hebron. (Arba was the father of Anak.)¹⁴Caleb forced out the three Anakite families living in Hebron: Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi, the descendants of Anak.¹⁵Then he left there and went to fight against the people living in Debir. (In the past Debir had been called Kiriath Sepher.)¹⁶Caleb said, "I will give Acsah, my daughter, as a wife to the man who attacks and captures the city of Kiriath Sepher."¹⁷Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's brother, captured the city, so Caleb gave his daughter Acsah to Othniel to be his wife.¹⁸When Acsah came to Othniel, she told him to ask her father for a field.

So Acsah went to her father. When she got down from her donkey, Caleb asked her, "What do you want?"

¹⁹Acsah answered, "Do me a special favor. Since you have given me land in southern Canaan, also give me springs of water." So Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

²⁰The tribe of Judah got the land God had promised them. Each family group got part of the land.

²¹The tribe of Judah got all these towns in the southern part of Canaan near the border of Edom: Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur,

²²Kinah, Dimonah, Adadah, ²³Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan, ²⁴Ziph, Telem, Bealoth, ²⁵Hazor Hadattah, Kerioth Hezron (also called Hazor), ²⁶Amam, Shema, Moladah, ²⁷Hazar Gaddah, Heshmon, Beth Pelet, ²⁸Hazar Shual, Beersheba, Biziothiah, ²⁹Baalalah, Im, Eze m, ³⁰Eltolad, Kesil, Hormah, ³¹Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah, ³²Lebaoth, Shilhim, Ain, and Rimmon. There were twenty-nine towns and their villages.

³³The tribe of Judah got these towns in the western hills: Eshtaol, Zorah, Ashnah, ³⁴Zanoah, En Gannim, Tappuah, Enam, ³⁵Jarmuth, Adullam, Socoh, Azekah, ³⁶Shaaraim, Adithaim, and Gederah (also called Gederothaim). There were fourteen towns and their villages.

³⁷Judah was also given these towns in the western hills: Zenan, Hadashah, Migdal Gad, ³⁸Dilean, Mizpah, Joktheel, ³⁹Lachish, Bozkath, Eglon, ⁴⁰Cabbon, Lahmas, Kitlish, ⁴¹Gederoth, Beth Dagon, Naamah, and Makkedah. There were sixteen towns and their villages.

⁴²Judah was also given these towns in the western hills: Libnah, Ether, Ashan, ⁴³Iphtah, Ashnah, Nezib, ⁴⁴Keilah, Aczib, and Mareshah. There were nine towns and their villages.

⁴⁵The tribe of Judah was also given these towns: Ekron and all the small towns and villages near it; ⁴⁶the area west of Ekron and all the villages and small towns near Ashdod; ⁴⁷Ashdod and the small towns and villages around it; the villages and small towns around Gaza as far as the brook of Egypt and along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

⁴⁸The tribe of Judah was also given these towns in the mountains: Shamir, Jattir, Socoh, ⁴⁹Dannah, Kiriath Sannah (also called Debir), ⁵⁰Anab, Eshtemoh, Anim, ⁵¹Goshen, Holon,

and Giloh. There were eleven towns and their villages.

⁵²They were also given these towns in the mountains: Arab, Dumah, Eshan, ⁵³Janim, Beth Tappuah, Aphekah, ⁵⁴Humtah, Kiriath Arba (also called Hebron), and Zior. There were nine towns and their villages.

⁵⁵Judah was also given these towns in the mountains: Maon, Carmel, Ziph, Juttah, ⁵⁶Jezreel, Jokdeam, Zanoah, ⁵⁷Kain, Gibeah, and Timnah. There were ten towns and their villages.

⁵⁸They were also given these towns in the mountains: Halhul, Beth Zur, Gedor, ⁵⁹Maarath, Beth Anoth, and Eltekon. There were six towns and their villages.

⁶⁰The people of Judah were also given the two towns of Rabbah and Kiriath Baal (also called Kiriath Jearim) and their villages.

⁶¹Judah was given these towns in the desert: Beth Arabah, Middin, Secacah, ⁶²Nibshan, the City of Salt, and En Gedi. There were six towns and all their villages.

⁶³The army of Judah was not able to force out the Jebusites living in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites still live among the people of Judah to this day.

Land for Ephraim and Manasseh

This is the land the tribe of Joseph received. It started at the Jordan River near Jericho and continued to the waters of Jericho, just east of the city. The border went up from Jericho to the mountains of Bethel.² Then it continued from Bethel (also called Luz) to the Arkite border at Ataroth.³ From there it went west to the border of the Japhletites and continued to the area of the Lower Beth Horon. Then it went to Gezer and ended at the sea.

⁴So Manasseh and Ephraim, sons of Joseph, received their land.

⁵This is the land that was given to the family groups of Ephraim: Their border started at Ataroth Addar in the east, went to Upper Beth Horon,⁶ and then to the sea. From Micmethath it turned eastward toward Taanath Shiloh and continued eastward to Janoah.⁷ Then it went down from Janoah to Ataroth and to Naarah. It continued until it touched Jericho and stopped at the Jordan River.⁸ The border went from Tappuah west to Kanah Ravine and ended at the sea. This is all the land that was given to each family group in the tribe of the Ephraimites.⁹ Many of the towns were actually within Manasseh's borders, but the people of Ephraim got those towns and their villages.¹⁰ The Ephraimites could not force the Canaanites to leave Gezer, so the Canaanites still live among the Ephraimites today, but they became slaves of the Ephraimites.

Then land was given to the tribe of Manasseh, Joseph's first son. Manasseh's first son was Makir, the father of Gilead. Makir was a great soldier, so the lands of Gilead and Bashan were given to his family.² Land was also given to the other family groups of Manasseh—Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hephher, and Shemida. These were all the other sons of Manasseh son of Joseph.

³Zelophehad was the son of Hephher, who was the son of Gilead, who was the son of Makir, who was the son of Manasseh. Zelophehad had no sons, but he had five daughters, named Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.⁴ They went to Eleazar the priest and to Joshua son of Nun and all the leaders. They said, "The Lord told Moses to give us land like the men received." So Eleazar obeyed the Lord and gave the daughters some land, just like the brothers of their father.⁵ So the tribe of Manasseh had ten sections of land west of the Jordan River and two more sections, Gilead and Bashan, on the east side of the Jordan River.⁶ The daughters of Manasseh received land just as the sons did. Gilead was given to the rest of the families of Manasseh.

⁷The lands of Manasseh were in the area between Asher and Micmethath, near Shechem. The border went south to the En Tappuah area,⁸ which belonged to Manasseh, except for the town of Tappuah. It was along the border of Manasseh's land and belonged to the sons of Ephraim.⁹ The border of Manasseh continued south to Kanah Ravine. The cities in this area of Manasseh belonged to Ephraim. Manasseh's border was on the north side of the ravine and went to the sea.¹⁰ The land to the south belonged to Ephraim, and the land to the north belonged to Manasseh. The Mediterranean Sea was the

western border. The border touched Asher's land on the north and Issachar's land on the east.

¹¹In the areas of Issachar and Asher, the people of Manasseh owned these towns: Beth Shan and its small towns; Ibleam and its small towns; the people who lived in Dor and its small towns; the people in Naphoth Dor and its small towns; the people who lived in Taanach and its small towns; the people in Megiddo and its small towns. ¹²Manasseh was not able to defeat those cities, so the Canaanites continued to live there. ¹³When the Israelites grew strong, they forced the Canaanites to work for them, although they did not force them to leave the land.

¹⁴The people from the tribes of Joseph said to Joshua, "You gave us only one area of land, but we are many people. Why did you give us only one part of all the land the Lord gave his people?"

¹⁵And Joshua answered them, "If you have too many people, go up to the forest and make a place for yourselves to live there in the land of the Perizzites and the Rephaites. The mountain country of Ephraim is too small for you."

¹⁶The people of Joseph said, "It is true. The mountain country of Ephraim is not enough for us, but the land where the Canaanites live is dangerous. They are skilled fighters. They have powerful weapons in Beth Shan and all the small towns in that area, and they are also in the Valley of Jezreel."

¹⁷Then Joshua said to the people of Joseph—to Ephraim and Manasseh, "There are many of you, and you have great power. You should be given more than one share of land. ¹⁸You also will have the mountain country. It is a forest, but you can cut down the trees and make it a good place to live. You will

own all of it because you will force the Canaanites to leave the land even though they have powerful weapons and are strong.”

Life Lessons

Joshua 18:1–19:51

Situation

Seven more tribes received their inheritance, which was administered by Joshua. He also took possession of the town, Timmath.

Observation

The children of Israel could not exercise full dominion over the land as its new tenants until each tribe had been assigned its portions. When this occurred, then the nation as a whole began to rule and have authority on the earth as God's representatives.

Inspiration

I was praying and fasting some years ago, seeking to understand God's purpose more fully. I heard his voice, level and conversational, "What do I desire for man?"

A bit surprised, I replied, "I don't know, Lord. You know." Then the Lord directed me to open my Bible. "Look at Genesis, and you will see, he said."

Genesis is one of the longest books in the Bible, but I opened it at the beginning. As I read along, my eyes fell on this passage:

And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man.

“Let them have dominion.” My eyes went over it several times. Then I knew the Lord’s purpose. He wanted man to have dominion—then and now.

It was very clear. This was a kingdom law. God wants man to have authority over the earth. He wants him to rule the way he was created to rule....

Almighty God wants us to recapture the dominion man held in the beginning. He has gone to great lengths to make that possible, sending His own Son as the second Adam to restore what was lost in Eden....

God gives man the authority to govern all that is willing to be governed... . He grants man authority over the untamed and rebellious. God gave man a sweeping and total mandate of dominion over this planet and everything in it.

But stewardship requires responsibility. And implicit in the grant was a requirement that man order the planet according to God’s will and for God’s purposes. This was a grant of freedom, not of license. As subsequent history proved, God’s intention was that His world be governed and subdued by those who themselves were governed by God. (From *The Secret Kingdom* by Pat Robertson)

Application

Are you a faithful steward of what God has given you? Do you spend money carefully? Do you take care of your environment? Be a faithful steward this week: recycle more, waste less. Don’t overlook the little details that can add up to tremendous waste.

Exploration

Man's Dominion—[Genesis 1:26](#); [9:2](#); [Daniel 2:38](#);
[Hebrews 2:7](#).

The Rest of the Land Divided

All of the Israelites gathered together at Shiloh where they set up the Meeting Tent. The land was now under their control.²But there were still seven tribes of Israel that had not yet received their land.

³So Joshua said to the Israelites: “Why do you wait so long to take your land? The Lord, the God of your ancestors, has given this land to you.⁴Choose three men from each tribe, and I will send them out to study the land. They will describe in writing the land their tribe wants as its share, and then they will come back to me.⁵They will divide the land into seven parts. The people of Judah will keep their land in the south, and the people of Joseph will keep their land in the north.⁶You should describe the seven parts of land in writing and bring what you have written to me. Then I will throw lots in the presence of the Lord our God.⁷But the Levites do not get any part of these lands, because they are priests, and their work is to serve the Lord. Gad, Reuben, and East Manasseh have received the land promised to them, which is east of the Jordan River. Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave it to them.”

⁸So the men who were chosen to map the land started out. Joshua told them, “Go and study the land and describe it in writing. Then come back to me, and I will throw lots in the presence of the Lord here in Shiloh.”⁹So the men left and went into the land. They described in a scroll each town in the seven

parts of the land. Then they came back to Joshua, who was still at the camp at Shiloh. ¹⁰There Joshua threw lots in the presence of the Lord to choose the lands that should be given to each tribe.

Land for Benjamin

¹¹The first part of the land was given to the tribe of Benjamin. Each family group received some land between the land of Judah and the land of Joseph. This is the land chosen for Benjamin: ¹²The northern border started at the Jordan River and went along the northern edge of Jericho, and then it went west into the mountains. That boundary continued until it was just east of Beth Aven. ¹³From there it went south to Luz (also called Bethel) and then down to Ataroth Addar, which is on the hill south of Lower Beth Horon.

¹⁴At the hill to the south of Beth Horon, the border turned and went south near the western side of the hill. It went to Kiriath Baal (also called Kiriath Jearim), a town where people of Judah lived. This was the western border.

¹⁵The southern border started near Kiriath Jearim and went west to the waters of Nephtoah. ¹⁶Then it went down to the bottom of the hill, which was near the Valley of Ben Hinnom, on the north side of the Valley of Rephaim. The border continued down the Hinnom Valley just south of the Jebusite city to En Rogel. ¹⁷There it turned north and went to En Shemesh. It continued to Geliloth near the Adummim Pass. Then it went down to the great Stone of Bohan son of Reuben. ¹⁸The border continued to the northern part of Beth Arabah and went down into the Jordan Valley. ¹⁹From there it went to

the northern part of Beth Hoglah and ended at the north shore of the Dead Sea, where the Jordan River flows into the sea. This was the southern border.

²⁰The Jordan River was the border on the eastern side. So this was the land given to the family groups of Benjamin with the borders on all sides.

²¹The family groups of Benjamin received these cities: Jericho, Beth Hoglah, Emek Keziz, ²²Beth Arabah, Zemaraim, Bethel, ²³Avvim, Parah, Ophrah, ²⁴Kephar Ammoni, Ophni, and Geba. There were twelve towns and all their villages.

²⁵The tribe of Benjamin also received Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth, ²⁶Mizpah, Kephirah, Mozah, ²⁷Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah, ²⁸Zelah, Haeleph, the Jebusite city (Jerusalem), Gibeah, and Kiriath. There were fourteen towns and their villages. All these areas are the lands the family groups of Benjamin were given.

Land for Simeon

The second part of the land was given to the tribe of Simeon. Each family group received some of the land inside the area of Judah. ²They received Beersheba (also called Sheba), Moladah, ³Hazar Shual, Balah, Ezem, ⁴Eltolad, Bethul, Hormah, ⁵Ziklag, Beth Marcaboth, Hazar Susah, ⁶Beth Lebaoth, and Sharuhén. There were thirteen towns and their villages.

⁷They received the towns of Ain, Rimmon, Ether, and Ashan, four towns and their villages. ⁸They also received all the very small areas with people living in them as far as Baalath Beer (this is the same as Ramah in southern Canaan). So these were the lands given to the family groups in the tribe of Simeon. ⁹The land of the Simeonites was taken from part of the land of Judah. Since Judah had much more land than they needed, the Simeonites received part of their land.

Land for Zebulun

¹⁰The third part of the land was given to the tribe of Zebulun. Each family group of Zebulun received some of the land. The border of Zebulun went as far as Sarid. ¹¹Then it went west to Maralah and came near Dabbesheth and then near Jokneam. ¹²Then it turned to the east. It went from Sarid to the area of Kisloth Tabor and on to Daberath and to Japhia. ¹³It continued eastward to Gath Hepher and Eth Kazin, ending at Rimmon. There the border turned and went toward Neah. ¹⁴At Neah it turned again and went to the north to Hannathon and

continued to the Valley of Iphtah El. ¹⁵Inside this border were the cities of Kattath, Nahalal, Shimron, Idalah, and Bethlehem. There were twelve towns and their villages.

¹⁶So these are the towns and the villages that were given to the family groups of Zebulun.

Land for Issachar

¹⁷The fourth part of the land was given to the tribe of Issachar. Each family group of Issachar received some of the land.

¹⁸Their land included Jezreel, Kesulloth, Shunem, ¹⁹Hapharaim, Shion, Anaharath, ²⁰Rabbith, Kishion, Ebez, ²¹Remeth, En Gannim, En Haddah, and Beth Pazzez.

²²The border of their land touched the area called Tabor, Shahazumah, and Beth Shemesh and stopped at the Jordan River. There were sixteen towns and their villages.

²³These cities and towns were part of the land that was given to the family groups of Issachar.

Land for Asher

²⁴The fifth part of the land was given to the tribe of Asher. Each family group of Asher received some of the land. ²⁵Their land included Helkath, Hali, Beten, Acshaph, ²⁶Allammelech, Amad, and Mishal.

The western border touched Mount Carmel and Shihor Libnath. ²⁷Then it turned east and went to Beth Dagon, touching Zebulun and the Valley of Iphtah El. Then it went north of Beth Emek and Niel and passed north to Cabul.

²⁸From there it went to Abdon, Rehob, Hammon, and Kanah and continued to Greater Sidon. ²⁹Then the border went back south toward Ramah and continued to the strong, walled city of Tyre. There it turned and went toward Hosah, ending at the sea. This was in the area of Aczib, ³⁰Ummah, Aphek, and Rehob. There were twenty-two towns and their villages.

³¹These cities and their villages were part of the land that was given to the family groups of Asher.

Land for Naphtali

³²The sixth part of the land was given to the tribe of Naphtali. Each family group of Naphtali received some of the land. ³³The border of their land started at the large tree in Zaanannim, which is near Heleph. Then it went through Adami Nekeb and Jabneel, as far as Lakkum, and ended at the Jordan River.

³⁴Then it went to the west through Aznoth Tabor and stopped at Hukkok. It went to the area of Zebulun on the south, Asher on the west, and Judah, at the Jordan River, on the east. ³⁵The strong, walled cities inside these borders were called Ziddim, Zer, Hammath, Rakkath, Kinnereth, ³⁶Adamah, Ramah, Hazor, ³⁷Kedesh, Edrei, En Hazor, ³⁸Iron, Migdal El, Horem, Beth Anath, and Beth Shemesh. There were nineteen towns and all their villages.

³⁹The towns and the villages around them were in the land that was given to the family groups of Naphtali.

Land for Dan

⁴⁰The seventh part of the land was given to the tribe of Dan. Each family group of Dan received some of the land. ⁴¹Their land included Zorah, Eshtaol, Ir Shemesh, ⁴²Shaalabbin, Aijalon, Ithlah, ⁴³Elon, Timnah, Ekron, ⁴⁴Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath, ⁴⁵Jehud, Bene Berak, Gath Rimmon, ⁴⁶Me Jarkon, Rakkon, and the area near Joppa.

⁴⁷(But the Danites had trouble taking their land. They went and fought against Leshem, defeated it, and killed the people who lived there. So the Danites moved into the town of Leshem and changed its name to Dan, because he was the father of their tribe.) ⁴⁸All of these towns and villages were given to the family groups of Dan.

Land for Joshua

⁴⁹After the leaders finished dividing the land and giving it to the different tribes, the Israelites gave Joshua son of Nun his land also. ⁵⁰They gave Joshua the town he asked for, Timnath Serah in the mountains of Ephraim, just as the Lord commanded. He built up the town and lived there.

⁵¹So these lands were given to the different tribes of Israel. Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the leaders of each tribe divided up the land by lots at Shiloh. They met in the presence of the Lord at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. Now they were finished dividing the land.

Life Lessons

Joshua 20:1–21:45

Situation

God set up cities of safety to protect the innocent and consecrated the Levites for service to him. Because of the Levites' position, they were not eligible to inherit land, but Joshua assigned them towns and pasturelands to provide for their needs.

Observation

The Lord, in justice and love for his people, provides for all their needs, even for unforeseen accidents.

Inspiration

To recognize God as Lord is to acknowledge that he is sovereign and supreme in the universe. To accept him as Savior is to accept his gift of salvation offered on the cross. To regard him as a Father is to go a step further. Ideally, a father is the one in your life who provides and protects. That is exactly what God has done.

He has provided for your needs. He has protected you from harm. He has adopted you. And he has given you his name.

God has proven himself as a faithful father. Now it falls to us to be trusting children. Let God give you what your family doesn't. Let him fill the void others have left. Rely upon him for your affirmation and encouragement. Look at Paul's words: "You are God's child, and *God will give you the blessing he*

*promised, because you are his child” ([Galatians 4:7](#), emphasis added). (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)*

Application

As God’s children we have confidence in his provision for all our needs. We know that he even notices the unforeseen problems and our smallest concerns. Approach God as you would a loving father.

Exploration

God Provides—[Psalm 103:3](#); [128:2](#); [Proverbs 10:22](#); [Isaiah 43:20](#); [Matthew 6:26](#).

Cities of Safety

Then the Lord said to Joshua: ²“Tell the Israelites to choose the special cities of safety, as I had Moses command you to do. ³If a person kills someone accidentally and without meaning to kill him, that person may go to a city of safety to hide. There the killer will be safe from the relative who has the duty of punishing a murderer.

⁴“When the killer runs to one of those cities, he must stop at the entrance gate, stand there, and tell the leaders of the people what happened. Then that person will be allowed to enter the city and will be given a place to live among them. ⁵But if the one who is chasing him follows him to that city, the leaders of the city must not hand over the killer. It was an accident. He did not hate him beforehand or kill him on purpose. ⁶The killer must stay in the city until a court comes to a decision and until the high priest dies. Then he may go back home to the town from which he ran away.”

⁷So the Israelites chose these cities to be cities of safety: Kedesh in Galilee in the mountains of Naphtali; Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim; Kiriath Arba (also called Hebron) in the mountains of Judah; ⁸Bezer on the east side of the Jordan River near Jericho in the desert in the land of Reuben; Ramoth in Gilead in the land of Gad; and Golan in Bashan in the land of Manasseh. ⁹Any Israelite or anyone living among them who killed someone accidentally was to be allowed to run to one of

these cities of safety. There he would not be killed, before he was judged, by the relative who had the duty of punishing a murderer.

Towns for the Levites

The heads of the Levite families went to talk to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua son of Nun, and to the heads of the families of all the tribes of Israel. ²At Shiloh in the land of Canaan, the heads of the Levite families said to them, “The Lord commanded Moses that you give us towns where we may live and pastures for our animals.” ³So the Israelites obeyed this command of the Lord and gave the Levite people these towns and pastures for their own land: ⁴The Kohath family groups were part of the tribe of Levi. Some of the Levites in the Kohath family groups were from the family of Aaron the priest. To these Levites were given thirteen towns in the areas of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. ⁵The other family groups of Kohath were given ten towns in the areas of Ephraim, Dan, and West Manasseh.

⁶The people from the Gershon family groups were given thirteen towns in the land of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and the East Manasseh in Bashan.

⁷The family groups of Merari were given twelve towns in the areas of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun.

⁸So the Israelites gave the Levites these towns and the pastures around them, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

⁹These are the names of the towns that came from the lands of Judah and Simeon. ¹⁰The first choice of towns was given to the Kohath family groups of the Levites. ¹¹They gave them Kiriath Arba, also called Hebron, and all its pastures in the

mountains of Judah. (Arba was the father of Anak.) ¹²But the fields and the villages around Kiriath Arba had been given to Caleb son of Jephunneh.

¹³So they gave the city of Hebron to the descendants of Aaron (Hebron was a city of safety). They also gave them the towns of Libnah, ¹⁴Jattir, Eshtemoa, ¹⁵Holon, Debir, ¹⁶Ain, Juttah, and Beth Shemesh, and all the pastures around them. Nine towns were given from these two tribes.

¹⁷They also gave the people of Aaron these cities that belonged to the tribe of Benjamin: Gibeon, Geba, ¹⁸Anathoth, and Almon. They gave them these four towns and the pastures around them.

¹⁹So these thirteen towns with their pastures were given to the priests, who were from the family of Aaron.

²⁰The other Kohathite family groups of the Levites were given these towns from the tribe of Ephraim: ²¹Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim (which was a city of safety), Gezer, ²²Kibzaim, and Beth Horon. There were four towns and their pastures.

²³The tribe of Dan gave them Eltekeh, Gibbethon, ²⁴Aijalon, and Gath Rimmon. There were four towns and their pastures.

²⁵West Manasseh gave them Taanach and Gath Rimmon and the pastures around these two towns.

²⁶So these ten towns and the pastures around them were given to the rest of the Kohathite family groups.

²⁷The Gershonite family groups of the Levite tribe were given these towns: East Manasseh gave them Golan in Bashan, which was a city of safety, and Be Eshtarah, and the pastures around these two towns.

²⁸The tribe of Issachar gave them Kishion, Daberath,

²⁹Jarmuth, and En Gannim, and the pastures around these four towns.

³⁰The tribe of Asher gave them Mishal, Abdon, ³¹Helkath, and Rehob, and the pastures around these four towns.

³²The tribe of Naphtali gave them Kedesh in Galilee (a city of safety), Hammoth Dor, and Kartan, and the pastures around these three towns.

³³So the Gershonite family groups received thirteen towns and the pastures around them.

³⁴The Merarite family groups (the rest of the Levites) were given these towns: The tribe of Zebulun gave them Jokneam, Kartah, ³⁵Dimnah, and Nahalal, and the pastures around these four towns.

³⁶The tribe of Reuben gave them Bezer, Jahaz, ³⁷Kedemoth, and Mephaath, along with the pastures around these four towns.

³⁸The tribe of Gad gave them Ramoth in Gilead (a city of safety), Mahanaim, ³⁹Heshbon, and Jazer, and the pastures around these four towns.

⁴⁰So the total number of towns given to the Merarite family groups was twelve.

⁴¹A total of forty-eight towns with their pastures in the land of Israel were given to the Levites. ⁴²Each town had pastures around it.

⁴³So the Lord gave the people all the land he had promised their ancestors. The people took the land and lived there. ⁴⁴The Lord gave them peace on all sides, as he had promised their ancestors. None of their enemies defeated them; the Lord handed all their enemies over to them. ⁴⁵He kept every promise he had made to the Israelites; each one came true.

Life Lessons

Joshua 22:1–34

Situation

The Israelites conquered and possessed the land. Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh fulfilled their obligations to conquer the western side of Jordan. Returning to the eastern side, the three tribes built an altar patterned after the Lord's altar. They were accused of idolatry and rebellion. But Phinehas declared that the altar was a token of solidarity with the rest of Israel and a reminder to the rest of the tribes that they all worshiped one God.

Observation

When conflict occurs we must not jump to a hasty conclusion, but listen to both sides of the story in order to make a wise decision.

Inspiration

These are ten questions you'll want to ask yourself and pray about when you're faced with a decision. The first five are generic. They represent moral issues and godly wisdom that are normative for all times. The next five are questions that you need to ask when facing a change in direction. Let's take a look at what each question entails.

First, have you prayed about it? The Lord's Prayer begins with a petition for His will. Prayer was never intended to be a fourth-down punting situation in which we ask God to bail us out of our hasty decisions. It was intended to be a first-down huddle.

We aren't supposed to ask God to bless our plans; we are supposed to ask God for His plans.

... Second, is it consistent with the Word of God? In our culture ignorance is no excuse since resources abound. I believe every home should have at least a concordance, Bible dictionary, topical Bible, a good commentary and a study Bible with notes.

... Third, can I do it and be a positive Christian witness?

... Fourth, will the Lord be glorified? ... Am I seeking the glory of man or glory of God? Am I doing this to be noticed by man or am I seeking to please the Lord?

... Fifth, am I acting responsibly? God doesn't bail us out of our irresponsibility. He will let us suffer the consequences of our sins and irresponsible choices. But when we are faithful in little things, He will put us in charge of greater things.

... Sixth, is it reasonable? God expects us to think. His guidance may transcend human reasoning, but it never excludes it. God doesn't bypass our mind... . We are warned in Scripture not to put our mind in neutral. We are to think and practice what we know to be true ([Philippians 4:8-9](#)).

Seventh, does a realistic opportunity exist? Closed doors are not meant to be knocked down. If you have a hopeless scheme let it go. If it isn't God's timing, wait. If a realistic opportunity exists, and all the other factors are in agreement, then take the plunge.

... Eighth, are unbiased, spiritually sensitive

associates in agreement? Be careful not to consult only those who will agree with you. Give your advisors permission to ask hard questions. Don't be afraid of no answers. If it isn't God's will, don't you want to know before you make the mistake of acting impulsively?

Ninth, do I have a sanctified desire? Don't think that being in the will of God must always be an unpleasant task. The joy of the Lord should be our strength... Is this a desire to satisfy a lust of the flesh, or a Spirit-filled desire to see God's kingdom established and people helped?

Tenth, do I have a peace about it? This is an inner peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but in Christ we have assurance of overcoming the world. Is the peace of God guarding your heart and your mind?

If you have been able to answer yes to all ten deciding factors, what are you waiting for? (From *Walking in the Light* by Neil Anderson)

Application

Rewrite the ten questions listed above. Which questions have you neglected to consider? Are you facing a key decision? Evaluate your choice in light of these questions.

Exploration

Decisions—[Proverbs 18:13](#), [15](#), [17](#); [Matthew 1:19](#); [James 1:5–8](#).

God rewards those who seek him. Not those who seek doctrine or religion or systems or creeds. —Max Lucado
(*Just Like Jesus*)

Three Tribes Go Home

Then Joshua called a meeting of all the people from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh. ²He said to them, “You have done everything Moses, the Lord’s servant, told you to do. You have also obeyed all my commands. ³For a long time you have supported the other Israelites. You have been careful to obey the commands the Lord your God gave you. ⁴The Lord your God promised to give the Israelites peace, and he has kept his promise. Now you may go back to your homes, to the land that Moses, the Lord’s servant, gave you, on the east side of the Jordan River. ⁵But be careful to obey the teachings and laws Moses, the Lord’s servant, gave you: to love the Lord your God and obey his commands, to continue to follow him and serve him the very best you can.”

⁶Then Joshua said goodbye to them, and they left and went away to their homes. ⁷Moses had given the land of Bashan to East Manasseh. Joshua gave land on the west side of the Jordan River to West Manasseh. And he sent them to their homes and he blessed them. ⁸He said, “Go back to your homes and your riches. You have many animals, silver, gold, bronze, and iron, and many beautiful clothes. Also, you have taken many things from your enemies that you should divide among

yourselves.”

⁹So the people from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh left the other Israelites at Shiloh in Canaan and went back to Gilead. It was their own land, given to them by Moses as the Lord had commanded.

¹⁰The people of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh went to Geliloth, near the Jordan River in the land of Canaan. There they built a beautiful altar. ¹¹The other Israelites still at Shiloh heard about the altar these three tribes built at the border of Canaan at Geliloth, near the Jordan River on Israel’s side. ¹²All the Israelites became very angry at these three tribes, so they met together and decided to fight them.

¹³The Israelites sent Phinehas son of Eleazar the priest to Gilead to talk to the people of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh. ¹⁴They also sent one leader from each of the ten tribes at Shiloh. Each of them was a leader of his family group of Israelites.

¹⁵These leaders went to Gilead to talk to the people of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh. They said: ¹⁶“All the Israelites ask you: ‘Why did you turn against the God of Israel by building an altar for yourselves? You know that this is against God’s law. ¹⁷Remember what happened at Peor? We still suffer today because of that sin, for which God made many Israelites very sick. ¹⁸And now are you turning against the Lord and refusing to follow him?

“‘If you don’t stop what you’re doing today, the Lord will be angry with everyone in Israel tomorrow. ¹⁹If your land is unclean, come over into our land where the Lord’s Tent is. Share it with us. But don’t turn against the Lord and us by building another altar for the Lord our God. ²⁰Remember how

Achan son of Zerah refused to obey the command about what must be completely destroyed. That one man broke God's law, but all the Israelites were punished. Achan died because of his sin, but others also died.'"

²¹The people from Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh answered, ²²"The Lord is God of gods! The Lord is God of gods! God knows, and we want you to know also. If we have done something wrong, you may kill us. ²³If we broke God's law, we ask the Lord himself to punish us. We did not build this altar to offer burnt offerings or grain and fellowship offerings.

²⁴"We did not build it for that reason. We feared that some day your people would not accept us as part of your nation. Then they might say, 'You cannot worship the Lord, the God of Israel. ²⁵The Lord made the Jordan River a border between us and you people of Reuben and Gad. You cannot worship the Lord.' So we feared that your children might make our children stop worshipping the Lord.

²⁶"That is why we decided to build this altar. But it is not for burnt offerings and sacrifices. ²⁷This altar is proof to you and us and to all our children who will come after us that we worship the Lord with our whole burnt offerings, grain, and fellowship offerings. This was so your children would not say to our children, 'You are not the Lord's.'

²⁸"In the future if your children say that, our children can say, 'See the altar made by our ancestors. It is exactly like the Lord's altar, but we do not use it for sacrifices. It shows that we are part of Israel.'

²⁹"Truly, we don't want to be against the Lord or to stop following him by building an altar for burnt offerings, grain

offerings, or sacrifices. We know the only true altar to the Lord our God is in front of the Holy Tent.”

³⁰When Phinehas the priest and the ten leaders heard the people of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh, they were pleased.

³¹So Phinehas, son of Eleazar the priest, said, “Now we know the Lord is with us and that you didn’t turn against him. Now the Israelites will not be punished by the Lord.”

³²Then Phinehas and the leaders left the people of Reuben and Gad in Gilead and went back to Canaan where they told the Israelites what had happened. ³³They were pleased and thanked God. So they decided not to fight the people of Reuben and Gad and destroy those lands.

³⁴And the people of Reuben and Gad named the altar Proof That We Believe the Lord Is God.

The Last Words of Joshua

The Lord gave Israel peace from their enemies around them. Many years passed, and Joshua grew very old.²He called a meeting of all the older leaders, heads of families, judges, and officers of Israel. He said, “I am now very old.³You have seen what the Lord has done to our enemies to help us. The Lord your God fought for you.⁴Remember that your people have been given their land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea in the west, the land I promised to give you.⁵The Lord your God will force out the people living there. The Lord will push them out ahead of you. And you will own the land, as he has promised you.

⁶“Be strong. You must be careful to obey everything commanded in the Book of the Teachings of Moses. Do exactly as it says.⁷Don’t become friends with the people living among us who are not Israelites. Don’t say the names of their gods or make anyone swear by them. Don’t serve or worship them.⁸You must continue to follow the Lord your God, as you have done in the past.

⁹“The Lord has forced many great and powerful nations to leave ahead of you. No nation has been able to defeat you.¹⁰With his help, one Israelite could defeat a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, as he promised to do.¹¹So you must be careful to love the Lord your God.

¹²“If you turn away from the way of the Lord and become friends with these people who are not part of Israel and marry them,¹³the Lord your God will not help you defeat your

enemies. They will be like traps for you, like whips on your back and thorns in your eyes, and none of you will be left in this good land the Lord your God has given you.

¹⁴“It’s almost time for me to die. You know and fully believe that the Lord has done great things for you. You know that he has not failed to keep any of his promises. ¹⁵Every good promise that the Lord your God made has come true, and in the same way, his other promises will come true. He promised that evil will come to you and that he will destroy you from this good land that he gave you. ¹⁶This will happen if you don’t keep your agreement with the Lord your God. If you go and serve other gods and worship them, the Lord will become very angry with you. Then none of you will be left in this good land he has given you.”

Life Lessons

Joshua 23:1–24:33

Situation

God gave the people of Israel rest from all their enemies. In his farewell address, Joshua reminded the people of God’s bountiful grace and mercy. He gave the Israelites commands to help them avoid falling into most likely areas of temptation.

Observation

We must resist the temptation to sin and live in loving obedience to God.

Inspiration

Several men went on a mission trip to Haiti where they met a nineteen-year-old boy who loved Christ deeply. He impressed them so profoundly that they

invited him to visit the United States.

Upon arrival a whole new world opened up before this young Haitian's eyes. He had never slept between sheets, never had three meals on the same day, never used indoor plumbing, and never tasted McDonald's.

While traveling the U.S., this godly young man made many new friends. At the end of a six-week-long visit, his sponsors hosted a farewell dinner in his honor. After dinner several members of the group offered warm parting remarks. Then they asked the young Haitian if he would like to say anything.

"Yes," he said as he rose, "I would. I want to thank you so much for inviting me here. I have really enjoyed this time in the United States. But I am also very glad to be going home. You have so much in America, that I'm beginning to lose my grip on my day-to-day dependency on Christ."

Do you have "so much" that you find it hard to keep a grip on your day-to-day dependency on Christ? Or worse, have you lost your grip?

When we don't need to depend on Christ, we will not.... Our natural tendency is to depend on self, not Christ. Depending on Christ is an act of the will by faith, not the natural disposition of our heart.

I have prayed that God will always keep some major unmet need in my life so that I will always depend upon Him. To be really in need, like the widow in [1 Timothy 5:5](#), creates dependency. To have so much, as the young Haitian observed, creates self-sufficiency. When our lives prosper, the natural

tendency is to lose our grip.

Someone called my prayer courageous. I disagree. It is not of courage, but of fear—the fear of a holy God. For God has the power to give us what we deserve, whether good or bad. I have come to fear, with reverence and awe, the God who is, for He is a consuming fire. (From *Walking with Christ in the Details of Life* by Patrick Morley)

Application

Have your abundant resources kept you from depending on God? Have you lost your grip on God's help? Focus on a special need that only God can meet. Seek his help today.

Exploration

Dependence—[2 Chronicles 13:18](#); [16:8](#); [Psalm 34:4–7](#); [John 8:26](#).

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel together at Shechem. He called the older leaders, heads of families, judges, and officers of Israel to stand before God.

²Then Joshua said to all the people, “Here’s what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to you: ‘A long time ago your ancestors lived on the other side of the Euphrates River. Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, worshiped other gods. ³But I, the Lord, took your ancestor Abraham from the other side of the river and led him through the land of Canaan. And I gave him many children, including his son Isaac. ⁴I gave Isaac two sons named Jacob and Esau. I gave the land around the mountains of Edom to Esau, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt. ⁵Then I sent Moses and Aaron to Egypt, where I brought many disasters on the Egyptians. Afterwards I brought you out. ⁶When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, they came to the Red Sea, and the Egyptians chased them with chariots and men on horses. ⁷So the people called out to the Lord. And I brought darkness between you and the Egyptians and made the sea to cover them. You yourselves saw what I did to the army of Egypt. After that, you lived in the desert for a long time.

⁸“Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, east of the Jordan River. They fought against you, but I handed them over to you. I destroyed them before you, and you took control of that land. ⁹But the king of Moab, Balak son of Zippor, prepared to fight against the Israelites. The king sent for Balaam son of Beor to curse you, ¹⁰but I refused to listen to Balaam. So he asked for good things to happen to you! I saved you and brought you out of his power.

¹¹“Then you crossed the Jordan River and came to Jericho, where the people of Jericho fought against you. Also, the

Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites, and Jebusites fought against you. But I handed them over to you. ¹²I sent terror ahead of you to force out two Amorite kings. You took the land without using swords and bows. ¹³I gave you that land where you did not have to work. I gave you cities that you did not have to build. And now you live in that land and in those cities, and you eat from vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant.”

¹⁴Then Joshua said to the people, “Now respect the Lord and serve him fully and sincerely. Throw away the gods that your ancestors worshiped on the other side of the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord. ¹⁵But if you don’t want to serve the Lord, you must choose for yourselves today whom you will serve. You may serve the gods that your ancestors worshiped when they lived on the other side of the Euphrates River, or you may serve the gods of the Amorites who lived in this land. As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.”

¹⁶Then the people answered, “We will never stop following the Lord to serve other gods! ¹⁷It was the Lord our God who brought our ancestors out of Egypt. We were slaves in that land, but the Lord did great things for us there. He brought us out and protected us while we traveled through other lands. ¹⁸Then he forced out all the people living in these lands, even the Amorites. So we will serve the Lord, because he is our God.”

¹⁹Then Joshua said, “You are not able to serve the Lord, because he is a holy God and a jealous God. If you turn against him and sin, he will not forgive you. ²⁰If you leave the Lord and serve other gods, he will send you great trouble. The Lord may have been good to you, but if you turn against him, he will

destroy you.”

²¹But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the Lord.”

²²Then Joshua said, “You are your own witnesses that you have chosen to serve the Lord.”

The people said, “Yes, we are.”

²³Then Joshua said, “Now throw away the gods that you have. Love the Lord, the God of Israel, with all your heart.”

²⁴Then the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the Lord our God, and we will obey him.”

²⁵On that day at Shechem Joshua made an agreement for the people. He made rules and laws for them to follow. ²⁶Joshua wrote these things in the Book of the Teachings of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up under the oak tree near the Lord’s Holy Tent.

²⁷Joshua said to all the people, “See this stone! It will remind you of what we did today. It was here the Lord spoke to us today. It will remind you of what happened so you will not turn against your God.”

Joshua Dies

²⁸Then Joshua sent the people back to their land.

²⁹After that, Joshua son of Nun died at the age of one hundred ten. ³⁰They buried him in his own land at Timnath Serah, in the mountains of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

³¹The Israelites served the Lord during the lifetime of Joshua and during the lifetimes of the older leaders who lived after Joshua who had seen what the Lord had done for Israel.

Joseph Comes Home

³²When the Israelites left Egypt, they carried the bones of Joseph with them. They buried them at Shechem, in the land Jacob had bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor (Hamor was the father of Shechem). This land now belonged to Joseph's children.

³³And Eleazar son of Aaron died and was buried at Gibeah in the mountains of Ephraim, which had been given to Eleazar's son Phinehas.

roof In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

The Book of Judges

Introduction

It was a nation born out of a passion for religious freedom. Free practice of faith had been oppressed and forbidden in the old country. The people longed to be in a place where they could worship God as they desired.

So they left. Willing to battle the fears of the unknown in exchange for freedom. Only a small portion of those who began the journey survived it.

When the travelers reached the new country they celebrated. They gave thanks to God and praised him for guiding them to their new home.

But their new home was not a peaceful place. Nearby enemies attacked and years of battles ensued. The settlers, however, were men and women of faith and courage. With time they sank their roots in the new land and began a new life.

The first generation of settlers were hearty people. Though the hardships were great, their faith was greater. God answered their prayers and established them in the new land.

With time the new land was divided into states, and leaders were assigned to each region. The population grew, and the boundary of the country expanded.

But with the growth of the land and the passage of the decades, two troubling trends began.

The first was the disappearance of values. Early settlers had a common conviction as to what was right and wrong. The family was the core of society. Religion was the source of faith. Education was the highest task.

But by the end of the first hundred years in the new land, these virtues had begun to wane ... the family was under

attack; sophisticated thinkers mocked religion.

The second alarming trend was the inconsistency of moral leadership. Early leaders—capable military and skillful politicians—were also men of God. Men prone to spend time in prayer and meditation. Men who listened to God and earnestly tried to follow his will.

Such leadership became rare, however. The nation we look at now lacks moral leadership. Leaders squabble and steal. Others are lazy and spoiled. There are even cases of national leaders accused of making sexual advances to women.

Though the nation has a glorious past, it is hidden in a cloudy present.

Sound familiar? Sound like any nation you know? Sound like us? It sounds like ours, could be ours, might be ours, but I didn't get the profile out of the newspaper. I read it in the Bible. In the Book of Judges.

Judges chronicles the dark ages of Israel, the death of Israel. The death of the heart. A three hundred-year era in which “everyone did what seemed right” ([Judges 21:25](#)).

Not a pretty story. Not intended to be. It's intended to be a warning. A warning of what happens when God is ignored and passions are worshiped.

A warning for our times.

About This Book

Author:

Probably Samuel, but possibly another prophet

Date Written:

1050–1043 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- Israel continued to fall in and out of disobedience to God.
- God continued to call Israel back and save them from destruction.
- Without a moral leader and center, Israel went the way of nations who didn't know God.

Key Verse:

“In those days Israel did not have a king. Everyone did what seemed right” ([Judges 21:25](#)).

Contents:

1. Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar [1:1–3:31](#)
2. Deborah [4:1–5:31](#)
3. Gideon [6:1–8:35](#)
4. From Abimelech to Jephthah [9:1–12:7](#)
5. From Ibzan to Samson [12:8–16:31](#)
6. Civil Strife and Spiritual Disobedience [17:1–21:25](#)

Life Lessons

Judges 1:1–2:5

Situation

God commanded Israel to destroy every enemy in the Promised Land. Yet, Israel decided to leave some “harmless” enemies alone. Not only was Israel disobedient, but the “harmless” residents of the land of Israel rose up to become dangerous enemies.

Observation

God foresees potential danger in our lives. He gives commands that, if followed, can protect us from dangerous consequences. If we neglect certain commands, we may reap painful consequences later.

Inspiration

The tables turned! Instead of the Hebrews’ keeping the upper hand, they loosened their grip on absolute obedience, they talked themselves out of Joshua’s game plan, they opted for compromise with wrong ... and they became victims instead of victors.

Compromises like that never work. We always get burned. Even though we rationalize around our weak decisions and tell ourselves that wicked associations really won’t harm us (“They’ll get better, our good will rub off on their bad!”), we get soiled in the process.

If you put on a pair of clean white gloves on a rainy day and then go out into the backyard to the flower bed and pick up a glob of mud, trust me, the mud will never get “glovey.” The gloves will

definitely get muddy. Every time. In all my forty nine years on earth, I have never seen glovey mud. Not once. In simple terms that is what [1 Corinthians 15:33](#) is saying: “Do not be deceived: bad company corrupts good morals.”

... Just as the human body cannot grow and survive unless disease is removed ... and just as the national body of Israel could not remain strong and healthy unless Canaanite lifestyle was removed, so it is in the body of Christ. If our resistance breaks down, alien germs will cause us to lose our health and hinder our ability to function. (From *Dropping Your Guard* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

What sin did you purposely commit yesterday or today? Learn from Israel: Compromise can be deadly! Decide today to be totally faithful and obedient to God.

Exploration

Compromise—[Genesis 19](#); [Exodus 8:25–29](#); [Numbers 25:1](#); [1 Kings 11:4](#); [Proverbs 12:3](#); [Daniel 1:8–16](#); [Mark 15:15](#); [2 Corinthians 6:14–18](#); [Galatians 2:11–14](#); [Revelation 2:2–3](#).

Judah Fights the Canaanites

After Joshua died, the Israelites asked the Lord, “Who will be first to go and fight for us against the Canaanites?”

²The Lord said to them, “The tribe of Judah will go. I have handed the land over to them.”

³The men of Judah said to the men of Simeon, their relatives, “Come and help us fight the Canaanites for our land. If you do, we will go and help you fight for your land.” So the men of Simeon went with them.

⁴When Judah attacked, the Lord handed over the Canaanites and the Perizzites to them, and they defeated ten thousand men at the city of Bezek. ⁵There they found Adoni-Bezek, the ruler of the city, and fought him. The men of Judah defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites, ⁶but Adoni-Bezek ran away. The men of Judah chased him, and when they caught him, they cut off his thumbs and big toes.

⁷Adoni-Bezek said, “Seventy kings whose thumbs and big toes had been cut off used to eat scraps that fell from my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them.” The men of Judah took Adoni-Bezek to Jerusalem, and he died there.

⁸Then the men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it. They attacked with their swords and burned the city.

⁹Later, they went down to fight the Canaanites who lived in the mountains, in the dry country to the south, and in the

western hills.¹⁰The men of Judah went to fight against the Canaanites in the city of Hebron (which used to be called Kiriath Arba). And they defeated Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi.

Caleb and His Daughter

¹¹Then they left there and went to fight against the people living in Debir. (In the past Debir had been called Kiriath Sepher.) ¹²Before attacking the city, Caleb said, "I will give Acsah, my daughter, as a wife to the man who attacks and captures the city of Kiriath Sepher." ¹³Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured the city, so Caleb gave his daughter Acsah to Othniel to be his wife. ¹⁴When Acsah came to Othniel, she told him to ask her father for a field. When she got down from her donkey, Caleb asked her, "What do you want?"

¹⁵Acsah answered him, "Do me a special favor. Since you have given me land in southern Canaan, also give me springs of water." So Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

Fights with the Canaanites

¹⁶The Kenite people, who were from the family of Moses' father-in-law, left Jericho, the city of palm trees. They went with the men of Judah to the Desert of Judah to live with them there in southern Judah near the city of Arad.

¹⁷The men of Judah and the men of Simeon, their relatives, defeated the Canaanites who lived in Zephath. They completely destroyed the city, so they called it [Hormah](#). ¹⁸The men of Judah captured Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron, and the lands

around them.

¹⁹The Lord was with the men of Judah. They took the land in the mountains, but they could not force out the people living on the plain, because they had iron chariots. ²⁰As Moses had promised, Hebron was given to Caleb, and Caleb forced out the three sons of Anak. ²¹But the people of Benjamin could not make the Jebusite people leave Jerusalem. Since that time the Jebusites have lived with the Benjaminites in Jerusalem.

²²The men of Joseph went to fight against the city of Bethel, and the Lord was with them. ²³They sent some spies to Bethel (which used to be called Luz). ²⁴The spies saw a man coming out of the city and said to him, "Show us a way into the city, and we will be kind to you." ²⁵So the man showed them the way into the city. The men of Joseph attacked with swords the people in Bethel, but they let the man and his family go free. ²⁶He went to the land where the Hittites lived and built a city. He named it Luz, which it is called even today.

²⁷There were Canaanites living in the cities of Beth Shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo, and the small towns around them. The people of Manasseh did not force those people out of their towns, because the Canaanites were determined to stay there. ²⁸Later, the Israelites grew strong and forced the Canaanites to work as slaves, but they did not make all the Canaanites leave their land. ²⁹The people of Ephraim did not force out all of the Canaanites living in Gezer. So the Canaanites continued to live in Gezer with the people of Ephraim. ³⁰The people of Zebulun did not force out the Canaanites living in the cities of Kitron and Nahalol. They stayed and lived with the people of Zebulun, but Zebulun made them work as slaves.

³¹The people of Asher did not force the Canaanites from the cities of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Aczib, Helbah, Aphek, and Rehob. ³²Since the people of Asher did not force them out, the Canaanites continued to live with them. ³³The people of Naphtali did not force out the people of the cities of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath. So they continued to live with the Canaanites in those cities, and the Canaanites worked as slaves. ³⁴The Amorites forced the Danites back into the mountains and would not let them come down to live in the plain. ³⁵The Amorites were determined to stay in Mount Heres, Aijalon, and Shaalbim. But when the Israelites grew stronger, they made the Amorites work as slaves. ³⁶The land of the Amorites was from Scorpion Pass to Sela and beyond.

The Angel of the Lord at Bokim

The angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, “I brought you up from Egypt and led you to the land I promised to give your ancestors. I said, ‘I will never break my agreement with you.’²But you must not make an agreement with the people who live in this land. You must destroy their altars.’ But you did not obey me. How could you do this?³Now I tell you, ‘I will not force out the people in this land. They will be your enemies, and their gods will be a trap for you.’”

⁴After the angel gave Israel this message from the Lord, they cried loudly. ⁵So they named the place [Bokim](#). There they offered sacrifices to the Lord.

Life Lessons

[Judges 2:6–3:6](#)

Situation

A new generation of Israelites neglected their relationship with God. They did not see God’s hand at work like their parents had. When they turned away from God, God disciplined them.

Observation

Failing to teach our children to love and obey God will bring disaster on them.

Inspiration

Have you ever thought about what you are going to leave behind when you die? Most people think in terms of possessions—property, money, stocks and

bonds, and so forth. But let's think in terms of what kind of spiritual heritage, what kind of lifestyle, what kind of understanding of who God is and of what the Scriptures say will be your legacy?

You may say, "Wait a minute. You can't give someone else your faith. That is something everyone has to experience on a personal basis. You can't really give your faith away." You cannot give away your experience, I admit, but you can hand down your faith. You can leave your sense of moral values, your understanding of the principles of Scripture, those principles of the Word of God that have guided you and led you as you made your decisions in life...

If you are a godly parent, look at what you have to give to your children. You may not be able to leave them even a small amount of money but if you have loved God and practiced the principles of Scripture, if you have loved your children and listened to them, you will leave them a faith to sustain them through every difficulty, every heartache, and every trial of life.

My challenge to you is to build a strong Christian home. If you will purpose to do so, you will keep your kids on your team. (From *How to Keep Your Kids on Your Team* by Charles Stanley)

Application

Pray daily with your children and discipline them. Speak to them from your heart about the Lord.

Exploration

Handing Down Your Faith—[Deuteronomy 6:4-7](#); [11:18-21](#); [32:46](#); [Proverbs 20:7](#); [22:6](#); [Isaiah 38:19](#);

Ephesians 6:4; 2 Timothy 1:1–9; 3:14–15.

Joshua Dies

⁶Then Joshua sent the people back to their land. ⁷The people served the Lord during the lifetime of Joshua and during the lifetimes of the older leaders who lived after Joshua and who had seen what great things the Lord had done for Israel.

⁸Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred ten. ⁹They buried him in his own land at Timnath Serah in the mountains of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

The People Disobey

¹⁰After those people had died, their children grew up and did not know the Lord or what he had done for Israel. ¹¹So they did what the Lord said was wrong, and they worshiped the Baal idols. ¹²They quit following the Lord, the God of their ancestors who had brought them out of Egypt. They began to worship the gods of the people who lived around them, and that made the Lord angry. ¹³The Israelites quit following the Lord and worshiped Baal and Ashtoreth. ¹⁴The Lord was angry with the people of Israel, so he handed them over to robbers who took their possessions. He let their enemies who lived around them defeat them; they could not protect themselves. ¹⁵When the Israelites went out to fight, they always lost, because the Lord was not with them. The Lord had sworn to them this would happen. So the Israelites suffered very much.

God Chooses Judges

¹⁶Then the Lord chose leaders called [judges](#), who saved the Israelites from the robbers. ¹⁷But the Israelites did not listen to their judges. They were not faithful to God but worshiped other gods instead. Their ancestors had obeyed the Lord's commands, but they quickly turned away and did not obey.

¹⁸When their enemies hurt them, the Israelites cried for help. So the Lord felt sorry for them and sent judges to save them from their enemies. The Lord was with those judges all their lives.

¹⁹But when the judges died, the Israelites again sinned and worshiped other gods. They became worse than their ancestors. The Israelites were very stubborn and refused to change their evil ways.

²⁰So the Lord became angry with the Israelites. He said, "These people have broken the agreement I made with their ancestors. They have not listened to me. ²¹I will no longer defeat the nations who were left when Joshua died. ²²I will use them to test Israel, to see if Israel will keep the Lord's commands as their ancestors did." ²³In the past the Lord had permitted those nations to stay in the land. He did not quickly force them out or help Joshua's army defeat them.

These are the nations the Lord did not force to leave. He wanted to test the Israelites who had not fought in the wars of Canaan.²(The only reason the Lord left those nations in the land was to teach the descendants of the Israelites who had not fought in those wars how to fight.)³These are the nations: the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the people of Sidon, and the Hivites who lived in the Lebanon mountains from Mount Baal Hermon to Lebo Hamath.⁴Those nations were in the land to test the Israelites—to see if they would obey the commands the Lord had given to their ancestors by Moses.

⁵The people of Israel lived with the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.⁶The Israelites began to marry the daughters of those people, and they allowed their daughters to marry the sons of those people. Israel also served their gods.

Othniel, the First Judge

⁷The Israelites did what the Lord said was wrong. They forgot about the Lord their God and served the idols of Baal and Asherah.⁸So the Lord was angry with Israel and allowed Cushan-Rishathaim king of Northwest Mesopotamia to rule over the Israelites for eight years.⁹When Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord sent someone to save them. Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, saved the Israelites.¹⁰The Spirit of the Lord entered Othniel, and he became Israel's judge. When he went to war, the Lord handed over to him Cushan-Rishathaim king of Northwest Mesopotamia.¹¹So the land was at peace for forty years. Then Othniel son of Kenaz

died.

Ehud, the Judge

¹²Again the people of Israel did what the Lord said was wrong. So the Lord gave Eglon king of Moab power to defeat Israel because of the evil Israel did. ¹³Eglon got the Ammonites and the Amalekites to join him. Then he attacked Israel and took Jericho, the city of palm trees. ¹⁴So the people of Israel were ruled by Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years.

¹⁵When the people cried to the Lord, he sent someone to save them. He was Ehud, son of Gera from the people of Benjamin, who was left-handed. Israel sent Ehud to give Eglon king of Moab the payment he demanded. ¹⁶Ehud made himself a sword with two edges, about eighteen inches long, and he tied it to his right hip under his clothes. ¹⁷Ehud gave Eglon king of Moab the payment he demanded. Now Eglon was a very fat man. ¹⁸After he had given Eglon the payment, Ehud sent away the people who had carried it. ¹⁹When he passed the statues near Gilgal, he turned around and said to Eglon, "I have a secret message for you, King Eglon."

The king said, "Be quiet!" Then he sent all of his servants out of the room. ²⁰Ehud went to King Eglon, as he was sitting alone in the room above his summer palace.

Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." As the king stood up from his chair, ²¹Ehud reached with his left hand and took out the sword that was tied to his right hip. Then he stabbed the sword deep into the king's belly! ²²Even the handle sank in, and the blade came out his back. The king's fat covered the whole sword, so Ehud left the sword in Eglon.

²³Then he went out of the room and closed and locked the doors behind him.

²⁴When the servants returned just after Ehud left, they found the doors to the room locked. So they thought the king was relieving himself. ²⁵They waited for a long time. Finally they became worried because he still had not opened the doors. So they got the key and unlocked them and saw their king lying dead on the floor!

²⁶While the servants were waiting, Ehud had escaped. He passed by the statues and went to Seirah. ²⁷When he reached the mountains of Ephraim he blew the trumpet. The people of Israel heard it and went down from the hills with Ehud leading them.

²⁸He said to them, “Follow me! The Lord has helped you to defeat your enemies, the Moabites.” So Israel followed Ehud and captured the crossings of the Jordan River. They did not allow the Moabites to cross the Jordan River. ²⁹Israel killed about ten thousand strong and able men from Moab; not one escaped. ³⁰So that day Moab was forced to be under the rule of Israel, and there was peace in the land for eighty years.

Shamgar, the Judge

³¹After Ehud, Shamgar son of Anath saved Israel. Shamgar killed six hundred Philistines with a sharp stick used to guide oxen.

Life Lessons

[Judges 3:7–31](#)

Situation

The Israelites rebelled against God. He used their enemies to exercise his discipline.

Observation

Despite their disobedience, God provided deliverers for the people of Israel in Othniel and later, Ehud. God is willing to provide safety and forgiveness for his people as long as they turn to him.

Inspiration

Our family used to go to Cape Cod every summer. Many times when the tide was low we looked eyeball to eyeball at some little sea creature in his shell. He wasn't a bit afraid of us; we were the ones who were afraid! There we were with all our sixty-nine hundred square inches apiece of exposed skin—and all his possible bites and pinches. But he was safe. He knew, as long as he stayed retracted in that nice, strong shell, that we couldn't get to him.

And as far as all eternity is concerned, you're safe in Christ.

As far as all the hassles in your life are concerned, you're safe in Him.

As far as all your unknowns are concerned, you're safe.

As far as all the world, the flesh and the devil are concerned—you're safe.

But what if that little fellow, instead of staying safe in his shell, comes right out and he's sunning himself on our hand, totally unconcerned? Now he's vulnerable to anything, everything.

If you refuse to learn what it means to abide in

Christ; if you insist on living out there where you worry and you strive and you're insecure and even disobedient; if you deliberately choose to live as if you were not in Christ at all—you're totally vulnerable, and you're in deep trouble with yourself and with God.

He commands you to learn to abide in Him and stay there. He requires that you settle down and shelter yourself in Him and trust Him absolutely. He insists on your living your life in Him; with its resulting rest and joy. If you don't, He loves you too much to neglect you. He'll childtrain you and chastise you until you consciously come into Him.

You need the “holy habit” of saying to the Father under any circumstances, “You are my hiding place”—saying it continually, and saying it in peace and stability and joy.

(From *My Sacrifice, His Fire* by Anne Ortlund)

Application

In a small group, explore the topic: “I am most likely to be disobedient when I...” Then talk about what safeguards you can establish to insure obedience to God.

Exploration

Disobedience—[Genesis 3:14–19](#); [Numbers 20:12](#); [1 Samuel 15:17–23](#); [Matthew 23:23–24](#); [1 John 2:3–6](#).

Deborah, the Woman Judge

After Ehud died, the Israelites again did what the Lord said was wrong. ²So he let Jabin, a king of Canaan who ruled in the city of Hazor, defeat Israel. Sisera, who lived in Harosheth Haggoyim, was the commander of Jabin's army. ³Because he had nine hundred iron chariots and was very cruel to the people of Israel for twenty years, they cried to the Lord for help.

⁴A prophetess named Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was judge of Israel at that time. ⁵Deborah would sit under the Palm Tree of Deborah, which was between the cities of Ramah and Bethel, in the mountains of Ephraim. And the people of Israel would come to her to settle their arguments.

⁶Deborah sent a message to Barak son of Abinoam. Barak lived in the city of Kedesh, which is in the area of Naphtali. Deborah said to Barak, "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go and gather ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them to Mount Tabor. ⁷I will make Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, and his chariots, and his army meet you at the Kishon River. I will hand Sisera over to you.'"

⁸Then Barak said to Deborah, "I will go if you will go with me, but if you won't go with me, I won't go."

⁹"Of course I will go with you," Deborah answered, "but you will not get credit for the victory. The Lord will let a woman defeat Sisera." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰At Kedesh, Barak called the people of Zebulun and Naphtali together. From them, he gathered ten thousand men to follow

him, and Deborah went with him also.

¹¹Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law. Heber had put up his tent by the great tree in Zaanannim, near Kedesh.

¹²When Sisera was told that Barak son of Abinoam had gone to Mount Tabor, ¹³Sisera gathered his nine hundred iron chariots and all the men with him, from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River.

¹⁴Then Deborah said to Barak, "Get up! Today is the day the Lord will hand over Sisera. The Lord has already cleared the way for you." So Barak led ten thousand men down Mount Tabor. ¹⁵As Barak approached, the Lord confused Sisera and his army and chariots. The Lord defeated them with the sword, but Sisera left his chariot and ran away on foot. ¹⁶Barak and his men chased Sisera's chariots and army to Harosheth Haggoyim. With their swords they killed all of Sisera's men; not one of them was left alive.

¹⁷But Sisera himself ran away to the tent where Jael lived. She was the wife of Heber, one of the Kenite family groups. Heber's family was at peace with Jabin king of Hazor. ¹⁸Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come into my tent, master! Come in. Don't be afraid." So Sisera went into Jael's tent, and she covered him with a rug.

¹⁹Sisera said to Jael, "I am thirsty. Please give me some water to drink." So she opened a leather bag of milk and gave him a drink. Then she covered him up.

²⁰He said to her, "Go stand at the entrance to the tent. If anyone comes and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say, 'No.'"

²¹But Jael, the wife of Heber, took a tent peg and a hammer and quietly went to Sisera. Since he was very tired, he was in a

deep sleep. She hammered the tent peg through the side of Sisera's head and into the ground. And so Sisera died.

²²At that very moment Barak came by Jael's tent, chasing Sisera. Jael went out to meet him and said, "Come. I will show you the man you are looking for." So Barak entered her tent, and there Sisera lay dead, with the tent peg in his head.

²³On that day God defeated Jabin king of Canaan in the sight of Israel.

²⁴Israel became stronger and stronger against Jabin king of Canaan until finally they destroyed him.

Life Lessons

Judges 4:1–5:31

Situation

Now the Israelites' enemy (the Canaanites) came from within their own territory. Deborah rose to national leadership.

Observation

God chooses the person with the strongest character to lead his people to victory at crucial times. The key elements for such leadership are faith, trust, and worship.

Inspiration

In the Old Testament almost every man and woman did the faith-oriented things for which we credit them *not* in religious environments but in real-world environments. Moses did most of his work in the Pharaoh's conference rooms and in the deserts. Esther did hers in a king's palace. Nehemiah did his on a construction project. These men and women were administrators, scholars, builders, warriors, and merchants. For the most part, they were not clergy. They were the people of the streets, and their faith was defined in terms of a God who wanted to be active in the streets.

Their faith language, recorded in the Bible, was the language of the streets; but we have taken it away from there and made it a religious language. Their jobs were the work of the streets; but we, in our lack of imagination, have taken these men and women off

the streets (figuratively speaking) and made them seem like theologians and full-time religious workers. The problems to which they addressed themselves were usually the problems of the streets; but we have taken the problems and spiritualized them.

In short, we have tended to tame these men and women of the Bible, making them smaller than life. It is not that we have not admired them and revered them as heroes. And it is not that we have not wanted to be like them. But it has not occurred to us often enough to wonder if they could have been construction workers on a highway project, manufacturers, franchisees, secretaries, and managers in our day. The result? I'll say it one more time: we do not fully appreciate that their faith was a faith for the real world and not for the restricted environment of professional religion. (From *Christ Followers in the Real World* by Gordon MacDonald)

Application

Take time this week to study a leader in the Bible (Esther, Elijah, Paul ...). What made that person successful? How did that leader honor God? What made that individual unique? As you develop your own character, imitate the godly characteristics you find.

Exploration

Women Leaders—[Exodus 15:20](#); [2 Kings 11:1–16; 22:14–20](#); Esther [2:17](#); [Luke 1:41–45](#); [2:36–38](#).

The Song of Deborah

On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song:

²“The leaders led Israel.
The people volunteered to go to battle.
Praise the Lord!
³Listen, kings.
Pay attention, rulers!
I myself will sing to the Lord.
I will make music to the Lord, the God of Israel.

⁴“Lord, when you came from Edom,
when you marched from the land of Edom,
the earth shook,
the skies rained,
and the clouds dropped water.

⁵The mountains shook before the Lord, the God of
Mount Sinai,
before the Lord, the God of Israel!

⁶“In the days of Shamgar son of Anath,
in the days of Jael, the main roads were empty.
Travelers went on the back roads.

⁷There were no warriors in Israel

until I, Deborah, arose,
until I arose to be a mother to Israel.

⁸At that time they chose to follow new gods.
Because of this, enemies fought us at our city gates.
No one could find a shield or a spear
among the forty thousand people of Israel.

⁹My heart is with the commanders of Israel.
They volunteered freely from among the people.
Praise the Lord!

¹⁰“You who ride on white donkeys
and sit on saddle blankets,
and you who walk along the road, listen!

¹¹Listen to the sound of the singers
at the watering holes.
There they tell about the victories of the Lord,
the victories of the Lord’s warriors in Israel.
Then the Lord’s people went down to the city gates.

¹²“Wake up, wake up, Deborah!
Wake up, wake up, sing a song!
Get up, Barak!
Go capture your enemies, son of Abinoam!

¹³“Then those who were left came down to the
important leaders.

The Lord’s people came down to me with strong men.

¹⁴They came from Ephraim in the mountains of Amalek.
Benjamin was among the people who followed you.
From the family group of Makir, the commanders came
down.
And from Zebulun came those who lead.

¹⁵The princes of Issachar were with Deborah.
The people of Issachar were loyal to Barak
and followed him into the valley.

The Reubenites thought hard
about what they would do.

¹⁶Why did you stay by the sheepfold?
Was it to hear the music played for your sheep?
The Reubenites thought hard
about what they would do.

¹⁷The people of Gilead stayed east of the Jordan River.
People of Dan, why did you stay by the ships?
The people of Asher stayed at the seashore,
at their safe harbors.

¹⁸But the people of Zebulun risked their lives,
as did the people of Naphtali on the battlefield.

¹⁹“The kings came, and they fought.
At that time the kings of Canaan fought
at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo.
But they took away no silver or possessions of Israel.

²⁰The stars fought from heaven;
from their paths, they fought Sisera.

²¹The Kishon River swept Sisera’s men away,
that old river, the Kishon River.
March on, my soul, with strength!

²²Then the horses’ hoofs beat the ground.
Galloping, galloping go Sisera’s mighty horses.

²³“May the town of Meroz be cursed,” said the angel of
the Lord.

‘Bitterly curse its people,

because they did not come to help the Lord.
They did not fight the strong enemy.'

²⁴“May Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite,
be blessed above all women who live in tents.

²⁵Sisera asked for water,
but Jael gave him milk.
In a bowl fit for a ruler,
she brought him cream.

²⁶Jael reached out and took the tent peg.
Her right hand reached for the workman's hammer.
She hit Sisera! She smashed his head!
She crushed and pierced the side of his head!

²⁷At Jael's feet he sank.
He fell, and he lay there.
At her feet he sank. He fell.
Where Sisera sank, there he fell, dead!

²⁸“Sisera's mother looked out through the window.
She looked through the curtains and cried out,
‘Why is Sisera's chariot so late in coming?
Why are sounds of his chariots' horses delayed?’

²⁹The wisest of her servant ladies answer her,
and Sisera's mother says to herself,

³⁰“Surely they are robbing the people they defeated!
Surely they are dividing those things among
themselves!

Each soldier is given a girl or two.
Maybe Sisera is taking pieces of dyed cloth.
Maybe they are even taking
pieces of dyed, embroidered cloth for the necks of the

victors!’

³¹“Let all your enemies die this way, Lord!
But let all the people who love you
be as strong as the rising sun!”

Then there was peace in the land for forty years.

Life Lessons

Judges 6:1–7:25

Situation

The Midianites were desert marauders related to the Israelites through Abraham's second wife, Keturah, and her son, Midian. For centuries they were at odds with Israel, especially during the period of the Judges.

Observation

At one point, when the Midianites and their allies were about to invade Israel again, God raised up the judge, Gideon. As a test, God asked Gideon to destroy his father's altar to Baal and offer one of his father's bulls as a burnt offering to the Lord. This step of obedience was the first step toward the defeat of the Midianites.

Inspiration

No one is happier than the one who has sincerely repented of wrong. Repentance is the decision to turn from selfish desires and seek God. It is a genuine, sincere regret that creates sorrow and moves us to admit wrong and desire to do better.

Genuine repentance is a moving condition of the heart that is testified and demonstrated by our deeds. It's an inward conviction that expresses itself in outward actions.

You look at the love of God and you can't believe he's loved you like he has, and it motivates you to change your life. That is the nature of repentance.

(From *The Inspirational Bible*, “Repentance”)

Application

What change is the love of God motivating you make? The Lord wants you to be obedient to him and to make your life a sacrifice to him.

Exploration

Repentance—[Leviticus 26:40–42](#); [2 Chronicles 7:14](#); [Job 22:23](#); [Proverbs 1:23–33](#); [Malachi 3:7](#); [Acts 17:30](#); [James 4:8–10](#); [1 John 1:9](#).

The Midianites Attack Israel

Again the Israelites did what the Lord said was wrong. So for seven years the Lord handed them over to Midian.²Because the Midianites were very powerful and were cruel to Israel, the Israelites made hiding places in the mountains, in caves, and in safe places.³Whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites, Amalekites, and other peoples from the east would come and attack them.⁴They camped in the land and destroyed the crops that the Israelites had planted as far away as Gaza. They left nothing for Israel to eat, and no sheep, cattle, or donkeys.⁵The Midianites came with their tents and their animals like swarms of locusts to ruin the land. There were so many people and camels they could not be counted.⁶Israel became very poor because of the Midianites, so they cried out to the Lord.

⁷When the Israelites cried out to the Lord against the Midianites,⁸the Lord sent a prophet to them. He said, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I brought you out of Egypt, the land of slavery.⁹I saved you from the Egyptians and from all those who were against you. I forced the Canaanites out of their land and gave it to you.¹⁰Then I said to you, 'I am the Lord your God. Live in the land of the Amorites, but do not worship their gods.' But you did not obey me."

The Angel of the Lord Visits Gideon

¹¹The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak tree at Ophrah that belonged to Joash, one of the Abiezrite people. Gideon, Joash's son, was separating some wheat from the chaff in a winepress to keep the wheat from the Midianites. ¹²The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!"

¹³Then Gideon said, "Sir, if the Lord is with us, why are we having so much trouble? Where are the miracles our ancestors told us he did when the Lord brought them out of Egypt? But now he has left us and has handed us over to the Midianites."

¹⁴The Lord turned to Gideon and said, "Go with your strength and save Israel from the Midianites. I am the one who is sending you."

¹⁵But Gideon answered, "Lord, how can I save Israel? My family group is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least important member of my family."

¹⁶The Lord answered him, "I will be with you. It will seem as if the Midianites you are fighting are only one man."

¹⁷Then Gideon said to the Lord, "If you are pleased with me, give me proof that it is really you talking with me. ¹⁸Please wait here until I come back to you. Let me bring my offering and set it in front of you."

And the Lord said, "I will wait until you return."

¹⁹So Gideon went in and cooked a young goat, and with twenty quarts of flour, made bread without yeast. Then he put the meat into a basket and the broth into a pot. He brought them out and gave them to the angel under the oak tree.

²⁰The angel of God said to Gideon, "Put the meat and the

bread without yeast on that rock over there. Then pour the broth on them.” And Gideon did as he was told. ²¹The angel of the Lord touched the meat and the bread with the end of the stick that was in his hand. Then fire jumped up from the rock and completely burned up the meat and the bread! And the angel of the Lord disappeared! ²²Then Gideon understood he had been talking to the angel of the Lord. So Gideon cried out, “Lord God! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!”

²³But the Lord said to Gideon, “Calm down! Don’t be afraid! You will not die!”

²⁴So Gideon built an altar there to worship the Lord and named it The Lord Is Peace. It still stands at Ophrah, where the Abiezrites live.

Gideon Tears Down the Altar of Baal

²⁵That same night the Lord said to Gideon, “Take the bull that belongs to your father and a second bull seven years old. Pull down your father’s altar to Baal, and cut down the Asherah idol beside it. ²⁶Then build an altar to the Lord your God with its stones in the right order on this high ground. Kill and burn a second bull on this altar, using the wood from the Asherah idol.”

²⁷So Gideon got ten of his servants and did what the Lord had told him to do. But Gideon was afraid that his family and the men of the city might see him, so he did it at night, not in the daytime.

²⁸When the men of the city got up the next morning, they saw that the altar for Baal had been destroyed and that the Asherah idol beside it had been cut down! They also saw the

altar Gideon had built and the second bull that had been sacrificed on it.²⁹ The men of the city asked each other, “Who did this?”

After they asked many questions, someone told them, “Gideon son of Joash did this.”

³⁰So they said to Joash, “Bring your son out. He has pulled down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah idol beside it. He must die!”

³¹But Joash said to the angry crowd around him, “Are you going to take Baal’s side? Are you going to defend him? Anyone who takes Baal’s side will be killed by morning! If Baal is a god, let him fight for himself. It’s his altar that has been pulled down.”³² So on that day Gideon got the name Jerub-Baal, which means “let Baal fight against him,” because Gideon pulled down Baal’s altar.

Gideon Defeats Midian

³³All the Midianites, the Amalekites, and other peoples from the east joined together and came across the Jordan River and camped in the Valley of Jezreel.³⁴ But the Spirit of the Lord entered Gideon, and he blew a trumpet to call the Abiezrites to follow him.³⁵ He sent messengers to all of Manasseh, calling them to follow him. He also sent messengers to the people of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. So they also went up to meet Gideon and his men.

³⁶Then Gideon said to God, “You said you would help me save Israel.³⁷ I will put some wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the wool but all of the ground is dry, then I will know that you will use me to save Israel, as you said.”

³⁸And that is just what happened. When Gideon got up early the next morning and squeezed the wool, he got a full bowl of water from it.

³⁹Then Gideon said to God, “Don’t be angry with me if I ask just one more thing. Please let me make one more test. Let only the wool be dry while the ground around it gets wet with dew.”

⁴⁰That night God did that very thing. Just the wool was dry, but the ground around it was wet with dew.

Early in the morning Jerub-Baal (also called Gideon) and all his men set up their camp at the spring of Harod. The Midianites were camped north of them in the valley at the bottom of the hill called Moreh.² Then the Lord said to Gideon, “You have too many men to defeat the Midianites. I don’t want the Israelites to brag that they saved themselves.³ So now, announce to the people, ‘Anyone who is afraid may leave Mount Gilead and go back home.’” So twenty-two thousand men returned home, but ten thousand remained.

⁴Then the Lord said to Gideon, “There are still too many men. Take the men down to the water, and I will test them for you there. If I say, ‘This man will go with you, he will go. But if I say, ‘That one will not go with you,’ he will not go.”

⁵So Gideon led the men down to the water. There the Lord said to him, “Separate them into those who drink water by lapping it up like a dog and those who bend down to drink.”⁶ There were three hundred men who used their hands to bring water to their mouths, lapping it as a dog does. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

⁷Then the Lord said to Gideon, “Using the three hundred men who lapped the water, I will save you and hand Midian over to you. Let all the others go home.”⁸ So Gideon sent the rest of Israel to their homes. But he kept three hundred men and took the jars and the trumpets of those who left.

Now the camp of Midian was in the valley below Gideon.⁹ That night the Lord said to Gideon, “Get up. Go down and attack the camp of the Midianites, because I will give them to you.¹⁰ But if you are afraid to go down, take your servant Purah with you.¹¹ When you come to the camp of Midian, you will hear what they are saying. Then you will not be afraid to attack

the camp.”

Gideon Is Encouraged

So Gideon and his servant Purah went down to the edge of the enemy camp.¹² The Midianites, the Amalekites, and all the peoples from the east were camped in that valley. There were so many of them they seemed like locusts. Their camels could not be counted because they were as many as the grains of sand on the seashore!

¹³When Gideon came to the enemy camp, he heard a man telling his friend about a dream. He was saying, “I dreamed that a loaf of barley bread rolled into the camp of Midian. It hit the tent so hard that the tent turned over and fell flat!”

¹⁴The man’s friend said, “Your dream is about the sword of Gideon son of Joash, a man of Israel. God will hand Midian and the whole army over to him!”

¹⁵When Gideon heard about the dream and what it meant, he worshiped God. Then Gideon went back to the camp of Israel and called out to them, “Get up! The Lord has handed the army of Midian over to you!”¹⁶Gideon divided the three hundred men into three groups. He gave each man a trumpet and an empty jar with a burning torch inside.

¹⁷Gideon told the men, “Watch me and do what I do. When I get to the edge of the camp, do what I do.”¹⁸Surround the enemy camp. When I and everyone with me blow our trumpets, you blow your trumpets, too. Then shout, ‘For the Lord and for Gideon!’”

Midian Is Defeated

¹⁹So Gideon and the one hundred men with him came to the edge of the enemy camp just after they had changed guards. It was during the middle watch of the night. Then Gideon and his men blew their trumpets and smashed their jars.²⁰All three groups of Gideon's men blew their trumpets and smashed their jars. They held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands. Then they shouted, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!"²¹Each of Gideon's men stayed in his place around the camp, but the Midianites began shouting and running to escape.

²²When Gideon's three hundred men blew their trumpets, the Lord made all the Midianites fight each other with their swords! The enemy army ran away to the city of Beth Shittah toward Zererah. They ran as far as the border of Abel Meholah, near the city of Tabbath.²³Then men of Israel from Naphtali, Asher, and all of Manasseh were called out to chase the Midianites.²⁴Gideon sent messengers through all the mountains of Ephraim, saying, "Come down and attack the Midianites. Take control of the Jordan River as far as Beth Barah before the Midianites can get to it."

So they called out all the men of Ephraim, who took control of the Jordan River as far as Beth Barah.²⁵The men of Ephraim captured two princes of Midian named Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb, and they continued chasing the Midianites. They brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, who was east of the Jordan River.

Life Lessons

Judges 8:1–9:57

Situation

Gideon and his army, though greatly outnumbered, defeated the Midianite invaders with God's blessing. Yet after Gideon died, the Israelites again abandoned God and worshiped Baal. The Israelites foolishly made Abimelech the king, helping him murder sixty-nine of his seventy brothers. God repaid the treachery and idolatry of Abimelech and the town of Shechem with death and destruction.

Observation

Sin will always be judged by God. Consequences from our past sins often come back to haunt us.

Inspiration

Sin entered the human race through Adam, and the human race has been trying without success to get rid of it ever since. And, short of that, mankind has been seeking in vain to reverse the curse. The Bible teaches that God warned Adam before he sinned that if he ate of the tree of knowledge he would surely die. The Bible also tells us that God instructed Adam and Eve to be fruitful and to multiply and to replenish the earth. But although they had been created in the image of God, after the Fall Adam and Eve gave birth to children after their own likeness and image. Consequently Cain and Abel were infected with the death-dealing disease of sin, which they inherited from their parents and which has been

passed on to every generation since. We are all sinners by inheritance, and try as we will, we cannot escape our birthright.

We have resorted to every means to win back the position that Adam lost. We have tried through education, through philosophy, through religion, through governments to throw off our yoke of depravity and sin. We have sought to accomplish with our sin-limited minds the things that God intended to do with the clear vision that can come only from on high. Our motives have been good and some of our attempts have been commendable, but they have all fallen far, far short of the goal. All our knowledge, all our inventions, all our developments and ambitious plans move us ahead only a very little before we drop back again to the point from which we started. For we are still making the same mistake that Adam made—we are still trying to be king in our own right, and with our own power, instead of obeying God's laws....

Man's only salvation from sin stands on a lonely, barren, skull-shaped hill: a thief hangs on one cross, a murderer on another, and between them, a Man with a crown of thorns....

And who is this tortured figure, who is this Man whom other men seek to humiliate and kill? He is the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, heaven's own appointed Messenger to the sin-ridden earth.

Who inflicted this hideous torture upon the Man who came to teach us love? You did and I did, for it was for your sin and my sin that Jesus was nailed to

the cross....

But sin overreached itself on the cross. Man's hideous injustice that crucified Christ became the means that opened the way for man to become free. Sin's masterpiece of shame and hate became God's masterpiece of mercy and forgiveness. Through the death of Christ upon the cross, sin itself was crucified for those who believe in Him. Sin was conquered on the cross. His death is the foundation of our hope, the promise of our triumph! Christ bore in His own body on the tree the sins that shackle us. He died for us and rose again. He proved the truth of all God's promises to man; and if you will accept Christ by faith today, you, too, can be forgiven for your sins. You can stand secure and free in the knowledge that through the love of Christ your soul is cleansed of sin and saved from damnation. (From *Peace with God* by Billy Graham)

Application

Sin brings judgment. Turn away from the sin that you enjoy. Seek help to remove the sin that reoccurs in your life. Don't let patterns of sinfulness destroy your life; repent and seek Christ's help.

Exploration

Sin—[Genesis 3:6–7](#); [9:20–27](#); [Exodus 2:12–14](#); [34:7](#); [Deuteronomy 7:2](#); [Nehemiah 13:14–18](#).

The men of Ephraim asked Gideon, “Why did you treat us this way? Why didn’t you call us when you went to fight against Midian?” They argued angrily with Gideon.

²But he answered them, “I have not done as well as you! The small part you did was better than all that my people of Abiezer did. ³God let you capture Oreb and Zeeb, the princes of Midian. How can I compare what I did with what you did?” When the men of Ephraim heard Gideon’s answer, they were not as angry anymore.

Gideon Captures Two Kings

⁴When Gideon and his three hundred men came to the Jordan River, they were tired, but they chased the enemy across to the other side. ⁵Gideon said to the men of Succoth, “Please give my soldiers some bread because they are very tired. I am chasing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.”

⁶But the leaders of Succoth said, “Why should we give your soldiers bread? You haven’t caught Zebah and Zalmunna yet.”

⁷Then Gideon said, “The Lord will surrender Zebah and Zalmunna to me. After that, I will whip your skin with thorns and briars from the desert.”

⁸Gideon left Succoth and went to the city of Peniel and asked them for food. But the people of Peniel gave him the same answer as the people of Succoth. ⁹So Gideon said to the

men of Peniel, “After I win the victory, I will return and pull down this tower.”

¹⁰Zebah and Zalmunna and their army were in the city of Karkor. About fifteen thousand men were left of the armies of the peoples of the east. Already one hundred twenty thousand soldiers had been killed. ¹¹Gideon went up the road of those who live in tents east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and he attacked the enemy army when they did not expect it. ¹²Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian, ran away, but Gideon chased and captured them and frightened away their army.

¹³Then Gideon son of Joash returned from the battle by the Pass of Heres. ¹⁴Gideon captured a young man from Succoth and asked him some questions. So the young man wrote down for Gideon the names of seventy-seven officers and older leaders of Succoth.

Gideon Punishes Succoth

¹⁵When Gideon came to Succoth, he said to the people of that city, “Here are Zebah and Zalmunna. You made fun of me by saying, ‘Why should we give bread to your tired men? You have not caught Zebah and Zalmunna yet.’” ¹⁶So Gideon took the older leaders of the city and punished them with thorns and briars from the desert. ¹⁷He also pulled down the tower of Peniel and killed the people in that city.

¹⁸Gideon asked Zebah and Zalmunna, “What were the men like that you killed on Mount Tabor?”

They answered, “They were like you. Each one of them looked like a prince.”

¹⁹Gideon said, “Those were my brothers, my mother’s sons.

As surely as the Lord lives, I would not kill you if you had spared them.”²⁰ Then Gideon said to Jether, his oldest son, “Kill them.” But Jether was only a boy and was afraid, so he did not take out his sword.

²¹ Then Zebah and Zalmunna said to Gideon, “Come on. Kill us yourself. As the saying goes, ‘It takes a man to do a man’s job.’” So Gideon got up and killed Zebah and Zalmunna and took the decorations off their camels’ necks.

Gideon Makes an Idol

²² The people of Israel said to Gideon, “You saved us from the Midianites. Now, we want you and your son and your grandson to rule over us.”

²³ But Gideon told them, “The Lord will be your ruler. I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you.” ²⁴ He said, “I want you to do this one thing for me. I want each of you to give me a gold earring from the things you took in the fighting.” (The [Ishmaelites](#) wore gold earrings.)

²⁵ They said, “We will gladly give you what you want.” So they spread out a coat, and everyone threw down an earring from what he had taken. ²⁶ The gold earrings weighed about forty-three pounds. This did not count the decorations, necklaces, and purple robes worn by the kings of Midian, nor the chains from the camels’ necks. ²⁷ Gideon used the gold to make a holy vest, which he put in his hometown of Ophrah. But all the Israelites were unfaithful to God and worshiped it, so it became a trap for Gideon and his family.

The Death of Gideon

²⁸So Midian was under the rule of Israel; they did not cause trouble anymore. And the land had peace for forty years, as long as Gideon was alive.

²⁹[Gideon](#) son of Joash went to his home to live. ³⁰He had seventy sons of his own, because he had many wives. ³¹He had a slave woman who lived in Shechem, and he had a son by her, whom he named Abimelech. ³²So Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age. He was buried in the tomb of Joash, his father, in Ophrah, where the Abiezrites live.

³³As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel were again unfaithful to God and followed the Baals. They made Baal-Berith their god. ³⁴The Israelites did not remember the Lord their God, who had saved them from all their enemies living all around them. ³⁵And they were not kind to the family of Jerub-Baal, also called Gideon, for all the good he had done for Israel.

Abimelech Becomes King

Abimelech son of Gideon went to his uncles in the city of Shechem. He said to his uncles and all of his mother's family group, ²"Ask the leaders of Shechem, 'Is it better for the seventy sons of Gideon to rule over you or for one man to rule?' Remember, I am your relative."

³Abimelech's uncles spoke to all the leaders of Shechem about this. And they decided to follow Abimelech, because they said, "He is our relative." ⁴So the leaders of Shechem gave Abimelech about one and three-quarter pounds of silver from the temple of the god Baal-Berith. Abimelech used the silver to hire some worthless, reckless men, who followed him wherever he went. ⁵He went to Ophrah, the hometown of his father, and murdered his seventy brothers, the sons of Gideon. He killed them all on one stone. But Gideon's youngest son, Jotham, hid from Abimelech and escaped. ⁶Then all of the leaders of Shechem and Beth Millo gathered beside the great tree standing in Shechem. There they made Abimelech their king.

Jotham's Story

⁷When Jotham heard this, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim. He shouted to the people: "Listen to me, you leaders of Shechem, so that God will listen to you! ⁸One day the trees decided to appoint a king to rule over them. They said to the olive tree, 'You be king over us!'

⁹"But the olive tree said, 'Men and gods are honored by my

oil. Should I stop making it and go and sway over the other trees?’

¹⁰“Then the trees said to the fig tree, ‘Come and be king over us!’

¹¹“But the fig tree answered, ‘Should I stop making my sweet and good fruit and go and sway over the other trees?’

¹²“Then the trees said to the vine, ‘Come and be king over us!’

¹³“But the vine answered, ‘My new wine makes men and gods happy. Should I stop making it and go and sway over the trees?’

¹⁴“Then all the trees said to the thornbush, ‘Come and be king over us.’

¹⁵“But the thornbush said to the trees, ‘If you really want to appoint me king over you, come and find shelter in my shade! But if not, let fire come out of the thornbush and burn up the cedars of Lebanon!’

¹⁶“Now, were you completely honest and sincere when you made Abimelech king? Have you been fair to [Gideon](#) and his family? Have you treated Gideon as you should? ¹⁷Remember, my father fought for you and risked his life to save you from the power of the Midianites. ¹⁸But now you have turned against my father’s family and have killed his seventy sons on one stone. You have made Abimelech, the son of my father’s slave girl, king over the leaders of Shechem just because he is your relative! ¹⁹So then, if you have been honest and sincere to Gideon and his family today, be happy with Abimelech as your king. And may he be happy with you! ²⁰But if not, may fire come out of Abimelech and completely burn you leaders of Shechem and Beth Millo! Also may fire come out of the leaders

of Shechem and Beth Millo and burn up Abimelech!”

²¹Then Jotham ran away and escaped to the city of Beer. He lived there because he was afraid of his brother Abimelech.

Abimelech Fights Against Shechem

²²Abimelech ruled Israel for three years. ²³Then God sent an evil spirit to make trouble between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem so that the leaders of Shechem turned against him.

²⁴Abimelech had killed [Gideon's](#) seventy sons, his own brothers, and the leaders of Shechem had helped him. So God sent the evil spirit to punish them. ²⁵The leaders of Shechem were against Abimelech then. They put men on the hilltops in ambush who robbed everyone going by. And Abimelech was told.

²⁶A man named Gaal son of Ebed and his brothers moved into Shechem, and the leaders of Shechem trusted him. ²⁷They went out to the vineyards to pick grapes, and they squeezed the grapes. Then they had a feast in the temple of their god, where they ate and drank and cursed Abimelech. ²⁸Gaal son of Ebed said, “We are the men of Shechem. Who is Abimelech that we should serve him? Isn’t he one of Gideon’s sons, and isn’t Zebul his officer? We should serve the men of Hamor, Shechem’s father. Why should we serve Abimelech? ²⁹If you made me commander of these people, I would get rid of Abimelech. I would say to him, ‘Get your army ready and come out to battle.’”

³⁰Now when Zebul, the ruler of Shechem, heard what Gaal son of Ebed said, he was very angry. ³¹He sent secret messengers to Abimelech, saying, “Gaal son of Ebed and

Gaal's brothers have come to Shechem, and they are turning the city against you! ³²You and your men should get up during the night and hide in the fields outside the city. ³³As soon as the sun comes up in the morning, attack the city. When Gaal and his men come out to fight you, do what you can to them."

³⁴So Abimelech and all his soldiers got up during the night and hid near Shechem in four groups. ³⁵Gaal son of Ebed went out and was standing at the entrance to the city gate. As he was standing there, Abimelech and his soldiers came out of their hiding places.

³⁶When Gaal saw the soldiers, he said to Zebul, "Look! There are people coming down from the mountains!"

But Zebul said, "You are seeing the shadows of the mountains. The shadows just look like people."

³⁷But again Gaal said, "Look, there are people coming down from the center of the land, and there is a group coming from the fortune-tellers' tree!"

³⁸Zebul said to Gaal, "Where is your bragging now? You said, 'Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?' You made fun of these men. Now go out and fight them."

³⁹So Gaal led the men of Shechem out to fight Abimelech. ⁴⁰Abimelech and his men chased them, and many of Gaal's men were killed before they could get back to the city gate. ⁴¹While Abimelech stayed at Arumah, Zebul forced Gaal and his brothers to leave Shechem.

⁴²The next day the people of Shechem went out to the fields. When Abimelech was told about it, ⁴³he separated his men into three groups and hid them in the fields. When he saw the people coming out of the city, he jumped up and attacked them. ⁴⁴Abimelech and his group ran to the entrance gate to the

city. The other two groups ran out to the people in the fields and struck them down.⁴⁵ Abimelech and his men fought the city of Shechem all day until they captured it and killed its people. Then he tore it down and threw [salt](#) over the ruins.

The Tower of Shechem Burns

⁴⁶When the leaders who were in the Tower of Shechem heard what had happened to Shechem, they gathered in the safest room of the temple of El Berith.⁴⁷ Abimelech heard that all the leaders of the Tower of Shechem had gathered there.⁴⁸ So he and all his men went up Mount Zalmon, near Shechem. Abimelech took an ax and cut some branches and put them on his shoulders. He said to all those with him, “Hurry! Do what I have done!”⁴⁹ So all those men cut branches and followed Abimelech and piled them against the safest room of the temple. Then they set them on fire and burned the people inside. So all the people who were at the Tower of Shechem also died—about a thousand men and women.

Abimelech’s Death

⁵⁰Then Abimelech went to the city of Thebez. He surrounded the city, attacked it, and captured it.⁵¹ But inside the city was a strong tower, so all the men, women, and leaders of that city ran to the tower. When they got inside, they locked the door behind them. Then they climbed up to the roof of the tower.⁵² Abimelech came to the tower to attack it. He approached the door of the tower to set it on fire,⁵³ but as he came near, a woman dropped a grinding stone on his head, crushing his

skull.

⁵⁴He quickly called to the officer who carried his armor and said, “Take out your sword and kill me. I don’t want people to say, ‘A woman killed Abimelech.’” So the officer stabbed Abimelech, and he died. ⁵⁵When the people of Israel saw Abimelech was dead, they all returned home.

⁵⁶In that way God punished Abimelech for all the evil he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers. ⁵⁷God also punished the men of Shechem for the evil they had done. So the curse spoken by Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, came true.

Tola, the Judge

After Abimelech died, another judge came to save Israel. He was Tola son of Puah, the son of Dodo. Tola was from the people of Issachar and lived in the city of Shamir in the mountains of Ephraim. ²Tola was a judge for Israel for twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir.

Jair, the Judge

³After Tola died, Jair from the region of Gilead became judge. He was a judge for Israel for twenty-two years. ⁴Jair had thirty sons, who rode thirty donkeys. These thirty sons controlled thirty towns in Gilead, which are called the Towns of Jair to this day. ⁵Jair died and was buried in the city of Kamon.

The Ammonites Trouble Israel

⁶Again the Israelites did what the Lord said was wrong. They worshiped Baal and Ashtoreth, the gods of Aram, Sidon, Moab, and Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines. The Israelites left the Lord and stopped serving him. ⁷So the Lord was angry with them and handed them over to the Philistines and the Ammonites. ⁸In the same year those people destroyed the Israelites who lived east of the Jordan River in the region of Gilead, where the Amorites lived. So the Israelites suffered for eighteen years. ⁹The Ammonites then crossed the Jordan River to fight the people of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim, causing

much trouble to the people of Israel. ¹⁰So the Israelites cried out to the Lord, “We have sinned against you. We left our God and worshiped the Baal idols.”

¹¹The Lord answered the Israelites, “When the Egyptians, Amorites, Ammonites, Philistines, ¹²Sidonians, Amalekites, and Maonites were cruel to you, you cried out to me, and I saved you. ¹³But now you have left me again and have worshiped other gods. So I refuse to save you again. ¹⁴You have chosen those gods. So go call to them for help. Let them save you when you are in trouble.”

¹⁵But the people of Israel said to the Lord, “We have sinned. Do to us whatever you want, but please save us today!” ¹⁶Then the Israelites threw away the foreign gods among them, and they worshiped the Lord again. So he felt sorry for them when he saw their suffering.

¹⁷The Ammonites gathered for war and camped in Gilead. The Israelites gathered and camped at Mizpah. ¹⁸The leaders of the people of Gilead said, “Who will lead us to attack the Ammonites? He will become the head of all those who live in Gilead.”

Life Lessons

Judges 10:1–12:15

Situation

Turning away from God, the idol-worshiping Israelites suffered foreign invasion and devastation. Finally, desperate for relief, they turned to God, and God raised up a deliverer, Jephthah.

Observation

The act of getting rid of foreign gods showed that Israel was serious about its confession.

Inspiration

God loves you just the way you are. If you think his love for you would be stronger if your faith were, you are wrong. If you think his love would be deeper if your thoughts were, wrong again. Don't confuse God's love with the love of people. The love of people often increases with performance and decreases with mistakes. Not so with God's love. He loves you right where you are. To quote my wife's favorite author:

God's love never ceases. Never. Though we spurn him. Ignore him. Reject him. Despise him. Disobey him. He will not change. Our evil cannot diminish his love. Our goodness cannot increase it. Our faith does not earn it anymore than our stupidity jeopardizes it. God doesn't love us less if we fail or more if we succeed. God's love never ceases.

God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you that way.

When my daughter Jenna was a toddler, I used to take her to a park not far from our apartment. One day as she was playing in a sandbox, an ice-cream salesman approached us. I purchased her a treat, and when I turned to give it to her, I saw her mouth was full of sand. Where I intended to put a delicacy, she had put dirt.

Did I love her with dirt in her mouth? Absolutely. Was she any less my daughter with dirt in her mouth? Of course not. Was I going to allow her to keep the

dirt in her mouth? No way. I loved her right where she was, but I refused to leave her there. I carried her over to the water fountain and washed out her mouth. Why? Because I love her.

God does the same for us. He holds us over the fountain. “Spit out the dirt, honey,” our Father urges. “I’ve got something better for you.” And so he cleanses us of filth: immorality, dishonesty, prejudice, bitterness, greed. We don’t enjoy the cleansing; sometimes we even opt for the dirt over the ice cream. “I can eat dirt if I want to!” we pout and proclaim. Which is true—we can. But if we do, the loss is ours. God has a better offer. He wants us to be just like Jesus.

Isn’t that good news? You aren’t stuck with today’s personality. You aren’t condemned to “grumpydom.” You are tweakable. Even if you’ve worried each day of your life, you needn’t worry the rest of your life. So what if you were born a bigot? You don’t have to die one.

Where did we get the idea we can’t change? From whence come statements such as, “It’s just my nature to worry,” or, “I’ll always be pessimistic. I’m just that way,” or, “I have a bad temper. I can’t help the way I react”? Who says? Would we make similar statements about our bodies? “It’s just my nature to have a broken leg. I can’t do anything about it.” Of course not. If our bodies malfunction, we seek help. Shouldn’t we do the same with our hearts? Shouldn’t we seek aid for our sour attitudes? Can’t we request treatment for our selfish tirades? Of course we can.

Jesus can change our hearts. He wants us to have a heart like his.

Can you imagine a better offer? (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

Isn't it good to know that God not only can change your heart but even desires to do so? Allow his cleansing to affect your life. Then ask the Lord to change your heart so your desires match his.

Exploration

Confessing Sin—[Psalm 32:5](#); [Proverbs 28:13](#); [James 5:16](#); [1 John 1:9](#).

New Life in Christ

“We have sinned. Do to us whatever you want, but please save us today!” —[Judges 10:15](#)

Confessed Sin Releases Joy

Confession does not create a relationship with God, it simply nourishes it. If you are a believer, admission of sins does not alter your position before God, but it does enhance your peace with God. When you confess, you agree; you quit arguing with God and agree with him about your sin. Unconfessed sin leads to a state of disagreement. You may be God’s child, but you don’t want to talk to him. He still loves you, but until you admit what you’ve done, there’s going to be tension in the house.

But just as unconfessed sin hinders joy, confessed sin releases it. When we admit sin we are like a first grader standing before the teacher with a messy paper. “I colored outside the lines too many times. Could I start over on a clean sheet?” “Of course,” says the teacher. Happy is the first grader who gets a second chance, or as David wrote, “Happy is the person whose sins are forgiven, whose wrongs are pardoned” ([Psalm 32:1](#)). So we dash back to our seat and start over. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Question: What sins should you confess to restore a proper relationship with God?

For more on [“New Life in Christ.”](#)

Jephthah Is Chosen as Leader

Jephthah was a strong soldier from Gilead. His father was named Gilead, and his mother was a prostitute.²Gilead's wife had several sons. When they grew up, they forced Jephthah to leave his home, saying to him, "You will not get any of our father's property, because you are the son of another woman."

³So Jephthah ran away from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob. There some worthless men began to follow him.

⁴After a time the Ammonites fought against Israel. ⁵When the Ammonites made war against Israel, the older leaders of Gilead went to Jephthah to bring him back from Tob. ⁶They said to him, "Come and lead our army so we can fight the Ammonites."

⁷But Jephthah said to them, "Didn't you hate me? You forced me to leave my father's house. Why are you coming to me now that you are in trouble?"

⁸The older leaders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "It is because of those troubles that we come to you now. Please come with us and fight against the Ammonites. You will be the ruler over everyone who lives in Gilead."

⁹Then Jephthah answered, "If you take me back to Gilead to fight the Ammonites and the Lord helps me win, I will be your ruler."

¹⁰The older leaders of Gilead said to him, "The Lord is listening to everything we are saying. We promise to do all that you tell us to do." ¹¹So Jephthah went with the older leaders of Gilead, and the people made him their leader and commander of

their army. Jephthah repeated all of his words in front of the Lord at Mizpah.

Jephthah Sends Messengers to the Ammonite King

¹²Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites, asking, “What have you got against Israel? Why have you come to attack our land?”

¹³The king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah, “We are fighting Israel because you took our land when you came up from Egypt. You took our land from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River to the Jordan River. Now give our land back to us peacefully.”

¹⁴Jephthah sent the messengers to the Ammonite king again. ¹⁵They said:

“This is what Jephthah says: Israel did not take the land of the people of Moab or Ammon. ¹⁶When the Israelites came out of Egypt, they went into the desert to the Red Sea and then to Kadesh. ¹⁷Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, ‘Let the people of Israel go across your land.’ But the king of Edom refused. We sent the same message to the king of Moab, but he also refused. So the Israelites stayed at Kadesh.

¹⁸“Then the Israelites went into the desert around the borders of the lands of Edom and Moab. Israel went east of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon River, the border of Moab. They did not cross it to go into the land of Moab.

¹⁹“Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of the city of Heshbon, asking, ‘Let the people of Israel pass through your land to go to our land.’ ²⁰But Sihon

did not trust the Israelites to cross his land. So he gathered all of his people and camped at Jahaz and fought with Israel.

²¹“But the Lord, the God of Israel, handed Sihon and his army over to Israel. All the land of the Amorites became the property of Israel. ²²So Israel took all the land of the Amorites from the Amon River to the Jabbok River, from the desert to the Jordan River.

²³“It was the Lord, the God of Israel, who forced out the Amorites ahead of the people of Israel. So do you think you can make them leave? ²⁴Take the land that your god Chemosh has given you. We will live in the land the Lord our God has given us!

²⁵“Are you any better than Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever quarrel or fight with the people of Israel? ²⁶For three hundred years the Israelites have lived in Heshbon and Aroer and the towns around them and in all the cities along the Amon River. Why have you not taken these cities back in all that time? ²⁷I have not sinned against you, but you are sinning against me by making war on me. May the Lord, the Judge, decide whether the Israelites or the Ammonites are right.”

²⁸But the king of the Ammonites ignored this message from Jephthah.

Jephthah's Promise

²⁹Then the Spirit of the Lord entered Jephthah. Jephthah passed through Gilead and Manasseh and the city of Mizpah in Gilead to the land of the Ammonites. ³⁰Jephthah made a promise to the Lord, saying, “If you will hand over the

Ammonites to me, ³¹I will give you as a burnt offering the first thing that comes out of my house to meet me when I return from the victory. It will be the Lord's."

³²Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord handed them over to him. ³³In a great defeat Jephthah struck them down from the city of Aroer to the area of Minnith, and twenty cities as far as the city of Abel Keramim. So the Ammonites were defeated by the Israelites.

³⁴When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, his daughter was the first one to come out to meet him, playing a tambourine and dancing. She was his only child; he had no other sons or daughters. ³⁵When Jephthah saw his daughter, he tore his clothes to show his sorrow. He said, "My daughter! You have made me so sad because I made a promise to the Lord, and I cannot break it!"

³⁶Then his daughter said, "Father, you made a promise to the Lord. So do to me just what you promised, because the Lord helped you defeat your enemies, the Ammonites." ³⁷She also said, "But let me do one thing. Let me be alone for two months to go to the mountains. Since I will never marry, let me and my friends go and cry together."

³⁸Jephthah said, "Go." So he sent her away for two months. She and her friends stayed in the mountains and cried for her because she would never marry. ³⁹After two months she returned to her father, and Jephthah did to her what he had promised. Jephthah's daughter never had a husband.

From this came a custom in Israel that ⁴⁰every year the young women of Israel would go out for four days to remember the daughter of Jephthah from Gilead.

Jephthah and Ephraim

The men of Ephraim called all their soldiers together and crossed the river to the town of Zaphon. They said to Jephthah, “Why didn’t you call us to help you fight the Ammonites? We will burn your house down with you in it.”

²Jephthah answered them, “My people and I fought a great battle against the Ammonites. I called you, but you didn’t come to help me. ³When I saw that you would not help me, I risked my own life and went against the Ammonites. The Lord handed them over to me. So why have you come to fight against me today?”

⁴Then Jephthah called the men of Gilead together and fought the men of Ephraim. The men of Gilead struck them down because the Ephraimites had said, “You men of Gilead are nothing but deserters from Ephraim—living between Ephraim and Manasseh.” ⁵The men of Gilead captured the crossings of the Jordan River that led to the country of Ephraim. A person from Ephraim trying to escape would say, “Let me cross the river.” Then the men of Gilead would ask him, “Are you from Ephraim?” If he replied no, ⁶they would say to him, “Say the word ‘Shibboleth.’” The men of Ephraim could not say that word correctly. So if the person from Ephraim said, “Sibboleth,” the men of Gilead would kill him at the crossing. So forty-two thousand people from Ephraim were killed at that time.

⁷Jephthah was a judge for Israel for six years. Then Jephthah, the man from Gilead, died and was buried in a town in Gilead.

Ibzan, the Judge

⁸After Jephthah died, Ibzan from Bethlehem was a judge for Israel. ⁹He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He let his daughters marry men who were not in his family group, and he brought thirty women who were not in his tribe to be wives for his sons. Ibzan judged Israel for seven years. ¹⁰Then he died and was buried in Bethlehem.

Elon, the Judge

¹¹After Ibzan died, Elon from the tribe of Zebulun was a judge for Israel. He judged Israel for ten years. ¹²Then Elon, the man of Zebulun, died and was buried in the city of Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.

Abdon, the Judge

¹³After Elon died, Abdon son of Hillel from the city of Pirathon was a judge for Israel. ¹⁴He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys. He judged Israel for eight years. ¹⁵Then Abdon son of Hillel died and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mountains where the Amalekites lived.

Life Lessons

Judges 13:1–25

Situation

As the Israelites settled into Palestine, they faced a struggle to retain their own identity as the Chosen Ones. Again and again they disregarded the commandments of God. Punishment often resulted. Yet, God retained his covenant with these obstinate people. At the time of the Judges, he provided a deliverer. A baby was promised to a childless couple. He was to deliver his people from the oppression of the Philistines. When he was born he was named Samson.

Observation

Pride makes us drift from God's commands. We feel "I can do it on my own," or we become confident in our own ability to handle each day. Yet, like Israel, we often remember to turn to God when life suddenly gets hard. Pride is idolatry—the idol is self.

Inspiration

In the rough and tumble of our abrasive twentieth century, humility is scarcely considered a virtue. Such qualities as meekness and gentleness are not the sort that most people seek in order to succeed. We are fast moving, masterful, permissive people who from the cradle learn to shove and push and scream and scramble to get ahead—to plant our proud feet on the top of the totem pole.

Fiercely we contend for our rights, believing the

strange philosophy that to be big and bold and brazen is best. We subscribe to the idea that since no one else will blow my horn for me, I must blow my own bugle loudly and long. We are completely convinced that unless we make our own mark in the world we will be forgotten in the crush—obliterated from memory by the milling masses around us.

From the hour we begin to take our first feeble, frightened steps as tiny tots we are exhorted to “stand on your own feet.” We are urged and encouraged to “make it on your own.” We are told to “make your own decisions.” We are stimulated to be aggressive, self-assertive, and very self-assured. All of these attributes we are sure will lead to ultimate greatness.

In the face of all this it comes to us as a distinct shock to hear our Lord declare: “whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” ...

The selfless, self-effacing character of God’s love simply does not permit it to strut and parade itself pompously. It will have no part of such a performance. It is not proud, arrogant, puffed up with its own importance.

(From A Gardener Looks at the Fruits of the Spirit by Phillip Keller)

Application

Has your pride led you away from God? Have you become self-reliant rather than following God’s advice? Follow his advice in every area of your life.

Exploration

Obedience to God—[Leviticus 25:18](#); [1 Samuel 15:22](#); [Job 22:23–29](#).

The Birth of Samson

Again the people of Israel did what the Lord said was wrong. So he handed them over to the Philistines for forty years.

²There was a man named Manoah from the tribe of Dan, who lived in the city of Zorah. He had a wife, but she could not have children. ³The angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah's wife and said, "You have not been able to have children, but you will become pregnant and give birth to a son. ⁴Be careful not to drink wine or beer or eat anything that is unclean, ⁵because you will become pregnant and have a son. You must never cut his hair, because he will be a Nazirite, given to God from birth. He will begin to save Israel from the power of the Philistines."

⁶Then Manoah's wife went to him and told him what had happened. She said, "A man from God came to me. He looked like an angel from God; his appearance was frightening. I didn't ask him where he was from, and he didn't tell me his name. ⁷But he said to me, 'You will become pregnant and will have a son. Don't drink wine or beer or eat anything that is unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite to God from his birth until the day of his death.'"

⁸Then Manoah prayed to the Lord: "Lord, I beg you to let the man of God come to us again. Let him teach us what we should do for the boy who will be born to us."

⁹God heard Manoah's prayer, and the angel of God came to

Manoah's wife again while she was sitting in the field. But her husband Manoah was not with her. ¹⁰So she ran to tell him, "He is here! The man who appeared to me the other day is here!"

¹¹Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said, "Are you the man who spoke to my wife?"

The man said, "I am."

¹²So Manoah asked, "When what you say happens, what kind of life should the boy live? What should he do?"

¹³The angel of the Lord said, "Your wife must be careful to do everything I told her to do. ¹⁴She must not eat anything that grows on a grapevine, or drink any wine or beer, or eat anything that is unclean. She must do everything I have commanded her."

¹⁵Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, "We would like you to stay awhile so we can cook a young goat for you."

¹⁶The angel of the Lord answered, "Even if I stay awhile, I would not eat your food. But if you want to prepare something, offer a burnt offering to the Lord." (Manoah did not understand that the man was really the angel of the Lord.)

¹⁷Then Manoah asked the angel of the Lord, "What is your name? Then we will honor you when what you have said really happens."

¹⁸The angel of the Lord said, "Why do you ask my name? It is too amazing for you to understand." ¹⁹So Manoah sacrificed a young goat on a rock and offered some grain as a gift to the Lord. Then an amazing thing happened as Manoah and his wife watched. ²⁰The flames went up to the sky from the altar. As the fire burned, the angel of the Lord went up to heaven in the flame. When Manoah and his wife saw that, they bowed

facedown on the ground. ²¹The angel of the Lord did not appear to them again. Then Manoah understood that the man was really the angel of the Lord. ²²Manoah said, “We have seen God, so we will surely die.”

²³But his wife said to him, “If the Lord wanted to kill us, he would not have accepted our burnt offering or grain offering. He would not have shown us all these things or told us all this.”

²⁴So the woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew, and the Lord blessed him. ²⁵The Spirit of the Lord began to work in Samson while he was in the city of Mahaneh Dan, between the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol.

Life Lessons

Judges 14:1–20

Situation

The Philistines ruled over Israel. The Israelites cried to God to save them. God provided a leader called Samson.

Observation

God always provides strength to do his will. In Samson's case, God supplied extraordinary physical power.

Inspiration

People who have moved the world have been Spirit-filled. Filled with the Spirit, the first disciples “turned the world upside down.” Filled with the Spirit, the reformers started the spiritual blaze which became the Reformation. Filled with the Spirit, Francis Asbury, George Fox, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, and David Brainerd set the mountains and prairies of America aglow with the fires of real Christianity. Filled with the Spirit, D. L. Moody and Ira Sankey shook two continents out of their spiritual lethargy. Corrie ten Boom and Mother Teresa impacted their world greatly.

The tides of civilization have risen, the courses of history have been brightened by people who have been filled with the Spirit of God...

Have you yielded your life to Christ without reserve, asking Him to fill you and use you for His glory? (From *The Secret of Happiness* by Billy

Graham)

Application

Pray for strength to do your work. Pray for yourself and others close to you: your family, pastor, friends. Let the Holy Spirit do extraordinary work in you.

Exploration

Source of Strength—[Psalm 28:7](#); [Zechariah 4:6](#); [Acts 1:8](#).

Samson's First Marriage

Samson went down to the city of Timnah where he saw a Philistine woman.²When he returned home, he said to his father and mother, "I saw a Philistine woman in Timnah. I want you to get her for me so I can marry her."

³His father and mother answered, "Surely there is a woman from Israel you can marry. Do you have to marry a woman from the Philistines, who are not circumcised?"

But Samson said, "Get that woman for me! She is the one I want!"⁴(Samson's parents did not know that the Lord wanted this to happen because he was looking for a way to challenge the Philistines, who were ruling over Israel at this time.)

⁵Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, as far as the vineyard near there. Suddenly, a young lion came roaring toward Samson! ⁶The Spirit of the Lord entered Samson with great power, and he tore the lion apart with his bare hands. For him it was as easy as tearing apart a young goat. But Samson did not tell his father or mother what he had done. ⁷Then he went down to the city and talked to the Philistine woman, and he liked her.

⁸Several days later Samson went back to marry her. On his way he went over to look at the body of the dead lion and found a swarm of bees and honey in it. ⁹Samson got some of the honey with his hands and walked along eating it. When he came to his parents, he gave some to them. They ate it, too, but

Samson did not tell them he had taken the honey from the body of the dead lion.

¹⁰Samson's father went down to see the Philistine woman. And Samson gave a feast, as was the custom for the bridegroom. ¹¹When the people saw him, they sent thirty friends to be with him.

Samson's Riddle

¹²Samson said to them, "Let me tell you a riddle. Try to find the answer during the seven days of the feast. If you can, I will give you thirty linen shirts and thirty changes of clothes. ¹³But if you can't, you must give me thirty linen shirts and thirty changes of clothes."

So they said, "Tell us your riddle so we can hear it."

¹⁴Samson said,

"Out of the eater comes something to eat.
Out of the strong comes something sweet."

After three days, they had not found the answer.

¹⁵On the [fourth](#) day they said to Samson's wife, "Did you invite us here to make us poor? Trick your husband into telling us the answer to the riddle. If you don't, we will burn you and everyone in your father's house."

¹⁶So Samson's wife went to him, crying, and said, "You hate me! You don't really love me! You told my people a riddle, but you won't tell me the answer."

Samson said, "I haven't even told my father or mother. Why should I tell you?"

¹⁷Samson's wife cried for the rest of the seven days of the feast. So he finally gave her the answer on the seventh day, because she kept bothering him. Then she told her people the answer to the riddle.

¹⁸Before sunset on the seventh day of the feast, the Philistine men had the answer. They came to Samson and said,

“What is sweeter than honey?
What is stronger than a lion?”

Then Samson said to them,

“If you had not plowed with my young cow,
you would not have solved my riddle!”

¹⁹Then the Spirit of the Lord entered Samson and gave him great power. Samson went down to the city of Ashkelon and killed thirty of its men and took all that they had and gave the clothes to the men who had answered his riddle. Then he went to his father's house very angry. ²⁰And Samson's wife was given to his best man.

Life Lessons

Judges 15:1-16:31

Situation

Samson lost his betrothed wife to his best man. Obviously angry, Samson took revenge on the Philistines. Eventually, he died as a result of revealing the secret of his strength to Delilah.

Observation

Samson initiated a cycle of violence and revenge between himself and the Philistines. This vicious cycle continued to grow in scope.

Inspiration

“Grudge” is one of those words that defines itself. Its very sound betrays its meaning.

Say it slowly: “Grr-uuuud-ge.”

It starts with a growl. “Grr ...” Like a bear with bad breath coming out of hibernation or a mangy mongrel defending his bone in an alley. “Grr....”

Being near a resentful person and petting a growling dog are equally enjoyable.

Don’t you just love being next to people who are nursing a grudge? Isn’t it a delight to listen to them sing their songs of woe? They are so optimistic! They are so full of hope. They are bubbling with life.

You know better. You know as well as I that if they are bubbling with anything it is anger. And if they are full of anything, it is poisonous barbs of condemnation for all the people who have hurt them. Grudge bearers and angry animals are a lot alike. Both

are irritable. Both are explosive. Both can be rabid. Someone needs to make a sign that can be worn around the neck of the resentful: “Beware of the Grrrrrudge Bearer.”

Add an M to the second part of the word , and you will see what grudge bearers throw. Mud. It’s not enough to accuse; the other person’s character must be attacked. It’s insufficient to point a finger; a rifle must be aimed. Slander is slung. Names are called. Circles are drawn. Walls are built. And enemies are made....

Is this the way you are coping with your hurts?
(From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

Grudges can create emotional walls in families, between friends, at work or at church—places where people step on and over each other. Are you holding a grudge against someone? It is a negative factor in your life. Pray for God to help you change your attitude.

Exploration

Revenge—[Leviticus 19:18](#); [Proverbs 24:29](#);
[Matthew 5:39](#); [Romans 12:19–20](#).

Samson Troubles the Philistines

At the time of the wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife, taking a young goat with him. He said, "I'm going to my wife's room," but her father would not let him go in.

²He said to Samson, "I thought you really hated your wife, so I gave her to your best man. Her younger sister is more beautiful. Take her instead."

³But Samson said to them, "This time no one will blame me for hurting you Philistines!" ⁴So Samson went out and caught three hundred foxes. He took two foxes at a time, tied their tails together, and then tied a torch to the tails of each pair of foxes. ⁵After he lit the torches, he let the foxes loose in the grainfields of the Philistines so that he burned up their standing grain, the piles of grain, their vineyards, and their olive trees.

⁶The Philistines asked, "Who did this?"

Someone told them, "Samson, the son-in-law of the man from Timnah, did because his father-in-law gave his wife to his best man."

So the Philistines burned Samson's wife and her father to death. ⁷Then Samson said to the Philistines, "Since you did this, I won't stop until I pay you back!" ⁸Samson attacked the Philistines and killed many of them. Then he went down and stayed in a cave in the rock of Etam.

⁹The Philistines went up and camped in the land of Judah, near a place named Lehi. ¹⁰The men of Judah asked them,

“Why have you come here to fight us?”

They answered, “We have come to make Samson our prisoner, to pay him back for what he did to our people.”

¹¹Then three thousand men of Judah went to the cave in the rock of Etam and said to Samson, “What have you done to us? Don’t you know that the Philistines rule over us?”

Samson answered, “I only paid them back for what they did to me.”

¹²Then they said to him, “We have come to tie you up and to hand you over to the Philistines.”

Samson said to them, “Promise me you will not hurt me yourselves.”

¹³The men from Judah said, “We agree. We will just tie you up and give you to the Philistines. We will not kill you.” So they tied Samson with two new ropes and led him up from the cave in the rock. ¹⁴When Samson came to the place named Lehi, the Philistines came to meet him, shouting for joy. Then the Spirit of the Lord entered Samson and gave him great power. The ropes on him weakened like burned strings and fell off his hands! ¹⁵Samson found the jawbone of a dead donkey, took it, and killed a thousand men with it!

¹⁶Then Samson said,

“With a donkey’s jawbone
I made donkeys out of them.
With a donkey’s jawbone
I killed a thousand men!”

¹⁷When he finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone. So that place was named [Ramath Lehi](#).

¹⁸Samson was very thirsty, so he cried out to the Lord,

“You gave me, your servant, this great victory. Do I have to die of thirst now? Do I have to be captured by people who are not circumcised?” ¹⁹Then God opened up a hole in the ground at Lehi, and water came out. When Samson drank, he felt better; he felt strong again. So he named that spring Caller’s Spring, which is still in Lehi.

²⁰Samson judged Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

Samson Goes to the City of Gaza

One day Samson went to Gaza and saw a prostitute there. He went in to spend the night with her. ²When the people of Gaza heard, “Samson has come here!” they surrounded the place and waited for him near the city gate all night. They whispered to each other, “When dawn comes, we will kill Samson!”

³But Samson only stayed with the prostitute until midnight. Then he got up and took hold of the doors and the two posts of the city gate and tore them loose, along with the bar. He put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces the city of Hebron.

Samson and Delilah

⁴After this, Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the Valley of Sorek. ⁵The Philistine rulers went to Delilah and said, “Find out what makes Samson so strong. Trick him into telling you how we can overpower him and capture him and tie him up. If you do this, each one of us will give you twenty-eight pounds of silver.”

⁶So Delilah said to Samson, “Tell me why you are so strong. How can someone tie you up and capture you?”

⁷Samson answered, “Someone would have to tie me up with seven new bowstrings that have not been dried. Then I would be as weak as any other man.”

⁸The Philistine rulers brought Delilah seven new bowstrings that had not been dried, and she tied Samson with

them.⁹ Some men were hiding in another room. Delilah said to him, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” But Samson broke the bowstrings like pieces of burned string. So the Philistines did not find out the secret of Samson’s strength.

¹⁰Then Delilah said to Samson, “You made a fool of me. You lied to me. Now tell me how someone can tie you up.”

¹¹Samson said, “They would have to tie me with new ropes that have not been used before. Then I would become as weak as any other man.”

¹²So Delilah took new ropes and tied Samson. Some men were hiding in another room. She called out to him, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” But he broke the ropes as easily as if they were threads.

¹³Then Delilah said to Samson, “Again you have made a fool of me. You lied to me. Tell me how someone can tie you up.”

He said, “Using the [loom](#), weave the seven braids of my hair into the cloth, and tighten it with a pin. Then I will be as weak as any other man.”

While Samson slept, Delilah wove the seven braids of his hair into the cloth.¹⁴ Then she fastened it with a pin.

Again she said to him, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” Samson woke up and pulled out the pin and the loom with the cloth.

¹⁵Then Delilah said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when you don’t even trust me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me. You haven’t told me the secret of your great strength.”¹⁶ She kept bothering Samson about his secret day after day until he felt he was going to die!

¹⁷So he told her everything. He said, “I have never had my

hair cut, because I have been set apart to God as a Nazirite since I was born. If someone shaved my head, I would lose my strength and be as weak as any other man.”

¹⁸When Delilah saw that he had told her everything sincerely, she sent a message to the Philistine rulers. She said, “Come back one more time, because he has told me everything.” So the Philistine rulers came back to Delilah and brought the silver with them. ¹⁹Delilah got Samson to sleep, lying in her lap. Then she called in a man to shave off the seven braids of Samson’s hair. In this way she began to make him weak, and his strength left him.

²⁰Then she said, “Samson, the Philistines are here!”

He woke up and thought, “I’ll leave as I did before and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the Lord had left him.

²¹Then the Philistines captured Samson and tore out his eyes. They took him down to Gaza, where they put bronze chains on him and made him grind grain in the prison. ²²But his hair began to grow again.

Samson Dies

²³The Philistine rulers gathered to celebrate and to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon. They said, “Our god has handed Samson our enemy over to us.” ²⁴When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying,

“This man destroyed our country.
He killed many of us!
But our god handed over

our enemy to us.”

²⁵While the people were enjoying the celebration, they said, “Bring Samson out to perform for us.” So they brought Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. They made him stand between the pillars. ²⁶Samson said to the servant holding his hand, “Let me feel the pillars that hold up the temple so I can lean against them.” ²⁷Now the temple was full of men and women. All the Philistine rulers were there, and about three thousand men and women were on the [roof](#) watching Samson perform. ²⁸Then Samson prayed to the Lord, “Lord God, remember me. God, please give me strength one more time so I can pay these Philistines back for putting out my two eyes!” ²⁹Then Samson turned to the two center pillars that supported the whole temple. He braced himself between the two pillars, with his right hand on one and his left hand on the other. ³⁰Samson said, “Let me die with these Philistines!” Then he pushed as hard as he could, causing the temple to fall on the rulers and all the people in it. So Samson killed more of the Philistines when he died than when he was alive.

³¹Samson’s brothers and his whole family went down to get his body. They brought him back and buried him in the tomb of Manoah, his father, between the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol. Samson was a judge for the people of Israel for twenty years.

Micah's Idols

There was a man named Micah who lived in the mountains of Ephraim.²He said to his mother, "I heard you speak a curse about the twenty-eight pounds of silver that were taken from you. I have the silver with me; I took it."

His mother said, "The Lord bless you, my son!"

³Micah gave the twenty-eight pounds of silver to his mother. Then she said, "I will give this silver to the Lord. I will have my son make an idol and a statue. So I will give the silver back to you."

⁴When he gave the silver back to his mother, she took about five pounds and gave it to a silversmith. With it he made an idol and a statue, which stood in Micah's house. ⁵Micah had a special holy place, and he made a holy vest and some household idols. Then Micah chose one of his sons to be his priest. ⁶At that time Israel did not have a king, so everyone did what seemed right.

⁷There was a young man who was a [Levite](#) from the city of Bethlehem in Judah who was from the people of Judah. ⁸He left Bethlehem to look for another place to live, and on his way he came to Micah's house in the mountains of Ephraim. ⁹Micah asked him, "Where are you from?"

He answered, "I'm a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah. I'm looking for a place to live."

¹⁰Micah said to him, "Live with me and be my father and my priest. I will give you four ounces of silver each year and clothes and food." So the Levite went in. ¹¹He agreed to live

with Micah and became like one of Micah's own sons. ¹²Micah made him a priest, and he lived in Micah's house. ¹³Then Micah said, "Now I know the Lord will be good to me, because I have a Levite as my priest."

Life Lessons

Judges 17:1–18:31

Situation

Micah, a man who stole money from his mother, decided to confess when he heard his mother calling down curses upon the thief who stole her money. His mother blessed and forgave him. Micah's mother made an idol from the money to try to atone for the sin her son committed.

Observation

False religion seeks peace of heart through all the wrong ways. A true relationship with God requires wholehearted obedience, not a token sacrifice.

Inspiration

"Lord," I said, "I want to be your man, not my own. So to you I give my money, my car—even my home."

Then, smug and content, I relaxed with a smile and whispered to God, "I bet it's been a while since anyone has given so much—so freely?" His answer surprised me. He replied, "Not really."

Not a day has gone by since the beginning of time, that someone hasn't offered meager nickels and dimes, golden altars and crosses, contributions and penance, stone monuments and steeples; but why

not repentance?

“The money, the statues, the cathedrals you’ve built, do you really think I need your offering of guilt?

“What good is money that’s meant only to salve the hurting conscience that so many of you have?

“Your lips know no prayers. Your eyes, no compassion.

But you will go to church (when church going’s in fashion).

“Just give me a tear—a heart ready to mold.

And I’ll give you a mission, a message so bold—

That a fire will be stirred where there was only death,

And your heart will be flamed by my life and my breath.”

I stuck my hands in my pockets and kicked at the dirt.

It’s tough to be corrected (I guess my feelings were hurt).

But it was worth the struggle to realize the thought.

That the cross isn’t for sale and Christ’s blood can’t be bought. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

Are you trying to win God’s favor? Instead, accept his gift of salvation. God has no price tag attached to his mercy. Jesus paid the price himself.

Exploration

Obedience Not Sacrifice—[1 Samuel 15:22](#); [Proverbs 21:3](#); [Hosea 6:6](#).

Dan's Family Captures Laish

At that time Israel did not have a king. And at that time the tribe of Dan was still looking for a land where they could live, a land of their own. The Danites had not yet been given their own land among the tribes of Israel.²So, from their family groups, they chose five soldiers from the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol to spy out and explore the land. They were told, “Go, explore the land.”

They came to the mountains of Ephraim, to Micah's house, where they spent the night.³When they came near Micah's house, they recognized the voice of the young [Levite](#). So they stopped there and asked him, “Who brought you here? What are you doing here? Why are you here?”

⁴He told them what Micah had done for him, saying, “He hired me. I am his priest.”

⁵They said to him, “Please ask God if our journey will be successful.”

⁶The priest said to them, “Go in peace. The Lord is pleased with your journey.”

⁷So the five men left. When they came to the city of Laish, they saw that the people there lived in safety, like the people of Sidon. They thought they were safe and had plenty of everything. They lived a long way from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone else.

⁸When the five men returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, their relatives asked them, “What did you find?”

⁹They answered, “We have seen the land, and it is very good. We should attack them. Aren't you going to do

something? Don't wait! Let's go and take that land! ¹⁰When you go, you will see there is plenty of land—plenty of everything! The people are not expecting an attack. Surely God has handed that land over to us!”

¹¹So six hundred Danites left Zorah and Eshtaol ready for war. ¹²On their way they set up camp near the city of Kiriath Jearim in Judah. That is why the place west of Kiriath Jearim is named [Mahaneh Dan](#) to this day. ¹³From there they traveled on to the mountains of Ephraim. Then they came to Micah's house.

¹⁴The five men who had explored the land around Laish said to their relatives, “Do you know in one of these houses there are a holy vest, household gods, an idol, and a statue? You know what to do.” ¹⁵So they stopped at the Levite's house, which was also Micah's house, and greeted the Levite. ¹⁶The six hundred Danites stood at the entrance gate, wearing their weapons of war. ¹⁷The five spies went into the house and took the idol, the holy vest, the household idols, and the statue. The priest and the six hundred men armed for war stood by the entrance gate.

¹⁸When the spies went into Micah's house and took the image, the holy vest, the household idols, and the statue, the priest asked them, “What are you doing?”

¹⁹They answered, “Be quiet! Don't say a word. Come with us and be our father and priest. Is it better for you to be a priest for one man's house or for a tribe and family group in Israel?”

²⁰This made the priest happy. So he took the holy vest, the household idols, and the idol and went with the Danites.

²¹They left Micah's house, putting their little children, their animals, and everything they owned in front of them.

²²When they had gone a little way from Micah's house, the men who lived near Micah were called out and caught up with them. ²³The men with Micah shouted at the Danites, who turned around and said to Micah, "What's the matter with you? Why have you been called out to fight?"

²⁴Micah answered, "You took my gods that I made and my priest. What do I have left? How can you ask me, 'What's the matter?'"

²⁵The Danites answered, "You should not argue with us. Some of our angry men might attack you, killing you and your family." ²⁶Then the Danites went on their way. Micah knew they were too strong for him, so he turned and went back home.

²⁷Then the Danites took what Micah had made and his priest and went on to Laish. They attacked those peaceful people and killed them with their swords and then burned the city. ²⁸There was no one to save the people of Laish. They lived too far from Sidon, and they had no dealings with anyone else. Laish was in a valley near Beth Rehob.

The people of Dan rebuilt the city and lived there. ²⁹They changed the name of Laish to Dan, naming it for their ancestor Dan, one of the sons of Israel.

³⁰The people of Dan set up the idols in the city of Dan. Jonathan son of Gershom, Moses' son, and his sons served as priests for the tribe of Dan until the land was captured. ³¹The people of Dan set up the idols Micah had made as long as the Holy Tent of God was in Shiloh.

A Levite and His Servant

At that time Israel did not have a king. There was a Levite who lived in the faraway mountains of Ephraim. He had taken a slave woman from the city of Bethlehem in the land of Judah to live with him,² but she was unfaithful to him. She left him and went back to her father's house in Bethlehem in Judah and stayed there for four months.³ Then her husband went to ask her to come back to him, taking with him his servant and two donkeys. When the Levite came to her father's house, she invited him to come in, and her father was happy to see him.⁴ The father-in-law, the young woman's father, asked him to stay. So he stayed for three days and ate, drank, and slept there.

⁵On the fourth day they got up early in the morning. The Levite was getting ready to leave, but the woman's father said to his son-in-law, "Refresh yourself by eating something. Then go." ⁶So the two men sat down to eat and drink together. After that, the father said to him, "Please stay tonight. Relax and enjoy yourself." ⁷When the man got up to go, his father-in-law asked him to stay. So he stayed again that night. ⁸On the fifth day the man got up early in the morning to leave. The woman's father said, "Refresh yourself. Wait until this afternoon." So the two men ate together.

⁹When the Levite, his slave woman, and his servant got up to leave, the father-in-law, the young woman's father, said, "It's almost night. The day is almost gone. Spend the night here and enjoy yourself. Tomorrow morning you can get up

early and go home.”¹⁰ But the Levite did not want to stay another night. So he took his two saddled donkeys and his slave woman and traveled toward the city of Jebus (also called Jerusalem).

¹¹As the day was almost over, they came near Jebus. So the servant said to his master, “Let’s stop at this city of the Jebusites, and spend the night here.”

¹²But his master said, “No. We won’t go inside a foreign city. Those people are not Israelites. We will go on to the city of Gibeah.”¹³ He said, “Come on. Let’s try to make it to Gibeah or Ramah so we can spend the night in one of those cities.”

¹⁴So they went on. The sun went down as they came near Gibeah, which belongs to the tribe of Benjamin.¹⁵ They stopped there to spend the night. They came to the public square of the city and sat down, but no one invited them home to spend the night.

¹⁶Finally, in the evening an old man came in from his work in the fields. His home was in the mountains of Ephraim, but now he was living in Gibeah. (The people of Gibeah were from the tribe of Benjamin.)¹⁷ He saw the traveler in the public square and asked, “Where are you going? Where did you come from?”

¹⁸The Levite answered, “We are traveling from Bethlehem in Judah to my home in the mountains of Ephraim. I have been to Bethlehem in Judah, but now I am going to the Holy Tent of the Lord. No one has invited me to stay in his house.”¹⁹ We already have straw and food for our donkeys and bread and wine for me, the young woman, and my servant. We don’t need anything.”

²⁰The old man said, “You are welcome to stay at my house.

Let me give you anything you need, but don't spend the night in the public square.”²¹ So the old man took the Levite into his house, and he fed their donkeys. They washed their feet and had something to eat and drink.

²²While they were enjoying themselves, some wicked men of the city surrounded the house and beat on the door. They shouted to the old man who owned the house, “Bring out the man who came to your house. We want to have sexual relations with him.”

²³The owner of the house went outside and said to them, “No, my friends. Don't be so evil. This man is a guest in my house. Don't do this terrible thing!”²⁴Look, here are my daughter, who has never had sexual relations before, and the man's slave woman. I will bring them out to you now. Do anything you want with them, but don't do such a terrible thing to this man.”

²⁵But the men would not listen to him. So the Levite took his slave woman and sent her outside to them. They forced her to have sexual relations with them, and they abused her all night long. Then, at dawn, they let her go.²⁶She came back to the house where her master was staying and fell down at the door and lay there until daylight.

²⁷In the morning when the Levite got up, he opened the door of the house and went outside to go on his way. But his slave woman was lying at the doorway of the house, with her hands on the doorsill.²⁸The Levite said to her, “Get up; let's go.” But she did not answer. So he put her on his donkey and went home.

²⁹When the Levite got home, he took a knife and cut his slave woman into twelve parts, limb by limb. Then he sent a

part to each area of Israel.³⁰Everyone who saw this said, “Nothing like this has ever happened before, not since the people of Israel came out of Egypt. Think about it. Tell us what to do.”

Life Lessons

Judges 19:1–21:25

Situation

A Levite priest cruelly and unjustly handed over his concubine to be abused by wicked men living in Gibeah, a village of the Benjamites. When he got home, the priest cut her corpse into twelve parts and sent each tribe in Israel a part to dramatize the shamefulness of the act perpetrated by the men of Gibeah.

Observation

We must protect the helpless and vulnerable, as we trust God to protect us.

Inspiration

That was the night God gave me real compassion for whites—the night those Mississippi police officers beat me almost to death.

It was Saturday, February 7, 1970, about 6:30 p.m. Here’s how I described the scene later in the court trial: “When I got to the jail and saw the people in jail, of course I was horrified as to why we were arrested and when I got in the jail Sheriff Jonathan Edwards came over to me right away and said, ‘This is the smart nigger, and this is a new ballgame. You’re not in Simpson county now; you are in Brandon.’ He began

to beat me, and from that time on they continued beating me.”

It got worse as the night wore on. One officer brought a fork over to me and said, “Do you see this?” And he jammed it up my nose. Then he crammed it down my throat. Then they beat me to the ground again and stomped on me.

... I remember their faces—so twisted with hate. It was like looking at white faced demons. For the first time I saw what hate had done to those people. These policemen were poor. They saw themselves as failures. The only way they knew how to find a sense of self worth was by beating us. Their racism made them feel like “somebody.”

My beating and the frustration and bitterness that followed took their toll. In July of 1970 I had a heart attack. I was hospitalized in Mound Bayou, a small black community where I had helped organize some co-ops. After a partial recovery I found myself back in the same hospital with ulcers. Dr. Harvey Sanders, a black doctor, had to take out two thirds of my stomach.

Lying in that hospital bed I had a lot of time to think. I thought about blacks and whites. About how, in a country that claimed to stand for “liberty and justice for all,” a black man in Mississippi could get no justice. I thought about how in Mississippi, “Christians” were the most racist whites of all.

... The Spirit of God worked on me as I lay in that bed. An image formed in my mind—the image of a cross, of Christ on the cross. This Jesus knew what I

had suffered. He understood. He cared. Because he had gone through it all himself.

I read [Matthew 6:14–15](#) again and again in that bed: “For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your heavenly Father will not forgive your transgressions.” To receive God’s forgiveness I was going to have to forgive those who had hurt me. As I prayed, the faces of those policemen passed before me one by one and I forgave each one. Faces of other white people from the past came before me, and I forgave them. I could sense that God was working a deep inner healing in me that went back beyond February 7, 1970. It went clear back to my earliest memories of childhood. God was healing all those wounds that had kept me from loving whites. How sweet God’s forgiveness and healing was! (From *With Justice for All* by John Perkins)

Application

Read [Matthew 6:14–15](#) and [18:21–35](#). Think about one or two people who have hurt you. Pray for them. Do not excuse what they did, but pray that God will help you forgive them as God forgave you.

Exploration

Injustice—[Exodus 22:21](#); [Psalm 43:1](#); [Zephaniah 3:5](#); [Luke 16:10](#).

The power of the prayer ... does not depend on the one who makes the prayer, but on the one who hears the prayer. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

The War Between Israel and Benjamin

So all the Israelites from [Dan to Beersheba](#), including the land of Gilead, joined together before the Lord in the city of Mizpah.

²The leaders of all the tribes of Israel took their places in the meeting of the people of God. There were 400,000 soldiers with swords. ³(The people of Benjamin heard that the Israelites had gone up to Mizpah.) Then the Israelites said to the Levite, “Tell us how this evil thing happened.”

⁴So the husband of the murdered woman answered, “My slave woman and I came to Gibeah in Benjamin to spend the night. ⁵During the night the men of Gibeah came after me. They surrounded the house and wanted to kill me. They forced my slave woman to have sexual relations and she died. ⁶I took her and cut her into parts and sent one part to each area of Israel because the people of Benjamin did this wicked and terrible thing in Israel. ⁷Now, all you Israelites, speak up. What is your decision?”

⁸Then all the people stood up at the same time, saying, “None of us will go home. Not one of us will go back to his house! ⁹Now this is what we will do to Gibeah. We will throw lots. ¹⁰That way we will choose ten men from every hundred men from all the tribes of Israel, and we will choose a hundred men from every thousand, and a thousand men from every ten thousand. These will find supplies for the army. Then the army will go to the city of Gibeah of Benjamin to repay them for the terrible thing they have done in Israel.” ¹¹So all the men of Israel were united and gathered against the city.

¹²The tribes of Israel sent men throughout the tribe of Benjamin demanding, “What is this evil thing some of your men have done? ¹³Hand over the wicked men in Gibeah so that we can put them to death. We must remove this evil from Israel.”

But the Benjaminites would not listen to their fellow Israelites. ¹⁴The Benjaminites left their own cities and met at Gibeah to fight the Israelites. ¹⁵In only one day the Benjaminites got 26,000 soldiers together who were trained with swords. They also had 700 chosen men from Gibeah. ¹⁶Seven hundred of these trained soldiers were left-handed, each of whom could sling a stone at a hair and not miss!

¹⁷The Israelites, except for the Benjaminites, gathered 400,000 soldiers with swords.

¹⁸The Israelites went up to the city of Bethel and asked God, “Which tribe shall be first to attack the Benjaminites?”

The Lord answered, “Judah shall go first.”

¹⁹The next morning the Israelites got up and made a camp near Gibeah. ²⁰The men of Israel went out to fight the Benjaminites and took their battle position at Gibeah. ²¹Then the Benjaminites came out of Gibeah and killed 22,000 Israelites during the battle that day. ²²⁻²³The Israelites went before the Lord and cried until evening. They asked the Lord, “Shall we go to fight our relatives, the Benjaminites, again?”

The Lord answered, “Go up and fight them.” The men of Israel encouraged each other. So they took the same battle positions they had taken the first day.

²⁴The Israelites came to fight the Benjaminites the second day. ²⁵The Benjaminites came out of Gibeah to attack the Israelites. This time, the Benjaminites killed 18,000 Israelites, all

of whom carried swords.

²⁶Then the Israelites went up to Bethel. There they sat down and cried to the Lord and went without food all day until evening. They also brought burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the Lord. ²⁷The Israelites asked the Lord a question. (In those days the Ark of the Agreement with God was there at Bethel. ²⁸A priest named Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, served before the Ark of the Agreement.) They asked, “Shall we go to fight our relatives, the Benjaminites, again, or shall we stop fighting?”

The Lord answered, “Go, because tomorrow I will hand them over to you.”

²⁹Then the Israelites set up ambushes all around Gibeah. ³⁰They went to fight against the Benjaminites at Gibeah on the third day, getting into position for battle as they had done before. ³¹When the Benjaminites came out to fight them, the Israelites backed up and led the Benjaminites away from the city. The Benjaminites began to kill some of the Israelites as they had done before. About thirty Israelites were killed—some in the fields and some on the roads leading to Bethel and to Gibeah.

³²The Benjaminites said, “We are winning as before!”

But the Israelites said, “Let’s run. Let’s trick them into going farther away from their city and onto the roads.”

³³All the Israelites moved from their places and got into battle positions at a place named Baal Tamar. Then the Israelites ran out from their hiding places west of Gibeah. ³⁴Ten thousand of the best trained soldiers from all of Israel attacked Gibeah. The battle was very hard. The Benjaminites did not know disaster was about to come to them. ³⁵The Lord used the

Israelites to defeat the Benjaminites. On that day the Israelites killed 25,100 Benjaminites, all armed with swords.³⁶ Then the Benjaminites saw that they were defeated.

The Israelites had moved back because they were depending on the surprise attack they had set up near Gibeah.³⁷ The men in hiding rushed into Gibeah, spread out, and killed everyone in the city with their swords.³⁸ Now the Israelites had set up a signal with the men in hiding. The men in the surprise attack were to send up a cloud of smoke from the city.³⁹ Then the army of Israel turned around in the battle.

The Benjaminites had killed about thirty Israelites. They were saying, “We are winning, as in the first battle!”⁴⁰ But then a cloud of smoke began to rise from the city. The Benjaminites turned around and saw that the whole city was going up in smoke.⁴¹ Then the Israelites turned and began to fight. The Benjaminites were terrified because they knew that disaster was coming to them.⁴² So the Benjaminites ran away from the Israelites toward the desert, but they could not escape the battle. And the Israelites who came out of the cities killed them.⁴³ They surrounded the Benjaminites and chased them and caught them in the area east of Gibeah.⁴⁴ So 18,000 brave Benjaminite fighters were killed.⁴⁵ The Benjaminites ran toward the desert to the rock of Rimmon, but the Israelites killed 5,000 Benjaminites along the roads. They chased them as far as Gidom and killed 2,000 more Benjaminites there.

⁴⁶On that day 25,000 Benjaminites were killed, all of whom had fought bravely with swords.⁴⁷ But 600 Benjaminites ran to the rock of Rimmon in the desert, where they stayed for four months.⁴⁸ Then the Israelites went back to the land of Benjamin and killed the people in every city and also the animals and

everything they could find. And they burned every city they found.

Wives for the Men of Benjamin

At Mizpah the men of Israel had sworn, “Not one of us will let his daughter marry a man from the tribe of Benjamin.”

²The people went to the city of Bethel and sat before God until evening, crying loudly. ³They said, “Lord, God of Israel, why has this terrible thing happened to us so that one tribe of Israel is missing today?”

⁴Early the next day the people built an altar and put burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to God on it.

⁵Then the Israelites asked, “Did any tribe of Israel not come here to meet with us in the presence of the Lord?” They asked this question because they had sworn that anyone who did not meet with them at Mizpah would be killed.

⁶The Israelites felt sorry for their relatives, the Benjaminites. They said, “Today one tribe has been cut off from Israel. ⁷We swore before the Lord that we would not allow our daughters to marry a Benjaminite. How can we make sure that the remaining men of Benjamin will have wives?” ⁸Then they asked, “Which one of the tribes of Israel did not come here to Mizpah?” They found that no one from the city of Jabesh Gilead had come. ⁹The people of Israel counted everyone, but there was no one from Jabesh Gilead.

¹⁰So the whole group of Israelites sent twelve thousand soldiers to Jabesh Gilead to kill the people with their swords, even the women and children.

¹¹“This is what you must do: Kill every man in Jabesh Gilead and every married woman.” ¹²The soldiers found four

hundred young unmarried women in Jabesh Gilead, so they brought them to the camp at Shiloh in Canaan.

¹³Then the whole group of Israelites sent a message to the men of Benjamin, who were at the rock of Rimmon, offering to make peace with them. ¹⁴So the men of Benjamin came back at that time. The Israelites gave them the women from Jabesh Gilead who had not been killed, but there were not enough women.

¹⁵The people of Israel felt sorry for the Benjaminites because the Lord had separated the tribes of Israel. ¹⁶The older leaders of the Israelites said, “The women of Benjamin have been killed. Where can we get wives for the men of Benjamin who are still alive? ¹⁷These men must have children to continue their families so a tribe in Israel will not die out. ¹⁸But we cannot allow our daughters to marry them, because we swore, ‘Anyone who gives a wife to a man of Benjamin is cursed.’ ¹⁹We have an idea! There is a yearly festival of the Lord at Shiloh, which is north of the city of Bethel, east of the road that goes from Bethel to Shechem, and south of the city of Lebonah.”

²⁰So the older leaders told the men of Benjamin, “Go and hide in the vineyards. ²¹Watch for the young women from Shiloh to come out to join the dancing. Then run out from the vineyards and take one of the young Shiloh women and return to the land of Benjamin. ²²If their fathers or brothers come to us and complain, we will say: ‘Be kind to the men of Benjamin. We did not get wives for Benjamin during the war, and you did not give the women to the men from Benjamin. So you are not guilty.’”

²³So that is what the Benjaminites did. While the young

women were dancing, each man caught one of them, took her away, and married her. Then they went back to the land God had given them and rebuilt their cities and lived there.

²⁴Then the Israelites went home to their own tribes and family groups, to their own land that God had given them.

²⁵In those days Israel did not have a king. Everyone did what seemed right.

Hormah Hormah sounds like the Hebrew word meaning “to destroy completely.”

Bokim This name means “crying.”

judges They were not judges in courts of law, but leaders of the people in times of emergency.

Ishmaelites Another name for the Midianites. See [Genesis 37:25–28](#).

Gideon Also called Jerub-Baal.

Gideon Also called Jerub-Baal.

salt The salt would keep crops from growing there.

Gideon Also called Jerub-Baal.

fourth The Hebrew word is “seventh.” Some old translations say “fourth,” which fits the order of events better.

Ramath Lehi This name means “Jawbone Hill.”

loom A machine for making cloth from thread.

roof In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

Levite The Levites were the only ones God had appointed as priests.

Levite The Levites were the only ones God had appointed as priests.

Mahaneh Dan This name means “the camp of Dan.”

Dan ... Beersheba Dan was the city farthest north in Israel. Beersheba was the city farthest south. So this means all the people of Israel.

The Book of Ruth

Introduction

Here is a play with four characters.

Character number one is a prostitute.

Character number two is her son. By the time we meet him he is wealthy, powerful, and single. (We wonder if his bachelorhood has anything to do with being the son of a prostitute.)

Character number three is a foreign widow in a clannish culture. Everything about her is different. Speaks with an accent. Wears a different name. Eats different food. Has a different way. Her only friend is her mother-in-law who happens also to be a widow and happens to be:

Character number four. She is older than the first widow. Too old to have kids. When her two sons die and her husband dies, she is left alone. With only a foreigner as a friend.

Four people. Each rejected. Each alone. Four frazzled strings in the bottom of the knitting basket. Left untouched, awaiting the toss of the master-weaver. But he doesn't discard them.

He picks them up and weaves them together.

The result? The unmarried son of the prostitute meets the foreign widow who left her homeland to accompany her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law recognizes the bachelor as a relative and urges her daughter-in-law to make herself available. She does, the two marry, and the single bachelor has a wife—the young widow has a husband and the older widow has a grandson and we have a story of providential romance.

Such is the story of Ruth.

You'll recognize her as the younger widow. The older is

named Naomi. Boaz is the son of the prostitute. And the prostitute? Well, she isn't mentioned in this book. But she is mentioned in, of all places, the Gospel of Matthew.

Read the words in the parentheses of [Matthew 1:5](#). Go ahead and flip over there, I'll wait for you.

Did you see it? Salmon was the father of Boaz. (Boaz's mother was Rahab.)

Who would've thought? A harlot on Jesus' family tree.

But these kind of things happen in the Bible. Aren't we glad they do? Aren't we glad the master-weaver has a place in his plan for each of us?

About This Book

Author:

Jewish tradition says Samuel, others say Ezra, no one knows with certainty.

Date Written:

After the era of Judges which was 1375–1050 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- Ruth was intensely loyal to her mother-in-law Naomi.
- Because of Ruth's loyalty she traveled to a new place and married into a Hebrew family.
- Obed was born to Ruth and was an ancestor of King David and Jesus Christ.

Key Verse:

“But Ruth said, ‘Don’t beg me to leave you or to

stop following you. Where you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God”([Ruth 1:16](#)).

Contents:

1. Ruth and Naomi [1:1–22](#)
2. Naomi’s Plan [3:1–18](#)
3. The Marriage [4:1–22](#)

Life Lessons

Ruth 1:1–22

Situation

The story of Ruth took place sometime during the rule of the Judges. Those were dark days for Israel, when “everyone did what seemed right” to him ([Judges 17:6](#)). But during those dark days and evil times many remained faithful to God.

Observation

Naomi and Ruth portrayed beautiful examples of loyalty, friendship, and commitment to each other and to God.

Inspiration

One relationship of this caliber can buoy us through the fiercest storms. It was the Beatles who sang, “Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I’m sixty-four?” Oh, the agony of being sixty-four (or any age, for that matter) and having no one to care for you or need you. Happy are those who have one companion, one relationship that is not based on looks or performance. Every person is in dire need of at least one faithful friend, or a mate who will look him in the eye and say, “I will never leave you. You may grow old and gray, but I’ll never leave you. Your face may wrinkle and your body may ruin, but I’ll never leave you. The years may be cruel and the times may be hard, but I’ll be here. I will never leave you.” (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

Think for a minute about the people in your world. What do they think of your commitment to them? How would they rate your faithfulness? Does your loyalty ever waver? With whom are you a friend forever? Pray for that person(s) today.

Exploration

Commitment—[1 Samuel 20:16–17](#); [2 Chronicles 15:14–15](#); Esther [4:16](#); [Psalm 37:5](#); [Proverbs 17:17](#); [Luke 9:23–27](#).

Long ago when the [judges](#) ruled Israel, there was a shortage of food in the land. ²So a man named Elimelech left the town of Bethlehem in Judah to live in the country of Moab with his wife and his two sons. His wife was named Naomi, and his two sons were named Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathahites from Bethlehem in Judah. When they came to Moab, they settled there.

³Then Naomi's husband, Elimelech, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴These sons married women from Moab. One was named Orpah, and the other was named Ruth. Naomi and her sons had lived in Moab about ten years ⁵when Mahlon and Kilion also died. So Naomi was left alone without her husband or her two sons.

⁶While Naomi was in Moab, she heard that the Lord had come to help his people and had given them food again. So she and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab and return home. ⁷Naomi and her daughters-in-law left the place where they had lived and started back to the land of Judah. ⁸But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back home, each of you to your own mother's house. May the Lord be as kind to you as you have been to me and my sons who are now dead. ⁹May the Lord give you another happy home and a new husband."

When Naomi kissed the women goodbye, they began to cry out loud. ¹⁰They said to her, "No, we want to go with you to your people."

¹¹But Naomi said, “My daughters, return to your own homes. Why do you want to go with me? I cannot give birth to more sons to give you new husbands; ¹²go back, my daughters, to your own homes. I am too old to have another husband. Even if I told myself, ‘I still have hope’ and had another husband tonight, and even if I had more sons, ¹³should you wait until they were grown into men? Should you live for so many years without husbands? Don’t do that, my daughters. My life is much too sad for you to share, because the Lord has been against me!”

¹⁴The women cried together out loud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law Naomi goodbye, but Ruth held on to her tightly.

¹⁵Naomi said to Ruth, “Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her own people and her own gods. Go back with her.”

Ruth Stays with Naomi

¹⁶But Ruth said, “Don’t beg me to leave you or to stop following you. Where you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. ¹⁷And where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. I ask the Lord to punish me terribly if I do not keep this promise: Not even death will separate us.”

¹⁸When Naomi saw that Ruth had firmly made up her mind to go with her, she stopped arguing with her. ¹⁹So Naomi and Ruth went on until they came to the town of Bethlehem. When they entered Bethlehem, all the people became very excited. The women of the town said, “Is this really Naomi?”

²⁰Naomi answered the people, “Don’t call me [Naomi](#). Call me

[Mara](#), because the Almighty has made my life very sad.
²¹When I left, I had all I wanted, but now, the Lord has brought me home with nothing. Why should you call me Naomi when the Lord has spoken against me and the Almighty has given me so much trouble?”

²²So Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth, the Moabite, returned from Moab and arrived at Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Life Lessons

Ruth 2:1–23

Situation

God rewarded Ruth's loyalty to Naomi when she went to glean barley in the fields of Boaz. Boaz recognized her as a woman of worth and made sure his workers left extra barley stalks for her. Even though Ruth had to work hard, she was thankful for what she had; she was not bitter and despondent.

Observation

Boaz exhibited small acts of kindness. These small acts produced great rewards.

Inspiration

Sometimes people think that the only significant things they do are those for which they receive public recognition... . We think that in order to do something of ultimate importance we must write the great American novel or paint some artistic masterpiece. There is a common notion that significance in life depends on some kind of public recognition. But such is not the case. Really gratifying deeds are often done quietly and with hardly any recognition....

Some of the most important things we do in life are often neither dramatic nor memorable. Happily, on Judgment Day, Jesus will reward a lot of people who hardly remember the important things for which they will be honored. Sending a card of appreciation to someone who is a bit down and needs a lift, visiting a

shut-in who is lonely, baby-sitting for a harried mother who needs a few hours off, calling someone on the phone to show that you care, and giving a glass of cool water in the name of Christ are not the sorts of things that we even remember doing after they are done. But the people we do them for often remember, and I know that Jesus never forgets.

(From *Who Switched the Price Tags?* by Tony Campolo)

Application

When life throws a curveball to a friend, do you stand ready to help? Ask God to help you explore ways to lighten someone's load.

Exploration

Character—[Genesis 5:18–24](#); [1 Samuel 16:7](#); [Romans 5:3–4](#).

Ruth Meets Boaz

Now Naomi had a rich relative named Boaz, from Elimelech's family.

²One day Ruth, the Moabite, said to Naomi, "I am going to the fields. Maybe someone will be kind enough to let me gather the grain he leaves behind."

Naomi said, "Go, my daughter."

³So Ruth went to the fields and gathered the grain that the workers cutting the grain had left behind. It just so happened that the field belonged to Boaz, from Elimelech's family.

⁴Soon Boaz came from Bethlehem and greeted his workers, "The Lord be with you!"

And the workers answered, "May the Lord bless you!"

⁵Then Boaz asked his servant in charge of the workers, "Whose girl is that?"

⁶The servant answered, "She is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. ⁷She said, 'Please let me follow the workers cutting grain and gather what they leave behind.' She came and has remained here, from morning until just now. She has stopped only a few moments to rest in the shelter."

⁸Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Don't go to gather grain for yourself in another field. Don't even leave this field at all, but continue following closely behind my women workers. ⁹Watch to see into which fields they go to cut grain

and follow them. I have warned the young men not to bother you. When you are thirsty, you may go and drink from the water jugs that the young men have filled.”

¹⁰Then Ruth bowed low with her face to the ground and said to him, “I am not an Israelite. Why have you been so kind to notice me?”

¹¹Boaz answered her, “I know about all the help you have given your mother-in-law after your husband died. You left your father and mother and your own country to come to a nation where you did not know anyone. ¹²May the Lord reward you for all you have done. May your wages be paid in full by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for shelter.”

¹³Then Ruth said, “I hope I can continue to please you, sir. You have said kind and encouraging words to me, your servant, though I am not one of your servants.”

¹⁴At mealtime Boaz told Ruth, “Come here. Eat some of our bread and dip it in our sauce.”

So Ruth sat down beside the workers. Boaz handed her some roasted grain, and she ate until she was full; she even had some food left over. ¹⁵When Ruth rose and went back to work, Boaz commanded his workers, “Let her gather even around the piles of cut grain. Don’t tell her to go away. ¹⁶In fact, drop some full heads of grain for her from what you have in your hands, and let her gather them. Don’t tell her to stop.”

¹⁷So Ruth gathered grain in the field until evening. Then she separated the grain from the chaff, and there was about one-half bushel of barley. ¹⁸Ruth carried the grain into town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also took out the food that was left over from lunch and gave it

to Naomi.

¹⁹Naomi asked her, “Where did you gather all this grain today? Where did you work? Blessed be whoever noticed you!”

Ruth told her mother-in-law whose field she had worked in. She said, “The man I worked with today is named Boaz.”

²⁰Naomi told her daughter-in-law, “The Lord bless him! He continues to be kind to us—both the living and the dead!” Then Naomi told Ruth, “Boaz is one of our [close relatives](#), one who should take care of us.”

²¹Then Ruth, the Moabite, said, “Boaz also told me, ‘Keep close to my workers until they have finished my whole harvest.’”

²²But Naomi said to her daughter-in-law Ruth, “It is better for you to continue working with his women workers. If you work in another field, someone might hurt you.” ²³So Ruth continued working closely with the workers of Boaz, gathering grain until the barley harvest and the wheat harvest were finished. And she continued to live with Naomi, her mother-in-law.

Life Lessons

Ruth 3:1–18

Situation

Naomi sought to find a husband for Ruth. She selected Boaz, a relative and a good-hearted man, to be someone who would care for Ruth, possibly even marry her according to custom. Ruth diligently followed Naomi's instructions and lay at the feet of Boaz at night as a servant would. Her loyalty met with Boaz's approval.

Observation

Both Ruth and Boaz were persons of high moral integrity who selflessly honored the customs and traditions of their people.

Inspiration

I don't see life divided into public and private, secular and sacred. It is all an open place of service before our God. My hope is to see this generation produce a group of Christians who will infiltrate our society—in fact, our entire world—with a pure, beautiful message of grace and honesty in the marketplace.

Recently I had a delightful talk with a keen-thinking young man following one of the worship services at our church. As we visited, I asked about his future plans. "Well, I've just graduated from law school," he said. "I want to be a man of integrity who practices law." What refreshing words! They reflected the right priority. There is not a career worth

pursuing where you cannot have integrity. Every vocation cries out for it.

(From *Simple Faith* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Can you be trusted to perform duties assigned? Today, try one over-and-above-the-call-of-duty task. Surprise someone: your boss, a fellow employee, a friend, or your spouse.

Exploration

Integrity—[Genesis 43:12](#); [Psalm 25:21](#); [Proverbs 12:3](#); [19:1](#).

Naomi's Plan

Then Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, said to her, "My daughter, I must find a suitable home for you, one that will be good for you. ²Now Boaz, whose young women you worked with, is our [close relative](#). Tonight he will be working at the threshing floor. ³Wash yourself, put on perfume, change your clothes, and go down to the threshing floor. But don't let him know you're there until he has finished his dinner. ⁴Watch him so you will know where he lies down to sleep. When he lies down, go and [lift the cover off his feet](#) and lie down. He will tell you what you should do."

⁵Then Ruth answered, "I will do everything you say."

⁶So Ruth went down to the threshing floor and did all her mother-in-law told her to do. ⁷After his evening meal, Boaz felt good and went to sleep lying beside the pile of grain. Ruth went to him quietly and lifted the cover from his feet and lay down.

⁸About midnight Boaz was startled and rolled over. There was a woman lying near his feet! ⁹Boaz asked, "Who are you?"

She said, "I am Ruth, your servant girl. [Spread your cover over me, because you are a relative who is supposed to take care of me.](#)"

¹⁰Then Boaz said, "The Lord bless you, my daughter. This act of kindness is greater than the kindness you showed to Naomi in the beginning. You didn't look for a young man to

marry, either rich or poor. ¹¹Now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do everything you ask, because all the people in our town know you are a good woman. ¹²It is true that I am a relative who is to take care of you, but you have a closer relative than I. ¹³Stay here tonight, and in the morning we will see if he will take care of you. If he decides to take care of you, that is fine. But if he refuses, I will take care of you myself, as surely as the Lord lives. So stay here until morning."

¹⁴So Ruth stayed near his feet until morning but got up while it was still too dark to recognize anyone. Boaz thought, "People in town must not know that the woman came here to the threshing floor." ¹⁵So Boaz said to Ruth, "Bring me your shawl and hold it open."

So Ruth held her shawl open, and Boaz poured six portions of barley into it. Boaz then put it on her head and went back to the city.

¹⁶When Ruth went back to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, "How did you do, my daughter?"

Ruth told Naomi everything that Boaz did for her. ¹⁷She said, "Boaz gave me these six portions of barley, saying, 'You must not go home without a gift for your mother-in-law.'"

¹⁸Naomi answered, "Ruth, my daughter, wait here until you see what happens. Boaz will not rest until he has finished doing what he should do today."

Life Lessons

Ruth 4:1–22

Situation

Naomi and Ruth waited for the decision of their close relatives. God blessed Ruth with marriage and children. David and Jesus were her descendants.

Observation

When life takes a negative turn, God can turn heartache ([Ruth 1:21](#)) into blessing ([Ruth 4:14–15](#)).

Inspiration

How far can we go with verses like this one: “In everything God works for the good of those who love him” ([Romans 8:28](#))? Does “everything” include tumors and tests and tempers and terminations? John would answer yes. John would tell you that *God can turn any tragedy into a triumph, if only you will wait and watch...*

Could there have been a greater tragedy for John than a dead Jesus? Three years earlier John had turned his back on his career and cast his lot with this Nazarene carpenter. Earlier in the week John had enjoyed a ticker-tape parade as Jesus and the disciples entered Jerusalem. Oh, how quickly things had turned! The people who had called him king on Sunday called for his death the following Friday. These linens were a tangible reminder that his friend and his future were wrapped in cloth and sealed behind a rock.

John didn't know on that Friday what you and I

now know. He didn't know that Friday's tragedy would be Sunday's triumph. John would later confess that he "did not yet understand from the Scriptures that Jesus must rise from the dead" ([John 20:9](#)).

That's why what he did on Saturday is so important.

We don't know anything about this day; we have no passage to read, no knowledge to share. All we know is this: When Sunday came, John was still present. When Mary Magdalene came looking for him, she found him.

Jesus was dead. The Master's body was lifeless. John's friend and future were buried. But John had not left. Why? Was he waiting for the resurrection? No. As far as he knew, the lips were forever silent and the hands forever still. He wasn't expecting a Sunday surprise. Then why was he here?

You'd think he would have left. Who was to say that the men who crucified Christ wouldn't come after him? The crowds were pleased with one crucifixion; the religious leaders might have called for more. Why didn't John get out of town?

Perhaps the answer was pragmatic; perhaps he was taking care of Jesus' mother. Or perhaps he didn't have anywhere else to go. Could be he didn't have any money or energy or direction ... or all of the above.

Or maybe he lingered because he loved Jesus.

To others, Jesus was a miracle worker. To others, Jesus was a master teacher. To others, Jesus was the hope of Israel. But to John, he was all of these and

more. To John, Jesus was a friend.

You don't abandon a friend—not even when that friend is dead. John stayed close to Jesus.

He had a habit of doing this. He was close to Jesus in the upper room. He was close to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was at the foot of the cross at the crucifixion, and he was a quick walk from the tomb at the burial.

Did he understand Jesus? No.

Was he glad Jesus did what he did? No.

But did he leave Jesus? No.

What about you? When you're in John's position, what do you do? When it's Saturday in your life, how do you react? When you are somewhere between yesterday's tragedy and tomorrow's triumph, what do you do? Do you leave God—or do you linger near him?

John chose to linger. And because he lingered on Saturday, he was around on Sunday to see the miracle....

Which takes us back to the question. Could God do something similar in your life? Could he take what today is a token of tragedy and turn it into a symbol of triumph? (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you feel like God's abandoned you? Don't give up! Pray that he will give you the patience to see the situation through, and thank him in advance for what he is going to do.

Exploration

God's Way—[Genesis 50:20](#); [Job 42:2–3](#); [Isaiah 38:17](#); [55:8](#); [Micah 4:11–12](#); [Romans 8:28](#).

Boaz Marries Ruth

Boaz went to the city gate and sat there until the close relative he had mentioned passed by. Boaz called to him, “Come here, friend, and sit down.” So the man came over and sat down.

²Boaz gathered ten of the older leaders of the city and told them, “Sit down here!” So they sat down.

³Then Boaz said to the close relative, “Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, wants to sell the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. ⁴So I decided to tell you about it: If you want to buy back the land, then buy it in front of the people who are sitting here and in front of the older leaders of my people. But if you don’t want to buy it, tell me, because you are the only one who can buy it, and I am next after you.”

The close relative answered, “I will buy back the land.”

⁵Then Boaz explained, “When you buy the land from Naomi, you must also marry Ruth, the Moabite, the dead man’s wife. That way, the land will stay in the dead man’s name.”

⁶The close relative answered, “I can’t buy back the land. If I did, I might harm what I can pass on to my own sons. I cannot buy the land back, so buy it yourself.”

⁷Long ago in Israel when people traded or bought back something, one person took off his sandal and gave it to the other person. This was the proof of ownership in Israel.

⁸So the close relative said to Boaz, “Buy the land yourself,”

and he took off his sandal.

⁹Then Boaz said to the older leaders and to all the people, “You are witnesses today. I am buying from Naomi everything that belonged to Elimelech and Kilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰I am also taking Ruth, the Moabite who was the wife of Mahlon, as my wife. I am doing this so her dead husband’s property will stay in his name and his name will not be separated from his family and his hometown. You are witnesses today.”

¹¹So all the people and older leaders who were at the city gate said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make this woman, who is coming into your home, like Rachel and Leah, who had many children and built up the people of Israel. May you become powerful in the district of Ephrathah and famous in Bethlehem. ¹²As Tamar gave birth to Judah’s son [Perez](#), may the Lord give you many children through Ruth. May your family be great like his.”

¹³So Boaz took Ruth home as his wife and had sexual relations with her. The Lord let her become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴The women told Naomi, “Praise the Lord who gave you this grandson. May he become famous in Israel. ¹⁵He will give you new life and will take care of you in your old age because of your daughter-in-law who loves you. She is better for you than seven sons, because she has given birth to your grandson.”

¹⁶Naomi took the boy, held him in her arms, and cared for him. ¹⁷The neighbors gave the boy his name, saying, “This boy was born for Naomi.” They named him Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David.

¹⁸This is the family history of Perez, the father of Hezron.

¹⁹Hezron was the father of Ram, who was the father of

Amminadab.²⁰ Amminadab was the father of Nahshon, who was the father of Salmon.²¹ Salmon was the father of Boaz, who was the father of Obed.²² Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David.

judges They were not judges in courts of law, but leaders of the people in times of emergency.

Naomi This name means “happy” or “pleasant.”

Mara This name means “bitter” or “sad.”

close relatives In Bible times the closest relative could marry a widow without children so she could have children. He would care for this family, but they and their property would not belong to him. They would belong to the dead husband.

lift ... feet This showed Ruth was asking him to be her husband.

Spread ... me By this, Ruth was asking Boaz to marry her.

Perez One of Boaz’s ancestors.

The Book of 1 Samuel

Introduction

It's the end of the race that matters.

Trophies aren't given for great starts. Medals aren't awarded for entering the race. A good start is crucial, but in the end, the end is all that matters.

First Samuel is a book of good starts but bad finishes.

It seems that every key character put his best foot forward and ended up in last place.

Take Eli for example.

A sterling religious leader. A man with a heart for God. Perceptive and strong, the last of the great priests. But look at the end of his life. The Ark of the Agreement has been captured. Two of his rebellious sons are killed. When he hears of their deaths, he falls over and breaks his neck.

Samuel is another case. Dedicated to God's service by Hannah, his mother, he anointed Israel's first kings. But he didn't learn from Eli's mistakes. Just like his mentor, he failed to train his family and his sons turned away from God.

But the most dramatic example is Saul, Israel's first king. He seemed to be the perfect man—handsome and meek, brave and victorious in battle. But success led to disobedience, and he slid from prominence to paranoia to suicide.

Why are these stories in the Bible? To remind us that we, too, are in a race. And that race isn't over. How we started isn't nearly as important as how we finish.

About This Book

Author:

Unknown, though some say Samuel, Nathan, and Gad

Date Written:

Possibly 1000–500 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- Samuel's birth was a product of his mother's faith and prayer.
- Saul lost his power and even his sanity when he refused to trust God.
- David found victory against the odds because of his faith.

Key Verse:

“What pleases the Lord more: burnt offerings and sacrifices or obedience to his voice? It is better to obey than to sacrifice. It is better to listen to God than to offer the fat of sheep” ([1 Samuel 15:22](#)).

Contents:

1. Samuel's Rise to Power as Judge [1:1–7:17](#)
2. Saul's Rise to Power as King [8:1–16:23](#)
3. David's Rise to Power as King [17:1–31:13](#)

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 1:1–2:11

Situation

As the book of 1 Samuel opens, judges had ruled Israel for more than two hundred years. Eli and Samuel were the last two judges, and Samuel was the first priest and prophet to serve when Israel had a king (Saul, David).

Observation

God rewards persevering faith. For example, Samuel's mother Hannah persevered in prayer, and God gave her a son. Faithful to her promise, she gave her son back to God.

Inspiration

Without continuance the prayer may go unanswered. Importunity is made up of the ability to hold on, to press on, to wait with unrelaxed and unrelaxable grasp, restless desire, and restful patience. Importunate prayer is not an incident but the main thing, not a performance but a passion, not a need but a necessity.

Prayer in its highest form and grandest success assumes the attitude of a wrestler with God. It is the contest, trial, and victory of faith; a victory not secured from an enemy, but from Him who tries our faith that He may enlarge it, who tests our strength to make us stronger. Few things give such quickened and permanent vigor to the soul as a long exhaustive search of importunate prayer. It makes an experience,

an epoch, a new calendar for the spirit, a new life to religion, a soldierly training. The Bible never wearies in its pressure and illustration of the fact that the highest spiritual good is secured as the return of the out-going of the highest form of spiritual effort. There is neither encouragement nor room in Bible religion for feeble desires, listless efforts, lazy attitudes; all must be strenuous, urgent, ardent. Inflamed desires, impassioned, unwearied insistence delight heaven. God would have His children incorrigibly in earnest and persistently bold in their efforts....

Our seasons of importunate prayer cut themselves, like the print of a diamond, into our hardest places, and mark with ineffaceable traces our characters. They are the salient periods of our lives, the memorial stones which endure and to which we turn.... Pray and never faint is the motto Christ gives us for praying. It is the test of our faith; and the severer the trial and the longer the waiting, the more glorious the result.

(From *Purpose in Prayer* by E. M. Bounds)

Application

How long do you hang on when it comes to praying for a specific need or desire? Do you give up or persevere? Try keeping a list: (1) what you pray for and when; (2) how God answers and when.

Exploration

Patience in Prayer—[Psalm 5:1–3](#); [40:1](#); [55:17](#); [116:2](#); [Luke 11:5–10](#); [18:1–8](#); [Ephesians 6:18](#).

Samuel's Birth

There was a man named Elkanah son of Jeroham from Ramathaim in the mountains of Ephraim. Elkanah was from the family of Zuph. (Jeroham was Elihu's son. Elihu was Tohu's son, and Tohu was the son of Zuph from the family group of Ephraim.)²Elkanah had two wives named Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

³Every year Elkanah left his town of Ramah and went up to Shiloh to worship the Lord All-Powerful and to offer sacrifices to him. Shiloh was where Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, served as priests of the Lord.⁴When Elkanah offered sacrifices, he always gave a share of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to her sons and daughters.⁵But Elkanah always gave a special share of the meat to Hannah, because he loved Hannah and because the Lord had kept her from having children.⁶Peninnah would tease Hannah and upset her, because the Lord had made her unable to have children.⁷This happened every year when they went up to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. Peninnah would upset Hannah until Hannah would cry and not eat anything.⁸Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you crying and why won't you eat? Why are you sad? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

⁹Once, after they had eaten their meal in Shiloh, Hannah got up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair near the entrance to the Lord's house.¹⁰Hannah was so sad that she cried and

prayed to the Lord. ¹¹She made a promise, saying, “Lord All-Powerful, see how sad I am. Remember me and don’t forget me. If you will give me a son, I will give him back to you all his life, and no one will ever [cut his hair with a razor](#).”

¹²While Hannah kept praying, Eli watched her mouth. ¹³She was praying in her heart so her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴and said to her, “Stop getting drunk! Throw away your wine!”

¹⁵Hannah answered, “No, sir, I have not drunk any wine or beer. I am a deeply troubled woman, and I was telling the Lord about all my problems. ¹⁶Don’t think I am an evil woman. I have been praying because I have many troubles and am very sad.”

¹⁷Eli answered, “Go! I wish you well. May the God of Israel give you what you asked of him.”

¹⁸Hannah said, “May I always please you.” When she left and ate something, she was not sad anymore.

¹⁹Early the next morning Elkanah’s family got up and worshiped the Lord. Then they went back home to Ramah. Elkanah had sexual relations with his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. ²⁰So Hannah became pregnant, and in time she gave birth to a son. She named him [Samuel](#), saying, “His name is Samuel because I asked the Lord for him.”

Hannah Gives Samuel to God

²¹Every year Elkanah went with his whole family to Shiloh to offer sacrifices and to keep the promise he had made to God.

²²But one time Hannah did not go with him. She told him, “When the boy is old enough to eat solid food, I will take him to Shiloh. Then I will give him to the Lord, and he will always

live there.”

²³Elkanah, Hannah’s husband, said to her, “Do what you think is best. You may stay home until the boy is old enough to eat. May the Lord do what you have said.” So Hannah stayed at home to nurse her son until he was old enough to eat.

²⁴When Samuel was old enough to eat, Hannah took him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh, along with a three-year-old bull, one-half bushel of flour, and a leather bag filled with wine.

²⁵After they had killed the bull for the sacrifice, Hannah brought Samuel to Eli. ²⁶She said to Eli, “As surely as you live, sir, I am the same woman who stood near you praying to the Lord. ²⁷I prayed for this child, and the Lord answered my prayer and gave him to me. ²⁸Now I give him back to the Lord. He will belong to the Lord all his life.” And he worshiped the Lord there.

Hannah Gives Thanks

Hannah prayed: "The Lord has filled my heart with joy;

I feel very strong in the Lord.
I can laugh at my enemies;
I am glad because you have helped me!

²"There is no one holy like the Lord.
There is no God but you;
there is no Rock like our God.

³"Don't continue bragging,
don't speak proud words.
The Lord is a God who knows everything,
and he judges what people do.

⁴"The bows of warriors break,
but weak people become strong.

⁵Those who once had plenty of food now must work
for food,
but people who were hungry are hungry no more.
The woman who could not have children now has
seven,
but the woman who had many children now is sad.

⁶"The Lord sends death,
and he brings to life.
He sends people to the grave,
and he raises them to life again.

⁷The Lord makes some people poor,
and others he makes rich.

He makes some people humble,
and others he makes great.

⁸The Lord raises the poor up from the dust,
and he lifts the needy from the ashes.

He lets the poor sit with princes
and receive a throne of honor.

“The foundations of the earth belong to the Lord,
and the Lord set the world upon them.

⁹He protects those who are loyal to him,
but evil people will be silenced in darkness.

Power is not the key to success.

¹⁰The Lord destroys his enemies;
he will thunder in heaven against them.

The Lord will judge all the earth.

He will give power to his king
and make his appointed king strong.”

Eli's Evil Sons

¹¹Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, but the boy continued to serve the Lord under Eli the priest.

¹²Now Eli's sons were evil men; they did not care about the Lord. ¹³This is what the priests would normally do to the people: Every time someone brought a sacrifice, the meat would be cooked in a pot. The priest's servant would then come carrying a fork that had three prongs. ¹⁴He would plunge

the fork into the pot or the kettle. Whatever the fork brought out of the pot belonged to the priest. But this is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh to offer sacrifices. ¹⁵Even before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come to the person offering sacrifices and say, "Give the priest some meat to roast. He won't accept boiled meat from you, only raw meat."

¹⁶If the one who offered the sacrifice said, "Let the fat be burned up first as usual, and then take anything you want," the priest's servant would answer, "No, give me the meat now. If you don't, I'll take it by force."

¹⁷The Lord saw that the sin of the servants was very great because they did not show respect for the offerings made to the Lord.

Samuel Grows Up

¹⁸But Samuel obeyed the Lord. As a boy he wore a linen holy vest. ¹⁹Every year Samuel's mother made a little coat for him and took it to him when she went with her husband to Shiloh for the sacrifice. ²⁰When Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, he would say, "May the Lord repay you with children through Hannah to take the place of the boy Hannah prayed for and gave back to the Lord." Then Elkanah and Hannah would go home. ²¹The Lord was kind to Hannah, so she became the mother of three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew up serving the Lord.

²²Now Eli was very old. He heard about everything his sons were doing to all the Israelites and how his sons had sexual relations with the women who served at the entrance to the

Meeting Tent. ²³Eli said to his sons, “Why do you do these evil things that the people tell me about? ²⁴No, my sons. The Lord’s people are spreading a bad report about you. ²⁵If you sin against someone, God can help you. But if you sin against the Lord himself, no one can help you!” But Eli’s sons would not listen to him, because the Lord had decided to put them to death.

²⁶The boy Samuel grew physically. He pleased the Lord and the people.

²⁷A man of God came to Eli and said, “This is what the Lord says: ‘I clearly showed myself to the family of your ancestor Aaron when they were slaves to the king of Egypt. ²⁸I chose them from all the tribes of Israel to be my priests. I wanted them to go up to my altar, to burn incense, and to wear the holy vest. I also let the family of your ancestor have part of all the offerings sacrificed by the Israelites. ²⁹So why don’t you respect the sacrifices and gifts? You honor your sons more than me. You grow fat on the best parts of the meat the Israelites bring to me.’

³⁰“So the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I promised that your family and your ancestor’s family would serve me always.’ But now the Lord says: ‘This must stop! I will honor those who honor me, but I will dishonor those who ignore me.

³¹The time is coming when I will destroy the descendants of both you and your ancestors. No man will grow old in your family. ³²You will see trouble in my house. No matter what good things happen to Israel, there will never be an old man in your family. ³³I will not totally cut off your family from my altar. But your eyes will cry and your heart be sad, because all your descendants will die.

³⁴“I will give you a sign. Both your sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will die on the same day. ³⁵I will choose a loyal priest for myself who will listen to me and do what I want. I will make his family continue, and he will always serve before my appointed king. ³⁶Then everyone left in your family will come and bow down before him. They will beg for a little money or a little food and say, “Please give me a job as priest so I can have food to eat.” ”

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 2:12–3:21

Situation

Contempt, arrogance, and disobedience marked Eli’s sons. Eli dealt with them poorly himself. These major factors contributed to the bleak spiritual climate during Samuel’s childhood. For three centuries no prophet had spoken God’s Word until Samuel was chosen.

Observation

God honors and wants to use people, such as Samuel, who honor him. But those who flagrantly disobey, such as Eli’s sons, God will judge.

Inspiration

It is not only the greatness of the blessings promised by Jesus that encourages us in His service. Their security encourages us too. The young man turned away from Christ because he was unwilling to part with his possessions [see [Matthew 19:16–30](#)], but it is an irony of the story that he turned from possessions that were certain to possessions that

were at best uncertain. Maybe he lost those possessions before the year was out. Maybe his gold was stolen. His land could have been taken. As in the prodigal's case, his friends could have grown cold and abandoned him.

This point can be made even stronger. God often allows the ungodly to amass great wealth—to their destruction. But if you are one with whom God is dealing and if you put the pursuit of riches (or anything else) before service to Christ, God may take away those riches (and other things) until you turn to Him.

Some years ago Donald Grey Barnhouse was counseling a young woman on the sidewalk in front of Tenth Presbyterian Church following an evening service. She said she was a Christian and that she wanted to follow Christ. But she wanted to be famous too. She wanted to pursue a stage career in New York. “After I have made it in the theater, I’ll follow Christ completely,” she said.

Barnhouse took a key out of his pocket and scratched a mark on a postal box standing on the corner. “That is what God will let you do,” he said. “God will let you scratch the surface of success. He will let you get close enough to the top to know what it is, but He will never let you have it, because He will never let one of His children have anything rather than Himself.”

Years later he met the girl again, and she confessed that this had indeed been her life story. She had dabbled in the stage. Once her picture had

been in a national magazine. But she had never quite made it. She told Barnhouse, “I can’t tell you how many times in my discouragement I have closed my eyes and seen you scratching on that postal box with your key. God let me scratch the edges, but He gave me nothing in place of Himself.”

How different for those who deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow Jesus. Their path begins with denial but ends in fulfillment, and the blessings given cannot be snatched away.

(From *Christ's Call to Discipleship* by James M. Boice)

Application

What is your attitude when it comes to success? Is reaching the pinnacle your real god? Ask God to show you what has first place in your heart. Pray today, with first place given to God.

Exploration

Arrogance—[Judges 8:1–3](#); [2 Samuel 17:11–13](#); [2 Chronicles 26:16](#); [Psalm 10:11](#); [Acts 12:23](#); [Ephesians 2:11–13](#).

God Calls Samuel

The boy Samuel served the Lord under Eli. In those days the Lord did not speak directly to people very often; there were very few visions.

²Eli's eyes were so weak he was almost blind. One night he was lying in bed. ³Samuel was also in bed in the Lord's house, where the Ark of the Agreement was. God's lamp was still burning.

⁴Then the Lord called Samuel, and Samuel answered, "I am here!" ⁵He ran to Eli and said, "I am here. You called me."

But Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." So Samuel went back to bed.

⁶The Lord called again, "Samuel!"

Samuel again went to Eli and said, "I am here. You called me."

Again Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed."

⁷Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the Lord had not spoken directly to him yet.

⁸The Lord called Samuel for the third time. Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "I am here. You called me."

Then Eli realized the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹So he told Samuel, "Go to bed. If he calls you again, say, 'Speak, Lord. I am your servant and I am listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in bed.

¹⁰The Lord came and stood there and called as he had before, "Samuel, Samuel!"

Samuel said, "Speak, Lord. I am your servant and I am

listening.”

¹¹The Lord said to Samuel, “Watch, I am going to do something in Israel that will shock those who hear about it.

¹²At that time I will do to Eli and his family everything I promised, from beginning to end. ¹³I told Eli I would punish his family always, because he knew his sons were evil. They acted without honor, but he did not stop them. ¹⁴So I swore to Eli’s family, ‘Your guilt will never be removed by sacrifice or offering.’”

¹⁵Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli about the vision, ¹⁶but Eli called to him, “Samuel, my son!”

Samuel answered, “I am here.”

¹⁷Eli asked, “What did the Lord say to you? Don’t hide it from me. May God punish you terribly if you hide from me anything he said to you.” ¹⁸So Samuel told Eli everything and did not hide anything from him. Then Eli said, “He is the Lord. Let him do what he thinks is best.”

¹⁹The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up; he did not let any of Samuel’s messages fail to come true. ²⁰Then all Israel, from [Dan to Beersheba](#), knew Samuel was a true prophet of the Lord. ²¹And the Lord continued to show himself at Shiloh, and he showed himself to Samuel through his word.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 4:1–5:12

Situation

When the Israelites improperly brought the Ark of the Agreement into battle with the Philistines, they were routed and the Ark captured. Eli, who had grown lazy in his position, died when he heard that the battle had been lost and his sons killed. The Israelites thought God had abandoned them. At the same time, the Philistines endured plagues when they set the Ark among their idols.

Observation

God's power and support for us is not based on a lucky charm or holy object like the Ark, but on our constant faithfulness to him.

Inspiration

Whenever God appears to people, His glory is veiled. It would be impossible for unredeemed humanity to look on God's unveiled glory and live. Jacob was surprised that he survived after seeing God. And yet the Savior promised that the pure in heart will see God.

That brings us to the inevitable question, If God is Spirit and therefore invisible, will we see God in heaven? The simplest answer is that Jesus is God, and we will certainly see Jesus in heaven.

But perhaps there is more. In heaven the limitations of this earthly body will be set aside. We will have powers that we cannot imagine now.

Although we cannot see God with these mortal eyes, is it not possible that, as one youngster suggested, we will have bigger eyes in heaven? We cannot be wrong in claiming the absolute promise of the Lord Jesus: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”...

True worship is not confined to any place or building on earth. It is not concerned with stained-glass windows, ecclesiastical garments, candles, liturgies, or incense. Rather, in genuine worship we pass from earth to heaven by faith, and there, in the presence of God, we pour out our souls in thanksgiving, praise, and homage to the Lord for all He is and for all He has done for us. (From *Alone in Majesty* by William MacDonald)

Application

The Israelites worshiped the Ark, rather than God himself. Is there an “ark” in your life? Does something get more attention than God? If so, turn your focus to the ever-present God, whose power transcends any object.

Exploration

Worship—[Deuteronomy 5:7](#); [Judges 17:6](#); [2 Kings 18:4](#); [2 Chronicles 4:11–16](#).

So, news about Samuel spread through all of Israel.

The Philistines Capture the Ark of the Agreement

At that time the Israelites went out to fight the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer and the Philistines at Aphek.²The Philistines went to meet the Israelites in battle. And as the battle spread, they defeated the Israelites, killing about four thousand soldiers on the battlefield.³When some Israelite soldiers went back to their camp, the older leaders of Israel asked, “Why did the Lord let the Philistines defeat us? Let’s bring the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord here from Shiloh and take it with us into battle. Then God will save us from our enemies.”

⁴So the people sent men to Shiloh. They brought back the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord All-Powerful, who sits between the gold creatures with wings. Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the Ark.

⁵When the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord came into the camp, all the Israelites gave a great shout of joy that made the ground shake.⁶When the Philistines heard Israel’s shout, they asked, “What’s all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?”

Then the Philistines found out that the Ark of the Lord had come into the Hebrew camp.⁷They were afraid and said, “A god has come into the Hebrew camp! We’re in trouble! This has never happened before! ⁸How terrible it will be for us! Who

can save us from these powerful gods? They are the ones who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of disasters in the desert. ⁹Be brave, Philistines! Fight like men! In the past they were our slaves. So fight like men, or we will become their slaves.”

¹⁰So the Philistines fought hard and defeated the Israelites, and every Israelite soldier ran away to his own home. It was a great defeat for Israel, because thirty thousand Israelite soldiers were killed. ¹¹The Ark of God was taken by the Philistines, and Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

¹²That same day a man from the tribe of Benjamin ran from the battle. He tore his clothes and put dust on his head to show his great sadness. ¹³When he arrived in Shiloh, Eli was by the side of the road. He was sitting there in a chair, watching, because he was worried about the Ark of God. When the Benjaminite entered Shiloh, he told the bad news. Then all the people in town cried loudly. ¹⁴Eli heard the crying and asked, “What’s all this noise?”

The Benjaminite ran to Eli and told him what had happened. ¹⁵Eli was now ninety-eight years old, and he was blind. ¹⁶The Benjaminite told him, “I have come from the battle. I ran all the way here today.”

Eli asked, “What happened, my son?”

¹⁷The Benjaminite answered, “Israel ran away from the Philistines, and the Israelite army has lost many soldiers. Your two sons are both dead, and the Philistines have taken the Ark of God.”

¹⁸When he mentioned the Ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair. He fell beside the gate, broke his neck, and died, because he was old and fat. He had led Israel for forty years.

The Glory Is Gone

¹⁹Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and was about to give birth. When she heard the news that the Ark of God had been taken and that Eli, her father-in-law, and Phinehas, her husband, were both dead, she began to give birth to her child. The child was born, but the mother had much trouble in giving birth. ²⁰As she was dying, the women who helped her said, "Don't worry! You've given birth to a son!" But she did not answer or pay attention. ²¹She named the baby [Ichabod](#), saying, "Israel's glory is gone." She said this because the Ark of God had been taken and her father-in-law and husband were dead. ²²She said, "Israel's glory is gone, because the Ark of God has been taken away."

Trouble for the Philistines

After the Philistines had captured the Ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ²They carried it into Dagon's temple and put it next to Dagon. ³When the people of Ashdod rose early the next morning, they found that Dagon had fallen on his face on the ground before the Ark of the Lord. So they put Dagon back in his place. ⁴The next morning when they rose, they again found Dagon fallen on the ground before the Ark of the Lord. His head and hands had broken off and were lying in the doorway. Only his body was still in one piece. ⁵So, even today, Dagon's priests and others who enter his temple at Ashdod refuse to step on the doorsill.

⁶The Lord was hard on the people of Ashdod and their neighbors. He caused them to suffer and gave them growths on their skin. ⁷When the people of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, "The Ark of the God of Israel can't stay with us. God is punishing us and Dagon our god." ⁸The people of Ashdod called all five Philistine kings together and asked them, "What should we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?"

The rulers answered, "Move the Ark of the God of Israel to Gath." So the Philistines moved it to Gath.

⁹But after they moved it to Gath, there was a great panic. The Lord was hard on that city also, and he gave both old and young people in Gath growths on their skin. ¹⁰Then the Philistines sent the Ark of God to Ekron.

But when it came into Ekron, the people of Ekron yelled, "Why are you bringing the Ark of the God of Israel to our city?"

Do you want to kill us and our people?”¹¹ So they called all the kings of the Philistines together and said, “Send the Ark of the God of Israel back to its place before it kills us and our people!” All the people in the city were struck with terror because God was so hard on them there.¹² The people who did not die were troubled with growths on their skin. So the people of Ekron cried loudly to heaven.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 6:1–7:17

Situation

Afflicted by plagues of rats and tumors, the Philistines returned the Ark to Israel. The Israelites rejoiced and under Samuel's direction discarded their idols and former arrogance. Later, when the Philistines invaded, Samuel offered up prayer and sacrifice to God, and the Philistines were routed. Israel lived in peace for many years under Samuel's wise leadership.

Observation

Chapter 7 provides a good illustration of the results of repentance. Israel's confession of sin led to the subduing of the Philistines. The end result was peace (v. 14).

Inspiration

By resisting authority, we bring judgment on ourselves. This judgment can include a lifting of God's presence coupled with some form of calamity...

Once judgment came, Aaron immediately cried out in repentance for himself and Miriam [see Numbers 12:1–15]. God forgave them, but per God's command, Miriam still had to be isolated from the congregation for seven days. There are many questions about why Miriam was struck, but Aaron was not. One reason may be that Miriam was more forceful in her verbal attack than Aaron was. Another common thought is

that it was more unseemly for Miriam to speak that way as a woman, and she did not hold quite as pivotal a position. Another reason may be that Aaron, high priest, had to remain in his position with the anointing upon him. Whatever the reason, this incident shows how seriously God views this matter.

Judgment for resistance to spiritual authority is more often than not an opportunity to learn and grow. After such a close call, people who repent often end up among the most faithful in the church. Resistance does not always proceed from an evil heart; it is often committed out of ignorance. Once the realization comes, repentance immediately follows. Sometimes this can take a while because some people have a higher tolerance for the pain that results from kicking against the goads.

It is certain Miriam never forgot her time of humiliation. She did not repeat the behavior, for she was not insubordinate again. However, not all turn as Miriam and Aaron did or learn from their example. Others within the same congregation later rose up against God's established authority. They did not repent, and they received everlasting judgment. (From *Under Cover* by John Beveré)

Application

What is in your life right now that needs to be confessed? Repentance may be your first step toward true freedom in Christ. Examine your heart to see if there are any bad thoughts, feelings, or attitudes there. If necessary, confess them, and find the peace that comes from forgiveness.

Exploration

Examining Yourself—[Psalm 26:2](#); [139:23–24](#); [2 Corinthians 13:5](#); [Hebrews 10:22–31](#).

The Ark of God Is Sent Home

The Philistines kept the Ark of God in their land seven months.²Then they called for their priests and magicians and said, “What should we do with the Ark of the Lord? Tell us how to send it back home!”

³The priests and magicians answered, “If you send back the Ark of the God of Israel, don’t send it back empty. You must give a penalty offering. If you are then healed, you will know that it was because of the Ark that you had such trouble.”

⁴The Philistines asked, “What kind of penalty offering should we send to Israel’s God?”

They answered, “Make five gold models of the growths on your skin and five gold models of rats. The number of models must match the number of Philistine kings, because the same sickness has come on you and your kings.⁵Make models of the growths and the rats that are ruining the country, and give honor to Israel’s God. Then maybe he will stop being so hard on you, your gods, and your land.⁶Don’t be stubborn like the king of Egypt and the Egyptians. After God punished them terribly, they let the Israelites leave Egypt.

⁷“You must build a new cart and get two cows that have just had calves. These must be cows that have never had yokes on their necks. Hitch the cows to the cart, and take the calves home, away from their mothers.⁸Put the Ark of the Lord on the cart and the gold models for the penalty offering in a

box beside the Ark. Then send the cart straight on its way.
⁹Watch the cart. If it goes toward Beth Shemesh in Israel's own land, the Lord has given us this great sickness. But if it doesn't, we will know that Israel's God has not punished us. Our sickness just happened by chance."

¹⁰The Philistines did what the priests and magicians said. They took two cows that had just had calves and hitched them to the cart, but they kept their calves at home. ¹¹They put the Ark of the Lord and the box with the gold rats and models of growths on the cart. ¹²Then the cows went straight toward Beth Shemesh. They stayed on the road, mooing all the way, and did not turn right or left. The Philistine kings followed the cows as far as the border of Beth Shemesh.

¹³Now the people of Beth Shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley. When they looked up and saw the Ark of the Lord, they were very happy. ¹⁴The cart came to the field belonging to Joshua of Beth Shemesh and stopped near a large rock. The people of Beth Shemesh chopped up the wood of the cart. Then they sacrificed the cows as burnt offerings to the Lord. ¹⁵The Levites took down the Ark of the Lord and the box that had the gold models, and they put both on the large rock. That day the people of Beth Shemesh offered whole burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the Lord. ¹⁶After the five Philistine kings saw this, they went back to Ekron the same day.

¹⁷The Philistines had sent these gold models of the growths as penalty offerings to the Lord. They sent one model for each Philistine town: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron.

¹⁸And the Philistines also sent gold models of rats. The number of rats matched the number of towns belonging to the

Philistine kings, including both strong, walled cities and country villages. The large rock on which they put the Ark of the Lord is still there in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.

¹⁹But some of the men of Beth Shemesh looked into the Ark of the Lord. So God killed seventy of them. The people of Beth Shemesh cried because the Lord had struck them down. ²⁰They said, “Who can stand before the Lord, this holy God? Whom will he strike next?”

²¹Then they sent messengers to the people of Kiriath Jearim, saying, “The Philistines have brought back the Ark of the Lord. Come down and take it to your city.”

The men of Kiriath Jearim came and took the Ark of the Lord to Abinadab's house on a hill. There they made Abinadab's son Eleazar holy for the Lord so he could guard the Ark of the Lord.

The Lord Saves the Israelites

²The Ark stayed at Kiriath Jearim a long time—twenty years in all. And the people of Israel began to follow the Lord again.

³Samuel spoke to the whole group of Israel, saying, "If you're turning back to the Lord with all your hearts, you must remove your foreign gods and your idols of Ashtoreth. You must give yourselves fully to the Lord and serve only him. Then he will save you from the Philistines."

⁴So the Israelites put away their idols of Baal and Ashtoreth, and they served only the Lord.

⁵Samuel said, "All Israel must meet at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you." ⁶So the Israelites met together at Mizpah. They drew water from the ground and poured it out before the Lord and did not eat that day. They confessed, "We have sinned against the Lord." And Samuel served as judge of Israel at Mizpah.

⁷The Philistines heard the Israelites were meeting at Mizpah, so the Philistine kings came up to attack them. When the Israelites heard they were coming, they were afraid. ⁸They said to Samuel, "Don't stop praying to the Lord our God for us! Ask him to save us from the Philistines!" ⁹Then Samuel took a baby lamb and offered it to the Lord as a whole burnt offering. He called to the Lord for Israel's sake, and the Lord answered him.

¹⁰While Samuel was burning the offering, the Philistines

came near to attack Israel. But the Lord thundered against them with loud thunder. They were so frightened they became confused. So the Israelites defeated the Philistines in battle. ¹¹The men of Israel ran out of Mizpah and chased the Philistines almost to Beth Car, killing the Philistines along the way.

Peace Comes to Israel

¹²After this happened Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named the stone [Ebenezer](#), saying, "The Lord has helped us to this point." ¹³So the Philistines were defeated and did not enter the Israelites' land again.

The Lord was against the Philistines all Samuel's life. ¹⁴Earlier the Philistines had taken towns from the Israelites, but the Israelites won them back, from Ekron to Gath. They also took back from the Philistines the lands near these towns. There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites.

¹⁵Samuel continued as judge of Israel all his life. ¹⁶Every year he went from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah and judged the Israelites in all these towns. ¹⁷But Samuel always went back to Ramah, where his home was. There he judged Israel and built an altar to the Lord.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 8:1–22

Situation

When Samuel retired, Israel rejected his sons as judges and asked for a king, in spite of God's warning against this. Their request for a king was based on a desire to be like all the other nations.

Observation

Israel demonstrates that our desire to imitate the world may seem righteous at first, but the final result will be destruction.

Inspiration

We need to show how cold, black, hard, and ugly we are, to get motivated to stay in that fire. Unless we do, we will never hate sin and fear sin and be repelled by sin enough to stay in the fire. (Says Tozer, "The Holy Spirit is first of all a moral flame.") ...

I see how, when liberalism waned and we evangelicals rose to popularity and were listened to, we could have given our authentic message and cried to the world, "Repent! Be radically cleansed of your sin! Receive Jesus Christ's purity and holiness for your lives!"

But instead, in that time of golden opportunity, we lost our courage. We Madison-Avenue-trivialized our glorious gospel. And we stained ourselves with the world's adulteries and fornications.

We must weep; we must mourn! We must hate what He hates! Let us ask Him to forgive our

unwashed praises before Him, our sillinesses, our ignorances.

Let us see how our coldness, blackness, hardness, ugliness become colder, blacker, harder, uglier—unless in terror we wrench ourselves free and rush to His precious Fire!

(From *My Sacrifice, His Fire* by Anne Ortlund)

Application

How deeply do you care about fitting in and being like the world? What are the areas of your life where you blend in with those around you when you should not? Ask God to give you the courage and conviction to stand apart when you should.

Exploration

Separation from the World—[Isaiah 52:11](#); [John 17:14](#); [Romans 12:2](#); [Galatians 1:10](#); [Hebrews 11:24–26](#); [James 1:27](#); [1 John 2:15–17](#).

It's one thing to miss a message from your wife about cleaning up a room. It's something else entirely to miss one from God about the destiny of your life. —Max Lucado (*He Chose the Nails*)

Israel Asks for a King

When Samuel was old, he made his sons judges for Israel.² His first son was named Joel, and his second son was named Abijah. Joel and Abijah were judges in Beersheba.³ But Samuel's sons did not live as he did. They tried to get money dishonestly, and they accepted money secretly to make wrong judgments.

⁴So all the older leaders came together and met Samuel at Ramah.⁵ They said to him, "You're old, and your sons don't live as you do. Give us a king to rule over us like all the other nations."

⁶When the older leaders said that, Samuel was not pleased. He prayed to the Lord,⁷ and the Lord told Samuel, "Listen to whatever the people say to you. They have not rejected you. They have rejected me from being their king.⁸ They are doing as they have always done. When I took them out of Egypt, they left me and served other gods. They are doing the same to you.⁹ Now listen to the people, but warn them what the king who rules over them will do."

¹⁰So Samuel told those who had asked him for a king what the Lord had said.¹¹ Samuel said, "If you have a king ruling

over you, this is what he will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and his horses, and they will run in front of the king's chariot. ¹²The king will make some of your sons commanders over thousands or over fifties. He will make some of your other sons plow his ground and reap his harvest. He will take others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. ¹³He will take your daughters to make perfume and cook and bake for him. ¹⁴He will take your best fields, vineyards, and olive groves and give them to his servants. ¹⁵He will take one-tenth of your grain and grapes and give it to his officers and servants. ¹⁶He will take your male and female servants, your best cattle, and your donkeys and use them all for his own work. ¹⁷He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. ¹⁸When that time comes, you will cry out because of the king you chose. But the Lord will not answer you then."

¹⁹But the people would not listen to Samuel. They said, "No! We want a king to rule over us. ²⁰Then we will be the same as all the other nations. Our king will judge for us and go with us and fight our battles."

²¹After Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated their words to the Lord. ²²The Lord answered, "You must listen to them. Give them a king."

Then Samuel told the people of Israel, "Go back to your towns."

Saul Looks for His Father's Donkeys

Kish, son of Abiel from the tribe of Benjamin, was an important man. (Abiel was the son of Zeror, who was the son of Becorath, who was the son of Aphiah of Benjamin.) ²Kish had a son named Saul, who was a fine young man. There was no Israelite better than he. Saul stood a head taller than any other man in Israel.

³Now the donkeys of Saul's father, Kish, were lost. So Kish said to Saul, his son, "Take one of the servants, and go and look for the donkeys." ⁴Saul went through the mountains of Ephraim and the land of Shalisha, but he and the servant could not find the donkeys. They went into the land of Shaalim, but the donkeys were not there. They went through the land of Benjamin, but they still did not find them. ⁵When they arrived in the area of Zuph, Saul said to his servant, "Let's go back or my father will stop thinking about the donkeys and will start worrying about us."

⁶But the servant answered, "A man of God is in this town. People respect him because everything he says comes true. Let's go into the town now. Maybe he can tell us something about the journey we have taken."

⁷Saul said to his servant, "If we go into the town, what can we give him? The food in our bags is gone. We have no gift to give him. Do we have anything?"

⁸Again the servant answered Saul. "Look, I have one-tenth of an ounce of silver. Give it to the man of God. Then he will tell us about our journey." ⁹(In the past, if someone in Israel wanted to ask something from God, he would say, "Let's go to

the seer.” We call the person a prophet today, but in the past he was called a seer.)

¹⁰Saul said to his servant, “That’s a good idea. Come, let’s go.” So they went toward the town where the man of God was.

¹¹As Saul and the servant were going up the hill to the town, they met some young women coming out to get water. Saul and the servant asked them, “Is the seer here?”

¹²The young women answered, “Yes, he’s here. He’s ahead of you. Hurry now. He has just come to our town today, because the people will offer a sacrifice at the place of worship.

¹³As soon as you enter the town, you will find him before he goes up to the place of worship to eat. The people will not begin eating until the seer comes, because he must bless the sacrifice. After that, the guests will eat. Go now, and you should find him.”

Saul Meets Samuel

¹⁴Saul and the servant went up to the town. Just as they entered it, they saw Samuel coming toward them on his way up to the place of worship.

¹⁵The day before Saul came, the Lord had told Samuel:
¹⁶“About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Appoint him to lead my people Israel. He will save my people from the Philistines. I have seen the suffering of my people, and I have listened to their cry.”

¹⁷When Samuel first saw Saul, the Lord said to Samuel, “This is the man I told you about. He will organize my people.”

¹⁸Saul approached Samuel at the gate and said, “Please tell me where the seer’s house is.”

¹⁹Samuel answered, “I am the seer. Go with me to the place of worship. Today you and your servant are to eat with me. Tomorrow morning I will answer all your questions and send you home.”²⁰Don’t worry about the donkeys you lost three days ago, because they have been found. Soon all the wealth of Israel will belong to you and your family.”

²¹Saul answered, “But I am from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest tribe in Israel. And my family group is the smallest in the tribe of Benjamin. Why are you saying such things?”

²²Then Samuel took Saul and his servant into a large room and gave them a choice place at the table. About thirty guests were there.²³Samuel said to the cook, “Bring the meat I gave you, the portion I told you to set aside.”

²⁴So the cook took the thigh and put it on the table in front of Saul. Samuel said, “This is the meat saved for you. Eat it, because it was set aside for you for this special time. As I said, ‘I had invited the people.’” So Saul ate with Samuel that day.

²⁵After they finished eating, they came down from the place of worship and went to the town. Then Samuel talked with Saul on the [roof](#) of his house.²⁶At dawn they got up, and Samuel called to Saul on the roof. He said, “Get up, and I will send you on your way.” So Saul got up and went out of the house with Samuel.²⁷As Saul, his servant, and Samuel were getting near the edge of the city, Samuel said to Saul, “Tell the servant to go on ahead of us, but you stay, because I have a message from God for you.”

Life Lessons

[1 Samuel 9:1–10:27](#)

Situation

Samuel had been an exceptional judge over Israel. But when it was time for him to retire, his sons were corrupt and inadequate for leading the nation. The people failed to recognize that God alone was their king and that their disobedience to him was the reason for their problems. God knew that Israel's desire for a king was based on her reliance on human rather than divine strength.

Observation

In the life of Saul, we learn the important lesson that seeking God and being obedient to him is far more important than all of the human strengths we may possess.

Inspiration

Pick at random a score of great saints whose lives and testimonies are widely known. Let them be Bible characters or well-known Christians of post-biblical times. You will be struck instantly with the fact that the saints were not alike. Sometimes the unlikenesses were so great as to be positively glaring. How different, for example, was Moses from Isaiah; how different was Elijah from David; how unlike each other were John and Paul, St. Francis and Luther, Finney and Thomas á Kempis. The differences are as wide as human life itself—differences of race, nationality, education, temperament, habit and personal qualities. Yet they all walked, each in his day, upon a high road of spiritual living far above the common way.

Their differences must have been incidental and in the eyes of God of no significance. In some vital

quality they must have been alike. What was it?

I venture to suggest that the one vital quality which they had in common was spiritual receptivity. Something in them was open to heaven, something which urged them Godward. Without attempting anything like a profound analysis, I shall say simply that they went on to cultivate it until it became the biggest thing in their lives. They differed from the average person in that when they felt the inward longing, they did something about it. They acquired the lifelong habit of spiritual response. They were not disobedient to the heavenly vision. As David put it neatly, “When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek” ([Psalm 27:8](#)).

(From *The Pursuit of God* by A. W. Tozer)

Application

If you want to be used by God, what do you see as the source of your potential success? Are you relying too heavily on your human strengths or doubting because of your human weaknesses? Remember, only God’s power can make us useful for service in his kingdom, and with his power we are more than conquerors.

Exploration

Necessity of Divine Power—[Exodus 3:11–12](#); [Judges 6:12–14](#); [2 Chronicles 14:11](#); [Ezra 1:2](#); [Psalm 20:6–7](#); [2 Corinthians 12:9](#).

Samuel Appoints Saul

Samuel took a jar of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head. He kissed Saul and said, "The Lord has appointed you to lead his people. ²After you leave me today, you will meet two men near Rachel's tomb on the border of Benjamin at Zelzah. They will say to you, 'The donkeys you were looking for have been found. But now your father has stopped thinking about his donkeys and is worrying about you. He is asking, "What will I do about my son?"' "

³"Then you will go on until you reach the big tree at Tabor. Three men on their way to worship God at Bethel will meet you there. One man will be carrying three goats. Another will be carrying three loaves of bread. And the third will have a leather bag full of wine. ⁴They will greet you and offer you two loaves of bread, which you must accept. ⁵Then you will go to Gibeah of God, where a Philistine camp is. When you approach this town, a group of prophets will come down from the place of worship. They will be playing harps, tambourines, flutes, and lyres, and they will be prophesying. ⁶Then the Spirit of the Lord will rush upon you with power. You will prophesy with these prophets, and you will be changed into a different man. ⁷After these signs happen, do whatever you find to do, because God will help you.

⁸"Go ahead of me to Gilgal. I will come down to you to offer whole burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. But you must wait seven days. Then I will come and tell you what to do."

Saul Made King

⁹When Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart. All these signs came true that day. ¹⁰When Saul and his servant arrived at Gibeah, Saul met a group of prophets. The Spirit of God rushed upon him, and he prophesied with the prophets. ¹¹When people who had known Saul before saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, "What has happened to Kish's son? Is even Saul one of the prophets?"

¹²A man who lived there said, "Who is the father of these prophets?" So this became a famous saying: "Is even Saul one of the prophets?" ¹³When Saul finished prophesying, he entered the place of worship.

¹⁴Saul's uncle asked him and his servant, "Where have you been?"

Saul said, "We were looking for the donkeys. When we couldn't find them, we went to talk to Samuel."

¹⁵Saul's uncle asked, "Please tell me. What did Samuel say to you?"

¹⁶Saul answered, "He told us the donkeys had already been found." But Saul did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about his becoming king.

¹⁷Samuel called all the people of Israel to meet with the Lord at Mizpah. ¹⁸He said, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I led Israel out of Egypt. I saved you from Egypt's control and from other kingdoms that were troubling you.'

¹⁹But now you have rejected your God. He saves you from all your troubles and problems, but you said, 'No! We want a king to rule over us.' Now come, stand before the Lord in your

tribes and family groups.”

²⁰When Samuel gathered all the tribes of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin was picked. ²¹Samuel had them pass by in family groups, and Matri’s family was picked. Then he had each man of Matri’s family pass by, and Saul son of Kish was picked. But when they looked for Saul, they could not find him. ²²They asked the Lord, “Has Saul come here yet?”

The Lord said, “Yes. He’s hiding behind the baggage.”

²³So they ran and brought him out. When Saul stood among the people, he was a head taller than anyone else. ²⁴Then Samuel said to the people, “See the man the Lord has chosen. There is no one like him among all the people.”

Then the people shouted, “Long live the king!”

²⁵Samuel explained the rights and duties of the king and then wrote them in a book and put it before the Lord. Then he told the people to go to their homes.

²⁶Saul also went to his home in Gibeah. God touched the hearts of certain brave men who went along with him. ²⁷But some troublemakers said, “How can this man save us?” They disapproved of Saul and refused to bring gifts to him. But Saul kept quiet.

Nahash Troubles Jabesh Gilead

About a month later Nahash the Ammonite and his army surrounded the city of Jabesh in Gilead. All the people of Jabesh said to Nahash, “Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you.”

²But he answered, “I will make a treaty with you only if I’m allowed to poke out the right eye of each of you. Then all Israel will be ashamed!”

³The older leaders of Jabesh said to Nahash, “Give us seven days to send messengers through all Israel. If no one comes to help us, we will give ourselves up to you.”

⁴When the messengers came to Gibeah where Saul lived and told the people the news, they cried loudly. ⁵Saul was coming home from plowing the fields with his oxen when he heard the people crying. He asked, “What’s wrong with the people that they are crying?” Then they told Saul what the messengers from Jabesh had said. ⁶When Saul heard their words, God’s Spirit rushed upon him with power, and he became very angry. ⁷So he took a pair of oxen and cut them into pieces. Then he gave the pieces of the oxen to messengers and ordered them to carry them through all the land of Israel.

The messengers said, “This is what will happen to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel.” So the people became very afraid of the Lord. They all came together as if they were one person. ⁸Saul gathered the people together at Bezek. There were three hundred thousand men from Israel and thirty thousand men from Judah.

⁹They said to the messengers who had come, “Tell the

people at Jabesh Gilead this: ‘Before the day warms up tomorrow, you will be saved.’” So the messengers went and reported this to the people at Jabesh, and they were very happy. ¹⁰The people said to Nahash the Ammonite, “Tomorrow we will come out to meet you. Then you can do anything you want to us.”

¹¹The next morning Saul divided his soldiers into three groups. At dawn they entered the Ammonite camp and defeated them before the heat of the day. The Ammonites who escaped were scattered; no two of them were still together.

¹²Then the people said to Samuel, “Who didn’t want Saul as king? Bring them here and we will kill them!”

¹³But Saul said, “No! No one will be put to death today. Today the Lord has saved Israel!”

¹⁴Then Samuel said to the people, “Come, let’s go to Gilgal. There we will again promise to obey the king.” ¹⁵So all the people went to Gilgal, and there, before the Lord, the people made Saul king. They offered fellowship offerings to the Lord, and Saul and all the Israelites had a great celebration.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 11:1–12:25

Situation

Saul’s strength and resolve as a ruler were tested soon after he was anointed by Samuel. Though some doubted whether Saul should be king, he acted to rescue Jabesh Gilead and united his people against the Ammonites. These events confirmed for the people his place as king.

Observation

Saul stepped out and took a risk to fulfill God's plan. He exemplifies that God protects us as we take intelligent risks to accomplish his will.

Inspiration

It is true that there are great possibilities for failure [when taking risks] and, if you fail, there will be those who will mock you. But mockers are not important. Those who like to point when the risk-takers stumble don't count. The criticisms of those who sit back, observe, and offer smug suggestions can be discounted. The Promised Land belongs to the person who takes the risks, whose face is marred with dust and sweat, who strives valiantly while daring everything, who may err and fall, but who has done his or her best. This person's place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

Oh, if only I could persuade timid souls I meet to listen to that inner voice of the Spirit, which challenges us to attempt great things for God and expect great things from God. Oh, if only I could inspire them to heed that inner urging that tells them "Go for it!" I cannot say what a person should do with life, but I can say what a person should not do with it. No one should devote one's life to safety, to a course of action that offers no challenge and no fun. (From *Who Switched the Price Tags?* by Tony Campolo)

Application

Be encouraged to take risks for the sake of others.

God honors those who follow his call to risk-taking.
Seek his peace and “go for it”!

Exploration

Risk Taking—[Judges 2:15](#); [3:9](#); [9:17](#); [13:5](#); [1 Samuel 9:16](#); [Nehemiah 9:27](#).

Observe a solemn principle: There are times when hearts grow so hard and ears so dull that God turns us over to endure the consequence of our choices. —Max Lucado
(The Great House of God)

Samuel's Farewell Speech

Samuel said to all Israel, "I have done everything you wanted me to do and have put a king over you. ²Now you have a king to lead you. I am old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have been your leader since I was young. ³Here I am. If I have done anything wrong, you must testify against me before the Lord and his appointed king. Did I steal anyone's ox or donkey? Did I hurt or cheat anyone? Did I ever secretly accept money to pretend not to see something wrong? If I did any of these things, I will make it right."

⁴The Israelites answered, "You have not cheated us, or hurt us, or taken anything unfairly from anyone."

⁵Samuel said to them, "The Lord is a witness to what you have said. His appointed king is also a witness today that you did not find anything wrong in me."

"He is our witness," they said.

⁶Then Samuel said to the people, "It is the Lord who chose Moses and Aaron and brought your ancestors out of Egypt. ⁷Now, stand there, and I will remind you of all the good things the Lord did for you and your ancestors.

⁸"After Jacob entered Egypt, his descendants cried to the Lord for help. So the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, who took your ancestors out of Egypt and brought them to live in this place.

⁹"But they forgot the Lord their God. So he handed them over as slaves to Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor, and as slaves to the Philistines and the king of Moab. They all

fought against your ancestors. ¹⁰Then your ancestors cried to the Lord and said, ‘We have sinned. We have left the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths. But now save us from our enemies, and we will serve you.’ ¹¹So the Lord sent [Gideon](#), Barak, Jephthah, and Samuel. He saved you from your enemies around you, and you lived in safety. ¹²But when you saw Nahash king of the Ammonites coming against you, you said, ‘No! We want a king to rule over us!’—even though the Lord your God was your king. ¹³Now here is the king you chose, the one you asked for. The Lord has put him over you. ¹⁴You must honor the Lord and serve him. You must obey his word and not turn against his commands. Both you and the king ruling over you must follow the Lord your God. If you do, it will be well with you. ¹⁵But if you don’t obey the Lord, and if you turn against his commands, he will be against you. He will do to you what he did to your ancestors.

¹⁶“Now stand still and see the great thing the Lord will do before your eyes. ¹⁷It is now the [time of the wheat harvest](#). I will pray for the Lord to send thunder and rain. Then you will know what an evil thing you did against the Lord when you asked for a king.”

¹⁸Then Samuel prayed to the Lord, and that same day the Lord sent thunder and rain. So the people were very afraid of the Lord and Samuel. ¹⁹They said to Samuel, “Pray to the Lord your God for us, your servants! Don’t let us die! We’ve added to all our sins the evil of asking for a king.”

²⁰Samuel answered, “Don’t be afraid. It’s true that you did wrong, but don’t turn away from the Lord. Serve the Lord with all your heart. ²¹Idols are of no use, so don’t worship them. They can’t help you or save you. They are useless! ²²For his

own sake, the Lord won't leave his people. Instead, he was pleased to make you his own people.²³ I will surely not stop praying for you, because that would be sinning against the Lord. I will teach you what is good and right.²⁴ You must honor the Lord and truly serve him with all your heart. Remember the wonderful things he did for you! ²⁵But if you are stubborn and do evil, he will sweep you and your king away.”

Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he was king over Israel forty-two years. ²Saul chose three thousand men from Israel. Two thousand men stayed with him at Micmash in the mountains of Bethel, and one thousand men stayed with Jonathan at Gibeah in Benjamin. Saul sent the other men in the army back home.

³Jonathan attacked the Philistine camp in Geba, and the other Philistines heard about it. Saul said, "Let the Hebrews hear what happened." So he told the men to blow trumpets through all the land of Israel. ⁴All the Israelites heard the news. The men said, "Saul has defeated the Philistine camp. Now the Philistines will really hate us!" Then the Israelites were called to join Saul at Gilgal.

⁵The Philistines gathered to fight Israel with three thousand chariots and six thousand men to ride in them. Their soldiers were as many as the grains of sand on the seashore. The Philistines went and camped at Micmash, which is east of Beth Aven. ⁶When the Israelites saw that they were in trouble, they went to hide in caves and bushes, among the rocks, and in pits and wells. ⁷Some Hebrews even went across the Jordan River to the land of Gad and Gilead.

But Saul stayed at Gilgal, and all the men in his army were shaking with fear. ⁸Saul waited seven days, because Samuel had said he would meet him then. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the soldiers began to leave.

⁹So Saul said, "Bring me the whole burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." Then Saul offered the whole burnt offering. ¹⁰Just as he finished, Samuel arrived, and Saul went to greet him.

¹¹Samuel asked, "What have you done?"

Saul answered, "I saw the soldiers leaving me, and you were not here when you said you would be. The Philistines were gathering at Micmash. ¹²Then I thought, 'The Philistines will come against me at Gilgal, and I haven't asked for the Lord's approval.' So I forced myself to offer the whole burnt offering."

¹³Samuel said, "You acted foolishly! You haven't obeyed the command of the Lord your God. If you had obeyed him, the Lord would have made your kingdom continue in Israel always, ¹⁴but now your kingdom will not continue. The Lord has looked for the kind of man he wants. He has appointed him to rule his people, because you haven't obeyed his command."

¹⁵Then Samuel left Gilgal and went to Gibeah in Benjamin. Saul counted the men who were still with him, and there were about six hundred.

Hard Times for Israel

¹⁶Saul and his son Jonathan and the soldiers with him stayed in Gibeah in the land of Benjamin. The Philistines made their camp at Micmash. ¹⁷Three groups went out from the Philistine camp to make raids. One group went on the Ophrah road in the land of Shual. ¹⁸The second group went on the Beth Horon road. The third group went on the border road that overlooks the Valley of Zeboim toward the desert.

¹⁹The whole land of Israel had no blacksmith because the Philistines had said, "The Hebrews might make swords and spears." ²⁰So all the Israelites had to go down to the Philistines to have their plows, hoes, axes, and sickles sharpened. ²¹The Philistine blacksmiths charged about one-fourth of an ounce of

silver for sharpening plows and hoes. And they charged one-eighth of an ounce of silver for sharpening picks, axes, and the sticks used to guide oxen.

²²So when the battle came, the soldiers with Saul and Jonathan had no swords or spears. Only Saul and his son Jonathan had them.

Israel Defeats the Philistines

²³A group from the Philistine army had gone out to the pass at Micmash.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 13:1–15:35

Situation

When the Philistines gathered to attack Israel at Geba, the Israelites were badly outnumbered. King Saul grew tired of waiting for Samuel to instruct him about the battle at hand. Samuel delayed, and Saul's men began to desert; but he erred in his panic.

Observation

Obey God's command in all circumstances. Saul lost his kingdom because he disobeyed God. Saul was pressured to act before all his men deserted. Lack of patience cost him everything.

Inspiration

Have you heard the American's prayer?

"Lord, give me patience ... , And I want it right now!"

It's awfully hard for a country that exists on frozen dinners, instant mashed potatoes, powdered orange juice, packaged cake mixes, instant-print cameras, and freeway express lanes to teach its young how to wait. In fact, it's next to impossible.

One evening I was fussing about seeds in the grapes my wife had served for supper. After crunching into another seed, I laid down the law. "No more grapes served in the Swindoll home unless they are seedless!" I announced with characteristic dogmatism. Later, when nobody else was around to hear her reproof, Cynthia edged up to me and quietly asked: "Do you know why seeds in grapes bug you?"

"Sure," I said, "because I bite into those bitter little things and they scatter all over my mouth!"

"No." She smiled. "It's because you're too impatient to dig them out first. The purple grapes really taste better ... but they take a little more time."

There I stood, riveted to the pantry door by a very true (yet painful) set of facts. I was too busy, too much in a hurry to split open a grape and pull out the seeds. Wow! No wonder waiting is such a difficult hassle for me to handle.

Wouldn't you rather do anything than wait? If the truth were known, some of us would rather do the wrong thing than wait.

I have found, however, that waiting is the rule rather than the exception in life. The exception is an open door; when you have one—go! They don't happen very often! But waiting, when the door is closed doesn't mean you're out of the will of God.

You could be right in the center of His will.

The open door is the exception. The burst of green lights happen just a few seconds in life. The rest of the time is filled with a few yellow lights, and mostly red lights that flash, “Wait, wait, wait!” (From *Three Steps Forward and Two Steps Back* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

It’s easy to compromise when people are waiting for you to act. Determine that no matter the pressure, no matter the cost, no matter the delay, you will act only when your response honors God. Never compromise your integrity to satisfy others.

Exploration

Waiting—[Psalm 27](#); [37:5–7](#).

One day Jonathan, Saul's son, said to the officer who carried his armor, "Come, let's go over to the Philistine camp on the other side." But Jonathan did not tell his father.

²Saul was sitting under a pomegranate tree at the threshing floor near Gibeah. He had about six hundred men with him. ³One man was Ahijah who was wearing the holy vest. (Ahijah was a son of Ichabod's brother Ahitub. Ichabod was the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the Lord's priest in Shiloh.) No one knew Jonathan had left.

⁴There was a steep slope on each side of the pass that Jonathan planned to go through to reach the Philistine camp. The cliff on one side was named Bozez, and the cliff on the other side was named Seneh. ⁵One cliff faced north toward Micmash. The other faced south toward Geba.

⁶Jonathan said to his officer who carried his armor, "Come. Let's go to the camp of those men who are not circumcised. Maybe the Lord will help us. The Lord can give us victory if we have many people, or just a few."

⁷The officer who carried Jonathan's armor said to him, "Do whatever you think is best. Go ahead. I'm with you."

⁸Jonathan said, "Then come. We will cross over to the Philistines and let them see us. ⁹If they say to us, 'Stay there until we come to you,' we will stay where we are. We won't go up to them. ¹⁰But if they say, 'Come up to us,' we will climb up, and the Lord will let us defeat them. This will be the sign for us."

¹¹When both Jonathan and his officer let the Philistines see them, the Philistines said, "Look! The Hebrews are crawling out of the holes they were hiding in!" ¹²The Philistines in the camp shouted to Jonathan and his officer, "Come up to us. We'll

teach you a lesson!”

Jonathan said to his officer, “Climb up behind me, because the Lord has given the Philistines to Israel!”¹³ So Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet, and his officer climbed just behind him. Jonathan struck down the Philistines as he went, and his officer killed them as he followed behind him.¹⁴ In that first fight Jonathan and his officer killed about twenty Philistines over a half acre of ground.

¹⁵ All the Philistine soldiers panicked—those in the camp and those in the raiding party. The ground itself shook! God had caused the panic.

¹⁶ Saul’s guards were at Gibeah in the land of Benjamin when they saw the Philistine soldiers running in every direction.¹⁷ Saul said to his army, “Check to see who has left our camp.” When they checked, they learned that Jonathan and his officer were gone.

¹⁸ So Saul said to Ahijah the priest, “Bring the Ark of God.” (At that time it was with the Israelites.)¹⁹ While Saul was talking to the priest, the confusion in the Philistine camp was growing. Then Saul said to Ahijah, “Put your hand down!”

²⁰ Then Saul gathered his army and entered the battle. They found the Philistines confused, striking each other with their swords!²¹ Earlier, there were Hebrews who had served the Philistines and had stayed in their camp, but now they joined the Israelites with Saul and Jonathan.²² When all the Israelites hidden in the mountains of Ephraim heard that the Philistine soldiers were running away, they also joined the battle and chased the Philistines.²³ So the Lord saved the Israelites that day, and the battle moved on past Beth Aven.

Saul Makes Another Mistake

²⁴The men of Israel were miserable that day because Saul had made an oath for all of them. He had said, “No one should eat food before evening and before I finish defeating my enemies. If he does, he will be cursed!” So no Israelite soldier ate food.

²⁵Now the army went into the woods, where there was some honey on the ground. ²⁶They came upon some honey, but no one took any because they were afraid of the oath. ²⁷Jonathan had not heard the oath Saul had put on the army, so he dipped the end of his stick into the honey and lifted some out and ate it. Then he felt better. ²⁸Then one of the soldiers told Jonathan, “Your father made an oath for all the soldiers. He said any man who eats today will be cursed! That’s why they are so weak.”

²⁹Jonathan said, “My father has made trouble for the land! See how much better I feel after just tasting a little of this honey! ³⁰It would have been much better for the men to eat the food they took from their enemies today. We could have killed many more Philistines!”

³¹That day the Israelites defeated the Philistines from Micmash to Aijalon. After that, they were very tired. ³²They had taken sheep, cattle, and calves from the Philistines. Now they were so hungry they killed the animals on the ground and ate them, without draining the blood from them! ³³Someone said to Saul, “Look! The men are sinning against the Lord. They’re eating meat without draining the blood from it!”

Saul said, “You have sinned! Roll a large stone over here now!” ³⁴Then he said, “Go to the men and tell them that each person must bring his ox and sheep to me and kill it here and eat it. Don’t sin against the Lord by eating meat without

draining the blood from it.”

That night everyone brought his animals and killed them there. ³⁵Then Saul built an altar to the Lord. It was the first altar he had built to the Lord.

³⁶Saul said, “Let’s go after the Philistines tonight and rob them. We won’t let any of them live!”

The men answered, “Do whatever you think is best.”

But the priest said, “Let’s ask God.”

³⁷So Saul asked God, “Should I chase the Philistines? Will you let us defeat them?” But God did not answer Saul at that time. ³⁸Then Saul said to all the leaders of his army, “Come here. Let’s find out what sin has been done today. ³⁹As surely as the Lord lives who has saved Israel, even if my son Jonathan did the sin, he must die.” But no one in the army spoke.

⁴⁰Then Saul said to all the Israelites, “You stand on this side. I and my son Jonathan will stand on the other side.”

The men answered, “Do whatever you think is best.”

⁴¹Then Saul prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel, “Give me the right answer.”

And Saul and Jonathan were picked; the other men went free. ⁴²Saul said, “Now let us discover if it is I or Jonathan my son who is guilty.” And Jonathan was picked.

⁴³Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.”

So Jonathan told Saul, “I only tasted a little honey from the end of my stick. And must I die now?”

⁴⁴Saul said, “Jonathan, if you don’t die, may God punish me terribly.”

⁴⁵But the soldiers said to Saul, “Must Jonathan die? Never! He is responsible for saving Israel today! As surely as the Lord

lives, not even a hair of his head will fall to the ground! Today Jonathan fought against the Philistines with God's help!" So the army saved Jonathan, and he did not die.

⁴⁶Then Saul stopped chasing the Philistines, and they went back to their own land.

Saul Fights Israel's Enemies

⁴⁷When Saul became king over Israel, he fought against Israel's enemies all around. He fought Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the king of Zobah, and the Philistines. Everywhere Saul went he defeated Israel's enemies. ⁴⁸He fought bravely and defeated the Amalekites. He saved the Israelites from their enemies who had robbed them.

⁴⁹Saul's sons were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malki-Shua. His older daughter was named Merab, and his younger daughter was named Michal. ⁵⁰Saul's wife was Ahinoam daughter of Ahimaaz. The commander of his army was Abner son of Ner, Saul's uncle. ⁵¹Saul's father Kish and Abner's father Ner were sons of Abiel.

⁵²All Saul's life he fought hard against the Philistines. When he saw strong or brave men, he took them into his army.

Saul Rejected as King

Samuel said to Saul, “The Lord sent me to appoint you king over Israel. Now listen to his message.²This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: ‘When the Israelites came out of Egypt, the Amalekites tried to stop them from going to Canaan. So I will punish them.³Now go, attack the Amalekites and destroy everything they own as an offering to the Lord. Don’t let anything live. Put to death men and women, children and small babies, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.’”

⁴So Saul called the army together at Telaim. There were two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men from Judah.⁵Then Saul went to the city of Amalek and set up an ambush in the ravine.⁶He said to the Kenites, “Go away. Leave the Amalekites so that I won’t destroy you with them, because you showed kindness to the Israelites when they came out of Egypt.” So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites.

⁷Then Saul defeated the Amalekites. He fought them all the way from Havilah to Shur, at the border of Egypt.⁸He took King Agag of the Amalekites alive, but he killed all of Agag’s army with the sword.⁹Saul and the army let Agag live, along with the best sheep, fat cattle, and lambs. They let every good animal live, because they did not want to destroy them. But when they found an animal that was weak or useless, they killed it.

¹⁰Then the Lord spoke his word to Samuel:¹¹“I am sorry I made Saul king, because he has stopped following me and has not obeyed my commands.” Samuel was upset, and he cried

out to the Lord all night long.

¹²Early the next morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul. But the people told Samuel, “Saul has gone to Carmel, where he has put up a monument in his own honor. Now he has gone down to Gilgal.”

¹³When Samuel came to Saul, Saul said, “May the Lord bless you! I have obeyed the Lord’s commands.”

¹⁴But Samuel said, “Then why do I hear cattle mooing and sheep bleating?”

¹⁵Saul answered, “The soldiers took them from the Amalekites. They saved the best sheep and cattle to offer as sacrifices to the Lord your God, but we destroyed all the other animals.”

¹⁶Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night.”

Saul answered, “Tell me.”

¹⁷Samuel said, “Once you didn’t think much of yourself, but now you have become the leader of the tribes of Israel. The Lord appointed you to be king over Israel. ¹⁸And he sent you on a mission. He said, ‘Go and destroy those evil people, the Amalekites. Make war on them until all of them are dead.’

¹⁹Why didn’t you obey the Lord? Why did you take the best things? Why did you do what the Lord said was wrong?”

²⁰Saul said, “But I did obey the Lord. I did what the Lord told me to do. I destroyed all the Amalekites, and I brought back Agag their king. ²¹The soldiers took the best sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal.”

²²But Samuel answered,

“What pleases the Lord more:

burnt offerings and sacrifices
or obedience to his voice?

It is better to obey than to sacrifice.

It is better to listen to God than to offer the fat of
sheep.

²³Disobedience is as bad as the sin of sorcery.

Pride is as bad as the sin of worshiping idols.

You have rejected the Lord's command.

Now he rejects you as king."

²⁴Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I didn't obey the Lord's commands and your words. I was afraid of the people, and I did what they said. ²⁵Now, I beg you, forgive my sin. Come back with me so I may worship the Lord."

²⁶But Samuel said to Saul, "I won't go back with you. You rejected the Lord's command, and now he rejects you as king of Israel."

²⁷As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught his robe, and it tore. ²⁸Samuel said to him, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors who is better than you. ²⁹The Lord is the Eternal One of Israel. He does not lie or change his mind. He is not a human being, so he does not change his mind.

³⁰Saul answered, "I have sinned. But please honor me in front of the older leaders of my people and in front of the Israelites. Come back with me so that I can worship the Lord your God." ³¹So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the Lord.

³²Then Samuel said, "Bring me King Agag of the Amalekites."

Agag came to Samuel in chains, but Agag thought, “Surely the threat of death has passed.”

³³Samuel said to him, “Your sword made other mothers lose their children. Now your mother will have no children.” And Samuel cut Agag to pieces before the Lord at Gilgal.

³⁴Then Samuel left and went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah. ³⁵And Samuel never saw Saul again the rest of his life, but he was sad for Saul. And the Lord was very sorry he had made Saul king of Israel.

Samuel Goes to Bethlehem

The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you continue to feel sorry for Saul? I have rejected him as king of Israel. Fill your container with olive oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse who lives in Bethlehem, because I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”

²But Samuel said, “If I go, Saul will hear the news and will try to kill me.”

The Lord said, “Take a young calf with you. Say, ‘I have come to offer a sacrifice to the Lord.’” ³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice. Then I will tell you what to do. You must appoint the one I show you.”

⁴Samuel did what the Lord told him to do. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the older leaders of Bethlehem shook with fear. They met him and asked, “Are you coming in peace?”

⁵Samuel answered, “Yes, I come in peace. I have come to make a sacrifice to the Lord. Set yourselves apart to the Lord and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he set Jesse and his sons apart to the Lord, and he invited them to come to the sacrifice.

⁶When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab, and he thought, “Surely the Lord has appointed this person standing here before him.”

⁷But the Lord said to Samuel, “Don’t look at how handsome Eliab is or how tall he is, because I have not chosen him. God does not see the same way people see. People look at the outside of a person, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

⁸Then Jesse called Abinadab and told him to pass by

Samuel. But Samuel said, “The Lord has not chosen this man either.” ⁹Then Jesse had Shammah pass by. But Samuel said, “No, the Lord has not chosen this one.” ¹⁰Jesse had seven of his sons pass by Samuel. But Samuel said to him, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.”

¹¹Then he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?”

Jesse answered, “I still have the youngest son. He is out taking care of the sheep.”

Samuel said, “Send for him. We will not sit down to eat until he arrives.”

¹²So Jesse sent and had his youngest son brought in. He was a fine boy, tanned, and handsome.

The Lord said to Samuel, “Go, appoint him, because he is the one.”

¹³So Samuel took the container of olive oil and poured it on Jesse’s youngest son to appoint him in front of his brothers. From that day on, the Lord’s Spirit worked in David. Samuel then went back to Ramah.

David Serves Saul

¹⁴But the Lord’s Spirit had left Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.

¹⁵Saul’s servants said to him, “See, an evil spirit from God is troubling you. ¹⁶Give us the command to look for someone who can play the harp. When the evil spirit from God troubles you, he will play, and you will feel better.”

¹⁷So Saul said to his servants, “Find someone who can play well and bring him to me.”

¹⁸One of the servants said, “I have seen a son of Jesse of

Bethlehem play the harp. He is brave and courageous. He is a good speaker and handsome, and the Lord is with him.”

¹⁹Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse, saying, “Send me your son David, who is with the sheep.” ²⁰So Jesse loaded a donkey with bread, a leather bag full of wine, and a young goat, and he sent them with his son David to Saul.

²¹When David came to Saul, he began to serve him. Saul liked David and made him the officer who carried his armor. ²²Saul sent a message to Jesse, saying, “Let David stay and serve me because I like him.”

²³When the evil spirit from God troubled Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then the evil spirit would leave him, and Saul would feel better.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 16:1–23

Situation

God sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse’s sons as king. This new king would replace King Saul, who had failed to obey God.

Observation

God does not see or judge in the same way that humans do. People look at the outside appearance or qualifications, but God looks at the heart. He evaluates our inner disposition and character.

Inspiration

None were more shunned by their culture than the blind, the lame, the lepers, and the deaf. They had no place. No name. No value. Canker sores on the

culture. Excess baggage on the side of the road. But those whom the people called trash, Jesus called treasures.

In my closet hangs a sweater that I seldom wear. It is too small. The sleeves are too short, the shoulders too tight. Some of the buttons are missing, and the thread is frazzled. I should throw that sweater away. I have no use for it. I'll never wear it again. Logic says I should clear out the space and get rid of the sweater.

That's what logic says.

But love won't let me.

Something unique about the sweater makes me keep it. What is unusual about it? For one thing, it has no label. Nowhere on the garment will you find a tag that reads, "Made In Taiwan," or "Wash in Cold Water." It has no tag because it wasn't made in a factory. It has no label because it wasn't produced on an assembly line. It isn't the product of a nameless employee earning a living. It's the creation of a devoted mother expressing her love.

That sweater is unique. One of a kind. It can't be replaced. Each strand was chosen with care. Each thread was selected with affection.

And though the sweater has lost all of its use, it has lost none of its value. It is valuable not because of its function, but because of its maker.

That must have been what the psalmist had in mind when he wrote, "You knit me together in my mother's womb."

Think on those words. You were knitted together. You aren't an accident. You weren't mass produced.

You aren't an assembly-line product. You were deliberately planned, specifically gifted, and lovingly positioned on this earth by the Master Craftsman.

"God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing" [[Ephesians 2:10](#)].

In a society that has little room for second fiddles, that's good news. In a culture where the door of opportunity opens only once and then slams shut, that is a revelation. In a system that ranks the value of a human by the figures of his salary or the shape of her legs ... let me tell you something: Jesus' plan is a reason for joy! Jesus told John that a new kingdom was coming—a kingdom where people have value not because of what they do, but because of whose they are.

(From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

We often pick leaders by credentials rather than character. Next time you must select a leader, ask questions about character—not about résumé. Spend more time cultivating your character than your references.

Exploration

God's Insight—[Exodus 4:10–16](#); [1 Chronicles 28:9](#); [Jeremiah 1:6–8](#); [17:9–10](#).

David and Goliath

The Philistines gathered their armies for war. They met at Socoh in Judah and camped at Ephes Dammim between Socoh and Azekah.² Saul and the Israelites gathered in the Valley of Elah and camped there and took their positions to fight the Philistines.³ The Philistines controlled one hill while the Israelites controlled another. The valley was between them.

⁴The Philistines had a champion fighter from Gath named Goliath. He was about nine feet, four inches tall. He came out of the Philistine camp⁵ with a bronze helmet on his head and a coat of bronze armor that weighed about one hundred twenty-five pounds.⁶ He wore bronze protectors on his legs, and he had a bronze spear on his back.⁷ The wooden part of his larger spear was like a weaver's rod, and its blade weighed about fifteen pounds. The officer who carried his shield walked in front of him.

⁸Goliath stood and shouted to the Israelite soldiers, "Why have you taken positions for battle? I am a Philistine, and you are Saul's servants! Choose a man and send him to fight me. ⁹If he can fight and kill me, we will be your servants. But if I can kill him, you will be our servants." ¹⁰Then he said, "Today I stand and dare the army of Israel! Send one of your men to fight me!" ¹¹When Saul and the Israelites heard the Philistine's words, they were very scared.

¹²Now David was the son of Jesse, an Ephrathite from Bethlehem in Judah. Jesse had eight sons. In Saul's time Jesse was an old man. ¹³His three oldest sons followed Saul to the

war. The first son was Eliab, the second was Abinadab, and the third was Shammah.¹⁴ David was the youngest. Jesse's three oldest sons followed Saul,¹⁵ but David went back and forth from Saul to Bethlehem, where he took care of his father's sheep.

¹⁶For forty days the Philistine came out every morning and evening and stood before the Israelite army.

¹⁷Jesse said to his son David, "Take this half bushel of cooked grain and ten loaves of bread to your brothers in the camp.¹⁸ Also take ten pieces of cheese to the commander and to your brothers. See how your brothers are and bring back some proof to show me that they are all right.¹⁹ Your brothers are with Saul and the army in the Valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines."

²⁰Early in the morning David left the sheep with another shepherd. He took the food and left as Jesse had told him. When David arrived at the camp, the army was going out to their battle positions, shouting their war cry.²¹ The Israelites and Philistines were lining up their men to face each other in battle.

²²David left the food with the man who kept the supplies and ran to the battle line to talk to his brothers.²³ While he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, came out. He shouted things against Israel as usual, and David heard him.²⁴ When the Israelites saw Goliath, they were very much afraid and ran away.

²⁵They said, "Look at this man! He keeps coming out to challenge Israel. The king will give much money to whoever kills him. He will also let whoever kills him marry his daughter. And his father's family will not have to pay taxes in Israel."

²⁶David asked the men who stood near him, “What will be done to reward the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the shame from Israel? Who does this uncircumcised Philistine think he is? Does he think he can speak against the armies of the living God?”

²⁷The Israelites told David what would be done for the man who would kill Goliath.

²⁸When David’s oldest brother Eliab heard David talking with the soldiers, he was angry with David. He asked David, “Why did you come here? Who’s taking care of those few sheep of yours in the desert? I know you are proud and wicked at heart. You came down here just to watch the battle.”

²⁹David asked, “Now what have I done wrong? Can’t I even talk?” ³⁰When he turned to other people and asked the same questions, they gave him the same answer as before. ³¹Yet what David said was told to Saul, and he sent for David.

³²David said to Saul, “Don’t let anyone be discouraged. I, your servant, will go and fight this Philistine!”

³³Saul answered, “You can’t go out against this Philistine and fight him. You’re only a boy. Goliath has been a warrior since he was a young man.”

³⁴But David said to Saul, “I, your servant, have been keeping my father’s sheep. When a lion or bear came and took a sheep from the flock, ³⁵I would chase it. I would attack it and save the sheep from its mouth. When it attacked me, I caught it by its fur and hit it and killed it. ³⁶I, your servant, have killed both a lion and a bear! This uncircumcised Philistine will be like them, because he has spoken against the armies of the living God. ³⁷The Lord who saved me from a lion and a bear will save me from this Philistine.”

Saul said to David, “Go, and may the Lord be with you.”³⁸ Saul put his own clothes on David. He put a bronze helmet on his head and dressed him in armor.³⁹ David put on Saul’s sword and tried to walk around, but he was not used to all the armor Saul had put on him.

He said to Saul, “I can’t go in this, because I’m not used to it.” Then David took it all off.⁴⁰ He took his stick in his hand and chose five smooth stones from a stream. He put them in his shepherd’s bag and grabbed his sling. Then he went to meet the Philistine.

⁴¹At the same time, the Philistine was coming closer to David. The man who held his shield walked in front of him.⁴² When Goliath looked at David and saw that he was only a boy, tanned and handsome, he looked down on David with disgust.⁴³ He said, “Do you think I am a dog, that you come at me with a stick?” He used his gods’ names to curse David.⁴⁴ He said to David, “Come here. I’ll feed your body to the birds of the air and the wild animals!”

⁴⁵But David said to him, “You come to me using a sword and two spears. But I come to you in the name of the Lord All-Powerful, the God of the armies of Israel! You have spoken against him.⁴⁶ Today the Lord will hand you over to me, and I’ll kill you and cut off your head. Today I’ll feed the bodies of the Philistine soldiers to the birds of the air and the wild animals. Then all the world will know there is a God in Israel!”⁴⁷ Everyone gathered here will know the Lord does not need swords or spears to save people. The battle belongs to him, and he will hand you over to us.”

⁴⁸As Goliath came near to attack him, David ran quickly to meet him.⁴⁹ He took a stone from his bag, put it into his sling,

and slung it. The stone hit the Philistine and went deep into his forehead, and Goliath fell facedown on the ground.

⁵⁰So David defeated the Philistine with only a sling and a stone. He hit him and killed him. He did not even have a sword in his hand. ⁵¹Then David ran and stood beside him. He took Goliath's sword out of its holder and killed him by cutting off his head.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they turned and ran. ⁵²The men of Israel and Judah shouted and chased the Philistines all the way to the entrance of the city of Gath and to the gates of Ekron.

The Philistines' bodies lay on the Shaaraim road as far as Gath and Ekron. ⁵³The Israelites returned after chasing the Philistines and robbed their camp. ⁵⁴David took Goliath's head to Jerusalem and put Goliath's weapons in his own tent.

⁵⁵When Saul saw David go out to meet Goliath, Saul asked Abner, commander of the army, "Abner, who is that young man's father?"

Abner answered, "As surely as you live, my king, I don't know."

⁵⁶The king said, "Find out whose son he is."

⁵⁷When David came back from killing Goliath, Abner brought him to Saul. David was still holding Goliath's head.

⁵⁸Saul asked him, "Young man, who is your father?"

David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem."

Life Lessons

[1 Samuel 17:1-58](#)

Situation

Earlier passages confirmed that Goliath came from an area that had many tall people. Even though it wasn't unusual for two armies to send out their best soldiers to fight in place of an all-out war, the Israelites had no one to compare to nine-foot-tall Goliath.

Observation

Though the Israelites feared losing to Goliath, they forgot who had called them to enter the Promised Land. Though they had seen God fight for them in many previous battles, they neglected to trust him in this one. David's focus was not on the size of the enemy, but on God.

Inspiration

There are certain things anyone knows not to do... . You don't fight a lion with a toothpick. You don't sneeze into the wind. You don't go bear hunting with a cork gun. And you don't send a shepherd boy to battle a giant.

You don't, that is, unless you are out of options. Saul was. And it is when we are out of options that we are most ready for God's surprises.

Was Saul ever surprised!

The king tried to give David some equipment. "What do you want, boy? Shield? Sword? Grenades? Rifles? A helicopter? We'll make a Rambo out of you."

David had something else in mind. Five smooth stones and an ordinary leather sling.

The soldiers gasped. Saul sighed. Goliath jeered.

David swung. And God made his point. “Anyone who underestimates what God can do with the ordinary has rocks in his head.” (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

What battle are you facing this week? Even if it's bigger than you can handle, it's not bigger than God can handle. Proceed with his backing.

Exploration

Don't Be Afraid—[Deuteronomy 31:6](#); [Isaiah 46:4](#); [Daniel 6:27](#); [Matthew 10:28–31](#); [John 14:27](#); [2 Corinthians 1:10](#); [Philippians 4:6](#); [Hebrews 13:6](#).

I described resentment as a prison and pointed out that when we put someone in our jail cell of hatred, we are stuck guarding the door. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

Saul Fears David

When David finished talking with Saul, Jonathan felt very close to David. He loved David as much as he loved himself. ²Saul kept David with him from that day on and did not let him go home to his father's house. ³Jonathan made an agreement with David, because he loved David as much as himself. ⁴He took off his coat and gave it to David, along with his armor, including his sword, bow, and belt.

⁵Saul sent David to fight in different battles, and David was very successful. Then Saul put David over the soldiers, which pleased Saul's officers and all the other people.

⁶After David had killed the Philistine, he and the men returned home. Women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul. They sang songs of joy, danced, and played tambourines and stringed instruments. ⁷As they played, they sang,

“Saul has killed thousands of his enemies,
but David has killed tens of thousands.”

⁸The women's song upset Saul, and he became very angry. He thought, “The women say David has killed tens of thousands, but they say I have killed only thousands. The only thing left for him to have is the kingdom!” ⁹So Saul watched David closely from then on, because he was jealous.

¹⁰The next day an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he prophesied in his house. David was playing the harp as he usually did, but Saul had a spear in his hand. ¹¹He threw the

spear, thinking, “I’ll pin David to the wall.” But David escaped from him twice.

¹²The Lord was with David but had left Saul. So Saul was afraid of David. ¹³He sent David away and made him commander of a thousand soldiers. So David led them in battle. ¹⁴He had great success in everything he did because the Lord was with him. ¹⁵When Saul saw that David was very successful, he feared David even more. ¹⁶But all the people of Israel and Judah loved David because he led them well in battle.

Saul’s Daughter Marries David

¹⁷Saul said to David, “Here is my older daughter Merab. I will let you marry her. All I ask is that you remain brave and fight the Lord’s battles.” Saul thought, “I won’t have to kill David. The Philistines will do that.”

¹⁸But David answered Saul, saying, “Who am I? My family is not important enough for me to become the king’s son-in-law.” ¹⁹So, when the time came for Saul’s daughter Merab to marry David, Saul gave her instead to Adriel of Meholah.

²⁰Now Saul’s other daughter, Michal, loved David. When they told Saul, he was pleased. ²¹He thought, “I will let her marry David. Then she will be a trap for him, and the Philistines will defeat him.” So Saul said to David a second time, “You may become my son-in-law.”

²²And Saul ordered his servants to talk with David in private and say, “Look, the king likes you. His servants love you. You should be his son-in-law.”

²³Saul’s servants said these words to David, but David

answered, “Do you think it is easy to become the king’s son-in-law? I am poor and unimportant.”

²⁴When Saul’s servants told him what David had said, ²⁵Saul said, “Tell David, ‘The king doesn’t want money for the bride. All he wants is a hundred Philistine foreskins to get even with his enemies.’” Saul planned to let the Philistines kill David.

²⁶When Saul’s servants told this to David, he was pleased to become the king’s son-in-law. ²⁷So he and his men went out and killed two hundred Philistines. David brought all their foreskins to Saul so he could be the king’s son-in-law. Then Saul gave him his daughter Michal for his wife. ²⁸Saul saw that the Lord was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David. ²⁹So he grew even more afraid of David, and he was David’s enemy all his life.

³⁰The Philistine commanders continued to go out to fight the Israelites, but every time, David was more skillful than Saul’s officers. So he became famous.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 18:1–20:42

Situation

Though Saul was king and his son Jonathan first in line for succession, God had appointed David as the next king of Israel. David waited for God’s timing and did not try to dethrone Saul or eliminate the heir to the throne. Saul’s goal was to protect his family line at any cost.

Observation

In this tender story, Jonathan protects David. In

hugging David, Jonathan was saying that his own bond of loyalty with David would never be broken.

Inspiration

The touch did not heal the disease, you know. Matthew is careful to mention that it was the pronouncement and not the touch of Christ that cured the condition. "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man and said, 'I will. Be healed!' And immediately the man was healed from his disease" ([Matthew 8:3](#)).

The infection was banished by a word from Jesus.

The loneliness, however, was treated by a touch from Jesus.

Oh, the power of a godly touch. Haven't you known it? The doctor who treated you, or the teacher who dried your tears? Was there a hand holding yours at a funeral? Another on your shoulder during a trial? A handshake of welcome at a new job? A pastoral prayer for healing? Haven't we known the power of a godly touch?

Can't we offer the same?

Many of you already do. Some of you have the master touch of the Physician himself. You use your hands to pray over the sick and minister to the weak. If you aren't touching them personally, your hands are writing letters, dialing phones, baking pies. You have learned the power of a touch.

But others of us tend to forget. Our hearts are good; it's just that our memories are bad. We forget how significant one touch can be. We fear saying the wrong thing or using the wrong tone or acting the

wrong way. So rather than do it incorrectly, we do nothing at all.

Aren't we glad Jesus didn't make the same mistake? If your fear of doing the wrong thing prevents you from doing anything, keep in mind the perspective of the lepers of the world. They aren't picky. They aren't finicky. They're just lonely. They are yearning for a godly touch.

Jesus touched the untouchables of the world. Will you do the same? (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

It's hard to imagine the affirmation and power that a simple hug or touch can do for another person. Are there lonely or depressed individuals you can reach out to this week? Encourage him or her in the Lord. Don't be afraid to show appropriate physical affection.

Exploration

Encouragement—[Acts 11:23](#); [13:15](#); [15:31–32](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:14](#); [2 Timothy 4:2](#); [Hebrews 3:13](#); [10:24–25](#).

Saul Tries to Kill David

Saul told his son Jonathan and all his servants to kill David, but Jonathan liked David very much.² So he warned David, “My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Watch out in the morning. Hide in a secret place.³ I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are hiding, and I’ll talk to him about you. Then I’ll let you know what I find out.”

⁴When Jonathan talked to Saul his father, he said good things about David. Jonathan said, “The king should do no wrong to your servant David since he has done nothing wrong to you. What he has done has helped you greatly.⁵ David risked his life when he killed Goliath the Philistine, and the Lord won a great victory for all Israel. You saw it and were happy. Why would you do wrong against David? He’s innocent. There’s no reason to kill him!”

⁶Saul listened to Jonathan and then made this promise: “As surely as the Lord lives, David won’t be put to death.”

⁷So Jonathan called to David and told him everything that had been said. He brought David to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

⁸When war broke out again, David went out to fight the Philistines. He defeated them, and they ran away from him.

⁹But once again an evil spirit from the Lord rushed upon Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand. David was playing the harp.¹⁰ Saul tried to pin David to the wall with his spear, but David jumped out of the way. So Saul’s spear went into the wall, and David ran away that night.

¹¹Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, saying, "Tonight you must run for your life. If you don't, you will be dead in the morning." ¹²So she let David down out of a window, and he ran away and escaped. ¹³Then Michal took an idol, laid it on the bed, covered it with clothes, and put goats' hair at its head.

¹⁴Saul sent messengers to take David prisoner, but Michal said, "He is sick."

¹⁵Saul sent them back to see David, saying, "Bring him to me on his bed so I can kill him."

¹⁶When the messengers entered David's house, they found just an idol on the bed with goats' hair on its head.

¹⁷Saul said to Michal, "Why did you trick me this way? You let my enemy go so he could run away!"

Michal answered Saul, "David told me if I did not help him escape, he would kill me."

¹⁸After David had escaped from Saul, he went to Samuel at Ramah and told him everything Saul had done to him. Then David and Samuel went to Naioth and stayed there. ¹⁹Saul heard that David was in Naioth at Ramah. ²⁰So he sent messengers to capture him. But they met a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there leading them. So the Spirit of God entered Saul's men, and they also prophesied.

²¹When Saul heard the news, he sent more messengers, but they also prophesied. Then he sent messengers a third time, but they also prophesied. ²²Finally, Saul himself went to Ramah, to the well at Secu. He asked, "Where are Samuel and David?"

The people answered, "In Naioth at Ramah."

²³When Saul went to Naioth at Ramah, the Spirit of God also rushed upon him. And he walked on, prophesying until he came to Naioth at Ramah. ²⁴He took off his robes and prophesied in front of Samuel. He lay that way all day and all night. That is why people ask, “Is even Saul one of the prophets?”

Jonathan Helps David

Then David ran away from Naioth in Ramah. He went to Jonathan and asked, “What have I done? What is my crime? How did I sin against your father? Why is he trying to kill me?”

²Jonathan answered, “No! You won’t die! See, my father doesn’t do anything great or small without first telling me. Why would he keep this from me? It’s not true!”

³But David took an oath, saying, “Your father knows very well that you like me. He says to himself, ‘Jonathan must not know about it, or he will tell David.’ As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I am only a step away from death!”

⁴Jonathan said to David, “I’ll do anything you want me to do.”

⁵So David said, “Look, tomorrow is the New Moon festival. I am supposed to eat with the king, but let me hide in the field until the third evening. ⁶If your father notices I am gone, tell him, ‘David begged me to let him go to his hometown of Bethlehem. Every year at this time his family group offers a sacrifice.’ ⁷If your father says, ‘Fine,’ I am safe. But if he becomes angry, you will know that he wants to hurt me. ⁸Jonathan, be loyal to me, your servant. You have made an agreement with me before the Lord. If I am guilty, you may kill me yourself! Why hand me over to your father?”

⁹Jonathan answered, “No, never! If I learn that my father plans to hurt you, I will warn you!”

¹⁰David asked, “Who will let me know if your father answers you unkindly?”

¹¹Then Jonathan said, “Come, let’s go out into the field.” So the two of them went out into the field.

¹²Jonathan said to David, “I promise this before the Lord, the God of Israel: At this same time the day after tomorrow, I will find out how my father feels. If he feels good toward you, I will send word to you and let you know. ¹³But if my father plans to hurt you, I will let you know and send you away safely. May the Lord punish me terribly if I don’t do this. And may the Lord be with you as he has been with my father. ¹⁴But show me the kindness of the Lord as long as I live so that I may not die. ¹⁵You must never stop showing your kindness to my family, even when the Lord has destroyed all your enemies from the earth.”

¹⁶So Jonathan made an agreement with David. He said, “May the Lord hold David’s enemies responsible.” ¹⁷And Jonathan asked David to repeat his promise of love for him, because he loved David as much as he loved himself.

¹⁸Jonathan said to David, “Tomorrow is the New Moon festival. Your seat will be empty, so my father will miss you. ¹⁹On the third day go to the place where you hid when this trouble began. Wait by the rock Ezel. ²⁰On the third day I will shoot three arrows to the side of the rock as if I am shooting at a target. ²¹Then I will send a boy to find the arrows. If I say to him, ‘The arrows are near you; bring them here,’ you may come out of hiding. You are safe. As the Lord lives, there is no danger. ²²But if I say to the boy, ‘Look, the arrows are beyond you,’ you must go, because the Lord is sending you away. ²³Remember what we talked about. The Lord is a witness between you and me forever.”

²⁴So David hid in the field. When the New Moon festival

came, the king sat down to eat.²⁵ He sat where he always sat, near the wall. Jonathan sat across from him, and Abner sat next to Saul, but David's place was empty.²⁶ That day Saul said nothing. He thought, "Maybe something has happened to David so that he is unclean."²⁷ But the next day was the second day of the month, and David's place was still empty. So Saul said to Jonathan, "Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the feast yesterday or today?"

²⁸Jonathan answered, "David begged me to let him go to Bethlehem.²⁹ He said, 'Let me go, because our family has a sacrifice in the town, and my brother has ordered me to be there. Now if I am your friend, please let me go to see my brothers.' That is why he has not come to the king's table."

³⁰Then Saul became very angry with Jonathan. He said, "You son of a wicked, worthless woman! I know you are on the side of David son of Jesse! You bring shame on yourself and on your mother who gave birth to you."³¹ As long as Jesse's son lives, you will never be king or have a kingdom. Now send for David and bring him to me. He must die!"

³²Jonathan asked his father, "Why should David be killed? What wrong has he done?"³³ Then Saul threw his spear at Jonathan, trying to kill him. So Jonathan knew that his father really wanted to kill David.³⁴ Jonathan was very angry and left the table. That second day of the month he refused to eat. He was ashamed of his father and upset over David.

³⁵The next morning Jonathan went out to the field to meet David as they had agreed. He had a young boy with him.³⁶ Jonathan said to the boy, "Run and find the arrows I shoot." When he ran, Jonathan shot an arrow beyond him.³⁷ The boy ran to the place where Jonathan's arrow fell, but Jonathan

called, “The arrow is beyond you!” ³⁸Then he shouted, “Hurry! Go quickly! Don’t stop!” The boy picked up the arrow and brought it back to his master. ³⁹(The boy knew nothing about what this meant; only Jonathan and David knew.) ⁴⁰Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and told him, “Go back to town.”

⁴¹When the boy left, David came out from the south side of the rock. He bowed facedown on the ground before Jonathan three times. Then David and Jonathan kissed each other and cried together, but David cried the most.

⁴²Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace. We have promised by the Lord that we will be friends. We said, ‘The Lord will be a witness between you and me, and between our descendants always.’” Then David left, and Jonathan went back to town.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 21:1–22:23

Situation

David, pursued by Saul, sought rest at the town of Nob. Ahimelech the priest cared for David and his men. When Saul discovered David had been at Nob, he condemned the priests who aided David. Fearful of a conspiracy against himself, Saul ordered eighty-five priests killed and the town of Nob destroyed. Only one son of Ahimelech escaped to join David.

Observation

Saul's fear and resentment of David caused him to stray farther from God, committing rash crimes. Saul chose to disregard God's plan and God's priests.

Inspiration

Sharing your personal testimony may not necessarily be convicting.

I discovered this recently when talking with an acquaintance who happens to be a prominent journalist....

It's wonderful that you've found peace and fulfillment through Jesus, he said in effect, but I don't believe in Jesus. He told me he had friends in the New Age movement who had found spirituality too; it had worked for them as well as Christ had "worked" for me.

So I shifted gears and began to talk about eternal life. This man had had some health problems in the past; surely he had done some thinking about his

own mortality.

Again he cut me off. Death was simply the end, he said. When we die we are just like a tree or an animal: we return to the dust. No such thing as an afterlife.

I talked about the Bible. He put his hand up, palm outward. “All legends,” he said firmly.

What could I say? He didn’t care about God’s plan for his life, getting into heaven, or what the Bible said.

Perhaps it’s when we are caught short—when our canned answers don’t work—that God uses us most effectively. For even as I was fumbling with my fork and my facts, an idea popped into my head.

“Have you seen Woody Allen’s *Crimes and Misdemeanors*?” I asked.

He had, and we talked about it for a few minutes. Then, catching him off guard, I asked, “Are you Judah Rosenthal?”

He laughed, but it was a nervous laugh.

“You may think this life is all there is,” I said, “but if so, then there is still an issue at hand—how do you live with yourself while you’re here? I know you have a conscience. So how do you deal with that when you know you do wrong?”

He picked at his food and told me that very issue gave him a lot of problems. Then somehow we moved into a discussion of Leo Tolstoy’s novel, *War and Peace*, in which Pierre, the central character, cries out, *Why is it that I know what is right but do what is wrong?* That in turn led us to C. S. Lewis’ concept of the natural law ingrained in all of us, and then to the

central point of [Romans 1](#): That we all are imbued with a conscience, run from it though we might, and that conscience itself points to questions which can only be answered outside of ourselves.

I don't know what's going to happen to this friend. My hunch is he's going to come to Christ, because I believe the Holy Spirit is hounding him. But I know one thing: without Woody Allen, Leo Tolstoy, and C. S. Lewis, I wouldn't have found a common ground and language with which to discuss the spiritual realm.

What does this tell us? Well, first of all, it does not mean that we must all run out to the video store and rent *Crimes and Misdemeanors* or slog through *War and Peace*. But it does mean that to evangelize today we must address the human condition at its point of felt need—conscience, guilt, dealing with others, finding a purpose for staying alive. Talking about the abundant life everlasting or Bible promises often just won't do it. (From *The Body* by Charles Colson)

Application

Sometimes our anger or fear causes us to act rashly and to displease God. Such acts separate us from our eternal Father and strain our relationship with him. What did you fear or get angry about yesterday? Repent and ask for God's forgiveness.

Exploration

Separation—[Isaiah 1:4–9](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:7–9](#); [Revelation 14:11](#).

David Goes to See Ahimelech

David went to Nob to see Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech shook with fear when he saw David, and he asked, “Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?”

²David answered him, “The king gave me a special order. He told me, ‘No one must know what I am sending you to do or what I told you to do.’ I told my men where to meet me. ³Now, what food do you have with you? Give me five loaves of bread or anything you find.”

⁴The priest said to David, “I don’t have any plain bread here, but I do have some [holy bread](#). You may eat it if your men have kept themselves from women.”

⁵David answered, “No women have been near us for days. My men always keep themselves holy, even when we do ordinary work. And this is especially true when the work is holy.”

⁶So the priest gave David the holy bread from the presence of God because there was no other. Each day the holy bread was replaced with hot bread.

⁷One of Saul’s servants happened to be there that day. He had been held there before the Lord. He was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul’s shepherds.

⁸David asked Ahimelech, “Do you have a spear or sword here? The king’s business was very important, so I left without my sword or any other weapon.”

⁹The priest answered, “The sword of Goliath the Philistine, the one you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here. It is wrapped in a cloth behind the holy vest. If you want it, you may take it. There’s no other sword here but that one.”

David said, “There is no other sword like it. Give it to me.”

David Goes to Gath

¹⁰That day David ran away from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. ¹¹But the servants of Achish said to him, “This is David, the king of the Israelites. He’s the man they dance and sing about, saying:

‘Saul has killed thousands of his enemies,
but David has killed tens of thousands.’”

¹²David paid attention to these words and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath. ¹³So he pretended to be crazy in front of Achish and his servants. While he was with them, he acted like a madman and clawed on the doors of the gate and let spit run down his beard.

¹⁴Achish said to his servants, “Look at the man! He’s crazy! Why do you bring him to me? ¹⁵I have enough madmen. I don’t need you to bring him here to act like this in front of me! Don’t let him in my house!”

David at Adullam and Mizpah

David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and other relatives heard that he was there, they went to see him. ²Everyone who was in trouble, or who owed money, or who was unsatisfied gathered around David, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him.

³From there David went to Mizpah in Moab and spoke to the king of Moab. He said, "Please let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God is going to do for me." ⁴So he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him as long as David was hiding in the stronghold.

⁵But the prophet Gad said to David, "Don't stay in the stronghold. Go to the land of Judah." So David left and went to the forest of Hereth.

Saul Destroys Ahimelech's Family

⁶Saul heard that David and his men had been seen. Saul was sitting under the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, and all his officers were standing around him. He had a spear in his hand. ⁷Saul said to them, "Listen, men of Benjamin! Do you think the son of Jesse will give all of you fields and vineyards? Will David make you commanders over thousands of men or hundreds of men? ⁸You have all made plans against me! No one tells me when my son makes an agreement with the son of Jesse! No one cares about me! No one tells me when my son has encouraged my servant to ambush me this very day!"

⁹Doeg the Edomite, who was standing there with Saul's officers, said, "I saw the son of Jesse. He came to see Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob. ¹⁰Ahimelech prayed to the Lord for David and gave him food and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

¹¹Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub and for all of Ahimelech's relatives who were priests at Nob. And they all came to the king. ¹²Saul said to Ahimelech, "Listen now, son of Ahitub."

Ahimelech answered, "Yes, master."

¹³Saul said, "Why are you and Jesse's son against me? You gave him bread and a sword! You prayed to God for him. David has turned against me and is waiting to attack me even now!"

¹⁴Ahimelech answered, "You have no other servant who is as loyal as David, your own son-in-law and captain of your bodyguards. Everyone in your house respects him. ¹⁵That was not the first time I prayed to God for David. Don't blame me or any of my relatives. I, your servant, know nothing about what is going on."

¹⁶But the king said, "Ahimelech, you and all your relatives must die!" ¹⁷Then he told the guards at his side, "Go and kill the priests of the Lord, because they are on David's side. They knew he was running away, but they didn't tell me."

But the king's officers refused to kill the priests of the Lord.

¹⁸Then the king ordered Doeg, "Go and kill the priests." So Doeg the Edomite went and killed the priests. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen holy vest. ¹⁹He also killed the people of Nob, the city of the priests. With the sword he killed men, women, children, babies, cattle, donkeys, and sheep.

²⁰But Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech, who was the son of Ahitub, escaped. He ran away and joined David. ²¹He told David that Saul had killed the Lord's priests. ²²Then David told him, "Doeg the Edomite was there at Nob that day. I knew he would surely tell Saul. So I am responsible for the death of all your father's family. ²³Stay with me. Don't be afraid. The man who wants to kill you also wants to kill me. You will be safe with me."

David Saves the People of Keilah

Someone told David, “Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and stealing grain from the threshing floors.”

²David asked the Lord, “Should I go and fight these Philistines?”

The Lord answered him, “Go. Attack them, and save Keilah.”

³But David’s men said to him, “We’re afraid here in Judah. We will be more afraid if we go to Keilah where the Philistine army is.”

⁴David again asked the Lord, and the Lord answered, “Go down to Keilah. I will help you defeat the Philistines.” ⁵So David and his men went to Keilah and fought the Philistines and took their cattle. David killed many Philistines and saved the people of Keilah. ⁶(Now Abiathar son of Ahimelech had brought the holy vest with him when he came to David at Keilah.)

Saul Chases David

⁷Someone told Saul that David was now at Keilah. Saul said, “God has handed David over to me! He has trapped himself, because he has entered a town with gates and bars.” ⁸Saul called all his army together for battle, and they prepared to go down to Keilah to attack David and his men.

⁹David learned Saul was making evil plans against him. So he said to Abiathar the priest, “Bring the holy vest.” ¹⁰David

prayed, “Lord, God of Israel, I have heard that Saul plans to come to Keilah to destroy the town because of me. ¹¹Will the leaders of Keilah hand me over to Saul? Will Saul come down to Keilah, as I heard? Lord, God of Israel, tell me, your servant!”

The Lord answered, “Saul will come down.”

¹²Again David asked, “Will the leaders of Keilah hand me and my men over to Saul?”

The Lord answered, “They will.”

¹³So David and his six hundred men left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul found out that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there.

¹⁴David stayed in the desert hideouts and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Every day Saul looked for David, but the Lord did not surrender David to him.

¹⁵While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul was coming to kill him. ¹⁶But Saul’s son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and strengthened his faith in God. ¹⁷Jonathan told him, “Don’t be afraid, because my father won’t touch you. You will be king of Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.” ¹⁸The two of them made an agreement before the Lord. Then Jonathan went home, but David stayed at Horesh.

¹⁹The people from Ziph went to Saul at Gibeah and told him, “David is hiding in our land. He’s at the hideouts of Horesh, on the hill of Hakilah, south of Jeshimon. ²⁰Now, our king, come down anytime you want. It’s our duty to hand David over to you.”

²¹Saul answered, “The Lord bless you for helping me. ²²Go and learn more about him. Find out where he is staying and

who has seen him there. I have heard that he is clever. ²³Find all the hiding places he uses, and come back and tell me everything. Then I'll go with you. If David is in the area, I will track him down among all the families in Judah.”

²⁴So they went back to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the Desert of [Maon](#) in the desert area south of Jeshimon. ²⁵Saul and his men went to look for David, but David heard about it and went down to a rock and stayed in the Desert of Maon. When Saul heard that, he followed David into the Desert of Maon.

²⁶Saul was going along one side of the mountain, and David and his men were on the other side. They were hurrying to get away from Saul, because Saul and his men were closing in on them. ²⁷But a messenger came to Saul, saying, “Come quickly! The Philistines are attacking our land!” ²⁸So Saul stopped chasing David and went to challenge the Philistines. That is why people call this place Rock of Parting. ²⁹David also left the Desert of Maon and stayed in the hideouts of En Gedi.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 23:1–24:22

Situation

David, hotly pursued by King Saul, proved his honorable motivations by *not* killing Saul in the cave. Although his own men pressured him, he would not kill God's king.

Observation

By maintaining right priorities in life, you can withstand the fiery trials and temptations.

Inspiration

“Careful!” the craftsman exclaimed. “Please don’t touch the pottery on that shelf. You’ll ruin it.” Then he surprised us when he said, “Why don’t you touch the ones on the other shelf?” Needless to say, we were curious as to why some vases could be touched and not others.

Glancing at the “do-not-touch” shelf, he explained, “These haven’t been fired yet.” The potter told us then that there was more to masterpieces than just making blobs into beautiful shapes. If he stopped at that point, they would quickly be marred and misshapen. Without the fire, the potter’s work is still beautiful, but too fragile.

The other vases could be touched because they had twice been baked in his kiln at temperatures of more than 2,000 degrees! “The fire makes the clay firm and strong,” our host concluded. “Fire makes the beauty last.”

That was the trigger. My thoughts raced to Peter’s words: “All kinds of trials ... have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine” ([1 Peter 1:6–7](#)).

Both Peter and the potter were talking to me about a fire that increases the value of something precious. Having spent my adult years in an oven—a pressure cooker to be exact—I knew about fire. Much of it could be traced to my overheated schedule and overcommitted lifestyle. That heat was my own fault.

But there is another fire that comes, not from me,

but from the Master Potter. There is, to be sure, a heat that burns, and another heat that beautifies. (From *Peaceful Living in a Stressful World* by Ron Hutchcraft)

Application

Grow a plant in an earthenware pot. Let it serve as a reminder that in the midst of stress, “there is a heat that beautifies.” Praise God for his gracious help while growing in your spiritual walk.

Exploration

Peace—[John 14:27](#); [Galatians 5:22](#). Pressure—[Philippians 3:12–14](#).

David Shames Saul

After Saul returned from chasing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the Desert of En Gedi.”² So he took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and began looking for David and his men near the Rocks of the Wild Goats.

³Saul came to the sheep pens beside the road. A cave was there, and he went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were hiding far back in the cave.⁴ The men said to David, “Today is the day the Lord spoke of when he said, ‘I will give your enemy over to you. Do anything you want with him.’”

Then David crept up to Saul and quietly cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.⁵ Later David felt guilty because he had cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.⁶ He said to his men, “May the Lord keep me from doing such a thing to my master! Saul is the Lord’s appointed king. I should not do anything against him, because he is the Lord’s appointed king!”⁷ David used these words to stop his men; he did not let them attack Saul. Then Saul left the cave and went his way.

⁸When David came out of the cave, he shouted to Saul, “My master and king!” Saul looked back, and David bowed facedown on the ground.⁹ He said to Saul, “Why do you listen when people say, ‘David wants to harm you’?”¹⁰ You have seen something with your own eyes today. The Lord put you in my power in the cave. They said I should kill you, but I was merciful. I said, ‘I won’t harm my master, because he is the Lord’s appointed king.’¹¹ My father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe, but I didn’t

kill you. Now understand and know I am not planning any evil against you. I did nothing wrong to you, but you are hunting me to kill me. ¹²May the Lord judge between us, and may he punish you for the wrong you have done to me! But I am not against you. ¹³There is an old saying: ‘Evil things come from evil people.’ But I am not against you. ¹⁴Whom is the king of Israel coming out against? Whom are you chasing? It’s as if you are chasing a dead dog or a flea. ¹⁵May the Lord be our judge and decide between you and me. May he support me and show that I am right. May he save me from you!”

¹⁶When David finished saying these words, Saul asked, “Is that your voice, David my son?” And he cried loudly. ¹⁷He said, “You are a better man than I am. You have been good to me, but I have done wrong to you. ¹⁸You told me what good things you did. The Lord handed me over to you, but you did not kill me. ¹⁹If a person finds his enemy, he doesn’t just send him on his way, does he? May the Lord reward you because you were good to me today. ²⁰I know you will surely be king, and you will rule the kingdom of Israel. ²¹Now swear to me by the Lord that you will not kill my descendants and that you won’t wipe out my name from my father’s family.”

²²So David made the promise to Saul. Then Saul went back home, and David and his men went up to their hideout.

Nabal Insults David

Now Samuel died, and all the Israelites met and had a time of sadness for him. Then they buried him at his home in Ramah.

David moved to the Desert of [Maon](#).² A man in Maon who had land at Carmel was very rich. He had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was cutting the wool off his sheep at Carmel.³ His name was Nabal, and he was a descendant of Caleb. His wife was named Abigail. She was wise and beautiful, but Nabal was cruel and mean.

⁴While David was in the desert, he heard that Nabal was cutting the wool from his sheep. ⁵So he sent ten young men and told them, “Go to Nabal at Carmel, and greet him for me. ⁶Say to Nabal, ‘May you and your family and all who belong to you have good health! ⁷I have heard that you are cutting the wool from your sheep. When your shepherds were with us, we did not harm them. All the time your shepherds were at Carmel, we stole nothing from them. ⁸Ask your servants, and they will tell you. We come at a happy time, so be kind to my young men. Please give anything you can find for them and for your son David.’”

⁹When David’s men arrived, they gave the message to Nabal, but Nabal insulted them. ¹⁰He answered them, “Who is David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many slaves are running away from their masters today! ¹¹I have bread and water, and I have meat that I killed for my servants who cut the wool. But I won’t give it to men I don’t know.”

¹²David’s men went back and told him all Nabal had said.

¹³Then David said to them, “Put on your swords!” So they put on their swords, and David put on his also. About four hundred men went with David, but two hundred men stayed with the supplies.

¹⁴One of Nabal’s servants said to Abigail, Nabal’s wife, “David sent messengers from the desert to greet our master, but Nabal insulted them. ¹⁵These men were very good to us. They did not harm us. They stole nothing from us during all the time we were out in the field with them. ¹⁶Night and day they protected us. They were like a wall around us while we were with them caring for the sheep. ¹⁷Now think about it, and decide what you can do. Terrible trouble is coming to our master and all his family. Nabal is such a wicked man that no one can even talk to him.”

¹⁸Abigail hurried. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two leather bags full of wine, five cooked sheep, a bushel of cooked grain, a hundred cakes of raisins, and two hundred cakes of pressed figs and put all these on donkeys. ¹⁹Then she told her servants, “Go on. I’ll follow you.” But she did not tell her husband.

²⁰Abigail rode her donkey and came down toward the mountain hideout. There she met David and his men coming down toward her.

²¹David had just said, “It’s been useless! I watched over Nabal’s property in the desert. I made sure none of his sheep was missing. I did good to him, but he has paid me back with evil. ²²May God punish my enemies even more. I will not leave one of Nabal’s men alive until morning.”

²³When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed facedown on the ground before him. ²⁴She fell at

David's feet and said, "My master, let the blame be on me! Please let me talk to you. Listen to what I say. ²⁵My master, don't pay attention to this worthless man Nabal. He is like his name. His name means 'fool,' and he is truly a fool. But I, your servant, didn't see the men you sent. ²⁶The Lord has kept you from killing and punishing anyone. As surely as the Lord lives and as surely as you live, may your enemies become like Nabal! ²⁷I have brought a gift to you for the men who follow you. ²⁸Please forgive my wrong. The Lord will certainly let your family have many kings, because you fight his battles. As long as you live, may you do nothing bad. ²⁹Someone might chase you to kill you, but the Lord your God will keep you alive. He will throw away your enemies' lives as he would throw a stone from a sling. ³⁰The Lord will keep all his promises of good things for you. He will make you leader over Israel. ³¹Then you won't feel guilty or troubled because you killed innocent people and punished them. Please remember me when the Lord brings you success."

³²David answered Abigail, "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me. ³³May you be blessed for your wisdom. You have kept me from killing or punishing people today. ³⁴As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, he has kept me from hurting you. If you hadn't come quickly to meet me, not one of Nabal's men would have lived until morning."

³⁵Then David accepted Abigail's gifts. He told her, "Go home in peace. I have heard your words, and I will do what you have asked."

Nabal's Death

³⁶When Abigail went back to Nabal, he was in the house, eating like a king. He was very drunk and in a good mood. So she told him nothing until the next morning. ³⁷In the morning when he was not drunk, his wife told him everything. His heart stopped, and he became like stone. ³⁸About ten days later the Lord struck Nabal and he died.

³⁹When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Praise the Lord! Nabal insulted me, but the Lord has supported me! He has kept me from doing wrong. The Lord has punished Nabal for his wrong.”

Then David sent a message to Abigail, asking her to be his wife. ⁴⁰His servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, “David sent us to take you so you can become his wife.”

⁴¹Abigail bowed facedown on the ground and said, “I am your servant. I’m ready to serve you and to wash the feet of my master’s servants.” ⁴²Abigail quickly got on a donkey and went with David’s messengers, with her five maids following her. And she became David’s wife.

⁴³David also had married Ahinoam of Jezreel. So they were both David’s wives. ⁴⁴Saul’s daughter Michal was also David’s wife, but Saul had given her to Paltiel son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 25:1–26:25

Situation

As an outcast David lived by his wits in order to evade death at the hands of King Saul. During this time, David went to Nabal (a rich man he had aided in

the past) for help. Nabal insulted David and his men, but God constrained David from killing Nabal. David then had an opportunity for the second time to kill Saul but respected his position instead.

Observation

Saul finally recognized that David was destined to be the leader of Israel. Apparently Saul never again tried to interfere with God's will for the kingdom (see [27:4](#)).

Inspiration

What do you do when people mistreat you or those you love? Does the fire of anger boil within you, with leaping flames consuming your emotions? Or do you reach somewhere, to some source of cool water and pull out a bucket of mercy—to free yourself? Is there any emotion that imprisons the soul more than the unwillingness to forgive?

Don't get on the roller coaster of resentment and anger. You be the one who says, "Yes, he mistreated me, but I am going to be like Christ. I'll be the one who says, 'Forgive them, Father, they don't know what they're doing.'"

The first step toward forgiveness is to see the other person as a human being, not as a source of hurt. That's how God treated us with mercy—he became one of us, he felt as we feel, he understood our frustrations. And as a result, when he hung on the cross, he could look at those crucifying him and ask God to forgive them.

When you forgive someone, you are as close to God as you will ever be, because in that forgiveness

you are demonstrating the very heart of God, the merciful King. If you want to understand God, if you want to draw closer to him, then forgive someone today. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, “Forgiveness”)

Application

Because of our inherent self-centeredness, it is never easy to forgive some people, especially those who have hurt us deeply. To keep yourself from allowing a root of bitterness to take hold, forgive those who have hurt you. Ask the Lord to impress on you the grace he bestowed on you at Calvary.

Exploration

Forgiveness—[Matthew 6:9–15](#); [2 Corinthians 2:10–11](#); [Ephesians 4:31–32](#); [Colossians 3:12–14](#).

David Shames Saul Again

The people of Ziph went to Saul at Gibeah and said to him, “David is hiding on the hill of Hakilah opposite Jeshimon.”

²So Saul went down to the Desert of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to look for David there. ³Saul made his camp beside the road on the hill of Hakilah opposite Jeshimon, but David stayed in the desert. When he heard Saul had followed him, ⁴he sent out spies and learned for certain that Saul had come to Hakilah.

⁵Then David went to the place where Saul had camped. He saw where Saul and Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul’s army, were sleeping. Saul was sleeping in the middle of the camp with all the army around him.

⁶David asked Ahimelech the Hittite and Abishai son of Zeruiah, Joab’s brother, “Who will go down into Saul’s camp with me?”

Abishai answered, “I’ll go with you.”

⁷So that night David and Abishai went into Saul’s camp. Saul was asleep in the middle of the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the army were sleeping around Saul. ⁸Abishai said to David, “Today God has handed your enemy over to you. Let me pin Saul to the ground with my spear. I’ll only have to do it once. I won’t need to hit him twice.”

⁹But David said to Abishai, “Don’t kill Saul! No one can harm the Lord’s appointed king and still be innocent! ¹⁰As surely as the Lord lives, the Lord himself will punish Saul.

Maybe Saul will die naturally, or maybe he will go into battle and be killed. ¹¹But may the Lord keep me from harming his appointed king! Take the spear and water jug that are near Saul's head. Then let's go."

¹²So David took the spear and water jug that were near Saul's head, and they left. No one saw them or knew about it or woke up, because the Lord had put them sound asleep.

¹³David crossed over to the other side of the hill and stood on top of the mountain far from Saul's camp. They were a long way away from each other. ¹⁴David shouted to the army and to Abner son of Ner, "Won't you answer me, Abner?"

Abner answered, "Who is calling for the king? Who are you?"

¹⁵David said, "You're the greatest man in Israel. Isn't that true? Why didn't you guard your master the king? Someone came into your camp to kill your master the king! ¹⁶You have not done well. As surely as the Lord lives, you and your men should die. You haven't guarded your master, the Lord's appointed king. Look! Where are the king's spear and water jug that were near his head?"

¹⁷Saul knew David's voice. He said, "Is that your voice, David my son?"

David answered, "Yes, it is, my master and king." ¹⁸David also said, "Why are you chasing me, my master? What wrong have I done? What evil am I guilty of? ¹⁹My master and king, listen to me. If the Lord made you angry with me, let him accept an offering. But if people did it, may the Lord curse them! They have made me leave the land the Lord gave me. They have told me, 'Go and serve other gods.' ²⁰Now don't let me die far away from the Lord's presence. The king of Israel has come out

looking for a flea! You're just hunting a bird in the mountains!"

²¹Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Today you respected my life, so I will not try to hurt you. I have been very stupid and foolish."

²²David answered, "Here is your spear. Let one of your young men come here and get it. ²³The Lord rewards us for the things we do right and for our loyalty to him. The Lord handed you over to me today, but I wouldn't harm the Lord's appointed king. ²⁴As I respected your life today, may the Lord also respect my life and save me from all trouble."

²⁵Then Saul said to David, "You are blessed, my son David. You will do great things and succeed."

So David went on his way, and Saul went back home.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 27:1-12

Situation

David knew that his life was in jeopardy as long as Saul was alive. David's problems drove him so far from his homeland and heritage that he resorted to an alliance with the Philistine king who allowed him to survive as an outlaw.

Observation

Troubles and conflicts sometimes cause us to make accommodations we normally would find unacceptable.

Inspiration

Jesus said that out of the nature of the heart a man speaks. There's nothing like a good thump to reveal the nature of a heart. The true character of a person is seen not in momentary heroics, but in the thump-packed humdrum of day-to-day living....

Begin by thanking God for thumps. I don't mean a halfhearted thank you. I mean a "rejoicing, jumping for joy" thank you from the bottom of your heart. Chances are that God is doing the thumping. And he's doing it for your own good. So every thump is a reminder that God is molding you....

Beware of "thump-slump" times. Know your pressure periods. For me, Mondays are infamous for causing thump-slumps. Fridays can be just as bad. For all of us there are times during the week that we can anticipate an unusual amount of thumping. The

best way to handle thump-slump times? Bolster yourself with extra prayer and don't give up.

Remember, no thump is disastrous. All thumps work for good if we are living for and obeying God. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

The problems and obstacles we encounter in life are meant to cultivate faith, wisdom, patience, and confidence. We can profit from facing such obstacles as we allow God to shape our character through them. What events today could bring obstacles into your path? Ask God to increase your faith through those difficulties.

Exploration

Trials—[Job 23:10](#); [Psalm 94:12](#); [Proverbs 3:11](#); [Romans 5:3](#); [1 Peter 1:7](#).

David Lives with the Philistines

But David thought to himself, “Saul will catch me someday. The best thing I can do is escape to the land of the Philistines. Then he will give up looking for me in Israel, and I can get away from him.”

²So David and his six hundred men left Israel and went to Achish son of Maach, king of Gath. ³David, his men, and their families made their home in Gath with Achish. David had his two wives with him—Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, the widow of Nabal. ⁴When Saul heard that David had run away to Gath, he stopped looking for him.

New Life in Christ

Extending Grace to Others

When the church in Rome was debating whether to eat meat offered to idols, did Paul tell them to start two churches? One for the meat-eaters and one for the non-meat-eaters? No, on the contrary, he urged, “Christ accepted you, so you should accept each other, which will bring glory to God” ([Romans 15:7](#)).

“No one can harm the Lord’s appointed king and still be innocent!”—[1 Samuel 26:9](#)

Is God asking us to do anything more than what he has already done? Hasn’t he gone a long way in

accepting us? If God can tolerate my mistakes, can't I tolerate the mistakes of others? If God allows me, with my foibles and failures, to call him Father, shouldn't I extend the same grace to others? In fact, who can offer grace except those secure in the grip of grace? If God doesn't demand perfection, should I? ...

God's ship is a grand vessel. Just as a ship has many rooms, so God's kingdom has room for many opinions. But just as a ship has one deck, God's kingdom has a common ground: the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Will you pray with me for the day when Jesus' prayer is answered?

Will you pray with me for the day when the world is won because the church is one?

Will you pray with me for the day when we come out of our rooms and stand together to salute our captain? When clusters cease and the chorus commences?

Jesus' final prayer before the cross was for the unity of his followers. Would he offer a prayer that couldn't be answered? I don't think so either. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Question: Is there anyone in your church, family, or circle of friends to whom you need to show grace?

For more on ["New Life in Christ."](#)

⁵Then David said to Achish, “If you are pleased with me, give me a place in one of the country towns where I can live. I don’t need to live in the royal city with you.”

⁶That day Achish gave David the town of Ziklag, and Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah ever since. ⁷David lived in the Philistine land a year and four months.

⁸David and his men raided the people of Geshur, Girzi, and Amalek. (These people had lived for a long time in the land that reached to Shur and Egypt.) ⁹When David fought them, he killed all the men and women and took their sheep, cattle, donkeys, camels, and clothes. Then he returned to Achish.

¹⁰Achish would ask David, “Where did you go raiding today?” And David would tell him that he had gone to the southern part of Judah, or Jerahmeel, or to the land of the Kenites. ¹¹David never brought a man or woman alive to Gath. He thought, “If we bring people alive, they may tell Achish, ‘This is what David really did.’” David did this all the time he lived in the Philistine land. ¹²So Achish trusted David and said to himself, “David’s own people, the Israelites, now hate him very much. He will serve me forever.”

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 28:1–25

Situation

Saul discovered the Philistines massing for an attack. Unsure of his ability to lead the nation to victory, Saul turned to the witch of Endor for help.

Observation

Sometimes, in a struggle to solve our problems, we are tempted to turn away from God's help. Saul's life demonstrated the disastrous results of seeking help by means of spiritual forces other than God. The Holy Spirit had long abandoned him.

Inspiration

And, for some, the loss of mystery has led to the loss of majesty. The more we know, the less we believe. Strange, don't you think? Knowledge of the workings shouldn't negate wonder. Knowledge should stir wonder. Who has more reason to worship than the astronomer who has seen the stars? Than the surgeon who has held a heart? Than the oceanographer who has pondered the depths? The more we know, the more we should be amazed.

Ironically, the more we know, the less we worship. We are more impressed with our discovery of the light switch than with the one who invented electricity. Call it cricket-brained logic. Rather than worship the Creator, we worship the creation (see [Romans 1:25](#)).

No wonder there is no wonder. We've figured it

all out.

One of the most popular attractions at Disney World is the Jungle Cruise. People will spend forty-five minutes waiting in the Florida heat for the chance to board the boat and wind through snake-infested forests. They come for the thrills. You never know when a native will jump out of the trees or a crocodile will peek out of the water. The waterfalls drench you, the rainbow inspires you, and the baby elephants playing in the water amuse you.

It's quite a trip—the first few times. But after four or five runs down the river, it begins to lose its zest. I should know. During the three years I lived in Miami, Florida, I made nearly twenty trips to Orlando. I was single and owned a van and was a sucker for anybody who wanted to spend a day at the Magic Kingdom. By the eighth or ninth trip I could tell you the names of the guides and the jokes they told.

A couple of times I actually dozed off on the journey. The trail had lost its secrets. Ever wonder why people sleep in on Sunday mornings (whether in the bed or in the sanctuary)? Now you know. They've seen it all. Why get excited? They know it all. There is nothing sacred. The holy becomes humdrum. Rather than dashing into life like kids to the park, we doze through our days like commuters on a train.

Can you see why people become “full of sexual sin, using their bodies wrongly with each other”? ([Romans 1:24](#)). You've got to get excitement somewhere.

According to [Romans 1](#), godlessness is a bad swap. In living for today, the hut-building hedonist destroys his hope of living in a castle tomorrow.

What was true in Paul's day is still true in ours, and we would do well to heed his warning. Otherwise, what is to keep us from destroying ourselves? If there is no standard in this life, no purpose to this life, and nothing sacred about this life, what is to keep us from doing whatever we want? (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Application

Ask yourself if you've allowed anything in your life to take the place of God. Do you find that God is not "exciting enough"? Do you prefer to go elsewhere to try to find answers to your problems? Admit the reality of spiritual warfare. Recognize that only in the true God can you find inner joy and peace.

Exploration

Spiritual Warfare—[Matthew 6:13](#); [2 Corinthians 4:3–4](#); [Ephesians 6:10–20](#); [Colossians 2:13–15](#); [1 Timothy 4:1–2](#); [Hebrews 2:14–15](#); [James 4:7–8](#).

Saul and the Witch of Endor

Later, the Philistines gathered their armies to fight against Israel. Achish said to David, “You understand that you and your men must join my army.”

²David answered, “You will see for yourself what I, your servant, can do!”

Achish said, “Fine, I’ll make you my permanent bodyguard.”

³Now Samuel was dead, and all the Israelites had shown their sadness for him. They had buried Samuel in his hometown of Ramah.

And Saul had forced out the mediums and fortune-tellers from the land.

⁴The Philistines came together and made camp at Shunem. Saul gathered all the Israelites and made camp at Gilboa. ⁵When he saw the Philistine army, he was afraid, and his heart pounded with fear. ⁶He prayed to the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him through dreams, Urim, or prophets. ⁷Then Saul said to his servants, “Find me a woman who is a medium so I may go and ask her what will happen.”

His servants answered, “There is a medium in Endor.”

⁸Then Saul put on other clothes to disguise himself, and at night he and two of his men went to see the woman. Saul said to her, “Talk to a spirit for me. Bring up the person I name.”

⁹But the woman said to him, “Surely you know what Saul

has done. He has forced the mediums and fortune-tellers from the land. You are trying to trap me and get me killed.”

¹⁰Saul made a promise to the woman in the name of the Lord. He said, “As surely as the Lord lives, you won’t be punished for this.”

¹¹The woman asked, “Whom do you want me to bring up?”
He answered, “Bring up Samuel.”

¹²When the woman saw Samuel, she screamed. She said, “Why have you tricked me? You are Saul!”

¹³The king said to the woman, “Don’t be afraid! What do you see?”

The woman said, “I see a spirit coming up out of the ground.”

¹⁴Saul asked, “What does he look like?”

The woman answered, “An old man wearing a coat is coming up.”

Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed facedown on the ground.

¹⁵Samuel asked Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?”

Saul said, “I am greatly troubled. The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has left me. He won’t answer me anymore, either by prophets or in dreams. That’s why I called for you. Tell me what to do.”

¹⁶Samuel said, “The Lord has left you and has become your enemy. So why do you call on me? ¹⁷He has done what he said he would do—the things he said through me. He has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors, David. ¹⁸You did not obey the Lord; you did not show the Amalekites how angry he was with them. That’s why

he has done this to you today. ¹⁹The Lord will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines. Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines.”

²⁰Saul quickly fell flat on the ground and was afraid of what Samuel had said. He was also very weak because he had eaten nothing all that day and night.

²¹Then the woman came to Saul and saw that he was really frightened. She said, “Look, I, your servant, have obeyed you. I have risked my life and done what you told me to do. ²²Now please listen to me. Let me give you some food so you may eat and have enough strength to go on your way.”

²³But Saul refused, saying, “I won’t eat.”

His servants joined the woman in asking him to eat, and he listened to them. So he got up from the ground and sat on the bed.

²⁴At the house the woman had a fat calf, which she quickly killed. She took some flour and mixed dough with her hands. Then she baked some bread without yeast. ²⁵She put the food before them, and they ate. That same night they got up and left.

David Goes Back to Ziklag

The Philistines gathered all their soldiers at Aphek. Israel camped by the spring at Jezreel.²The Philistine kings were marching with their groups of a hundred and a thousand men. David and his men were marching behind Achish.³The Philistine commanders asked, “What are these Hebrews doing here?”

Achish told them, “This is David. He served Saul king of Israel, but he has been with me for over a year now. I have found nothing wrong in David since the time he left Saul.”

⁴But the Philistine commanders were angry with Achish and said, “Send David back to the city you gave him. He cannot go with us into battle. If he does, we’ll have an enemy in our own camp. He could please his king by killing our own men.”⁵David is the one the Israelites dance and sing about, saying:

‘Saul has killed thousands of his enemies,
but David has killed tens of thousands.’”

⁶So Achish called David and said to him, “As surely as the Lord lives, you are loyal. I would be pleased to have you serve in my army. Since the day you came to me, I have found no wrong in you. But the other kings don’t trust you.”⁷Go back in peace. Don’t do anything to displease the Philistine kings.”

⁸David asked, “What wrong have I done? What evil have you found in me from the day I came to you until now? Why can’t I go fight your enemies, my lord and king?”

⁹Achish answered, “I know you are as good as an angel

from God. But the Philistine commanders have said, ‘David must not go with us into battle.’ ¹⁰Early in the morning you and your master’s servants should leave. Get up as soon as it is light and go.”

¹¹So David and his men got up early in the morning and went back to the country of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 29:1–11

Situation

David and his refugee warriors prepared to fight with the Philistines against Saul’s army. But the Philistines feared David would turn traitor against them, and they refused his assistance.

Observation

God helps us avoid situations that would divide our loyalties and break our hearts.

Inspiration

“Give me a word picture to describe a relative in your life who really bugs you.”...

“Tar baby in Brer Rabbit,” someone responded. Everyone understood the reference except me. I didn’t remember the story of Brer Rabbit. I asked for the short version. Wily Fox played a trick on Brer Rabbit. The fox made a doll out of tar and stuck it on the side of the road. When Rabbit saw the tar baby, he thought it was a person and stopped to visit.

It was a one-sided conversation. The tar baby’s silence bothered the rabbit... So in his frustration he

hit the tar baby and stuck to it. He hit the tar baby again with the other hand and, you guessed it, the other hand got stuck.

“That’s how we are with difficult relatives,” my fable-using friend explained. “We’re stuck to someone we can’t communicate with.”...

You’ve probably got a tar baby in your life, someone you can’t talk to and can’t walk away from. A mother who whines, an uncle who slurps his soup, or a sister who flaunts her figure....

Tar-baby relationships—stuck together but falling apart....

I can’t assure you that your family will ever give you the blessing you seek, but I know God will. Let God give you what your family doesn’t. If your earthly father doesn’t affirm you, then let your heavenly Father take his place... . (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

God knows the pain of conflict with people close to us.

Exploration

God and Conflict—[Genesis 13:5–9](#); [Luke 12:51–53](#); [John 14:27–29](#); [Acts 15:37–39](#); [Ephesians 4:25–32](#).

David's War with the Amalekites

On the third day, when David and his men arrived at Ziklag, he found that the Amalekites had raided southern Judah and Ziklag, attacking Ziklag and burning it.² They captured the women and everyone, young and old, but they had not killed anyone. They had only taken them away.

³When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found the town had been burned and their wives, sons, and daughters had been taken as prisoners.⁴ Then David and his army cried loudly until they were too weak to cry anymore.⁵ David's two wives had also been taken—Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal from Carmel.⁶ The men in the army were threatening to kill David with stones, which greatly upset David. Each man was sad and angry because his sons and daughters had been captured, but David found strength in the Lord his God.⁷ David said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring me the holy vest."

⁸Then David asked the Lord, "Should I chase the people who took our families? Will I catch them?"

The Lord answered, "Chase them. You will catch them, and you will succeed in saving your families."

⁹David and the six hundred men with him came to the Besor Ravine, where some of the men stayed.¹⁰ David and four hundred men kept up the chase. The other two hundred men stayed behind because they were too tired to cross the ravine.

¹¹They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David. They gave the Egyptian some water to drink and some

food to eat. ¹²And they gave him a piece of a fig cake and two clusters of raisins. Then he felt better, because he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and nights.

¹³David asked him, “Who is your master? Where do you come from?”

He answered, “I’m an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite. Three days ago my master left me, because I was sick. ¹⁴We had raided the southern area of the Kerethites, the land of Judah, and the southern area of Caleb. We burned Ziklag, as well.”

¹⁵David asked him, “Can you lead me to the people who took our families?”

He answered, “Yes, if you promise me before God that you won’t kill me or give me back to my master. Then I will take you to them.”

¹⁶So the Egyptian led David to the Amalekites. They were lying around on the ground, eating and drinking and celebrating with the things they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah. ¹⁷David fought them from sunset until the evening of the next day. None of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode off on their camels. ¹⁸David got his two wives back and everything the Amalekites had taken. ¹⁹Nothing was missing. David brought back everyone, young and old, sons and daughters. He recovered the valuable things and everything the Amalekites had taken. ²⁰David took all the sheep and cattle, and his men made these animals go in front, saying, “They are David’s prize.”

²¹Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too tired to follow him, who had stayed at the Besor Ravine. They came out to meet David and the people with him. When

he came near, David greeted the men at the ravine.

²²But the evil men and troublemakers among those who followed David said, “Since these two hundred men didn’t go with us, we shouldn’t give them any of the things we recovered. Just let each man take his wife and children and go.”

²³David answered, “No, my brothers. Don’t do that after what the Lord has given us. He has protected us and given us the enemy who attacked us. ²⁴Who will listen to what you say? The share will be the same for the one who stayed with the supplies as for the one who went into battle. All will share alike.” ²⁵David made this an order and rule for Israel, which continues even today.

²⁶When David arrived in Ziklag, he sent some of the things he had taken from the Amalekites to his friends, the leaders of Judah. He said, “Here is a present for you from the things we took from the Lord’s enemies.”

²⁷David also sent some things to the leaders in Bethel, Ramoth in the southern part of Judah, Jattir, ²⁸Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa, ²⁹Racal, the cities of the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites, ³⁰Hormah, Bor Ashan, Athach, ³¹Hebron, and to the people in all the other places where he and his men had been.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 30:1–31:13

Situation

When his own village was raided by the Amalekites, David pursued the raiders. But first he averted a mutiny by his warriors and sought God’s wisdom. After destroying the Amalekite band, David

brought back the captured women, children, and plunder. He divided the plunder equally among those who had fought and those who had stayed behind. Elsewhere, Saul killed himself in a losing battle with the Philistines, who hung his headless body on a city wall as an insult to the defeated Israelites.

Observation

In times of trouble, David turned to God for wisdom and help, while Saul consistently turned away from God, even at his death.

Inspiration

You came home cranky because a deadline got moved up. She came home grumpy because the day care forgot to give your five-year-old her throat medicine. Each of you was wanting a little sympathy from the other, but neither got any. So there you sit at the dinner table—cranky and grumpy—with little Emily. Emily folds her hands to pray (as she has been taught), and the two of you bow your heads (but not your hearts) and listen. From where this prayer comes, God only knows.

“God, it’s Emily. How are you? I’m fine, thank you. Mom and Dad are mad. I don’t know why. We’ve got birds and toys and mash potatoes and each other. Maybe you can get them to stop being mad? Please do, or it’s just gonna be you and me having any fun tonight. Amen.”

The prayer is answered before it’s finished, you both look up in the middle and laugh at the end and shake your heads and say you’re sorry. And you both thank God for the little voice who reminded you

about what matters.

That's what "lovebursts" do ... Lovebursts. Spontaneous affection. Tender moments of radiant love. Ignited devotion. Explosions of tenderness ... They remind you about what matters. A telegram delivered to the back door of the familiar, telling you to treasure the treasure you've got while you've got it. A whisper from an angel, or someone who sounds like one, reminding you that what you have is greater than what you want and that what is urgent is not always what matters. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

How do you react to problems and pressures? Ask God to help you lighten up with laughter, forgiveness, and trust—that God will give you all the energy you need.

Exploration

Listening to God—[Exodus 9:12](#); [1 Kings 19:11–13](#); [Proverbs 1:20–28](#); [Mark 4:9](#); [Hebrews 2:1–3](#).

The Death of Saul

The Philistines fought against Israel, and the Israelites ran away from them. Many Israelites were killed on Mount Gilboa.

²The Philistines fought hard against Saul and his sons, killing his sons Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malki-Shua. ³The fighting was heavy around Saul. The archers shot him, and he was badly wounded. ⁴He said to the officer who carried his armor, "Pull out your sword and kill me. Then those uncircumcised men won't make fun of me and kill me." But Saul's officer refused, because he was afraid. So Saul took his own sword and threw himself on it. ⁵When the officer saw that Saul was dead, he threw himself on his own sword, and he died with Saul. ⁶So Saul, his three sons, and the officer who carried his armor died together that day.

⁷When the Israelites who lived across the Jezreel Valley and those who lived across the Jordan River saw how the Israelite army had run away, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they left their cities and ran away. Then the Philistines came and lived there.

⁸The next day when the Philistines came to take all the valuable things from the dead soldiers, they found Saul and his three sons dead on Mount Gilboa. ⁹They cut off Saul's head and took off his armor. Then they sent messengers through all the land of the Philistines to tell the news in the temple of their idols and to their people. ¹⁰They put Saul's armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and hung his body on the wall of Beth Shan.

¹¹When the people living in Jabesh Gilead heard what the

Philistines had done to Saul,¹²the brave men of Jabesh marched all night and came to Beth Shan. They removed the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and brought them to Jabesh. There they burned the bodies.¹³They took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh. Then the people of Jabesh gave up eating for seven days.

cut ... razor People who made special promises not to cut their hair or to drink wine or beer were called Nazirites. These people gave a specific time in their lives, or sometimes their entire lives, to the Lord. See [Numbers 6:1-5](#).

Samuel This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “God heard.”

Dan to Beersheba Dan was the city farthest north in Israel, and Beersheba was the city farthest south. So this means all the people of Israel.

Ichabod This name means “no glory.”

Ebenezer This name means “stone of help.”

roof In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer. See [Deuteronomy 22:8](#).

Gideon Also called Jerub-Baal.

time ... harvest This was a dry time in the summer when no rains fell.

Saul ... years This is how the verse is worded in some early Greek copies. The Hebrew is not clear here.

three thousand Some Greek copies say three thousand. The Hebrew copies say thirty thousand.

holy bread This was the bread that showed the people were in the presence of God. Normally only the priests ate this bread.

Maon Some early Greek copies say “Maon.” The Hebrew copies say “Paran.”

Maon Some early Greek copies say “Maon.” The Hebrew copies say “Paran.”

The Book of 2 Samuel

Introduction

King David.

In the first ten chapters of 2 Samuel he can do no wrong. He is never defeated in battle. Never wrong in judgment. He begins his reign in prayer ([2:1](#)) and continues in faith. Enemies are subdued, the nation is unified, the capitol secured, and the boundary extends from six thousand to sixty thousand square miles.

But that is the first ten chapters.

Chapter [11](#) is a hinge on which hangs the cellar door. David opens it, and down he falls. By the time he lands on the cellar floor, he is bruised, confused, and staring into the darkness.

You know what happened. On a lazy afternoon his wandering eyes found a forbidden maiden. Testosterone surged and evil urged so he summoned her, slept with her, and then sent her home.

A rendezvous. So fast. So impulsive. So passionate. So pregnant.

Rather than repent, he connives and lies and leaves a soldier dead and a widow weeping and all of us wondering: Is this the same David? Is this the shepherd? Is this the boy of faith? The man of prayer? Is this the man after God's own heart?

With time, confession comes and forgiveness is given, but the scars remain. Nathan's prophecy proves true: the sword never departed from David's house ([12:10](#)). Bloodshed stained his home from then on.

Some of the final words written about David are some of the saddest, "King David was very old, and although his servants

covered him with blankets, he could not keep warm” ([1 Kings 1:1](#)).

Mark it down. Compromise chills the soul.

If only David hadn’t opened that cellar door.

About This Book

Author:

Unknown, though some say Samuel, Nathan, and Gad

Date Written:

Possibly 1000–500 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- Though David had been mistreated by Saul, he mourned Saul’s passing.
- David was a man after God’s own heart, a man of faith, even though he made mistakes.
- Among the good things David did, he returned the Ark of the Agreement to Jerusalem.
- Among the mistakes David made was his affair with Bathsheba and the resulting family discord.

Key Verse:

“Your family and your kingdom will continue always before me. Your throne will last forever” ([2 Samuel 7:16](#)).

Contents:

1. David's Kingdom [1:1–10:19](#)
2. David and Bathsheba [11:1–18:33](#)
3. David's Spiritual Restoration and Later Reign
[19:1–24:25](#)

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 1:1–27

Situation

After hearing of the report of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, David and his men wept and mourned.

Observation

David's lament showed his deep feelings for both men. He still showed respect for Saul, and he displayed his love for Jonathan.

Inspiration

In God's plan every life is long enough and every death is timely. And though you and I might wish for a longer life, God knows better.

And—this is important—though you and I may wish a longer life for our loved ones, they don't. Ironically, the first to accept God's decision of death is the one who dies.

While we are shaking heads in disbelief, they are lifting hands in worship. While we are mourning at a grave, they are marveling at heaven. While we are questioning God, they are praising God.

But, Max, what of those who die with no faith? My husband never prayed. My grandpa never worshiped. My mother never opened a Bible, much less her heart. What about the one who never believed?

How do we know he didn't?

Who among us is privy to a person's final thoughts? Who among us knows what transpires in

those final moments? Are you sure no prayer was offered? Eternity can bend the proudest knees. Could a person stare into the yawning canyon of death without whispering a plea for mercy? And could our God, who is partial to the humble, resist it?

He couldn't on Calvary. The confession of the thief on the cross was both a first and final one. But Christ heard it. Christ received it. Maybe you never heard your loved one confess Christ, but who's to say Christ didn't?

We don't know the final thoughts of a dying soul, but we know this. We know our God is a good God. "He does not want anyone to be lost, but he wants all people to change their hearts and lives" ([2 Peter 3:9](#)). He wants your loved one in heaven more than you do. And he usually gets what he wants.

You know what else God wants? He wants you to face your sorrow. Denial and dismissal are not a part of God's grief therapy.

David faced his. When he learned of the death of Saul and Jonathan, David and the entire army tore their clothing, wept aloud, and fasted until sunset. His lament was intense and public. "May there be no dew or rain on the mountains of Gilboa," he mourned, "and may their fields produce no grain... We loved Saul and Jonathan and enjoyed them while they lived. They are together even in death. They were faster than eagles. They were stronger than lions" ([2 Samuel 1:21-23](#)).

David not only sang this dirge, he "ordered that the people of Judah be taught this song" (v. [18](#)).

Death was not soft-pedaled or passed over. Face it, fight it, question it, or condemn it, but don't deny it... Don't heed, but do forgive, those who urge you not to.

God will lead you through, not around, the valley of the shadow of death. And, by the way, aren't you glad it's just a shadow? (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

Application

Are you unable to face the death of someone? Face your sorrow head-on, and ask the Lord to provide you with inner peace.

Exploration

Sorrow—[Isaiah 35:10](#); [John 16:19–20](#); [2 Corinthians 7:8–10](#); [Revelation 21:3–4](#).

David Learns About Saul's Death

Now Saul was dead. After David had defeated the Amalekites, he returned to Ziklag and stayed there two days. ²On the third day a young man from Saul's camp came to Ziklag. To show his sadness, his clothes were torn and he had dirt on his head. He came and bowed facedown on the ground before David.

³David asked him, "Where did you come from?"

The man answered, "I escaped from the Israelite camp."

⁴David asked him, "What happened? Please tell me!"

The man answered, "The people have run away from the battle, and many of them have fallen and are dead. Saul and his son Jonathan are dead also."

⁵David asked him, "How do you know Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?"

⁶The young man answered, "I happened to be on Mount Gilboa. There I saw Saul leaning on his spear. The Philistine chariots and the men riding in them were coming closer to Saul. ⁷When he looked back and saw me, he called to me. I answered him, 'Here I am!'

⁸"Then Saul asked me, 'Who are you?'

"I told him, 'I am an Amalekite.'

⁹"Then Saul said to me, 'Please come here and kill me. I am badly hurt and am almost dead already.'

¹⁰"So I went over and killed him. He had been hurt so badly I knew he couldn't live. Then I took the crown from his head

and the bracelet from his arm, and I have brought them here to you, my master.”

¹¹Then David tore his clothes to show his sorrow, and all the men with him did also. ¹²They were very sad and cried and did not eat until evening. They cried for Saul and his son Jonathan and for all the people of the Lord and for all the Israelites who had died in the battle.

David Orders the Amalekite Killed

¹³David asked the young man who brought the report, “Where are you from?”

The young man answered, “I am the son of a foreigner, an Amalekite.”

¹⁴David asked him, “Why were you not afraid to kill the Lord’s appointed king?”

¹⁵Then David called one of his men and told him, “Go! Kill the Amalekite!” So the Israelite killed him. ¹⁶David had said to the Amalekite, “You are responsible for your own death. You confessed by saying, ‘I have killed the Lord’s appointed king.’”

David’s Song About Saul and Jonathan

¹⁷David sang a funeral song about Saul and his son Jonathan, ¹⁸and he ordered that the people of Judah be taught this song. It is called “The Bow,” and it is written in the Book of Jashar:

¹⁹“Israel, your leaders have been killed on the hills.
How the mighty have fallen in battle!

²⁰Don't tell it in Gath.

Don't announce it in the streets of Ashkelon.

If you do, the Philistine women will be happy.

The daughters of the Philistines will rejoice.

²¹“May there be no dew or rain on the mountains of Gilboa,

and may their fields produce no grain,

because there the mighty warrior's shield was dishonored.

Saul's shield will no longer be rubbed with oil.

²²Jonathan's bow did not fail

to kill many soldiers.

Saul's sword did not fail

to wound many strong men.

²³“We loved Saul and Jonathan

and enjoyed them while they lived.

They are together even in death.

They were faster than eagles.

They were stronger than lions.

²⁴“You daughters of Israel, cry for Saul.

Saul clothed you with red dresses

and put gold decorations on them.

²⁵“How the mighty have fallen in battle!

Jonathan is dead on Gilboa's hills.

²⁶I cry for you, my brother Jonathan.

I enjoyed your friendship so much.

Your love to me was wonderful,

better than the love of women.

²⁷“How the mighty have fallen!
The weapons of war are gone.”

David Is Made King of Judah

Later, David prayed to the Lord, saying, “Should I go up to any of the cities of Judah?”

The Lord said to David, “Go.”

David asked, “Where should I go?”

The Lord answered, “To Hebron.”

²So David went up to Hebron with his two wives: Ahinoam from Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal from Carmel.

³David also brought his men and their families, and they all made their homes in the cities of Hebron. ⁴Then the men of Judah came to Hebron and appointed David king over Judah.

They told David that the men of Jabesh Gilead had buried Saul. ⁵So David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh Gilead and said to them, “The Lord bless you. You have shown loyalty to your master Saul by burying him. ⁶May the Lord now be loyal and true to you. I will also treat you well because you have done this. ⁷Now be strong and brave. Saul your master is dead, and the people of Judah have appointed me their king.”

War Between Judah and Israel

⁸Abner son of Ner was the commander of Saul’s army. Abner took Saul’s son Ish-Bosheth to Mahanaim ⁹and made him king of Gilead, Ashuri, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, and all Israel.

¹⁰Saul’s son Ish-Bosheth was forty years old when he became king over Israel, and he ruled two years. But the people of Judah followed David. ¹¹David was king in Hebron for seven

years and six months.

¹²Abner son of Ner and the servants of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul left Mahanaim and went to Gibeon. ¹³Joab son of Zeruiah and David's men also went there and met Abner and Ish-Bosheth's men at the pool of Gibeon. Abner's group sat on one side of the pool; Joab's group sat on the other.

¹⁴Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men have a contest here."

Joab said, "Yes, let them have a contest."

¹⁵Then the men got up and were counted—twelve from the people of Benjamin for Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, and twelve from David's men. ¹⁶Each man grabbed the one opposite him by the head and stabbed him in the side with a knife. So the men fell down together. For that reason, that place in Gibeon is called the Field of Knives. ¹⁷That day there was a terrible battle, and David's men defeated Abner and the Israelites.

Abner Kills Asahel

¹⁸Zeruiah's three sons, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel, were there. Now Asahel was a fast runner, as fast as a deer in the field.

¹⁹Asahel chased Abner, going straight toward him. ²⁰Abner looked back and asked, "Is that you, Asahel?"

Asahel said, "Yes, it is."

²¹Then Abner said to Asahel, "Turn to your right or left and catch one of the young men and take his armor." But Asahel refused to stop chasing him.

²²Abner again said to Asahel, "Stop chasing me! If you don't stop, I'll have to kill you! Then I won't be able to face your brother Joab again!"

²³But Asahel refused to stop chasing Abner. So using the back end of his spear, Abner stabbed Asahel in the stomach, and the spear came out of his back. Asahel died right there, and everyone stopped when they came to the place where Asahel's body lay.

²⁴But Joab and Abishai continued chasing Abner. As the sun was going down, they arrived at the hill of Ammah, near Giah on the way to the desert near Gibeon. ²⁵The men of Benjamin came to Abner, and all stood together at the top of the hill.

²⁶Abner shouted to Joab, "Must the sword kill forever? Surely you must know this will only end in sadness! Tell the people to stop chasing their own brothers!"

²⁷Then Joab said, "As surely as God lives, if you had not said anything, the people would have chased their brothers until morning." ²⁸Then Joab blew a trumpet, and his people stopped chasing the Israelites. They did not fight them anymore.

²⁹Abner and his men marched all night through the Jordan Valley. They crossed the Jordan River, and after marching all day, arrived at Mahanaim.

³⁰After he had stopped chasing Abner, Joab came back and gathered the people together. Asahel and nineteen of David's men were missing. ³¹But David's men had killed three hundred sixty Benjaminites who had followed Abner. ³²David's men took Asahel and buried him in the tomb of his father at Bethlehem. Then Joab and his men marched all night. The sun came up as they reached Hebron.

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 2:1–3:5

Situation

David mourned when he received the news of Saul's death. For years David had run from Saul; then he became king in Saul's place.

Observation

David courageously laid aside any hatred or hurt he felt toward his enemy, Saul. He waited for God to fulfill his promises.

Inspiration

That faith can and should grow is evident from the use of such phrases as “little faith” and “great faith.” Paul looked forward to the increase of the Corinthians' faith ([2 Corinthians 10:15](#))...

The book of Acts speaks of certain men as being “full of faith” ([Acts 6:5](#), [8](#), [11:24](#))... . All Christians experience the periodic gift of faith during times of extremity. But there is a vast difference between these intermittent acts of faith, “emergency rations,” as it were, and the continuing, day-by-day posture of faith. It is the difference between scraping the bottom of the barrel for a crumb of faith and a constant resting in an abundant supply. To one, faith is a last resort; to the other it is the first response.

(From *The Faith Crises* by Ronald Dunn)

Application

When was the last time you prayed, “*God, why don't you act?*” Develop trust in God's timing. Be confident that God's plans will be revealed. Until they are, let *faith* be your first resort.

Exploration

Faith—[Isaiah 29:22–24](#); [Psalm 24:4–6](#); [Proverbs 3:5](#); [Jeremiah 33:14–17](#); [Matthew 1:1–17](#); [Luke 20:41–44](#).

There was a long war between the people who supported Saul's family and those who supported David's family. The supporters of David's family became stronger and stronger, but the supporters of Saul's family became weaker and weaker.

David's Sons

²Sons were born to David at Hebron. The first was Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam from Jezreel. ³The second son was Kileab, whose mother was Abigail, the widow of Nabal from Carmel. The third son was Absalom, whose mother was Maacah daughter of Talmai, the king of Geshur. ⁴The fourth son was Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith. The fifth son was Shephatiah, whose mother was Abital. ⁵The sixth son was Ithream, whose mother was Eglah, David's wife. These sons were born to David at Hebron.

Life Lessons

[2 Samuel 3:6–4:12](#)

Situation

David welcomed Abner to join him in battle. All of his men did not share his enthusiasm, and Joab killed Abner. David sought justice for his murder.

Observation

David not only battled the house of Saul, but battled sin. Leaders can suffer from sinful decisions others make.

Inspiration

Real change is an inside job. You might alter

things a day or two with money and systems, but the heart of the matter is and always will be, the matter of the heart.

Allow me to get specific. Our problem is sin. Not finances. Not budgets. Not overcrowded prisons or drug dealers. Our problem is sin. We are in rebellion against our Creator. We are separated from our Father. We are cut off from the source of life. A new president or policy won't fix that. It can only be solved by God.

That's why the Bible uses drastic terms like *conversion*, *repentance*, and *lost and found*. Society may renovate, but only God re-creates.

Here is a practical exercise to put this truth into practice. The next time alarms go off in your world, ask yourself three questions.

1. Is there any unconfessed sin in my life? ...

2. Are there any unresolved conflicts in my world?

...

3. Are there any unsundered worries in my heart? ...

Alarms serve a purpose. They signal a problem. Sometimes the problem is out there. More often it's in here. So before you peek outside, take a good look inside. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

Application

Ask yourself the three questions in this lesson's "Inspiration." What alarms are sounding? Take a peek inside and turn those alarms off!

Exploration

Submission to God—[Deuteronomy 4:27–29](#); [1 Chronicles 16:11](#); [22:19](#); [Psalm 25:4](#); [27:4–14](#); [Romans 6:13–23](#); [12:1–2](#); [James 4:8](#).

If the Bible is called the Good Book, it's not because its people are. Blood runs as freely through the stories as the ink through the quills that penned them. —Max Lucado
(*He Chose the Nails*)

Abner Joins David

⁶During the war between the supporters of Saul's family and the supporters of David's family, Abner made himself a main leader among the supporters of Saul.

⁷Saul once had a slave woman named Rizpah, who was the daughter of Aiah. Ish-Bosheth said to Abner, "Why did you have sexual relations with my father's slave woman?"

⁸Abner was very angry because of what Ish-Bosheth said, and he replied, "I have been loyal to Saul and his family and friends! I didn't hand you over to David. I am not a traitor working for Judah! But now you are saying I did something wrong with this woman!" ⁹May God help me if I don't join David! I will make sure that what the Lord promised does happen! ¹⁰I will take the kingdom from the family of Saul and make David king of Israel and Judah, from [Dan to Beersheba](#)!"

¹¹Ish-Bosheth couldn't say anything to Abner, because he was afraid of him.

¹²Then Abner sent messengers to ask David, "Who is going to rule the land? Make an agreement with me, and I will help you unite all Israel."

¹³David answered, "Good! I will make an agreement with you, but I ask you one thing. I will not meet with you unless

you bring Saul's daughter Michal to me.”¹⁴ Then David sent messengers to Saul's son Ish-Bosheth, saying, “Give me my wife Michal. She was promised to me, and I killed a hundred Philistines to get her.”

¹⁵ So Ish-Bosheth sent men to take Michal from her husband Paltiel son of Laish. ¹⁶ Michal's husband went with her, crying as he followed her to Bahurim. But Abner said to Paltiel, “Go back home.” So he went home.

¹⁷ Abner sent this message to the older leaders of Israel: “You have been wanting to make David your king. ¹⁸ Now do it! The Lord said of David, ‘Through my servant David, I will save my people Israel from the Philistines and all their enemies.’”

¹⁹ Abner also said these things to the people of Benjamin. He then went to Hebron to tell David what the Benjaminites and Israel wanted to do. ²⁰ Abner came with twenty men to David at Hebron. There David prepared a feast for them. ²¹ Abner said to David, “My master and king, I will go and bring all the Israelites to you. Then they will make an agreement with you so you will rule over all Israel as you wanted.” So David let Abner go, and he left in peace.

Abner's Death

²² Just then Joab and David's men came from a battle, bringing many valuable things they had taken from the enemy. David had let Abner leave in peace, so he was not with David at Hebron. ²³ When Joab and all his army arrived at Hebron, the army said to Joab, “Abner son of Ner came to King David, and David let him leave in peace.”

²⁴ Joab came to the king and said, “What have you done?

Abner came to you. Why did you let him go? Now he's gone.
²⁵You know Abner son of Ner! He came to trick you! He came to learn about everything you are doing!"

²⁶After Joab left David, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the well of Sirah. But David did not know this. ²⁷When Abner arrived at Hebron, Joab took him aside into the gateway. He acted as though he wanted to talk with Abner in private, but Joab stabbed him in the stomach, and Abner died. Abner had killed Joab's brother Asahel, so Joab killed Abner to pay him back.

²⁸Later when David heard the news, he said, "My kingdom and I are innocent forever of the death of Abner son of Ner. The Lord knows this. ²⁹Joab and his family are responsible for this. May his family always have someone with sores or with a skin disease. May they always have someone who must lean on a crutch. May some of his family be killed in war. May they always have someone without food to eat."

³⁰(Joab and his brother Abishai killed Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel in the battle at Gibeon.)

³¹Then David said to Joab and to all the people with Joab, "Tear your clothes and put on rough cloth to show how sad you are. Cry for Abner." King David himself followed the body of Abner. ³²They buried Abner in Hebron, and David and all the people cried at Abner's grave.

³³King David sang this funeral song for Abner.

"Did Abner die like a fool?

³⁴His hands were not tied.

His feet were not in chains.

He fell at the hands of evil men."

Then all the people cried again for Abner. ³⁵They came to encourage David to eat while it was still day. But he made a promise, saying, “May God punish me terribly if I eat bread or anything else before the sun sets!”

³⁶All the people saw what happened, and they agreed with what the king was doing, just as they agreed with everything he did. ³⁷That day all the people of Judah and Israel understood that David did not order the killing of Abner son of Ner.

³⁸David said to his officers, “You know that a great man died today in Israel. ³⁹Even though I am the appointed king, I feel empty. These sons of Zeruiah are too much for me. May the Lord give them the punishment they should have.”

Ish-Bosheth's Death

When Ish-Bosheth son of Saul heard that Abner had died at Hebron, he was shocked and all Israel became frightened. ²Two men who were captains in Saul's army came to Ish-Bosheth. One was named Baanah, and the other was named Recab. They were the sons of Rimmon of Beeroth, who was a Benjaminite. (The town Beeroth belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. ³The people of Beeroth ran away to Gittaim, and they still live there as foreigners today.) ⁴(Saul's son Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both feet. He was five years old when the news came from Jezreel that Saul and Jonathan were dead. Mephibosheth's nurse had picked him up and run away. But as she hurried to leave, she dropped him, and now he was lame.)

⁵Recab and Baanah, sons of Rimmon from Beeroth, went to Ish-Bosheth's house in the afternoon while he was taking a nap. ⁶⁻⁷They went into the middle of the house as if to get some wheat. Ish-Bosheth was lying on his bed in his bedroom. Then Recab and Baanah stabbed him in the stomach, killed him, cut off his head, and took it with them. They escaped and traveled all night through the Jordan Valley. ⁸When they arrived at Hebron, they gave his head to David and said to the king, "Here is the head of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, your enemy. He tried to kill you! Today the Lord has paid back Saul and his family for what they did to you!"

⁹David answered Recab and his brother Baanah, the sons of Rimmon of Beeroth, "As surely as the Lord lives, he has saved me from all trouble! ¹⁰Once a man thought he was

bringing me good news. When he told me, ‘Saul is dead!’ I seized him and killed him at Ziklag. That was the reward I gave him for his news! ¹¹So even more I must put you evil men to death because you have killed an innocent man on his own bed in his own house!”

¹²So David commanded his men to kill Recab and Baanah. They cut off the hands and feet of Recab and Baanah and hung them over the pool of Hebron. Then they took Ish-Bosheth’s head and buried it in Abner’s tomb at Hebron.

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 5:1–6:23

Situation

At the beginning of David's reign, God enabled him to conquer Jerusalem and bring the Ark of God to this holy city. These accomplishments filled David with joy.

Observation

Through the high and low points of our lives, God graciously provides for our needs. As we experience this, our lives can be filled with joyful expressions of praise to him.

Inspiration

A heart filled with God's heart is free both to glorify and to enjoy God. There is no grimness in David's relationship with God. He could weep out his loneliness and fear to the Lord, but he could also dance with unrestrained fervor. When we love God with all our heart we can openly express our emotions to him, and then to others. He wants us to be real with him. When we are in the valley of despair or the mountain peaks of sublime joy, we can express it.

David's abandoned freedom to express his praise is contrasted with his wife Michal's reserve and contempt... Michal was like her father Saul. Her emotional energy was not guided by firm beliefs about God's sovereignty and grace. There was little in her mind about God's lovingkindness, and therefore, little capacity of emotional delight in him...

There are Michals in all our lives, people whose minds are starved for liberating truth about God and whose emotions are stunted by malnutrition of lively belief. The conviction of God's grace results in the expression of joy... . The tragedy of religion is that it produces more Michals than Davids... . A heart that has never felt God's presence in sorrow or pain will seldom express his delight in adoration and praise. (From *Lord of the Impossible* by Lloyd John Ogilvie)

Application

Keep a prayer journal. Be completely honest with God. Write down disappointments, then devote pages to successes.

Exploration

Joy—[1 Thessalonians 5:16–22](#). Unity—[Romans 15:5–6](#). Love—[Romans 12:9–21](#).

With God there are no accidents. Every incident is intended to bring us closer to him. —Max Lucado (*A Gentle Thunder*)

David Is Made King of Israel

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said to him, “Look, we are your own family. ²Even when Saul was king, you were the one who led Israel in battle. The Lord said to you, ‘You will be a shepherd for my people Israel. You will be their leader.’”

³So all the older leaders of Israel came to King David at Hebron, and he made an agreement with them in Hebron in the presence of the Lord. Then they poured oil on David to make him king over Israel.

⁴David was thirty years old when he became king, and he ruled forty years. ⁵He was king over Judah in Hebron for seven years and six months, and he was king over all Israel and Judah in Jerusalem for thirty-three years.

⁶When the king and his men went to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites who lived there, the Jebusites said to David, “You can’t get inside our city. Even the blind and the crippled can stop you.” They thought David could not enter their city. ⁷But David did take the city of Jerusalem with its strong walls, and it became the City of David.

⁸That day David said to his men, “To defeat the Jebusites you must go through the water tunnel. Then you can reach

those ‘crippled’ and ‘blind’ enemies. This is why people say, ‘The blind and the crippled may not enter the palace.’”

⁹So David lived in the strong, walled city and called it the City of David. David built more buildings around it, beginning where the land was filled in. He also built more buildings inside the city. ¹⁰He became stronger and stronger, because the Lord God All-Powerful was with him.

¹¹Hiram king of the city of Tyre sent messengers to David, along with cedar logs, carpenters, and stonecutters. They built a palace for David. ¹²Then David knew that the Lord really had made him king of Israel and that the Lord had made his kingdom great because the Lord loved his people Israel.

¹³After he came from Hebron, David took for himself more slave women and wives in Jerusalem. More sons and daughters were born to David. ¹⁴These are the names of the sons born to David in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, ¹⁵Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, ¹⁶Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

David Defeats the Philistines

¹⁷When the Philistines heard that David had been made king over Israel, all the Philistines went to look for him. But when David heard the news, he went down to the stronghold. ¹⁸The Philistines came and camped in the Valley of Rephaim. ¹⁹David asked the Lord, “Should I attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?”

The Lord said to David, “Go! I will certainly hand them over to you.”

²⁰So David went to Baal Perazim and defeated the

Philistines there. David said, “Like a flood of water, the Lord has broken through my enemies in front of me.” So David named the place [Baal Perazim](#).²¹ The Philistines left their idols behind at Baal Perazim, so David and his men carried them away.

²² Once again the Philistines came and camped at the Valley of Rephaim. ²³ When David prayed to the Lord, he answered, “Don’t attack the Philistines from the front. Instead, go around and attack them in front of the balsam trees.” ²⁴ When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, act quickly. I, the Lord, will have gone ahead of you to defeat the Philistine army.” ²⁵ So David did what the Lord commanded. He defeated the Philistines and chased them all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.

The Ark Is Brought to Jerusalem

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel—thirty thousand of them.² Then he and all his people went to [Baalah in Judah](#) to bring back the Ark of God. The Ark is called by the Name, the name of the Lord All-Powerful, whose throne is between the gold creatures with wings.³ They put the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of Abinadab's house on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, led the new cart⁴ which had the Ark of God on it. Ahio was walking in front of it.⁵ David and all the Israelites were celebrating in the presence of the Lord. They were playing wooden instruments: lyres, harps, tambourines, rattles, and cymbals.

⁶When David's men came to the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled. So Uzzah reached out to steady the Ark of God.⁷ The Lord was angry with Uzzah and killed him because of what he did. So Uzzah died there beside the Ark of God.⁸ David was angry because the Lord had killed Uzzah. Now that place is called the Punishment of Uzzah.

⁹David was afraid of the Lord that day, and he said, "How can the Ark of the Lord come to me now?"¹⁰ So David would not move the Ark of the Lord to be with him in Jerusalem. Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-Edom, a man from Gath.¹¹ The Ark of the Lord stayed in Obed-Edom's house for three months, and the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and all his family.

¹²The people told David, "The Lord has blessed the family of Obed-Edom and all that belongs to him, because the Ark of

God is there.” So David went and brought it up from Obed-Edom’s house to Jerusalem with joy. ¹³When the men carrying the Ark of the Lord had walked six steps, David sacrificed a bull and a fat calf. ¹⁴Then David danced with all his might before the Lord. He had on a holy linen vest. ¹⁵David and all the Israelites shouted with joy and blew the trumpets as they brought the Ark of the Lord to the city.

¹⁶As the Ark of the Lord came into the city, Saul’s daughter Michal looked out the window. When she saw David jumping and dancing in the presence of the Lord, she hated him.

¹⁷David put up a tent for the Ark of the Lord, and then the Israelites put it in its place inside the tent. David offered whole burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the Lord. ¹⁸When David finished offering the whole burnt offerings and the fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord All-Powerful. ¹⁹David gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates, and a cake of raisins to every Israelite, both men and women. Then all the people went home.

²⁰David went back to bless the people in his home, but Saul’s daughter Michal came out to meet him. She said, “With what honor the king of Israel acted today! You took off your clothes in front of the servant girls of your officers like one who takes off his clothes without shame!”

²¹Then David said to Michal, “I did it in the presence of the Lord. The Lord chose me, not your father or anyone from Saul’s family. The Lord appointed me to be over Israel. So I will celebrate in the presence of the Lord. ²²Maybe I will lose even more honor, and maybe I will be brought down in my own opinion, but the girls you talk about will honor me!”

²³And Saul’s daughter Michal had no children to the day

she died.

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 7:1–29

Situation

David sought to honor God, and God rewarded him with promises for his future. David's response was humble, worshipful prayer.

Observation

David not only knew about God, he fellowshiped with God. David shows us the value of knowing God better.

Inspiration

What is prayer? What do we mean when we say that we pray? Some teaching on prayer makes it seem too vague, mystical, spiritual, or even too difficult for us simple, busy women. However, prayer is practical.

Others imagine that praying is kneeling with closed eyes and speaking in eloquent phrases. This is perhaps one kind of prayer, but I believe prayer is communication with the One who loves us most, the One who cares for us and cherishes us more than anyone else, the One who always has our best interest in His heart and mind. Prayer is an attitude of worship and thanksgiving. And this can be done in any position—standing, sitting, kneeling, or lying down. It can be done any time of day or night—as the old hymn says, “Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.” We can pray while driving, working, cleaning, playing, waking up to face our day, or when we can't sleep at night. The apostle Paul tells us to

“pray without ceasing” ([1 Thessalonians 5:17](#), KJV). For me, more often than not, this means that I pray without ceasing my work. I just talk to the Lord as I carry on my responsibilities.

Prayer is a vital part of every person’s spiritual experience. We are all aware of how important verbal communication is to any relationship, such as with our spouses, friends, or coworkers. A quick way to destroy a relationship is to avoid talking. Likewise, prayer is simply verbal communication with God. This simple principle was beautifully exemplified by a dear, older friend who passed away recently. He always started his prayers with, “And Lord... .” In other words, he was just continuing where he had left off with his last conversation with God.

Prayer is also the way we get to know God. We pray in order to receive a better understanding of God. Prayer is one of the important elements of nourishing our personal relationships with God. I have discovered that the more time I spend in prayer, the better I begin to know God Himself and the more I see things from His perspective. This in turn brings the needed transformation in my disposition and attitude, which gives me more strength and serenity.

Prayer doesn’t so often change the outward circumstances or our situations as much as it transforms the way we view those circumstances and situations. Often it is our spirits and our attitudes that need changing. (From *A Quiet Knowing* by Gigi Graham Tchividjian)

Application

Do you feel like you communicate with God when you pray? Or do your prayers merely fulfill an obligation? Next time you pray, talk to God as you would a friend. Ask God if you need a change in your attitude. Learn to pray continually.

Exploration

Hindrances to Prayer—[Micah 3:4](#); [Philippians 4:6](#); [1 Peter 3:7](#).

David Wants to Build a Temple

King David was living in his palace, and the Lord had given him peace from all his enemies around him. ²Then David said to Nathan the prophet, “Look, I am living in a palace made of cedar wood, but the Ark of God is in a tent!”

³Nathan said to the king, “Go and do what you really want to do, because the Lord is with you.”

⁴But that night the Lord spoke his word to Nathan, ⁵“Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord says: Will you build a house for me to live in? ⁶From the time I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until now I have not lived in a house. I have been moving around all this time with a tent as my home. ⁷As I have moved with the Israelites, I have never said to the tribes, whom I commanded to take care of my people Israel, ‘Why haven’t you built me a house of cedar?’”

⁸“You must tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: I took you from the pasture and from tending the sheep and made you leader of my people Israel. ⁹I have been with you everywhere you have gone and have defeated your enemies for you. I will make you as famous as any of the great people on the earth. ¹⁰Also I will choose a place for my people Israel, and I will plant them so they can live in their own homes. They will not be bothered anymore. Wicked people will no longer bother them as they have in the past ¹¹when I chose judges for my people Israel. But I will give

you peace from all your enemies. I also tell you that I will make your descendants kings of Israel after you.

¹²“When you die and join your ancestors, I will make one of your sons the next king, and I will set up his kingdom. ¹³He will build a house for me, and I will let his kingdom rule always. ¹⁴I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he sins, I will use other people to punish him. They will be my whips. ¹⁵I took away my love from Saul, whom I removed before you, but I will never stop loving your son. ¹⁶But your family and your kingdom will continue always before me. Your throne will last forever.”

¹⁷Nathan told David everything God had said in this vision.

David Prays to God

¹⁸Then King David went in and sat in front of the Lord. David said, “Lord God, who am I? What is my family? Why did you bring me to this point? ¹⁹But even this is not enough for you, Lord God. You have also made promises about my future family. This is not normal, Lord God.

²⁰“What more can I say to you, Lord God, since you know me, your servant, so well! ²¹You have done this great thing because you said you would and because you wanted to, and you have let me know about it. ²²This is why you are great, Lord God! There is no one like you. There is no God except you. We have heard all this ourselves! ²³There is no nation like your people Israel. They are the only people on earth that God chose to be his own. You made your name well known. You did great and wonderful miracles for them. You went ahead of them and forced other nations and their gods out of the land. You

freed your people from slavery in Egypt. ²⁴You made the people of Israel your very own people forever, and, Lord, you are their God.

²⁵“Now, Lord God, keep the promise forever that you made about my family and me, your servant. Do what you have said. ²⁶Then you will be honored always, and people will say, ‘The Lord All-Powerful is God over Israel!’ And the family of your servant David will continue before you.

²⁷“Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, you have said to me, ‘I will make your family great.’ So I, your servant, am brave enough to pray to you. ²⁸Lord God, you are God, and your words are true. And you have promised these good things to me, your servant. ²⁹Please, bless my family. Let it continue before you always. Lord God, you have said so. With your blessing let my family always be blessed.”

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 8:1–10:19

Situation

David had defeated the Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, and Philistines. These nations had been a constant military and religious threat to Israel.

Observation

The story of David and Mephibosheth is a striking picture of salvation by grace. It also beautifully shows how David remembered and followed through on his covenant with Jonathan.

Inspiration

Mephibosheth is bracketed into the Bible. [[Second Samuel 4:4](#)] doesn't tell us much, just his name (Mephibosheth), his calamity (dropped by his nurse), his deformity (crippled), and then it moves on.

But that's enough to raise a few questions. Who was this boy? Why is this story in Scripture? Why is Lucado mentioning him in a book about grace? A bit of background would be helpful.

Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, the grandson of Saul, who was the first king of Israel. Saul and Jonathan were killed in battle, leaving the throne to be occupied by David. In those days the new king often staked out his territory by exterminating the family of the previous king.

David had no intention of following this tradition, but the family of Saul didn't know that. So they hurried to escape. Of special concern to them was

five-year-old Mephibosheth, for upon the deaths of his father and uncle, he was the presumptive heir to the throne. If David was intent on murdering Saul's heirs, this boy would be first on his list. So the family got out of Dodge. But in the haste of the moment, Mephibosheth slipped from the arms of his nurse, permanently damaging both feet. For the rest of his life he would be a cripple.

If his story is beginning to sound familiar, it should. You and he have a lot in common. Weren't you also born of royalty? And don't you carry the wounds of a fall? And hasn't each of us lived in fear of a king we have never seen?

Mephibosheth would understand Paul's portrait of us paupers, "when we were unable to help ourselves ..." ([Romans 5:6](#)). For nearly two decades the young prince lived in a distant land, unable to walk to the king, too fearful to talk to the king. He was unable to help himself.

Meanwhile, David's kingdom flourished. Under his leadership, Israel grew to ten times its original size. He knew no defeat on the battlefield nor insurrection in his court. Israel was at peace. The people were thankful. And David, the shepherd made king, did not forget his promise to Jonathan. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Application

During the course of our lives, we will come across many people who have needs that we are able to meet. What will be our response? Don't assume someone else will meet that need. And ask the Holy

Spirit to prompt you to see if you've promised to help someone in the past but never followed through.

Exploration

God's Grace—[Nehemiah 9:31](#); [Psalm 111:4](#); [112:4](#); [Proverbs 19:17](#).

David Wins Many Wars

Later, David defeated the Philistines, conquered them, and took the city of Metheg Ammah.

²He also defeated the people of Moab. He made them lie on the ground, and then he used a rope to measure them. Those who were measured within two rope lengths were killed, but those who were within the next rope length were allowed to live. So the people of Moab became servants of David and gave him the payment he demanded.

³David also defeated Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to take control again at the Euphrates River.

⁴David captured one thousand chariots, seven thousand men who rode in chariots, and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He crippled all but a hundred of the chariot horses.

⁵Arameans from Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, but David killed twenty-two thousand of them. ⁶Then David put groups of soldiers in Damascus in Aram. The Arameans became David's servants and gave him the payment he demanded. The Lord gave David victory everywhere he went.

⁷David took the shields of gold that had belonged to Hadadezer's officers and brought them to Jerusalem. ⁸David also took many things made of bronze from Tebah and Berothai, which had been cities under Hadadezer's control.

⁹Toi king of Hamath heard that David had defeated all the

army of Hadadezer. ¹⁰So Toi sent his son Joram to greet and congratulate King David for defeating Hadadezer. (Hadadezer had been at war with Toi.) Joram brought items made of silver, gold, and bronze. ¹¹King David gave them to the Lord, along with the silver and gold he had taken from the other nations he had defeated. ¹²These nations were Edom, Moab, Ammon, Philistia, and Amalek. David also gave the Lord what he had taken from Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

¹³David was famous after he returned from defeating eighteen thousand Arameans in the Valley of Salt. ¹⁴He put groups of soldiers all over Edom, and all the Edomites became his servants. The Lord gave David victory everywhere he went.

¹⁵David was king over all Israel, and he did what was fair and right for all his people. ¹⁶Joab son of Zeruiah was commander over the army. Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was the recorder. ¹⁷Zadok son of Ahitub and Abiathar son of Ahimelech were priests. Seraiah was the royal secretary.

¹⁸Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the [Kerethites and Pelethites](#). And David's sons were priests.

David Helps Saul's Family

David asked, "Is anyone still left in Saul's family? I want to show kindness to that person for Jonathan's sake!"

²Now there was a servant named Ziba from Saul's family. So David's servants called Ziba to him. King David said to him, "Are you Ziba?"

He answered, "Yes, I am your servant."

³The king asked, "Is anyone left in Saul's family? I want to show God's kindness to that person."

Ziba answered the king, "Jonathan has a son still living who is crippled in both feet."

⁴The king asked Ziba, "Where is this son?"

Ziba answered, "He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar."

⁵Then King David had servants bring Jonathan's son from the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar. ⁶Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, came before David and bowed facedown on the floor.

David said, "Mephibosheth!"

Mephibosheth said, "I am your servant."

⁷David said to him, "Don't be afraid. I will be kind to you for your father Jonathan's sake. I will give you back all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table."

⁸Mephibosheth bowed to David again and said, "You are being very kind to me, your servant! And I am no better than a dead dog!"

⁹Then King David called Saul's servant Ziba. David said to him, "I have given your master's grandson everything that

belonged to Saul and his family. ¹⁰You, your sons, and your servants will farm the land and harvest the crops. Then your family will have food to eat. But Mephibosheth, your master's grandson, will always eat at my table."

(Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.) ¹¹Ziba said to King David, "I, your servant, will do everything my master, the king, commands me."

So Mephibosheth ate at David's table as if he were one of the king's sons. ¹²Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica. Everyone in Ziba's family became Mephibosheth's servants. ¹³Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table. And he was crippled in both feet.

War with the Ammonites and Arameans

When Nahash king of the Ammonites died, his son Hanun became king after him. ²David said, “Nahash was loyal to me, so I will be loyal to his son Hanun.” So David sent his messengers to comfort Hanun about his father’s death.

David’s officers went to the land of the Ammonites. ³But the Ammonite leaders said to Hanun, their master, “Do you think David wants to honor your father by sending men to comfort you? No! David sent them to study the city and spy it out and capture it!” ⁴So Hanun arrested David’s officers. To shame them he shaved off half their beards and cut off their clothes at the hips. Then he sent them away.

⁵When the people told David, he sent messengers to meet his officers because they were very ashamed. King David said, “Stay in Jericho until your beards have grown back. Then come home.”

⁶The Ammonites knew that they had insulted David. So they hired twenty thousand Aramean foot soldiers from Beth Rehob and Zobah. They also hired the king of Maacah with a thousand men and twelve thousand men from Tob.

⁷When David heard about this, he sent Joab with the whole army. ⁸The Ammonites came out and prepared for battle at the city gate. The Arameans from Zobah and Rehob and the men from Tob and Maacah were out in the field by themselves.

⁹Joab saw that there were enemies both in front of him and behind him. So he chose some of the best soldiers of Israel and sent them out to fight the Arameans. ¹⁰Joab put the rest of the

army under the command of Abishai, his brother. Then he sent them out to fight the Ammonites. ¹¹Joab said to Abishai, “If the Arameans are too strong for me, you must help me. Or, if the Ammonites are too strong for you, I will help you. ¹²Be strong. We must fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what he thinks is right.”

¹³Then Joab and the army with him went to attack the Arameans, and the Arameans ran away. ¹⁴When the Ammonites saw that the Arameans were running away, they also ran away from Abishai and went back to their city. So Joab returned from the battle with the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem.

¹⁵When the Arameans saw that Israel had defeated them, they came together into one big army. ¹⁶Hadadezer sent messengers to bring the Arameans from east of the Euphrates River, and they went to Helam. Their leader was Shobach, the commander of Hadadezer’s army.

¹⁷When David heard about this, he gathered all the Israelites together. They crossed over the Jordan River and went to Helam. There the Arameans prepared for battle and attacked him. ¹⁸But the Arameans ran away from the Israelites. David killed seven hundred Aramean chariot drivers and forty thousand Aramean horsemen. He also killed Shobach, the commander of the Aramean army.

¹⁹When the kings who served Hadadezer saw that the Israelites had defeated them, they made peace with the Israelites and served them. And the Arameans were afraid to help the Ammonites again.

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 11:1–12:31

Situation

David became king of Israel after Saul's death. Although a successful commander of Israel's army, he let himself be conquered by lust. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, then arranged to have her husband murdered.

Observation

David was not immune to temptation. When he sinned, God held him accountable for his actions.

Inspiration

As to our personal evil and the pain that comes from present sin, it was sin precisely like our sin that killed Christ, for sin is always the anxious pride of the creature by which we try to be our own god... . Each man, each nation, each era must make its own choice under new options, yet the options in essence do not change, for always the alternatives are man's futile will or God's overruling will... .

As for the mystery of pain—why the snake appears in our natural world and as seducer in our world of human decision—the mystery remains: We do not know, though we do know that we cannot shelve responsibility for our choice.

The pain that comes of sin is the focal item in the whole “problem” and in the midst of it stand a Cross and a Resurrection... . Of us, you and me, the prayer is spoken, “Father, forgive them; for they know not

what they do.”... Yes, the prayer is spoken of us. Yet because God raised him from the dead the prayer is already answered for us. We are forgiven! (From *God, Pain, and Evil* by George Arthur Buttrick)

Application

God has forgiven us. But, many times we have done something that is so painful it is difficult to forgive ourselves. You are sorry for what you have done. You have tried to make amends. Now, forgive yourself and begin to live life anew.

Exploration

Put Off Sin—[Proverbs 3:11–12](#); [Isaiah 59](#); [Romans 6:15–23](#); [Hebrews 12:1](#).

Remember, discipline should result in mercy, not misery. Some saints are awakened by a tap on the shoulder while others need a two-by-four to the head. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

David Sins with Bathsheba

In the spring, when the kings normally went out to war, David sent out Joab, his servants, and all the Israelites. They destroyed the Ammonites and attacked the city of Rabbah. But David stayed in Jerusalem. ²One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the [roof](#) of his palace. While he was on the roof, he saw a woman bathing. She was very beautiful. ³So David sent his servants to find out who she was. A servant answered, “That woman is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam. She is the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” ⁴So David sent messengers to bring Bathsheba to him. When she came to him, he had sexual relations with her. (Now Bathsheba had purified herself from her monthly period.) Then she went back to her house. ⁵But Bathsheba became pregnant and sent word to David, saying, “I am pregnant.”

⁶So David sent a message to Joab: “Send Uriah the Hittite to me.” And Joab sent Uriah to David. ⁷When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were, and how the war was going. ⁸Then David said to Uriah, “Go home and rest.”

So Uriah left the palace, and the king sent a gift to him. ⁹But

Uriah did not go home. Instead, he slept outside the door of the palace as all the king's officers did.

¹⁰The officers told David, "Uriah did not go home."

Then David said to Uriah, "You came from a long trip. Why didn't you go home?"

¹¹Uriah said to him, "The Ark and the soldiers of Israel and Judah are staying in tents. My master Joab and his officers are camping out in the fields. It isn't right for me to go home to eat and drink and have sexual relations with my wife!"

¹²David said to Uriah, "Stay here today. Tomorrow I'll send you back to the battle." So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³Then David called Uriah to come to see him, so Uriah ate and drank with David. David made Uriah drunk, but he still did not go home. That evening Uriah again slept with the king's officers.

¹⁴The next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by Uriah. ¹⁵In the letter David wrote, "Put Uriah on the front lines where the fighting is worst and leave him there alone. Let him be killed in battle."

¹⁶Joab watched the city and saw where its strongest defenders were and put Uriah there. ¹⁷When the men of the city came out to fight against Joab, some of David's men were killed. And Uriah the Hittite was one of them.

¹⁸Then Joab sent David a complete account of the war. ¹⁹Joab told the messenger, "Tell King David what happened in the war. ²⁰After you finish, the king may be angry and ask, 'Why did you go so near the city to fight? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the city wall?' ²¹Do you remember who killed Abimelech son of [Jerub-Besheth](#)? It was a woman on the city wall. She threw a large stone for grinding

grain on Abimelech and killed him there in Thebez. Why did you go so near the wall?’ If King David asks that, tell him, ‘Your servant Uriah the Hittite also died.’ ”

²²The messenger left and went to David and told him everything Joab had told him to say. ²³The messenger told David, “The men of Ammon were winning. They came out and attacked us in the field, but we fought them back to the city gate. ²⁴The archers on the city wall shot at your servants, and some of your men were killed. Your servant Uriah the Hittite also died.”

²⁵David said to the messenger, “Say this to Joab: ‘Don’t be upset about this. The sword kills everyone the same. Make a stronger attack against the city and capture it.’ Encourage Joab with these words.”

²⁶When Bathsheba heard that her husband was dead, she cried for him. ²⁷After she finished her time of sadness, David sent servants to bring her to his house. She became David’s wife and gave birth to his son, but the Lord did not like what David had done.

David's Son Dies

The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to David, he said, "There were two men in a city. One was rich, but the other was poor. ²The rich man had many sheep and cattle. ³But the poor man had nothing except one little female lamb he had bought. The poor man fed the lamb, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food and drank from his cup and slept in his arms. The lamb was like a daughter to him.

⁴"Then a traveler stopped to visit the rich man. The rich man wanted to feed the traveler, but he didn't want to take one of his own sheep or cattle. Instead, he took the lamb from the poor man and cooked it for his visitor."

⁵David became very angry at the rich man. He said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this should die! ⁶He must pay for the lamb four times for doing such a thing. He had no mercy!"

⁷Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I appointed you king of Israel and saved you from Saul. ⁸I gave you his kingdom and his wives. And I made you king of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given you even more. ⁹So why did you ignore the Lord's command? Why did you do what he says is wrong? You killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the Ammonites and took his wife to be your wife! ¹⁰Now there will always be people in your family who will die by a sword, because you did not respect me; you took the wife of Uriah the Hittite for yourself!'

¹¹“This is what the Lord says: ‘I am bringing trouble to you from your own family. While you watch, I will take your wives from you and give them to someone who is very close to you. He will have sexual relations with your wives, and everyone will know it. ¹²You had sexual relations with Bathsheba in secret, but I will do this so all the people of Israel can see it.’”

Godly sorrow makes people change their hearts and lives.

This leads to salvation, and you cannot be sorry for that.

—Max Lucado (*A Gentle Thunder*)

¹³Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

Nathan answered, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You will not die. ¹⁴But what you did caused the Lord’s enemies to lose all respect for him. For this reason the son who was born to you will die.”

¹⁵Then Nathan went home. And the Lord caused the son of David and Bathsheba, Uriah’s widow, to be very sick. ¹⁶David prayed to God for the baby. David refused to eat or drink. He went into his house and stayed there, lying on the ground all night. ¹⁷The older leaders of David’s family came to him and tried to pull him up from the ground, but he refused to get up or to eat food with them.

¹⁸On the seventh day the baby died. David’s servants were afraid to tell him that the baby was dead. They said, “Look, we tried to talk to David while the baby was alive, but he refused to listen to us. If we tell him the baby is dead, he may do something awful.”

¹⁹When David saw his servants whispering, he knew that the baby was dead. So he asked them, “Is the baby dead?”

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus Washes Our Feet

I don't understand how God can be so kind to us, but he is. He kneels before us, takes our feet in his hands, and washes them. Please understand that in washing the disciples' feet, Jesus is washing ours. You and I are in this story. We are at the table. That's us being cleansed, not from our dirt, but from our sins

....

Don't miss the meaning here. To place our feet in the basin of Jesus is to place the filthiest parts of our lives into his hands. In the ancient East, people's feet were caked with mud and dirt. The servant of the feast saw to it that the feet were cleaned. Jesus is assuming the role of the servant. He will wash the grimeiest part of your life.

If you let him. The water of the Servant comes only when we confess that we are dirty. Only when we confess that we are caked with filth, that we have walked forbidden trails and followed the wrong paths.

We tend to be proud like Peter and resist. "I'm not that dirty, Jesus. Just sprinkle a few drops on me and I'll be fine."

What a lie! "If we say we have no sin, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth is not in us" ([1 John 1:8](#)).

We will never be cleansed until we confess we are dirty. We will never be pure until we admit we are filthy. And we will never be able to wash the feet of those who have hurt us until we allow Jesus, the one we have hurt, to wash ours.

You see, that is the secret of forgiveness. You will never forgive anyone more than God has already forgiven you. Only by letting him wash your feet can you have strength to wash those of another. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

They answered, “Yes, he is dead.”

²⁰Then David got up from the floor, washed himself, put lotions on, and changed his clothes. Then he went into the Lord’s house to worship. After that, he went home and asked for something to eat. His servants gave him some food, and he ate.

²¹David’s servants said to him, “Why are you doing this? When the baby was still alive, you refused to eat and you cried. Now that the baby is dead, you get up and eat food.”

²²David said, “While the baby was still alive, I refused to eat, and I cried. I thought, ‘Who knows? Maybe the Lord will feel sorry for me and let the baby live.’” ²³But now that the baby is dead, why should I go without food? I can’t bring him back to life. Some day I will go to him, but he cannot come back to me.”

²⁴Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife. He slept with her and had sexual relations with her. She became pregnant again and had another son, whom David named Solomon. The Lord loved Solomon. ²⁵The Lord sent word through Nathan the prophet to name the baby [Jedidiah](#), because the Lord loved the child.

David Captures Rabbah

²⁶Joab fought against Rabbah, a royal city of the Ammonites, and he was about to capture it. ²⁷Joab sent messengers to David and said, “I have fought against Rabbah and have captured its water supply. ²⁸Now bring the other soldiers

together and attack this city. Capture it before I capture it myself and it is called by my name!”

²⁹So David gathered all the army and went to Rabbah and fought against it and captured it. ³⁰David took the crown off their king’s head and had it placed on his own head. That gold crown weighed about seventy-five pounds, and it had valuable gems in it. And David took many valuable things from the city.

³¹He also brought out the people of the city and forced them to work with saws, iron picks, and axes. He also made them build with bricks. David did this to all the Ammonite cities. Then David and all his army returned to Jerusalem.

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 13:1–14:33

Situation

David's family was in conflict. His eldest son, Amnon, raped Tamar, his own half sister. Absalom, Tamar's brother, murdered Amnon in revenge.

Observation

Sexual sin produces disastrous consequences in a family.

Inspiration

What do you do with your failures? Our mistakes come to us as pebbles; small stones that serve as souvenirs of our stumbles... Here are some failures that have been drug into my office.

Unfaithfulness. He wanted to try again. She said, "No way." He wanted a second chance. She said, "You blew your chance." He admitted that he made a mistake by seeing another woman. He sees now that the mistake was fatal to his marriage.

Homosexuality. His wrists bore the scars of a suicide attempt. His arms had tracks from countless needles. His eyes reflected the spirit of one hellbent on self-destruction. His words were those of a prisoner grimly resigned to the judge's sentence. "I'm gay. My dad says I'm queer. I guess he's right..."

Immorality. She came to church with a pregnant womb and a repentant spirit. "I can't have a child," she pleaded. "We'll find a home for it," she was assured. She agreed. Then she changed her mind. Her

boyfriend funded the abortion. “Can God ever forgive me?” she asked....

Could you do it all over again, you’d do it differently. You’d be a different person. You’d be more patient. You’d control your tongue. You’d finish what you started. You’d turn the other cheek instead of slapping his. You’d get married first. You wouldn’t marry at all. You’d be honest. You’d resist the temptation....

But you can’t. And as many times as you tell yourself, “What’s done is done,” what you did can’t be undone.

That’s part of what Paul meant when he said, “The wages of sin is death.” He didn’t say, “The wages of sin is a bad mood.” Or, “The wages of sin is a hard day.” Nor, “The wages of sin is depression.” Read it again. “The wages of sin is death.” Sin is fatal.

Can anything be done with it? ... What do you do with the stones from life’s stumbles?

My oldest daughter, Jenna, is four years old. Some time ago she came to me with a confession. “Daddy, I took a crayon and drew on the wall.” (Kids amaze me with their honesty.)

I sat down and lifted her up into my lap and tried to be wise. “Is that a good thing to do?” I asked her.

“No.”

“What does Daddy do when you write on the wall?”

“You spank me.”

“What do you think Daddy should do this time?”

“Love.”

Don't we all want that? Don't we all long for a father who even though our mistakes are written all over the wall, will love us anyway? Don't we want a father who cares for us in spite of our failures?

We do have that type of a father. A father who is at his best when we are at our worst. A father whose grace is strongest when our devotion is weakest. If your bag is bulky, then you're in for some thrilling news: Your failures are not fatal. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

Application

What price have you paid for sin? Remember, God does not want you to live in guilt or defeat. Embrace Christ for healing and hope. Trust Christ for tomorrow. In faith, begin to heal wounds today.

Exploration

Consequences of Sin—[Genesis 4:1–16](#); [Exodus 34:6–7](#); [Joshua 7:24–25](#); [Hebrews 12:4–17](#); [Revelation 2:20–23](#).

If you're out to settle the score, you'll never rest. How can you? For one thing, your enemy may never pay up. —Max Lucado (*He Chose the Nails*)

Amnon and Tamar

David had a son named Absalom and a son named Amnon. Absalom had a beautiful sister named Tamar, and Amnon loved her. ²Tamar was a virgin. Amnon made himself sick just thinking about her, because he could not find any chance to be alone with her.

³Amnon had a friend named Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab was a very clever man. ⁴He asked Amnon, "Son of the king, why do you look so sad day after day? Tell me what's wrong!"

Amnon told him, "I love Tamar, the sister of my half-brother Absalom."

⁵Jonadab said to Amnon, "Go to bed and act as if you are sick. Then your father will come to see you. Tell him, 'Please let my sister Tamar come in and give me food to eat. Let her make the food in front of me so I can watch and eat it from her hand.'"

⁶So Amnon went to bed and acted sick. When King David came in to see him, Amnon said to him, "Please let my sister Tamar come in. Let her make two of her special cakes for me while I watch. Then I will eat them from her hands."

⁷David sent for Tamar in the palace, saying, "Go to your

brother Amnon's house and make some food for him." ⁸So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house, and he was in bed. Tamar took some dough and pressed it together with her hands. She made some special cakes while Amnon watched. Then she baked them. ⁹Next she took the pan and served him, but he refused to eat.

He said to his servants, "All of you, leave me alone!" So they all left him alone. ¹⁰Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food into the bedroom so I may eat from your hand."

Tamar took the cakes she had made and brought them to her brother Amnon in the bedroom. ¹¹She went to him so he could eat from her hands, but Amnon grabbed her. He said, "Sister, come and have sexual relations with me."

¹²Tamar said to him, "No, brother! Don't force me! This should never be done in Israel! Don't do this shameful thing! ¹³I could never get rid of my shame! And you will be like the shameful fools in Israel! Please talk with the king, and he will let you marry me."

¹⁴But Amnon refused to listen to her. He was stronger than she was, so he forced her to have sexual relations with him. ¹⁵After that, Amnon hated Tamar. He hated her more than he had loved her before. Amnon said to her, "Get up and leave!"

¹⁶Tamar said to him, "No! Sending me away would be worse than what you've already done!"

But he refused to listen to her. ¹⁷He called his young servant back in and said, "Get this woman out of here and away from me! Lock the door after her." ¹⁸So his servant led her out of the room and bolted the door after her.

Tamar was wearing a special robe with long sleeves, because the king's virgin daughters wore this kind of robe.

¹⁹To show how upset she was, Tamar put ashes on her head and tore her special robe and put her hand on her head. Then she went away, crying loudly.

²⁰Absalom, Tamar's brother, said to her, "Has Amnon, your brother, forced you to have sexual relations with him? For now, sister, be quiet. He is your half-brother. Don't let this upset you so much!" So Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house and was sad and lonely.

²¹When King David heard the news, he was very angry. ²²Absalom did not say a word, good or bad, to Amnon. But he hated Amnon for disgracing his sister Tamar.

Absalom's Revenge

²³Two years later Absalom had some men come to Baal Hazor, near Ephraim, to cut the wool from his sheep. Absalom invited all the king's sons to come also. ²⁴Absalom went to the king and said, "I have men coming to cut the wool. Please come with your officers and join me."

²⁵King David said to Absalom, "No, my son. We won't all go, because it would be too much trouble for you." Although Absalom begged David, he would not go, but he did give his blessing.

²⁶Absalom said, "If you don't want to come, then please let my brother Amnon come with us."

King David asked, "Why should he go with you?"

²⁷Absalom kept begging David until he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with Absalom.

²⁸Then Absalom instructed his servants, "Watch Amnon. When he is drunk, I will tell you, 'Kill Amnon.' Right then, kill

him! Don't be afraid, because I have commanded you! Be strong and brave!"²⁹ So Absalom's young men killed Amnon as Absalom commanded, but all of David's other sons got on their mules and escaped.

³⁰While the king's sons were on their way, the news came to David, "Absalom has killed all of the king's sons! Not one of them is left alive!"³¹ King David tore his clothes and lay on the ground to show his sadness. All his servants standing nearby tore their clothes also.

³²Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother, said to David, "Don't think all the young men, your sons, are killed. No, only Amnon is dead! Absalom has planned this ever since Amnon forced his sister Tamar to have sexual relations with him."³³ My master and king, don't think that all of the king's sons are dead. Only Amnon is dead!"

³⁴In the meantime Absalom had run away.

A guard standing on the city wall saw many people coming from the other side of the hill.³⁵ So Jonadab said to King David, "Look, I was right! The king's sons are coming!"

³⁶As soon as Jonadab had said this, the king's sons arrived, crying loudly. David and all his servants began crying also.³⁷ David cried for his son every day.

But Absalom ran away to [Talmai](#) son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur.³⁸ After Absalom ran away to Geshur, he stayed there for three years.³⁹ When King David got over Amnon's death, he missed Absalom greatly.

Joab Sends a Wise Woman to David

Joab son of Zeruiah knew that King David missed Absalom very much.² So Joab sent messengers to Tekoa to bring a wise woman from there. He said to her, “Pretend to be very sad. Put on funeral clothes and don’t put lotion on yourself. Act like a woman who has been crying many days for someone who died.³ Then go to the king and say these words.” Then Joab told her what to say.

⁴ So the woman from Tekoa spoke to the king. She bowed facedown on the ground to show respect and said, “My king, help me!”

⁵ King David asked her, “What is the matter?”

The woman said, “I am a widow; my husband is dead.⁶ I had two sons. They were out in the field fighting, and no one was there to stop them. So one son killed the other son.⁷ Now all the family group is against me. They said to me, ‘Bring the son who killed his brother so we may kill him for killing his brother. That way we will also get rid of the one who would receive what belonged to his father.’ My son is like the last spark of a fire. He is all I have left. If they kill him, my husband’s name and property will be gone from the earth.”

⁸ Then the king said to the woman, “Go home. I will take care of this for you.”

⁹ The woman of Tekoa said to him, “Let the blame be on me and my father’s family. My master and king, you and your throne are innocent.”

¹⁰ King David said, “Bring me anyone who says anything

bad to you. Then he won't bother you again."

¹¹The woman said, "Please promise in the name of the Lord your God. Then my relative who has the duty of punishing a murderer won't add to the destruction by killing my son."

David said, "As surely as the Lord lives, no one will hurt your son. Not one hair from his head will fall to the ground."

¹²The woman said, "Let me say something to you, my master and king."

The king said, "Speak."

¹³Then the woman said, "Why have you decided this way against the people of God? When you judge this way, you show that you are guilty for not bringing back your son who was forced to leave home. ¹⁴We will all die some day. We're like water spilled on the ground; no one can gather it back. But God doesn't take away life. Instead, he plans ways that those who have been sent away will not have to stay away from him! ¹⁵My master and king, I came to say this to you because the people have made me afraid! I thought, 'Let me talk to the king. Maybe he will do what I ask. ¹⁶Maybe he will listen. Perhaps he will save me from those who want to keep both me and my son from getting what God gave us.'

¹⁷"Now I say, 'May the words of my master the king give me rest. Like an angel of God, you know what is good and what is bad. May the Lord your God be with you!'"

¹⁸Then King David said, "Do not hide the truth. Answer me one question."

The woman said, "My master the king, please ask your question."

¹⁹The king said, "Did Joab tell you to say all these things?"

The woman answered, "As you live, my master the king, no

one could avoid that question. You are right. Your servant Joab did tell me to say these things. ²⁰Joab did it so you would see things differently. My master, you are wise like an angel of God who knows everything that happens on earth.”

Absalom Returns to Jerusalem

²¹The king said to Joab, “Look, I will do what I promised. Bring back the young man Absalom.”

²²Joab bowed facedown on the ground and blessed the king. Then he said, “Today I know you are pleased with me, because you have done what I asked.”

²³Then Joab got up and went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. ²⁴But King David said, “Absalom must go to his own house. He may not come to see me.” So Absalom went to his own house and did not go to see the king.

²⁵Absalom was greatly praised for his handsome appearance. No man in Israel was as handsome as he. No blemish was on him from his head to his foot. ²⁶At the end of every year, Absalom would cut his hair, because it became too heavy. When he weighed it, it would weigh about five pounds by the royal measure.

²⁷Absalom had three sons and one daughter. His daughter’s name was also Tamar, and she was a beautiful woman.

²⁸Absalom lived in Jerusalem for two full years without seeing King David. ²⁹Then Absalom sent for Joab so he could send him to the king, but Joab would not come. Absalom sent a message a second time, but Joab still refused to come. ³⁰Then Absalom said to his servants, “Look, Joab’s field is next to

mine, and he has barley growing there. Go burn it.” So Absalom’s servants set fire to Joab’s field.

³¹Then Joab went to Absalom’s house and said to him, “Why did your servants burn my field?”

³²Absalom said to Joab, “I sent a message to you, asking you to come here. I wanted to send you to the king to ask him why he brought me home from Geshur. It would have been better for me to stay there! Now let me see the king. If I have sinned, he can put me to death!”

³³So Joab went to the king and told him Absalom’s words. Then the king called for Absalom. Absalom came and bowed facedown on the ground before the king, and the king kissed him.

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 15:1–16:14

Situation

Absalom's charisma and charm won over many followers. His rebellion became so strong and widespread that David fled rather than engage in a long, bloody opposition.

Observation

Even though God had forgiven David, David's sins brought painful consequences. In this passage, David was forced to flee Jerusalem because of opposition from his own son. Imagine the pain and rejection David must have felt. Jesus could have associated with those emotions as his own family and followers fled from him.

Inspiration

Judas wasn't the only turncoat. Matthew is admirably honest when he confesses, "All of Jesus' followers left him and ran away" ([26:56](#)).

For such a short word, "all" sure packs some pain. "All of Jesus' followers ... ran away." John did. Matthew did. Simon did. Thomas did. They all did. We don't have to go far to find the last time this word was used. Note the verse just a few lines before our text: "But Peter said, 'I will never say that I don't know you! I will even die with you!' And *all* the other followers said the same thing" ([26:35](#), italics mine).

All pledged loyalty, and yet all ran. From the outside looking in, all we see is betrayal. The

disciples have left him. The people have rejected him. And God hasn't heard him. Never has so much trash been dumped on one being. Stack all the disloyalties of deadbeat dads and cheating wives and prodigal kids and dishonest workers in one pile, and you begin to see what Jesus had to face that night. From a human point of view, Jesus' world has collapsed. No answer from heaven, no help from the people, no loyalty from his friends.

Jesus, neck deep in rubbish. That's how I would have described the scene. That's how a reporter would have described it. That's how a witness would have portrayed it. But that's not how Jesus saw it. He saw something else entirely. He wasn't oblivious to the trash; he just wasn't limited to it. Somehow he was able to see good in the bad, the purpose in the pain, and God's presence in the problem.

We could use a little of Jesus' 20/20 vision, couldn't we? You and I live in a trashy world. Unwanted garbage comes our way on a regular basis. We, too, have unanswered prayers and unfruitful dreams and unbelievable betrayals, do we not? Haven't you been handed a trash sack of mishaps and heartaches? Sure you have. May I ask, what are you going to do with it? (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

So what are you going to do with the pain, rejection, and trash in your life? Take time to reflect on how Jesus dealt with his own pain and rejection. Ask him to help you overcome the negatives in your

life with a positive response. Ask him to help you see the purpose in the pain.

Exploration

Rebellion—[Numbers 16](#); [1 Kings 1-2](#); [12:16-20](#); [15:27-16:7](#); [Hosea 9:15](#); [13:16](#).

Absalom Plans to Take David's Kingdom

After this, Absalom got a chariot and horses for himself and fifty men to run before him. ²Absalom would get up early and stand near the [city gate](#). Anyone who had a problem for the king to settle would come here. When someone came, Absalom would call out and say, "What city are you from?"

The person would answer, "I'm from one of the tribes of Israel."

³Then Absalom would say, "Look, your claims are right, but the king has no one to listen to you." ⁴Absalom would also say, "I wish someone would make me judge in this land! Then people with problems could come to me, and I could help them get justice."

⁵People would come near Absalom to bow to him. When they did, Absalom would reach out his hand and take hold of them and kiss them. ⁶Absalom did that to all the Israelites who came to King David for decisions. In this way, Absalom stole the hearts of all Israel.

⁷After four years Absalom said to King David, "Please let me go to Hebron. I want to carry out my promise that I made to the Lord ⁸while I was living in Geshur in Aram. I said, 'If the Lord takes me back to Jerusalem, I will worship him in Hebron.'"

⁹The king said, "Go in peace."

So Absalom went to Hebron. ¹⁰But he sent secret

messengers through all the tribes of Israel. They told the people, “When you hear the trumpets, say this: ‘Absalom is the king at Hebron!’”

¹¹Absalom had invited two hundred men to go with him. So they went from Jerusalem with him, but they didn’t know what he was planning. ¹²While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel, one of the people who advised David, to come from his hometown of Giloh. So Absalom’s plans were working very well. More and more people began to support him.

¹³A messenger came to David, saying, “The Israelites are giving their loyalty to Absalom.”

¹⁴Then David said to all his officers who were with him in Jerusalem, “We must leave quickly! If we don’t, we won’t be able to get away from Absalom. We must hurry before he catches us and destroys us and kills the people of Jerusalem.”

¹⁵The king’s officers said to him, “We will do anything you say.”

¹⁶The king set out with everyone in his house, but he left ten slave women to take care of the palace. ¹⁷The king left with all his people following him, and they stopped at a house far away. ¹⁸All the king’s servants passed by him—the [Kerethites and Pelethites](#), all those from Gath, and the six hundred men who had followed him.

¹⁹The king said to Ittai, a man from Gath, “Why are you also going with us? Turn back and stay with King Absalom because you are a foreigner. This is not your homeland. ²⁰You joined me only a short time ago. Should I make you wander with us when I don’t even know where I’m going? Turn back and take your brothers with you. May kindness and loyalty be

shown to you.”

²¹But Ittai said to the king, “As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will stay with you, whether it means life or death.”

²²David said to Ittai, “Go, march on.” So Ittai from Gath and all his people with their children marched on. ²³All the people cried loudly as everyone passed by. King David crossed the Kidron Valley, and then all the people went on to the desert. ²⁴Zadok and all the Levites with him carried the Ark of the Agreement with God. They set it down, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had left the city.

²⁵The king said to Zadok, “Take the Ark of God back into the city. If the Lord is pleased with me, he will bring me back and will let me see both it and Jerusalem again. ²⁶But if the Lord says he is not pleased with me, I am ready. He can do what he wants with me.”

²⁷The king also said to Zadok the priest, “Aren’t you a seer? Go back to the city in peace and take your son Ahimaaz and Abiathar’s son Jonathan with you. ²⁸I will wait near the crossings into the desert until I hear from you.” ²⁹So Zadok and Abiathar took the Ark of God back to Jerusalem and stayed there.

³⁰David went up the Mount of Olives, crying as he went. He covered his head and went barefoot. All the people with David covered their heads also and cried as they went. ³¹Someone told David, “Ahithophel is one of the people with Absalom who made secret plans against you.”

So David prayed, “Lord, please make Ahithophel’s advice foolish.”

³²When David reached the top of the mountain where people used to worship God, Hushai the Arkite came to meet

him. Hushai's coat was torn, and there was dirt on his head to show how sad he was.³³ David said to Hushai, "If you go with me, you will be just one more person for me to take care of.³⁴ But if you return to the city, you can make Ahithophel's advice useless. Tell Absalom, 'I am your servant, my king. In the past I served your father, but now I will serve you.'"³⁵ The priests Zadok and Abiathar will be with you. Tell them everything you hear in the royal palace.³⁶ Zadok's son Ahimaaz and Abiathar's son Jonathan are with them. Send them to tell me everything you hear."³⁷ So David's friend Hushai entered Jerusalem just as Absalom arrived.

Ziba Meets David

When David had passed a short way over the top of the Mount of Olives, Ziba, Mephibosheth's servant, met him. Ziba had a row of donkeys loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, one hundred cakes of raisins, one hundred cakes of figs, and leather bags full of wine.²The king asked Ziba, "What are these things for?"

Ziba answered, "The donkeys are for your family to ride. The bread and cakes of figs are for the servants to eat. And the wine is for anyone to drink who might become weak in the desert."

³The king asked, "Where is Mephibosheth?"

Ziba answered him, "Mephibosheth is staying in Jerusalem because he thinks, 'Today the Israelites will give my father's kingdom back to me!'"

⁴Then the king said to Ziba, "All right. Everything that belonged to Mephibosheth, I now give to you!"

Ziba said, "I bow to you. I hope I will always be able to please you."

Shimei Curses David

⁵As King David came to Bahurim, a man came out and cursed him. He was from Saul's family group, and his name was Shimei son of Gera. ⁶He threw stones at David and his officers, but the people and soldiers gathered all around David. ⁷Shimei cursed David, saying, "Get out, get out, you murderer, you

troublemaker. ⁸The Lord is punishing you for the people in Saul's family you killed! You took Saul's place as king, but now the Lord has given the kingdom to your son Absalom! Now you are ruined because you are a murderer!"

⁹Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse you, the king? Let me go over and cut off his head!"

¹⁰But the king answered, "This does not concern you, sons of Zeruiah! If he is cursing me because the Lord told him to, who can question him?"

¹¹David also said to Abishai and all his officers, "My own son is trying to kill me! This man is a Benjaminite and has more right to kill me! Leave him alone, and let him curse me because the Lord told him to do this. ¹²Maybe the Lord will see my misery and repay me with something good for Shimei's curses today!"

¹³So David and his men went on down the road, but Shimei followed on the nearby hillside. He kept cursing David and throwing stones and dirt at him. ¹⁴When the king and all his people arrived at the Jordan, they were very tired, so they rested there.

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 16:15–17:23

Situation

Ahithophel and Hushai competed as advisers to Absalom during the revolution. Most leaders in those times relied on advisers to make important policy decisions.

Observation

God enables his chosen leaders (such as David) to prevail, even through the most complex and adverse circumstances.

Inspiration

In our day-to-day experience it is sometimes difficult to determine the source of our adversity. Adversity related to our personal sin is usually easy to identify. Beyond that, though, things begin to run together. We certainly do not want to rebuke the devil for something God is behind. Neither do we want to just grin and bear it if there is something we can do to put an end to our suffering.

The Bible does not give us three simple steps to aid us in determining the source of our adversity. This used to really bother me. For a long time, when I faced adversity, I would pray and pray for God to give me some indication as to why I was suffering. Then I realized why those kinds of prayers rarely seemed to be answered. There was and is a much more important issue at stake.

Far more important than the source of adversity is the response to adversity. Why? Because adversity, regardless of the source, is God's most effective tool for deepening your faith and commitment to Him. The areas in which you are experiencing the most adversity are the areas in which God is at work. When someone says, "God is not doing anything in my life," my response is always, "So, you don't have any problems?" Why? Because the best way to identify God's involvement in your life is to consider your

response to adversity. God uses adversity, regardless of the source. But your response to adversity determines whether or not God is able to use it to accomplish His purpose....

As much as we all want to know the answer to the *why* question, it is really not the most significant question. The real question each of us needs to ask is, “*How* should I respond?” To spend too much time trying to answer the *why* question is to run the risk of missing what God wants to teach us. (From *How to Handle Adversity* by Charles Stanley)

Application

Isolate a major problem you will face today. Choose a Christian response to it, check out your solution with a trusted friend, and put your idea into action.

Exploration

God's Purposes—[Genesis 45:4–7](#); [50:19–20](#); [Isaiah 46:8–11](#); [Matthew 25:34](#); [2 Timothy 1:8–9](#).

¹⁵Meanwhile, Absalom, Ahithophel, and all the Israelites arrived at Jerusalem. ¹⁶David's friend Hushai the Arkite came to Absalom and said to him, "Long live the king! Long live the king!"

¹⁷Absalom asked, "Why are you not loyal to your friend David? Why didn't you leave Jerusalem with your friend?"

¹⁸Hushai said, "I belong to the one chosen by the Lord and by these people and everyone in Israel. I will stay with you. ¹⁹In the past I served your father. So whom should I serve now? David's son! I will serve you as I served him."

Ahithophel's Advice

²⁰Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Tell us what we should do."

²¹Ahithophel said, "Your father left behind some of his slave women to take care of the palace. Have sexual relations with them. Then all Israel will hear that your father is your enemy, and all your people will be encouraged to give you more support." ²²So they put up a tent for Absalom on the [roof](#) of the palace where everyone in Israel could see it. And Absalom had sexual relations with his father's slave women.

²³At that time people thought Ahithophel's advice was as reliable as God's own word. Both David and Absalom thought it was that reliable.

Ahithophel said to Absalom, “Let me choose twelve thousand men and chase David tonight. ²I’ll catch him while he is tired and weak, and I’ll frighten him so all his people will run away. But I’ll kill only King David. ³Then I’ll bring everyone back to you. If the man you are looking for is dead, everyone else will return safely.” ⁴This plan seemed good to Absalom and to all the leaders of Israel.

⁵But Absalom said, “Now call Hushai the Arkite, so I can hear what he says.” ⁶When Hushai came to Absalom, Absalom said to him, “This is the plan Ahithophel gave. Should we follow it? If not, tell us.”

⁷Hushai said to Absalom, “Ahithophel’s advice is not good this time.” ⁸Hushai added, “You know your father and his men are strong. They are as angry as a bear that is robbed of its cubs. Your father is a skilled fighter. He won’t stay all night with the army. ⁹He is probably already hiding in a cave or some other place. If the first attack fails, people will hear the news and think, ‘Absalom’s followers are losing!’ ¹⁰Then even the men who are as brave as lions will be frightened, because all the Israelites know your father is a fighter. They know his men are brave!

¹¹“This is what I suggest: Gather all the Israelites from [Dan to Beersheba](#). There will be as many people as grains of sand by the sea. Then you yourself must go into the battle. ¹²We will go to David wherever he is hiding. We will fall on him as dew falls on the ground. We will kill him and all of his men so that no one will be left alive. ¹³If David escapes into a city, all the Israelites will bring ropes to that city and pull it into the valley. Not a stone will be left!”

¹⁴Absalom and all the Israelites said, “The advice of Hushai

the Arkite is better than that of Ahithophel.” (The Lord had planned to destroy the good advice of Ahithophel so the Lord could bring disaster on Absalom.)

¹⁵Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, what Ahithophel had suggested to Absalom and the older leaders of Israel. He also reported to them what he himself had suggested. Hushai said, ¹⁶“Quickly! Send a message to David. Tell him not to stay tonight at the crossings into the desert but to cross over the Jordan River at once. If he crosses the river, he and all his people won’t be destroyed.”

¹⁷Jonathan and Ahimaaz were waiting at En Rogel. They did not want to be seen going into the city, so a servant girl would go out to them and give them messages. Then Jonathan and Ahimaaz would go and tell King David.

¹⁸But a boy saw Jonathan and Ahimaaz and told Absalom. So Jonathan and Ahimaaz left quickly and went to a man’s house in Bahurim. He had a well in his courtyard, and they climbed down into it. ¹⁹The man’s wife spread a sheet over the opening of the well and covered it with grain. No one could tell that anyone was hiding there.

²⁰Absalom’s servants came to the woman at the house and asked, “Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?”

She said to them, “They have already crossed the brook.”

Absalom’s servants then went to look for Jonathan and Ahimaaz, but they could not find them. So they went back to Jerusalem.

²¹After Absalom’s servants left, Jonathan and Ahimaaz climbed out of the well and went to tell King David. They said, “Hurry, cross over the river! Ahithophel has said these things against you!” ²²So David and all his people crossed the Jordan

River. By dawn, everyone had crossed the Jordan.

²³When Ahithophel saw that the Israelites did not accept his advice, he saddled his donkey and went to his hometown. He left orders for his family and property, and then he hanged himself. He died and was buried in his father's tomb.

War Between David and Absalom

²⁴David arrived at Mahanaim. And Absalom and all his Israelites crossed over the Jordan River. ²⁵Absalom had made Amasa captain of the army instead of Joab. Amasa was the son of a man named Jether the Ishmaelite. Amasa's mother was Abigail daughter of Nahash and sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother. ²⁶Absalom and the Israelites camped in the land of Gilead.

²⁷Shobi, Makir, and Barzillai were at Mahanaim when David arrived. Shobi son of Nahash was from the Ammonite town of Rabbah. Makir son of Ammiel was from Lo Debar, and Barzillai was from Rogelim in Gilead. ²⁸They brought beds, bowls, clay pots, wheat, barley, flour, roasted grain, beans, small peas, ²⁹honey, milk curds, sheep, and cheese made from cows' milk for David and his people. They said, "The people are hungry and tired and thirsty in the desert."

Life Lessons

[2 Samuel 17:24–19:43](#)

Situation

The armies of David and Absalom fought each other, resulting in Absalom's death and David's

mourning for his son. David returned to Jerusalem and reached out to bring those who supported Absalom back into the kingdom of Israel.

Observation

God desires that his people be unified and avoid petty squabbles, arguments and fights over minor issues. Just as brides are to be pure on their wedding day, so the church should be pure in its relationship with Christ.

Inspiration

In a parable she entitles “A Brawling Bride,” Karen Mains paints a vivid scene, describing a suspenseful moment in a wedding ceremony. Down front stands the groom in a spotless tuxedo—handsome, smiling, full of anticipation, shoes shined, every hair in place, anxiously awaiting the presence of his bride. All attendants are in place, looking joyful and attractive. The magical moment finally arrives as the pipe organ reaches full crescendo and the stately wedding march begins.

Everyone rises and looks toward the door for their first glimpse of the bride. Suddenly there is a horrified gasp. The wedding party is shocked. The groom stares in embarrassed disbelief. Instead of a lovely woman dressed in elegant white, smiling behind a lace veil, the bride is twisted. Ugly cuts and bruises cover her bare arms. Her nose is bleeding, one eye is purple and swollen, and her hair is disheveled.

“Does not this handsome groom deserve better than this?” asks the author. And then the clincher: “Alas, His bride, THE CHURCH, has been fighting

again!”

... [What would] the wedding picture ... look like if Christ claimed His bride, the church, today? Try to picture Him standing next to his brawling bride. It is one thing for us to survive the blows of a world that is hostile to the things of Christ, but to be in disharmony with one another, fighting and arguing among ourselves—unthinkable....

Unthinkable and unnatural though it may seem, the bride has been brawling for centuries. We get along for a little while and then we are back at each others' throats....

In a “Peanuts” cartoon, Lucy says to Snoopy: “There are times when you really bug me, but I must admit there are also times when I feel like giving you a big hug.”

Snoopy replies: “That’s the way I am ... huggable and buggable.”

And so it is with us and our relationships within the ranks of God’s family. I’m not referring to the variety of our personalities, gifts, tastes, and preferences—that’s healthy. The Master made us like that. It’s our mistreatment of each other, the infighting, the angry assaults, the verbal misrepresentations, the choosing of sides, the stubborn wills, the childish squabbles. An objective onlooker who watches us from a distance could wonder how and why some of us call ourselves Christians... . Why so little acceptance and tolerance? Aren’t we given the direct command to “keep the unity of the “Spirit in the bond of peace”?

(From *Laugh Again* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Are there Christians you prefer not to talk to? Is there a style of worship that you dislike? How can you demonstrate love and tolerance for others?

Exploration

United Together with Christ—[Romans 7:4](#); [1 Corinthians 6:15](#); [2 Corinthians 11:2](#); [Ephesians 5:30](#); [1 John 2:24](#).

God's trust makes us eager to do right. Such is the genius of grace. —Max Lucado (*In the Grip of Grace*)

David counted his men and placed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds.² He sent the troops out in three groups. Joab commanded one-third of the men. Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah commanded another third. And Ittai from Gath commanded the last third. King David said to them, "I will also go with you."

³But the men said, "You must not go with us! If we run away in the battle, Absalom's men won't care. Even if half of us are killed, Absalom's men won't care. But you're worth ten thousand of us! You can help us most by staying in the city."

⁴The king said to his people, "I will do what you think is best." So the king stood at the side of the gate as the army went out in groups of a hundred and a thousand.

⁵The king commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, "Be gentle with young Absalom for my sake." Everyone heard the king's orders to the commanders about Absalom.

⁶David's army went out into the field against Absalom's Israelites, and they fought in the forest of Ephraim. ⁷There David's army defeated the Israelites. Many died that day—twenty thousand men. ⁸The battle spread through all the country, but that day more men died in the forest than in the fighting.

Absalom Dies

⁹Then Absalom happened to meet David's troops. As Absalom was riding his mule, it went under the thick branches of a large oak tree. Absalom's head got caught in the tree, and his mule ran out from under him. So Absalom was left hanging above the ground.

¹⁰When one of the men saw it happen, he told Joab, “I saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree!”

¹¹Joab said to him, “You saw him? Why didn’t you kill him and let him fall to the ground? I would have given you a belt and four ounces of silver!”

¹²The man answered, “I wouldn’t touch the king’s son even if you gave me twenty-five pounds of silver. We heard the king command you, Abishai, and Ittai, ‘Be careful not to hurt young Absalom.’ ¹³If I had killed him, the king would have found out, and you would not have protected me!”

¹⁴Joab said, “I won’t waste time here with you!” Absalom was still alive in the oak tree, so Joab took three spears and stabbed him in the heart. ¹⁵Ten young men who carried Joab’s armor also gathered around Absalom and struck him and killed him.

¹⁶Then Joab blew the trumpet, so the troops stopped chasing the Israelites. ¹⁷Then Joab’s men took Absalom’s body and threw it into a large pit in the forest and filled the pit with many stones. All the Israelites ran away to their homes.

¹⁸When Absalom was alive, he had set up a pillar for himself in the King’s Valley. He said, “I have no son to keep my name alive.” So he named the pillar after himself, and it is called Absalom’s Monument even today.

¹⁹Ahimaaz son of Zadok said to Joab, “Let me run and take the news to King David. I’ll tell him the Lord has saved him from his enemies.”

²⁰Joab answered Ahimaaz, “No, you are not the one to take the news today. You may do it another time, but do not take it today, because the king’s son is dead.”

²¹Then Joab said to a man from Cush, “Go, tell the king

what you have seen.” The Cushite bowed to Joab and ran to tell David.

²²But Ahimaaz son of Zadok begged Joab again, “No matter what happens, please let me go along with the Cushite!”

Joab said, “Son, why do you want to carry the news? You won’t get any reward.”

²³Ahimaaz answered, “No matter what happens, I will run.”

So Joab said to Ahimaaz, “Run!” Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the Jordan Valley and passed the Cushite.

²⁴David was sitting between the inner and outer gates of the city. The watchman went up to the roof of the gate by the walls, and as he looked up, he saw a man running alone. ²⁵He shouted the news to the king.

The king said, “If he is alone, he is bringing good news!”

The man came nearer and nearer to the city. ²⁶Then the watchman saw another man running, and he called to the gatekeeper, “Look! Another man is running alone!”

The king said, “He is also bringing good news!”

²⁷The watchman said, “I think the first man runs like Ahimaaz son of Zadok.”

The king said, “Ahimaaz is a good man. He must be bringing good news!”

²⁸Then Ahimaaz called a greeting to the king. He bowed facedown on the ground before the king and said, “Praise the Lord your God! The Lord has defeated those who were against you, my king.”

²⁹The king asked, “Is young Absalom all right?”

Ahimaaz answered, “When Joab sent me, I saw some great excitement, but I don’t know what it was.”

³⁰The king said, “Step over here and wait.” So Ahimaaz

stepped aside and stood there.

³¹Then the Cushite arrived. He said, “Master and king, hear the good news! Today the Lord has punished those who were against you!”

³²The king asked the Cushite, “Is young Absalom all right?”

The Cushite answered, “May your enemies and all who come to hurt you be like that young man!”

³³Then the king was very upset, and he went to the room over the city gate and cried. As he went, he cried out, “My son Absalom, my son Absalom! I wish I had died and not you. Absalom, my son, my son!”

Joab Scolds David

People told Joab, “Look, the king is sad and crying because of Absalom.”² David’s army had won the battle that day. But it became a very sad day for all the people, because they heard that the king was very sad for his son.³ The people came into the city quietly that day. They were like an army that had been defeated in battle and had run away.⁴ The king covered his face and cried loudly, “My son Absalom! Absalom, my son, my son!”

⁵Joab went into the king’s house and said, “Today you have shamed all your men. They saved your life and the lives of your sons, daughters, wives, and slave women.⁶ You have shamed them because you love those who hate you, and you hate those who love you. Today you have made it clear that your commanders and men mean nothing to you. What if Absalom had lived and all of us were dead? I can see you would be pleased.⁷ Now go out and encourage your servants. I swear by the Lord that if you don’t go out, no man will be left with you by tonight! That will be worse than all the troubles you have had from your youth until today.”

⁸So the king went to the [city gate](#). When the news spread that the king was at the gate, everyone came to see him.

David Goes Back to Jerusalem

All the Israelites who had followed Absalom had run away to their homes.⁹ People in all the tribes of Israel began to argue,

saying, “The king saved us from the Philistines and our other enemies, but he left the country because of Absalom.”¹⁰ We appointed Absalom to rule us, but now he has died in battle. We should make David the king again.”

¹¹King David sent a message to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, that said, “Speak to the older leaders of Judah. Say, ‘Even in my house I have heard what all the Israelites are saying. So why are you the last tribe to bring the king back to his palace?’”¹² You are my brothers, my own family. Why are you the last tribe to bring back the king?”¹³ And say to Amasa, ‘You are part of my own family. May God punish me terribly if I don’t make you commander of the army in Joab’s place!’”

¹⁴David touched the hearts of all the people of Judah at once. They sent a message to the king that said, “Return with all your men.”¹⁵ Then the king returned as far as the Jordan River. The men of Judah came to Gilgal to meet him and to bring him across the Jordan.

¹⁶Shimei son of Gera, a Benjaminite who lived in Bahurim, hurried down with the men of Judah to meet King David.¹⁷ With Shimei came a thousand Benjaminites. Ziba, the servant from Saul’s family, also came, bringing his fifteen sons and twenty servants with him. They all hurried to the Jordan River to meet the king.¹⁸ The people went across the Jordan to help bring the king’s family back to Judah and to do whatever the king wanted. As the king was crossing the river, Shimei son of Gera came to him and bowed facedown on the ground in front of the king.¹⁹ He said to the king, “My master, don’t hold me guilty. Don’t remember the wrong I did when you left Jerusalem! Don’t hold it against me.”²⁰ I know I have sinned. That is why I am the first person from Joseph’s family to come

down and meet you today, my master and king!"

²¹But Abishai son of Zeruiah said, "Shimei should die because he cursed you, the Lord's appointed king!"

²²David said, "This does not concern you, sons of Zeruiah! Today you're against me! No one will be put to death in Israel today. Today I know I am king over Israel!" ²³Then the king promised Shimei, "You won't die."

²⁴Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, also went down to meet King David. Mephibosheth had not cared for his feet, cut his beard, or washed his clothes from the time the king had left Jerusalem until he returned safely. ²⁵When Mephibosheth came from Jerusalem to meet the king, the king asked him, "Mephibosheth, why didn't you go with me?"

²⁶He answered, "My master, my servant Ziba tricked me! I said to Ziba, 'I am crippled, so saddle a donkey. Then I will ride it so I can go with the king.' ²⁷But he lied about me to you. You, my master and king, are like an angel from God. Do what you think is good. ²⁸You could have killed all my grandfather's family. Instead, you put me with those people who eat at your own table. So I don't have a right to ask anything more from the king!"

²⁹The king said to him, "Don't say anything more. I have decided that you and Ziba will divide the land."

³⁰Mephibosheth said to the king, "Let Ziba take all the land now that my master the king has arrived safely home."

³¹Barzillai of Gilead came down from Rogelim to cross the Jordan River with the king. ³²Barzillai was a very old man, eighty years old. He had taken care of the king when David was staying at Mahanaim, because Barzillai was a very rich man. ³³David said to Barzillai, "Cross the river with me. Come

with me to Jerusalem, and I will take care of you.”

³⁴But Barzillai answered the king, “Do you know how old I am? Do you think I can go with you to Jerusalem? ³⁵I am eighty years old! I am too old to taste what I eat or drink. I am too old to hear the voices of men and women singers. Why should you be bothered with me? ³⁶I am not worthy of a reward from you, but I will cross the Jordan River with you. ³⁷Then let me go back so I may die in my own city near the grave of my father and mother. But here is Kimham, your servant. Let him go with you, my master and king. Do with him whatever you want.”

³⁸The king answered, “Kimham will go with me. I will do for him anything you wish, and I will do anything for you that you wish.” ³⁹The king kissed Barzillai and blessed him. Then Barzillai returned home, and the king and all the people crossed the Jordan.

⁴⁰When the king crossed over to Gilgal, Kimham went with him. All the troops of Judah and half the troops of Israel led David across the river.

⁴¹Soon all the Israelites came to the king and said to him, “Why did our relatives, the people of Judah, steal you away? Why did they bring you and your family across the Jordan River with your men?”

⁴²All the people of Judah answered the Israelites, “We did this because the king is our close relative. Why are you angry about it? We have not eaten food at the king’s expense or taken anything for ourselves!”

⁴³The Israelites answered the people of Judah, “We have ten tribes in the kingdom, so we have more right to David than you do! But you ignored us! We were the first ones to talk about bringing our king back!”

But the people of Judah spoke even more unkindly than the people of Israel.

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 20:1–26

Situation

Sheba, a Benjamite, called upon the Israelites to follow him and rebel against king David. David, who had just defeated Absalom's rebellion, put down Sheba's rebellion as well.

Observation

The house of Benjamin had been a rival of David since he became king of Israel. Old jealousies and bitterness prompted Sheba to call for a revolt against David. In doing so, Sheba hoped to take the monarchy by force and return it to the house of Benjamin.

Inspiration

Black and cold, bitterness denies easy escape. The sides are slippery with resentment. A floor of muddy anger stills the feet. The stench of betrayal fills the air and stings the eyes. A cloud of self-pity blocks the view of the tiny exit above....

You can choose, like many, to chain yourself to your hurt.

Or you can choose, like some, to put away your hurts before they become hates. You can choose to go to the party. You have a place there. Your name is beside a plate. If you are a child of God, no one can take away your sonship.

Which is precisely what the father said to the older son [in Jesus' story of the prodigal son; see

[Luke 15:11–32](#), particularly v. [31](#)]. “Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.”

And that is precisely what the Father says to you. How does God deal with your bitter heart? He reminds you that what you have is more important than what you don’t have. You still have your relationship with God. No one can take that. No one can touch it. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

Who or what can evoke a bitter response from you? Put the past behind you. Trust God for the strength to forgive.

Exploration

Jealousy—[Proverbs 6:34](#); [Romans 13:13](#); [1 Corinthians 13:4](#).

Debt-settling is a lonely occupation. It's also an unhealthy occupation. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

Sheba Leads Israel Away from David

It happened that a troublemaker named Sheba son of Bicri from the tribe of Benjamin was there. He blew the trumpet and said:

“We have no share in David!
We have no part in the son of Jesse!
People of Israel, let's go home!”

²So all the Israelites left David and followed Sheba son of Bicri. But the people of Judah stayed with their king all the way from the Jordan River to Jerusalem.

³David came back to his palace in Jerusalem. He had left ten of his slave women there to take care of the palace. Now he put them in a locked house. He gave them food, but he did not have sexual relations with them. So they lived like widows until they died.

⁴The king said to Amasa, “Tell the men of Judah to meet with me in three days, and you must also be here.” ⁵So Amasa went to call the men of Judah together, but he took more time than the king had said.

⁶David said to Abishai, “Sheba son of Bicri is more dangerous to us than Absalom was. Take my men and chase him before he finds walled cities and escapes from us.” ⁷So

Joab's men, the [Kerethites and the Pelethites](#), and all the soldiers went with Abishai. They went out from Jerusalem to chase Sheba son of Bicri.

⁸When Joab and the army came to the great rock at Gibeon, Amasa came out to meet them. Joab was wearing his uniform, and at his waist he wore a belt that held his sword in its case. As Joab stepped forward, his sword fell out of its case.⁹Joab asked Amasa, "Brother, is everything all right with you?" Then with his right hand he took Amasa by the beard to kiss him.¹⁰Amasa was not watching the sword in Joab's hand. So Joab pushed the sword into Amasa's stomach, causing Amasa's insides to spill onto the ground. Joab did not have to stab Amasa again; he was already dead. Then Joab and his brother Abishai continued to chase Sheba son of Bicri.

¹¹One of Joab's young men stood by Amasa's body and said, "Everyone who is for Joab and David should follow Joab!"¹²Amasa lay in the middle of the road, covered with his own blood. When the young man saw that everyone was stopping to look at the body, he dragged it from the road, laid it in a field, and put a cloth over it.¹³After Amasa's body was taken off the road, all the men followed Joab to chase Sheba son of Bicri.

¹⁴Sheba went through all the tribes of Israel to Abel Beth Maacah. All the Berites also came together and followed him.¹⁵So Joab and his men came to Abel Beth Maacah and surrounded it. They piled dirt up against the city wall, and they began hacking at the walls to bring them down.

¹⁶But a wise woman shouted out from the city, "Listen! Listen! Tell Joab to come here. I want to talk to him!"

¹⁷So Joab came near her. She asked him, "Are you Joab?"

He answered, "Yes, I am."

Then she said, "Listen to what I say."

Joab said, "I'm listening."

¹⁸Then the woman said, "In the past people would say, 'Ask for advice at Abel,' and the problem would be solved. ¹⁹I am one of the peaceful, loyal people of Israel. You are trying to destroy an important city of Israel. Why must you destroy what belongs to the Lord?"

²⁰Joab answered, "I would prefer not to destroy or ruin anything! ²¹That is not what I want. But there is a man here from the mountains of Ephraim, who is named Sheba son of Bicri. He has turned against King David. If you bring him to me, I will leave the city alone."

The woman said to Joab, "His head will be thrown over the wall to you."

²²Then the woman spoke very wisely to all the people of the city. They cut off the head of Sheba son of Bicri and threw it over the wall to Joab. So he blew the trumpet, and the army left the city. Every man returned home, and Joab went back to the king in Jerusalem.

²³Joab was commander of all the army of Israel. Benaiah son of Jehoiada led the Kerethites and Pelethites. ²⁴Adoniram was in charge of the men who were forced to do hard work. Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was the recorder. ²⁵Sheba was the royal secretary. Zadok and Abiathar were the priests, ²⁶and Ira the Jairite was David's priest.

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 21:1–23:7

Situation

The last four chapters of this book are an appendix. They record many events that occurred earlier in David's reign.

Observation

David remembered the pledge he had made to Jonathan that he would preserve his family forever. David's grace is seen in the way he continued that pledge by showing grace to Mephibosheth.

Inspiration

What is the grace of God? The grace of God says you serve God *because* you're saved, not in order to *be* saved. You love people *because* you're saved, and not in order to *be* saved. You're not trying to keep a legalistic system, you're responding to a system of love and peace.

What is grace? It's what someone gives us out of the goodness of their heart, not out of the perfection of ours. The story of grace is the good news that says that when we come, he gives. That's what grace is.

Grace is a pleasant surprise. Grace is a kind gesture. Grace is something you did not expect. It is something you certainly could never earn. But grace is something you'd never turn down.

You know what happens when someone sees the grace of God? When someone really tastes the

forgiving and liberating grace of God? Someone who tastes God's grace is the hardest worker, the most morally pure individual, and the person most willing to forgive.

Always remember that Jesus says, "My grace is deeper than your sins." (From *The Inspirational Bible*, "Grace")

Application

David remembered his promise for the rest of his life. Is there someone in your circle of friends and family who needs some extra kindness right now? Make a list this week of a few people to whom you could extend God's grace. Then think of creative ways to show it!

Exploration

Source of Grace—[2 Corinthians 9:8; 12:9; Ephesians 3:7; Hebrews 4:14–16.](#)

If he is able to place the stars in their sockets and suspend the sky like a curtain, do you think it remotely possible that God is able to guide your life? —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

The Gibeonites Punish Saul's Family

During the time David was king, there was a shortage of food that lasted for three years. So David prayed to the Lord.

The Lord answered, "Saul and his family of murderers are the reason for this shortage, because he killed the Gibeonites."²(Now the Gibeonites were not Israelites; they were a group of Amorites who were left alive. The Israelites had promised not to hurt the Gibeonites, but Saul had tried to kill them, because he was eager to help the people of Israel and Judah.)

King David called the Gibeonites together and spoke to them.³He asked, "What can I do for you? How can I make up for the harm done so you can bless the Lord's people?"

⁴The Gibeonites said to David, "We cannot demand silver or gold from Saul or his family. And we don't have the right to kill anyone in Israel."

Then David asked, "What do you want me to do for you?"

⁵The Gibeonites said, "Saul made plans against us and tried to destroy all our people who are left in the land of Israel. ⁶So bring seven of his sons to us. Then we will kill them and hang them on stakes in the presence of the Lord at Gibeah, the hometown of Saul, the Lord's chosen king."

The king said, "I will give them to you."⁷ But the king protected Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the promise he had made to Jonathan in the Lord's name.⁸ The king did take Armoni and [Mephibosheth](#), sons of Rizpah and Saul. (Rizpah was the daughter of Aiah.) And the king took the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab. (Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholathite was the father of Merab's five sons.)⁹ David gave these seven sons to the Gibeonites. Then the Gibeonites killed them and hung them on stakes on a hill in the presence of the Lord. All seven sons died together. They were put to death during the first days of the harvest season at the beginning of barley harvest.

¹⁰Aiah's daughter Rizpah took the rough cloth that was worn to show sadness and put it on a rock for herself. She stayed there from the beginning of the harvest until the rain fell on her sons' bodies. During the day she did not let the birds of the sky touch her sons' bodies, and during the night she did not let the wild animals touch them.

¹¹People told David what Aiah's daughter Rizpah, Saul's slave woman, was doing.¹² Then David took the bones of Saul and Jonathan from the men of Jabesh Gilead. (The Philistines had hung the bodies of Saul and Jonathan in the public square of Beth Shan after they had killed Saul at Gilboa. Later the men of Jabesh Gilead had secretly taken them from there.)¹³ David brought the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from Gilead. Then the people gathered the bodies of Saul's seven sons who were hanged on stakes.¹⁴ The people buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan at Zela in Benjamin in the tomb of Saul's father Kish. The people did everything the king commanded.

Then God answered the prayers for the land.

Wars with the Philistines

¹⁵Again there was war between the Philistines and Israel. David and his men went out to fight the Philistines, but David became tired. ¹⁶Ishbi-Benob, one of the sons of Rapha, had a bronze spearhead weighing about seven and one-half pounds and a new sword. He planned to kill David, ¹⁷but Abishai son of Zeruiah killed the Philistine and saved David's life.

Then David's men made a promise to him, saying, "Never again will you go out with us to battle. If you were killed, Israel would lose its greatest leader."

¹⁸Later, at Gob, there was another battle with the Philistines. Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Saph, another one of the sons of Rapha.

¹⁹Later, there was another battle at Gob with the Philistines. Elhanan son of Jaare-Oregim from Bethlehem killed [Goliath](#) from Gath. His spear was as large as a weaver's rod.

²⁰At Gath another battle took place. A huge man was there; he had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot—twenty-four fingers and toes in all. This man also was one of the sons of Rapha. ²¹When he challenged Israel, Jonathan son of Shimeah, David's brother, killed him.

²²These four sons of Rapha from Gath were killed by David and his men.

David's Song of Praise

David sang this song to the Lord when the Lord saved him from Saul and all his other enemies. ²He said:

“The Lord is my rock, my protection, my Savior.

³My God is my rock.

I can run to him for safety.

He is my shield and my saving strength,
my defender and my place of safety.

The Lord saves me from those who want to harm me.

⁴I will call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise,
and I will be saved from my enemies.

⁵“The waves of death came around me;
the deadly rivers overwhelmed me.

⁶The ropes of death wrapped around me.
The traps of death were before me.

⁷In my trouble I called to the Lord;
I cried out to my God.
From his temple he heard my voice;
my call for help reached his ears.

⁸“The earth trembled and shook.
The foundations of heaven began to shake.
They trembled because the Lord was angry.

⁹Smoke came out of his nose,
and burning fire came out of his mouth.
Burning coals went before him.

¹⁰He tore open the sky and came down
with dark clouds under his feet.

¹¹He rode a creature with wings and flew.
He raced on the wings of the wind.

¹²He made darkness his shelter,
surrounded by fog and clouds.

¹³Out of the brightness of his presence
came flashes of lightning.

Let a lamb take the wrong turn and miss the pasture and
our Shepherd, unwilling to let him wander too far, comes
to guide him home. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of
God*)

¹⁴The Lord thundered from heaven;
the Most High raised his voice.

¹⁵He shot his arrows and scattered his enemies.
His bolts of lightning confused them with fear.

¹⁶The Lord spoke strongly.
The wind blew from his nose.
Then the valleys of the sea appeared,
and the foundations of the earth were seen.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The Shepherd Who Knows Our Name

When I see a flock of sheep I see exactly that, a
flock. A rabble of wool. A herd of hooves. I don't see
a sheep. I see sheep. All alike. None different. That's
what I see.

But not so with the shepherd. To him every sheep
is different. Every face is special. Every face has a

story. And every sheep has a name. *The one with the sad eyes, that's Droopy. And the fellow with one ear up and the other down, I call him Oscar. And the small one with the black patch on his leg, he's an orphan with no brothers. I call him Joseph.*

The shepherd knows his sheep. He calls them by name.

When we see a crowd, we see exactly that, a crowd. Filling a stadium or flooding a mall. When we see a crowd, we see people, not persons, but people. A herd of humans. A flock of faces. That's what we see.

But not so with the Shepherd. To him every face is different. Every face is a story. Every face is a child. Every child has a name. *The one with the sad eyes, that's Sally. The old fellow with one eyebrow up and the other down, Harry's his name. And the young one with the limp? He's an orphan with no brothers. I call him Joey.*

The shepherd knows his sheep. He knows each one by name. The Shepherd knows you. He knows your name. And he will never forget it. *I have written your name on my hand ([Isaiah 49:16](#)).*

Quite a thought, isn't it? Your name on God's hand. Your name on God's lips. Maybe you've seen your name in some special places. On an award or diploma or walnut door. Or maybe you've heard your name from some important people—a coach, a celebrity, a teacher. But to think that your name is on God's hand, on God's lips ... my, could it be?

(From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max

Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

¹⁷“The Lord reached down from above and took me;
he pulled me from the deep water.

¹⁸He saved me from my powerful enemies,
from those who hated me, because they were too
strong for me.

¹⁹They attacked me at my time of trouble,
but the Lord supported me.

²⁰He took me to a safe place.
Because he delights in me, he saved me.

²¹“The Lord spared me because I did what was right.
Because I have not done evil, he has rewarded me.

²²I have followed the ways of the Lord;
I have not done evil by turning from my God.

²³I remember all his laws
and have not broken his rules.

²⁴I am innocent before him;
I have kept myself from doing evil.

²⁵The Lord rewarded me because I did what was right,
because I did what the Lord said was right.

²⁶“Lord, you are loyal to those who are loyal,
and you are good to those who are good.

²⁷You are pure to those who are pure,
but you are against those who are evil.

²⁸You save the humble,
but you bring down those who are proud.

²⁹Lord, you give light to my lamp.
The Lord brightens the darkness around me.

³⁰With your help I can attack an army.
With God's help I can jump over a wall.

³¹“The ways of God are without fault;
the Lord's words are pure.
He is a shield to those who trust him.

³²Who is God? Only the Lord.
Who is the Rock? Only our God.

³³God is my protection.
He makes my way free from fault.

³⁴He makes me like a deer that does not stumble;
he helps me stand on the steep mountains.

³⁵He trains my hands for battle
so my arms can bend a bronze bow.

³⁶You protect me with your saving shield.
You have stooped to make me great.

³⁷You give me a better way to live,
so I live as you want me to.

³⁸I chased my enemies and destroyed them.
I did not quit till they were destroyed.

³⁹I destroyed and crushed them
so they couldn't rise up again.
They fell beneath my feet.

⁴⁰You gave me strength in battle.
You made my enemies bow before me.

⁴¹You made my enemies turn back,
and I destroyed those who hated me.

⁴²They called for help,
but no one came to save them.
They called to the Lord,
but he did not answer them.
⁴³I beat my enemies into pieces,
like dust on the ground.
I poured them out and walked on them
like mud in the streets.

⁴⁴“You saved me when my people attacked me.
You kept me as the leader of nations.
People I never knew serve me.
⁴⁵Foreigners obey me.
As soon as they hear me, they obey me.
⁴⁶They all become afraid
and tremble in their hiding places.

⁴⁷“The Lord lives!
May my Rock be praised!
Praise God, the Rock, who saves me!
⁴⁸God gives me victory over my enemies
and brings people under my rule.
⁴⁹He frees me from my enemies.

“You set me over those who hate me.
You saved me from cruel men.
⁵⁰So I will praise you, Lord, among the nations.
I will sing praises to your name.
⁵¹The Lord gives great victories to his king.
He is loyal to his appointed king,
to David and his descendants forever.”

David's Last Words

These are the last words of David.

This is the message of David son of Jesse.

The man made great by the Most High God speaks.
He is the appointed king of the God of Jacob;
he is the sweet singer of Israel:

²“The Lord’s Spirit spoke through me,
and his word was on my tongue.

³The God of Israel spoke;
the Rock of Israel said to me:
‘Whoever rules fairly over people,
who rules with respect for God,

⁴is like the morning light at dawn,
like a morning without clouds.
He is like sunshine after a rain
that makes the grass sprout from the ground.’

⁵“This is how God has cared for my family.
God made a lasting agreement with me,
right and sure in every way.
He will accomplish my salvation
and satisfy all my desires.

⁶“But all evil people will be thrown away like thorns
that cannot be held in a hand.

⁷No one can touch them
except with a tool of iron or wood.

They will be thrown in the fire and burned where they lie.”

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 23:8–24:25

Situation

David’s reign brought great peace, prosperity, and military success. David and the people began to be proud, and God punished them for this sin.

Observation

We must find our strength and security only in God and never in worldly possessions.

Inspiration

Do you think anything concerning you right now is too small?

Your house or apartment? Your personal reputation? Your influence? Your job? Your family? (You want to add a spouse or children)? Your circle of friends? Your salary? Your life?

Until I paid attention to [Psalm 131](#), I chafed. Then I discovered that God’s leash wasn’t too tight—my heart was too proud! I thought I “deserved” more; my self-image had greater expectations, and that attitude was the very grease on which I slid into self-pity, discontent, ungratefulness, misery.

Then I fixed my eyes on Jesus and in my own eyes I became smaller and smaller. What was my stature, my purity, my power, my excellence compared with His?

I felt foolish, embarrassed, very small.

And now what did I deserve? Nothing—nothing at all. I was an “unworthy servant” ([Luke 17:10](#)).

Now I looked at all that the Lord God in His incredible grace had lavished on me—with such love and joy—and it was like Christmas in July! (From *My Sacrifice, His Fire* by Anne Ortlund)

Application

What gives your life security or significance apart from God: Money? Status? Position? Possessions? Imagine that you lost them all. How would you feel? Learn to see all that you have as a gift from God to be used only for him, not for personal pride.

Exploration

Pride—[Judges 7:2](#); [1 Samuel 2:3](#); [Proverbs 18:11–12](#); [Jeremiah 9:23–24](#); [Zechariah 4:6](#); [Romans 12:3](#); [1 Corinthians 4:6–10](#); [2 Corinthians 10:12](#); [Galatians 6:3](#); [Revelation 3:17](#).

The truth is, every touchdown in life is a team effort. Applaud your teammates. —Max Lucado (*Traveling Light*)

David's Army

⁸These are the names of David's warriors:

Josheb-Basshebeth, the Tahkemonite, was head of the [Three](#). He killed eight hundred men at one time.

⁹Next was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. Eleazar was one of the three soldiers who were with David when they challenged the Philistines. The Philistines were gathered for battle, and the Israelites drew back. ¹⁰But Eleazar stayed where he was and fought the Philistines until he was so tired his hand stuck to his sword. The Lord gave a great victory for the Israelites that day. The troops came back after Eleazar had won the battle, but only to take weapons and armor from the enemy.

¹¹Next there was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. The Philistines came together to fight in a vegetable field. Israel's troops ran away from the Philistines, ¹²but Shammah stood in the middle of the field and fought for it and killed the Philistines. And the Lord gave a great victory.

¹³Once, three of the Thirty, David's chief soldiers, came down to him at the cave of Adullam during harvest. The Philistine army had camped in the Valley of Rephaim. ¹⁴At that time David was in the stronghold, and some of the Philistines were in Bethlehem.

¹⁵David had a strong desire for some water. He said, "Oh, I

wish someone would get me water from the well near the city gate of Bethlehem!”¹⁶ So the three warriors broke through the Philistine army and took water from the well near the city gate of Bethlehem. Then they brought it to David, but he refused to drink it. He poured it out before the Lord,¹⁷ saying, “May the Lord keep me from drinking this water! It would be like drinking the blood of the men who risked their lives!” So David refused to drink it. These were the brave things that the three warriors did.

¹⁸Abishai, brother of Joab son of Zeruiah, was captain of the Three. Abishai fought three hundred soldiers with his spear and killed them. He became as famous as the Three¹⁹ and was more honored than the Three. He became their commander even though he was not one of them.

²⁰Benaiah son of Jehoiada was a brave fighter from Kabzeel who did mighty things. He killed two of the best warriors from Moab. He also went down into a pit and killed a lion on a snowy day.²¹ Benaiah killed a large Egyptian who had a spear in his hand. Benaiah had a club, but he grabbed the spear from the Egyptian’s hand and killed him with his own spear.²² These were the things Benaiah son of Jehoiada did. He was as famous as the Three.²³ He received more honor than the Thirty, but he did not become a member of the Three. David made him leader of his bodyguards.

The Thirty Chief Soldiers

²⁴The following men were among the Thirty:



- Asahel brother of Joab;
- Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem;
- ²⁵Shammah the Harodite;
- Elikah the Harodite;
- ²⁶Helez the Paltite;
- Ira son of Ikkesh from Tekoa;
- ²⁷Abiezer the Anathothite;
- Mebunnai the Hushathite;
- ²⁸Zalmon the Ahohite;
- Maharai the Netophathite;
- ²⁹Heled son of Baanah the Netophathite;
- Ithai son of Ribai from Gibeah in Benjamin;
- ³⁰Benaiah the Pirathonite;
- Hiddai from the ravines of Gaash;
- ³¹Abi-Albon the Arbathite;
- Azmaveth the Barhumite;
- ³²Eliabha the Shaalbonite;
- the sons of Jashen;
- Jonathan ³³son of Shammah the Hararite;
- Ahiam son of Sharar the Hararite;
- ³⁴Eliphelet son of Ahasbai the Maacathite;
- Eliam son of Ahithophel the Gilonite;
- ³⁵Hezro the Carmelite;
- Paarai the Arbite;
- ³⁶Igal son of Nathan of Zobah;
- the son of Hagri;
- ³⁷Zelek the Ammonite;
- Naharai the Beerothite, who carried the armor of Joab son of Zeruiah;
- ³⁸Ira the Ithrite;

- Gareb the Ithrite;
- ³⁹and Uriah the Hittite.

There were thirty-seven in all.

David Counts His Army

The Lord was angry with Israel again, and he caused David to turn against the Israelites. He said, “Go, count the people of Israel and Judah.”

²So King David said to Joab, the commander of the army, “Go through all the tribes of Israel, from [Dan to Beersheba](#), and count the people. Then I will know how many there are.”

³But Joab said to the king, “May the Lord your God give you a hundred times more people, and may my master the king live to see this happen. Why do you want to do this?”

⁴But the king commanded Joab and the commanders of the army, so they left the king to count the Israelites.

⁵After crossing the Jordan River, they camped near Aroer on the south side of the city in the ravine. They went through Gad and on to Jazer. ⁶Then they went to Gilead and the land of Tahtim Hodshi and to Dan Jaan and around to Sidon. ⁷They went to the strong, walled city of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and Canaanites. Finally, they went to southern Judah, to Beersheba. ⁸After nine months and twenty days, they had gone through all the land. Then they came back to Jerusalem.

⁹Joab gave the list of the people to the king. There were eight hundred thousand men in Israel who could use the sword and five hundred thousand men in Judah.

¹⁰David felt ashamed after he had counted the people. He said to the Lord, “I have sinned greatly by what I have done. Lord, I beg you to forgive me, your servant, because I have

been very foolish.”

¹¹When David got up in the morning, the Lord spoke his word to Gad, who was a prophet and David’s seer. ¹²The Lord told Gad, “Go and tell David, ‘This is what the Lord says: I offer you three choices. Choose one of them and I will do it to you.’”

¹³So Gad went to David and said to him, “Should three years of hunger come to you and your land? Or should your enemies chase you for three months? Or should there be three days of disease in your land? Think about it. Then decide which of these things I should tell the Lord who sent me.”

¹⁴David said to Gad, “I am in great trouble. Let the Lord punish us, because the Lord is very merciful. Don’t let my punishment come from human beings!”

¹⁵So the Lord sent a terrible disease on Israel. It began in the morning and continued until the chosen time to stop. From Dan to Beersheba seventy thousand people died. ¹⁶When the angel raised his arm toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord felt very sorry about the terrible things that had happened. He said to the angel who was destroying the people, “That is enough! Put down your arm!” The angel of the Lord was then by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

¹⁷When David saw the angel that killed the people, he said to the Lord, “I am the one who sinned and did wrong. These people only followed me like sheep. They did nothing wrong. Please punish me and my family.”

¹⁸That day Gad came to David and said, “Go and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” ¹⁹So David did what Gad told him to do, just as the Lord commanded.

²⁰Araunah looked and saw the king and his servants coming to him. So he went out and bowed facedown on the ground before the king. ²¹He said, “Why has my master the king come to me?”

David answered, “To buy the threshing floor from you so I can build an altar to the Lord. Then the terrible disease will stop.”

²²Araunah said to David, “My master and king, you may take anything you want for a sacrifice. Here are some oxen for the whole burnt offering and the threshing boards and the yokes for the wood. ²³My king, I give everything to you.” Araunah also said to the king, “May the Lord your God be pleased with you.”

²⁴But the king answered Araunah, “No, I will pay you for the land. I won’t offer to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for one and one-fourth pounds of silver. ²⁵He built an altar to the Lord there and offered whole burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the Lord answered his prayer for the country, and the disease in Israel stopped.

Dan to Beersheba Dan was the city farthest north in Israel, and Beersheba was the city farthest south. So this means all the people of Israel.

Baal Perazim This name means “the Lord breaks through.”

Baalath in Judah Another name for Kiriath Jearim.

Kerethites and Pelethites These were probably special units of the army that were responsible for the king’s safety, a kind of palace guard.

roof In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

Jerub-Besheth Another name for Gideon.

Jedidiah This name means “loved by the Lord.”

Talmai He was Absalom’s grandfather.

city gate People came here to conduct business. Public meetings and court cases were also held here.

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Dan to Beersheba Dan was the city farthest north in Israel, and Beersheba was the city farthest south. So this means all the people of Israel.

city gate People came here to conduct business. Public meetings and court cases were also held here.

Kerethites and Pelethites These were probably special units of the army that were responsible for the king’s safety, a

kind of palace guard.

Mephibosheth This is not Jonathan's son but another man with the same name.

Goliath In [1 Chronicles 20:5](#) he is called Lahmi, brother of Goliath.

Three These were David's most powerful soldiers. See [1 Chronicles 11:11](#).

Dan to Beersheba Dan was the city farthest north in Israel, and Beersheba was the city farthest south. So this means all the people of Israel.

[The Book of 1 Kings](#)

Introduction

The book starts with Solomon and ends with Elijah. The difference between the two gives you an idea as to what lies between.

Solomon might never have been born had it not been for the palace scandal between David and Bathsheba. Not the best of beginnings. He picked up some of his father's traits, both good and bad. Like his dad, he got off to a good start. But like his dad, he had a weakness for women that undid him.

You have to wonder what it was like growing up in a house where your father had several wives and your siblings wore swords to the dinner table. Solomon did well at first, praying for wisdom and building a temple that would have bankrupted most nations.

He took seven years building it. But then he spent thirteen years building a palace for himself. Somewhere around mid-life he got off track. His taste for wives (he was known to have accumulated some seven hundred or so) led him to worship whom they worshiped. This, in turn, led him away from God. His nation followed suit, and even the preaching of Elijah couldn't bring them back.

Not that Elijah didn't try. Toward the end of this book you'll read of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. In a classic my-God-is-greater-than-yours encounter, Jehovah won hands down. God was exalted. But Queen Jezebel, a leading Baal-worshiper, was infuriated.

She ordered Elijah's death, so Elijah ran. He ran until he was so tired and discouraged that he sat down under a bush and said, "Let me die" ([19:4](#)).

What does God do with tired servants who want to quit? In a tender moment the God who'd brought fire on the mountain sent food to the prophet and whispered his affection in a "quiet, gentle sound" ([19:12](#)).

What a Father.

What a book! In between Solomon and Elijah, you'll find it all. Rebellion, corruption, courage, faith. You'll see that their world is much like ours. Things haven't changed much.

And God? God hasn't changed at all. The quiet, gentle sound that encouraged Elijah? Listen as you read. It will encourage you.

About This Book

Author:

Unknown, though some think Jeremiah the prophet

Date Written:

After the death of Solomon, 900–500 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- Solomon's priority on wisdom gave him everything he needed.
- Even the greatest and richest King Solomon was not happy once he lost sight of his relationship with God.
- After the kingdom divided, prophets such as Elijah still spoke out for God.

Key Verse:

“But I will not take all the kingdom away from Solomon. I will let him rule all his life because of my servant David, whom I chose, who obeyed all my commands and laws” ([1 Kings 11:34](#)).

Contents:

1. The Rise of Solomon's Kingdom [1:1–10:29](#)
2. Solomon's Decline [11:1–43](#)
3. The Divided Kingdom [12:1–22:53](#)

Life Lessons

1 Kings 1:1–53

Situation

When David's life and reign drew to a close, his sons competed for his throne. David appointed Solomon as his heir.

Observation

Although David served well as a king, he often failed as a parent. We can be successful in our public life and a failure in private. Our families should be our first ministry priority.

Inspiration

When Daddy came to tuck me in, he would sit on the bed, and I would often kneel, reaching up to put my hands on his knees. With his huge hands on mine he prayed for me... The biggest decisions of his life—his salvation, his marriage, his life's work—were made on the basis of eternal, not temporal value...

As Christ's submission to His Father meant also His submission to the needs of His disciples, so a father's submission to a Heavenly Father means submission to the needs of his children, in other words, sacrifice and humble service, always the conditions of Godlike authority. "I am among you as one who serves," Jesus said ([Luke 22:27](#), RSV)...

It is sad to read that the average father nowadays spends three minutes per week with each child. Home, frankly, is just "not his scene." He'd rather be elsewhere. What does he do with the rest of his time?

Is it a relentless frantic scramble to earn money five or six days a week, with a frantic scramble on weekends to “relax” and enjoy himself, often in expensive and sometimes dangerous ways? Can this really be what God wants for Christian families? If there were the willingness to be content with less money, fewer activities which eat into the budget and take the family away from home, fewer possessions; if there were the willingness to “be content with such things as you have,” would we not sooner find the truth of God’s Word, “A man’s real life in no way depends upon the number of his possessions” ([Luke 12:15](#))? The willingness to be and to have just what God wants us to be and to have, nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else, would set our hearts at rest, and we would discover that the simpler the life the greater the peace. (From *The Shaping of a Christian Family* by Elisabeth Elliot)

Application

If you are a parent, take time with each child today: listen, talk, and care. As a son or daughter, plan to spend time with your parents. Be concerned for their needs. Be eager to pray for family needs.

Exploration

Family Responsibility—[Deuteronomy 6:4–7; 11:18–21; 32:46; Psalm 127:3; Proverbs 20:7; 22:6; Isaiah 38:19; Matthew 19:14; Ephesians 6:4; 1 Thessalonians 2:10–12; 1 Timothy 3:14–15; 2 Timothy 1:3–7.](#)

Adonijah Tries to Become King

At this time King David was very old, and although his servants covered him with blankets, he could not keep warm. ²They said to him, “We will look for a young woman to care for you. She will lie close to you and keep you warm.” ³After searching everywhere in Israel for a beautiful young woman, they found a girl named Abishag from Shunam and brought her to the king. ⁴The girl was very beautiful, and she cared for the king and served him. But the king did not have sexual relations with her.

⁵Adonijah was the son of King David and Haggith, and he was very proud. “I will be the king,” he said. So he got chariots and horses for himself and fifty men for his personal bodyguard. ⁶Now David had never interfered with Adonijah by questioning what he did. Born next after Absalom, Adonijah was a very handsome man.

⁷Adonijah spoke with Joab son of Zeruiah and Abiathar the priest, and they agreed to help him. ⁸But Zadok the priest, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei, Rei, and King David’s special guard did not join Adonijah.

⁹Then Adonijah killed some sheep, cows, and fat calves for sacrifices at the Stone of Zoheleth near the spring of Rogel. He invited all his brothers, the other sons of King David, to come, as well as all the men of Judah. ¹⁰But Adonijah did not invite Nathan the prophet, Benaiah, his father’s special guard, or his

brother Solomon.

¹¹When Nathan heard about this, he went to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. "Have you heard that Adonijah, Haggith's son, has made himself king?" Nathan asked. "Our real king, David, does not know it. ¹²I strongly advise you to save yourself and your sons. ¹³Go to King David and tell him, 'My master and king, you promised that my son Solomon would be king and would rule on your throne after you. Why then has Adonijah become king?' ¹⁴While you are still talking to the king, I will come in and tell him that what you have said about Adonijah is true."

¹⁵So Bathsheba went in to see the aged king in his bedroom, where Abishag, the girl from Shunam, was caring for him. ¹⁶Bathsheba bowed and knelt before the king. He asked, "What do you want?"

¹⁷She answered, "My master, you made a promise to me in the name of the Lord your God. You said, 'Your son Solomon will become king after me, and he will rule on my throne.' ¹⁸But now, unknown to you, Adonijah has become king. ¹⁹He has killed many cows, fat calves, and sheep for sacrifices. And he has invited all your sons, as well as Abiathar the priest and Joab the commander of the army, but he did not invite Solomon, who serves you. ²⁰My master and king, all the Israelites are watching you, waiting for you to decide who will be king after you. ²¹As soon as you die, Solomon and I will be treated as criminals."

²²While Bathsheba was still talking with the king, Nathan the prophet arrived. ²³The servants told the king, "Nathan the prophet is here." So Nathan went to the king and bowed facedown on the ground before him.

²⁴Nathan said, “My master and king, have you said that Adonijah will be the king after you and that he will rule on your throne? ²⁵Today he has sacrificed many cows, fat calves, and sheep, and he has invited all your other sons, the commanders of the army, and Abiathar the priest. Right now they are eating and drinking with him. They are saying, ‘Long live King Adonijah!’ ²⁶But he did not invite me, your own servant, or Zadok the priest, or Benaiah son of Jehoiada, or your son Solomon. ²⁷Did you do this? Since we are your servants, why didn’t you tell us who should be king after you?”

David Makes Solomon King

²⁸Then the king said, “Tell Bathsheba to come in!” So she came in and stood before the king.

²⁹Then the king made this promise, “The Lord has saved me from all trouble. As surely as he lives, ³⁰I will do today what I have promised you in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. I promised that your son Solomon would be king after me and rule on my throne in my place.”

³¹Then Bathsheba bowed facedown on the ground and knelt before the king and said, “Long live my master King David!”

³²Then King David said, “Tell Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada to come in.” When they came before the king, ³³he said to them, “Take my servants with you and put my son Solomon on my own mule. Take him down to the spring called Gihon. ³⁴There Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet should pour olive oil on him and make him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, ‘Long live King

Solomon!’ ³⁵Then come back up here with him. He will sit on my throne and rule in my place, because he is the one I have chosen to be the ruler over Israel and Judah.”

³⁶Benaiah son of Jehoiada answered the king, “Amen! This is what the Lord, the God of my master, has declared! ³⁷The Lord has always helped you, our king. May he also help Solomon and make King Solomon’s throne an even greater throne than yours.”

³⁸So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada left with the [Kerethites and Pelethites](#). They put Solomon on King David’s mule and took him to the spring called Gihon. ³⁹Zadok the priest took the container of olive oil from the Holy Tent and poured the oil on Solomon’s head to show he was the king. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people shouted, “Long live King Solomon!” ⁴⁰All the people followed Solomon into the city. Playing flutes and shouting for joy, they made so much noise the ground shook.

⁴¹At this time Adonijah and all the guests with him were finishing their meal. When he heard the sound from the trumpet, Joab asked, “What does all that noise from the city mean?”

⁴²While Joab was speaking, Jonathan son of Abiathar the priest arrived. Adonijah said, “Come in! You are an important man, so you must be bringing good news.”

⁴³But Jonathan answered, “No! Our master King David has made Solomon the new king. ⁴⁴King David sent Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and all the king’s bodyguards with him, and they have put Solomon on the king’s own mule. ⁴⁵Then Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet poured olive oil on Solomon at Gihon to make him

king. After that they went into the city, shouting with joy. Now the whole city is excited, and that is the noise you hear.⁴⁶Solomon has now become the king.⁴⁷All the king's officers have come to tell King David that he has done a good thing. They are saying, 'May your God make Solomon even more famous than you and an even greater king than you.'" Jonathan continued, "And King David bowed down on his bed to worship God,⁴⁸saying, 'Bless the Lord, the God of Israel. Today he has made one of my sons the king and allowed me to see it.'"

⁴⁹Then all of Adonijah's guests were afraid, and they left quickly and scattered.⁵⁰Adonijah was also afraid of Solomon, so he went and took hold of the [corners of the altar](#).⁵¹Then someone told Solomon, "Adonijah is afraid of you, so he is at the altar, holding on to its corners. He says, 'Tell King Solomon to promise me today that he will not kill me.'"

⁵²So Solomon answered, "Adonijah must show that he is a man of honor. If he does that, I promise he will not lose even a single hair from his head. But if he does anything wrong, he will die."⁵³Then King Solomon sent some men to get Adonijah. When he was brought from the altar, he came before King Solomon and bowed down. Solomon told him, "Go home."

Life Lessons

1 Kings 2:1-46

Situation

David gave final instructions to Solomon that would ensure success. At David's death, Solomon consolidated his power and administration.

Observation

At his death, the great King David exhorted his son: obey God, follow him, and be kind to others.

Inspiration

Successful people are at the right place at the right time to a great extent because they have learned how to take certain action steps in proper sequence. They have learned that scriptural truth, "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven." They know that everything they desire has an appropriate place and time for accomplishment, and toward that end, they set their priorities in certain orders, prepare themselves in certain ways, and refuse to give in to discouragement or failures along the way.

What about those who are unsuccessful?

Some fail because they lack dreams or they don't believe in the possibility of their dreams becoming reality. Some fail to reach their full potential of a rewarding harvest in life because they have not turned their dreams into specific goals and plans of action for reaching those goals. Many others fail, however, because they are out of sync with time and

place:

—They planted or fertilized their goals in the wrong season.

—They planted before they fully planned.

—They attempted to harvest a goal before it was fully developed.

Such failures arise not from a lack of determination or willingness to keep trying but from efforts that are out of proper sequence. The result is that those who fail because of their improper alignment of time and place soon become frustrated, begin to believe that it's impossible for them to achieve anything significant, or allow their disappointments to develop into a failure-anticipating mindset.

... The opportunity for success is yours. Believe it. Regardless of what you experienced in your past, the future can hold success for you.

(From *Timing Is Everything* by Denis Waitley)

Application

If you want success in life, then all your activities must reflect God's will. Today, make God the center of your life. Ask God to show you what successful living means for you. Then, rest easy in God's peace and his plans.

Exploration

Success—[Joshua 1:6–8](#); [2 Samuel 5:12](#); [1 Chronicles 18:13](#); [Proverbs 3:6](#); [16:3](#); [Matthew 6:33–34](#).

The Death of David

Since it was almost time for David to die, he gave his son Solomon his last commands.²David said, “My time to die is near. Be a good and strong leader.³Obey the Lord your God. Follow him by obeying his demands, his commands, his laws, and his rules that are written in the teachings of Moses. If you do these things, you will be successful in all you do and wherever you go.⁴And if you obey the Lord, he will keep the promise he made to me. He said: ‘If your descendants live as I tell them and have complete faith in me, a man from your family will always be king over the people of Israel.’

⁵“Also, you remember what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me. He killed the two commanders of Israel’s armies: Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He did this as if he and they were at war, although it was a time of peace. He put their blood on the belt around his waist and on his sandals on his feet.⁶Punish him in the way you think is wisest, but do not let him die peacefully of old age.

⁷“Be kind to the children of Barzillai of Gilead, and allow them to eat at your table. They welcomed me when I ran away from your brother Absalom.

⁸“And remember, Shimei son of Gera, the Benjaminite, is here with you. He cursed me the day I went to Mahanaim. But when he came down to meet me at the Jordan River, I promised him before the Lord, ‘Shimei, I will not kill you.’⁹But you

should not leave him unpunished. You are a wise man, and you will know what to do to him, but you must be sure he is killed.”

¹⁰Then David died and was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem. ¹¹He had ruled over Israel forty years—seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem.

Solomon Takes Control as King

¹²Solomon became king after David, his father, and he was in firm control of his kingdom.

¹³At this time Adonijah son of Haggith went to Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother. “Do you come in peace?” Bathsheba asked.

“Yes. This is a peaceful visit,” Adonijah answered. ¹⁴“I have something to say to you.”

“You may speak,” she said.

¹⁵“You remember that at one time the kingdom was mine,” Adonijah said. “All the people of Israel recognized me as their king, but things have changed. Now my brother is the king, because the Lord chose him. ¹⁶Now I have one thing to ask you; please do not refuse me.”

Bathsheba answered, “What do you want?”

¹⁷“I know King Solomon will do anything you ask him,” Adonijah continued. “Please ask him to give me Abishag the Shunammite to be my wife.”

¹⁸“Very well,” she answered. “I will speak to the king for you.”

¹⁹So Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah. When Solomon saw her, he stood up to meet her, then bowed down, and sat on the throne. He told some servants to bring another throne for his mother. Then she sat

down at his right side.

²⁰Bathsheba said, “I have one small thing to ask you. Please do not refuse me.”

“Ask, mother,” the king answered. “I will not refuse you.”

²¹So she said, “Allow Abishag the Shunammite to marry your brother Adonijah.”

²²King Solomon answered his mother, “Why do you ask me to give him Abishag? Why don’t you also ask for him to become the king since he is my older brother? Abiathar the priest and Joab son of Zeruiah would support him!”

²³Then King Solomon swore by the name of the Lord, saying, “May God punish me terribly if this doesn’t cost Adonijah his life! ²⁴By the Lord who has given me the throne that belonged to my father David and who has kept his promise and given the kingdom to me and my people, Adonijah will die today!” ²⁵Then King Solomon gave orders to Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and he went and killed Adonijah.

²⁶King Solomon said to Abiathar the priest, “I should kill you too, but I will allow you to go back to your fields in Anathoth. I will not kill you at this time, because you helped carry the Ark of the Lord God while marching with my father David. And I know you shared in all the hard times with him.”

²⁷Then Solomon removed Abiathar from being the Lord’s priest. This happened as the Lord had said it would, when he was speaking in Shiloh about the priest Eli and his descendants.

²⁸When Joab heard about what had happened, he was afraid. He had supported Adonijah but not Absalom. So Joab ran to the Tent of the Lord and took hold of the [corners of the altar](#). ²⁹Someone told King Solomon that Joab had run to the

Tent of the Lord and was beside the altar. Then Solomon ordered Benaiah to go and kill him.

³⁰Benaiah went into the Tent of the Lord and said to Joab, “The king says, ‘Come out!’”

But Joab answered, “No, I will die here.”

So Benaiah went back to the king and told him what Joab had said. ³¹Then the king ordered Benaiah, “Do as he says! Kill him there and bury him. Then my family and I will be free of the guilt of Joab, who has killed innocent people. ³²Without my father knowing it, he killed two men who were much better than he was—Abner son of Ner, the commander of Israel’s army, and Amasa son of Jether, the commander of Judah’s army. So the Lord will pay him back for those deaths. ³³Joab and his family will be forever guilty for their deaths, but there will be peace from the Lord for David, his descendants, his family, and his throne forever.”

³⁴So Benaiah son of Jehoiada killed Joab, and he was buried near his home in the desert. ³⁵The king then made Benaiah son of Jehoiada commander of the army in Joab’s place. He also made Zadok the new high priest in Abiathar’s place.

³⁶Next the king sent for Shimei. Solomon said to him, “Build a house for yourself in Jerusalem and live there. Don’t leave the city. ³⁷The very day you leave and cross the Kidron Valley, someone will kill you, and it will be your own fault.”

³⁸So Shimei answered the king, “I agree with what you say. I will do what you say, my master and king.” So Shimei lived in Jerusalem for a long time.

³⁹But three years later two of Shimei’s slaves ran away to Achish king of Gath, who was the son of Maacah. Shimei heard that his slaves were in Gath, ⁴⁰so he put his saddle on his

donkey and went to Achish at Gath to find them. Then he brought them back from Gath.

⁴¹Someone told Solomon that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath and had returned. ⁴²So Solomon sent for Shimei and said, “I made you promise in the name of the Lord not to leave Jerusalem. I warned you if you went out anywhere you would die, and you agreed to what I said. ⁴³Why did you break your promise to the Lord and disobey my command?”

⁴⁴The king also said, “You know the many wrong things you did to my father David, so now the Lord will punish you for those wrongs. ⁴⁵But the Lord will bless me and make the rule of David safe before the Lord forever.”

⁴⁶Then the king ordered Benaiah to kill Shimei, and he did. Now Solomon was in full control of his kingdom.

Life Lessons

1 Kings 3:1–4:34

Situation

Solomon carefully lived by God's rules, and God gave him success. Solomon asked God for wisdom, and with it, God gave him economic prosperity and fame.

Observation

God expects all people to use their gifts to do his will. When they do, everyone else benefits.

Inspiration

The enemy emphasizes the past, with its mistakes and heartaches; the Comforter exalts the present help of our Lord ([Psalm 46:1](#)). The devil delights in taunting us with our weaknesses, and the Lord reminds us of the wealth of His riches in grace. Condemnation concerns itself with our failures; conviction shows us the faithfulness of God. The tempter teases us with immediate gain, at any cost; the Trustworthy One tells us of eternal gain, and reminds us of Passion and Patience in Bunyan's House of the Interpreter. The father of lies magnifies our problems, by showing their hopelessness, impossibility, and pain; the God of all grace reminds us of the promises, whereby we can hope against hope; for "suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope; and hope does not disappoint us" ([Romans 5:3–5](#)). Thus we know that pain can mean gain.

The false angel of light would have us walk by sight and earthly wisdom (“the counsel of the ungodly,” [Psalm 1:1](#)); the Lord of life, who sees the end from the beginning, would have us walk by faith ([2 Corinthians 5:7](#)), and thereby please our heavenly Father ([Hebrews 11:6](#)). The enemy would have us see the hosts of evil against us rather than the hillsides covered with ministering spirits ([2 Kings 6:15–17](#)). He would keep us dwelling upon the injuries from others, until we become ineffective in service, rather than forgetting the things that are behind and pressing forward ([Philippians 3:13, 14](#)) in the spirit of Him who said, “Father, forgive them.” The Vanquished would have us feel the nails and the thorns, the Victor would have us see the triumph of Calvary’s tree.

The discipline of discernment requires that we follow the tenets of divine revelation, lest we fall before the wrath of the tempter. We are to meet his subtlety, selfishness and sophistry in the same way as did the Captain of our salvation, with the unequivocal statement, “It is written” ([Matthew 4:4, 7, 10](#)). We also are to live by the Word of God, are not to tempt the Lord our God, and are to worship Him only. We are to believe that as we commit our way unto the Lord and trust also in Him, He brings to pass His will ([Psalm 37:5](#)). We are to trust that He is able to fill us with the knowledge of His will ([Colossians 1:9](#)), and to protect us from ways of the destroyer. “When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him” ([Isaiah 59:19](#)). As we submit ourselves without reservation

unto God, and resist the devil, the latter will flee from us ([James 4:7](#)).

By the Word, by the Spirit, by faith, by submission to the divine will, and by resistance to any appeal to self and sin we discern between the way of God and the path of the destroyer. (From *The Disciplines of Life* by V. Raymond Edman)

Application

If you were given Solomon's opportunity to ask for anything, what would you choose? Would your requests benefit others if God granted them? In your prayers today, ask God for your heart's desire. Trust in God's generosity to you.

Exploration

Wisdom—[Job 28:13](#); [Psalm 119:97–104](#); [Proverbs 1:7–9](#), [20–28](#); [2:9–10](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:1](#).

Solomon Asks for Wisdom

Solomon made an agreement with the king of Egypt by marrying his daughter and bringing her to Jerusalem. At this time Solomon was still building his palace and the Temple of the Lord, as well as a wall around Jerusalem.²The Temple for the worship of the Lord had not yet been finished, so people were still sacrificing at altars in many places of worship.³Solomon showed he loved the Lord by following the commands his father David had given him, except many other places of worship were still used to offer sacrifices and to burn incense.

⁴King Solomon went to Gibeon to offer a sacrifice, because it was the most important place of worship. He offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.⁵While he was at Gibeon, the Lord appeared to him in a dream during the night. God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”

⁶Solomon answered, “You were very kind to your servant, my father David. He obeyed you, and he was honest and lived right. You showed great kindness to him when you allowed his son to be king after him.⁷Lord my God, now you have made me, your servant, king in my father’s place. But I am like a little child; I don’t know how to do what must be done.⁸I, your servant, am here among your chosen people, and there are too many of them to count.⁹I ask that you give me an obedient heart so I can rule the people in the right way and will know the

difference between right and wrong. Otherwise, it is impossible to rule this great people of yours.”

¹⁰The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹So God said to him, “You did not ask for a long life, or riches for yourself, or the death of your enemies. Since you asked for wisdom to make the right decisions, ¹²I will do what you asked. I will give you wisdom and understanding that is greater than anyone has had in the past or will have in the future. ¹³I will also give you what you did not ask for: riches and honor. During your life no other king will be as great as you. ¹⁴If you follow me and obey my laws and commands, as your father David did, I will also give you a long life.”

¹⁵After Solomon woke up from the dream, he went to Jerusalem. He stood before the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord, where he made burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. After that, he gave a feast for all his leaders and officers.

Solomon Makes a Wise Decision

¹⁶One day two women who were prostitutes came to Solomon. As they stood before him, ¹⁷one of the women said, “My master, this woman and I live in the same house. I gave birth to a baby while she was there with me. ¹⁸Three days later this woman also gave birth to a baby. No one else was in the house with us; it was just the two of us. ¹⁹One night this woman rolled over on her baby, and he died. ²⁰So she took my son from my bed during the night while I was asleep, and she carried him to her bed. Then she put the dead baby in my bed. ²¹The next morning when I got up to feed my baby, I saw that he was dead! When I looked at him more closely, I realized he was not

my son.”

²²“No!” the other woman cried. “The living baby is my son, and the dead baby is yours!”

But the first woman said, “No! The dead baby is yours, and the living one is mine!” So the two women argued before the king.

²³Then King Solomon said, “One of you says, ‘My son is alive and your son is dead.’ Then the other one says, ‘No! Your son is dead and my son is alive.’”

²⁴The king sent his servants to get a sword. When they brought it to him, ²⁵he said, “Cut the living baby into two pieces, and give each woman half.”

²⁶The real mother of the living child was full of love for her son. So she said to the king, “Please, my master, don’t kill him! Give the baby to her!”

But the other woman said, “Neither of us will have him. Cut him into two pieces!”

²⁷Then King Solomon said, “Don’t kill him. Give the baby to the first woman, because she is the real mother.”

²⁸When the people of Israel heard about King Solomon’s decision, they respected him very much. They saw he had wisdom from God to make the right decisions.

Solomon's Officers

King Solomon ruled over all Israel. ²These are the names of his leading officers:

Azariah son of Zadok was the priest;

³Elihoreph and Ahijah, sons of Shisha, recorded what happened in the courts;

Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud recorded the history of the people;

⁴Benaiah son of Jehoiada was commander of the army;
Zadok and Abiathar were priests;

⁵Azariah son of Nathan was in charge of the district governors;

Zabud son of Nathan was a priest and adviser to the king;

⁶Ahishar was responsible for everything in the palace;

Adoniram son of Abda was in charge of the labor force.

⁷Solomon placed twelve governors over the districts of Israel, who gathered food from their districts for the king and his family. Each governor was responsible for bringing food to the king one month of each year. ⁸These are the names of the twelve governors:

Ben-Hur was governor of the mountain country of Ephraim.

⁹Ben-Deker was governor of Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth Shemesh, and Elon Bethhanan.

¹⁰Ben-Hesed was governor of Arubboth, Socoh, and all the land of Hepher.

¹¹Ben-Abinadab was governor of Naphoth Dor. (He was married to Taphath, Solomon's daughter.)

¹²Baana son of Ahilud was governor of Taanach, Megiddo, and all of Beth Shan next to Zarethan. This was below Jezreel from Beth Shan to Abel Meholah across from Jokmeam.

¹³Ben-Geber was governor of Ramoth in Gilead. (He was governor of all the towns of Jair in Gilead. Jair was the son of Manasseh. Ben-Geber was also over the district of Argob in Bashan, which had sixty large, walled cities with bronze bars on their gates.)

¹⁴Ahinadab son of Iddo was governor of Mahanaim.

¹⁵Ahimaaz was governor of Naphtali. (He was married to Basemath, Solomon's daughter.)

¹⁶Baana son of Hushai was governor of Asher and Aloth.

¹⁷Jehoshaphat son of Paruah was governor of Issachar.

¹⁸Shimei son of Ela was governor of Benjamin.

¹⁹Geber son of Uri was governor of Gilead. Gilead had been the country of Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan. But Geber was the only governor over this district.

Solomon's Kingdom

²⁰There were as many people in Judah and Israel as grains of sand on the seashore. The people ate, drank, and were happy.

²¹Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought Solomon the payments he demanded, and they were under his control all his life.

²²Solomon needed much food each day to feed himself and all the people who ate at his table: one hundred ninety-five bushels of fine flour, three hundred ninety bushels of grain,

²³ten cows that were fed on good grain, twenty cows that were

raised in the fields, one hundred sheep, three kinds of deer, and fattened birds.

²⁴Solomon controlled all the countries west of the Euphrates River—the land from Tiphseh to Gaza. And he had peace on all sides of his kingdom. ²⁵During Solomon's life Judah and Israel, from [Dan to Beersheba](#), also lived in peace; all of his people were able to sit under their own fig trees and grapevines.

²⁶Solomon had four thousand stalls for his chariot horses and twelve thousand horses. ²⁷Each month one of the district governors gave King Solomon all the food he needed—enough for every person who ate at the king's table. The governors made sure he had everything he needed. ²⁸They also brought enough barley and straw for Solomon's chariot and work horses; each person brought this grain to the right place.

Solomon's Wisdom

²⁹God gave Solomon great wisdom so he could understand many things. His wisdom was as hard to measure as the grains of sand on the seashore. ³⁰His wisdom was greater than any wisdom of the East, or any wisdom in Egypt. ³¹He was wiser than anyone on earth. He was even wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, as well as Heman, Calcol, and Darda—the three sons of Mahol. King Solomon became famous in all the surrounding countries. ³²During his life he spoke three thousand wise sayings and also wrote one thousand five songs. ³³He taught about many kinds of plants—everything from the great cedar trees of Lebanon to the weeds that grow out of the walls. He also taught about animals, birds, crawling things, and fish.

³⁴People from all nations came to listen to King Solomon's wisdom. The kings of all nations sent them to him, because they had heard of Solomon's wisdom.

Life Lessons

1 Kings 5:1–6:38

Situation

Solomon began to build the great Temple in Jerusalem. The king of Tyre allowed the wood from his forest to be used for building materials. In order to keep family ties strong, Solomon rotated the workmen so that only one-third of the workforce lived away from home at a time.

Observation

During the Temple construction, God reaffirmed to Solomon the promise he had previously made to David. It was predicated on Solomon obeying the Lord's laws and commands.

Inspiration

It's a wonderful day indeed when we stop working for God and begin working with God. (Go ahead, read the sentence again.)

For years I viewed God as a compassionate CEO and my role as a loyal sales representative. He had his office, and I had my territory. I could contact him as much as I wanted. He was always a phone or fax away. He encouraged me, rallied behind me, and supported me, but he didn't go with me. At least I didn't think he did. Then I read [2 Corinthians 6:1](#): "We are workers together with God."

Workers with God? Colaborers? God and I work together? Imagine the paradigm shift this truth creates. Rather than report to God, we work with God.

Rather than check in with him and then leave, we check in with him and then follow. We are always in the presence of God. We never leave church. There is never a nonsacred moment! His presence never diminishes. Our awareness of his presence may falter, but the reality of his presence never changes. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you desire to commune with God on a regular basis? He is always available. What can you do today to remind yourself of God's constant presence?

Exploration

Obedience—[Exodus 19:5](#); [24:7](#); [1 Kings 3:14](#); [Psalms 25:10](#); [Proverbs 1:33](#); [Luke 8:21](#); [John 14:15](#); [Acts 5:29](#); [1 Peter 1:14](#); [1 John 5:2](#).

Preparing to Build the Temple

Hiram, the king of Tyre, had always been David's friend. When Hiram heard that Solomon had been made king in David's place, he sent his messengers to Solomon.² Solomon sent this message back to King Hiram:³ "You remember my father David had to fight many wars with the countries around him, so he was never able to build a temple for worshiping the Lord his God. David was waiting until the Lord allowed him to defeat all his enemies.⁴ But now the Lord my God has given me peace on all sides of my country. I have no enemies now, and no danger threatens my people.

⁵ "The Lord promised my father David, 'I will make your son king after you, and he will build a temple for worshiping me.' Now, I plan to build that temple for worshiping the Lord my God.⁶ So send your men to cut down cedar trees for me from Lebanon. My servants will work with yours, and I will pay them whatever wages you decide. We don't have anyone who can cut down trees as well as the people of Sidon."

⁷ When Hiram heard what Solomon asked, he was very happy. He said, "Praise the Lord today! He has given David a wise son to rule over this great nation!"⁸ Then Hiram sent back this message to Solomon: "I received the message you sent, and I will give you all the cedar and pine trees you want.⁹ My servants will bring them down from Lebanon to the sea. There I will tie them together and float them along the shore to the

place you choose. Then I will separate the logs there, and you can take them away. In return it is my wish that you give food to all those who live with me.”¹⁰ So Hiram gave Solomon as much cedar and pine as he wanted.¹¹ And Solomon gave Hiram about one hundred twenty-five thousand bushels of wheat each year to feed the people who lived with him. Solomon also gave him about one hundred fifteen thousand gallons of pure olive oil every year.

¹²The Lord gave Solomon wisdom as he had promised. And there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; these two kings made a treaty between themselves.

¹³King Solomon forced thirty thousand men of Israel to help in this work.¹⁴ He sent a group of ten thousand men each month to Lebanon. Each group worked in Lebanon one month, then went home for two months. A man named Adoniram was in charge.¹⁵ Solomon forced eighty thousand men to work in the hill country, cutting stone, and he had seventy thousand men to carry the stones.¹⁶ There were also thirty-three hundred men who directed the workers.¹⁷ King Solomon commanded them to cut large blocks of fine stone to be used for the foundation of the Temple.¹⁸ Solomon’s and Hiram’s builders and the men from Byblos carved the stones and prepared the stones and the logs for building the Temple.

Solomon Builds the Temple

Solomon began to build the Temple four hundred eighty years after the people of Israel had left Egypt. This was during the fourth year of King Solomon's rule over Israel. It was the second month, the month of Ziv.

²The Temple was ninety feet long, thirty feet wide, and forty-five feet high. ³The porch in front of the main room of the Temple was fifteen feet deep and thirty feet wide. This room ran along the front of the Temple itself. Its width was equal to that of the Temple. ⁴The Temple also had windows that opened and closed. ⁵Solomon also built some side rooms against the walls of the main room and the inner room of the Temple. He built rooms all around. ⁶The rooms on the bottom floor were seven and one-half feet wide. Those on the middle floor were nine feet wide, and the rooms above them were ten and one-half feet wide. The Temple wall that formed the side of each room was thinner than the wall in the room below. These rooms were pushed against the Temple wall, but they did not have their main beams built into this wall.

⁷The stones were prepared at the same place where they were cut from the ground. Since these stones were the only ones used to build the Temple, there was no noise of hammers, axes, or any other iron tools at the Temple.

⁸The entrance to the lower rooms beside the Temple was on the south side. From there, stairs went up to the second-floor rooms. And from there, stairs went on to the third-floor rooms.

⁹Solomon put a roof made from beams and cedar boards on the

Temple. So he finished building the Temple ¹⁰as well as the bottom floor that was beside the Temple. This bottom floor was seven and one-half feet high and was attached to the Temple by cedar beams.

¹¹The Lord said to Solomon: ¹²“If you obey all my laws and commands, I will do for you what I promised your father David. ¹³I will live among the Israelites in this Temple, and I will never leave my people Israel.”

¹⁴So Solomon finished building the Temple. ¹⁵The inside walls were covered from floor to ceiling with cedar boards. The floor was made from pine boards. ¹⁶A room thirty feet long was built in the back part of the Temple. This room, called the Most Holy Place, was separated from the rest of the Temple by cedar boards which reached from floor to ceiling. ¹⁷The main room, the one in front of the Most Holy Place, was sixty feet long. ¹⁸Everything inside the Temple was covered with cedar, which was carved with pictures of flowers and plants. A person could not see the stones of the wall, only the cedar.

¹⁹Solomon prepared the inner room at the back of the Temple to keep the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord. ²⁰This inner room was thirty feet long, thirty feet wide, and thirty feet high. He covered this room with pure gold, and he also covered the altar of cedar. ²¹He covered the inside of the Temple with pure gold, placing gold chains across the front of the inner room, which was also covered with gold. ²²So all the inside of the Temple, as well as the altar of the Most Holy Place, was covered with gold.

²³Solomon made two creatures from olive wood and placed them in the Most Holy Place. Each creature was fifteen feet tall ²⁴and had two wings. Each wing was seven and one-half feet

long, so it was fifteen feet from the end of one wing to the end of the other. ²⁵The creatures were the same size and shape; ²⁶each was fifteen feet tall. ²⁷These creatures were put beside each other in the Most Holy Place with their wings spread out. One creature's wing touched one wall, and the other creature's wing touched the other wall with their wings touching each other in the middle of the room. ²⁸These two creatures were covered with gold.

²⁹All the walls around the Temple were carved with pictures of creatures with wings, as well as palm trees and flowers. This was true for both the main room and the inner room. ³⁰The floors of both rooms were covered with gold.

³¹Doors made from olive wood were placed at the entrance to the Most Holy Place. These doors had five-sided frames. ³²Creatures with wings, as well as palm trees and flowers, were also carved on the two olive wood doors that were covered with gold. The creatures and the palm trees on the doors were covered with gold as well. ³³At the entrance to the main room there was a square door frame made of olive wood. ³⁴Two doors were made from pine. Each door had two parts so the doors folded. ³⁵The doors were covered with pictures of creatures with wings, as well as palm trees and flowers. All of the carvings were covered with gold, which was evenly spread over them.

³⁶The inner courtyard was enclosed by walls, which were made of three rows of cut stones and one row of cedar boards.

³⁷Work began on the Temple in Ziv, the second month, during the fourth year Solomon was king over Israel. ³⁸The Temple was finished during the eleventh year he was king, in the eighth month, the month of Bul. It was built exactly as it

was planned. Solomon had spent seven years building it.

Solomon's Palace

King Solomon also built a palace for himself; it took him thirteen years to finish it.²Built of cedars from the Forest of Lebanon, it was one hundred fifty feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and forty-five feet high. It had four rows of cedar columns which supported the cedar beams.³There were forty-five beams on the roof, with fifteen beams in each row, and the ceiling was covered with cedar above the beams.⁴Windows were placed in three rows facing each other.⁵All the doors were square, and the three doors at each end faced each other.

⁶Solomon also built the porch that had pillars. This porch was seventy-five feet long and forty-five feet wide. Along the front of the porch was a roof supported by pillars.

⁷Solomon also built a throne room where he judged people, called the Hall of Justice. This room was covered with cedar from the floor to the ceiling.⁸The palace where Solomon lived was built like the Hall of Justice, and it was behind this hall. Solomon also built the same kind of palace for his wife, who was the daughter of the king of Egypt.

⁹All these buildings were made with blocks of fine stone. First they were carefully cut. Then they were trimmed with a saw in the front and back. These fine stones went from the foundations of the buildings to the top of the walls. Even the courtyard was made with blocks of stone.¹⁰The foundations were made with large blocks of fine stone, some as long as fifteen feet. Others were twelve feet long.¹¹On top of these foundation stones were other blocks of fine stone and cedar

beams.¹²The palace courtyard, the courtyard inside the Temple, and the porch of the Temple were surrounded by walls. All of these walls had three rows of stone blocks and one row of cedar beams.

The Temple Is Completed Inside

¹³King Solomon sent to Tyre and had Hiram brought to him.

¹⁴Hiram's mother was a widow from the tribe of Naphtali. His father was from Tyre and had been skilled in making things from bronze. Hiram was also very skilled and experienced in bronze work. So he came to King Solomon and did all the bronze work.

¹⁵He made two bronze pillars, each one twenty-seven feet tall and eighteen feet around.¹⁶He also made two bronze capitals that were seven and one-half feet tall, and he put them on top of the pillars.¹⁷Then he made a net of seven chains for each capital, which covered the capitals on top of the two pillars.¹⁸He made two rows of bronze pomegranates to go on the nets. These covered the capitals at the top of the pillars.¹⁹The capitals on top of the pillars in the porch were shaped like lilies, and they were six feet tall.²⁰The capitals were on top of both pillars, above the bowl-shaped section and next to the nets. At that place there were two hundred pomegranates in rows all around the capitals.²¹Hiram put these two bronze pillars at the porch of the Temple. He named the south pillar He Establishes and the north pillar In Him Is Strength.²²The capitals on top of the pillars were shaped like lilies. So the work on the pillars was finished.

²³Then Hiram made from bronze a large round bowl, which

was called the Sea. It was forty-five feet around, fifteen feet across, and seven and one-half feet deep.²⁴ Around the outer edge of the bowl was a rim. Under this rim were two rows of bronze plants which surrounded the bowl. There were ten plants every eighteen inches, and these plants were made in one piece with the bowl.²⁵ The bowl rested on the backs of twelve bronze bulls that faced outward from the center of the bowl. Three bulls faced north, three faced west, three faced south, and three faced east.²⁶ The sides of the bowl were four inches thick, and it held about eleven thousand gallons. The rim of the bowl was like the rim of a cup or like a lily blossom.

²⁷ Then Hiram made ten bronze stands, each one six feet long, six feet wide, and four and one-half feet high.²⁸ The stands were made from square sides, which were put on frames.²⁹ On the sides were bronze lions, bulls, and creatures with wings. On the frames above and below the lions and bulls were designs of flowers hammered into the bronze.³⁰ Each stand had four bronze wheels with bronze axles. At the corners there were bronze supports for a large bowl, and the supports had designs of flowers.³¹ There was a frame on top of the bowls, eighteen inches high above the bowls. The opening of the bowl was round, twenty-seven inches deep. Designs were carved into the bronze on the frame, which was square, not round.³² The four wheels, placed under the frame, were twenty-seven inches high. The axles between the wheels were made as one piece with the stand.³³ The wheels were like a chariot's wheels. Everything on the wheels—the axles, rims, spokes, and hubs—were made of bronze.

³⁴ The four supports were on the four corners of each stand. They were made as one piece with the stand.³⁵ A strip of

bronze around the top of each stand was nine inches deep. It was also made as one piece with the stand.³⁶ The sides of the stand and the frames were covered with carvings of creatures with wings, as well as lions, palm trees, and flowers.³⁷ This is the way Hiram made the ten stands. The bronze for each stand was melted and poured into a mold, so all the stands were the same size and shape.

³⁸Hiram also made ten bronze bowls, one bowl for each of the ten stands. Each bowl was six feet across and could hold about two hundred thirty gallons.³⁹ Hiram put five stands on the south side of the Temple and five on the north side. He put the large bowl in the southeast corner of the Temple.⁴⁰ Hiram also made bowls, shovels, and small bowls.

So Hiram finished all his work for King Solomon on the Temple of the Lord:

-
- ⁴¹two pillars;
- two large bowls for the capitals on top of the pillars;
- two nets to cover the two large bowls for the capitals on top of the pillars;
- ⁴²four hundred pomegranates for the two nets (there were two rows of pomegranates for each net covering the bowls for the capitals on top of the pillars);
- ⁴³ten stands with a bowl on each stand;
- ⁴⁴the large bowl with twelve bulls under it;
- ⁴⁵the pots, shovels, small bowls, and all the utensils for the Temple of the Lord.

Hiram made everything King Solomon wanted from polished bronze.⁴⁶ The king had these things poured into clay

molds that were made in the plain of the Jordan River between Succoth and Zarethan.⁴⁷ Solomon never weighed the bronze used to make these things, because there was too much to weigh. So the total weight of all the bronze was never known.

⁴⁸Solomon also made all the items for the Temple of the Lord:

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- the golden altar;
- the golden table which held the bread that shows God's people are in his presence;
- ⁴⁹the lampstands of pure gold (five on the right side and five on the left side in front of the Most Holy Place);
- the flowers, lamps, and tongs of gold;
- ⁵⁰the pure gold bowls, wick trimmers, small bowls, pans, and dishes used to carry coals;
- the gold hinges for the doors of the Most Holy Place and the main room of the Temple.

⁵¹Finally the work King Solomon did for the Temple of the Lord was finished. Solomon brought in everything his father David had set apart for the Temple—silver, gold, and other articles. He put everything in the treasuries of the Temple of the Lord.

Life Lessons

1 Kings 7:1–8:66

Situation

After lavishly constructing and decorating the Temple, Solomon offered a prayer of thanksgiving

and blessing to God. He praised God and prayed for the people.

Observation

As he finished his blessing, Solomon said that God had given rest to his people and had kept his good promises.

Inspiration

The bow cannot always be bent without fear of breaking. For a field to bear fruit, it must occasionally lie fallow. And for you to be healthy, you must rest. Slow down, and God will heal you. He will bring rest to your mind, to your body, and most of all to your soul. He will lead you to green pastures.

Green pastures were not the natural terrain of Judea. The hills around Bethlehem where David kept his flock were not lush and green. Even today they are white and parched. Any green pasture in Judea is the work of some shepherd. He has cleared the rough, rocky land. Stumps have been torn out, and brush has been burned. Irrigation. Cultivation. Such are the work of a shepherd.

Hence, when David says, “He lets me rest in green pastures” [[Psalm 23:2](#)], he is saying, “My shepherd makes me lie down in his finished work.” With his own pierced hands, Jesus created a pasture for the soul. He tore out the thorny underbrush of condemnation. He pried loose the huge boulders of sin. In their place he planted seeds of grace and dug ponds of mercy.

And he invites us to rest there. Can you imagine the satisfaction in the heart of the shepherd when,

with work completed, he sees his sheep rest in the tender grass?

Can you imagine the satisfaction in the heart of God when we do the same? His pasture is his gift to us. This is not a pasture that you have made. Nor is it a pasture that you deserve. It is a gift of God. “I mean that you have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God” ([Ephesians 2:8](#)).

In a world rocky with human failure, there is a land lush with divine mercy. Your Shepherd invites you there. He wants you to lie down. Nestle deeply until you are hidden, buried, in the tall shoots of his love, and there you will find rest. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

Application

Jesus said that those who are tired and have heavy loads will find rest in his presence. Ask him to loosen your heavy load. Ask him to give you peace and rest. If necessary, take steps to slow down your hectic pace so you can spend more time with the Lord.

Exploration

Rest—[Jeremiah 6:16](#); [31:25](#); [Matthew 11:28–30](#); [Mark 6:31–32](#); [John 7:37–38](#).

The Ark Is Brought into the Temple

King Solomon called for the older leaders of Israel, the heads of the tribes, and the leaders of the families to come to him in Jerusalem. He wanted them to bring the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord from the older part of the city.² So all the Israelites came together with King Solomon during the festival in the month of Ethanim, the seventh month.

³When all the older leaders of Israel arrived, the priests lifted up the Ark.⁴ They carried the Ark of the Lord, the Meeting Tent, and the holy utensils; the priests and the Levites brought them up.⁵ King Solomon and all the Israelites gathered before the Ark and sacrificed so many sheep and cattle no one could count them all.⁶ Then the priests put the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord in its place inside the Most Holy Place in the Temple, under the wings of the golden creatures.⁷ The wings of these creatures were spread out over the place for the Ark, covering it and its carrying poles.⁸ The carrying poles were so long that anyone standing in the Holy Place in front of the Most Holy Place could see the ends of the poles, but no one could see them from outside the Holy Place. The poles are still there today.⁹ The only things inside the Ark were two [stone tablets](#) that Moses had put in the Ark at Mount Sinai. That was where the Lord made his agreement with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt.

¹⁰When the priests left the Holy Place, a cloud filled the Temple of the Lord.¹¹ The priests could not continue their work, because the Temple was filled with the glory of the Lord.

Solomon Speaks to the People

¹²Then Solomon said, “The Lord said he would live in a dark cloud. ¹³Lord, I have truly built a wonderful Temple for you—a place for you to live forever.”

¹⁴While all the Israelites were standing there, King Solomon turned to them and blessed them.

¹⁵Then he said, “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel. He has done what he promised to my father David. The Lord said, ¹⁶‘Since the time I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city in any tribe of Israel where a temple will be built for me. But I have chosen David to lead my people Israel.’

¹⁷“My father David wanted to build a temple for the Lord, the God of Israel. ¹⁸But the Lord said to my father David, ‘It was good that you wanted to build a temple for me. ¹⁹But you are not the one to build it. Your son, who comes from your own body, is the one who will build my temple.’

²⁰“Now the Lord has kept his promise. I am the king now in place of David my father. Now I rule Israel as the Lord promised, and I have built the Temple for the Lord, the God of Israel. ²¹I have made a place there for the Ark, in which is the Agreement the Lord made with our ancestors when he brought them out of Egypt.”

Solomon's Prayer

²²Then Solomon stood facing the Lord's altar, and all the Israelites were standing behind him. He spread out his hands toward the sky ²³and said:

“Lord, God of Israel, there is no god like you in heaven above or on earth below. You keep your agreement of love with your servants who truly follow you.²⁴ You have kept the promise you made to your servant David, my father. You spoke it with your own mouth and finished it with your hands today.²⁵ Now Lord, God of Israel, keep the promise you made to your servant David, my father. You said, ‘If your sons are careful to obey me as you have obeyed me, there will always be someone from your family ruling Israel.’²⁶ Now, God of Israel, please continue to keep that promise you made to your servant David, my father.

²⁷“But, God, can you really live here on the earth? The sky and the highest place in heaven cannot contain you. Surely this house which I have built cannot contain you.²⁸ But please listen to my prayer and my request, because I am your servant. Lord my God, hear this prayer your servant prays to you today.²⁹ Night and day please watch over this Temple where you have said, ‘I will be worshiped there.’ Hear the prayer I pray facing this Temple.³⁰ Hear my prayers and the prayers of your people Israel when we pray facing this place. Hear from your home in heaven, and when you hear, forgive us.

³¹“If someone wrongs another person, he will be brought to the altar in this Temple. If he swears an oath that he is not guilty,³² then hear in heaven. Judge the case, punish the guilty, but declare that the innocent person is not guilty.

³³“When your people, the Israelites, sin against you, their enemies will defeat them. But if they come back to you and praise you and pray to you in this Temple,³⁴ then hear them in heaven. Forgive the sins of your people Israel, and bring them back to the land you gave to their ancestors.

³⁵“When they sin against you, you will stop the rain from falling on their land. Then they will pray, facing this place and praising you; they will stop sinning when you make them suffer. ³⁶When this happens, please hear their prayer in heaven, and forgive the sins of your servants, the Israelites. Teach them to do what is right. Then please send rain to this land you have given particularly to them.

³⁷“At times the land will become so dry that no food will grow, or a great sickness will spread among the people. Sometimes all the crops will be destroyed by locusts or grasshoppers. Your people will be attacked in their cities by their enemy or will become sick. ³⁸When any of these things happen, the people will become truly sorry. If your people spread their hands in prayer toward this Temple, ³⁹then hear their prayers from your home in heaven. Forgive and treat each person as he should be treated because you know what is in a person’s heart. Only you know what is in everyone’s heart.

⁴⁰Then your people will respect you as long as they live in this land you gave to our ancestors.

^{41–42}“People who are not Israelites, foreigners from other lands, will hear about your greatness and power. They will come from far away to pray at this Temple. ⁴³Then hear from your home in heaven, and do whatever they ask you. Then people everywhere will know you and respect you, just as your people in Israel do. Then everyone will know I built this Temple as a place to worship you.

⁴⁴“When your people go out to fight their enemies along some road on which you send them, your people will pray to you, facing the city which you have chosen and the Temple I have built for you. ⁴⁵Then hear in heaven their prayers, and do

what is right.

⁴⁶“Everyone sins, so your people will also sin against you. You will become angry with them and hand them over to their enemies. Their enemies will capture them and take them away to their countries far or near. ⁴⁷Your people will be sorry for their sins when they are held as prisoners in another country. They will be sorry and pray to you in the land where they are held as prisoners, saying, ‘We have sinned. We have done wrong and acted wickedly.’ ⁴⁸They will truly turn back to you in the land of their enemies. They will pray to you, facing this land you gave their ancestors, this city you have chosen, and the Temple I have built for you. ⁴⁹Then hear their prayers from your home in heaven, and do what is right. ⁵⁰Forgive your people of all their sins and for turning against you. Make those who have captured them show them mercy. ⁵¹Remember, they are your special people. You brought them out of Egypt, as if you were pulling them out of a blazing furnace.

⁵²“Give your attention to my prayers and the prayers of your people Israel. Listen to them anytime they ask you for help. ⁵³You chose them from all the nations on earth to be your very own people. This is what you promised through Moses your servant when you brought our ancestors out of Egypt, Lord God.”

⁵⁴Solomon prayed this prayer to the Lord, kneeling in front of the altar with his arms raised toward heaven. When he finished praying, he got up. ⁵⁵Then, in a loud voice, he stood and blessed all the people of Israel, saying: ⁵⁶“Praise the Lord! He promised he would give rest to his people Israel, and he has given us rest. The Lord has kept all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses. ⁵⁷May the Lord our God be with us

as he was with our ancestors. May he never leave us,⁵⁸ and may he turn us to himself so we will follow him. Let us obey all the laws and commands he gave our ancestors.⁵⁹ May the Lord our God remember this prayer day and night and do what is right for his servant and his people Israel day by day.⁶⁰ Then all the people of the world will know the Lord is the only true God.⁶¹ You must fully obey the Lord our God and follow all his laws and commands. Continue to obey in the future as you do now.”

Sacrifices Are Offered

⁶²Then King Solomon and all Israel with him offered sacrifices to the Lord.⁶³ Solomon killed twenty-two thousand cattle and one hundred twenty thousand sheep as fellowship offerings. So the king and all the people gave the Temple to the Lord.

⁶⁴On that day King Solomon made holy the middle part of the courtyard which is in front of the Temple of the Lord. There he offered whole burnt offerings, grain offerings, and the fat of the fellowship offerings. He offered them in the courtyard, because the bronze altar before the Lord was too small to hold all the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the fat of the fellowship offerings.

⁶⁵Solomon and all the Israelites celebrated the other festival that came at that time. People came from as far away as Lebo Hamath and the brook of Egypt. A great many people celebrated before the Lord for seven days, then seven more days, for a total of fourteen days.⁶⁶ On the following day Solomon sent the people home. They blessed the king as they went, happy because of all the good things the Lord had done

for his servant David and his people Israel.

Life Lessons

1 Kings 9:1–28

Situation

This is the story of Solomon's greatness and decline. God appeared to Solomon and promised blessing in exchange for obedience.

Observation

Solomon's sin did not catch God off guard. Although God knew Solomon would sin, he continued to bless Solomon because of God's promise to David.

Inspiration

God is outside and above the Timeline. In that case, what we call "tomorrow" is visible to Him in just the same way as what we call "today." All the days are "now" for Him. He does not remember you doing things yesterday; He simply sees you doing because, though you have lost yesterday, He has not. He does not "foresee" you doing things tomorrow; He simply sees you doing them: because, though tomorrow is not yet here for you, it is for Him. You must never suppose that your actions at this moment are any less free because God knows what you are doing. (From *The Quotable Lewis* edited by Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root)

Application

What gifts has God given you? Money? Musical talent? Outgoing personality? Intelligence, sensitivity, or discipline? Find a way to use your gifts

in service to God so that he receives the glory.

Exploration

Purpose of Gifts—[Romans 12:3–6](#); [1 Corinthians 12:12](#); [14:26](#); [Ephesians 4:11–16](#); [1 Timothy 4:14](#); [2 Timothy 1:6](#).

The Lord Appears to Solomon Again

Solomon finished building the Temple of the Lord and his royal palace and everything he wanted to build.²Then the Lord appeared to him again just as he had done before, in Gibeon.³The Lord said to him: “I have heard your prayer and what you have asked me to do. You built this Temple, and I have made it a holy place. I will be worshiped there forever and will watch over it and protect it always.

⁴“But you must serve me as your father David did; he was fair and sincere. You must obey all I have commanded and keep my laws and rules. ⁵If you do, I will make your kingdom strong. This is the promise I made to your father David—that someone from his family would always rule Israel.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The Sinless Savior

The figure on the center cross ... has no such shadow of sin. “When he lived on earth, he was tempted in every way that we are, but he did not sin” ([Hebrews 4:15](#)). Stainless. Selfless. Even on a sinner’s cross Jesus’ holiness illuminates heaven

Many could have spoken on behalf of Jesus, but none did. Until now. Kind words from the lips of a thief. He makes his request. “Jesus, remember me

when you come into your kingdom” ([Luke 23:42](#)).

The Savior turns his heavy head toward the prodigal child and promises, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” ([Luke 23:43](#)).

To those at the foot of the cross, the dialogue was curious. But to those at the foot of the throne, the dialogue was outrageous. They couldn’t imagine it. How could the thief come to paradise? How could a soul speckled by sin go to heaven? How could a sinner be saved? They were about to see.

Did an angel move, did a demon stir as they witnessed the answering of the prayer? The sins of the thief (and all us thieves!) leave him and go to Jesus. Tiny specks at first, then large flakes, and finally layers of filth. Every evil thought. Each vile deed. The thief’s ravings. His cursings. His greed. His sin. All now covering Jesus Christ. What nauseates God now covers his son. . . .

The One with no sin becomes sin-filled. The one sin-filled becomes sinless.

It is eternity’s most bizarre exchange. Paul explained it like this: “Christ took away the curse the law put on us. He changed places with us and put himself under that curse” ([Galatians 3:13](#)). (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible,”](#) see page 450.

⁶“But you and your children must follow me and obey the laws and commands I have given you. You must not serve or worship other gods. ⁷If you do, I will force Israel to leave the land I have given them, and I will leave this Temple that I have made holy. All the nations will make fun of Israel and speak evil about them. ⁸If the Temple is destroyed, everyone who passes by will be shocked. They will make fun of you and ask, ‘Why did the Lord do this terrible thing to this land and this Temple?’ ⁹People will answer, ‘This happened because they left the Lord their God. This was the God who brought their ancestors out of Egypt, but they decided to follow other gods. They worshiped and served those gods, so the Lord brought all this disaster on them.’”

Solomon's Other Achievements

¹⁰By the end of twenty years, King Solomon had built two buildings—the Temple of the Lord and the royal palace. ¹¹At that time King Solomon gave twenty towns in Galilee to Hiram king of Tyre, because Hiram had helped with the buildings. Hiram had given Solomon all the cedar, pine, and gold he wanted. ¹²So Hiram traveled from Tyre to see the towns Solomon had given him, but when he saw them, he was not pleased. ¹³He asked, “What good are these towns you have given me, my brother?” So he named them the Land of [Cabul](#), and they are still called that today. ¹⁴Hiram had sent Solomon about nine thousand pounds of gold.

¹⁵This is the account of the forced labor Solomon used to

build the Temple and the palace. He had them fill in the land and build the wall around Jerusalem. He also had them rebuild the cities of Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. ¹⁶(In the past the king of Egypt had attacked and captured Gezer. After burning it, he killed the Canaanites who lived there. Then he gave it as a wedding present to his daughter, who married Solomon. ¹⁷So Solomon rebuilt it.) He also built the cities of Lower Beth Horon ¹⁸and Baalath, as well as Tadmor, which is in the desert. ¹⁹King Solomon also built cities for storing grain and supplies and cities for his chariots and horses. He built whatever he wanted in Jerusalem, Lebanon, and everywhere he ruled.

²⁰There were other people in the land who were not Israelites—Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. ²¹They were descendants of people that the Israelites had not destroyed. Solomon forced them to work for him as slaves, as is still true today. ²²But Solomon did not make slaves of the Israelites. They were his soldiers, government leaders, officers, captains, chariot commanders, and drivers.

²³These were his most important officers over the work. There were five hundred fifty supervisors over the people who did the work on Solomon's projects.

²⁴The daughter of the king of Egypt moved from the old part of Jerusalem to the palace that Solomon had built for her. Then Solomon filled in the surrounding land.

²⁵Three times each year Solomon offered whole burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar he had built for the Lord. He also burned incense before the Lord. So he finished the work on the Temple.

²⁶King Solomon also built ships at Ezion Geber, a town near Elath on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom. ²⁷Hiram

had skilled sailors, so he sent them to serve in these ships with Solomon's men.²⁸ The ships sailed to Ophir and brought back about thirty-two thousand pounds of gold to King Solomon.

The Queen of Sheba Visits Solomon

When the queen of Sheba heard about Solomon, she came to test him with hard questions.² She traveled to Jerusalem with a large group of servants and camels carrying spices, jewels, and much gold. When she came to Solomon, she talked with him about all she had in mind,³ and Solomon answered all her questions. Nothing was too hard for him to explain to her.⁴ The queen of Sheba learned that Solomon was very wise. She saw the palace he had built,⁵ the food on his table, his many officers, the palace servants, and their good clothes. She saw the servants who served him at feasts and the whole burnt offerings he made in the Temple of the Lord. All these things amazed her.

⁶So she said to King Solomon, “What I heard in my own country about your achievements and wisdom is true.⁷ I could not believe it then, but now I have come and seen it with my own eyes. I was not told even half of it! Your wisdom and wealth are much greater than I had heard.⁸ Your men and officers are very lucky, because in always serving you, they are able to hear your wisdom.⁹ Praise the Lord your God, who was pleased to make you king of Israel. The Lord has constant love for Israel, so he made you king to keep justice and to rule fairly.”

¹⁰Then she gave the king about nine thousand pounds of gold and many spices and jewels. No one since that time has brought more spices than the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

¹¹(Hiram's ships brought gold from Ophir, as well as much juniper wood and jewels. ¹²Solomon used the juniper wood to build supports for the Temple of the Lord and the palace, and to make harps and lyres for the musicians. Such fine juniper wood has not been brought in or been seen since that time.)

¹³King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba everything she wanted and asked for, in addition to what he had already given her of his wealth. Then she and her servants returned to her own country.

Solomon's Wealth

¹⁴Every year King Solomon received about fifty thousand pounds of gold. ¹⁵Besides that, he also received gold from the traders and merchants, as well as from the kings of Arabia and governors of the land.

¹⁶King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold, each of which contained about seven and one-half pounds of gold. ¹⁷He also made three hundred smaller shields of hammered gold, each of which contained about four pounds of gold. The king put them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon.

¹⁸The king built a large throne of ivory and covered it with fine gold. ¹⁹The throne had six steps on it, and its back was round at the top. There were armrests on both sides of the chair, and each armrest had a lion beside it. ²⁰Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one lion at each end of each step. Nothing like this had ever been made for any other kingdom. ²¹All of Solomon's drinking cups, as well as the dishes in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon, were made of pure gold.

Nothing was made from silver, because silver was not valuable in Solomon's time.

²²King Solomon also had many trading ships at sea, along with Hiram's ships. Every three years the ships returned, bringing back gold, silver, ivory, apes, and baboons.

²³So Solomon had more riches and wisdom than all the other kings on earth. ²⁴People everywhere wanted to see King Solomon and listen to the wisdom God had given him. ²⁵Every year those who came brought gifts of silver and gold, clothes, weapons, spices, horses, and mules.

²⁶Solomon had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses. He kept some in special cities for the chariots, and others he kept with him in Jerusalem. ²⁷In Jerusalem Solomon made silver as common as stones and cedar trees as common as the fig trees on the western hills. ²⁸He imported horses from Egypt and Kue. His traders bought them in Kue. ²⁹A chariot from Egypt cost about fifteen pounds of silver, and a horse cost nearly four pounds of silver. Solomon's traders also sold horses and chariots to all the kings of the Hittites and the Arameans.

Life Lessons

1 Kings 10:1–11:43

Situation

The queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's wisdom and came to see if the reports were true. Finally, toward the end of his life, Solomon's many wives influenced him to turn away from God.

Observation

Solomon had been given great gifts from God, but instead of responsibly using those gifts in obedience to God, the king allowed himself to be influenced by others. Christ's followers need to stand against pressure to compromise our faith and what we know to be true.

Inspiration

Jesus made it clear that with blessings also come responsibilities. He summed it up succinctly: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" [[Luke 12:48](#), KJV].

... Those who are given understanding, ability, goods, money, authority, or fame have a responsibility that the less favored do not bear; failure to fulfill it produces fearful punishment...

Whatever level of opportunity is given to us, both God and man expect us to give a certain standard of performance. Favor carries with it responsibility. As the favor increases, the responsibility increases...

Arthur Rubinstein, the great pianist, capsulized this principle when he remarked that should he fail to practice one day, he would know it; should he skip practice for two days, the critics would know it; but should that extend to three days "the whole world knows it." A part-time church pianist might get away with a bit of a letdown, but not an internationally acclaimed musician. More is required of the professional.

Harry Truman said it well when remarking on the burden of the presidency: "If you can't stand the

heat, get out of the kitchen.” The sign on his Oval office desk said, “The buck stops here.” (From *The Secret Kingdom* by Pat Robertson)

Application

What responsibilities have you been given to serve God? In what areas are you vulnerable to the influence of others? Ask God to help you stand against those influences.

Exploration

Responsibility—[Genesis 43:9](#); [Deuteronomy 21:1–9](#); [1 Chronicles 21:8](#).

Solomon's Many Wives

King Solomon loved many women who were not from Israel. He loved the daughter of the king of Egypt, as well as women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites.

²The Lord had told the Israelites, "You must not marry people of other nations. If you do, they will cause you to follow their gods." But Solomon fell in love with these women.³He had seven hundred wives who were from royal families and three hundred slave women who gave birth to his children. His wives caused him to turn away from God.⁴As Solomon grew old, his wives caused him to follow other gods. He did not follow the Lord completely as his father David had done.⁵Solomon worshiped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the people of Sidon, and Molech, the hated god of the Ammonites.⁶So Solomon did what the Lord said was wrong and did not follow the Lord completely as his father David had done.

⁷On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built two places for worship. One was a place to worship Chemosh, the hated god of the Moabites, and the other was a place to worship Molech, the hated god of the Ammonites.⁸Solomon did the same thing for all his foreign wives so they could burn incense and offer sacrifices to their gods.

⁹The Lord had appeared to Solomon twice, but the king turned away from following the Lord, the God of Israel. The Lord was angry with Solomon,¹⁰because he had commanded Solomon not to follow other gods. But Solomon did not obey the Lord's command.¹¹So the Lord said to Solomon, "Because

you have chosen to break your agreement with me and have not obeyed my commands, I will tear your kingdom away from you and give it to one of your officers. ¹²But I will not take it away while you are alive because of my love for your father David. I will tear it away from your son when he becomes king. ¹³I will not tear away all the kingdom from him, but I will leave him one tribe to rule. I will do this because of David, my servant, and because of Jerusalem, the city I have chosen.”

Solomon's Enemies

¹⁴The Lord caused Hadad the Edomite, a member of the family of the king of Edom, to become Solomon's enemy. ¹⁵Earlier, David had defeated Edom. When Joab, the commander of David's army, went into Edom to bury the dead, he killed all the males. ¹⁶Joab and all the Israelites stayed in Edom for six months and killed every male in Edom. ¹⁷At that time Hadad was only a young boy, so he ran away to Egypt with some of his father's officers. ¹⁸They left Midian and went to Paran, where they were joined by other men. Then they all went to Egypt to see the king, who gave Hadad a house, some food, and some land.

¹⁹The king liked Hadad so much he gave Hadad a wife—the sister of Tahpenes, the king's wife. ²⁰They had a son named Genubath. Queen Tahpenes brought him up in the royal palace with the king's own children.

²¹While he was in Egypt, Hadad heard that David had died and that Joab, the commander of the army, was dead also. So Hadad said to the king, “Let me go; I will return to my own country.”

²²“Why do you want to go back to your own country?” the king asked. “What haven’t I given you here?”

“Nothing,” Hadad answered, “but please, let me go.”

²³God also caused another man to be Solomon’s enemy—Rezon son of Eliada. Rezon had run away from his master, Hadadezer king of Zobah. ²⁴After David defeated the army of Zobah, Rezon gathered some men and became the leader of a small army. They went to Damascus and settled there, and Rezon became king of Damascus. ²⁵Rezon ruled Aram, and he hated Israel. So he was an enemy of Israel all the time Solomon was alive. Both Rezon and Hadad made trouble for Israel.

²⁶Jeroboam son of Nebat was one of Solomon’s officers. He was an Ephraimite from the town of Zeredah, and he was the son of a widow named Zeruah. Jeroboam turned against the king.

²⁷This is the story of how Jeroboam turned against the king. Solomon was filling in the land and repairing the wall of Jerusalem, the city of David, his father. ²⁸Jeroboam was a capable man, and Solomon saw that this young man was a good worker. So Solomon put him over all the workers from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

²⁹One day as Jeroboam was leaving Jerusalem, Ahijah, the prophet from Shiloh, who was wearing a new coat, met him on the road. The two men were alone out in the country. ³⁰Ahijah took his new coat and tore it into twelve pieces. ³¹Then he said to Jeroboam, “Take ten pieces of this coat for yourself. The Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will tear the kingdom away from Solomon and give you ten tribes. ³²But I will allow him to control one tribe. I will do this for the sake of my servant David and for Jerusalem, the city I have chosen from all the tribes of

Israel.³³ I will do this because Solomon has stopped following me and has worshiped the Sidonian god Ashtoreth, the Moabite god Chemosh, and the Ammonite god Molech. Solomon has not obeyed me by doing what I said is right and obeying my laws and commands, as his father David did.

³⁴“But I will not take all the kingdom away from Solomon. I will let him rule all his life because of my servant David, whom I chose, who obeyed all my commands and laws.”³⁵ But I will take the kingdom away from his son, and I will allow you to rule over the ten tribes.³⁶ I will allow Solomon’s son to continue to rule over one tribe so that there will always be a descendant of David, my servant, in Jerusalem, the city where I chose to be worshiped.³⁷ But I will make you rule over everything you want. You will rule over all of Israel,³⁸ and I will always be with you if you do what I say is right. You must obey all my commands. If you obey my laws and commands as David did, I will be with you. I will make your family a lasting family of kings, as I did for David, and give Israel to you.³⁹ I will punish David’s children because of this, but I will not punish them forever.”

Solomon’s Death

⁴⁰Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but he ran away to Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt, where he stayed until Solomon died.

⁴¹Everything else King Solomon did, and the wisdom he showed, is written in the book of the history of Solomon.

⁴²Solomon ruled in Jerusalem over all Israel for forty years.

⁴³Then he died and was buried in Jerusalem, the city of David, his father. And his son Rehoboam became king in his place.

Life Lessons

1 Kings 12:1–14:31

Situation

Rehoboam, Solomon's heir, rejected the advice of experienced elders in favor of the harsh counsel of friends. This action placed such a burden on the country that the Northern Kingdom (Israel) chose to rebel, expressing its rebellion through idolatry.

Observation

God provides elders to help us lead well. The older and more experienced person often speaks with wisdom.

Inspiration

Cattle are driven; sheep are led; and our Lord compares His people to sheep, not to cattle.

He did not and does not drive His people; rather He leads the way Himself and enables His followers to come after Him. He suffered at the hands of men and can therefore fairly ask His people to suffer as He did. While He lived on earth He went about doing good, walking in dignified poverty, and it is no injustice when He calls His followers to lives of frugality and simplicity. He lived in the bosom of the Father even while here below ([John 1:18](#)), and led the way for us so we may do the same. He bore His cross and died upon it, so the New Testament requirement of personal crucifixion for all believers is morally logical. Finally, He arose and ascended to sit in heavenly places and thus give foundation to Paul's

words in Colossians: “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” ([3:1–3](#)). (From *The Price of Neglect* by A. W. Tozer)

Application

You don’t have to be a king to have influence. Pray that God would develop your own character.

Exploration

Shepherding—[Job 12:12](#); [Matthew 23:4–12](#); [Acts 20:28](#); [Titus 2:1–8](#).

The problem with pecking orders is not the order. The problem is with the pecking. —Max Lucado (*A Love Worth Giving*)

Israel Turns Against Rehoboam

Rehoboam went to Shechem, where all the Israelites had gone to make him king. ²Jeroboam son of Nebat was still in Egypt, where he had gone to escape from Solomon. When Jeroboam heard about Rehoboam being made king, he was living in Egypt. ³After the people sent for him, he and the people went to Rehoboam and said to him, ⁴“Your father forced us to work very hard. Now, make it easier for us, and don’t make us work as hard as he did. Then we will serve you.”

⁵Rehoboam answered, “Go away for three days, and then come back to me.” So the people left.

⁶King Rehoboam asked the older leaders who had advised Solomon during his lifetime, “How do you think I should answer these people?”

⁷They said, “You should be like a servant to them today. If you serve them and give them a kind answer, they will serve you always.”

⁸But Rehoboam rejected this advice. Instead, he asked the young men who had grown up with him and who served as his advisers. ⁹Rehoboam asked them, “What is your advice? How should we answer these people who said, ‘Don’t make us work as hard as your father did’?”

¹⁰The young men who had grown up with him answered, “Those people said to you, ‘Your father forced us to work very hard. Now make our work easier.’ You should tell them, ‘My little finger is bigger than my father’s legs. ¹¹He forced you to work hard, but I will make you work even harder. My father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with whips that have sharp points.’”

¹²Rehoboam had told the people, “Come back to me in three days.” So after three days Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam. ¹³King Rehoboam spoke cruel words to them, because he had rejected the advice the older leaders had given him. ¹⁴He followed the advice of the young men and said to the people, “My father forced you to work hard, but I will make you work even harder. My father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with whips that have sharp points.” ¹⁵So the king did not listen to the people. The Lord caused this to happen to keep the promise he had made to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah, a prophet from Shiloh.

¹⁶When all the Israelites saw that the new king refused to listen to them, they said to the king,

“We have no share in David!
We have no part in the son of Jesse!
People of Israel, let’s go to our own homes!
Let David’s son rule his own people!”

So the Israelites went home. ¹⁷But Rehoboam still ruled over the Israelites who lived in the towns of Judah.

¹⁸Adoniram was in charge of the forced labor. When Rehoboam sent him to the people of Israel, they threw stones at him until he died. But King Rehoboam ran to his chariot and

escaped to Jerusalem. ¹⁹Since then, Israel has been against the family of David.

²⁰When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they called him to a meeting and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah continued to follow the family of David.

²¹When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he gathered one hundred eighty thousand of the best soldiers from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. As son of Solomon, Rehoboam wanted to fight the people of Israel to take back his kingdom.

²²But God spoke his word to Shemaiah, a man of God, saying, ²³“Speak to Solomon’s son Rehoboam, the king of Judah, and to all the people of Judah and Benjamin and the rest of the people. Say to them, ²⁴“The Lord says you must not go to war against your brothers, the Israelites. Every one of you should go home, because I made all these things happen.” So they obeyed the Lord’s command and went home as the Lord had commanded.

²⁵Then Jeroboam made Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim a very strong city, and he lived there. He also went to the city of Peniel and made it stronger.

Jeroboam Builds Golden Calves

²⁶Jeroboam said to himself, “The kingdom will probably go back to David’s family. ²⁷If the people continue going to the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices, they will want to be ruled again by Rehoboam. Then they will kill me and follow Rehoboam king of Judah.”

²⁸King Jeroboam asked for advice. Then he made two golden calves. “It is too long a journey for you to go to

Jerusalem to worship,” he said to the people. “Israel, here are your gods who brought you out of Egypt.” ²⁹Jeroboam put one golden calf in the city of Bethel and the other in the city of Dan. ³⁰This became a very great sin, because the people traveled as far as Dan to worship the calf there.

³¹Jeroboam built temples on the places of worship. He also chose priests from all the people, not just from the tribe of Levi. ³²And he started a new festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, just like the festival in Judah. During that time the king offered sacrifices on the altar, along with sacrifices to the calves in Bethel he had made. He also chose priests in Bethel to serve at the places of worship he had made. ³³So Jeroboam chose his own time for a festival for the Israelites—the fifteenth day of the eighth month. During that time he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built in Bethel. He set up a festival for the Israelites and offered sacrifices on the altar.

The Man of God Speaks Against Bethel

The Lord commanded a man of God from Judah to go to Bethel. When he arrived, Jeroboam was standing by the altar to offer a sacrifice. ²The Lord had commanded the man of God to speak against the altar. The man said, "Altar, altar, the Lord says to you: 'David's family will have a son named Josiah. The priests for the places of worship now make their sacrifices on you, but Josiah will sacrifice those priests on you. Human bones will be burned on you.'" ³That same day the man of God gave proof that these things would happen. "This is the Lord's sign that this will happen," he said. "This altar will break apart, and the ashes on it will fall to the ground."

⁴When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God said about the altar in Bethel, the king raised his hand from the altar and pointed at the man. "Take him!" he said. But when the king said this, his arm was paralyzed, and he could not move it. ⁵The altar also broke into pieces, and its ashes fell to the ground. This was the sign the Lord had told the man of God to give.

⁶Then the king said to the man of God, "Please pray to the Lord your God for me, and ask him to heal my arm."

So the man of God prayed to the Lord, and the king's arm was healed, becoming as it was before.

⁷Then the king said to the man of God, "Please come home and eat with me, and I will give you a gift."

⁸But the man of God answered the king, "Even if you gave me half of your kingdom, I would not go with you. I will not eat or drink anything in this place. ⁹The Lord commanded me not to eat or drink anything nor to return on the same road by

which I came.”¹⁰ So he took a different road and did not return on the same road by which he had come to Bethel.

¹¹Now an old prophet was living in Bethel. His sons came and told him what the man of God had done there that day. They also told their father what he had said to King Jeroboam.

¹²The father asked, “Which road did he use when he left?” So his sons showed him the road the man of God from Judah had taken. ¹³Then the prophet told his sons to put a saddle on his donkey. So they saddled the donkey, and he left.

¹⁴He went after the man of God and found him sitting under an oak tree. The prophet asked, “Are you the man of God who came from Judah?”

The man answered, “Yes, I am.”

¹⁵The prophet said, “Please come home and eat with me.”

¹⁶“I can’t go home with you,” the man of God answered. “I can’t eat or drink with you in this place. ¹⁷The Lord said to me, ‘Don’t eat or drink anything there or return on the same road by which you came.’”

¹⁸Then the old prophet said, “But I also am a prophet like you.” Then he told a lie. He said, “An angel from the Lord came to me and told me to bring you to my home. He said you should eat and drink with me.” ¹⁹So the man of God went to the old prophet’s house, and he ate and drank with him there.

²⁰While they were sitting at the table, the Lord spoke his word to the old prophet. ²¹The old prophet cried out to the man of God from Judah, “The Lord said you did not obey him! He said you did not do what the Lord your God commanded you. ²²The Lord commanded you not to eat or drink anything in this place, but you came back and ate and drank. So your body will not be buried in your family grave.”

²³After the man of God finished eating and drinking, the prophet put a saddle on his donkey for him, and the man left.

²⁴As he was traveling home, a lion attacked and killed him. His body lay on the road, with the donkey and the lion standing nearby. ²⁵Some men who were traveling on that road saw the body and the lion standing nearby. So they went to the city where the old prophet lived and told what they had seen.

²⁶The old prophet who had brought back the man of God heard what had happened. "It is the man of God who did not obey the Lord's command," he said. "So the Lord sent a lion to kill him, just as he said he would."

²⁷Then the prophet said to his sons, "Put a saddle on my donkey," which they did. ²⁸The old prophet went out and found the body lying on the road, with the donkey and the lion still standing nearby. The lion had not eaten the body or hurt the donkey. ²⁹The prophet put the body on his donkey and carried it back to the city to have a time of sadness for him and to bury him. ³⁰The prophet buried the body in his own family grave, and they were sad for the man of God and said, "Oh, my brother."

³¹After the prophet buried the body, he said to his sons, "When I die, bury me in this same grave. Put my bones next to his." ³²Through him the Lord spoke against the altar at Bethel and against the places of worship in the towns of Samaria. What the Lord spoke through him will certainly come true."

³³After this incident King Jeroboam did not stop doing evil. He continued to choose priests for the places of worship from among all the people. Anyone who wanted to be a priest for the places of worship was allowed to be one. ³⁴In this way the family of Jeroboam sinned, and this sin caused its ruin and

destruction from the earth.

Jeroboam's Son Dies

At that time Jeroboam's son Abijah became very sick. ²So Jeroboam said to his wife, "Go to Shiloh to see the prophet Ahijah. He is the one who said I would become king of Israel. But dress yourself so people won't know you are my wife. ³Take the prophet ten loaves of bread, some cakes, and a jar of honey. Then ask him what will happen to our son, and he will tell you." ⁴So the king's wife did as he said and went to Ahijah's home in Shiloh.

Now Ahijah was very old and blind. ⁵The Lord said to him, "Jeroboam's son is sick, and Jeroboam's wife is coming to ask you about him. When she arrives, she will pretend to be someone else." Then the Lord told Ahijah what to say.

⁶When Ahijah heard her walking to the door, he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why are you pretending to be someone else? I have bad news for you. ⁷Go back and tell Jeroboam that this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Jeroboam, I chose you from among all the people and made you the leader of my people Israel. ⁸I tore the kingdom away from David's family, and I gave it to you. But you are not like my servant David, who always obeyed my commands and followed me with all his heart. He did only what I said was right. ⁹But you have done more evil than anyone who ruled before you. You have quit following me and have made other gods and idols of metal. This has made me very angry, ¹⁰so I will soon bring disaster to your family. I will kill all the men in your family, both slaves and free men. I will destroy your family

as completely as fire burns up manure. ¹¹Anyone from your family who dies in the city will be eaten by dogs, and those who die in the fields will be eaten by the birds. The Lord has spoken.”

¹²Then Ahijah said to Jeroboam’s wife, “Go home now. As soon as you enter your city, your son will die, ¹³and all Israel will be sad for him and bury him. He is the only one of Jeroboam’s family who will be buried, because he is the only one in the king’s family who pleased the Lord, the God of Israel.

¹⁴“The Lord will put a new king over Israel, who will destroy Jeroboam’s family, and this will happen soon. ¹⁵Then the Lord will punish Israel, which will be like grass moving in the water. The Lord will pull up Israel from this good land, the land he gave their ancestors. He will scatter Israel beyond the Euphrates River, because he is angry with the people. They made the Lord angry when they set up idols to worship Asherah. ¹⁶Jeroboam sinned, and then he made the people of Israel sin. So the Lord will let the people of Israel be defeated.”

¹⁷Then Jeroboam’s wife left and returned to Tirzah. As soon as she entered her home, the boy died. ¹⁸After they buried him, all Israel had a time of sadness for him, just as the Lord had said through his servant, the prophet Ahijah.

¹⁹Everything else Jeroboam did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. He fought wars and continued to rule the people, ²⁰serving as king for twenty-two years. Then he died, and his son Nadab became king in his place.

The Death of Rehoboam

²¹Solomon's son Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he became king of Judah. His mother was Naamah from Ammon. Rehoboam ruled in Jerusalem for seventeen years. (The Lord had chosen that city from all the land of Israel as the place where he would be worshiped.)

²²The people of Judah did what the Lord said was wrong. Their sins made the Lord very angry, even more angry than he had been at their ancestors. ²³The people built stone pillars and places to worship gods and Asherah idols on every high hill and under every green tree. ²⁴There were even male prostitutes in the land. They acted like the people who had lived in the land before the Israelites. They had done many evil things, and God had taken the land away from them.

²⁵During the fifth year Rehoboam was king, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem. ²⁶He took the treasures from the Temple of the Lord and the king's palace. He took everything, even the gold shields Solomon had made. ²⁷So King Rehoboam made bronze shields to put in their place and gave them to the commanders of the guards for the palace gates. ²⁸Whenever the king went to the Temple of the Lord, the guards carried the shields. Later, they would put them back in the guardroom.

²⁹Everything else King Rehoboam did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. ³⁰There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam the whole time. ³¹Rehoboam, son of Naamah from Ammon, died and was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, and his son Abijah became king in his place.

Life Lessons

1 Kings 15:1–16:34

Situation

The author of 1 Kings recounted the lives of seven evil kings. Only one king, Asa, did what was right in God's eyes. God blessed him with long life.

Observation

Asa undoubtedly faced opposition as he tore down the nation's idols. He made unpopular decisions, but remained faithful to God all his life.

Inspiration

We develop toughness or fortitude by repeatedly being tested and *prevailing*. The more tests we pass, the tougher we become. As a boxer engages in bout after bout, he toughens and becomes wiser and stronger. After a time he develops such fortitude, perseverance, and staying power that he can take on the best. There is no way a fighter, or any of us, can develop toughness without testing! The endurance and fortitude of the Apostle Paul or William Carey or Corrie ten Boom did not come overnight and did not come apart from trials....

Nature teaches us the same principle. Free a butterfly from its chrysalis, and thus from the struggle of liberating itself, and you destroy its life, for it will never develop the strength to soar as it should. (From *James* by R. Kent Hughes)

Application

Are you willing to stand up for your faith? Think

about the people and circumstances that might challenge your standards of humor, entertainment, or activities, and plan how you can respond.

Exploration

Choosing—[Joshua 24:15](#); [Ruth 1:16](#); [1 Kings 18:21](#); [2 Kings 17:41](#); [Matthew 6:24](#).

Doesn't peace always follow obedience? —Max Lucado
(*A Gentle Thunder*)

Abijah King of Judah

Abijah became king of Judah during the eighteenth year Jeroboam son of Nebat was king of Israel. ²Abijah ruled in Jerusalem for three years. His mother was Maacah daughter of Abishalom. ³He did all the same sins his father before him had done. Abijah was not faithful to the Lord his God as David, his great-grandfather, had been. ⁴Because the Lord loved David, the Lord gave him a kingdom in Jerusalem and allowed him to have a son to be king after him. The Lord also kept Jerusalem safe. ⁵David always did what the Lord said was right and obeyed his commands all his life, except the one time when David sinned against Uriah the Hittite.

⁶There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam during Abijah's lifetime. ⁷Everything else Abijah did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. During the time Abijah ruled, there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. ⁸Abijah died and was buried in Jerusalem, and his son Asa became king in his place.

Asa King of Judah

⁹During the twentieth year Jeroboam was king of Israel, Asa

became king of Judah. ¹⁰His grandmother's name was Maacah, the daughter of Abishalom. Asa ruled in Jerusalem for forty-one years.

¹¹Asa did what the Lord said was right, as his ancestor David had done. ¹²He forced the male prostitutes at the worship places to leave the country. He also took away the idols that his ancestors had made. ¹³His grandmother Maacah had made a terrible Asherah idol, so Asa removed her from being queen mother. He cut down that idol and burned it in the Kidron Valley. ¹⁴The places of worship to gods were not removed. Even so, Asa was faithful to the Lord all his life. ¹⁵Asa brought into the Temple of the Lord the gifts he and his father had given: gold, silver, and utensils.

¹⁶There was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all the time they were kings. ¹⁷Baasha attacked Judah, and he made the town of Ramah strong so he could keep people from leaving or entering Judah, Asa's country.

¹⁸Asa took the rest of the silver and gold from the treasuries of the Temple of the Lord and his own palace and gave it to his officers. Then he sent them to Ben-Hadad son of Tabrimmon, who was the son of Hezion. Ben-Hadad was the king of Aram and ruled in the city of Damascus. Asa said, ¹⁹“Let there be a treaty between you and me as there was between my father and your father. I am sending you a gift of silver and gold. Break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so he will leave my land.”

²⁰Ben-Hadad agreed with King Asa, so he sent the commanders of his armies to attack the towns of Israel. They defeated the towns of Ijon, Dan, and Abel Beth Maacah, as well as all Galilee and the area of Naphtali. ²¹When Baasha heard about these attacks, he stopped building up Ramah and

returned to Tirzah. ²²Then King Asa gave an order to all the people of Judah; everyone had to help. They carried away all the stones and wood Baasha had been using in Ramah, and they used them to build up Geba and Mizpah in the land of Benjamin.

²³Everything else Asa did—his victories and the cities he built—is written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. When he became old, he got a disease in his feet. ²⁴After Asa died, he was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, the city of David, his ancestor. Then Jehoshaphat, Asa's son, became king in his place.

Nadab King of Israel

²⁵Nadab son of Jeroboam became king of Israel during the second year Asa was king of Judah. Nadab was king of Israel for two years, ²⁶and he did what the Lord said was wrong. Jeroboam had led the people of Israel to sin, and Nadab sinned in the same way as his father Jeroboam.

²⁷Baasha son of Ahijah, from the tribe of Issachar, made plans to kill Nadab. Nadab and all Israel were attacking the Philistine town of Gibbethon, so Baasha killed Nadab there. ²⁸This happened during Asa's third year as king of Judah, and Baasha became the next king of Israel.

Baasha King of Israel

²⁹As soon as Baasha became king, he killed all of Jeroboam's family, leaving no one in Jeroboam's family alive. He destroyed them all as the Lord had said would happen through his

servant Ahijah from Shiloh. ³⁰King Jeroboam had sinned very much and had led the people of Israel to sin, so he made the Lord, the God of Israel, very angry.

³¹Everything else Nadab did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. ³²There was war between Asa king of Judah and Baasha king of Israel all the time they ruled.

³³Baasha son of Ahijah became king of Israel during Asa's third year as king of Judah. Baasha ruled in Tirzah for twenty-four years, ³⁴and he did what the Lord said was wrong. Jeroboam had led the people of Israel to sin, and Baasha sinned in the same way as Jeroboam.

Jehu son of Hanani spoke the word of the Lord against King Baasha. ²The Lord said, “You were nothing, but I took you and made you a leader over my people Israel. But you have followed the ways of Jeroboam and have led my people Israel to sin. Their sins have made me angry, ³so, Baasha, I will soon destroy you and your family. I will do to you what I did to the family of Jeroboam son of Nebat. ⁴Anyone from your family who dies in the city will be eaten by dogs, and anyone from your family who dies in the fields will be eaten by birds.”

⁵Everything else Baasha did and all his victories are written down in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. ⁶So Baasha died and was buried in Tirzah, and his son Elah became king in his place.

⁷The Lord spoke his word against Baasha and his family through the prophet Jehu son of Hanani. Baasha had done many things the Lord said were wrong, which made the Lord very angry. He did the same evil deeds that Jeroboam’s family had done before him. The Lord also spoke against Baasha because he killed all of Jeroboam’s family.

Elah King of Israel

⁸Elah son of Baasha became king of Israel during Asa’s twenty-sixth year as king of Judah, and Elah ruled in Tirzah for two years.

⁹Zimri, one of Elah’s officers, commanded half of Elah’s chariots. Zimri made plans against Elah while the king was in Tirzah, getting drunk at Arza’s home. (Arza was in charge of the palace at Tirzah.) ¹⁰Zimri went into Arza’s house and killed Elah during Asa’s twenty-seventh year as king of Judah. Then

Zimri became king of Israel in Elah's place.

Zimri King of Israel

¹¹As soon as Zimri became king, he killed all of Baasha's family, not allowing any of Baasha's family or friends to live. ¹²So Zimri destroyed all of Baasha's family just as the Lord had said it would happen through the prophet Jehu. ¹³Baasha and his son Elah sinned and led the people of Israel to sin, and they made the Lord, the God of Israel, angry because of their worthless idols.

¹⁴Everything else Elah did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel.

¹⁵So during Asa's twenty-seventh year as king of Judah, Zimri became king of Israel and ruled in Tirzah seven days.

The army of Israel was camped near Gibbethon, a Philistine town. ¹⁶The men in the camp heard that Zimri had made secret plans against King Elah and had killed him. So that day in the camp they made Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel. ¹⁷So Omri and all the Israelite army left Gibbethon and attacked Tirzah. ¹⁸When Zimri saw that the city had been captured, he went into the palace and set it on fire, burning the palace and himself with it. ¹⁹So Zimri died because he had sinned by doing what the Lord said was wrong. Jeroboam had led the people of Israel to sin, and Zimri sinned in the same way as Jeroboam.

²⁰Everything else Zimri did and the story of how he turned against King Elah are written down in the book of the history of the kings of Israel.

Omri King of Israel

²¹The people of Israel were divided into two groups. Half of the people wanted Tibni son of Ginath to be king, while the other half wanted Omri. ²²Omri's followers were stronger than the followers of Tibni son of Ginath, so Tibni died, and Omri became king.

²³Omri became king of Israel during the thirty-first year Asa was king of Judah. Omri ruled Israel for twelve years, six of those years in the city of Tirzah. ²⁴He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for about one hundred fifty pounds of silver. Omri built a city on that hill and called it Samaria after the name of its earlier owner, Shemer.

²⁵But Omri did what the Lord said was wrong; he did more evil than all the kings who came before him. ²⁶Jeroboam son of Nebat had led the people of Israel to sin, and Omri sinned in the same way as Jeroboam. The Israelites made the Lord, the God of Israel, very angry because they worshiped worthless idols.

²⁷Everything else Omri did and all his successes are written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. ²⁸So Omri died and was buried in Samaria, and his son Ahab became king in his place.

Ahab King of Israel

²⁹Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel during Asa's thirty-eighth year as king of Judah, and Ahab ruled Israel in the city of Samaria for twenty-two years. ³⁰More than any king before him, Ahab son of Omri did many things the Lord said were

wrong.³¹He sinned in the same ways as Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he did even worse things. He married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal, the king of Sidon. Then Ahab began to serve Baal and worship him.³²He built a temple in Samaria for worshiping Baal and put an altar there for Baal.³³Ahab also made an idol for worshiping Asherah. He did more things to make the Lord, the God of Israel, angry than all the other kings before him.

³⁴During the time of Ahab, Hiel from Bethel rebuilt the city of Jericho. It cost Hiel the life of Abiram, his oldest son, to begin work on the city, and it cost the life of Segub, his youngest son, to build the city gates. This happened just as [the Lord, speaking through Joshua son of Nun, said it would happen.](#)

Life Lessons

1 Kings 17:1-24

Situation

Elijah was the first of many important prophets God sent to warn Israel and Judah as the two kingdoms fell away from God. Israel especially needed these prophets because of an evil king and unfaithful priests.

Observation

The widow demonstrated her faith by feeding the prophet with her last meal. That devotion led to her son being restored to life.

Inspiration

We serve the God who designed the universe and set our world in motion. But those hands that hung the stars in the heavens also wiped away the tears of the widow and the leper. And they will wipe away your tears as well.

There has never been a time in the history of this globe when there was not a rain cloud somewhere on the earth. There may be blue skies for us occasionally, but the rain always comes. So, instead of looking for ways to escape problems, look for methods to face them head on.

Father, you are God and Creator, but we come to you as children coming to their father, as children who would ask their father to hold and comfort them, hoping to receive words of wisdom.

(From *The Inspirational Bible*, "Sorrow")

Application

Jesus Christ is not only the Sin-bearer but also the Sorrow-bearer. He can wipe away the tears of all who are hurting. You can run to God, the Friend who sticks closer than a brother. But God also uses human instruments. Let the body of Christ minister to you as well.

Exploration

Sorrow—[Genesis 21:17–20](#); [Exodus 3:7–10](#); [Isaiah 53:11](#); [Matthew 11:28–30](#); [2 Corinthians 7:10–11](#).

Elijah Stops the Rain

Now Elijah the Tishbite was a prophet from the settlers in Gilead. “I serve the Lord, the God of Israel,” Elijah said to Ahab. “As surely as the Lord lives, no rain or dew will fall during the next few years unless I command it.”

²Then the Lord spoke his word to Elijah: ³“Leave this place and go east and hide near Kerith Ravine east of the Jordan River. ⁴You may drink from the stream, and I have commanded ravens to bring you food there.” ⁵So Elijah did what the Lord said; he went to Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and lived there. ⁶The birds brought Elijah bread and meat every morning and evening, and he drank water from the stream.

⁷After a while the stream dried up because there was no rain. ⁸Then the Lord spoke his word to Elijah, ⁹“Go to Zarephath in Sidon and live there. I have commanded a widow there to take care of you.”

¹⁰So Elijah went to Zarephath. When he reached the town gate, he saw a widow gathering wood for a fire. Elijah asked her, “Would you bring me a little water in a cup so I may have a drink?” ¹¹As she was going to get his water, Elijah said, “Please bring me a piece of bread, too.”

¹²The woman answered, “As surely as the Lord your God lives, I have no bread. I have only a handful of flour in a jar and only a little olive oil in a jug. I came here to gather some wood so I could go home and cook our last meal. My son and I will

eat it and then die from hunger.”

¹³“Don’t worry,” Elijah said to her. “Go home and cook your food as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread from the flour you have, and bring it to me. Then cook something for yourself and your son. ¹⁴The Lord, the God of Israel, says, ‘That jar of flour will never be empty, and the jug will always have oil in it, until the day the Lord sends rain to the land.’”

¹⁵So the woman went home and did what Elijah told her to do. And the woman and her son and Elijah had enough food every day. ¹⁶The jar of flour and the jug of oil were never empty, just as the Lord, through Elijah, had promised.

Elijah Brings a Boy Back to Life

¹⁷Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. He grew worse and worse and finally stopped breathing. ¹⁸The woman said to Elijah, “Man of God, what have you done to me? Did you come here to remind me of my sin and to kill my son?”

¹⁹Elijah said to her, “Give me your son.” Elijah took the boy from her, carried him upstairs, and laid him on the bed in the room where he was staying. ²⁰Then he prayed to the Lord: “Lord my God, this widow is letting me stay in her house. Why have you done this terrible thing to her and caused her son to die?” ²¹Then Elijah lay on top of the boy three times. He prayed to the Lord, “Lord my God, let this boy live again!”

²²The Lord answered Elijah’s prayer; the boy began breathing again and was alive. ²³Elijah carried the boy downstairs and gave him to his mother and said, “See! Your son is alive!”

²⁴“Now I know you really are a man from God,” the woman said to Elijah. “I know that the Lord truly speaks through you!”

Elijah Kills the Prophets of Baal

During the third year without rain, the Lord spoke his word to Elijah: “Go and meet King Ahab, and I will soon send rain.” ²So Elijah went to meet Ahab.

By this time there was no food in Samaria. ³King Ahab sent for Obadiah, who was in charge of the king’s palace. (Obadiah was a true follower of the Lord. ⁴When Jezebel was killing all the Lord’s prophets, Obadiah hid a hundred of them in two caves, fifty in one cave and fifty in another. He also brought them food and water.) ⁵Ahab said to Obadiah, “Let’s check every spring and valley in the land. Maybe we can find enough grass to keep our horses and mules alive and not have to kill our animals.” ⁶So each one chose a part of the country to search; Ahab went in one direction and Obadiah in another.

⁷While Obadiah was on his way, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized Elijah, so he bowed down to the ground and said, “Elijah? Is it really you, master?”

⁸“Yes,” Elijah answered. “Go tell your master that I am here.”

⁹Then Obadiah said, “What wrong have I done for you to hand me over to Ahab like this? He will put me to death. ¹⁰As surely as the Lord your God lives, the king has sent people to every country to search for you. If the ruler said you were not there, Ahab forced the ruler to swear you could not be found in his country. ¹¹Now you want me to go to my master and tell him, ‘Elijah is here’? ¹²The Spirit of the Lord may carry you to some other place after I leave. If I go tell King Ahab you are

here, and he comes and doesn't find you, he will kill me! I have followed the Lord since I was a boy. ¹³Haven't you been told what I did? When Jezebel was killing the Lord's prophets, I hid a hundred of them, fifty in one cave and fifty in another. I brought them food and water. ¹⁴Now you want me to go and tell my master you are here? He will kill me!"

¹⁵Elijah answered, "As surely as the Lord All-Powerful lives, whom I serve, I will be seen by Ahab today."

¹⁶So Obadiah went to Ahab and told him where Elijah was. Then Ahab went to meet Elijah.

¹⁷When he saw Elijah, he asked, "Is it you—the biggest troublemaker in Israel?"

¹⁸Elijah answered, "I have not made trouble in Israel. You and your father's family have made all this trouble by not obeying the Lord's commands. You have gone after the Baals. ¹⁹Now tell all Israel to meet me at Mount Carmel. Also bring the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

²⁰So Ahab called all the Israelites and those prophets to Mount Carmel. ²¹Elijah approached the people and said, "How long will you not decide between two choices? If the Lord is the true God, follow him, but if Baal is the true God, follow him!" But the people said nothing.

²²Elijah said, "I am the only prophet of the Lord here, but there are four hundred fifty prophets of Baal. ²³Bring two bulls. Let the prophets of Baal choose one bull and kill it and cut it into pieces. Then let them put the meat on the wood, but they are not to set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull, putting the meat on the wood but not setting fire to it. ²⁴You prophets of Baal, pray to your god, and I will pray to the Lord. The god

who answers by setting fire to his wood is the true God.”

All the people agreed that this was a good idea.

²⁵Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “There are many of you, so you go first. Choose a bull and prepare it. Pray to your god, but don’t start the fire.”

²⁶So they took the bull that was given to them and prepared it. They prayed to Baal from morning until noon, shouting “Baal, answer us!” But there was no sound, and no one answered. They danced around the altar they had built.

²⁷At noon Elijah began to make fun of them. “Pray louder!” he said. “If Baal really is a god, maybe he is thinking, or busy, or traveling! Maybe he is sleeping so you will have to wake him!” ²⁸The prophets prayed louder, cutting themselves with swords and spears until their blood flowed, which was the way they worshiped. ²⁹The afternoon passed, and the prophets continued to act like this until it was time for the evening sacrifice. But no voice was heard; Baal did not answer, and no one paid attention.

³⁰Then Elijah said to all the people, “Now come to me.” So they gathered around him, and Elijah rebuilt the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down. ³¹He took twelve stones, one stone for each of the twelve tribes, the number of Jacob’s sons. (The Lord changed Jacob’s name to Israel.) ³²Elijah used these stones to rebuild the altar in honor of the Lord. Then he dug a ditch around the altar that was big enough to hold about thirteen quarts of seed. ³³Elijah put the wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood. ³⁴Then he said, “Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the meat and on the wood.” Then Elijah said, “Do it again,” and they did it again. Then he said, “Do it a third time,” and they did it the

third time. ³⁵So the water ran off the altar and filled the ditch.

³⁶At the time for the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah went near the altar. “Lord, you are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel,” he prayed. “Prove that you are the God of Israel and that I am your servant. Show these people that you commanded me to do all these things. ³⁷Lord, answer my prayer so these people will know that you, Lord, are God and that you will change their minds.”

³⁸Then fire from the Lord came down and burned the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the ground around the altar. It also dried up the water in the ditch. ³⁹When all the people saw this, they fell down to the ground, crying, “The Lord is God! The Lord is God!”

⁴⁰Then Elijah said, “Capture the prophets of Baal! Don’t let any of them run away!” The people captured all the prophets. Then Elijah led them down to the Kishon Valley, where he killed them.

The Rain Comes Again

⁴¹Then Elijah said to Ahab, “Now, go, eat, and drink, because a heavy rain is coming.” ⁴²So King Ahab went to eat and drink. At the same time Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel, where he bent down to the ground with his head between his knees.

⁴³Then Elijah said to his servant, “Go and look toward the sea.”

The servant went and looked. “I see nothing,” he said.

Elijah told him to go and look again. This happened seven times. ⁴⁴The seventh time, the servant said, “I see a small cloud,

the size of a human fist, coming from the sea.”

Elijah told the servant, “Go to Ahab and tell him to get his chariot ready and go home now. Otherwise, the rain will stop him.”

⁴⁵After a short time the sky was covered with dark clouds. The wind began to blow, and soon a heavy rain began to fall. Ahab got in his chariot and started back to Jezreel. ⁴⁶The Lord gave his power to Elijah, who tightened his clothes around him and ran ahead of King Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

Life Lessons

1 Kings 18:1–46

Situation

King Ahab and his wife Jezebel worshiped Baal, the most popular Canaanite god. Baal idols were often cast in the form of a bull, which represented lust, power, and fertility. Baals were believed to supply rain for crops—an irony during this time of God-appointed drought.

Observation

God demonstrated, powerfully and dramatically, his superiority to all false gods and their prophets.

Inspiration

Fifty-six times in the Bible the word *almighty* is used. Always it is used of God; never of anyone else. God is all powerful, or omnipotent. Again we are forced to use a negative to explain the concept—there is nothing He can’t do. That is a staggering idea. He has no bounds to His energy.

God can do one thing as easily as He can do

another. It is no more difficult for God to create a universe than it is for Him to make a butterfly, and He does everything without losing any of His strength. [Isaiah 40:28](#) says, “The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired.” God never needs to be replenished. Where would He go for more strength? There is no power outside of God.

Built into absolute power is the authority to use it. God not only has the power but He has the authority to do anything He wants to do. While God can do anything He wants to do, however, His will is totally consistent with His nature. That’s why, for example, He cannot lie and will not tolerate sin. It is also why He shows grace and mercy. [Psalms 115:3](#) says, “Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.” Have you ever asked the question, “Why did God do this?” He did it because He wanted to. If this doesn’t seem like a sufficient answer to you, it’s because you don’t understand God...

We worship an unchanging, all-powerful God. If that makes Him seem far beyond your ability to comprehend, that is good. If you think of God as someone simple enough for the human mind to understand, your god is not the true God.

What is your concept of God? Do you see Him as a timeless, infinite, all-powerful, unchanging, glorious being? Or do you, like many, tend to minimize God’s greatness, preferring to think of Him as one who may be manipulated or fooled by human hypocrisy, or one who may be mandated to do what we want? Such a

view of God is utterly pagan.

A vision of the steadfastness of our immutable God brings a sense of security and stability to our unsettled lives. And the understanding that His power is unlimited and undiminishing strengthens and encourages even the weakest believer. The natural response to that is praise and adoration that overflows in a life that worships. (From *The Ultimate Priority* by John MacArthur, Jr.)

Application

Is your God too small? Take a moment to pray as you contemplate God's almighty power. Ask him to help you realize his greatness and worship him.

Exploration

God Is All-Powerful—[Genesis 18:14](#); [Exodus 15:6](#); [1 Samuel 14:6](#); [Psalms 93:4](#); [115:3](#); [Matthew 19:26](#); [Luke 1:37](#); [Revelation 19:6](#).

Elijah Runs Away

King Ahab told Jezebel every thing Elijah had done and how Elijah had killed all the prophets with a sword.² So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “May the gods punish me terribly if by this time tomorrow I don’t kill you just as you killed those prophets.”

³When Elijah heard this, he was afraid and ran for his life, taking his servant with him. When they came to Beersheba in Judah, Elijah left his servant there.⁴ Then Elijah walked for a whole day into the desert. He sat down under a bush and asked to die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he prayed. “Let me die. I am no better than my ancestors.”⁵ Then he lay down under the tree and slept.

Suddenly an angel came to him and touched him. “Get up and eat,” the angel said.⁶ Elijah saw near his head a loaf baked over coals and a jar of water, so he ate and drank. Then he went back to sleep.

⁷Later the Lord’s angel came to him a second time. The angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat. If you don’t, the journey will be too hard for you.”⁸ So Elijah got up and ate and drank. The food made him strong enough to walk for forty days and nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God.⁹ There Elijah went into a cave and stayed all night.

Then the Lord spoke his word to him: “Elijah! Why are you here?”

¹⁰He answered, “Lord God All-Powerful, I have always served you as well as I could. But the people of Israel have

broken their agreement with you, destroyed your altars, and killed your prophets with swords. I am the only prophet left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”

¹¹The Lord said to Elijah, “Go, stand in front of me on the mountain, and I will pass by you.” Then a very strong wind blew until it caused the mountains to fall apart and large rocks to break in front of the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹²After the earthquake, there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire, there was a quiet, gentle sound. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he covered his face with his coat and went out and stood at the entrance to the cave.

Then a voice said to him, “Elijah! Why are you here?”

¹⁴He answered, “Lord God All-Powerful, I have always served you as well as I could. But the people of Israel have broken their agreement with you, destroyed your altars, and killed your prophets with swords. I am the only prophet left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”

¹⁵The Lord said to him, “Go back on the road that leads to the desert around Damascus. Enter that city, and pour olive oil on Hazael to make him king over Aram. ¹⁶Then pour oil on Jehu son of Nimshi to make him king over Israel. Next, pour oil on Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to make him a prophet in your place. ¹⁷Jehu will kill anyone who escapes from Hazael’s sword, and Elisha will kill anyone who escapes from Jehu’s sword. ¹⁸I have seven thousand people left in Israel who have never bowed down before Baal and whose mouths have never kissed his idol.”

Elisha Becomes a Prophet

¹⁹So Elijah left that place and found Elisha son of Shaphat plowing a field with a team of oxen. He owned twelve teams of oxen and was plowing with the twelfth team. Elijah came up to Elisha, took off his coat, and put it on Elisha. ²⁰Then Elisha left his oxen and ran to follow Elijah. “Let me kiss my father and my mother goodbye,” Elisha said. “Then I will go with you.”

Elijah answered, “Go back. It does not matter to me.”

²¹So Elisha went back and took his pair of oxen and killed them. He used their wooden yoke for a fire. Then he cooked the meat and gave it to the people. After they ate it, Elisha left and followed Elijah and became his helper.

Life Lessons

1 Kings 19:1–20:43

Situation

In one moment God displayed his power, and Elijah triumphed over the prophets of Baal. In the next, God’s prophet ran for his life from Jezebel who sought revenge. He hid in the desert.

Observation

God cares for his servants both in moments of triumph and defeat. He remains present with those who trust him.

Inspiration

In the barren prairie, the hiker huddles down. The cold northerly sweeps over him, stinging his face and numbing his fingers. The whistle of the wind is deafening. The hiker hugs his knees to his chest, yearning for warmth.

He doesn't move. The sky is orange with dirt. His teeth are grainy, his eyes sooty. He thinks of quitting, Going home. Home to the mountains.

"Ahh. The mountains." The spirit that moved him in the mountains seems so far away. For a moment, his mind wanders back to his homeland. Green country. Mountain trails. Fresh water. Hikers hiking on well-marked trails. No surprises, few fears, rich companionship.

One day, while on a brisk hike, he had stopped to look out from the mountains across the neighboring desert. He felt strangely pulled to the sweeping barrenness that lay before him. The next day he paused again. And the next, and the next. "Shouldn't someone try to take life to the desert?" Slowly the flicker in his heart became a flame.

Many agreed that someone should go, but no one volunteered.

Uncharted land, fearful storms, loneliness.

But the hiker, spurred by the enthusiasm of others, determined to go. After careful preparation, he set out, alone. With the cheers of his friends behind him, he descended the grassy highlands and entered the desolate wilderness.

The first few days his steps were springy and his eye was keen. He yearned to do his part to bring life to the desert. Then came the heat. The scorpions. The monotony. The snakes. Slowly, the fire diminished. And now ... the storm. The endless roar of the wind. The relentless, cursed cold.

"I don't know how much more I can take." Weary

and beaten, the hiker considers going back. “At least I got this far.” Knees tucked under him, head bowed, almost touching the ground. “Will it ever stop?”

Grimly he laughs at the irony of the situation. “Some hiker. Too tired to go on, yet too ashamed to go home.” Deep, deep is the struggle. No longer can he hear the voices of friends. Long gone is the romance of his mission. No longer does he float on the fancifulness of a dream.

“Maybe someone else should do this. I’m too young, too inexperienced.” The winds of discouragement and fear whip at his fire, exhausting what is left of the flame. But the coals remain, hidden and hot.

The hiker, now almost the storm’s victim, looks one last time for the fire. (Is there any greater challenge than of stirring a spirit while in the clutches of defeat?) Yearning and clawing, the temptation to quit is gradually overcome by the urge to go on. Blowing on the coals, the hiker once again hears the call to the desert. Though faint, the call is clear.

With all the strength he can summon, the hiker rises to his feet, bows his head, and takes his first step into the wind. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

Are you facing a life challenge? Are you discouraged and wondering why circumstances have suddenly taken a turn for the worse? Where is God? Run to God to help you! Everywhere, anytime, God has resources to help you.

Exploration

Desert Experiences—[Matthew 4:1–11](#); [28:19–20](#);
[Acts 5:1–32](#); [16:16–24](#); [Hebrews 13:5–8](#).

Disbelief has peculiar children. Children who are miserable on the journey, blind to the beauty, and oblivious to a once-in-a-lifetime romance with God. —Max Lucado (*A Gentle Thunder*)

Ben-Hadad and Ahab Go to War

Ben-Hadad king of Aram gathered together all his army. There were thirty-two kings with their horses and chariots who went with him and surrounded Samaria and attacked it.²The king sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of Israel.

This was his message: “Ben-Hadad says,³ ‘Your silver and gold belong to me, as well as the best of your wives and children.’”

⁴Ahab king of Israel answered, “My master and king, I agree to what you say. I and everything I have belong to you.”

⁵Then the messengers came to Ahab again. They said, “Ben-Hadad says, ‘I told you before that you must give me your silver and gold, your wives and your children.’⁶About this time tomorrow I will send my men, who will search everywhere in your palace and in the homes of your officers. Whatever they want they will take and carry off.”

⁷Then Ahab called a meeting of all the older leaders of his country. He said, “Ben-Hadad is looking for trouble. First he said I had to give him my wives, my children, my silver, and my gold, and I have not refused him.”

⁸The older leaders and all the people said, “Don’t listen to him or agree to this.”

⁹So Ahab said to Ben-Hadad’s messengers, “Tell my master the king: ‘I will do what you said at first, but I cannot allow this second command.’” And King Ben-Hadad’s men carried the message back to him.

¹⁰Then Ben-Hadad sent another message to Ahab: “May

the gods punish me terribly if I don't completely destroy Samaria. There won't be enough left for each of my men to get a handful of dust!"

¹¹Ahab answered, "Tell Ben-Hadad, 'The man who puts on his armor should not brag. It's the man who lives to take it off who has the right to brag.'"

¹²Ben-Hadad was drinking in his tent with the other rulers when the message came from Ahab. Ben-Hadad commanded his men to prepare to attack the city, and they moved into place for battle.

¹³At the same time a prophet came to Ahab king of Israel. The prophet said, "Ahab, the Lord says to you, 'Do you see that big army? I will hand it over to you today so you will know I am the Lord.'"

¹⁴Ahab asked, "Who will you use to defeat them?"

The prophet answered, "The Lord says, 'The young officers of the district governors will defeat them.'"

Then the king asked, "Who will command the main army?"

The prophet answered, "You will."

¹⁵So Ahab gathered the young officers of the district governors, two hundred thirty-two of them. Then he called together the army of Israel, about seven thousand people in all.

¹⁶They marched out at noon, while Ben-Hadad and the thirty-two rulers helping him were getting drunk in their tents.

¹⁷The young officers of the district governors attacked first. Ben-Hadad sent out scouts who told him that soldiers were coming from Samaria. ¹⁸Ben-Hadad said, "They may be coming to fight, or they may be coming to ask for peace. In either case capture them alive."

¹⁹The young officers of the district governors led the

attack, followed by the army of Israel.²⁰ Each officer of Israel killed the man who came against him. The men from Aram ran away as Israel chased them, but Ben-Hadad king of Aram escaped on a horse with some of his horsemen.²¹ Ahab king of Israel led the army and destroyed the Arameans' horses and chariots. King Ahab thoroughly defeated the Aramean army.

²²Then the prophet went to Ahab king of Israel and said, "The king of Aram will attack you again next spring. So go home now and strengthen your army and see what you need to do."

²³Meanwhile the officers of Ben-Hadad king of Aram said to him, "The gods of Israel are mountain gods. Since we fought in a mountain area, Israel won. Let's fight them on the flat land, and then we will win."²⁴This is what you should do. Don't allow the thirty-two rulers to command the armies, but put other commanders in their places.²⁵Gather an army like the one that was destroyed and as many horses and chariots as before. We will fight the Israelites on flat land, and then we will win." Ben-Hadad agreed with their advice and did what they said.

²⁶The next spring Ben-Hadad gathered the army of Aram and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel.

²⁷The Israelites also had prepared for war. They marched out to meet the Arameans and camped opposite them. The Israelites looked like two small flocks of goats, but the Arameans covered the area.

²⁸A man of God came to the king of Israel with this message: "The Lord says, 'The people of Aram say that I, the Lord, am a god of the mountains, not a god of the valleys. So I will allow you to defeat this huge army, and then you will know I am the Lord.'"

²⁹The armies were camped across from each other for seven days. On the seventh day the battle began. The Israelites killed one hundred thousand Aramean soldiers in one day. ³⁰The rest of them ran away to the city of Aphek, where a city wall fell on twenty-seven thousand of them. Ben-Hadad also ran away to the city and hid in a room.

³¹His officers said to him, "We have heard that the kings of Israel are trustworthy. Let's dress in rough cloth to show our sadness, and wear ropes on our heads. Then we will go to the king of Israel, and perhaps he will let you live."

³²So they dressed in rough cloth and wore ropes on their heads and went to the king of Israel. They said, "Your servant Ben-Hadad says, 'Please let me live.'"

Ahab answered, "Is he still alive? He is my brother."

³³Ben-Hadad's men had wanted a sign from Ahab. So when Ahab called Ben-Hadad his brother, they quickly said, "Yes! Ben-Hadad is your brother."

Ahab said, "Bring him to me." When Ben-Hadad came, Ahab asked him to join him in the chariot.

³⁴Ben-Hadad said to him, "Ahab, I will give you back the cities my father took from your father. And you may put shops in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria."

Ahab said, "If you agree to this, I will allow you to go free." So the two kings made a peace agreement. Then Ahab let Ben-Hadad go free.

A Prophet Speaks Against Ahab

³⁵One prophet from one of the groups of prophets told another, "Hit me!" He said this because the Lord had commanded it, but

the other man refused. ³⁶The prophet said, “You did not obey the Lord’s command, so a lion will kill you as soon as you leave me.” When the man left, a lion found him and killed him.

³⁷The prophet went to another man and said, “Hit me, please!” So the man hit him and hurt him. ³⁸The prophet wrapped his face in a cloth so no one could tell who he was. Then he went and waited by the road for the king. ³⁹As Ahab king of Israel passed by, the prophet called out to him. “I went to fight in the battle,” the prophet said. “One of our men brought an enemy soldier to me. Our man said, ‘Guard this man. If he runs away, you will have to give your life in his place. Or, you will have to pay a fine of seventy-five pounds of silver.’” ⁴⁰But I was busy doing other things, so the man ran away.”

The king of Israel answered, “You have already said what the punishment is. You must do what the man said.”

⁴¹Then the prophet quickly took the cloth from his face. When the king of Israel saw him, he knew he was one of the prophets. ⁴²The prophet said to the king, “This is what the Lord says: ‘You freed the man I said should die, so your life will be taken instead of his. The lives of your people will also be taken instead of the lives of his people.’”

⁴³Then King Ahab went back to his palace in Samaria, angry and upset.

Life Lessons

1 Kings 21:1–22:53

Situation

King Ahab was not content with what he already had. In partnership with his wicked wife, Jezebel, he killed the owner of a choice vineyard, and they took it for themselves. God promised to bring them to justice.

Observation

Be on the alert: jealousy may creep into life and lead you to sin. Surrounding yourself with bad company during these vulnerable times can lead to sin.

Inspiration

Monkey see, monkey do. When we spend enough time around those in a particular scene, our actions usually become similar. It is just the way we're made. And it is especially true if the one in the minority is insecure and unsure. If you doubt that, you are merely deceiving yourself. Wake up, eagle! Realize the overwhelming power of peer pressure on you as well as your kids. Some call it the "herd instinct." All things being equal, if you run with bad company, you will be corrupted. The good won't rub off on them. Their bad will rub off on you.

(From *Living above the Level of Mediocrity* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

If parents in your church are worried about negative peer influence, start a kids' club. If you'd

like to nurture better friendships, start a weekly Bible study group, a men's club, a women's club.

Exploration

Bad Company—[Joshua 23:12–13](#); [1 Corinthians 15:33](#); [2 Corinthians 6:14](#); [2 Thessalonians 3:6](#).

Ahab Takes Naboth's Vineyard

After these things had happened, this is what followed. A man named Naboth owned a vineyard in Jezreel, near the palace of Ahab king of Israel. ²One day Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard. It is near my palace, and I want to make it into a vegetable garden. I will give you a better vineyard in its place, or, if you prefer, I will pay you what it is worth."

³Naboth answered, "May the Lord keep me from ever giving my land to you. It belongs to my family."

⁴Ahab went home angry and upset, because he did not like what Naboth from Jezreel had said. (Naboth had said, "I will not give you my family's land.") Ahab lay down on his bed, turned his face to the wall, and refused to eat.

⁵His wife, Jezebel, came in and asked him, "Why are you so upset that you refuse to eat?"

⁶Ahab answered, "I talked to Naboth, the man from Jezreel. I said, 'Sell me your vineyard, or, if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard for it.' But Naboth refused."

⁷Jezebel answered, "Is this how you rule as king over Israel? Get up, eat something, and cheer up. I will get Naboth's vineyard for you."

⁸So Jezebel wrote some letters, signed Ahab's name to them, and used his own seal to seal them. Then she sent them to the older leaders and important men who lived in Naboth's town. ⁹The letter she wrote said: "Declare a day during which

the people are to give up eating. Call the people together, and give Naboth a place of honor among them.¹⁰ Seat two troublemakers across from him, and have them say they heard Naboth speak against God and the king. Then take Naboth out of the city and kill him with stones.”

¹¹The older leaders and important men of Jezreel obeyed Jezebel’s command, just as she wrote in the letters.¹² They declared a special day on which the people were to give up eating. And they put Naboth in a place of honor before the people.¹³ Two troublemakers sat across from Naboth and said in front of everybody that they had heard him speak against God and the king. So the people carried Naboth out of the city and killed him with stones.¹⁴ Then the leaders sent a message to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been killed.”

¹⁵When Jezebel heard that Naboth had been killed, she told Ahab, “Naboth of Jezreel is dead. Now you may go and take for yourself the vineyard he would not sell to you.”¹⁶ When Ahab heard that Naboth of Jezreel was dead, he got up and went to the vineyard to take it for his own.

¹⁷At this time the Lord spoke his word to the prophet Elijah the Tishbite. The Lord said,¹⁸ “Go to Ahab king of Israel in Samaria. He is at Naboth’s vineyard, where he has gone to take it as his own.¹⁹ Tell Ahab that I, the Lord, say to him, ‘You have murdered Naboth and taken his land. So I tell you this: In the same place the dogs licked up Naboth’s blood, they will also lick up your blood!’”

²⁰When Ahab saw Elijah, he said, “So you have found me, my enemy!”

Elijah answered, “Yes, I have found you. You have always chosen to do what the Lord says is wrong.²¹ So the Lord says

to you, 'I will soon destroy you. I will kill you and every male in your family, both slave and free. ²²Your family will be like the family of King Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the family of King Baasha son of Ahijah. I will destroy you, because you have made me angry and have led the people of Israel to sin.'

²³“And the Lord also says, ‘Dogs will eat the body of Jezebel in the city of Jezreel.’

²⁴“Anyone in your family who dies in the city will be eaten by dogs, and anyone who dies in the fields will be eaten by birds.”

²⁵There was no one like Ahab who had chosen so often to do what the Lord said was wrong, because his wife Jezebel influenced him to do evil. ²⁶Ahab sinned terribly by worshiping idols, just as the Amorite people did. And the Lord had taken away their land and given it to the people of Israel.

²⁷After Elijah finished speaking, Ahab tore his clothes. He put on rough cloth, refused to eat, and even slept in the rough cloth to show how sad and upset he was.

²⁸The Lord spoke his word to Elijah the Tishbite: ²⁹“I see that Ahab is now sorry for what he has done. So I will not cause the trouble to come to him during his life, but I will wait until his son is king. Then I will bring this trouble to Ahab’s family.”

The Death of Ahab

For three years there was peace between Israel and Aram.
²During the third year Jehoshaphat king of Judah went to visit Ahab king of Israel.

³At that time Ahab asked his officers, “Do you remember that the king of Aram took Ramoth in Gilead from us? Why have we done nothing to get it back?” ⁴So Ahab asked King Jehoshaphat, “Will you go with me to fight at Ramoth in Gilead?”

“I will go with you,” Jehoshaphat answered. “My soldiers are yours, and my horses are yours.” ⁵Jehoshaphat also said to Ahab, “But first we should ask if this is the Lord’s will.”

⁶Ahab called about four hundred prophets together and asked them, “Should I go to war against Ramoth in Gilead or not?”

They answered, “Go, because the Lord will hand them over to you.”

⁷But Jehoshaphat asked, “Isn’t there a prophet of the Lord here? Let’s ask him what we should do.”

⁸Then King Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, “There is one other prophet. We could ask the Lord through him, but I hate him. He never prophesies anything good about me, but something bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah.”

Jehoshaphat said, “King Ahab, you shouldn’t say that!”

⁹So Ahab king of Israel told one of his officers to bring Micaiah to him at once.

¹⁰Ahab king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah had

on their royal robes and were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor, near the entrance to the gate of Samaria. All the prophets were standing before them, speaking their messages.¹¹ Zedekiah son of Kenaanah had made some iron horns. He said to Ahab, “This is what the Lord says, ‘You will use these horns to fight the Arameans until they are destroyed.’”

¹²All the other prophets said the same thing. “Attack Ramoth in Gilead and win, because the Lord will hand the Arameans over to you.”

¹³The messenger who had gone to get Micaiah said to him, “All the other prophets are saying King Ahab will succeed. You should agree with them and give the king a good answer.”

¹⁴But Micaiah answered, “As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me.”

¹⁵When Micaiah came to Ahab, the king asked him, “Micaiah, should we attack Ramoth in Gilead or not?”

Micaiah answered, “Attack and win! The Lord will hand them over to you.”

¹⁶But Ahab said to Micaiah, “How many times do I have to tell you to speak only the truth to me in the name of the Lord?”

¹⁷So Micaiah answered, “I saw the army of Israel scattered over the hills like sheep without a shepherd. The Lord said, ‘They have no leaders. They should go home and not fight.’”

¹⁸Then Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “I told you! He never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad.”

¹⁹But Micaiah said, “Hear the message from the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with his heavenly army standing near him on his right and on his left.²⁰ The Lord said, ‘Who will trick Ahab into attacking Ramoth in Gilead where he will be

killed?’

“Some said one thing; some said another. ²¹Then one spirit came and stood before the Lord and said, ‘I will trick him.’

²²“The Lord asked, ‘How will you do it?’

“The spirit answered, ‘I will go to Ahab’s prophets and make them tell lies.’

“So the Lord said, ‘You will succeed in tricking him. Go and do it.’”

²³Micaiah said, “Ahab, the Lord has made your prophets lie to you, and the Lord has decided that disaster should come to you.”

²⁴Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up to Micaiah and slapped him in the face. Zedekiah said, “Has the Lord’s spirit left me to speak through you?”

²⁵Micaiah answered, “You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inside room.”

²⁶Then Ahab king of Israel ordered, “Take Micaiah and send him to Amon, the governor of the city, and to Joash, the king’s son. ²⁷Tell them I said to put this man in prison and give him only bread and water until I return safely from the battle.”

²⁸Micaiah said, “Ahab, if you come back safely from battle, the Lord has not spoken through me. Remember my words, all you people!”

²⁹So Ahab king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went to Ramoth in Gilead. ³⁰King Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, “I will go into battle, but I will wear other clothes so no one will recognize me. But you wear your royal clothes.” So Ahab wore other clothes and went into battle.

³¹The king of Aram had ordered his thirty-two chariot commanders, “Don’t fight with anyone—important or

unimportant—except the king of Israel.”³²When these commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought he was certainly the king of Israel, so they turned to attack him. But Jehoshaphat began shouting.³³When they saw he was not King Ahab, they stopped chasing him.

³⁴By chance, a soldier shot an arrow, but he hit Ahab king of Israel between the pieces of his armor. King Ahab said to his chariot driver, “Turn around and get me out of the battle, because I am hurt!”³⁵The battle continued all day. King Ahab was held up in his chariot and faced the Arameans. His blood flowed down to the bottom of the chariot. That evening he died.³⁶Near sunset a cry went out through the army of Israel: “Each man go back to his own city and land.”

³⁷In that way King Ahab died. His body was carried to Samaria and buried there.³⁸The men cleaned Ahab’s chariot at a pool in Samaria where prostitutes bathed, and the dogs licked his blood from the chariot. These things happened as the Lord had said they would.

³⁹Everything else Ahab did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. It tells about the palace Ahab built and decorated with ivory and the cities he built.⁴⁰So Ahab died, and his son Ahaziah became king in his place.

Jehoshaphat King of Judah

⁴¹Jehoshaphat son of Asa became king of Judah during Ahab’s fourth year as king of Israel.⁴²Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled in Jerusalem for twenty-five years. His mother’s name was Azubah daughter of Shilhi.⁴³Jehoshaphat was good, like his father Asa, and he did

what the Lord said was right. But Jehoshaphat did not destroy the places where gods were worshiped, so the people continued offering sacrifices and burning incense there.⁴⁴ Jehoshaphat was at peace with the king of Israel.⁴⁵ Jehoshaphat fought many wars, and these wars and his successes are written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah.⁴⁶ There were male prostitutes still in the places of worship from the days of his father, Asa. So Jehoshaphat forced them to leave.

⁴⁷During this time the land of Edom had no king; it was ruled by a governor.

⁴⁸King Jehoshaphat built trading ships to sail to Ophir for gold. But the ships were wrecked at Ezion Geber, so they never set sail.⁴⁹ Ahaziah son of Ahab went to help Jehoshaphat, offering to give Jehoshaphat some men to sail with his men, but Jehoshaphat refused.

⁵⁰Jehoshaphat died and was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, the city of David, his ancestor. Then his son Jehoram became king in his place.

Ahaziah King of Israel

⁵¹Ahaziah son of Ahab became king of Israel in Samaria during Jehoshaphat's seventeenth year as king over Judah. Ahaziah ruled Israel for two years,⁵² and he did what the Lord said was wrong. He did the same evil his father Ahab, his mother Jezebel, and Jeroboam son of Nebat had done. All these rulers led the people of Israel into more sin.⁵³ Ahaziah worshiped and served the god Baal, and this made the Lord, the God of Israel, very angry. In these ways Ahaziah did what his father had

done.

Kerethites and Pelethites These were probably special units of the army that were responsible for the king's safety, a kind of palace guard.

corners of the altar If a person were innocent of a crime, he could run into the Holy Place where the altar was. If he held on to the corners of the altar, which looked like horns, he would be safe.

corners of the altar If a person were innocent of a crime, he could run into the Holy Place where the altar was. If he held on to the corners of the altar, which looked like horns, he would be safe.

Dan to Beersheba Dan was the city farthest north in Israel, and Beersheba was the city farthest south. So this means all the people of Israel.

stone tablets They were the two tablets on which God wrote the Ten Commandments.

Cabul This name sounds like the Hebrew word for "worthless."

the Lord ... happen When Joshua destroyed Jericho, he said whoever rebuilt the city would lose his oldest and youngest sons. See **Joshua 6:26**.

The Book of 2 Kings

Introduction

The tone for the book is set in the first two verses.

After Ahab died, Moab broke away from Israel's rule. Ahaziah fell down through the wooden bars in his upstairs room in Samaria and was badly hurt. He sent messengers and told them, "Go, ask Baal-Zebub, god of Ekron, if I will recover from my injuries" (1:1-2).

In those inaugural words you find death (Ahab died), rebellion (Moab broke away), calamity (Ahaziah fell down), and superstition (Go ask ... the god of Ekron).

What a beginning. It doesn't get any better. Second Kings is not a book for the faint of heart. But it is a book for the serious disciple. Its message is embossed at the top of every page: "The way of transgressors is hard."

Remember what Paul said about the wages of sin being death? This book proves his point. Twenty-five chapters of people reaping the harvest of sin. Story after story of people learning firsthand the eternal truth: *The consequence of persistent sin is pain*. Pain, not just in your life but in the lives of those you love.

The book relates the decline of two powers.

The Northern Kingdom, Israel, was headquartered in Samaria. Nineteen kings led this nation. Not one was godly. Not one! In spite of strong prophets like Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Elijah, and Elisha, the kings didn't listen.

The Southern Kingdom, Judah, used Jerusalem as its capital. Of its twenty sovereigns, only eight walked with God. Again powerful prophets challenged them. Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah were just a few of the men who proclaimed

God's message.

But the people didn't listen. They slipped from conviction to compromise into captivity. The book ends with the battered nations of Israel and Judah dragged behind the horses of their conquerors. God will leave them in captivity for seventy years. Plenty of time for them to ponder the lesson: *Do not be fooled: You cannot cheat God. People harvest only what they plant* ([Galatians 6:7](#)).

It took these people several decades to get the point. I hope we are better listeners.

About This Book

Author:

Unknown, though some think Jeremiah the prophet

Date Written:

After the death of Solomon, 900–500 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- Though Judah and Israel were declining both politically and spiritually, there were still strong spiritual leaders such as Elijah and Elisha.
- The hearts of the people were affected by the hearts of their king, whether wicked or righteous.
- Since God brought the Hebrews out of Egypt, he had promised that their disobedience would lead to destruction.
- God's promise was revealed in the exile of both

Israel to the north and Judah to the south.

Key Verse:

““In the future everything in your palace and everything your ancestors have stored up until this day will be taken away to Babylon. Nothing will be left,’ says the Lord” ([2 Kings 20:17](#)).

Contents:

1. Elijah’s Final Days [1:1–2:14](#)
2. The Work of Elisha [2:15–13:25](#)
3. Judah and Israel’s Decline and Israel’s Exile [14:1–17:41](#)
4. Judah’s Further Decline and Exile [18:1–25:30](#)

Life Lessons

2 Kings 1:1–18

Situation

Ahaziah served as king of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) for two years. As an evil king, he followed Baal.

Observation

Pagan deities are no help, and God is offended when we think otherwise.

Inspiration

In Jude's brief letter to believers, the apostle firmly warns against false prophets and tells us how to respond to them. "Keep yourselves in the love of God" ([Jude 21](#)). Our primary response to false teaching is simply to be right with God in the first place, to make sure we are in fellowship with Him and receiving His blessing and power. Then we can "have mercy on some, who are doubting" (v. [22](#), NASB)—believers who doubt their faith because of false teachers need reassurance.

Another necessary response might be to "save others, snatching them out of the fire" (v. [23](#), NASB)—unbelievers bound for hell after hearing false teaching need to be rescued before it's too late.

Finally, Jude tells about a third response to false prophets: "On some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh" (v. [23](#), NASB). We sometimes must confront false prophets and their followers, doing so with a special dependence on the

Lord and being careful not to get contaminated by their false teachings. (From *Truth for Today* by John MacArthur)

Application

False prophets and false gods have always been with us. Study the Scriptures to see their characteristics, and then adopt Jude's three-point plan: stay in God's love; guide believers away from false teachings back to God; and confront (with mercy) false teachers.

Exploration

False Prophets—[Deuteronomy 13:1–11](#); [18:22](#); [Jeremiah 14:13–16](#); [Matthew 7:15](#). False Gods—[Exodus 20:3](#); [Deuteronomy 4:28](#); [1 Chronicles 16:26](#).

Elijah and King Ahaziah

After Ahab died, Moab broke away from Israel's rule. ²Ahaziah fell down through the wooden bars in his upstairs room in Samaria and was badly hurt. He sent messengers and told them, "Go, ask Baal-Zebub, god of Ekron, if I will recover from my injuries."

³But the Lord's angel said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Go up and meet the messengers sent by the king of Samaria. Ask them, 'Why are you going to ask questions of Baal-Zebub, god of Ekron? Is it because you think there is no God in Israel?' ⁴This is what the Lord says: 'You will never get up from the bed you are lying on; you will die.'" Then Elijah left.

⁵When the messengers returned to Ahaziah, he asked them, "Why have you returned?"

⁶They said, "A man came to meet us. He said, 'Go back to the king who sent you and tell him what the Lord says: "Why do you send messengers to ask questions of Baal-Zebub, god of Ekron? Is it because you think there is no God in Israel? You will never get up from the bed you are lying on; you will die."' "

⁷Ahaziah asked them, "What did the man look like who met you and told you this?"

⁸They answered, "He was a hairy man and wore a leather belt around his waist."

Ahaziah said, "It was Elijah the Tishbite."

⁹Then he sent a captain with his fifty men to Elijah. The captain went to Elijah, who was sitting on top of the hill, and said to him, “Man of God, the king says, ‘Come down!’”

¹⁰Elijah answered the captain, “If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and burn up you and your fifty men.” Then fire came down from heaven and burned up the captain and his fifty men.

¹¹Ahaziah sent another captain and fifty men to Elijah. The captain said to him, “Man of God, this is what the king says: ‘Come down quickly!’”

¹²Elijah answered, “If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and burn up you and your fifty men!” Then fire came down from heaven and burned up the captain and his fifty men.

¹³Ahaziah then sent a third captain with his fifty men. The third captain came and fell down on his knees before Elijah and begged, “Man of God, please respect my life and the lives of your fifty servants.” ¹⁴See, fire came down from heaven and burned up the first two captains of fifty with all their men. But now, respect my life.”

¹⁵The Lord’s angel said to Elijah, “Go down with him and don’t be afraid of him.” So Elijah got up and went down with him to see the king.

¹⁶Elijah told Ahaziah, “This is what the Lord says: ‘You have sent messengers to ask questions of Baal-Zebub, god of Ekron. Is it because you think there is no God in Israel to ask? Because of this, you will never get up from your bed; you will die.’” ¹⁷So Ahaziah died, just as the Lord, through Elijah, had said he would.

Joram became king in Ahaziah’s place during the second

year Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat was king of Judah. Joram ruled because Ahaziah had no son to take his place.¹⁸The other things Ahaziah did are written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel.

Elijah Is Taken to Heaven

It was almost time for the Lord to take Elijah by a whirlwind up into heaven. While Elijah and Elisha were leaving Gilgal, ²Elijah said to Elisha, “Please stay here. The Lord has told me to go to Bethel.”

But Elisha said, “As the Lord lives, and as you live, I won’t leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. ³The groups of prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, “Do you know the Lord will take your master away from you today?”

Elisha said, “Yes, I know, but don’t talk about it.”

⁴Elijah said to him, “Stay here, Elisha, because the Lord has sent me to Jericho.”

But Elisha said, “As the Lord lives, and as you live, I won’t leave you.”

So they went to Jericho. ⁵The groups of prophets at Jericho came to Elisha and said, “Do you know that the Lord will take your master away from you today?”

Elisha answered, “Yes, I know, but don’t talk about it.”

⁶Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here. The Lord has sent me to the Jordan River.”

Elisha answered, “As the Lord lives, and as you live, I won’t leave you.”

So the two of them went on. ⁷Fifty men of the groups of prophets came and stood far from where Elijah and Elisha were by the Jordan. ⁸Elijah took off his coat, rolled it up, and hit the water. The water divided to the right and to the left, and Elijah and Elisha crossed over on dry ground.

⁹After they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, “What

can I do for you before I am taken from you?”

Elisha said, “[Leave me a double share of your spirit.](#)”

¹⁰Elijah said, “You have asked a hard thing. But if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours. If you don’t, it won’t happen.”

¹¹As they were walking and talking, a chariot and horses of fire appeared and separated Elijah from Elisha. Then Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. ¹²Elisha saw it and shouted, “My father! My father! The chariots of Israel and their horsemen!” And Elisha did not see him anymore. Then Elisha grabbed his own clothes and tore them to show how sad he was.

¹³He picked up Elijah’s coat that had fallen from him. Then he returned and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴Elisha hit the water with Elijah’s coat and said, “Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?” When he hit the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and Elisha crossed over.

¹⁵The groups of prophets at Jericho were watching and said, “Elisha now has the spirit Elijah had.” And they came to meet him, bowing down to the ground before him. ¹⁶They said to him, “There are fifty strong men with us. Please let them go and look for your master. Maybe the Spirit of the Lord has taken Elijah up and set him down on some mountain or in some valley.”

But Elisha answered, “No, don’t send them.”

¹⁷When the groups of prophets had begged Elisha until he couldn’t refuse them anymore, he said, “Send them.” So they sent fifty men who looked for three days, but they could not find him. ¹⁸Then they came back to Elisha at Jericho where he was staying. He said to them, “I told you not to go, didn’t I?”

Elisha Makes the Water Pure

¹⁹The people of the city said to Elisha, “Look, master, this city is a nice place to live as you can see. But the water is so bad the land cannot grow crops.”

²⁰Elisha said, “Bring me a new bowl and put salt in it.” So they brought it to him.

²¹Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt in it. He said, “This is what the Lord says: ‘I have healed this water. From now on it won’t cause death, and it won’t keep the land from growing crops.’” ²²So the water has been healed to this day just as Elisha had said.

Boys Make Fun of Elisha

²³From there Elisha went up to Bethel. On the way some boys came out of the city and made fun of him. They said to him, “Go up too, you baldhead! Go up too, you baldhead!” ²⁴Elisha turned around, looked at them, and put a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two mother bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys to pieces. ²⁵Elisha went to Mount Carmel and from there he returned to Samaria.

Life Lessons

2 Kings 2:1–3:27

Situation

As Elijah’s ministry came to a close, Elisha requested a double portion of the Holy Spirit that rested upon Elijah. Elisha’s request demonstrated his

willingness to be God's prophet, no matter the cost.

Observation

The request was granted as Elijah's blessing fell on Elisha. From then on Elisha would wear Elijah's coat and serve with the authority and power it symbolized.

Inspiration

If I were to ask you to describe your heavenly Father, you'd give me a response. If I were to ask you to tell me what Jesus did for you, you'd likely give a cogent answer. But if I were to ask about the role of the Holy Spirit in your life ... ? Eyes would duck. Throats would be cleared. And it would soon be obvious that of the three persons of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit is the one we understand the least.

Perhaps the most common mistake made regarding the Spirit is perceiving him as a power but not a person, a force with no identity. Such is not true. The Holy Spirit is a person.

"The world cannot accept *him*, because it does not see *him* or know *him*. But you know *him*, because *he* lives with you and *he* will be in you" ([John 14:17](#), emphasis mine).

The Holy Spirit is not an "it." He is a person. He has knowledge ([1 Corinthians 2:11](#)). He has a will ([1 Corinthians 12:11](#)). He has a mind ([Romans 8:27](#)). He has affections ([Romans 15:30](#)). You can lie to him ([Acts 5:3-4](#)). You can insult him ([Hebrews 10:29](#)). You can grieve him ([Ephesians 4:30](#)).

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force. He is not Popeye's spinach or the surfer's wave. He is God

within you to help you. In fact John calls him the Helper.

Envision a father helping his son learn to ride a bicycle, and you will have a partial picture of the Holy Spirit. The father stays at the son's side. He pushes the bike and steadies it if the boy starts to tumble. The Spirit does that for us; he stays our step and strengthens our stride. Unlike the father, however, he never leaves. He is with us to the end of the age.

What does the Spirit do?

He comforts the saved. "When I go away, I will send the Helper to you" ([John 16:7](#)).

He convicts the lost. "When the Helper comes, he will prove to the people of the world the truth about sin, about being right with God, and about judgment" ([John 16:8](#)).

He conveys the truth. "I have many more things to say to you, but they are too much for you now. But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you into all truth" ([John 16:12](#)).

Is John saying we don't need the book in order to dance? Of course not; he helped write it. Emotion without knowledge is as dangerous as knowledge without emotion. God seeks a balance. "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" ([John 4:24](#)).

What is essential is that you know the music is in you. "If Christ is in you, then the Spirit gives you life" ([Romans 8:10](#)). You don't need a formula to hear it. I don't have a four-step plan to help you know it. What I do have is his promise that the Helper would come

to comfort, convict, and convey.

So think about it; have you ever been comforted? Has God ever brought you peace when the world brought you pain? Then you heard the music.

Have you ever been convicted? Have you ever sensed a stab of sorrow for your actions? Then you've been touched by the Holy Spirit.

Or have you ever understood a new truth? Or seen an old principle in a new way? The light comes on. Your eyes pop open. "Aha, now I understand." Ever happen to you? If so, that was the Holy Spirit conveying to you a new truth.

What do you know? He's been working in your life already. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

Thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. Pray to be filled daily with his Spirit. Thank him for giving you the discernment to choose between good and evil.

Exploration

Holy Spirit—[Isaiah 63:10](#); [Luke 4:1](#); [Romans 9:1-2](#); [Ephesians 5:18-20](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:7-8](#).

War Between Israel and Moab

Joram son of Ahab became king over Israel at Samaria in Jehoshaphat's eighteenth year as king of Judah. And Joram ruled twelve years. ²He did what the Lord said was wrong, but he was not like his father and mother; he removed the stone pillars his father had made for Baal. ³But he continued to sin like Jeroboam son of Nebat who had led Israel to sin. Joram did not stop doing these same sins.

⁴Mesha king of Moab raised sheep. He paid the king of Israel one hundred thousand lambs and the wool of one hundred thousand sheep. ⁵But when Ahab died, the king of Moab turned against the king of Israel. ⁶So King Joram went out from Samaria and gathered Israel's army. ⁷He also sent messengers to Jehoshaphat king of Judah. "The king of Moab has turned against me," he said. "Will you go with me to fight Moab?"

Jehoshaphat replied, "I will go with you. My soldiers and my horses are yours."

⁸Jehoshaphat asked, "Which way should we attack?"

Joram answered, "Through the Desert of Edom."

⁹So the king of Israel went with the king of Judah and the king of Edom. After they had marched seven days, there was no more water for the army or for their animals that were with them. ¹⁰The king of Israel said, "This is terrible! The Lord has called us three kings together to hand us over to the Moabites!"

¹¹But Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there a prophet of the Lord

here? We can ask the Lord through him.”

An officer of the king of Israel answered, “Elisha son of Shaphat is here. He was Elijah’s servant.”

¹²Jehoshaphat said, “He speaks the Lord’s truth.” So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to see Elisha.

¹³Elisha said to the king of Israel, “I have nothing to do with you. Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother!”

The king of Israel said to Elisha, “No, the Lord has called us three kings together to hand us over to the Moabites.”

¹⁴Elisha said, “As surely as the Lord All-Powerful lives, whom I serve, I tell you the truth. I wouldn’t even look at you or notice you if Jehoshaphat king of Judah were not here. I respect him. ¹⁵Now bring me someone who plays the harp.”

While the harp was being played, the Lord gave Elisha power. ¹⁶Then Elisha said, “The Lord says to dig holes in the valley. ¹⁷The Lord says you won’t see wind or rain, but the valley will be filled with water. Then you, your cattle, and your other animals can drink. ¹⁸This is easy for the Lord to do; he will also hand Moab over to you. ¹⁹You will destroy every strong, walled city and every important town. You will cut down every good tree and stop up all springs. You will ruin every good field with rocks.”

²⁰The next morning, about the time the sacrifice was offered, water came from the direction of Edom and filled the valley.

²¹All the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them. So they gathered everyone old enough to put on armor and waited at the border. ²²But when the Moabites got up early in the morning, the sun was shining on

the water. They saw the water across from them, and it looked as red as blood. ²³Then they said, “This is blood! The kings must have fought and killed each other! Come, Moabites, let’s take the valuables from the dead bodies!”

²⁴When the Moabites came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites came out and fought them until they ran away. Then the Israelites went on into the land, killing the Moabites.

²⁵They tore down the cities and threw rocks all over every good field. They stopped up all the springs and cut down all the good trees. Kir Hareseth was the only city with its stones still in place, but the men with slingshots surrounded it and conquered it, too.

²⁶When the king of Moab saw that the battle was too much for him, he took seven hundred men with swords to try to break through to the king of Edom. But they could not break through.

²⁷Then the king of Moab took his oldest son, who would have been king after him, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall. So there was great anger against the Israelites, who left and went back to their own land.

A Widow Asks Elisha for Help

The wife of a man from the groups of prophets said to Elisha, “Your servant, my husband, is dead. You know he honored the Lord. But now the man he owes money to is coming to take my two boys as his slaves!”

²Elisha answered, “How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?”

The woman said, “I don’t have anything there except a pot of oil.”

³Then Elisha said, “Go and get empty jars from all your neighbors. Don’t ask for just a few. ⁴Then go into your house and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and set the full ones aside.”

⁵So she left Elisha and shut the door behind her and her sons. As they brought the jars to her, she poured out the oil. ⁶When the jars were all full, she said to her son, “Bring me another jar.”

But he said, “There are no more jars.” Then the oil stopped flowing.

⁷She went and told Elisha. And the prophet said to her, “Go, sell the oil and pay what you owe. You and your sons can live on what is left.”

The Shunammite Woman

⁸One day Elisha went to Shunem, where an important woman lived. She begged Elisha to stay and eat. So every time Elisha

passed by, he stopped there to eat. ⁹The woman said to her husband, "I know that this is a holy man of God who passes by our house all the time. ¹⁰Let's make a small room on the [roof](#) and put a bed in the room for him. We can put a table, a chair, and a lampstand there. Then when he comes by, he can stay there."

¹¹One day Elisha came to the woman's house. After he went to his room and rested, ¹²he said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite woman."

When the servant had called her, she stood in front of him. ¹³Elisha had told his servant, "Now say to her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. What can I do for you? Do you want me to speak to the king or the commander of the army for you?'"

She answered, "I live among my own people."

¹⁴Elisha said to Gehazi, "But what can we do for her?"

He answered, "She has no son, and her husband is old."

¹⁵Then Elisha said to Gehazi, "Call her." When he called her, she stood in the doorway. ¹⁶Then Elisha said, "About this time next year, you will hold a son in your arms."

The woman said, "No, master, man of God, don't lie to me, your servant!"

¹⁷But the woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son at that time the next year, just as Elisha had told her.

¹⁸The boy grew up and one day went out to his father, who was with the grain harvesters. ¹⁹The boy said to his father, "My head! My head!"

The father said to his servant, "Take him to his mother!"

²⁰The servant took him to his mother, and he lay on his mother's lap until noon. Then he died. ²¹So she took him up

and laid him on Elisha's bed. Then she shut the door and left.

²²She called to her husband, "Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys. Then I can go quickly to the man of God and return."

²³The husband said, "Why do you want to go to him today? It isn't the New Moon or the Sabbath day."

She said, "It will be all right."

²⁴Then she saddled the donkey and said to her servant, "Lead on. Don't slow down for me unless I tell you." ²⁵So she went to Elisha, the man of God, at Mount Carmel.

When he saw her coming from far away, he said to his servant Gehazi, "Look, there's the Shunammite woman! ²⁶Run to meet her and ask, 'Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is the boy all right?'"

She answered, "Everything is all right."

²⁷Then she came to Elisha at the hill and grabbed his feet. Gehazi came near to pull her away, but Elisha said to him, "Leave her alone. She's very upset, and the Lord has not told me about it. He has hidden it from me."

²⁸She said, "Master, did I ask you for a son? Didn't I tell you not to lie to me?"

²⁹Then Elisha said to Gehazi, "Get ready. Take my walking stick in your hand and go quickly. If you meet anyone, don't say hello. If anyone greets you, don't respond. Lay my walking stick on the boy's face."

³⁰The boy's mother said, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I won't leave you!" So Elisha got up and followed her.

³¹Gehazi went on ahead and laid the walking stick on the boy's face, but the boy did not talk or move. Then Gehazi went

back to meet Elisha. “The boy has not awakened,” he said.

³²When Elisha came into the house, the boy was lying dead on his bed. ³³Elisha entered the room and shut the door, so only he and the boy were in the room. Then he prayed to the Lord. ³⁴He went to the bed and lay on the boy, putting his mouth on the boy’s mouth, his eyes on the boy’s eyes, and his hands on the boy’s hands. He stretched himself out on top of the boy. Soon the boy’s skin became warm. ³⁵Elisha turned away and walked around the room. Then he went back and put himself on the boy again. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

³⁶Elisha called Gehazi and said, “Call the Shunammite!” So he did. When she came, Elisha said, “Pick up your son.” ³⁷She came in and fell at Elisha’s feet, bowing facedown to the floor. Then she picked up her son and went out.

Elisha and the Stew

³⁸When Elisha returned to Gilgal, there was a shortage of food in the land. While the groups of prophets were sitting in front of him, he said to his servant, “Put the large pot on the fire, and boil some stew for these men.”

³⁹One of them went out into the field to gather plants. Finding a wild vine, he picked fruit from the vine and filled his robe with it. Then he came and cut up the fruit into the pot. But they didn’t know what kind of fruit it was. ⁴⁰They poured out the stew for the others to eat. When they began to eat it, they shouted, “Man of God, there’s death in the pot!” And they could not eat it.

⁴¹Elisha told them to bring some flour. He threw it into the

pot and said, “Pour it out for the people to eat.” Then there was nothing harmful in the pot.

Elisha Feeds the People

⁴²A man from Baal Shalishah came to Elisha, bringing him twenty loaves of barley bread from the first harvest. He also brought fresh grain in his sack. Elisha said, “Give it to the people to eat.”

⁴³Elisha’s servant asked, “How can I feed a hundred people with so little?”

“Give the bread to the people to eat,” Elisha said. “This is what the Lord says: ‘They will eat and will have food left over.’” ⁴⁴After he gave it to them, the people ate and had food left over, as the Lord had said.

Life Lessons

2 Kings 4:1–44

Situation

God used Elisha to express divine power and concern by working wonders through this faithful servant. The miracles in this passage not only benefited the Israelites but also helped people whom the Israelites considered ungodly and unworthy of God’s attention.

Observation

The Shunammite’s son died. But the mother showed great faith by asking for “the man of God.” The son was brought back to life. Elijah had

performed a similar miracle (see [1 Kings 17:17-24](#)).

Inspiration

The problem with this world is that it doesn't fit. Oh, it will do for now, but it isn't tailor-made. We were made to live with God, but on earth we live by faith. We were made to live forever, but on this earth we live but for a moment. We were made to live holy lives, but this world is stained by sin.

This world wears like a borrowed shirt. Heaven, however, will fit like one tailor-made.

By the way, I've often thought it curious how few people Jesus raised from the dead. He healed hundreds and fed thousands, but as far as we know he only raised three: the daughter of Jairus, the boy near Nain, and Lazarus. Why so few? Could it be because he knew he'd be doing them no favors? Could it be because he couldn't get any volunteers? Could it be that once someone is there, the last place they want to return to is here?

My, what a thought. God is taking them away from the evil days ahead. Could death be God's grace? Could the funeral wreath be God's safety ring? Why does an eight-year-old die of cancer? Why is a young mother taken from her children? As horrible as the grave may be, could it be God's protection from the future?

Trust in God, Jesus urges, and trust in me.

Several years ago I heard then Vice President George Bush speak at a prayer breakfast. He told of his trip to Russia to represent the United States at the funeral of Leonid Brezhnev. The funeral was as

precise and stoic as the communist regime. No tears were seen, and no emotion displayed. With one exception. Mr. Bush told how Brezhnev's widow was the last person to witness the body before the coffin was closed. For several seconds she stood at his side and then reached down and performed the sign of the cross on her husband's chest.

In the hour of her husband's death, she went not to Lenin, not to Karl Marx, not to Khrushchev. In the hour of death she turned to a Nazarene carpenter who had lived two thousand years ago and who dared to claim: "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me" [[John 14:1](#)]. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

If we live on this earth only for a moment in light of eternity, how does that affect your life? Your work? Your family? Your ministry?

Exploration

Resurrection Hope—[John 5:24-29](#); [6:37-40](#); [11:25-26](#); [Revelation 1:17-18](#).

Naaman Is Healed

Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was honored by his master, and he had much respect because the Lord used him to give victory to Aram. He was a mighty and brave man, but he had a skin disease.

²The Arameans had gone out to raid the Israelites and had taken a little girl as a captive. This little girl served Naaman's wife. ³She said to her mistress, "I wish my master would meet the prophet who lives in Samaria. He would cure him of his disease."

⁴Naaman went to the king and told him what the girl from Israel had said. ⁵The king of Aram said, "Go ahead, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left and took with him about seven hundred fifty pounds of silver, as well as one hundred fifty pounds of gold and ten changes of clothes. ⁶He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "I am sending my servant Naaman to you so you can heal him of his skin disease."

⁷When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes to show how upset he was. He said, "I'm not God! I can't kill and make alive again! Why does this man send someone with a skin disease for me to heal? You can see that the king of Aram is trying to start trouble with me."

⁸When Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent the king this message: "Why have you torn your clothes? Let Naaman come to me. Then he will know there is a prophet in Israel." ⁹So Naaman went with his horses and chariots to Elisha's house and stood outside the

door.

¹⁰Elisha sent Naaman a messenger who said, “Go and wash in the Jordan River seven times. Then your skin will be healed, and you will be clean.”

¹¹Naaman became angry and left. He said, “I thought Elisha would surely come out and stand before me and call on the name of the Lord his God. I thought he would wave his hand over the place and heal the disease.” ¹²The Abana and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, are better than all the waters of Israel. Why can’t I wash in them and become clean?” So Naaman went away very angry.

¹³Naaman’s servants came near and said to him, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, wouldn’t you have done it? Doesn’t it make more sense just to do it? After all, he only told you, ‘Wash, and you will be clean.’” ¹⁴So Naaman went down and dipped in the Jordan seven times, just as Elisha had said. Then his skin became new again, like the skin of a child. And he was clean.

¹⁵Naaman and all his group returned to Elisha. He stood before Elisha and said, “Look, I now know there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. Now please accept a gift from me.”

¹⁶But Elisha said, “As surely as the Lord lives whom I serve, I won’t accept anything.” Naaman urged him to take the gift, but he refused.

¹⁷Then Naaman said, “If you won’t take the gift, then please give me some soil—as much as two of my mules can carry. From now on I’ll not offer any burnt offering or sacrifice to any other gods but the Lord.” ¹⁸But let the Lord pardon me for this: When my master goes into the [temple of Rimmon](#) to worship, he leans on my arm. Then I must bow in that temple. May the

Lord pardon me when I do that.”

¹⁹Elisha said to him, “Go in peace.”

Naaman left Elisha and went a short way. ²⁰Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, thought, “My master has not accepted what Naaman the Aramean brought. As surely as the Lord lives, I’ll run after him and get something from him.” ²¹So Gehazi went after Naaman.

When Naaman saw someone running after him, he got off the chariot to meet Gehazi. He asked, “Is everything all right?”

²²Gehazi said, “Everything is all right. My master has sent me. He said, ‘Two young men from the groups of prophets in the mountains of Ephraim just came to me. Please give them seventy-five pounds of silver and two changes of clothes.’”

²³Naaman said, “Please take one hundred fifty pounds,” and he urged Gehazi to take it. He tied one hundred fifty pounds of silver in two bags with two changes of clothes. Then he gave them to two of his servants to carry for Gehazi. ²⁴When they came to the hill, Gehazi took these things from Naaman’s servants and put them in the house. Then he let Naaman’s servants go, and they left.

²⁵When he came in and stood before his master, Elisha said to him, “Where have you been, Gehazi?”

“I didn’t go anywhere,” he answered.

²⁶But Elisha said to him, “My spirit was with you. I knew when the man turned from his chariot to meet you. This isn’t a time to take money, clothes, olives, grapes, sheep, oxen, male servants, or female servants. ²⁷So Naaman’s skin disease will come on you and your children forever.” When Gehazi left Elisha, he had the disease and was as white as snow.

Life Lessons

2 Kings 5:1–6:7

Situation

A young Israelite slave girl showed courage and faith by speaking out and suggesting her master seek healing and help from the prophet Elisha.

Observation

God intends every Christian to grow in faith and become a mature Christian. But God welcomes, honors, and rewards those who come with the faith of a child.

Inspiration

One of the saddest experiences for a wife or husband is stillbirth, and there is often a tense moment when a baby is delivered as everyone waits for it to squawk and wave its limbs, and then suck, and so show itself to be fully alive. In the same way, not every churned-up soul becomes a live birth spiritually, and signs that new life has really come must be sought from people's actual behavior. The signs whereby a regenerate person may be known correspond to the natural actions of the newborn child.

First, the baby *cries*, instinctively; and the born-again person instinctively prays, crying to God in dependence, hope and trust as a child to his father. The gospel which he received and to which he responded by embracing Christ as his Saviour and Lord promised him adoption into God's family ([Galatians 4:4f](#)), and now it is his nature to treat God as his Father, bringing to him all his own felt needs

and desires

Second, the baby *sucks*, instinctively; and the born-again person also feels a hunger for spiritual food—first the milk and the meat of God’s revealed word ([1 Peter 2:2](#); [Hebrews 5:12–14](#); [1 Corinthians 3:2](#)). He listens to the word preached and taught and discussed; he reads it in his Bible, and in books that throw light on the Bible; he asks questions about it; he meditates on it, memorizes it, chews the cud on it, labours to squeeze all the goodness out of it

Third, the baby *moves*, turning its head, flexing its limbs, later on rolling, crawling, tottering, toddling, exploring; and similarly the born-again person moves in the spiritual realm into which he has now come, sorting out priorities, reshaping his life in the light of his new allegiance, exploring Christian relationships and ways of worship, using enterprise for the Lord in many kinds of work and witness

Fourth, the baby *rests*, relaxing completely and sleeping soundly in adult arms and wherever else feels firm; and in the same way the born-again person rests in the knowledge that God’s everlasting arms are underneath him, and is able to spend his days, whatever pressures they bring, without panic and in peace

Childlikeness before God is what regeneration is really all about, inasmuch as the gospel calls for it and regeneration is no more (and no less!) than the work of God in our hearts which leads to the gospel being wholeheartedly received. If only God would make us all simple enough to see this and, having seen it,

never to lose sight of it! Then the Christian world would be a very different place. (From *God's Words* by J. I. Packer)

Application

Grow in your faith: craving spiritual food, worshiping God, and resting in God's timing. Persevering in these areas will demonstrate that your spiritual life is alive!

Exploration

Childlike Faith—[Psalm 8:2](#); [Matthew 18:2-6](#); [Matthew 21:15-16](#); [Mark 9:36-37](#); [Mark 10:15](#); [Luke 9:46-48](#).

An Axhead Floats

The groups of prophets said to Elisha, “The place where we meet with you is too small for us. ²Let’s go to the Jordan River. There everyone can get a log, and let’s build a place there to live.”

Elisha said, “Go.”

³One of them said, “Please go with us.”

Elisha answered, “I will go,” ⁴so he went with them. When they arrived at the Jordan, they cut down some trees. ⁵As one man was cutting down a tree, the head of his ax fell into the water. He yelled, “Oh, my master! I borrowed that ax!”

⁶Elisha asked, “Where did it fall?” The man showed him the place. Then Elisha cut down a stick and threw it into the water, and it made the iron head float. ⁷Elisha said, “Pick up the axhead.” Then the man reached out and took it.

Elisha and the Blinded Arameans

⁸The king of Aram was at war with Israel. He had a council meeting with his officers and said, “I will set up my camp in this place.”

⁹Elisha, the man of God, sent a message to the king of Israel, saying, “Be careful! Don’t pass that place, because the Arameans are going down there!”

¹⁰The king of Israel checked the place about which Elisha had warned him. Elisha warned him several times, so the king protected himself there.

¹¹The king of Aram was angry about this. He called his officers together and demanded, “Tell me who of us is working for the king of Israel.”

¹²One of the officers said, “None, my master and king. It’s Elisha, the prophet from Israel. He can tell you what you speak in your bedroom.”

¹³The king said, “Go and find him so I can send men and catch him.”

The servants came back and reported, “He is in Dothan.”

¹⁴Then the king sent horses, chariots, and many troops to Dothan. They arrived at night and surrounded the city.

¹⁵Elisha’s servant got up early, and when he went out, he saw an army with horses and chariots all around the city. The servant said to Elisha, “Oh, my master, what can we do?”

¹⁶Elisha said, “Don’t be afraid. The army that fights for us is larger than the one against us.”

¹⁷Then Elisha prayed, “Lord, open my servant’s eyes, and let him see.”

The Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw that the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

¹⁸As the enemy came down toward Elisha, he prayed to the Lord, “Make these people blind.” So he made the Aramean army blind, as Elisha had asked.

¹⁹Elisha said to them, “This is not the right road or the right city. Follow me and I’ll take you to the man you are looking for.” Then Elisha led them to Samaria.

²⁰After they entered Samaria, Elisha said, “Lord, open these men’s eyes so they can see.” So the Lord opened their eyes, and the Aramean army saw that they were inside the city of

Samaria!

²¹When the king of Israel saw the Aramean army, he said to Elisha, “My father, should I kill them? Should I kill them?”

²²Elisha answered, “Don’t kill them. You wouldn’t kill people whom you captured with your sword and bow. Give them food and water, and let them eat and drink and then go home to their master.” ²³So he prepared a great feast for the Aramean army. After they ate and drank, the king sent them away, and they went home to their master. The soldiers of Aram did not come anymore into the land of Israel.

A Shortage of Food

²⁴Later, Ben-Hadad king of Aram gathered his whole army and surrounded and attacked Samaria. ²⁵There was a shortage of food in Samaria. It was so bad that a donkey’s head sold for about two pounds of silver, and half of a pint of dove’s dung sold for about two ounces of silver.

²⁶As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman yelled out to him, “Help me, my master and king!”

²⁷The king said, “If the Lord doesn’t help you, how can I? Can I get help from the threshing floor or from the winepress?”

²⁸Then the king said to her, “What is your trouble?”

She answered, “This woman said to me, ‘Give up your son so we can eat him today. Then we will eat my son tomorrow.’

²⁹So we boiled my son and ate him. Then the next day I said to her, ‘Give up your son so we can eat him.’ But she had hidden him.”

³⁰When the king heard the woman’s words, he tore his clothes in grief. As he walked along the wall, the people looked

and saw he had on rough cloth under his clothes to show his sadness.³¹ He said, “May God punish me terribly if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat isn’t cut off from his body today!”

³²The king sent a messenger to Elisha, who was sitting in his house with the older leaders. But before the messenger arrived, Elisha said to them, “See, this murderer is sending men to cut off my head. When the messenger arrives, shut the door and hold it; don’t let him in. The sound of his master’s feet is behind him.”

³³Elisha was still talking with the leaders when the messenger arrived. The king said, “This trouble has come from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?”

Life Lessons

2 Kings 6:8–8:15

Situation

Aram was a region in southern Syria. The kings of Aram and Israel frequently fought each other, with tenuous times of peace between the battles. During one raid, the Arameans arrived at night and surrounded the city. This caused Elisha’s servant to be greatly afraid, but the prophet told him not to fear.

Observation

Elisha was not disturbed by what he saw; instead, he gave his servant the ability to see the invisible spirits that are constantly ready to do God’s work. The Lord was in control, and there was no need to worry.

Inspiration

The same God that gave us commandments such

as “Do not commit adultery, do not murder” said, “Do not worry.” It’s a violation of our relationship to God to question his authority by worrying.

Has any good ever come out of any worrying that you’ve ever done? Worry only compartmentalizes us and makes us unable to do what we set out to do. If you are worried about a problem, what you need to do is simply trust the Lord and do good.

The word “worry” comes from a word that means “to divide.” When you worry, you divide your energy. Do you worry? I worry about you if you don’t worry! All of us worry, but we shouldn’t. Jesus commands us half a dozen times, “Do not worry.” When we worry about a situation, the problem gets us instead of us getting it.

Jesus is not afraid of the things that cause us fear. He never said, “Don’t bring your fears to me; I’m too busy.” Instead, he said, “I’m not afraid of the things that cause you fear. Bring your fears to me.”

(From *The Inspirational Bible*, “Worry”)

Application

It has been noted that most of the things that we worry about don’t even come to pass. It’s proper to let God know about your concerns, for Jesus said he would provide rest for your soul.

Exploration

Worry—[Deuteronomy 31:6–8](#); [Joshua 1:5–9](#); [Matthew 6:25–34](#); [Philippians 4:6–9](#); [Revelation 1:17–18](#).

Elisha said, “Listen to the Lord’s word. This is what the Lord says: ‘About this time tomorrow seven quarts of fine flour will be sold for two-fifths of an ounce of silver, and thirteen quarts of barley will be sold for two-fifths of an ounce of silver. This will happen at the gate of Samaria.’”

²Then the officer who was close to the king answered Elisha, “Even if the Lord opened windows in the sky, that couldn’t happen.”

Elisha said, “You will see it with your eyes, but you will not eat any of it.”

³There were four men with a skin disease at the entrance to the city gate. They said to each other, “Why do we sit here until we die? ⁴There is no food in the city. So if we go into the city, we will die there. If we stay here, we will die. So let’s go to the Aramean camp. If they let us live, we will live. If they kill us, we die.”

⁵So they got up at twilight and went to the Aramean camp, but when they arrived, no one was there. ⁶The Lord had caused the Aramean army to hear the sound of chariots, horses, and a large army. They had said to each other, “The king of Israel has hired the Hittite and Egyptian kings to attack us!” ⁷So they got up and ran away in the twilight, leaving their tents, horses, and donkeys. They left the camp standing and ran for their lives.

⁸When the men with the skin disease came to the edge of the camp, they went into one of the tents and ate and drank. They carried silver, gold, and clothes out of the camp and hid them. Then they came back and entered another tent. They carried things from this tent and hid them, also. ⁹Then they said to each other, “We’re doing wrong. Today we have good news, but we are silent. If we wait until the sun comes up, we’ll

be discovered. Let's go right now and tell the people in the king's palace."

¹⁰So they went and called to the gatekeepers of the city. They said, "We went to the Aramean camp, but no one is there; we didn't hear anyone. The horses and donkeys were still tied up, and the tents were still standing." ¹¹Then the gatekeepers shouted out and told the people in the palace.

¹²The king got up in the night and said to his officers, "I'll tell you what the Arameans are doing to us. They know we are starving. They have gone out of the camp to hide in the field. They're saying, 'When the Israelites come out of the city, we'll capture them alive. Then we'll enter the city.'"

¹³One of his officers answered, "Let some men take five of the horses that are still left in the city. These men are like all the Israelites who are left; they are also about to die. Let's send them to see what has happened."

¹⁴So the men took two chariots with horses. The king sent them after the Aramean army, saying, "Go and see what has happened." ¹⁵The men followed the Aramean army as far as the Jordan River. The road was full of clothes and equipment that the Arameans had thrown away as they had hurriedly left. So the messengers returned and told the king. ¹⁶Then the people went out and took valuables from the Aramean camp. So seven quarts of fine flour were sold for two-fifths of an ounce of silver, and thirteen quarts of barley were sold for two-fifths of an ounce of silver, just as the Lord had said.

¹⁷The king chose the officer who was close to him to guard the gate, but the people trampled the officer to death. This happened just as Elisha had told the king when the king came to his house. ¹⁸He had said, "Thirteen quarts of barley and

seven quarts of fine flour will each sell for two-fifths of an ounce of silver about this time tomorrow at the gate of Samaria.”

¹⁹But the officer had answered, “Even if the Lord opened windows in the sky, that couldn’t happen.” And Elisha had told him, “You will see it with your eyes, but you won’t eat any of it.” ²⁰It happened to the officer just that way. The people trampled him in the gateway, and he died.

The Shunammite Regains Her Land

Elisha spoke to the woman whose son he had brought back to life. He said, "Get up and go with your family. Stay any place you can, because the Lord has called for a time without food that will last seven years."² So the woman got up and did as the man of God had said. She left with her family, and they stayed in the land of the Philistines for seven years.³ After seven years she returned from the land of the Philistines and went to beg the king for her house and land.⁴ The king was talking with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God. The king had said, "Please tell me all the great things Elisha has done."⁵ Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had brought a dead boy back to life. Just then the woman whose son Elisha had brought back to life came and begged the king for her house and land.

Gehazi said, "My master and king, this is the woman, and this is the son Elisha brought back to life."

⁶The king asked the woman, and she told him about it. Then the king chose an officer to help her. "Give the woman everything that is hers," the king said. "Give her all the money made from her land from the day she left until now."

Ben-Hadad Is Killed

⁷Then Elisha went to Damascus, where Ben-Hadad king of Aram was sick. Someone told him, "The man of God has arrived."

⁸The king said to Hazael, “Take a gift in your hand and go meet him. Ask the Lord through him if I will recover from my sickness.”

⁹So Hazael went to meet Elisha, taking with him a gift of forty camels loaded with every good thing in Damascus. He came and stood before Elisha and said, “Your son Ben-Hadad king of Aram sent me to you. He asks if he will recover from his sickness.”

¹⁰Elisha said to Hazael, “Go and tell Ben-Hadad, ‘You will surely recover,’ but the Lord has told me he will really die.”

¹¹Hazael stared at Elisha until he felt ashamed. Then Elisha cried.

¹²Hazael asked, “Why are you crying, master?”

Elisha answered, “Because I know what evil you will do to the Israelites. You will burn their strong, walled cities with fire and kill their young men with swords. You will throw their babies to the ground and split open their pregnant women.”

¹³Hazael said, “Am I a dog? How could I do such things?”

Elisha answered, “The Lord has shown me that you will be king over Aram.”

¹⁴Then Hazael left Elisha and came to his master. Ben-Hadad said to him, “What did Elisha say to you?”

Hazael answered, “He told me that you will surely recover.”

¹⁵But the next day Hazael took a blanket and dipped it in water. Then he put it over Ben-Hadad’s face, and he died. So Hazael became king in Ben-Hadad’s place.

Life Lessons

[2 Kings 8:16–9:37](#)

Situation

With Jehoshaphat as a father, Jehoram had a good example to follow. When he became king, however, he foolishly chose to marry the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (probably as a political alliance). This daughter, Athaliah, brought evil practices and the need for God's judgment to the Southern Kingdom.

Observation

If we purposely ignore God's desire for us, we will find ourselves candidates for his discipline.

Inspiration

In our less consistent moments we almost unconsciously see the conflict between God and Satan as an arm-wrestling match. Their wrists go first this way, then that; God's arm is on top one moment, Satan's the next. We remind ourselves that God will win in the end because He's slightly stronger and can hold out longer. But, we reason, it's going to take much time, effort, and a few close calls. We almost think Satan's schemes throw a monkey wrench into God's plans, catch Him off guard, and present Him with problems He wishes wouldn't happen.

That's silly. The truth is, God is infinitely more powerful than Satan. God, the One who is in you, is greater than Satan, the one who is in the world. Satan owes his very existence to God—he is a created being, an angel, and a fallen one at that. Satan had to receive God's permission before afflicting Job, and even then he was under definite restrictions. Satan's demonic hordes feared Jesus and obeyed Jesus'

commands. And the Bible is clear that when our Lord is ready, He will crush the Evil One forever.

No, Satan doesn't sneak out and cause pneumonia and cancer while God happens to be looking the other way listening to the prayers of His saints. He can only do what our all-powerful and all-knowing God allows him to do.

Lord Jesus, I have nothing to fear, knowing that You are in control. There is no accident, injury, or circumstance that can happen beyond Your sovereign will. I recognize that the Devil cannot touch my life, that he cannot even tempt me without gaining Your permission. Help me to realize just how great and powerful You really are!

(From *Diamonds in the Dust* by Joni Eareckson Tada)

Application

Are you troubled by the evil that surrounds you? Leaders or managers who don't honor God? The suffering of the innocent? The influence of sin?—All of these can weigh you down and make you doubt God's ability to intervene. Remember: God has perfect timing. He has a plan to judge and punish evil. Bring your discouragement to him and rely on his victory.

Exploration

Evil Defeated—[Psalm 44:2–8](#); [Romans 8:37–39](#); [1 Corinthians 15:55–57](#); [Colossians 2:13–15](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:8](#); [Hebrews 2:14–15](#); [1 John 4:4](#); [5:4](#); [Jude 6](#); [Revelation 19:20](#).

Jehoram King of Judah

¹⁶While Jehoshaphat was king in Judah, Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat became king of Judah. This was during the fifth year Joram son of Ahab was king of Israel. ¹⁷Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he began to rule, and he ruled eight years in Jerusalem. ¹⁸He followed the ways of the kings of Israel, just as the family of Ahab had done, because he married Ahab's daughter. Jehoram did what the Lord said was wrong. ¹⁹But the Lord would not destroy Judah because of his servant David. The Lord had promised that one of David's descendants would always rule.

²⁰In Jehoram's time Edom broke away from Judah's rule and chose their own king. ²¹So Jehoram and all his chariots went to Zair. The Edomites surrounded him and his chariot commanders. Jehoram got up and attacked the Edomites at night, but his army ran away to their tents. ²²From then until now the country of Edom has fought against the rule of Judah. At the same time Libnah also broke away from Judah's rule.

²³The other acts of Jehoram and all the things he did are written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. ²⁴Jehoram died and was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, and Jehoram's son Ahaziah ruled in his place.

²⁵Ahaziah son of Jehoram became king of Judah during the twelfth year Joram son of Ahab was king of Israel. ²⁶Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he ruled one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, a

granddaughter of Omri king of Israel. ²⁷Ahaziah followed the ways of Ahab's family. He did what the Lord said was wrong, as Ahab's family had done, because he was a son-in-law to Ahab.

²⁸Ahaziah went with Joram son of Ahab to Ramoth in Gilead, where they fought against Hazael king of Aram. The Arameans wounded Joram. ²⁹So King Joram returned to Jezreel to heal from the wound he had received from the Arameans at Ramoth when he fought Hazael king of Aram. Ahaziah son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to visit Joram son of Ahab at Jezreel, because he had been wounded.

Jehu Is Chosen King

At the same time, Elisha the prophet called a man from the groups of prophets. Elisha said, “Get ready, and take this small bottle of olive oil in your hand. Go to Ramoth in Gilead. ²When you arrive, find Jehu son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi. Go in and make Jehu get up from among his brothers, and take him to an inner room. ³Then take the bottle and pour the oil on Jehu’s head and say, ‘This is what the Lord says: I have appointed you king over Israel.’ Then open the door and run away. Don’t wait!”

⁴So the young man, the prophet, went to Ramoth in Gilead. ⁵When he arrived, he saw the officers of the army sitting together. He said, “Commander, I have a message for you.”

Jehu asked, “For which one of us?”

The young man said, “For you, commander.”

⁶Jehu got up and went into the house. Then the young prophet poured the olive oil on Jehu’s head and said to him, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: ‘I have appointed you king over the Lord’s people Israel. ⁷You must destroy the family of Ahab your master. I will punish Jezebel for the deaths of my servants the prophets and for all the Lord’s servants who were murdered. ⁸All of Ahab’s family must die. I will not let any male child in Ahab’s family live in Israel, whether slave or free. ⁹I will make Ahab’s family like the family of Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the family of Baasha son of Ahijah. ¹⁰The dogs will eat Jezebel at Jezreel, and no one will bury her.’”

Then the young prophet opened the door and ran away.

¹¹When Jehu went back to his master's officers, one of them said to Jehu, "Is everything all right? Why did this crazy man come to you?"

Jehu answered, "You know the man and how he talks."

¹²They answered, "That's not true. Tell us."

Jehu said, "He said to me, 'This is what the Lord says: I have appointed you to be king over Israel.'"

¹³Then the officers hurried, and each man took off his own coat and put it on the stairs for Jehu. They blew the trumpet and shouted, "Jehu is king!"

Joram and Ahaziah Are Killed

¹⁴So Jehu son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, made plans against Joram. Now Joram and all Israel had been defending Ramoth in Gilead from Hazael king of Aram. ¹⁵But King Joram had to return to Jezreel to heal from the injuries the Arameans had given him when he fought against Hazael king of Aram.

Jehu said, "If you agree with this, don't let anyone leave the city. They might tell the news in Jezreel." ¹⁶Then he got into his chariot and set out for Jezreel, where Joram was resting. Ahaziah king of Judah had gone down to see him.

¹⁷The lookout was standing on the watchtower in Jezreel when he saw Jehu's troops coming. He said, "I see some soldiers!"

Joram said, "Take a horseman and send him to meet them. Tell him to ask, 'Is all in order?'"

¹⁸The horseman rode out to meet Jehu, and he said, "This is what the king says: 'Is all in order?'"

Jehu said, “Why bother yourself with order? Come along behind me.”

The lookout reported, “The messenger reached them, but he is not coming back.”

¹⁹Then Joram sent out a second horseman. This rider came to Jehu’s group and said, “This is what the king says: ‘Is all in order?’”

Jehu answered, “Why bother yourself with order? Come along behind me.”

²⁰The lookout reported, “The second man reached them, but he is not coming back. The man in the chariot is driving like Jehu son of Nimshi. He drives as if he were crazy!”

²¹Joram said, “Get my chariot ready.” Then the servant got Joram’s chariot ready. Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his own chariot, to meet Jehu at the property of Naboth the Jezreelite.

²²When Joram saw Jehu, he said, “Is all in order, Jehu?”

Jehu answered, “There will never be any order as long as your mother Jezebel worships idols and uses witchcraft.”

²³Joram turned the horses to run away and yelled to Ahaziah, “It’s a trick, Ahaziah!”

²⁴Then Jehu drew his bow and shot Joram between his shoulders. The arrow went through Joram’s heart, and he fell down in his chariot.

²⁵Jehu ordered Bidkar, his chariot officer, “Pick up Joram’s body, and throw it into the field of Naboth the Jezreelite. Remember when you and I rode together with Joram’s father Ahab. The Lord made this prophecy against him: ²⁶‘Yesterday I saw the blood of Naboth and his sons, says the Lord, so I will punish Ahab in his field, says the Lord.’ Take Joram’s body

and throw it into the field, as the Lord has said.”

²⁷When Ahaziah king of Judah saw this, he ran away toward Beth Haggan. Jehu chased him, saying, “Shoot Ahaziah, too!” Ahaziah was wounded in his chariot on the way up to Gur near Ibleam. He got as far as Megiddo but died there.

²⁸Ahaziah’s servants carried his body in a chariot to Jerusalem and buried him with his ancestors in his tomb in Jerusalem.

²⁹(Ahaziah had become king over Judah in the eleventh year Joram son of Ahab was king.) Death of Jezebel

³⁰When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard about it. She put on her eye makeup and fixed her hair. Then she looked out the window. ³¹When Jehu entered the city gate, Jezebel said, “Have you come in peace, you [Zimri](#), you who killed your master?”

³²Jehu looked up at the window and said, “Who is on my side? Who?” Two or three servants looked out the window at Jehu. ³³He said to them, “Throw her down.” So they threw Jezebel down, and the horses ran over her. Some of her blood splashed on the wall and on the horses.

³⁴Jehu went into the house and ate and drank. Then he said, “Now see about this cursed woman. Bury her, because she is a king’s daughter.”

³⁵The men went to bury Jezebel, but they could not find her. They found only her skull, feet, and the palms of her hands.

³⁶When they came back and told Jehu, he said, “The Lord said this through his servant Elijah the Tishbite: ‘The dogs will eat Jezebel at Jezreel. ³⁷Her body will be like manure on the field in the land at Jezreel. No one will be able to say that this is Jezebel.’”

Families of Ahab and Ahaziah Killed

Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. Jehu wrote letters and sent them to Samaria to the officers and older leaders of Jezreel and to the guardians of the sons of Ahab. Jehu said, ²“You have your master’s sons with you, and you have chariots, horses, a city with strong walls, and weapons. When you get this letter, ³choose the best and most worthy person among your master’s sons, and make him king. Then fight for your master’s family.”

⁴But the officers and leaders of Jezreel were frightened. They said, “Two kings could not stand up to Jehu, so how can we?”

⁵The palace manager, the city governor, the leaders, and the guardians sent a message to Jehu. “We are your servants,” they said. “We will do everything you tell us to do. We won’t make any man king, so do whatever you think is best.”

⁶Then Jehu wrote a second letter, saying, “If you are on my side and will obey me, cut off the heads of your master’s sons and come to me at Jezreel tomorrow about this time.”

Now the seventy sons of the king’s family were with the leading men of the city who were their guardians. ⁷When the leaders received the letter, they took the king’s sons and killed all seventy of them. They put their heads in baskets and sent them to Jehu at Jezreel. ⁸The messenger came to Jehu and told him, “They have brought the heads of the king’s sons.”

Then Jehu said, “Lay the heads in two piles at the city gate until morning.”

⁹In the morning, Jehu went out and stood before the people and said to them, “You are innocent. Look, I made plans

against my master and killed him. But who killed all these?
¹⁰You should know that everything the Lord said about Ahab's family will come true. The Lord has spoken through his servant Elijah, and the Lord has done what he said." ¹¹So Jehu killed everyone of Ahab's family in Jezreel who was still alive. He also killed all Ahab's leading men, close friends, and priests. No one who had helped Ahab was left alive.

¹²Then Jehu left and went to Samaria by way of the road to Beth Eked of the Shepherds. ¹³There Jehu met some relatives of Ahaziah king of Judah. Jehu asked, "Who are you?"

They answered, "We are relatives of Ahaziah. We have come down to get revenge for the families of the king and the king's mother."

¹⁴Then Jehu said, "Take them alive!" So they captured Ahaziah's relatives alive and killed them at the well near Beth Eked—forty-two of them. Jehu did not leave anyone alive.

¹⁵After Jehu left there, he met Jehonadab son of Recab, who was also on his way to meet Jehu. Jehu greeted him and said, "Are you as good a friend to me as I am to you?"

Jehonadab answered, "Yes, I am."

Jehu said, "If you are, then give me your hand." So Jehonadab gave him his hand, and Jehu pulled him into the chariot. ¹⁶"Come with me," Jehu said. "You can see how strong my feelings are for the Lord." So Jehu had Jehonadab ride in his chariot.

¹⁷When Jehu came to Samaria, he killed all of Ahab's family in Samaria. He destroyed all those who were left, just as the Lord had told Elijah it would happen.

Baal Worshipers Killed

¹⁸Then Jehu gathered all the people together and said to them, "Ahab served Baal a little, but Jehu will serve Baal much. ¹⁹Now call for me all Baal's prophets and priests and all the people who worship Baal. Don't let anyone miss this meeting, because I have a great sacrifice for Baal. Anyone who is not there will not live." But Jehu was tricking them so he could destroy the worshipers of Baal. ²⁰He said, "Prepare a holy meeting for Baal." So they announced the meeting. ²¹Then Jehu sent word through all Israel, and all the worshipers of Baal came; not one stayed home. They came into the temple of Baal, and the temple was filled from one side to the other.

²²Jehu said to the man who kept the robes, "Bring out robes for all the worshipers of Baal." After he brought out robes for them, ²³Jehu and Jehonadab son of Recab went into the temple of Baal. Jehu said to the worshipers of Baal, "Look around, and make sure there are no servants of the Lord with you. Be sure there are only worshipers of Baal." ²⁴Then the worshipers of Baal went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings.

Jehu had eighty men waiting outside. He had told them, "Don't let anyone escape. If you do, you must pay with your own life."

²⁵As soon as Jehu finished offering the burnt offering, he ordered the guards and the captains, "Go in and kill the worshipers of Baal. Don't let anyone come out." So the guards and captains killed the worshipers of Baal with the sword and threw their bodies out. Then they went to the inner rooms of the temple ²⁶and brought out the pillars of the temple of Baal and burned them. ²⁷They tore down the stone pillar of Baal, as well as the temple of Baal. And they made it into a sewage pit, as it is today.

²⁸So Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel, ²⁹but he did not stop doing the sins Jeroboam son of Nebat had done. Jeroboam had led Israel to sin by worshipping the golden calves in Bethel and Dan.

³⁰The Lord said to Jehu, “You have done well in obeying what I said was right. You have done to the family of Ahab as I wanted. Because of this, your descendants as far as your great-great-grandchildren will be kings of Israel.” ³¹But Jehu was not careful to follow the teachings of the Lord, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not stop doing the same sins Jeroboam had done, by which he had led Israel to sin.

³²At that time the Lord began to make Israel smaller. Hazael defeated the Israelites in all the land of Israel, ³³taking all the land of the Jordan known as the land of Gilead. (It was the region of Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh.) He took land from Aroer by the Arnon Ravine through Gilead to Bashan.

³⁴The other things Jehu did—everything he did and all his victories—are recorded in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. ³⁵Jehu died and was buried in Samaria, and his son Jehoahaz became king in his place. ³⁶Jehu was king over Israel in Samaria for twenty-eight years.

Life Lessons

2 Kings 10:1–36

Situation

King Jehu drastically reformed society. He spoke out against practices that disregarded God’s law and called the people back to God’s standards. He killed wicked Ahab’s household and the prophets of Baal.

Although he led the way in these reforms, he failed to finish the job—he did not remove the idols set up in Dan and Bethel.

Observation

Jehu passionately opposed practices that were dishonoring to God, but some of his own efforts were sinful ([Hosea 1:4-5](#)).

Inspiration

It seems a couple of prowlers broke into a department store in a large city... . They took nothing. Absolutely nothing. No merchandise was stolen. No items were removed. But what they did was ridiculous.

Instead of stealing anything, they changed the cost of everything. Price tags were swapped. Values were exchanged. These clever pranksters took the tag off a \$395 camera and stuck it on a \$5.00 box of stationery. The \$5.95 sticker on a paperback book was removed and placed on an outboard motor. They repriced everything in the store!

Crazy? You bet. But the craziest part of this story took place the next morning. The store opened as usual. Employees went to work. Customers began to shop. The place functioned as normal for four hours before anyone noticed what had happened.

Four hours! Some people got some great bargains. Others got fleeced. For four solid hours no one noticed that all the values had been swapped.

Hard to believe? It shouldn't be—we see the same thing happening every day. We are deluged by a distorted value system. We see the most valuable

things in our lives peddled for pennies and we see the cheapest smut go for millions.

The salesman who defended his illegal practices by saying, "Let's not confuse business with ethics."

The military men who sold top-secret information (as well as their integrity) for \$6,000.

The cabinet member of a large nation who was caught illegally dealing in semi-precious stones. His cabinet position? Minister of *Justice*.

The father who confessed to the murder of his twelve-year-old daughter. The reason he killed her? She refused to go to bed with him.

Why do we do what we do? Why do we take blatantly black-and-white and paint it gray? Why are priceless mores trashed while senseless standards are obeyed? What causes us to elevate the body and degrade the soul? What causes us to pamper the skin while we pollute the heart?

Our values are messed up. Someone broke into the store and exchanged all the price tags. Thrills are going for top dollar and the value of human beings is at an all-time low....

And you've seen the results of this. Our system goes haywire. We feel useless and worthless. We freak out. We play games. We create false value systems. We say that you are valuable if you are pretty. We say that you are valuable if you can produce....

Now please understand, this is man's value system. It is not God's....

In God's book man is heading somewhere. He has

an amazing destiny. We are being prepared to walk down the church aisle and become the bride of Jesus. We are going to live with him. Share the throne with him. Reign with him. We count. We are valuable. And what's more, our worth is built in! Our value is inborn. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

Application

Make a list of things the world values (money, good looks, nice cars). When you've completed your list, ask yourself, "Which of these do I value? Which does God value? How can I spend my time and money better to reflect what God values?"

Exploration

Distorted Values—[Job 21:14](#); [Psalms 82:5](#); [Proverbs 14:12](#); [30:20](#); [Isaiah 44:18–20](#); [Jeremiah 9:3–6](#); [Zephaniah 3:5](#); [John 1:5](#); [Romans 1:21–32](#); [Ephesians 4:18](#); [2 Peter 2:19](#).

Athaliah and Joash

When Ahaziah's mother, Athaliah, saw that her son was dead, she killed all the royal family. ²But Jehosheba, King Jehoram's daughter and Ahaziah's sister, took Joash, Ahaziah's son. She stole him from among the other sons of the king who were about to be murdered. She put Joash and his nurse in a bedroom to hide him from Athaliah, so he was not killed. ³He hid with her in the Temple of the Lord for six years. During that time Athaliah ruled the land.

⁴In the seventh year Jehoiada sent for the commanders of groups of a hundred men, as well as the [Carites](#). He brought them together in the Temple of the Lord and made an agreement with them. There, in the Temple of the Lord, he made them promise loyalty, and then he showed them the king's son. ⁵He commanded them, "This is what you must do. A third of you who go on duty on the Sabbath will guard the king's palace. ⁶A third of you will be at the Sur Gate, and another third will be at the gate behind the guard. This way you will guard the Temple. ⁷The two groups who go off duty on the Sabbath must protect the Temple of the Lord for the king. ⁸All of you must stand around the king, each man with his weapons in his hand. If anyone comes near, kill him. Stay close to the king when he goes out and when he comes in."

⁹The commanders over a hundred men obeyed everything Jehoiada the priest had commanded. Each one took his men who came on duty on the Sabbath and those who went off duty on the Sabbath, and they came to Jehoiada the priest.

¹⁰He gave the commanders the spears and shields that had belonged to King David and that were kept in the Temple of the Lord.

Joash Becomes King

¹¹Then each guard took his place with his weapons in his hand. There were guards from the south side of the Temple to the north side. They stood by the altar and the Temple and around the king. ¹²Jehoiada brought out the king's son and put the crown on him and gave him a copy of the agreement. They appointed him king and poured olive oil on him. Then they clapped their hands and said, "Long live the king!"

¹³When Athaliah heard the noise of the guards and the people, she went to them at the Temple of the Lord. ¹⁴She looked, and there was the king, standing by the pillar, as the custom was. The officers and trumpeters were standing beside him, and all the people of the land were very happy and were blowing trumpets. Then Athaliah tore her clothes and screamed, "Traitors! Traitors!"

¹⁵Jehoiada the priest gave orders to the commanders of a hundred men, who led the army. He said, "Surround her with soldiers and kill with a sword anyone who follows her." He commanded this because he had said, "Don't put Athaliah to death in the Temple of the Lord." ¹⁶So they caught her when she came to the horses' entrance near the palace. There she was put to death.

¹⁷Then Jehoiada made an agreement between the Lord and the king and the people that they would be the Lord's special people. He also made an agreement between the king and the

people. ¹⁸All the people of the land went to the temple of Baal and tore it down, smashing the altars and idols. They also killed Mattan, the priest of Baal, in front of the altars.

Then Jehoiada the priest placed guards at the Temple of the Lord. ¹⁹He took with him the commanders of a hundred men and the Carites, the royal bodyguards, as well as the guards and all the people of the land. Together they took the king out of the Temple of the Lord and went into the palace through the gate of the guards. Then the king sat on the royal throne. ²⁰So all the people of the land were very happy, and Jerusalem had peace, because Athaliah had been put to death with the sword at the palace.

²¹Joash was seven years old when he became king.

Joash became king of Judah in Jehu's seventh year as king of Israel, and he ruled for forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah, and she was from Beersheba. ²Joash did what the Lord said was right as long as Jehoiada the priest taught him. ³But the places where gods were worshiped were not removed; the people still made sacrifices and burned incense there.

Joash Repairs the Temple

⁴Joash said to the priests, "Take all the money brought as offerings to the Temple of the Lord. This includes the money each person owes in taxes and the money each person promises or brings freely to the Lord. ⁵Each priest will take the money from the people he serves. Then the priests must repair any damage they find in the Temple."

⁶But by the twenty-third year Joash was king, the priests still had not repaired the Temple. ⁷So King Joash called for Jehoiada the priest and the other priests and said to them, "Why aren't you repairing the damage of the Temple? Don't take any more money from the people you serve, but hand over the money for the repair of the Temple." ⁸The priests agreed not to take any more money from the people and not to repair the Temple themselves.

⁹Jehoiada the priest took a box and made a hole in the top of it. Then he put it by the altar, on the right side as the people came into the Temple of the Lord. The priests guarding the doorway put all the money brought to the Temple of the Lord into the box.

¹⁰Each time the priests saw that the box was full of money,

the king's royal secretary and the high priest came. They counted the money that had been brought to the Temple of the Lord, and they put it into bags. ¹¹Next they weighed the money and gave it to the people in charge of the work on the Temple. With it they paid the carpenters and the builders who worked on the Temple of the Lord, ¹²as well as the bricklayers and stonecutters. They also used the money to buy timber and cut stone to repair the damage of the Temple of the Lord. It paid for everything.

¹³The money brought into the Temple of the Lord was not used to make silver cups, wick trimmers, bowls, trumpets, or gold or silver vessels. ¹⁴They paid the money to the workers, who used it to repair the Temple of the Lord. ¹⁵They did not demand to know how the money was spent, because the workers were honest. ¹⁶The money from the penalty offerings and sin offerings was not brought into the Temple of the Lord, because it belonged to the priests.

Joash Saves Jerusalem

¹⁷About this time Hazael king of Aram attacked Gath and captured it. Then he went to attack Jerusalem. ¹⁸Joash king of Judah took all the holy things given by his ancestors, the kings of Judah—Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, and Ahaziah. He also took his own holy things as well as the gold that was found in the treasuries of the Temple of the Lord and the gold from the palace. Joash sent all this treasure to Hazael king of Aram, who turned away from Jerusalem.

¹⁹Everything else Joash did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. ²⁰His officers made plans against

him and killed him at Beth Millo on the road down to Silla.
²¹The officers who killed him were Jozabad son of Shimeath and Jehozabad son of Shomer. Joash was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, and Amaziah, his son, became king in his place.

Life Lessons

2 Kings 11:1–12:21

Situation

Joash, under the guidance of the priest Jehoiada, purged the land of idolatry. Joash collected money and ordered the priests to repair the Temple. When they failed, he brought in other workmen to complete the task.

Observation

God uses people other than priests and pastors. Sometimes the most effective workers God uses are just ordinary people.

Inspiration

Recently, I read a sociological study that has great significance for those of us who are trying to respond to champions of the yuppies value system. In this particular study fifty people over the age of ninety-five were asked one question: “If you could live your life over again, what would you do differently?”... Three answers constantly re-emerged and dominated the results of that study...

1. If I had it to do over again, I would reflect more.

2. If I had it to do over again, I would risk more.
3. If I had it to do over again, I would do more things that would live on after I am dead.

I think that these elderly people have a good handle on what life is all about. I believe that their perspective gives better direction on how to live life with joy and satisfaction than we can gain from listening to the new kids on the block... I am convinced that people who want to have fun in life would do well to consider the observations of those whom time has made wise. (From *Who Switched the Price Tags?* by Tony Campolo)

Application

Don't let your lack of theological training or position stop you from serving God in your work. Become an active participant in church. Talk about Christ with your neighbors, coworkers, family members, and friends. Be a witness right where you are.

Exploration

Lay People—[Exodus 39:42](#); [Joshua 1:16](#); [2 Kings 10:30–31](#); [2 Chronicles 30:15](#).

Jehoahaz King of Israel

Jehoahaz son of Jehu became king over Israel in Samaria during the twenty-third year Joash son of Ahaziah was king of Judah. Jehoahaz ruled seventeen years,² and he did what the Lord said was wrong. Jehoahaz did the same sins Jeroboam son of Nebat had done. Jeroboam had led Israel to sin, and Jehoahaz did not stop doing these same sins.³ So the Lord was angry with Israel and handed them over to Hazael king of Aram and his son Ben-Hadad for a long time.

⁴Then Jehoahaz begged the Lord, and the Lord listened to him. The Lord had seen the troubles of Israel; he saw how terribly the king of Aram was treating them.⁵ He gave Israel a man to save them, and they escaped from the Arameans. The Israelites then lived in their own homes as they had before,⁶ but they still did not stop doing the same sins that the family of Jeroboam had done. He had led Israel to sin, and they continued doing those sins. The Asherah idol also was left standing in Samaria.

⁷Nothing was left of Jehoahaz's army except fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand foot soldiers. The king of Aram had destroyed them and made them like chaff.

⁸Everything else Jehoahaz did and all his victories are written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel.⁹ Jehoahaz died and was buried in Samaria, and his son Jehoash became king in his place.

Jehoash King of Israel

¹⁰Jehoash son of Jehoahaz became king of Israel in Samaria during Joash's thirty-seventh year as king of Judah. Jehoash ruled sixteen years, ¹¹and he did what the Lord said was wrong. He did not stop doing the same sins Jeroboam son of Nebat had done. Jeroboam had led Israel to sin, and Jehoash continued to do the same thing. ¹²Everything else he did and all his victories, including his war against Amaziah king of Judah, are written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. ¹³Jehoash died, and Jeroboam took his place on the throne. Jehoash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

The Death of Elisha

¹⁴At this time Elisha became sick. Before he died, Jehoash king of Israel went to Elisha and cried for him. Jehoash said, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and their horsemen!"

¹⁵Elisha said to Jehoash, "Take a bow and arrows." So he took a bow and arrows. ¹⁶Then Elisha said to him, "Put your hand on the bow." So Jehoash put his hand on the bow. Then Elisha put his hands on the king's hands. ¹⁷Elisha said, "Open the east window." So Jehoash opened the window. Then Elisha said, "Shoot," and Jehoash shot. Elisha said, "The Lord's arrow of victory over Aram! You will defeat the Arameans at Aphek until you destroy them."

¹⁸Elisha said, "Take the arrows." So Jehoash took them. Then Elisha said to him, "Strike the ground." So Jehoash struck the ground three times and stopped. ¹⁹The man of God was angry with him. "You should have struck five or six times!" Elisha said. "Then you would have struck Aram until you had completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three

times.”

²⁰Then Elisha died and was buried.

At that time groups of Moabites would rob the land in the springtime. ²¹Once as some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a group of Moabites coming. The Israelites threw the dead man into Elisha’s grave. When the man touched Elisha’s bones, the man came back to life and stood on his feet.

War with Aram

²²During all the days Jehoahaz was king, Hazael king of Aram troubled Israel. ²³But the Lord was kind to the Israelites; he had mercy on them and helped them because of his agreement with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To this day he has never wanted to destroy them or reject them.

²⁴When Hazael king of Aram died, his son Ben-Hadad became king in his place. ²⁵During a war Hazael had taken some cities from Jehoahaz, Jehoash’s father. Now Jehoash took back those cities from Hazael’s son Ben-Hadad. He defeated Ben-Hadad three times and took back the cities of Israel.

Life Lessons

[2 Kings 13:1–14:29](#)

Situation

Under the domination of Syria, Israel became helpless. The Israelites lost the power to rule themselves and degraded their belief in God by corrupting their religion. Yet, when Jehoahaz prayed to God for the first time in seventeen years, God

listened.

Observation

God always listens to a person who sincerely repents and returns to a life of obedience. God wants more than just an outward show of faith. He seeks true devotion.

Inspiration

Out of all the people of the earth, they [Israel] believed God had chosen them to be his own particular people. They described their unique relationship with God as a covenant or binding agreement. The covenant was not something that they invented. On the contrary, it was a gift of God's grace. It was offered to them purely out of God's love for them and for all men. As long as they remained faithful to their covenant with God, life was rich and moved in a purposive direction. But any reader of the Old Testament is familiar with the record of broken covenants, of unfaithfulness, and of growing estrangement between Israel and God. One of the astounding things about human life is that even when we know that the purpose of life is realized in relationship with God, we choose to rebel and try to walk alone. It has been this way from the beginning.

... If one part of the Old Testament is a record of broken covenants and unfaithfulness, the other is a story of continuing forgiveness and renewal. God continued to call man into relationship with himself even in the face of continuing rejection. To our astonishment the Old Testament ends with a promise that God's purpose will soon be even more clearly

revealed in a Messiah, one whose life will be the supreme revelation of what every man's life is intended to be. (From *Beyond Belief* by Edward W. Bauman)

Application

Do your actions represent your heart? Do you put on your best behavior on Sunday and then do wrong on Monday? Be honest with yourself and with others. Ask God to help you live a godly life all week.

Exploration

Faith—[2 Samuel 22](#); [Psalm 136](#); [Luke 24:46–48](#); [Romans 1:17](#); [1 John 1:8–10](#).

Amaziah King of Judah

Amaziah son of Joash became king of Judah during the second year Jehoash son of Jehoahaz was king of Israel. ²Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother was named Jehoaddin, and she was from Jerusalem. ³Amaziah did what the Lord said was right. He did everything his father Joash had done, but he did not do as his ancestor David had done. ⁴The places where gods were worshiped were not removed, so the people still sacrificed and burned incense there.

⁵As soon as Amaziah took control of the kingdom, he executed the officers who had murdered his father the king. ⁶But he did not put to death the children of the murderers because of the rule written in the Book of the Teachings of Moses. The Lord had commanded: [“Parents must not be put to death when their children do wrong, and children must not be put to death when their parents do wrong. Each must die for his own sins.”](#)

⁷In battle Amaziah killed ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. He also took the city of Sela. He called it Joktheel, as it is still called today.

⁸Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, king of Israel. They said, “Come, let’s meet face to face.”

⁹Then Jehoash king of Israel answered Amaziah king of Judah, “A thornbush in Lebanon sent a message to a cedar tree in Lebanon. It said, ‘Let your daughter marry my son.’ But then a wild animal from Lebanon came by, walking on and

crushing the thornbush. ¹⁰You have defeated Edom, but you have become proud. Stay at home and brag. Don't ask for trouble, or you and Judah will be defeated."

¹¹But Amaziah would not listen, so Jehoash king of Israel went to attack. He and Amaziah king of Judah faced each other in battle at Beth Shemesh in Judah. ¹²Israel defeated Judah, and every man of Judah ran away to his home. ¹³At Beth Shemesh Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah. (Amaziah was the son of Joash, who was the son of Ahaziah.) Jehoash went up to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the Gate of Ephraim to the Corner Gate, which was about six hundred feet. ¹⁴He took all the gold and silver and all the utensils in the Temple of the Lord, and he took the treasures of the palace and some hostages. Then he returned to Samaria.

¹⁵The other acts of Jehoash and his victories, including his war against Amaziah king of Judah, are written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. ¹⁶Jehoash died and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel, and his son Jeroboam became king in his place.

¹⁷Amaziah son of Joash, the king of Judah, lived fifteen years after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, the king of Israel. ¹⁸The other things Amaziah did are written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. ¹⁹The people in Jerusalem made plans against him. So he ran away to the town of Lachish, but they sent men after him to Lachish and killed him. ²⁰They brought his body back on horses, and he was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, in the city of David.

²¹Then all the people of Judah made [Uzziah](#) king in place of his father Amaziah. Uzziah was sixteen years old. ²²He rebuilt

the town of Elath and made it part of Judah again after Amaziah died.

Jeroboam King of Israel

²³Jeroboam son of Jehoash became king of Israel in Samaria during the fifteenth year Amaziah was king of Judah. (Amaziah was the son of Joash.) Jeroboam ruled forty-one years, ²⁴and he did what the Lord said was wrong. Jeroboam son of Nebat had led Israel to sin, and Jeroboam son of Jehoash did not stop doing the same sins. ²⁵Jeroboam won back Israel's border from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea. This happened as the Lord, the God of Israel, had said through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher. ²⁶The Lord had seen how the Israelites, both slave and free, were suffering terribly. No one was left who could help Israel. ²⁷The Lord had not said he would completely destroy Israel from the world, so he saved the Israelites through Jeroboam son of Jehoash.

²⁸Everything else Jeroboam did is written down—all his victories and how he won back from Judah the towns of Damascus and Hamath for Israel. All this is written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. ²⁹Jeroboam died and was buried with his ancestors, the kings of Israel. Jeroboam's son Zechariah became king in his place.

Uzziah King of Judah

Uzziah son of Amaziah became king of Judah during Jeroboam's twenty-seventh year as king of Israel. ²Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he ruled fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother was named Jecoliah, and she was from Jerusalem. ³He did what the Lord said was right, just as his father Amaziah had done. ⁴But the places where gods were worshiped were not removed, so the people still made sacrifices and burned incense there.

⁵The Lord struck Uzziah with a skin disease, which he had until the day he died. So he had to live in a separate house. Jotham, the king's son, was in charge of the palace, and he governed the people of the land.

⁶All the other things Uzziah did are written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. ⁷Uzziah died and was buried near his ancestors in Jerusalem, and his son Jotham became king in his place.

Zechariah King of Israel

⁸Zechariah son of Jeroboam was king over Israel in Samaria. He ruled for six months during [Uzziah's](#) thirty-eighth year as king of Judah. ⁹Zechariah did what the Lord said was wrong, just as his ancestors had done. Jeroboam son of Nebat had led the people of Israel to sin, and Zechariah did not stop doing the same sins.

¹⁰Shallum son of Jabesh made plans against Zechariah and

killed him in front of the people. Then Shallum became king in his place. ¹¹The other acts of Zechariah are written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. ¹²The Lord had told Jehu: “Your sons down to your great-great-grandchildren will be kings of Israel,” and the Lord’s word came true.

Shallum King of Israel

¹³Shallum son of Jabesh became king during Uzziah’s thirty-ninth year as king of Judah. Shallum ruled for a month in Samaria. ¹⁴Then Menahem son of Gadi came up from Tirzah to Samaria and attacked Shallum son of Jabesh in Samaria. He killed him and became king in Shallum’s place.

¹⁵The other acts of Shallum and his secret plans are written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel.

Menahem King of Israel

¹⁶Menahem started out from Tirzah and attacked Tiphseh, destroying the city and the area nearby. This was because the people had refused to open the city gate for him. He defeated them and ripped open all their pregnant women.

¹⁷Menahem son of Gadi became king over Israel during Uzziah’s thirty-ninth year as king of Judah. Menahem ruled ten years in Samaria, ¹⁸and he did what the Lord said was wrong. Jeroboam son of Nebat had led Israel to sin, and all the time Menahem was king, he did not stop doing the same sins.

¹⁹Pul king of Assyria came to attack the land. Menahem gave him about seventy-four thousand pounds of silver so Pul would support him and make his hold on the kingdom stronger.

²⁰Menahem taxed Israel to pay about one and one-fourth pounds of silver to each soldier of the king of Assyria. So the king left and did not stay in the land.

²¹Everything else Menahem did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. ²²Then Menahem died, and his son Pekahiah became king in his place.

Pekahiah King of Israel

²³Pekahiah son of Menahem became king over Israel in Samaria during [Uzziah's](#) fiftieth year as king of Judah. Pekahiah ruled two years, ²⁴and he did what the Lord said was wrong. Jeroboam son of Nebat had led Israel to sin, and Pekahiah did not stop doing the same sins.

²⁵Pekah son of Remaliah was one of Pekahiah's captains, and he made plans against Pekahiah. He took fifty men of Gilead with him and killed Pekahiah, as well as Argob and Arieah, in the palace at Samaria. Then Pekah became king in Pekahiah's place.

²⁶Everything else Pekahiah did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel.

Pekah King of Israel

²⁷Pekah son of Remaliah became king over Israel in Samaria during [Uzziah's](#) fifty-second year as king of Judah. Pekah ruled twenty years, ²⁸and he did what the Lord said was wrong. Jeroboam son of Nebat had led Israel to sin, and Pekah did not stop doing the same sins.

²⁹[Tiglath-Pileser](#) was king of Assyria. He attacked while

Pekah was king of Israel, capturing the cities of Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, and Hazor. He also captured Gilead and Galilee and all the land of Naphtali and carried the people away to Assyria. ³⁰Then Hoshea son of Elah made plans against Pekah son of Remaliah and attacked and killed him. Then Hoshea became king in Pekah's place during the twentieth year Jotham son of Uzziah was king.

³¹Everything else Pekah did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Israel.

Jotham King of Judah

³²Jotham son of Uzziah became king of Judah during the second year Pekah son of Remaliah was king of Israel. ³³Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerusha daughter of Zadok. ³⁴Jotham did what the Lord said was right, just as his father Uzziah had done. ³⁵But the places where gods were worshiped were not removed, and the people still made sacrifices and burned incense there. Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of the Temple of the Lord.

³⁶The other things Jotham did while he was king are written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. ³⁷At that time the Lord began to send Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah against Judah. ³⁸Jotham died and was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, the city of David, his ancestor. Then Jotham's son Ahaz became king in his place.

Life Lessons

2 Kings 15:1–16:20

Situation

During this time, all the kings of Israel did what God said was wrong. On the other hand, the kings of Judah did what God said was right. The one exception was Ahaz, who even dedicated his son to false gods. God used many prophets to speak to these rebellious kings: Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah.

Observation

God loves his people even when they are unfaithful children. Israel and Judah remained God's chosen people despite their spiritual adultery.

Inspiration

Now God raised up the prophets, burned into their consciousness a lively awareness of his presence, and sent them to reveal him in a warmer, more passionate manner. Though Israel had played the prostitute whoring after false gods, the prophets cry the constancy of God in the face of human infidelity: "Israel, don't ever be so foolish as to measure my love for you in terms of your love for me! Don't ever compare your thin, pallid, wavering, and moody love with my love, for I am God, not man."

Human love will always be a faint shadow of God's love. Not because it is too sugary or sentimental but simply because it can never compare from whence it comes. Human love with all its passion and emotion is a thin echo of the passion/emotion love of Yahweh.

In the Sinai wilderness the covenant-God was faithful and just. Israel was faithful. They were

related. But if Israel became unfaithful, logic and human justice required no further pursuit of Yahweh. He sees the contract broken, picks up his briefcase, and walks out of court. The relationship ended.

But we cannot apply human logic and justice to the living God. Human logic is based on human experience and human nature. Yahweh does not conform to this model. If Israel is unfaithful, God remains faithful against all logic and all limits of justice because *he is*. Love clarifies the happy irrationality of God's conduct. Love tends to be irrational at times. It pursues despite infidelity. It blossoms into jealousy and anger—which betrays keen interest. The more complex and emotional the image of God becomes in the Bible, the bigger he grows, and the more we approach the mystery of his indefinability. (From *The Ragamuffin Gospel* by Brennan Manning)

Application

Thank God for his faithfulness to you. Make that faithfulness the model for all your relationships: Concerning family members, how can you serve them? Concerning coworkers, how can you help them perform better? Concerning friends, how can you show your loyalty? All without regard for anything in return.

Exploration

Spiritual Adultery—[Isaiah 1:21–22](#); [57:3–13](#);
[Hosea 1–3](#); [Mark 8:38](#).

Ahaz King of Judah

Ahaz was the son of Jotham king of Judah. Ahaz became king of Judah in the seventeenth year Pekah son of Remaliah was king of Israel.² Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he ruled sixteen years in Jerusalem. Unlike his ancestor David, he did not do what the Lord his God said was right.³ Ahaz did the same things the kings of Israel had done. He even made his son pass through fire. He did the same hateful sins as the nations had done whom the Lord had forced out of the land ahead of the Israelites.⁴ Ahaz offered sacrifices and burned incense at the places where gods were worshiped, on the hills, and under every green tree.

⁵Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, came up to attack Jerusalem. They surrounded Ahaz but could not defeat him.⁶ At that time Rezin king of Aram took back the city of Elath for Aram, and he forced out all the people of Judah. Then Edomites moved into Elath, and they still live there today.

⁷Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your friend. Come and save me from the king of Aram and the king of Israel, who are attacking me."⁸ Ahaz took the silver and gold that was in the Temple of the Lord and in the treasuries of the palace, and he sent these as a gift to the king of Assyria.⁹ So the king of Assyria listened to Ahaz. He attacked Damascus and captured it and sent all its people away to Kir. And he killed Rezin.

¹⁰Then King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-

Pileser king of Assyria. Ahaz saw an altar at Damascus, and he sent plans and a pattern of this altar to Uriah the priest.¹¹ So Uriah the priest built an altar, just like the plans King Ahaz had sent him from Damascus. Uriah finished the altar before King Ahaz came back from Damascus.¹² When the king arrived from Damascus, he saw the altar and went near and offered sacrifices on it.¹³ He burned his burnt offerings and grain offerings and poured out his drink offering. He also sprinkled the blood of his fellowship offerings on the altar.

¹⁴Ahaz moved the bronze altar that was before the Lord at the front of the Temple. It was between Ahaz's altar and the Temple of the Lord, but he put it on the north side of his altar.¹⁵ King Ahaz commanded Uriah the priest, "On the large altar burn the morning burnt offering, the evening grain offering, the king's burnt offering and grain offering, and the whole burnt offering, the grain offering, and the drink offering for all the people of the land. Sprinkle on the altar all the blood of the burnt offering and of the sacrifice. But I will use the bronze altar to ask questions of God."¹⁶ So Uriah the priest did everything as King Ahaz commanded him.

¹⁷Then King Ahaz took off the side panels from the bases and removed the washing bowls from the top of the bases. He also took the large bowl, which was called the Sea, off the bronze bulls that held it up, and he put it on a stone base.¹⁸ Ahaz took away the platform for the royal throne, which had been built at the Temple of the Lord. He also took away the outside entrance for the king. He did these things because of the king of Assyria.

¹⁹The other things Ahaz did as king are written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah.²⁰ Ahaz died and was

buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, and Ahaz's son Hezekiah became king in his place.

Life Lessons

2 Kings 17:1–18:37

Situation

Because of its long history of sin and rebellion, the Northern Kingdom was invaded, beaten, and exiled. Foreigners settled the vacant land and practiced idolatry.

Observation

God consciously disciplines his people. He knows that it is the only way they can learn certain lessons.

Inspiration

The essential meaning of exile is that we are where we don't want to be. We are separated from home. We are not permitted to reside in the place where we comprehend and appreciate our surroundings. We are forced to be away from that which is most congenial to us. It is an experience of dislocation—everything is out of joint; nothing fits together. The thousand details that have been built up through the years that give a sense of at-home—gestures, customs, rituals, phrases—are all gone. Life is ripped out of the familiar soil of generations of language, habit, weather, storytelling, and rudely and unceremoniously dropped into some unfamiliar spot of earth. The place of exile may boast a higher standard of living. It may be more pleasant in its weather. That doesn't matter. It isn't home.

But this very strangeness can open up new reality to us. An accident, a tragedy, a disaster of any kind

can force the realization that the world is not predictable, that reality is far more extensive than our habitual perception of it. With the pain and in the midst of alienation a sense of freedom can occur. (From *Run with the Horses* by Eugene Peterson)

Application

God permits some hard times into our lives to teach us. When hardship comes, thank God for this demonstration of love. Then ask him to help you learn from the situation.

Exploration

Discipline—[Deuteronomy 8:5](#); [2 Samuel 7:14–15](#); [Hebrews 12:3–11](#); [Revelation 3:19](#).

Hoshea, Last King of Israel

Hoshea son of Elah became king over Israel during Ahaz's twelfth year as king of Judah. Hoshea ruled in Samaria nine years.²He did what the Lord said was wrong, but he was not as bad as the kings of Israel who had ruled before him.

³Shalmaneser king of Assyria came to attack Hoshea. Hoshea had been Shalmaneser's servant and had made the payments to Shalmaneser that he had demanded.⁴But the king of Assyria found out that Hoshea had made plans against him by sending messengers to So, the king of Egypt. Hoshea had also stopped giving Shalmaneser the payments, which he had paid every year in the past. For that, the king put Hoshea in prison.⁵Then the king of Assyria came and attacked all the land of Israel. He surrounded Samaria and attacked it for three years.⁶He defeated Samaria in the ninth year Hoshea was king, and he took the Israelites away to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River, and in the cities of the Medes.

Israelites Punished for Sin

⁷All these things happened because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God. He had brought them out of Egypt and had rescued them from the power of the king of Egypt, but

the Israelites had honored other gods.⁸ They lived like the nations the Lord had forced out of the land ahead of them. They lived as their evil kings had shown them,⁹ secretly sinning against the Lord their God. They built places to worship gods in all their cities, from the watchtower to the strong, walled city.¹⁰ They put up stone pillars to gods and Asherah idols on every high hill and under every green tree.¹¹ The Israelites burned incense everywhere gods were worshiped, just as the nations who lived there before them had done, whom the Lord had forced out of the land. The Israelites did wicked things that made the Lord angry.¹² They served idols when the Lord had said, “You must not do this.”¹³ The Lord used every prophet and seer to warn Israel and Judah. He said, “Stop your evil ways and obey my commands and laws. Follow all the teachings that I commanded your ancestors, the teachings that I gave you through my servants the prophets.”

¹⁴But the people would not listen. They were stubborn, just as their ancestors had been who did not believe in the Lord their God.¹⁵ They rejected the Lord’s laws and the agreement he had made with their ancestors. And they refused to listen to his warnings. They worshiped useless idols and became useless themselves. They did what the nations around them did, which the Lord had warned them not to do.

¹⁶The people rejected all the commands of the Lord their God. They molded statues of two calves, and they made an Asherah idol. They worshiped all the stars of the sky and served Baal.¹⁷ They made their sons and daughters pass through fire and tried to find out the future by magic and witchcraft. They always chose to do what the Lord said was wrong, which made him angry.¹⁸ Because he was very angry

with the people of Israel, he removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left.

Judah Is Also Guilty

¹⁹But even Judah did not obey the commands of the Lord their God. They did what the Israelites had done,²⁰so the Lord rejected all the people of Israel. He punished them and let others destroy them; he threw them out of his presence.

²¹When the Lord separated them from the family of David, the Israelites made Jeroboam son of Nebat their king. Jeroboam led the Israelites away from the Lord and led them to sin greatly.

²²So they continued to do all the sins Jeroboam did. They did not stop doing these sins²³until the Lord removed the Israelites from his presence, just as he had said through all his servants the prophets. So the Israelites were taken out of their land to Assyria, and they have been there to this day.

New Life in Christ

“Do not honor other gods. Instead worship the Lord your God, who will save you from all your enemies.”—[2 Kings 17:38–39](#)

The One Who Can Save You from Your Enemies

When Jesus says he will keep you safe, he means it. Hell will have to get through him to get to you. Jesus is able to protect you. When he says he will get you home, he will get you home.

Let me conclude this chapter with an important question. Has Satan invaded a garden of your life?

Has he profaned a holy part of your world? Your marriage? Your purity? Your honesty? Has he taken away from you a rose God gave? If so, let Jesus claim it back. Today. Now. Before you turn the page.

Forgive me for sounding urgent, but I am. Satan has no authority over you. If he has invaded a garden of your life, then invite Jesus to reclaim it. Open the gate to God. He will enter and do what he did at Gethsemane. He will pray, and he will protect.

Why don't you do that?

Don't know how? It's easy. I'll help you. Let's pray. You and me. I'll show you the way; you fill in the blanks.

Precious Father, I praise your name. You have reclaimed so much in my life. I was lost, and you found me. I was confused, and you guided me. I had nothing to offer, but still you loved me.

I confess that I still need help. I have a part of my life that needs your touch. Satan is battling for a garden in my heart. Don't let him win. Drive him out. He is a liar and has been since the beginning. Please defeat him. I'll give you the glory.

Father, here is the area where I need your strength: _____. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["New Life in Christ."](#)

The Beginning of the Samaritan People

²⁴The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim and put them in the cities of Samaria to replace the Israelites. These people took over Samaria and lived in the cities. ²⁵At first they did not worship the Lord, so he sent lions among them which killed some of them. ²⁶The king of Assyria was told, “You sent foreigners into the cities of Samaria who do not know the law of the god of the land. This is why he has sent lions among them. The lions are killing them because they don’t know what the god wants.”

²⁷Then the king of Assyria commanded, “Send back one of the priests you took away. Let him live there and teach the people what the god wants.” ²⁸So one of the priests who had been carried away from Samaria returned to live in Bethel. And he taught the people how to honor the Lord.

²⁹But each nation made gods of its own and put them in the cities where they lived and in the temples where gods were worshiped. These temples had been built by the Samaritans. ³⁰The people from Babylon made Succoth Benoth their god. The people from Cuthah worshiped Nergal. The people of Hamath worshiped Ashima. ³¹The Avvites worshiped Nibhaz and Tartak. The Sepharvites burned their children in the fire, sacrificing them to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. ³²They also honored the Lord, but they chose priests for the places where gods were worshiped. The priests were chosen from among themselves, and they made sacrifices

for the people.³³The people honored the Lord but also served their own gods, just as the nations did from which they had been brought.³⁴Even today they do as they did in the past. They do not worship the Lord nor obey his rules and commands. They do not obey the teachings or the commands of the Lord, which he gave to the children of Jacob, whom he had named Israel.³⁵The Lord had made an agreement with them and had commanded them, “Do not honor other gods. Do not bow down to them or worship them or offer sacrifices to them.³⁶Worship the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and strength. Bow down to him and offer sacrifices to him.³⁷Always obey the rules, orders, teachings, and commands he wrote for you. Do not honor other gods.³⁸Do not forget the agreement I made with you, and do not honor other gods.³⁹Instead worship the Lord your God, who will save you from all your enemies.”

⁴⁰But the Israelites did not listen. They kept on doing the same things they had done before.⁴¹So these nations honored the Lord but also worshiped their idols, and their children and grandchildren still do as their ancestors did.

Hezekiah King of Judah

Hezekiah son of Ahaz king of Judah became king during the third year Hoshea son of Elah was king of Israel.² Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah.³ Hezekiah did what the Lord said was right, just as his ancestor David had done.⁴ He removed the places where gods were worshiped. He smashed the stone pillars and cut down the Asherah idols. Also the Israelites had been burning incense to Nehushtan, the bronze snake Moses had made. But Hezekiah broke it into pieces.

⁵Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him.⁶ Hezekiah was loyal to the Lord and did not stop following him; he obeyed the commands the Lord had given Moses.⁷ And the Lord was with Hezekiah, so he had success in everything he did. He turned against the king of Assyria and stopped serving him.⁸ Hezekiah defeated the Philistines all the way to Gaza and its borders, including the watchtowers and the strong, walled cities.

The Assyrians Capture Samaria

⁹Shalmaneser king of Assyria surrounded Samaria and attacked it in the fourth year Hezekiah was king. This was the seventh year Hoshea son of Elah was king of Israel.¹⁰ After three years the Assyrians captured Samaria. This was in the sixth year

Hezekiah was king, which was Hoshea's ninth year as king of Israel. ¹¹The king of Assyria took the Israelites away to Assyria and settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River, and in the cities of the Medes. ¹²This happened because they did not obey the Lord their God. They broke his agreement and did not obey all that Moses, the Lord's servant, had commanded. They would not listen to the commands or do them.

Assyria Attacks Judah

¹³During Hezekiah's fourteenth year as king, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the strong, walled cities of Judah and captured them. ¹⁴Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent a message to the king of Assyria at Lachish. He said, "I have done wrong. Leave me alone, and I will pay anything you ask." So the king of Assyria made Hezekiah pay about twenty-two thousand pounds of silver and two thousand pounds of gold. ¹⁵Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was in the Temple of the Lord and in the palace treasuries. ¹⁶Hezekiah stripped all the gold that covered the doors and doorposts of the Temple of the Lord. Hezekiah had put gold on these doors himself, but he gave it all to the king of Assyria.

¹⁷The king of Assyria sent out his supreme commander, his chief officer, and his field commander. They went with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. When they came near the waterway from the upper pool on the road where people do their laundry, they stopped. ¹⁸They called for the king, so the king sent Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah out to meet them. Eliakim son of Hilkiah was the palace manager, Shebna was the royal secretary, and Joah son of Asaph was the

recorder.

¹⁹The field commander said to them, “Tell Hezekiah this:

“The great king, the king of Assyria, says: What can you trust in now? ²⁰You say you have battle plans and power for war, but your words mean nothing. Whom are you trusting for help so that you turn against me? ²¹Look, you are depending on Egypt to help you, but Egypt is like a splintered walking stick. If you lean on it for help, it will stab your hand and hurt you. The king of Egypt will hurt all those who depend on him. ²²You might say, “We are depending on the Lord our God,” but Hezekiah destroyed the Lord’s altars and the places of worship. Hezekiah told Judah and Jerusalem, “You must worship only at this one altar in Jerusalem.”

²³“Now make an agreement with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses if you can find enough men to ride them. ²⁴You cannot defeat one of my master’s least important officers, so why do you depend on Egypt to give you chariots and horsemen? ²⁵I have not come to attack and destroy this place without an order from the Lord. The Lord himself told me to come to this country and destroy it.”

²⁶Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, Shebna, and Joah said to the field commander, “Please speak to us in the Aramaic language. We understand it. Don’t speak to us in Hebrew, because the people on the city wall can hear you.”

²⁷“No,” the commander said, “my master did not send me to tell these things only to you and your king. He sent me to speak also to those people sitting on the wall who will have to eat their own dung and drink their own urine like you.”

²⁸Then the commander stood and shouted loudly in the

Hebrew language, “Listen to what the great king, the king of Assyria, says! ²⁹The king says you should not let Hezekiah fool you, because he can’t save you from my power. ³⁰Don’t let Hezekiah talk you into trusting the Lord by saying, ‘The Lord will surely save us. This city won’t be handed over to the king of Assyria.’

³¹“Don’t listen to Hezekiah. The king of Assyria says, ‘Make peace with me, and come out of the city to me. Then everyone will be free to eat the fruit from his own grapevine and fig tree and to drink water from his own well. ³²After that I will come and take you to a land like your own—a land with grain and new wine, bread and vineyards, olives, and honey. Choose to live and not to die!’

“Don’t listen to Hezekiah. He is fooling you when he says, ‘The Lord will save us.’ ³³Has a god of any other nation saved his people from the power of the king of Assyria? ³⁴Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? They did not save Samaria from my power. ³⁵Not one of all the gods of these countries has saved his people from me. Neither can the Lord save Jerusalem from my power.”

³⁶The people were silent. They didn’t answer the commander at all, because King Hezekiah had ordered, “Don’t answer him.”

³⁷Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah tore their clothes to show how upset they were. (Eliakim son of Hilkiah was the palace manager, Shebna was the royal secretary, and Joah son of Asaph was the recorder.) The three men went to Hezekiah and told him what the field commander had said.

Jerusalem Will Be Saved

When King Hezekiah heard the message, he tore his clothes and put on rough cloth to show how sad he was. Then he went into the Temple of the Lord. ²Hezekiah sent Eliakim, the palace manager, and Shebna, the royal secretary, and the older priests to Isaiah. They were all wearing rough cloth when they came to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. ³They told Isaiah, “This is what Hezekiah says: Today is a day of sorrow and punishment and disgrace, as when a child should be born, but the mother is not strong enough to give birth to it. ⁴The king of Assyria sent his field commander to make fun of the living God. Maybe the Lord your God will hear what the commander said and will punish him for it. So pray for the few of us who are left alive.”

⁵When Hezekiah’s officers came to Isaiah, ⁶he said to them, “Tell your master this: The Lord says, ‘Don’t be afraid of what you have heard. Don’t be frightened by the words the servants of the king of Assyria have spoken against me. ⁷Listen! I am going to put a spirit in the king of Assyria. He will hear a report that will make him return to his own country, and I will cause him to die by the sword there.’”

⁸The field commander heard that the king of Assyria had left Lachish. When he went back, he found the king fighting against the city of Libnah.

⁹The king received a report that Tirhakah, the Cushite king of Egypt, was coming to attack him. When the king of Assyria heard this, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, ¹⁰“Tell Hezekiah king of Judah: Don’t be fooled by the god you trust. Don’t believe him when he says Jerusalem will not be handed

over to the king of Assyria. ¹¹You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done. They have completely defeated every country, so do not think you will be saved. ¹²Did the gods of those people save them? My ancestors destroyed them, defeating the cities of Gozan, Haran, and Rezep, and the people of Eden living in Tel Assar. ¹³Where are the kings of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the kings of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?”

Hezekiah Prays to the Lord

¹⁴When Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it, he went up to the Temple of the Lord. He spread the letter out before the Lord ¹⁵and prayed to the Lord: “Lord, God of Israel, whose throne is between the gold creatures with wings, only you are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth. ¹⁶Hear, Lord, and listen. Open your eyes, Lord, and see. Listen to the words Sennacherib has said to insult the living God. ¹⁷It is true, Lord, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed these countries and their lands. ¹⁸They have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire, but they were only wood and rock statues that people made. So the kings have destroyed them. ¹⁹Now, Lord our God, save us from the king’s power so that all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you, Lord, are the only God.”

God Answers Hezekiah

²⁰Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah that said, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I have

heard your prayer to me about Sennacherib king of Assyria.

²¹This is what the Lord has said against Sennacherib:

‘The people of Jerusalem
hate you and make fun of you.

The people of Jerusalem
laugh at you as you run away.

²²You have insulted me and spoken against me;
you have raised your voice against me.

You have a proud look on your face,
which is against me, the Holy One of Israel.

²³You have sent your messengers to insult the Lord.
You have said, “With my many chariots

I have gone to the tops of the mountains,
to the highest mountains of Lebanon.

I have cut down its tallest cedars
and its best pine trees.

I have gone to its farthest places
and to its best forests.

²⁴I have dug wells in foreign countries
and drunk water there.

By the soles of my feet,
I have dried up all the rivers of Egypt.”

²⁵“King of Assyria, surely you have heard.

Long ago I, the Lord, planned these things.

Long ago I designed them,
and now I have made them happen.

I allowed you to turn those strong, walled cities
into piles of rocks.

²⁶The people in those cities were weak;

they were frightened and put to shame.
They were like grass in the field,
like tender, young grass,
like grass on the housetop
that is burned by the wind before it can grow.

²⁷“I know when you rest,
when you come and go,
and how you rage against me.

²⁸Because you rage against me,
and because I have heard your proud words,
I will put my hook in your nose
and my bit in your mouth.
Then I will force you to leave my country
the same way you came.’

²⁹“Then the Lord said, ‘Hezekiah, I will give you this sign:

This year you will eat the grain that grows wild,
and the second year you will eat what grows wild from
that.

But in the third year, plant grain and harvest it.
Plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

³⁰Some of the people in the family of Judah
will escape.

Like plants that take root,
they will grow strong and have many children.

³¹A few people will come out of Jerusalem alive;
a few from Mount Zion will live.
The strong love of the Lord All-Powerful
will make this happen.’

³²“So this is what the Lord says about the king of Assyria:

‘He will not enter this city
or even shoot an arrow here.
He will not fight against it with shields
or build a ramp to attack the city walls.

³³He will return to his country the same way he came,
and he will not enter this city,’
says the Lord.

³⁴‘I will defend and save this city
for my sake and for the sake of David, my servant.’”

³⁵That night the angel of the Lord went out and killed one hundred eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up early the next morning, they saw all the dead bodies. ³⁶So Sennacherib king of Assyria left and went back to Nineveh and stayed there.

³⁷One day as Sennacherib was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with a sword. Then they escaped to the land of Ararat. So Sennacherib’s son Esarhaddon became king of Assyria.

Hezekiah's Illness

At that time Hezekiah became so sick he almost died. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to see him and told him, "This is what the Lord says: Make arrangements because you are not going to live, but die."

²Hezekiah turned toward the wall and prayed to the Lord, ³"Lord, please remember that I have always obeyed you. I have given myself completely to you and have done what you said was right." Then Hezekiah cried loudly.

⁴Before Isaiah had left the middle courtyard, the Lord spoke his word to Isaiah: ⁵"Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people: 'This is what the Lord, the God of your ancestor David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears, so I will heal you. Three days from now you will go up to the Temple of the Lord. ⁶I will add fifteen years to your life. I will save you and this city from the king of Assyria; I will protect the city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.'"

⁷Then Isaiah said, "Make a paste from figs." So they made it and put it on Hezekiah's boil, and he got well.

⁸Hezekiah had asked Isaiah, "What will be the sign that the Lord will heal me and that I will go up to the Temple of the Lord on the third day?"

⁹Isaiah said, "The Lord will do what he says. This is the sign from the Lord to show you: Do you want the shadow to go forward ten steps or back ten steps?"

¹⁰Hezekiah answered, "It's easy for the shadow to go forward ten steps. Instead, let it go back ten steps."

¹¹Then Isaiah the prophet called to the Lord, and the Lord brought the shadow ten steps back up the stairway of Ahaz that it had gone down.

Messengers from Babylon

¹²At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan was king of Babylon. He sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, because he had heard that Hezekiah was sick. ¹³Hezekiah listened to the messengers, so he showed them what was in his storehouses: the silver, gold, spices, expensive perfumes, his swords and shields, and all his wealth. He showed them everything in his palace and his kingdom.

¹⁴Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked him, “What did these men say? Where did they come from?”

Hezekiah said, “They came from a faraway country—from Babylon.”

¹⁵So Isaiah asked him, “What did they see in your palace?”

Hezekiah said, “They saw everything in my palace. I showed them all my wealth.”

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The Healer

[[Matthew 9:20–22](#) tells the story of a woman who had] a chronic menstrual disorder. A perpetual issue of blood. Such a condition would be difficult for any woman of any era... . She was a bruised reed. She awoke daily in a body that no one wanted. She is down to her last prayer. And on the day we

encounter her, she's about to pray it.

By the time she gets to Jesus, he is surrounded by people. He's on his way to help the daughter of Jairus, the most important man in the community. What are the odds that he will interrupt an urgent mission with a high official to help the likes of her? Very few. But what are the odds that she will survive if she doesn't take a chance? Fewer still. So she takes a chance.

"If I can just touch his clothes," she thinks, "I will be healed."

Risky decision. To touch him, she will have to touch the people. If one of them recognizes her... . But what choice does she have? She has no money, no clout, no friends, no solutions. All she has is a crazy hunch that Jesus can help and a high hope that he will...

God's economy is upside down (or rightside up and ours is upside down!). God says that the more hopeless your circumstance, the more likely your salvation. The greater your cares, the more genuine your prayers. The darker the room, the greater the need for light.

A healthy lady never would have appreciated the power of a touch of the hem of his robe. But this woman was sick ... and when her dilemma met his dedication, a miracle occurred.

Healing begins when we do something. Healing begins when we reach out. Healing starts when we take a step. (From *He still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

¹⁶Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Listen to the words of the Lord: ¹⁷“In the future everything in your palace and everything your ancestors have stored up until this day will be taken away to Babylon. Nothing will be left,” says the Lord. ¹⁸“Some of your own children, those who will be born to you, will be taken away. And they will become servants in the palace of the king of Babylon.””

¹⁹Hezekiah told Isaiah, “These words from the Lord are good.” He said this because he thought, “There will be peace and security in my lifetime.”

²⁰Everything else Hezekiah did—all his victories, his work on the pool, his work on the tunnel to bring water into the city—is written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah.

²¹Then Hezekiah died, and his son Manasseh became king in his place.

Life Lessons

2 Kings 19:1–21:26

Situation

Because God loved Hezekiah, he healed him. Hezekiah prayed, God healed, and the king lived. His son, Manasseh, became the next king and led Israel into sin.

Observation

What a contrast! Hezekiah obeyed God and did what was right. His son Manasseh, however, made idolatry and defection from God a mark of his reign; and Hezekiah’s grandson Amon followed in

Manasseh's wicked footsteps.

Inspiration

As a general rule, parents who follow biblical principles in bringing up their children will see a positive effect on the character of their children. From a purely statistical point of view, children who grow up in Christ-honoring homes are more likely to remain faithful to Christ in adulthood than kids growing up in homes where the parents dishonor the Lord. The truism of [Proverbs 22:6](#) does apply. We're certainly not to think that God's sovereignty in salvation means the way we raise our kids is immaterial. God often uses faithful parents as instruments in the salvation of children.

Ultimately, however, your children's salvation is a matter to be settled between them and God. Nothing you can do will guarantee your kids' salvation. To that end you should be praying to God and instructing your child—using all available means to impress the truths of the gospel perpetually on the child's heart. But ultimately a grown child's spiritual fitness alone is not necessarily a reliable gauge of the parents' success.

Having said that, I want to stress that sometimes—I should say often—parents are partly to blame for their wayward children's rebellion. And it has been my observation over the years that parents are generally more to blame for wayward kids than society, or peers, or any of the other influences parents tend to blame. I occasionally encounter parents who have violated nearly every biblical

principle of parenting, who nonetheless come to the pastor seeking some kind of absolution from the responsibility for their children's defiance. They want verbal assurance that they are in no way to blame; someone else is.

Yet God Himself has given the responsibility for raising children to parents—not to schoolteachers, peers, child-care workers, or other people outside the family—and therefore it is wrong for parents to attempt to unload that responsibility or shift the blame when things go wrong.

(From *Successful Christian Parenting* by John MacArthur)

Application

If you are a parent, how would you evaluate your parenting skills? Study God's rules of parenting. Take responsibility for raising your children to honor and love God.

Exploration

Raising Children—[Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:6–7;](#) [Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:1–4.](#)

Manasseh King of Judah

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he was king fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah.²He did what the Lord said was wrong. He did the hateful things the other nations had done —the nations that the Lord had forced out of the land ahead of the Israelites.³Manasseh's father, Hezekiah, had destroyed the places where gods were worshiped, but Manasseh rebuilt them. He built altars for Baal, and he made an Asherah idol as Ahab king of Israel had done. Manasseh also worshiped all the stars of the sky and served them.⁴The Lord had said about the Temple, "I will be worshiped in Jerusalem," but Manasseh built altars in the Temple of the Lord.⁵He built altars to worship the stars in the two courtyards of the Temple of the Lord.⁶He made his own son pass through fire. He practiced magic and told the future by explaining signs and dreams, and he got advice from mediums and fortune-tellers. He did many things the Lord said were wrong, which made the Lord angry.

⁷Manasseh carved an Asherah idol and put it in the Temple. The Lord had said to David and his son Solomon about the Temple, "I will be worshiped forever in this Temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel."⁸I will never again make the Israelites wander out of the land I gave their ancestors. But they must obey everything I have commanded them and all the teachings my servant Moses gave them."⁹But the people did not listen. Manasseh led them to do more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed ahead of the Israelites.

¹⁰The Lord said through his servants the prophets,
¹¹“Manasseh king of Judah has done these hateful things. He has done more evil than the Amorites before him. He also has led Judah to sin with his idols. ¹²So this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will bring so much trouble on Jerusalem and Judah that anyone who hears about it will be shocked. ¹³I will stretch the measuring line of Samaria over Jerusalem, and the plumb line used against Ahab’s family will be used on Jerusalem. I will wipe out Jerusalem as a person wipes a dish and turns it upside down. ¹⁴I will throw away the rest of my people who are left. I will give them to their enemies, and they will be robbed by all their enemies, ¹⁵because my people did what I said was wrong. They have made me angry from the day their ancestors left Egypt until now.’”

¹⁶Manasseh also killed many innocent people, filling Jerusalem from one end to the other with their blood. This was besides the sin he led Judah to do; he led Judah to do what the Lord said was wrong.

¹⁷The other things Manasseh did as king, even the sin he did, are written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. ¹⁸Manasseh died and was buried in the garden of his own palace, the garden of Uzza. Then Manasseh’s son Amon became king in his place.

Amon King of Judah

¹⁹Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he was king for two years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Meshullemeth daughter of Haruz, who was from Jotbah. ²⁰Amon did what the Lord said was wrong, as his father

Manasseh had done. ²¹He lived in the same way his father had lived: he worshiped the idols his father had worshiped, and he bowed down before them. ²²Amon rejected the Lord, the God of his ancestors, and did not follow the ways of the Lord.

²³Amon's officers made plans against him and killed him in his palace. ²⁴Then the people of the land killed all those who had made plans to kill King Amon, and they made his son Josiah king in his place.

²⁵Everything else Amon did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah. ²⁶He was buried in his grave in the garden of Uzza, and his son Josiah became king in his place.

Life Lessons

2 Kings 22:1–23:35

Situation

Josiah obeyed God with undivided devotion and initiated thorough reforms. While repairing the formerly neglected Temple, God's Word was found. Josiah used God's Word to bring drastic changes to the nation's lifestyle.

Observation

God used one man to bring a revival to an entire nation.

Inspiration

Maybe your past isn't much to brag about. Maybe you've seen raw evil. And now you, like Josiah, have to make a choice. Do you rise above the past and make a difference? Or do you remain controlled by the past and make excuses?

Many choose the latter.

Many choose the convalescent homes of the heart. Healthy bodies. Sharp minds. But retired dreams. Back and forth they rock in the chair of regret, repeating the terms of surrender. Lean closely and you will hear them: "If only." The white flag of the heart.

"If only ..."

"If only I'd been born somewhere else ..."

"If only I'd been treated fairly ..."

"If only I'd had kinder parents, more money, greater opportunities ..."

“If only I’d been potty-trained sooner, spanked less, or taught to eat without slurping.”

Maybe you’ve used those words. Maybe you have every right to use them. Perhaps you, like Josiah, were hearing the ten count before you even got into the ring. For you to find an ancestor worth imitating, you, like Josiah, have to flip way back in your family album.

If such is the case, let me show you where to turn. Put down the scrapbook and pick up your Bible. Go to John’s Gospel and read Jesus’ words: “Human life comes from human parents, but spiritual life comes from the Spirit” ([John 3:6](#)).

Think about that. Spiritual life comes from the Spirit! Your parents may have given you genes, but God gives you grace. Your parents may be responsible for your body, but God has taken charge of your soul. You may get your looks from your mother, but you get eternity from your Father, your heavenly Father....

God has not left you adrift on a sea of heredity. Just like Josiah, you cannot control the way your forefathers responded to God. But you can control the way you respond to him. The past does not have to be your prison. You have a voice in your destiny. You have a say in your life. You have a choice in the path you take.

Choose well and someday—generations from now—your grandchildren and great-grandchildren will thank God for the seeds you sowed. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

Application

How many times during the last week did you read your Bible? Develop an action plan for making God's message all-important in your life. Equip yourself to pass on a righteous legacy.

Exploration

Scripture—[Deuteronomy 17:18–20](#); [2 Kings 22:11](#); [Psalms 119:19, 105](#); [2 Timothy 3:15–17](#).

Josiah King of Judah

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he ruled thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah, who was from Bozkath.² Josiah did what the Lord said was right. He lived as his ancestor David had lived, and he did not stop doing what was right.

³In Josiah's eighteenth year as king, he sent Shaphan to the Temple of the Lord. Shaphan son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, was the royal secretary. Josiah said, ⁴"Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, and have him empty out the money the gatekeepers have gathered from the people. This is the money they have brought into the Temple of the Lord. ⁵Have him give the money to the supervisors of the work on the Temple of the Lord. They must pay the workers who repair the Temple of the Lord— ⁶the carpenters, builders, and bricklayers. Also use the money to buy timber and cut stone to repair the Temple. ⁷They do not need to report how they use the money given to them, because they are working honestly."

The Book of the Teachings Is Found

⁸Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the royal secretary, "I've found the Book of the Teachings in the Temple of the Lord." He gave it to Shaphan, who read it.

⁹Then Shaphan the royal secretary went to the king and reported to Josiah, “Your officers have paid out the money that was in the Temple of the Lord. They have given it to the workers and supervisors at the Temple.” ¹⁰Then Shaphan the royal secretary told the king, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read from the book to the king.

¹¹When the king heard the words of the Book of the Teachings, he tore his clothes to show how upset he was. ¹²He gave orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Acbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the royal secretary, and Asaiah the king’s servant. These were the orders: ¹³“Go and ask the Lord about the words in the book that was found. Ask for me, for all the people, and for all Judah. The Lord’s anger is burning against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book; they did not do all the things written for us to do.”

¹⁴So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to talk to Huldah the prophetess. She was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, who took care of the king’s clothes. Huldah lived in Jerusalem, in the new area of the city.

¹⁵She said to them, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, ¹⁶“This is what the Lord says: I will bring trouble to this place and to the people living here, as it is written in the book which the king of Judah has read. ¹⁷The people of Judah have left me and have burned incense to other gods. They have made me angry by all that they have done. My anger burns against this place like a fire, and it will not be put out.” ¹⁸Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to ask the Lord, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel,

says about the words you heard: ¹⁹When you heard my words against this place and its people, you became sorry for what you had done and humbled yourself before me. I said they would be cursed and would be destroyed. You tore your clothes to show how upset you were, and you cried in my presence. This is why I have heard you, says the Lord. ²⁰So I will let you die, and you will be buried in peace. You won't see all the trouble I will bring to this place.'"

So they took her message back to the king.

The People Hear the Agreement

Then the king gathered all the older leaders of Judah and Jerusalem together. ²He went up to the Temple of the Lord, and all the people from Judah and Jerusalem went with him. The priests, prophets, and all the people—from the least important to the most important—went with him. He read to them all the words of the Book of the Agreement that was found in the Temple of the Lord. ³The king stood by the pillar and made an agreement in the presence of the Lord to follow the Lord and obey his commands, rules, and laws with his whole being, and to obey the words of the agreement written in this book. Then all the people promised to obey the agreement.

Josiah Destroys the Places for Idol Worship

⁴The king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the next rank and the gatekeepers to bring out of the Temple of the Lord everything made for Baal, Asherah, and all the stars of the sky. Then Josiah burned them outside Jerusalem in the open country of the Kidron Valley and carried their ashes to Bethel. ⁵The kings of Judah had chosen priests for these gods. These priests burned incense in the places where gods were worshiped in the cities of Judah and the towns around Jerusalem. They burned incense to Baal, the sun, the moon, the planets, and all the stars of the sky. But Josiah took those priests away. ⁶He removed the Asherah idol from the Temple of the Lord and took it outside Jerusalem to the Kidron Valley,

where he burned it and beat it into dust. Then he threw the dust on the graves of the common people.⁷ He also tore down the houses of the male prostitutes who were in the Temple of the Lord, where the women did weaving for Asherah.

⁸King Josiah brought all the false priests from the cities of Judah. He ruined the places where gods were worshiped, where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba. He destroyed the places of worship at the entrance to the Gate of Joshua, the ruler of the city, on the left side of the city gate.⁹ The priests at the places where gods were worshiped were not allowed to serve at the Lord's altar in Jerusalem. But they could eat bread made without yeast with their brothers.

¹⁰Josiah ruined Topheth, in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could sacrifice his son or daughter to Molech.¹¹ Judah's kings had placed horses at the front door of the Temple of the Lord in the courtyard near the room of Nathan-Melech, an officer. These horses were for the worship of the sun. So Josiah removed them and burned the chariots that were for sun worship also.

¹²The kings of Judah had built altars on the [roof](#) of the upstairs room of Ahaz. Josiah broke down these altars and the altars Manasseh had made in the two courtyards of the Temple of the Lord. Josiah smashed them to pieces and threw their dust into the Kidron Valley.¹³ King Josiah ruined the places where gods were worshiped east of Jerusalem, south of the [Mount of Olives](#). Solomon king of Israel had built these places. One was for Ashtoreth, the hated goddess of the Sidonians. One was for Chemosh, the hated god of Moab. And one was for Molech, the hated god of the Ammonites.¹⁴ Josiah smashed to pieces the stone pillars they worshiped, and he cut down the

Asherah idols. Then he covered the places with human bones.

¹⁵Josiah also broke down the altar at Bethel—the place of worship made by Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had led Israel to sin. Josiah burned that place, broke the stones of the altar into pieces, then beat them into dust. He also burned the Asherah idol. ¹⁶When he turned around, he saw the graves on the mountain. He had the bones taken from the graves, and he burned them on the altar to ruin it. This happened as the Lord had said it would through the man of God.

¹⁷Josiah asked, “What is that monument I see?”

The people of the city answered, “It’s the grave of the man of God who came from Judah. This prophet announced the things you have done against the altar of Bethel.”

¹⁸Josiah said, “Leave the grave alone. No one may move this man’s bones.” So they left his bones and the bones of the prophet who had come from Samaria.

¹⁹The kings of Israel had built temples for worshiping gods in the cities of Samaria, which had caused the Lord to be angry. Josiah removed all those temples and did the same things as he had done at Bethel. ²⁰He killed all the priests of those places of worship; he killed them on the altars and burned human bones on the altars. Then he went back to Jerusalem.

Josiah Celebrates the Passover

²¹The king commanded all the people, “Celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God as it is written in this Book of the Agreement.” ²²The Passover had not been celebrated like this since the judges led Israel. Nor had one like it happened while there were kings of Israel and kings of Judah. ²³This Passover

was celebrated to the Lord in Jerusalem in the eighteenth year of King Josiah's rule.

²⁴Josiah destroyed the mediums, fortune-tellers, house gods, and idols. He also destroyed all the hated gods seen in the land of Judah and Jerusalem. This was to obey the words of the teachings written in the book Hilkiah the priest had found in the Temple of the Lord.

²⁵There was no king like Josiah before or after him. He obeyed the Lord with all his heart, soul, and strength, following all the Teachings of Moses.

²⁶Even so, the Lord did not stop his strong and terrible anger. His anger burned against Judah because of all Manasseh had done to make him angry. ²⁷The Lord said, "I will send Judah out of my sight, as I have sent Israel away. I will reject Jerusalem, which I chose. And I will take away the Temple about which I said, 'I will be worshiped there.'"

²⁸Everything else Josiah did is written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah.

²⁹While Josiah was king, Neco king of Egypt went to help the king of Assyria at the Euphrates River. King Josiah marched out to fight against Neco, but at Megiddo, Neco faced him and killed him. ³⁰Josiah's servants carried his body in a chariot from Megiddo to Jerusalem and buried him in his own grave. Then the people of Judah chose Josiah's son Jehoahaz and poured olive oil on him to make him king in his father's place.

Jehoahaz King of Judah

³¹Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king,

and he was king in Jerusalem for three months. His mother's name was Hamutal, who was the daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah. ³²Jehoahaz did what the Lord said was wrong, just as his ancestors had done.

³³King Neco took Jehoahaz prisoner at Riblah in the land of Hamath so that Jehoahaz could not rule in Jerusalem. Neco made the people of Judah pay about seventy-five hundred pounds of silver and about seventy-five pounds of gold.

³⁴King Neco made Josiah's son Eliakim the king in place of Josiah his father. Then Neco changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim. But Neco took Jehoahaz to Egypt, where he died.

³⁵Jehoiakim gave King Neco the silver and gold he demanded. Jehoiakim taxed the land and took silver and gold from the people of the land to give to King Neco. Each person had to pay his share.

Jehoiakim King of Judah

³⁶Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he was king in Jerusalem for eleven years. His mother's name was Zebidah daughter of Pedaiah, who was from Rumah.

³⁷Jehoiakim did what the Lord said was wrong, just as his ancestors had done.

Life Lessons

2 Kings 23:36–25:30

Situation

Each of the last three kings of Judah rebelled against the Babylonians. Each time, Babylon brought

quick and severe retribution. They displaced people, looted the Temple, and destroyed Jerusalem. Even though Israel's captivity had been foretold for over a century by various prophets, the people and their leaders refused to listen and stop sinning.

Observation

God warned the people for over one hundred years that continued disobedience would lead to disaster.

Inspiration

As long as men and women seek to gain their sense of significance and self-worth from anything other than God, they will be set up for temptation. Certain people, places, or things will always have an inordinate ability to lure them into sin. Until they change their definition of significance and until they transfer their security to Someone who can give them real security, they will never experience lasting victory in their lives....

Making the switch from your present set of values to God's involves two steps. First of all, you must identify the things and people from which you draw your identity. I call this step of the process reviewing your life....

A second step in making this switch involves renewing your mind to the truth. To renew your mind, you must remove the old ways of thinking and replace them with the truth.... The truth is that all of your security and significance is wrapped up in your relationship with God through Jesus Christ. (From *Winning the War Within* by Charles Stanley)

Application

Are you most likely to disobey God with certain friends? At certain places? In certain moods? Ask Jesus to take charge of your relationships, desires, and moods. Then choose to spend your time wisely.

Exploration

Disobedience—[Genesis 3:13–19](#); [Exodus 8:15](#); [Numbers 20:1–13](#); [1 Chronicles 10:13–14](#); [Isaiah 3:1–9](#).

While Jehoiakim was king, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon attacked the land of Judah. So Jehoiakim became Nebuchadnezzar's servant for three years. Then he turned against Nebuchadnezzar and broke away from his rule.²The Lord sent raiding parties from Babylon, Aram, Moab, and Ammon against Jehoiakim to destroy Judah. This happened as the Lord had said it would through his servants the prophets.

³The Lord commanded this to happen to the people of Judah, to remove them from his presence, because of all the sins of Manasseh.⁴He had killed many innocent people and had filled Jerusalem with their blood. And the Lord would not forgive these sins.

⁵The other things that happened while Jehoiakim was king and all he did are written in the book of the history of the kings of Judah.⁶Jehoiakim died, and his son Jehoiachin became king in his place.

⁷The king of Egypt did not leave his land again, because the king of Babylon had captured all that belonged to the king of Egypt, from the brook of Egypt to the Euphrates River.

Jehoiachin King of Judah

⁸Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he was king three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Nehushta daughter of Elnathan from Jerusalem.⁹Jehoiachin did what the Lord said was wrong, just as his father had done.

¹⁰At that time the officers of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up to Jerusalem. When they reached the city, they attacked it.¹¹Nebuchadnezzar himself came to the city while his officers were attacking it.¹²Jehoiachin king of Judah

surrendered to the king of Babylon, along with Jehoiachin's mother, servants, older leaders, and officers. So Nebuchadnezzar made Jehoiachin a prisoner in the eighth year he was king of Babylon.¹³ Nebuchadnezzar took all the treasures from the Temple of the Lord and from the palace. He cut up all the gold objects Solomon king of Israel had made for the Temple of the Lord. This happened as the Lord had said it would.¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar took away all the people of Jerusalem, including all the leaders, all the wealthy people, and all the craftsmen and metal workers. There were ten thousand prisoners in all. Only the poorest people in the land were left.¹⁵ Nebuchadnezzar carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, as well as the king's mother and his wives, the officers, and the leading men of the land. They were taken captive from Jerusalem to Babylon.¹⁶ The king of Babylon also took all seven thousand soldiers, who were strong and able to fight in war, and about a thousand craftsmen and metal workers. Nebuchadnezzar took them as prisoners to Babylon.¹⁷ Then he made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in Jehoiachin's place. He also changed Mattaniah's name to Zedekiah.

Zedekiah King of Judah

¹⁸Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he was king in Jerusalem for eleven years. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of [Jeremiah](#) from Libnah.¹⁹ Zedekiah did what the Lord said was wrong, just as Jehoiakim had done.²⁰ All this happened in Jerusalem and Judah because the Lord was angry with them. Finally, he threw them out of his presence.

The Fall of Jerusalem

Zedekiah turned against the king of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army during Zedekiah's ninth year as king, on the tenth day of the tenth month. He made a camp around the city and piled dirt against the city walls to attack it.²The city was under attack until Zedekiah's eleventh year as king.³By the ninth day of the fourth month, the hunger was terrible in the city. There was no food for the people to eat.⁴Then the city was broken into, and the whole army ran away at night through the gate between the two walls by the king's garden. While the Babylonians were still surrounding the city, Zedekiah and his men ran away toward the Jordan Valley.⁵But the Babylonian army chased King Zedekiah and caught up with him in the plains of Jericho. All of his army was scattered from him,⁶so they captured Zedekiah and took him to the king of Babylon at Riblah. There he passed sentence on Zedekiah.⁷They killed Zedekiah's sons as he watched. Then they put out his eyes and put bronze chains on him and took him to Babylon.

⁸Nebuzaradan was the commander of the king's special guards. This officer of the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem on the seventh day of the fifth month, in Nebuchadnezzar's nineteenth year as king of Babylon.⁹Nebuzaradan set fire to the Temple of the Lord and the palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building was burned.

¹⁰The whole Babylonian army, led by the commander of the king's special guards, broke down the walls around Jerusalem.¹¹Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guards, captured the people left in Jerusalem, those who had surrendered to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the people.¹²But the commander left behind some of the poorest people of the land to take care of the vineyards and fields.

¹³The Babylonians broke up the bronze pillars, the bronze stands, and the large bronze bowl, which was called the Sea, in the Temple of the Lord. Then they carried the bronze to Babylon. ¹⁴They also took the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, dishes, and all the bronze objects used to serve in the Temple. ¹⁵The commander of the king's special guards took away the pans for carrying hot coals, the bowls, and everything made of pure gold or silver. ¹⁶There were two pillars and the large bronze bowl and the movable stands which Solomon had made for the Temple of the Lord. There was so much bronze that it could not be weighed. ¹⁷Each pillar was about twenty-seven feet high. The bronze capital on top of the pillar was about four and one-half feet high. It was decorated with a net design and bronze pomegranates all around it. The other pillar also had a net design and was like the first pillar.

Judah Is Taken Prisoner

¹⁸The commander of the guards took some prisoners—Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the priest next in rank, and the three doorkeepers. ¹⁹Of the people who were still in the city, he took the officer in charge of the fighting men, as well as five people who advised the king. He took the royal secretary who selected people for the army and sixty other men who were in the city. ²⁰Nebuzaradan, the commander, took all these people and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. ²¹There at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, the king had them killed. So the people of Judah were led away from their country as captives.

Gedaliah Becomes Governor

²²Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon left some people in the land of Judah. He appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, as governor.

²³The army captains and their men heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, so they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah. They were Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan son of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, Jaazaniah son of the Maacathite, and their men.

²⁴Then Gedaliah promised these army captains and their men, "Don't be afraid of the Babylonian officers. Live in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and everything will go well for you."

²⁵In the seventh month Ishmael son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama from the king's family, came with ten men and killed Gedaliah. They also killed the men of Judah and Babylon who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah. ²⁶Then all the people, from the least important to the most important, along with the army leaders, ran away to Egypt, because they were afraid of the Babylonians.

Jehoiachin Is Set Free

²⁷Jehoiachin king of Judah was held in Babylon for thirty-seven years. In the thirty-seventh year Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon, and he let Jehoiachin out of prison on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month. ²⁸Evil-Merodach spoke kindly to Jehoiachin and gave him a seat of honor above the seats of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. ²⁹So Jehoiachin put away his prison clothes. For the rest of his life,

he ate at the king's table. ³⁰Every day, for as long as Jehoiachin lived, the king gave him an allowance.

Leave ... spirit By law, the first son in a family would inherit a double share of his father's possessions. Elisha is asking to inherit a share of his master's power as his follower. He is not asking for twice as much power as Elijah had.

roof In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

temple of Rimmon The place where the Aramean people worshiped the god Rimmon.

Zimri He was the man who killed Elah and the family of Baasha. Read [1 Kings 16:8-12](#).

Carites This was probably a special unit of the army that was responsible for the king's safety, a kind of palace guard similar to the Kerethites and the Pelethites.

"Parents ... sins." See [Deuteronomy 24:16](#).

Uzziah Also called Azariah.

Uzziah Also called Azariah.

Uzziah Also called Azariah.

Tiglath-Pileser Also called Pul.

roof In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

Mount of Olives Literally, "The Mountain of Ruin."

Jeremiah This is not the prophet Jeremiah, but a different man with the same name.

[The Book of 1 Chronicles](#)

Introduction

Ever been held up by a grandparent?

You naively ask how the grandkids are, and before you know it the purse opens and out pops a billfold thick with pictures.

“This is Joey in the third grade holding his puppy named Snapper. And this is Joey in the fourth grade on his little league team where he played second base. And this is Joey in the fifth grade. The kid behind him is his cousin Terry who is living in Seattle with his dad. I’ve got some pictures of them I’ll show you in just a minute. But first let me show you Joey in the seventh grade wearing his football uniform...”

Yawn.

Hard to stay interested hearing names of people you’ll never see who live in places you’ll never know.

Such is the case with the Book of 1 Chronicles. Full of names, many hard to pronounce. Full of places, most of which you’ll never see. The book won’t keep you on the edge of your seat. It wasn’t intended to. It will, however, provide you with a catalog of facts and names of people who matter to God.

Which reminds us of an encouraging truth: God keeps up with his children. He knows their names and keeps them in a book. What may be dry to us matters to him, because they are his kids. By the way, he’s working on a new volume. This one is entitled the Book of Life.

Is your name in it?

About This Book

Author:

Probably Ezra

Date Written:

500–400 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- While David was not allowed to build the Temple, it was still his heart's desire that God be honored by a permanent place of worship.
- The people of David's kingdom honored God by contributing to the Temple construction.
- David was not a perfect king, but he was still a king who acknowledged God with his life.

Key Verse:

“You made the people of Israel your very own people forever, and, Lord, you are their God” ([1 Chronicles 17:22](#)).

Contents:

1. Genealogies [1:1–9:44](#)
2. David's Reign [10:1–20:8](#)
3. Preparations for the Temple [21:1–29:20](#)
4. From David to Solomon [29:21–30](#)

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 1:1–3:24

Situation

Chronicles was written after the exile to help those returning to Israel understand how to worship God. The history focused on the Southern Kingdom—the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi. These tribes tended to be more faithful to God.

Observation

God knows every person who has ever lived. We are not just faceless numbers among the thousands of years of humanity. God concerns himself with every person and detail. We should never feel insignificant.

Inspiration

We can learn much about a person by looking at his or her track record, checking out how he or she has related to others in the past.

We can learn much about God by taking a close look at how he has acted in the past and how he has related to his people, the children of Israel. What we find is that God is profoundly loving. In fact, time after time when Israel would disobey his commands and even begin to worship idols, God would be slow to punish them and would take them back as soon as they turned from their sin.

The fact that God is “slow to anger” should not encourage us to take him for granted. Instead, we should remember his unending love and determine to

live for him and close to him.

Thank God for what he has done in the past, for Israel and for you. And live in the light of his gracious and compassionate love. (From *On Eagle's Wings* by Dave Veerman)

Application

God knows your name, your history, your dreams, your future, your thoughts, and every detail of your life. Are you tempted to feel insignificant? Remember that he loves you intensely.

Exploration

Important to God—[Isaiah 43:1](#); [49:16](#); [Jeremiah 31:3](#); [Luke 12:6–7](#); [John 10:3](#); [Romans 8:27](#); [1 John 3:1](#).

God adopted you simply because he wanted to. You were in his good will and pleasure. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

From Adam to Abraham

Adam was the father of Seth. Seth was the father of Enosh. Enosh was the father of Kenan.²Kenan was the father of Mahalalel. Mahalalel was the father of Jared. Jared was the father of Enoch.³Enoch was the father of Methuselah. Methuselah was the father of Lamech, and Lamech was the father of Noah.

⁴The sons of Noah were Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

⁵Japheth's sons were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras.

⁶Gomer's sons were Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah.

⁷Javan's sons were Elishah, Tarshish, [Kittim](#), and Rodanim.

⁸Ham's sons were Cush, [Mizraim](#), Put, and Canaan.

⁹Cush's sons were Seba, Havilah, Sabta, Raamah, and Sabteca.

Raamah's sons were Sheba and Dedan.

¹⁰Cush was the father of Nimrod, who grew up to become a mighty warrior on the earth.

¹¹Mizraim was the father of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, and Naphtuhites,

¹²Pathrusites, Casluhites, and Caphtorites. (The Philistines

came from the Casluhites.)

¹³Canaan's first child was Sidon. He was also the father of the Hittites, ¹⁴Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, ¹⁵Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, ¹⁶Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites.

¹⁷Shem's sons were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.

Aram's sons were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Meshech.

¹⁸Arphaxad was the father of Shelah, who was the father of Eber.

¹⁹Eber had two sons. One son was named [Peleg](#), because the people on the earth were divided into different languages during his life. Peleg's brother was named Joktan.

²⁰Joktan was the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, ²¹Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, ²²Obal, Abimael, Sheba, ²³Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these were Joktan's sons. ²⁴The family line included Shem, Arphaxad, Shelah, ²⁵Eber, Peleg, Reu, ²⁶Serug, Nahor, Terah, ²⁷and Abram, who was called Abraham.

Abraham's Family

²⁸Abraham's sons were Isaac and Ishmael.

²⁹These were the sons of Isaac and Ishmael. Ishmael's first son was Nebaioth. His other sons were Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, ³⁰Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, ³¹Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These were Ishmael's sons. ³²Keturah, Abraham's slave woman, gave birth to Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.

Jokshan's sons were Sheba and Dedan.

³³Midian's sons were Ephah, Ephher, Hanoch, Abida, and

Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah.

³⁴Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac's sons were Esau and Israel.

³⁵Esau's sons were Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

³⁶Eliphaz's sons were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, Kenaz, Timna, and Amalek.

³⁷Reuel's sons were Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah.

The Edomites from Seir

³⁸Seir's sons were Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan.

³⁹Lotan's sons were Hori and Homam, and his sister was Timna.

⁴⁰Shobal's sons were Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam.

Zibeon's sons were Aiah and Anah.

⁴¹Anah's son was Dishon.

Dishon's sons were Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Keran.

⁴²Ezer's sons were Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan.

Dishan's sons were Uz and Aran.

The Kings of Edom

⁴³These kings ruled in Edom before there were kings in Israel. Bela son of Beor was king of Edom, and his city was named Dinhabah.

⁴⁴When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah became king. He was from Bozrah.

⁴⁵When Jobab died, Husham became king. He was from the land of the Temanites.

⁴⁶When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad became king, and his city was named Avith. Hadad defeated Midian in the country of Moab.

⁴⁷When Hadad died, Samlah became king. He was from Masrekah.

⁴⁸When Samlah died, Shaul became king. He was from Rehoboth by the river.

⁴⁹When Shaul died, Baal-Hanan son of Acbor became king.

⁵⁰When Baal-Hanan died, Hadad became king, and his city was named Pau. Hadad's wife was named Mehetabel, and she was the daughter of Matred, who was the daughter of Me-Zahab. ⁵¹Then Hadad died.

The leaders of the family groups of Edom were Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, ⁵²Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, ⁵³Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, ⁵⁴Magdiel, and Iram. These were the leaders of Edom.

Israel's Family

The sons of [Israel](#) were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, ²Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.

Judah's Family

³Judah's sons were Er, Onan, and Shelah. A Canaanite woman, the daughter of Shua, was their mother. Judah's first son, Er, did what the Lord said was wicked, so the Lord put him to death. ⁴Judah's daughter-in-law Tamar gave birth to Perez and Zerah. Judah was the father, so Judah had five sons.

⁵Perez's sons were Hezron and Hamul.

⁶Zerah had five sons: Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Darda.

⁷Carmi's son was Achan, who caused trouble for Israel because he took things that had been given to the Lord to be destroyed.

⁸Ethan's son was Azariah.

⁹Hezron's sons were Jerahmeel, Ram, and Caleb.

¹⁰Ram was Amminadab's father, and Amminadab was Nahshon's father. Nahshon was the leader of the people of Judah. ¹¹Nahshon was the father of Salmon, who was the father of Boaz. ¹²Boaz was the father of Obed, and Obed was the father of Jesse.

¹³Jesse's first son was Eliab. His second son was Abinadab, his third was Shimea, ¹⁴his fourth was Nethanel, his fifth was Raddai, ¹⁵his sixth was Ozem, and his seventh son

was David. ¹⁶Their sisters were Zeruiah and Abigail. Zeruiah's three sons were Abishai, Joab, and Asahel. ¹⁷Abigail was the mother of Amasa, and his father was Jether, an Ishmaelite.

Caleb's Family

¹⁸Caleb son of Hezron had children by his wife Azubah and by Jerioth. Caleb and Azubah's sons were Jesher, Shobab, and Ardon. ¹⁹When Azubah died, Caleb married Ephrath. They had a son named Hur, ²⁰who was the father of Uri, who was the father of Bezalel.

²¹Later, when Hezron was sixty years old, he married the daughter of Makir, Gilead's father. Hezron had sexual relations with Makir's daughter, and she had a son named Segub. ²²Segub was the father of Jair. Jair controlled twenty-three cities in the country of Gilead. ²³(But Geshur and Aram captured the Towns of Jair, as well as Kenath and the small towns around it—sixty towns in all.) All these were descendants of Makir, the father of Gilead.

²⁴After Hezron died in Caleb Ephrathah, his wife Abijah had his son, named Ashhur. Ashhur became the father of Tekoa.

Jerahmeel's Family

²⁵Hezron's first son was Jerahmeel. Jerahmeel's sons were Ram, Bunah, Oren, Ozem, and Ahijah. Ram was Jerahmeel's first son.

²⁶Jerahmeel had another wife, named Atarah. She was the mother of Onam.

²⁷Jerahmeel's first son, Ram, had sons. They were Maaz,

Jamin, and Eker.

²⁸Onam's sons were Shammai and Jada.

Shammai's sons were Nadab and Abishur.

²⁹Abishur's wife was named Abihail, and their sons were Ahban and Molid.

³⁰Nadab's sons were Seled and Appaim. Seled died without having children.

³¹Appaim's son was Ishi, who became the father of Sheshan.

Sheshan was the father of Ahlai.

³²Jada was Shammai's brother, and Jada's sons were Jether and Jonathan. Jether died without having children.

³³Jonathan's sons were Peleth and Zaza.

These were Jerahmeel's descendants.

³⁴Sheshan did not have any sons, only daughters. He had a servant from Egypt named Jarha. ³⁵Sheshan let his daughter marry his servant Jarha, and she had a son named Attai.

³⁶Attai was the father of Nathan. Nathan was the father of Zabad. ³⁷Zabad was the father of Ephlal. Ephlal was the father of Obed. ³⁸Obed was the father of Jehu. Jehu was the father of Azariah. ³⁹Azariah was the father of Helez. Helez was the father of Eleasah. ⁴⁰Eleasah was the father of Sismai. Sismai was the father of Shallum. ⁴¹Shallum was the father of Jekamiah, and Jekamiah was the father of Elishama.

Caleb's Family

⁴²Caleb was Jerahmeel's brother. Caleb's first son was Mesha. Mesha was the father of Ziph, and his son Mareshah was the father of Hebron.

⁴³Hebron's sons were Korah, Tappuah, Rekem, and Shema.

⁴⁴Shema was the father of Raham, who was the father of Jorkeam. Rekem was the father of Shammai. ⁴⁵Shammai was the father of Maon, and Maon was the father of Beth Zur.

⁴⁶Caleb's slave woman was named Ephah, and she was the mother of Haran, Moza, and Gazez. Haran was the father of Gazez.

⁴⁷Jahdai's sons were Regem, Jotham, Geshan, Pelet, Ephah, and Shaaph.

⁴⁸Caleb had another slave woman named Maacah. She was the mother of Sheber, Tirhanah, ⁴⁹Shaaph, and Sheva. Shaaph was the father of Madmannah. Sheva was the father of Macbenah and Gibeaz. Caleb's daughter was Acsah.

⁵⁰⁻⁵¹These were Caleb's descendants: Caleb's son Hur was the first son of his mother Ephrathah. Hur's sons were Shobal, Salma, and Hareph. Shobal was the father of Kiriath Jearim. Salma was the father of Bethlehem. And Hareph was the father of Beth Gader.

⁵²Shobal was the father of Kiriath Jearim. Shobal's descendants were Haroeh, half the Manahathites, ⁵³and the family groups of Kiriath Jearim: the Ithrites, Puthites, Shumathites, and Mishraites. The Zorathites and the Eshtaulites came from the Mishraite people.

⁵⁴Salma's descendants were Bethlehem, the Netophathites, Atroth Beth Joab, half the Manahathites, and the Zorites. ⁵⁵His descendants included the families who lived at Jabez, who wrote and copied important papers. They were called the Tirathites, Shimeathites, and Sucathites and were from the Kenite family group who came from Hammath. He was the father of the people living in Recab.

David's Family

These are David's sons who were born in Hebron. The first was Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam from Jezreel. The second son was Daniel, whose mother was Abigail from Carmel.²The third son was Absalom, whose mother was Maacah daughter of Talmai, the king of Geshur. The fourth son was Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith.³The fifth son was Shephatiah, whose mother was Abital. The sixth son was Ithream, whose mother was Eglah.⁴These six sons of David were born to him in Hebron, where David ruled for seven and one-half years.

David ruled in Jerusalem thirty-three years.⁵These were his children who were born in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, and Solomon—the four children of David and Bathsheba, Ammiel's daughter.⁶⁻⁸David's other nine children were Ibhar, Elishua, Eliphelet, Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.⁹These were all of David's sons, except for those born to his slave women. David also had a daughter named Tamar.

The Kings of Judah

¹⁰Solomon's son was Rehoboam. Rehoboam's son was Abijah. Abijah's son was Asa. Asa's son was Jehoshaphat.

¹¹Jehoshaphat's son was Jehoram. Jehoram's son was Ahaziah. Ahaziah's son was Joash.¹²Joash's son was Amaziah. Amaziah's son was Azariah. Azariah's son was Jotham.

¹³Jotham's son was Ahaz. Ahaz's son was Hezekiah. Hezekiah's son was Manasseh. ¹⁴Manasseh's son was Amon, and Amon's son was Josiah.

¹⁵These were Josiah's sons: His first son was Johanan, his second was Jehoiakim, his third was Zedekiah, and his fourth was Shallum.

¹⁶Jehoiakim was followed by Jehoiachin, and he was followed by Zedekiah.

David's Descendants After the Babylonian Captivity

¹⁷Jehoiachin was taken as a prisoner. His sons were Shealtiel, ¹⁸Malkiram, Pedaiah, Shenazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama, and Nedabiah.

¹⁹Pedaiah's sons were Zerubbabel and Shimei.

Zerubbabel's sons were Meshullam and Hananiah, and their sister was Shelomith. ²⁰Zerubbabel also had five other sons: Hashubah, Ohel, Berekiah, Hasadiah, and Jushab-Hesed.

²¹Hananiah's descendants were Pelatiah and Jeshaiah, and the sons of Rephaiah, Arnan, Obadiah, and Shecaniah.

²²Shecaniah's son was Shemaiah. Shemaiah's sons were Hattush, Igal, Bariah, Neariah, and Shaphat. There were six in all.

²³Neariah had three sons: Elioenai, Hizkiah, and Azrikam.

²⁴Elioenai had seven sons: Hodaviah, Eliashib, Pelaiah, Akkub, Johanan, Delaiah, and Anani.

Other Family Groups of Judah

Judah's descendants were Perez, Hezron, Carmi, Hur, and Shobal.

²Reaiah was Shobal's son. Reaiah was the father of Jahath, and Jahath was the father of Ahumai and Lahad. They were the family groups of the Zorathite people.

³⁻⁴Hur was the oldest son of Caleb and his wife Ephrathah. Hur was the leader of Bethlehem. His three sons were Etam, Penuel, and Ezer. Etam's sons were Jezreel, Ishma, and Idbash. They had a sister named Hazzelelponi. Penuel was the father of Gedor, and Ezer was the father of Hushah.

⁵Tekoa's father was Ashhur. Ashhur had two wives named Helah and Naarah.

⁶The sons of Ashhur and Naarah were Ahuzzam, Hephher, Temeni, and Haahashtari. These were the descendants of Naarah.

⁷Helah's sons were Zereth, Zohar, Ethnan, ⁸and Koz. Koz was the father of Anub, Hazzobebah, and the Aharhel family group. Aharhel was the son of Harum.

⁹There was a man named Jabez, who was respected more than his brothers. His mother named him [Jabez](#) because she said, "I was in much pain when I gave birth to him." ¹⁰Jabez prayed to the God of Israel, "Please do good things for me and give me more land. Stay with me, and don't let anyone hurt me. Then I won't have any pain." And God did what Jabez had asked.

¹¹Kelub, Shuhah's brother, was the father of Mehir. Mehir

was the father of Eshton.¹² Eshton was the father of Beth Rapha, Paseah, and Tehinnah. Tehinnah was the father of the people from the town of Nahash. These people were from Recah.

¹³The sons of Kenaz were Othniel and Seraiah.

Othniel's sons were Hathath and Meonothai.¹⁴ Meonothai was the father of Ophrah.

Seraiah was the father of Joab. Joab was the ancestor of the people from Craftsmen's Valley, named that because the people living there were craftsmen.

¹⁵Caleb was Jephunneh's son. Caleb's sons were Iru, Elah, and Naam. Elah's son was Kenaz.

¹⁶Jehallelel's sons were Ziph, Ziphah, Tiria, and Asarel.

¹⁷⁻¹⁸Ezrah's sons were Jether, Mered, Ephraim, and Jalon. Mered married Bithiah, the daughter of the king of Egypt. The children of Mered and Bithiah were Miriam, Shammai, and Ishbah. Ishbah was the father of Eshtemoa. Mered also had a wife from Judah, who gave birth to Jered, Heber, and Jekuthiel. Jered became the father of Gedor. Heber became the father of Soco. And Jekuthiel became the father of Zanoah.

¹⁹Hodiah's wife was Naham's sister. The sons of Hodiah's wife were Eshtemoa and the father of Keilah. Keilah was from the Garmite people, and Eshtemoa was from the Maacathite people.

²⁰Shimon's sons were Amnon, Rinnah, Ben-Hanan, and Tilon.

Ishi's sons were Zoheth and Ben-Zoheth.

²¹⁻²²Shelah was Judah's son. Shelah's sons were Er, Laadah, Jokim, the men from Cozeba, Joash, and Saraph. Er was the father of Lecah. Laadah was the father of Mareshah and the

family groups of linen workers at Beth Ashbea. Joash and Saraph ruled in Moab and Jashubi Lehem. The writings about this family are very old.²³ These sons of Shelah were potters. They lived in Netaim and Gederah and worked for the king.

Simeon's Children

²⁴Simeon's sons were Nemuel, Jamin, Jarib, Zerah, and Shaul.

²⁵Shaul's son was Shallum. Shallum's son was Mibsam. Mibsam's son was Mishma.

²⁶Mishma's son was Hammuel. Hammuel's son was Zaccur. Zaccur's son was Shimei. ²⁷Shimei had sixteen sons and six daughters, but his brothers did not have many children, so there were not as many people in their family group as there were in Judah.

²⁸Shimei's children lived in Beersheba, Moladah, Hazar Shual, ²⁹Bilhah, Ezem, Tolad, ³⁰Bethuel, Hormah, Ziklag, ³¹Beth Marcaboth, Hazar Susim, Beth Biri, and Shaaraim. They lived in these cities until David became king. ³²The five villages near these cities were Etam, Ain, Rimmon, Token, and Ashan. ³³There were also other villages as far away as Baalath. This is where they lived. And they wrote the history of their family.

³⁴⁻³⁸The men in this list were leaders of their family groups: Meshobab, Jamlech, Joshah son of Amaziah, Joel, Jehu son of Joshibiah (Joshibiah was the son of Seraiah, who was the son of Asiel), Elioenai, Jaakobah, Jeshohaiah, Asaiah, Adiel, Jesimiel, Benaiah, and Ziza. (Ziza was the son of Shiphi, who was the son of Allon. Allon was the son of Jedaiah, who was the son of Shimri. And Shimri was the son of Shemaiah.)

These families grew very large. ³⁹They went outside the city

of Gedor to the east side of the valley to look for pasture for their flocks. ⁴⁰They found good pastures with plenty of grass, and the land was open country and peaceful and quiet. Ham's descendants had lived there in the past.

⁴¹These men who were listed came to Gedor while Hezekiah was king of Judah. They fought against the Hamites, destroying their tents, and also against the Meunites who lived there, and completely destroyed them. So there are no Meunites there even today. Then these men began to live there, because there was pasture for their flocks. ⁴²Ishi's sons, Pelatiah, Neariah, Rephaiah, and Uzziel, led five hundred of the Simeonites and attacked the people living in the mountains of Edom. ⁴³They killed the few Amalekites who were still alive. From that time until now these Simeonites have lived in Edom.

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 4:1–9:1

Situation

An individual's lineage was very important in Bible times. A person's tribe determined where that person would live or what occupation he or she would pursue (for example, Levites served in the Temple). Prophecies stated that the Messiah would come from the line of David. Though careful records were kept, the genealogical listings in Chronicles were considered a condensed version, with certain names, lines, and generations omitted.

Observation

Rather than merely listing names, several times the genealogy reveals glimpses into individuals' lives. It

mentions small acts of faith, small deeds of kindness, and even “small” sins. Many of these people used their years on earth to serve God.

Inspiration

A hospital is a microcosm of the world.

Why? Let me explain.

On the surface, a hospital appears to be a great place. The sheets are clean and the staff is friendly. Nurses come and go with warm smiles. Doctors periodically appear wearing nice loafers, a tie, and a kind face. Friends and family visit bringing pretty plants and friendly words.

There’s a curiously large number of smiles here. I’ve walked the halls and been greeted by the smiling Candy Stripers pushing the coffee cart. The gift shop downstairs is full of magazines with smiling people on the covers. The lady selling them smiled broadly at me when I bought one. The receptionist at the front desk smiles when you pass by....

Smiles, efficiency, distraction. I’ve seen some resorts that don’t offer this kind of treatment. My, you almost forget where you are....

But just when you relax—just when you begin to smile to yourself ... a siren reminds you. The scream of the patient next door reminds you. Paramedics rushing a stretcher toward the emergency room remind you.

And the reminder is sobering. This is a hospital. The sole function of this building is to bargain with death. The walls can’t be white enough nor the staff polite enough to hide the stark reality of the bottom

line: People come here to give all they have to postpone the inevitable.

We give it our best shot. We put up the best we have—the best technology, the best minds, the best equipment; and yet, at best we walk away with an extension, never a solution. And though we may walk or be wheeled out with smiles and waves of victory, down deep we know it is just a matter of time until the best we have won't be enough and the enemy will conquer....

Our world is identical to a hospital. Have you ever noticed the endless extremes to which a person will go to hide the realities of life?

Take age for example. Do you know anyone who has not aged? Do you know anyone who is younger today than when you met him? Aging is a universal condition. But the way we try to hide it, you would think it was a plague! ...

Dentures bring youth to the mouth, wrinkle cream brings youth to the face, and color in a bottle brings youth to the hair.

All to hide what everyone already knows—we're getting older.

Death is another lump in the carpet. We don't like it. (If you ever want to stall a conversation at a party just say, "How are you feeling about your approaching death?" It won't put much life into the conversation.)

I have a friend who has cancer. At present the cancer is in remission. Recently he had to go to the doctor for a physical. A nurse, apparently unaware of

his condition, was asking him questions for his medical record. “Are you presently ill?”

“Well, yes. I have cancer.”

She dropped her pencil and looked up at him. “Are you terminal?” she asked.

“Yes, aren’t we all?”

You’d think we weren’t, the way the subject is kept hush-hush....

But this obsession with fleeing the facts is as maddening as it is futile. For, as in the case of the hospital, the truth always surfaces. A siren sounds causing reality to shock us out of our sleep.

An old college roomie retires and you have to admit that if he is in the autumn of his life, you must be too.

You walk your daughter down the aisle. “When did she grow up?”...

Be the event pleasant or painful, the result is the same. Reality breaks through the papier-maché mask and screams at you like a Marine drill sergeant. “You *are* getting old! You *are* going to die! You *can’t* be someone you are not!”...

The best thing for you to do now is pause and think. Take a good look at the facts. And while you’re looking at them, it would be wise to take a good look at him. To those perched on the peak of Mount Perspective, His Majesty takes on special significance.

Jesus does his best work at such moments. Just when the truth about life sinks in, his truth starts to surface. He takes us by the hand and dares us not to

sweep the facts under the rug but to confront them with him at our side.

Aging? A necessary process to pass on to a better world.

Death? Merely a brief passage, a tunnel.

Self? Designed and created for a purpose, purchased by God himself.

There, was that so bad?

Funerals, divorces, illnesses, and stays in the hospital—you can't lie about life at such times. Maybe that's why he's always present at such moments.

The next time you find yourself alone in a dark alley facing the undeniable of life, don't cover them with a blanket, or ignore them with a nervous grin. Don't turn up the TV and pretend they aren't there. Instead, stand still, whisper his name, and listen. He is nearer than you think. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

What could you do for God this week? What are some ways you could serve that hardly seem worth mentioning (but could meet a real need)? Take the time to do even small deeds. They could be more important than the larger tasks you plan.

Exploration

Small Acts of Faith—[Matthew 10:42](#); [25:34–40](#); [Mark 14:8–9](#); [Luke 10:33–35](#); [Acts 28:2](#); [Hebrews 11:20–24](#), [30–34](#).

Reuben's Children

Reuben was Israel's first son. Reuben should have received the special privileges of the oldest son, but he had sexual relations with his father's slave woman. So those special privileges were given to Joseph's sons. (Joseph was a son of Israel.) In the family history Reuben's name is not listed as the first son.² Judah became stronger than his brothers, and a leader came from his family. But Joseph's family received the privileges that belonged to the oldest son.³ Reuben was Israel's first son. Reuben's sons were Hanoah, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.

⁴These were the children of Joel: Shemaiah was Joel's son. Gog was Shemaiah's son. Shimei was Gog's son. ⁵Micah was Shimei's son. Reaiah was Micah's son. Baal was Reaiah's son. ⁶Beerah was Baal's son. Beerah was a leader of the tribe of Reuben. Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria captured him and took him away.

⁷Joel's brothers and all his family groups are listed just as they are written in their family histories: Jeiel was the first, then Zechariah,⁸ and Bela. (Bela was the son of Azaz. Azaz was the son of Shema, and Shema was the son of Joel.) They lived in the area of Aroer all the way to Nebo and Baal Meon. ⁹Bela's people lived to the east—as far as the edge of the desert, which is beside the Euphrates River—because they had too many cattle for the land of Gilead.

¹⁰When Saul was king, Bela's people fought a war against the Hagrite people and defeated them. Then Bela's people lived

in the tents that had belonged to the Hagrites in all the area east of Gilead.

Gad's Children

¹¹The people from the tribe of Gad lived near the Reubenites. The Gadites lived in the area of Bashan all the way to Salecah.

¹²Joel was the main leader, Shapham was second, and then Janai and Shaphat were leaders in Bashan.

¹³The seven relatives in their families were Michael, Meshullam, Sheba, Jorai, Jacan, Zia, and Eber. ¹⁴They were the descendants of Abihail. Abihail was Huri's son. Huri was Jaroah's son. Jaroah was Gilead's son. Gilead was Michael's son. Michael was Jeshishai's son. Jeshishai was Jahdo's son, and Jahdo was the son of Buz. ¹⁵Ahi was Abdiel's son, and Abdiel was Guni's son. Ahi was the leader of their family.

¹⁶The Gadites lived in Gilead, Bashan and the small towns around it, and on all the pasturelands in the Plain of Sharon all the way to the borders.

¹⁷All these names were written in the family history of Gad during the time Jotham was king of Judah and Jeroboam was king of Israel.

Soldiers Skilled in War

¹⁸There were forty-four thousand seven hundred sixty soldiers from the tribes of Reuben and Gad and East Manasseh who carried shields and swords and bows. They were skilled in war.

¹⁹They started a war against the Hagrites and the people of Jetur, Naphish, and Nodab. ²⁰The men from the tribes of

Manasseh, Reuben, and Gad prayed to God during the war, asking him to help them. So he helped them because they trusted him. He handed over to them the Hagarites and all those who were with them.²¹ They took the animals that belonged to the Hagarites: fifty thousand camels, two hundred fifty thousand sheep, and two thousand donkeys. They also captured one hundred thousand people.²² Many Hagarites were killed because God helped the people of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. Then they lived there until Babylon captured them and took them away.

East Manasseh

²³There were many people in East Manasseh, and they lived in the area of Bashan all the way to Baal Hermon, Senir, and Mount Hermon.

²⁴These were the family leaders: Ephraim, Ishi, Eliel, Azriel, Jeremiah, Hodaviah, and Jahdiel. They were all strong, brave, and famous men, and leaders in their families.²⁵ But they sinned against the God that their ancestors had worshiped. They began worshiping the gods of the people in that land, and those were the people God was destroying.²⁶ So the God of Israel made Pul king of Assyria want to go to war. (Pul was also called Tiglath-Pileser.) He captured the people of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh, and he took them away to Halah, Habor, Hara, and near the Gozan River. They have lived there from that time until this day.

Levi's Children

Levi's sons were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.²Kohath's sons were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

³Amram's children were Aaron, Moses, and Miriam.

Aaron's sons were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

⁴Eleazar was the father of Phinehas. Phinehas was the father of Abishua. ⁵Abishua was the father of Bukki. Bukki was the father of Uzzi. ⁶Uzzi was the father of Zerahiah. Zerahiah was the father of Meraioth. ⁷Meraioth was the father of Amariah. Amariah was the father of Ahitub. ⁸Ahitub was the father of Zadok. Zadok was the father of Ahimaaz. ⁹Ahimaaz was the father of Azariah. Azariah was the father of Johanan. ¹⁰Johanan was the father of Azariah. (Azariah was a priest in the Temple Solomon built in Jerusalem.) ¹¹Azariah was the father of Amariah. Amariah was the father of Ahitub. ¹²Ahitub was the father of Zadok. Zadok was the father of Shallum. ¹³Shallum was the father of Hilkiah. Hilkiah was the father of Azariah. ¹⁴Azariah was the father of Seraiah, and Seraiah was the father of Jehozadak.

¹⁵Jehozadak was forced to leave his home when the Lord sent Judah and Jerusalem into captivity under the control of Nebuchadnezzar.

¹⁶Levi's sons were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

¹⁷The names of Gershon's sons were Libni and Shimei.

¹⁸Kohath's sons were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

¹⁹Merari's sons were Mahli and Mushi.

This is a list of the family groups of Levi, listed by the name

of the father of each group.

²⁰Gershon's son was Libni. Libni's son was Jehath. Jehath's son was Zimmah. ²¹Zimmah's son was Joah. Joah's son was Iddo. Iddo's son was Zerah. And Zerah's son was Jeatherai.

²²Kohath's son was Amminadab. Amminadab's son was Korah. Korah's son was Assir. ²³Assir's son was Elkanah. Elkanah's son was Ebiasaph. Ebiasaph's son was Assir. ²⁴Assir's son was Tahath. Tahath's son was Uriel. Uriel's son was Uziah, and Uziah's son was Shaul.

²⁵Elkanah's sons were Amasai and Ahimoth. ²⁶Ahimoth's son was Elkanah. Elkanah's son was Zophai. Zophai's son was Nahath. ²⁷Nahath's son was Eliab. Eliab's son was Jeroham. Jeroham's son was Elkanah, and Elkanah's son was Samuel.

²⁸Samuel's sons were Joel, the first son, and Abijah, the second son.

²⁹Merari's son was Mahli. Mahli's son was Libni. Libni's son was Shimei. Shimei's son was Uzzah. ³⁰Uzzah's son was Shimea. Shimea's son was Haggiah, and Haggiah's son was Asaiah.

The Temple Musicians

³¹David chose some people to be in charge of the music in the house of the Lord. They began their work after the Ark of the Agreement was put there. ³²They served by making music at the Holy Tent (also called the Meeting Tent), and they served until Solomon built the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. They followed the rules for their work.

³³These are the musicians and their sons:

From Kohath's family there was Heman the singer. Heman was Joel's son. Joel was Samuel's son. ³⁴Samuel was Elkanah's son. Elkanah was Jeroham's son. Jeroham was Eliel's son. Eliel was Toah's son. ³⁵Toah was Zuph's son. Zuph was Elkanah's son. Elkanah was Mahath's son. Mahath was Amasai's son. ³⁶Amasai was Elkanah's son. Elkanah was Joel's son. Joel was Azariah's son. Azariah was Zephaniah's son. ³⁷Zephaniah was Tahath's son. Tahath was Assir's son. Assir was Ebiasaph's son. Ebiasaph was Korah's son. ³⁸Korah was Izhar's son. Izhar was Kohath's son. Kohath was Levi's son. Levi was Israel's son.

³⁹There was Heman's helper Asaph, whose group stood by Heman's right side. Asaph was Berekiah's son. Berekiah was Shimea's son. ⁴⁰Shimea was Michael's son. Michael was Baaseiah's son. Baaseiah was Malkijah's son. ⁴¹Malkijah was Ethni's son. Ethni was Zerah's son. Zerah was Adaiah's son. ⁴²Adaiah was Ethan's son. Ethan was Zimmah's son. Zimmah was Shimei's son. ⁴³Shimei was Jahath's son. Jahath was Gershon's son, and Gershon was Levi's son.

⁴⁴Merari's family were the helpers of Heman and Asaph, and they stood by Heman's left side. In this group was Ethan son of Kishi. Kishi was Abdi's son. Abdi was Malluch's son. ⁴⁵Malluch was Hashabiah's son. Hashabiah was Amaziah's son. Amaziah was Hilkiah's son. ⁴⁶Hilkiah was Amzi's son. Amzi was Bani's son. Bani was Shemer's son. ⁴⁷Shemer was Mahli's son. Mahli was Mushi's son. Mushi was Merari's son, and Merari was Levi's son.

⁴⁸The other Levites served by doing their own special work in the Holy Tent, the house of God. ⁴⁹Aaron and his descendants offered the sacrifices on the altar of burnt offering

and burned the incense on the altar of incense. They offered the sacrifices that removed the Israelites' sins so they could belong to God. They did all the work in the Most Holy Place and followed all the laws that Moses, God's servant, had commanded.

⁵⁰These were Aaron's sons: Eleazar was Aaron's son. Phinehas was Eleazar's son. Abishua was Phinehas' son.

⁵¹Bukki was Abishua's son. Uzzi was Bukki's son. Zerahiah was Uzzi's son. ⁵²Meraioth was Zerahiah's son. Amariah was Meraioth's son. Ahitub was Amariah's son. ⁵³Zadok was Ahitub's son, and Ahimaaz was Zadok's son.

Land for the Levites

⁵⁴These are the places where Aaron's descendants lived. His descendants from the Kohath family group received the first share of the land.

⁵⁵They were given the city of Hebron in Judah and the pastures around it, ⁵⁶but the fields farther from the city and the villages near Hebron were given to Caleb son of Jephunneh.

⁵⁷So the descendants of Aaron were given Hebron, one of the cities of safety. They also received the towns and pastures of Libnah, Jattir, Eshtemoa, ⁵⁸Hilen, Debir, ⁵⁹Ashan, Juttah, and Beth Shemesh. ⁶⁰They also received these towns and pastures from the tribe of Benjamin: Gibeon, Geba, Alemeth, and Anathoth.

The Kohath family groups received a total of thirteen towns.

⁶¹The rest of the Kohath family group was given ten towns from the family groups of West Manasseh. The towns were

chosen by throwing lots.

⁶²The Gershon family group received thirteen towns from the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and the part of Manasseh living in Bashan.

⁶³The Merari family group received twelve towns from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. Those towns were chosen by throwing lots.

⁶⁴So the Israelites gave these towns and their pastures to the Levites. ⁶⁵The towns from the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin, which were named, were chosen by throwing lots.

⁶⁶Some of the Kohath family groups received towns and pastures from the tribe of Ephraim. ⁶⁷They received Shechem, one of the [cities of safety](#), with its pastures in the mountains of Ephraim. They also received the towns and pastures of Gezer, ⁶⁸Jokmeam, Beth Horon, ⁶⁹Aijalon, and Gath Rimmon.

⁷⁰The rest of the people in the Kohath family group received the towns of Aner and Bileam and their pastures from West Manasseh.

⁷¹From East Manasseh, the Gershon family received the towns and pastures of Golan in Bashan and Ashtaroth.

⁷²⁻⁷³From the tribe of Issachar, the Gershon family received the towns and pastures of Kedesh, Daberath, Ramoth, and Anem.

⁷⁴⁻⁷⁵From the tribe of Asher, the Gershon family received the towns and pastures of Mashal, Abdon, Hukok, and Rehob.

⁷⁶From the tribe of Naphtali, the Gershon family received the towns and pastures of Kedesh in Galilee, Hammon, and Kiriathaim.

⁷⁷The rest of the Levites, the people from the Merari family, received from the tribe of Zebulun the towns and pastures of

Jokneam, Kartah, Rimmono, and Tabor.

⁷⁸⁻⁷⁹From the tribe of Reuben, the Merari family received the towns and pastures of Bezer in the desert, Jahzah, Kedemoth, and Mephaath. (The tribe of Reuben lived east of the Jordan River, across from Jericho.)

⁸⁰⁻⁸¹From the tribe of Gad, the Merari family received the towns and pastures of Ramoth in Gilead, Mahanaim, Heshbon, and Jazer.

Issachar's Children

Issachar had four sons: Tola, Puah, Jashub, and Shimron.

²Tola's sons were Uzzi, Rephaiah, Jeriel, Jahmai, Ibsam, and Samuel, and they were leaders of their families. In the family history of Tola's descendants, twenty-two thousand six hundred men were listed as fighting men during the time David was king.

³Uzzi's son was Izrahiah.

Izrahiah's sons were Michael, Obadiah, Joel, and Isshiah. All five of them were leaders. ⁴Their family history shows they had thirty-six thousand men ready to serve in the army, because they had many wives and children.

⁵The records of the family groups of Issachar show there were eighty-seven thousand fighting men.

Benjamin's Children

⁶Benjamin had three sons: Bela, Beker, and Jediahel.

⁷Bela had five sons: Ezbon, Uzzi, Uzziel, Jerimoth, and Iri, and they were leaders of their families. Their family history shows they had twenty-two thousand thirty-four fighting men.

⁸Beker's sons were Zemirah, Joash, Eliezer, Elioenai, Omri, Jeremoth, Abijah, Anathoth, and Alemeth. They all were Beker's sons. ⁹Their family history listed the family leaders and twenty thousand two hundred fighting men.

¹⁰Jediahel's son was Bilhan.

Bilhan's sons were Jeush, Benjamin, Ehud, Kenaanah,

Zethan, Tarshish, and Ahishahar. ¹¹All these sons of Jediahel were leaders of their families. They had seventeen thousand two hundred fighting men ready to serve in the army.

¹²The Shuppites and Huppites were descendants of Ir, and the Hushites were descendants of Aher.

Naphtali's Children

¹³Naphtali's sons were Jahziel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. They were Bilhah's grandsons.

Manasseh's Children

¹⁴These are Manasseh's descendants. Manasseh had an Aramean slave woman, who was the mother of Asriel and Makir. Makir was Gilead's father. ¹⁵Makir took a wife from the Huppites and Shuppites. His sister was named Maacah. His second son was named Zelophehad, and he had only daughters. ¹⁶Makir's wife Maacah had a son whom she named Peresh. Peresh's brother was named Sheresh. Sheresh's sons were Ulam and Rakem.

¹⁷Ulam's son was Bedan.

These were the sons of Gilead, who was the son of Makir. Makir was Manasseh's son. ¹⁸Makir's sister Hammoleketh gave birth to Ishhod, Abiezer, and Mahlah.

¹⁹The sons of Shemida were Ahian, Shechem, Likhi, and Aniam.

Ephraim's Children

²⁰These are the names of Ephraim's descendants. Ephraim's son was Shuthelah. Shuthelah's son was Bered. Bered's son was Tahath. Tahath's son was Eleadah. Eleadah's son was Tahath. ²¹Tahath's son was Zabad. Zabad's son was Shuthelah.

Ezer and Elead went to Gath to steal cows and sheep and were killed by some men who grew up in that city. ²²Their father Ephraim cried for them many days, and his family came to comfort him. ²³Then he had sexual relations with his wife again. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son whom Ephraim named Beriah because of the trouble that had happened to his family. ²⁴Ephraim's daughter was Sheerah. She built Lower Beth Horon, Upper Beth Horon, and Uzen Sheerah.

²⁵Rephah was Ephraim's son. Resheph was Rephah's son. Telah was Resheph's son. Tahan was Telah's son. ²⁶Ladan was Tahan's son. Ammihud was Ladan's son. Elishama was Ammihud's son. ²⁷Nun was Elishama's son, and Joshua was the son of Nun.

²⁸Ephraim's descendants lived in these lands and towns: Bethel and the villages near it, Naaran on the east, Gezer and the villages near it on the west, and Shechem and the villages near it. These villages went all the way to Ayyah and its villages. ²⁹Along the borders of Manasseh's land were the towns of Beth Shan, Taanach, Megiddo, and Dor, and the villages near them. The descendants of Joseph son of Israel lived in these towns.

Asher's Children

³⁰Asher's sons were Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah. Their

sister was Serah.

³¹Beriah's sons were Heber and Malkiel. Malkiel was Birzaith's father.

³²Heber was the father of Japhlet, Shomer, Hotham, and their sister Shua.

³³Japhlet's sons were Pasach, Bimhal, and Ashvath. They were Japhlet's children.

³⁴Japhlet's brother was Shomer. Shomer's sons were Rohgah, Hubbah, and Aram.

³⁵Shomer's brother was Hotham. Hotham's sons were Zophah, Imna, Shelesh, and Amal.

³⁶Zophah's sons were Suah, Hamepher, Shual, Beri, Imrah,
³⁷Bezer, Hod, Shamma, Shilshah, Ithran, and Beera.

³⁸Jether's sons were Jephunneh, Pispah, and Ara.

³⁹Ulla's sons were Arah, Hanniel, and Rizia.

⁴⁰All these men were descendants of Asher and leaders of their families. They were powerful warriors and outstanding leaders. Their family history lists that they had twenty-six thousand soldiers ready to serve in the army.

The Family History of King Saul

Benjamin was the father of Bela, his first son. Ashbel was his second son, Aharah was his third, ²Nohah was his fourth, and Rapha was his fifth son.

³Bela's sons were Addar, Gera, Abihud, ⁴Abishua, Naaman, Ahoah, ⁵Gera, Shephuphan, and Huram.

⁶These were the descendants of Ehud and leaders of their families in Geba. They were forced to move to Manahath. ⁷Ehud's descendants were Naaman, Ahijah, and Gera. Gera forced them to leave. He was the father of Uzza and Ahihud.

⁸⁻¹¹Shaharaim and his wife Hushim had sons named Abitub and Elpaal. In Moab, Shaharaim divorced his wives Hushim and Baara. Shaharaim and his wife Hodesh had these sons: Jobab, Zibia, Mesha, Malcam, Jeuz, Sakia, and Mirmah. They were leaders of their families.

¹²⁻¹³Elpaal's sons were Eber, Misham, Shemed, Beriah, and Shema. Shemed built the towns of Ono and Lod and the villages around them. Beriah and Shema were leaders of the families living in Aijalon, and they forced out the people who lived in Gath.

¹⁴Beriah's sons were Ahio, Shashak, Jeremoth, ¹⁵Zebadiah, Arad, Eder, ¹⁶Michael, Ishpah, and Joha.

¹⁷Elpaal's sons were Zebadiah, Meshullam, Hizki, Heber, ¹⁸Ishmerai, Izliah, and Jobab.

¹⁹Shimei's sons were Jakim, Zicri, Zabdi, ²⁰Elienai, Zillethai, Eiel, ²¹Adaiah, Beraiah, and Shimrath.

²²Shashak's sons were Ishpan, Eber, Eliel, ²³Abdon, Zicri,

Hanan, ²⁴Hananiah, Elam, Anthothijah, ²⁵Iphdeiah, and Penuel.

²⁶Jeroham's sons were Shamsheraï, Shehariah, Athaliah, ²⁷Jareshiah, Elijah, and Zicri.

²⁸The family histories show that all these men were leaders of their families and lived in Jerusalem.

²⁹Jeiel lived in the town of Gibeon, where he was the leader. His wife was named Maacah. ³⁰Jeiel's first son was Abdon. His other sons were Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, ³¹Gedor, Ahio, Zeker, ³²and Mikloth. Mikloth was the father of Shimeah. These sons also lived near their relatives in Jerusalem.

³³Ner was the father of Kish. Kish was the father of Saul, and Saul was the father of Jonathan, Malki-Shua, Abinadab, and EshBaal.

³⁴Jonathan's son was Merib-Baal, who was the father of Micah.

³⁵Micah's sons were Pithon, Melech, Tarea, and Ahaz.

³⁶Ahaz was the father of Jehoaddah. Jehoaddah was the father of Alemeth, Azmaveth, and Zimri. Zimri was the father of Moza.

³⁷Moza was the father of Binea. Raphah was Binea's son. Eleasah was Raphah's son, and Azel was Eleasah's son.

³⁸Azel had six sons: Azrikam, Bokeru, Ishmael, Sheariah, Obadiah, and Hanan. All these were Azel's sons.

³⁹Azel's brother was Eshek. Eshek's first son was Ulam, his second was Jeush, and Eliphelet was his third. ⁴⁰Ulam's sons were mighty warriors and good archers. They had many sons and grandsons—one hundred fifty of them in all.

All these men were Benjamin's descendants.

The names of all the people of Israel were listed in their family histories, and those family histories were put in the book of the kings of Israel.

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 9:2-44

Situation

The families of Israel who lived in Jerusalem after the captivity were recorded.

Observation

God holds his people accountable for the stewardship of their belongings. Each person must contribute to God's work and to the upkeep of his house.

Inspiration

You have a responsibility to build up your church and help it to be and do what Jesus created it to be and do. You could do so much for your church if you would just give yourself and your church a chance. For instance, if your church has a weekly prayer meeting, you could get your whole youth group together and show up. It would be wild if you didn't tell your pastor in advance. You would blow his mind. Have you ever thought of doing that? Or, have you thought of going to a church business meeting to share your beliefs and convictions about how the church can minister to the world? Your church needs your input. If you come in a loving and humble manner, the faithful workers in the church will be thrilled to see you taking an active part in the life of

the church. You will be a source of encouragement to everyone.

You need the church and the church desperately needs you. If you are not affiliated with the church, you have denied yourself one of the major means through which God wants to keep you faithful to Him. (From *You Can Make a Difference* by Tony Campolo)

Application

Do you participate in church? Use your God-given gifts and your temperament to help build the church. Help out in the nursery, with Sunday school, in a fellowship group ...

Exploration

The Spiritual House of God—[Matthew 16:18](#); [Ephesians 1:21–23](#); [Hebrews 3:6](#); [1 Peter 2:5](#).

We know he has a tattoo, and we know what it says. “I have written your name on my hand,” he declares ([Isaiah 49:16](#)). —Max Lucado (*In the Grip of Grace*)

The People in Jerusalem

The people of Judah were captured and forced to go to Babylon, because they were not faithful to God.²The first people to come back and live in their own lands and towns were some Israelites, priests, Levites, and Temple servants.

³People from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh lived in Jerusalem. This is a list of those people.

⁴There was Uthai son of Ammihud. (Ammihud was Omri’s son. Omri was Imri’s son. Imri was Bani’s son. Bani was a descendant of Perez, and Perez was Judah’s son.)

⁵Of the Shilonite people there were Asaiah and his sons. Asaiah was the oldest son in his family.

⁶Of the Zerahite people there were Jeuel and other relatives of Zerah. There were six hundred ninety of them in all.

⁷From the tribe of Benjamin there was Sallu son of Meshullam. (Meshullam was Hodaviah’s son, and Hodaviah was Hassenuah’s son.)⁸There was also Ibneiah son of Jeroham and Elah son of Uzzi. (Uzzi was Micri’s son.) And there was Meshullam son of Shephatiah. (Shephatiah was Reuel’s son, and Reuel was Ibnijah’s son.)⁹The family history of Benjamin lists nine hundred fifty-six people living in Jerusalem, and all these were leaders of their families.

¹⁰Of the priests there were Jedaiah, Jehoiarib, Jakin, and

¹¹Azariah son of Hilkiah. (Hilkiah was Meshullam's son. Meshullam was Zadok's son. Zadok was Meraioth's son. Meraioth was Ahitub's son. Ahitub was the officer responsible for the Temple of God.) ¹²Also there was Adaiah son of Jeroham. (Jeroham was Pashhur's son, and Pashhur was Malkijah's son.) And there was Maasai son of Adiel. (Adiel was Jahzerah's son. Jahzerah was Meshullam's son. Meshullam was Meshillemith's son, and Meshillemith was Immer's son.) ¹³There were one thousand seven hundred sixty priests. They were leaders of their families, and they were responsible for serving in the Temple of God.

¹⁴Of the Levites there was Shemaiah son of Hasshub. (Hasshub was Azrikam's son, and Azrikam was Hashabiah's son. Hashabiah was from the family of Merari.) ¹⁵There were also Bakbakkar, Heresh, Galal, and Mattaniah son of Mica. (Mica was Zicri's son, and Zicri was Asaph's son.) ¹⁶There was also Obadiah son of Shemaiah. (Shemaiah was Galal's son, and Galal was Jeduthun's son.) And there was Berekiah son of Asa. (Asa was the son of Elkanah, who lived in the villages of the Netophathites.) ¹⁷Of the gatekeepers there were Shallum, Akkub, Talmon, Ahiman, and their relatives. Shallum was their leader. ¹⁸These gatekeepers from the tribe of Levi still stand next to the King's Gate on the east side of the city. ¹⁹Shallum was Kore's son. Kore was Ebiasaph's son, and Ebiasaph was Korah's son. Shallum and his relatives from the family of Korah were gatekeepers and were responsible for guarding the gates of the Temple. Their ancestors had also been responsible for guarding the entrance to the Temple of the Lord. ²⁰In the past Phinehas, Eleazar's son, was in charge of the gatekeepers, and the Lord was with Phinehas. ²¹Zechariah son of Meshelemiah

was the gatekeeper at the entrance to the Temple.

²²In all, two hundred twelve men were chosen to guard the gates, and their names were written in their family histories in their villages. David and Samuel the seer chose these men because they were dependable. ²³The gatekeepers and their descendants had to guard the gates of the Temple of the Lord. (The Temple took the place of the Holy Tent.) ²⁴There were gatekeepers on all four sides of the Temple: east, west, north, and south. ²⁵The gatekeepers' relatives who lived in the villages had to come and help them at times. Each time they came they helped the gatekeepers for seven days. ²⁶Because they were dependable, four gatekeepers were made the leaders of all the gatekeepers. They were Levites, and they were responsible for the rooms and treasures in the Temple of God. ²⁷They stayed up all night guarding the Temple of God, and they opened it every morning.

²⁸Some of the gatekeepers were responsible for the utensils used in the Temple services. They counted these utensils when people took them out and when they brought them back. ²⁹Other gatekeepers were chosen to take care of the furniture and utensils in the Holy Place. They also took care of the flour, wine, oil, incense, and spices, ³⁰but some of the priests took care of mixing the spices. ³¹There was a Levite named Mattithiah who was dependable and had the job of baking the bread used for the offerings. He was the first son of Shallum, who was from the family of Korah. ³²Some of the gatekeepers from the Kohath family had the job of preparing the special bread that was put on the table every Sabbath day.

³³Some of the Levites were musicians in the Temple. The leaders of these families stayed in the rooms of the Temple.

Since they were on duty day and night, they did not do other work in the Temple.

³⁴These are the leaders of the Levite families. Their names were listed in their family histories, and they lived in Jerusalem.

The Family History of King Saul

³⁵Jeiel lived in the town of Gibeon, where he was the leader. His wife was named Maacah. ³⁶Jeiel's first son was Abdon. His other sons were Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, ³⁷Gedor, Ahio, Zechariah, and Mikloth. ³⁸Mikloth was Shimeam's father. Jeiel's family lived near their relatives in Jerusalem.

³⁹Ner was Kish's father. Kish was Saul's father. Saul was the father of Jonathan, Malki-Shua, Abinadab, and EshBaal.

⁴⁰Jonathan's son was Merib-Baal, who was the father of Micah.

⁴¹Micah's sons were Pithon, Melech, Tahrea, and Ahaz.

⁴²Ahaz was Jadah's father. Jadah was the father of Alemeth, Azmaveth, and Zimri. Zimri was Moza's father. ⁴³Moza was Binea's father. Rephaiah was Binea's son. Eleasah was Rephaiah's son, and Azel was Eleasah's son.

⁴⁴Azel had six sons: Azrikam, Bokeru, Ishmael, Sheariah, Obadiah, and Hanan. They were Azel's sons.

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 10:1–12:40

Situation

After Saul's death, David was anointed king of Judah. Even so, it was more than seven years later before he ruled over all of Israel. That seven-year period was marked by civil war and Philistine domination.

Observation

Failure results when people forsake God. We must choose to follow and fight for the kingdom that follows God rather than the one that forsakes him.

Inspiration

On the very spot where the evil ambitions of the Third Reich were born, we came to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Nazis had promised the German people a thousand-year regime of military might and power and awful judgment; I spoke to them of the good news of forgiveness and the love of God. It was a different time. It was a message for a people struggling between the failures of history and ideology and their hopes for peace and security.

The entire world watched via satellite when the Berlin Wall came down. I suspect a large part of the shock expressed by the world was not because the hideous wall had at last fallen, but that the emotional and political barriers to peace were being taken away, stone by stone....

The place where I stood to address the German

people on that afternoon in March 1990 was only yards away from the shattered section of the Berlin Wall where workers with saws and torches were ripping out the bars that supported the barriers. By a show of hands, I learned that more than half of the fifteen thousand to seventeen thousand people who came out to brave the wind and rain were from East Germany. They listened attentively and hopefully, and I wanted to give them a message of peace, a message as big as their dreams.

I told these expectant men and women that the world was watching them by satellite and that Christians everywhere were praying for them. I said it was “with tears of rejoicing and happiness as we watched you coming through the wall.” Because of these events, there was a new “hope that peace was on its way to our world.” “God has answered our prayers,” I assured them, and the changes taking place in the world prove that He cares for us.

(From *Storm Warning* by Billy Graham)

Application

Which side are you on? Which kingdom do you fight for? Speak for? Pray for? Pray for the fortitude to stand for God’s kingdom, even if it brings personal loss to you.

Exploration

Serve God—[Exodus 23:22](#); [Joshua 24:15](#); [Galatians 6:7–10](#).

The Death of King Saul

The Philistines fought against Israel, and the Israelites ran away from them. Many Israelites were killed on Mount Gilboa.

²The Philistines fought hard against Saul and his sons, killing his sons Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malki-Shua. ³The fighting was heavy around Saul, and the archers shot him with their arrows and wounded him.

⁴Then Saul said to the officer who carried his armor, “Pull out your sword and stab me. If you don’t, these Philistines who are not circumcised will come and hurt me.” But Saul’s officer refused, because he was afraid. So Saul took his own sword and threw himself on it. ⁵When the officer saw that Saul was dead, he threw himself on his own sword and died. ⁶So Saul and three of his sons died; all his family died together.

⁷When the Israelites living in the valley saw that their army had run away and that Saul and his sons were dead, they left their towns and ran away. Then the Philistines came and settled in them.

⁸The next day when the Philistines came to strip the dead soldiers, they found Saul and his sons dead on Mount Gilboa. ⁹The Philistines stripped Saul’s body and took his head and his armor. Then they sent messengers through all their country to tell the news to their idols and to their people. ¹⁰The Philistines put Saul’s armor in the temple of their idols and hung his head in the temple of Dagon.

¹¹All the people in Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul. ¹²So the brave men of Jabesh went and got the bodies of Saul and his sons and brought them to Jabesh. They buried their bones under the large tree in Jabesh. Then the people of Jabesh gave up eating for seven days.

¹³Saul died because he was not faithful to the Lord and did not obey the Lord. He even went to a medium and asked her for advice ¹⁴instead of asking the Lord. This is why the Lord put Saul to death and gave the kingdom to Jesse's son David.

David Becomes King

Then the people of Israel came to David at the town of Hebron and said, “Look, we are your own family. ²Even when Saul was king, you were the one who led Israel in battle. The Lord your God said to you, ‘You will be the shepherd for my people Israel. You will be their leader.’”

³So all the older leaders of Israel came to King David at Hebron. He made an agreement with them in Hebron in the presence of the Lord. Then they poured oil on David to make him king over Israel. The Lord had promised through Samuel that this would happen.

David Captures Jerusalem

⁴David and all the Israelites went to the city of Jerusalem. At that time Jerusalem was called Jebus, and the people living there were named Jebusites. ⁵They said to David, “You can’t get inside our city.” But David did take the city of Jerusalem with its strong walls, and it became the City of David.

⁶David had said, “The person who leads the attack against the Jebusites will become the commander over all my army.” Joab son of Zeruiah led the attack, so he became the commander of the army.

⁷Then David made his home in the strong, walled city, which is why it was named the City of David. ⁸David rebuilt the city, beginning where the land was filled in and going to the wall that was around the city. Joab repaired the other parts of

the city. ⁹David became stronger and stronger, and the Lord All-Powerful was with him.

David's Mighty Warriors

¹⁰This is a list of the leaders over David's warriors who helped make David's kingdom strong. All the people of Israel also supported David's kingdom. These heroes and all the people of Israel made David king, just as the Lord had promised.

¹¹This is a list of David's warriors:

Jashobeam was from the Hacmonite people. He was the head of the [Three](#), David's most powerful soldiers. He used his spear to fight three hundred men at one time, and he killed them all.

¹²Next was Eleazar, one of the Three. Eleazar was Dodai's son from the Ahohite people. ¹³Eleazar was with David at Pas Dammim when the Philistines came there to fight. There was a field of barley at that place. The Israelites ran away from the Philistines, ¹⁴but they stopped in the middle of that field and fought for it and killed the Philistines. The Lord gave them a great victory.

¹⁵Once, three of the Thirty, David's chief soldiers, came down to him at the rock by the cave near Adullam. At the same time the Philistine army had camped in the Valley of Rephaim.

¹⁶At that time David was in a stronghold, and some of the Philistines were in Bethlehem. ¹⁷David had a strong desire for some water. He said, "Oh, I wish someone would get me water from the well near the city gate of Bethlehem!" ¹⁸So the Three broke through the Philistine army and took water from the well near the city gate in Bethlehem. Then they brought it to David,

but he refused to drink it. He poured it out before the Lord,¹⁹saying, “May God keep me from drinking this water! It would be like drinking the blood of the men who risked their lives to bring it to me!” So David refused to drink it.

These were the brave things that the three warriors did.

²⁰Abishai brother of Joab was the captain of the Three. Abishai fought three hundred soldiers with his spear and killed them. He became as famous as the Three²¹and was more honored than the Three. He became their commander even though he was not one of them.

²²Benaiah son of Jehoiada was a brave fighter from Kabzeel who did mighty things. He killed two of the best warriors from Moab. He also went down into a pit and killed a lion on a snowy day. ²³Benaiah killed an Egyptian who was about seven and one-half feet tall and had a spear as large as a weaver’s rod. Benaiah had a club, but he grabbed the spear from the Egyptian’s hand and killed him with his own spear. ²⁴These were the things Benaiah son of Jehoiada did. He was as famous as the Three. ²⁵He received more honor than the Thirty, but he did not become a member of the Three. David made him leader of his bodyguards.

The Thirty Chief Soldiers

²⁶These were also mighty warriors:

-
- Asahel brother of Joab;
- Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem;
- ²⁷Shammoth the Harorite;

- Helez the Pelonite;
- ²⁸Ira son of Ikkesh from Tekoa;
- Abiezer the Anathothite;
- ²⁹Sibbecai the Hushathite;
- Ilai the Ahohite;
- ³⁰Maharai the Netophathite;
- Heled son of Baanah the Netophathite;
- ³¹Ithai son of Ribai from Gibeah in Benjamin;
- Benaiah the Pirathonite;
- ³²Hurai from the ravines of Gaash;
- Abiel the Arbathite;
- ³³Azmaveth the Baharumite;
- Eliahba the Shaalbonite;
- ³⁴the sons of Hashem the Gizonite;
- Jonathan son of Shagee the Hararite;
- ³⁵Ahiam son of Sacar the Hararite;
- Eliphal son of Ur;
- ³⁶Hepher the Mekerathite;
- Ahijah the Pelonite;
- ³⁷Hezro the Carmelite;
- Naarai son of Ezbai;
- ³⁸Joel brother of Nathan;
- Mibhar son of Hagri;
- ³⁹Zelek the Ammonite;
- Naharai the Berothite, the officer who carried the armor for Joab son of Zeruiah;
- ⁴⁰Ira the Ithrite;
- Gareb the Ithrite;
- ⁴¹Uriah the Hittite;
- Zabad son of Ahlai;

- ⁴²Adina son of Shiza the Reubenite, who was the leader of the Reubenites, and his thirty soldiers;
- ⁴³Hanan son of Maacah;
- Joshaphat the Mithnite;
- ⁴⁴Uzzia the Ashterathite;
- Shama and Jeiel sons of Hotham the Aroerite;
- ⁴⁵Jediael son of Shimri;
- Joha, Jediael's brother, the Tizite;
- ⁴⁶Eliel the Mahavite;
- Jeribai and Joshaviah, Elnaam's sons;
- Ithmah the Moabite;
- ⁴⁷Eliel, Obed, and Jaasiel the Mezobaite.

Warriors Join David

These were the men who came to David at Ziklag when David was hiding from Saul son of Kish. They were among the warriors who helped David in battle.²They came with bows for weapons and could use either their right or left hands to shoot arrows or to sling rocks. They were Saul's relatives from the tribe of Benjamin.³Ahiezer was their leader, and there was Joash. (Ahiezer and Joash were sons of Shemaah, who was from the town of Gibeah.) There were also Jeziel and Pelet, the sons of Azmaveth. There were Beracah and Jehu from the town of Anathoth.⁴And there was Ishmaiah from the town of Gibeon; he was one of the Thirty. In fact, he was the leader of the Thirty. There were Jeremiah, Jahaziel, Johanan, and Jozabad from Gederah.⁵There were Eluzai, Jerimoth, Bealiah, and Shemariah. There was Shephatiah from Haruph.⁶There were Elkanah, Isshiah, Azarel, Joezer, and Jashobeam from the family group of Korah.⁷And there were Joelah and Zebadiah, the sons of Jeroham, from the town of Gedor.

⁸Part of the people of Gad joined David at his stronghold in the desert. They were brave warriors trained for war and skilled with shields and spears. They were as fierce as lions and as fast as gazelles over the hills.

⁹Ezer was the leader of Gad's army, and Obadiah was second in command. Eliab was third,¹⁰Mishmannah was fourth, Jeremiah was fifth,¹¹Attai was sixth, Eliel was seventh,¹²Johanan was eighth, Elzabad was ninth,¹³Jeremiah was tenth, and Macbannai was eleventh in command.

¹⁴They were the commanders of the army from Gad. The least of these leaders was in charge of a hundred soldiers, and the greatest was in charge of a thousand. ¹⁵They crossed the Jordan River and chased away the people living in the valleys, to the east and to the west. This happened in the first month of the year when the Jordan floods the valley.

¹⁶Other people from the tribes of Benjamin and Judah also came to David at his stronghold. ¹⁷David went out to meet them and said to them, "If you have come peacefully to help me, I welcome you. Join me. But if you have come to turn me over to my enemies, even though I have done nothing wrong, the God of our fathers will see this and punish you."

¹⁸Then the Spirit entered Amasai, the leader of the Thirty, and he said:

"We belong to you, David.
We are with you, son of Jesse.
Success, success to you.
Success to those who help you,
because your God helps you."

So David welcomed these men and made them leaders of his army.

¹⁹Some of the men from Manasseh also joined David when he went with the Philistines to fight Saul. But David and his men did not really help the Philistines. After talking about it, the Philistine leaders decided to send David away. They said, "If David goes back to his master Saul, we will be killed."

²⁰These are the men from Manasseh who joined David when he went to Ziklag: Adnah, Jozabad, Jedaiel, Michael, Jozabad, Elihu, and Zillethai. Each of them was a leader of a thousand

men from Manasseh. ²¹All these men of Manasseh were brave soldiers, and they helped David fight against groups of men who went around the country robbing people. These soldiers became commanders in David's army. ²²Every day more men joined David, and his army became large, like the army of God.

Others Join David at Hebron

²³These are the numbers of the soldiers ready for battle who joined David at Hebron. They came to help turn the kingdom of Saul over to David, just as the Lord had said.

²⁴There were sixty-eight hundred men with their weapons from Judah. They carried shields and spears.

²⁵There were seventy-one hundred men from Simeon. They were warriors ready for war.

²⁶There were forty-six hundred men from Levi. ²⁷Jehoiada, a leader from Aaron's family, was in that group. There were thirty-seven hundred with him. ²⁸Zadok was also in that group. He was a strong young warrior, and with him came twenty-two leaders from his family.

²⁹There were three thousand men from Benjamin, who were Saul's relatives. Most of them had remained loyal to Saul's family until then.

³⁰There were twenty thousand eight hundred men from Ephraim. They were brave warriors and were famous men in their own family groups.

³¹There were eighteen thousand men from West Manasseh. Each one was especially chosen to make David king.

³²There were two hundred leaders from Issachar. They knew what Israel should do, and they knew the right time to do

it. Their relatives were with them and under their command.

³³There were fifty thousand men from Zebulun. They were trained soldiers and knew how to use every kind of weapon of war. They followed David completely.

³⁴There were one thousand officers from Naphtali. They had thirty-seven thousand soldiers with them who carried shields and spears.

³⁵There were twenty-eight thousand six hundred men from Dan, who were ready for war.

³⁶There were forty thousand trained soldiers from Asher, who were ready for war.

³⁷There were one hundred twenty thousand soldiers from the east side of the Jordan River from the people of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh. They had every kind of weapon.

³⁸All these fighting men were ready to go to war. They came to Hebron fully agreed to make David king of all Israel. All the other Israelites also agreed to make David king. ³⁹They spent three days there with David, eating and drinking, because their relatives had prepared food for them. ⁴⁰Also, their neighbors came from as far away as Issachar, Zebulun, and Naphtali, bringing food on donkeys, camels, mules, and oxen. They brought much flour, fig cakes, raisins, wine, oil, cows, and sheep, because the people of Israel were very happy.

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 13:1–14:17

Situation

God had given specific instructions concerning the sacred objects ([Numbers 4:15](#)). God said he would put to death anyone who touched the Ark.

Observation

David became angry at God. Yet, it was David's own neglect that brought God's severe action.

Inspiration

Some time ago, I took my family to the bicycle store to purchase a bike for five-year-old Jenna. She picked out a shiny “Starlett” with a banana seat and training wheels. And Andrea, age three, decided she wanted one as well.

... I told her she was still having trouble with a tricycle and was too small for a two-wheeler. No luck; she still wanted a bike...

Finally I sighed and said this time her daddy knew best. Her response? ...

“Then I want a *new* daddy!”

Though the words were from a child's mouth, they carried an adult's sentiments.

... When we don't agree with the One who calls the shots, our reaction is often the same as Andrea's—the same as John's... . “Are you the one? Should we look for another?”

... John couldn't believe that anything less than his release would be for the best interest of all

involved... . But the One who had the power was “sitting on his hands.”

... You may learn, as John did, that the problem is not as much in God’s silence as it is in your ability to hear.

(From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

God helps us avoid future mistakes by sending people to correct us. When you are corrected, use the opportunity to learn and improve your attitude and work!

Exploration

Obedience—[Exodus 24:7](#); [Psalm 143:10](#); [Isaiah 1:19](#); [Matthew 12:50](#); [John 14:15, 23, 31](#).

If humility precedes an event, then confidence may follow.
—Max Lucado (*Traveling Light*)

Bringing Back the Ark

David talked with all the officers of his army, the commanders of a hundred men and the commanders of a thousand men.² Then David called the people of Israel together and said, “If you think it is a good idea, and if it is what the Lord our God wants, let’s send a message. Let’s tell our fellow Israelites in all the areas of Israel and the priests and Levites living with them in their towns and pastures to come and join us.³ Let’s bring the Ark of our God back to us. We did not use it to ask God for help while Saul was king.”⁴ All the people agreed with David, because they all thought it was the right thing to do.

⁵ So David gathered all the Israelites, from the Shihor River in Egypt to Lebo Hamath, to bring the Ark of God back from the town of Kiriath Jearim.⁶ David and all the Israelites with him went to Baalah of Judah, which is Kiriath Jearim, to get the Ark of God the Lord. God’s throne is between the golden, winged creatures on the Ark, and the Ark is called by his name.

⁷ The people carried the Ark of God from Abinadab’s house on a new cart, and Uzzah and Ahio guided it.⁸ David and all the Israelites were celebrating in the presence of God. With all their strength they were singing and playing lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals, and trumpets.

⁹ When David’s men came to the threshing floor of Kidon,

the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the Ark. ¹⁰The Lord was angry with Uzzah and killed him, because he had touched the Ark. So Uzzah died there in the presence of God.

¹¹David was angry because the Lord had punished Uzzah in his anger. Now that place is called The Punishment of Uzzah.

¹²David was afraid of God that day and asked, “How can I bring the Ark of God home to me?” ¹³So David did not take the Ark with him to Jerusalem. Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-Edom who was from Gath. ¹⁴The Ark of God stayed with Obed-Edom’s family in his house for three months, and the Lord blessed Obed-Edom’s family and everything he owned.

David's Kingdom Grows

Hiram king of the city of Tyre sent messengers to David. He also sent cedar logs, bricklayers, and carpenters to build a palace for David.² Then David knew that the Lord really had made him king of Israel and that he had made his kingdom great. The Lord did this because he loved his people Israel.

³David married more women in Jerusalem and had more sons and daughters. ⁴These are the names of David's children born in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, ⁵Ibhar, Elishua, Elpelet, ⁶Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, ⁷Elishama, Beeliada, and Eliphelet.

David Defeats the Philistines

⁸When the Philistines heard that David had been made king of all Israel, they went to look for him. But David heard about it and went out to fight them. ⁹The Philistines had attacked and robbed the people in the Valley of Rephaim. ¹⁰David asked God, "Should I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?"

The Lord answered him, "Go, I will hand them over to you."

¹¹So David and his men went up to the town of Baal Perazim and defeated the Philistines. David said, "Like a flood of water, God has broken through my enemies by using me." So that place was named [Baal Perazim](#). ¹²The Philistines had left their idols there, so David ordered his men to burn them.

¹³Soon the Philistines attacked the people in the valley

again. ¹⁴David prayed to God again, and God answered him, saying, “Don’t attack the Philistines from the front. Instead, go around them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. ¹⁵When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then attack. I, God, will have gone out before you to defeat the Philistine army.” ¹⁶David did as God commanded, and he and his men defeated the Philistine army all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.

¹⁷So David became famous in all the countries, and the Lord made all nations afraid of him.

The Ark Is Brought to Jerusalem

David built houses for himself in Jerusalem. Then he prepared a place for the Ark of God, and he set up a tent for it. ²David said, “Only the Levites may carry the Ark of God. The Lord chose them to carry the Ark of the Lord and to serve him forever.”

³David called all the people of Israel to come to Jerusalem. He wanted to bring the Ark of the Lord to the place he had made for it. ⁴David called together the descendants of Aaron and the Levites. ⁵There were one hundred twenty people from Kohath’s family group, with Uriel as their leader. ⁶There were two hundred twenty people from Merari’s family group, with Asaiah as their leader. ⁷There were one hundred thirty people from Gershon’s family group, with Joel as their leader. ⁸There were two hundred people from Elizaphan’s family group, with Shemaiah as their leader. ⁹There were eighty people from Hebron’s family group, with Eliel as their leader. ¹⁰And there were one hundred twelve people from Uzziel’s family group, with Amminadab as their leader.

¹¹Then David asked the priests Zadok and Abiathar and these Levites to come to him: Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel, and Amminadab. ¹²David said to them, “You are the leaders of the families of Levi. You and the other Levites must give yourselves for service to the Lord. Bring up the Ark of the Lord, the God of Israel, to the place I have made for it. ¹³The last time we did not ask the Lord how to carry it. You Levites didn’t carry it, so the Lord our God punished us.”

¹⁴Then the priests and Levites prepared themselves for

service to the Lord so they could carry the Ark of the Lord, the God of Israel. ¹⁵The Levites used special poles to carry the Ark of God on their shoulders, as Moses had commanded, just as the Lord had said they should.

¹⁶David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brothers as singers to play their lyres, harps, and cymbals and to sing happy songs.

¹⁷So the Levites appointed Heman and his relatives Asaph and Ethan. Heman was Joel's son. Asaph was Berekiah's son. And Ethan, from the Merari family group, was Kushaiah's son.

¹⁸There was also a second group of Levites: Zechariah, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-Edom, and Jeiel. They were the Levite guards.

¹⁹The singers Heman, Asaph, and Ethan played bronze cymbals. ²⁰Zechariah, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and Benaiah played the lyres. ²¹Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-Edom, Jeiel, and Azariah played the harps. ²²The Levite leader Kenaniah was in charge of the singing, because he was very good at it.

²³Berekiah and Elkanah were two of the guards for the Ark of the Agreement. ²⁴The priests Shebaniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer had the job of blowing trumpets in front of the Ark of God. Obed-Edom and Jehiah were also guards for the Ark.

²⁵David, the leaders of Israel, and the commanders of a thousand soldiers went to get the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord. They all went to bring the Ark from Obed-Edom's house with great joy. ²⁶Because God helped the Levites who carried the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord, they sacrificed

seven bulls and seven male sheep.²⁷ All the Levites who carried the Ark, and Kenaniah, the man in charge of the singing, and all the singers wore robes of fine linen. David also wore a robe of fine linen and a holy vest of fine linen.²⁸ So all the people of Israel brought up the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord. They shouted, blew horns and trumpets, and played cymbals, lyres, and harps.

²⁹ As the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord entered Jerusalem, Saul's daughter Michal watched from a window. When she saw King David dancing and celebrating, she hated him.

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 15:1–17:27

Situation

David learned from his previous mistake. When they moved the Ark, David and his men carefully followed God's instructions.

Observation

David's praise-filled reception of God's Ark demonstrates genuine spiritual worship. God showed that he was greatly pleased with such worship and honor.

Inspiration

Although it is intensely personal, there is nothing self-centered about genuine worship. If believers are to maintain a consistent lifestyle of continuous worship, they need the fellowship and encouragement of other believers as they assemble for group worship. Individual worship and corporate

worship feed each other. So on the one hand, I need the fellowship of the saints. On the other hand, the community of saints needs me to live a consistent life of worship.

The source of most of the problems people have in their Christian lives relates to two things: either they are not worshiping six days a week with their life, or they are not worshiping one day a week with the assembly of the saints. We need both.

If you go to church only when it is convenient, you will never be victorious and productive as a Christian. You can't succeed on your own; you need to have the spiritual stimulation of fellow believers. We live in such an easy-come, easy-go, casual, flippant society that people don't make consistent, faithful commitments, and then they wonder why they fail. The answer is clear. Spiritual success requires commitment to others....

A pastor went to see a man who didn't attend church very faithfully. The man was sitting before a fire, watching the warm glow of the coals. It was a cold winter day, but the coals were red hot, and the fire was warm. The pastor pleaded with the man to be more faithful in meeting with the people of God, but the man didn't seem to be getting the message.

So the pastor took the tongs beside the fireplace, pulled open the screen, and reached in and began to separate all the coals. When none of the coals was touching the others, he stood and watched in silence. In a matter of moments, they were all cold. "That's what's happening in your life," he told the man. "As

soon as you isolate yourself from God's people, the fire goes out." The man got the message.

The church is not the brick-and-mortar building in which the assembly meets; it is God's people in whom He dwells. In the church—among God's people, the true worshipers—we must bring a worshiping heart to stimulate others while being stimulated to love and good works. As that stimulation affects our souls we do good and share. The cycle is complete when we live out the overflow of praise and a continual heart of thanksgiving. Then worship is a way of life. For that we were redeemed. (From *The Ultimate Priority* by John MacArthur, Jr.)

Application

Plan for a special day this Sunday. On Saturday night, start preparing your heart and mind for worship. On Sunday, anticipate worship.

Exploration

Attitude of Worship—[1 Chronicles 29:9](#); [Psalms 27:4](#); [51:16–17](#); [84:1–3](#); [John 4:23–24](#); [Romans 12:1](#); [Philippians 3:3](#); [Hebrews 10:1–10](#).

They brought the Ark of God and put it inside the tent that David had set up for it. Then they offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to God. ²When David had finished giving the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord. ³He gave a loaf of bread, some dates, and raisins to every Israelite man and woman.

⁴Then David appointed some of the Levites to serve before the Ark of the Lord. They had the job of leading the worship and giving thanks and praising the Lord, the God of Israel. ⁵Asaph, who played the cymbals, was the leader. Zechariah was second to him. The other Levites were Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-Edom, and Jeiel. They played the lyres and harps. ⁶Benaiah and Jahaziel were priests who blew the trumpets regularly before the Ark of the Agreement with God. ⁷That day David first gave Asaph and his relatives the job of singing praises to the Lord.

David's Song of Thanks

⁸Give thanks to the Lord and pray to him.
Tell the nations what he has done.

⁹Sing to him; sing praises to him.
Tell about all his miracles.

¹⁰Be glad that you are his;
let those who seek the Lord be happy.

¹¹Depend on the Lord and his strength;
always go to him for help.

¹²Remember the miracles he has done,
his wonders, and his decisions.

¹³You are the descendants of his servant, Israel;
you are the children of Jacob, his chosen people.

¹⁴He is the Lord our God.
His laws are for all the world.

¹⁵He will keep his agreement forever;
he will keep his promises always.

¹⁶He will keep the agreement he made with Abraham
and the promise he made to Isaac.

¹⁷He made it a law for the people of Jacob;
he made it an agreement with Israel to last forever.

¹⁸He said, "I will give the land of Canaan to you,
to belong to you."

¹⁹Then God's people were few in number,
and they were strangers in the land.

²⁰They went from one nation to another,
from one kingdom to another.

²¹But he did not let anyone hurt them;
he warned kings not to harm them.

²²He said, "Don't touch my chosen people,
and don't harm my prophets."

²³Sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Every day tell how he saves us.

²⁴Tell the nations about his glory;
tell all peoples the miracles he does.

²⁵The Lord is great; he should be praised.
He should be respected more than all the gods.

²⁶All the gods of the nations are only idols,
but the Lord made the skies.

²⁷He has glory and majesty;
he has power and joy in his Temple.

²⁸Praise the Lord, all nations on earth.

Praise the Lord's glory and power;

²⁹praise the glory of the Lord's name.

Bring an offering and come to him.

Worship the Lord because he is holy.

³⁰Tremble before him, everyone on earth.

The earth is set, and it cannot be moved.

³¹Let the skies rejoice and the earth be glad.

Let people everywhere say, "The Lord is king!"

³²Let the sea and everything in it shout;

let the fields and everything in them rejoice.

³³Then the trees of the forest will sing

for joy before the Lord.

They will sing because he is coming to judge the world.

³⁴Thank the Lord because he is good.

His love continues forever.

³⁵Say to him, "Save us, God our Savior,

and bring us back and save us from other nations.

Then we will thank you

and will gladly praise you."

³⁶Praise the Lord, the God of Israel.

He always was and always will be.

All the people said "Amen" and praised the Lord.

³⁷Then David left Asaph and the other Levites there in front of the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord. They were to serve

there every day. ³⁸David also left Obed-Edom and sixty-eight other Levites to serve with them. Hosah and Obed-Edom son of Jeduthun were guards.

³⁹David left Zadok the priest and the other priests who served with him in front of the Tent of the Lord at the place of worship in Gibeon. ⁴⁰Every morning and evening they offered burnt offerings on the altar of burnt offerings, following the rules written in the Teachings of the Lord, which he had given Israel. ⁴¹With them were Heman and Jeduthun and other Levites. They were chosen by name to sing praises to the Lord because his love continues forever. ⁴²Heman and Jeduthun also had the job of playing the trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments when songs were sung to God. Jeduthun's sons guarded the gates.

⁴³Then all the people left. Each person went home, and David also went home to bless the people in his home.

God's Promise to David

When David moved into his palace, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Look, I am living in a palace made of cedar, but the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord sits in a tent."

²Nathan said to David, "Do what you want to do, because God is with you."

³But that night God spoke his word to Nathan, saying, ⁴"Go and tell David my servant, 'This is what the Lord says: You are not the person to build a house for me to live in. ⁵From the time I brought Israel out of Egypt until now I have not lived in a house. I have moved from one tent site to another and from one place to another. ⁶As I have moved with the Israelites to different places, I have never said to the leaders, whom I commanded to take care of my people, 'Why haven't you built me a house of cedar?'"

⁷"Now, tell my servant David: 'This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: I took you from the pasture and from tending the sheep and made you king of my people Israel. ⁸I have been with you everywhere you have gone. I have defeated your enemies for you. I will make you as famous as any of the great people on the earth. ⁹I will choose a place for my people Israel, and I will plant them so they can live in their own homes. They will not be bothered anymore. Wicked people will no longer hurt them as they have in the past ¹⁰when I chose judges for my people Israel. I will defeat all your enemies.

"I tell you that the Lord will make your descendants kings of Israel after you. ¹¹When you die and join your ancestors, I

will make one of your sons the new king, and I will set up his kingdom. ¹²He will build a house for me, and I will let his kingdom rule always. ¹³I will be his father, and he will be my son. I took away my love from Saul, who ruled before you, but I will never stop loving your son. ¹⁴I will put him in charge of my house and kingdom forever. His family will rule forever.”

¹⁵Nathan told David everything God had said in this vision.

David Prays to God

¹⁶Then King David went in and sat in front of the Lord. David said, “Lord God, who am I? What is my family? Why did you bring me to this point? ¹⁷But that was not enough for you, God. You have also made promises about my future family. Lord God, you have treated me like a very important person.

¹⁸“What more can I say to you for honoring me, your servant? You know me so well. ¹⁹Lord, you have done this wonderful thing for my sake and because you wanted to. You have made known all these great things.

²⁰“There is no one like you, Lord. There is no God except you. We have heard all this ourselves! ²¹There is no nation like your people Israel. They are the only people on earth that God chose to be his own. You made your name well known by the great and wonderful things you did for them. You went ahead of them and forced other nations out of the land. You freed your people from slavery in Egypt. ²²You made the people of Israel your very own people forever, and, Lord, you are their God.

²³“Lord, keep the promise forever that you made about my family and me, your servant. Do what you have said. ²⁴Then

you will be honored always, and people will say, ‘The Lord All-Powerful, the God over Israel, is Israel’s God!’ And the family of your servant David will continue before you.

²⁵“My God, you have told me that you would make my family great. So I, your servant, am brave enough to pray to you. ²⁶Lord, you are God, and you have promised these good things to me, your servant. ²⁷You have chosen to bless my family. Let it continue before you always. Lord, you have blessed my family, so it will always be blessed.”

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 18:1–22:1

Situation

God gave David victory over the surrounding kings. David congratulated himself by taking a census of the people to portray his power.

Observation

In repenting, David acknowledged that he would rather fall into the hands of the Lord than the hands of men ([21:13](#)). He called the Lord “very merciful.”

Inspiration

The beautiful thing about mercy is that it is demonstrated to the offender as well as to the victim. When the offender realizes his or her wrong, God brings mercy. When the victim needs help to go on, God gives mercy ...

The connecting link between a holy God and a sinful person is God’s love, which activates His grace, which, in turn, sets in motion His mercy. They’re like divine dominoes that bump up against one another. He loves us not because of something in ourselves but because of something in Himself. And in His love He demonstrates His grace, which brings forgiveness. And on top of that, grace prompts mercy ... and there it is: *relief*. (From *The Mystery of God’s Will* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

What an amazing concept: mercy. Spend the next week thanking God daily for his immeasurable mercy

and grace. Thank him that you will receive more mercy from him than from others.

Exploration

Mercy—[Exodus 34:6](#); [Psalm 103:8](#); [Romans 9:15](#); [1 Corinthians 7:25](#); [Ephesians 2:4](#); [James 5:11](#).

David Defeats Nations

Later, David defeated the Philistines, conquered them, and took the city of Gath and the small towns around it.

²He also defeated the people of Moab. So the people of Moab became servants of David and gave him the payment he demanded.

³David also defeated Hadadezer king of Zobah all the way to the town of Hamath as he tried to spread his kingdom to the Euphrates River. ⁴David captured one thousand of his chariots, seven thousand men who rode in chariots, and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He crippled all but a hundred of the chariot horses.

⁵Arameans from Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, but David killed twenty-two thousand of them. ⁶Then David put groups of soldiers in Damascus in Aram. The Arameans became David's servants and gave him the payments he demanded. So the Lord gave David victory everywhere he went.

⁷David took the shields of gold that had belonged to Hadadezer's officers and brought them to Jerusalem. ⁸David also took many things made of bronze from Tebah and Cun, which had been cities under Hadadezer's control. Later, Solomon used this bronze to make things for the Temple: the large bronze bowl, which was called the Sea, the pillars, and other bronze utensils.

⁹Toi king of Hamath heard that David had defeated all the army of Hadadezer king of Zobah. ¹⁰So Toi sent his son Hadoram to greet and congratulate King David for defeating Hadadezer. (Hadadezer had been at war with Toi.) Hadoram brought items made of gold, silver, and bronze. ¹¹King David gave them to the Lord, along with the silver and gold he had taken from these nations: Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, and Amalek.

¹²Abishai son of Zeruiah killed eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. ¹³David put groups of soldiers in Edom, and all the Edomites became his servants. The Lord gave David victory everywhere he went.

David's Important Officers

¹⁴David was king over all of Israel, and he did what was fair and right for all his people. ¹⁵Joab son of Zeruiah was commander over the army. Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was the recorder. ¹⁶Zadok son of Ahitub and Abiathar son of Ahimelech were priests. Shavsha was the royal secretary. ¹⁷Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the [Kerethites and Pelethites](#). And David's sons were important officers who served at his side.

War with the Ammonites and Arameans

When Nahash king of the Ammonites died, his son became king after him. ²David said, “Nahash was loyal to me, so I will be loyal to his son Hanun.” So David sent messengers to comfort Hanun about his father’s death.

David’s officers went to the land of the Ammonites to comfort Hanun. ³But the Ammonite leaders said to Hanun, “Do you think David wants to honor your father by sending men to comfort you? No! David sent them to study the land and capture it and spy it out.” ⁴So Hanun arrested David’s officers. To shame them he shaved their beards and cut off their clothes at the hips. Then he sent them away.

⁵When the people told David what had happened to his officers, he sent messengers to meet them, because they were very ashamed. King David said, “Stay in Jericho until your beards have grown back. Then come home.”

⁶The Ammonites knew that they had insulted David. So Hanun and the Ammonites sent about seventy-four thousand pounds of silver to hire chariots and chariot drivers from Northwest Mesopotamia, Aram Maacah, and Zobah. ⁷The Ammonites hired thirty-two thousand chariots and the king of Maacah and his army. So they came and set up camp near the town of Medeba. The Ammonites themselves came out of their towns and got ready for battle.

⁸When David heard about this, he sent Joab with the whole army. ⁹The Ammonites came out and prepared for battle at the city gate. The kings who had come to help were out in the field by themselves.

¹⁰Joab saw that there were enemies both in front of him and behind him. So he chose some of the best soldiers of Israel and sent them out to fight the Arameans. ¹¹Joab put the rest of the army under the command of Abishai, his brother. Then they went out to fight the Ammonites. ¹²Joab said to Abishai, "If the Arameans are too strong for me, you must help me. Or, if the Ammonites are too strong for you, I will help you. ¹³Be strong. We must fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what he thinks is right."

¹⁴Then Joab and the army with him went to attack the Arameans, and the Arameans ran away. ¹⁵When the Ammonites saw that the Arameans were running away, they also ran away from Joab's brother Abishai and went back to their city. So Joab went back to Jerusalem.

¹⁶When the Arameans saw that Israel had defeated them, they sent messengers to bring other Arameans from east of the Euphrates River. Their leader was Shophach, the commander of Hadadezer's army.

¹⁷When David heard about this, he gathered all the Israelites, and they crossed over the Jordan River. He prepared them for battle, facing the Arameans. The Arameans fought with him, ¹⁸but they ran away from the Israelites. David killed seven thousand Aramean chariot drivers and forty thousand Aramean foot soldiers. He also killed Shophach, the commander of the Aramean army.

¹⁹When those who served Hadadezer saw that the Israelites had defeated them, they made peace with David and served him. So the Arameans refused to help the Ammonites again.

Joab Destroys the Ammonites

In the spring, the time of year when kings normally went out to battle, Joab led out the army of Israel. But David stayed in Jerusalem. The army of Israel destroyed the land of Ammon and went to the city of Rabbah and attacked it. ²David took the crown off the head of [their king](#), and had it placed on his own head. That gold crown weighed about seventy-five pounds, and it had valuable gems in it. And David took many valuable things from the city. ³He also brought out the people of the city and forced them to work with saws, iron picks, and axes. David did this to all the Ammonite cities. Then David and all his army returned to Jerusalem.

Philistine Giants Are Killed

⁴Later, at Gezer, war broke out with the Philistines. Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Sippai, who was one of the descendants of the Rephaites. So those Philistines were defeated.

⁵Later, there was another battle with the Philistines. Elhanan son of Jair killed Lahmi, the brother of Goliath, who was from the town of Gath. His spear was as large as a weaver's rod.

⁶At Gath another battle took place. A huge man was there; he had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot—twenty-four fingers and toes in all. This man also was one of the sons of Rapha. ⁷When he spoke against Israel, Jonathan son of Shimea, David's brother, killed him.

⁸These descendants of Rapha from Gath were killed by

David and his men.

David Counts the Israelites

Satan was against Israel, and he caused David to count the people of Israel. ²So David said to Joab and the commanders of the troops, “Go and count all the Israelites from [Beersheba to Dan](#). Then tell me so I will know how many there are.”

³But Joab said, “May the Lord give the nation a hundred times more people. My master the king, all the Israelites are your servants. Why do you want to do this, my master? You will make Israel guilty of sin.”

⁴But the king commanded Joab, so Joab left and went through all Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem. ⁵Joab gave the list of the people to David. There were one million one hundred thousand men in all of Israel who could use the sword, and there were four hundred seventy thousand men in Judah who could use the sword. ⁶But Joab did not count the tribes of Levi and Benjamin, because he didn’t like King David’s order. ⁷David had done something God had said was wrong, so God punished Israel.

⁸Then David said to God, “I have sinned greatly by what I have done! Now, I beg you to forgive me, your servant, because I have been very foolish.”

⁹The Lord said to Gad, who was David’s seer, ¹⁰“Go and tell David, ‘This is what the Lord says: I offer you three choices. Choose one of them and I will do it.’”

¹¹So Gad went to David and said to him, “This is what the Lord says: ‘Choose for yourself ¹²three years of hunger. Or choose three months of running from your enemies as they

chase you with their swords. Or choose three days of punishment from the Lord, in which a terrible disease will spread through the country. The angel of the Lord will go through Israel destroying the people.' Now, David, decide which of these things I should tell the Lord who sent me."

¹³David said to Gad, "I am in great trouble. Let the Lord punish me, because the Lord is very merciful. Don't let my punishment come from human beings."

¹⁴So the Lord sent a terrible disease on Israel, and seventy thousand people died. ¹⁵God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem, but when the angel started to destroy it, the Lord saw it and felt very sorry about the terrible things that had happened. So he said to the angel who was destroying, "That is enough! Put down your arm!" The angel of the Lord was then standing at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

¹⁶David looked up and saw the angel of the Lord in the sky, holding his sword drawn and pointed at Jerusalem. Then David and the older leaders bowed facedown on the ground. They were wearing rough cloth to show their grief. ¹⁷David said to God, "I am the one who sinned and did wrong. I gave the order for the people to be counted. These people only followed me like sheep. They did nothing wrong. Lord my God, please punish me and my family, but stop the terrible disease that is killing your people."

¹⁸Then the angel of the Lord told Gad to tell David that he should build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. ¹⁹So David did what Gad told him to do, in the name of the Lord.

²⁰Araunah was separating the wheat from the straw. When he turned around, he saw the angel. Araunah's four sons who

were with him hid.²¹David came to Araunah, and when Araunah saw him, he left the threshing floor and bowed facedown on the ground before David.

²²David said to him, “Sell me your threshing floor so I can build an altar to the Lord here. Then the terrible disease will stop. Sell it to me for the full price.”

²³Araunah said to David, “Take this threshing floor. My master the king, do anything you want. Look, I will also give you oxen for the whole burnt offerings, the threshing boards for the wood, and wheat for the grain offering. I give everything to you.”

²⁴But King David answered Araunah, “No, I will pay the full price for the land. I won’t take anything that is yours and give it to the Lord. I won’t offer a burnt offering that costs me nothing.”

²⁵So David paid Araunah about fifteen pounds of gold for the place.²⁶David built an altar to the Lord there and offered whole burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. David prayed to the Lord, and he answered him by sending down fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering.²⁷Then the Lord commanded the angel to put his sword back into its holder.

²⁸When David saw that the Lord had answered him on the threshing floor of Araunah, he offered sacrifices there.²⁹The Holy Tent that Moses made while the Israelites were in the desert and the altar of burnt offerings were in Gibeon at the place of worship.³⁰But David could not go to the Holy Tent to speak with God, because he was afraid of the angel of the Lord and his sword.

David said, “The Temple of the Lord God and the altar for Israel’s burnt offerings will be built here.”

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 22:2–24:31

Situation

David planned the Temple. After the exile, these dimensions were used to rebuild the Temple.

Observation

In service to God, everyone’s job remains important. Each person’s part honors God.

Inspiration

When we compare the present day churches to the original blueprint it is strikingly apparent that many deviations have been permitted which have been detrimental to the life of the church. Through the centuries the church gradually turned away from the simple provisions which made it such a powerful and compelling force in its early years, and there came in terrible distortions from which we are suffering greatly today. The popular thinking fastened upon the building as the identifying symbol and emphasis was put upon great imposing structures and massive cathedrals. In the beginning, “working in the church” meant to exercise a gift or perform a ministry among Christian people wherever they were, but gradually it came to mean doing some religious act within a building.

Along with this came a gradual transfer of responsibility from the people to what was termed

“the clergy,” which is a term derived from the Latin *clericus* meaning a priest. The scriptural concept that every believer is a priest before God was gradually lost and a special body of super-Christians emerged who were looked to for practically everything and so came to be termed “the ministry.”...

When the ministry was thus left to the professionals there was nothing left for the people to do other than come to church and listen. They were told it was their responsibility to bring the world into the church building to hear the pastor preach the gospel. Soon Christianity became nothing but a spectator sport, very much akin to the definition of football—22 men down on the field, desperately in need of rest, and 20 thousand in the grandstands, desperately in need of exercise!

This unbiblical distortion has placed pastors under an unbearable burden. They have proved completely unequal to the task of evangelizing the world, counseling the distressed and brokenhearted, ministering to the poor and needy, relieving the oppressed and afflicted, expounding the Scriptures, and challenging the entrenched forces of evil in an increasingly darkened world. They were never meant to do it...

Nothing is more desperately needed than to return to the dynamic of the early church....

Again it is the entire body of believers who must attempt the work of the ministry, equipped and guided by gifted men who are able to expound and apply the Scriptures with such wisdom that even the

least believer discovers and begins to exercise the gift or gifts the Holy Spirit has given him. The whole body then stirs with resurrection power. Boldness and power again become the trademarks of the church of Jesus Christ. (From *Body Life* by Ray C. Stedman)

Application

How can you begin to serve God? Perhaps you can help lead a Bible study for new believers or even open your home so someone else can. Look for a way you can lift the load from someone else.

Exploration

Body of Believers—[Romans 12:3–8](#); [1 Corinthians 12:4–27](#); [Ephesians 2:19–22](#); [4:11–12](#), [15–16](#).

David Makes Plans for the Temple

²So David ordered all foreigners living in Israel to gather together. From that group David chose stonecutters to cut stones to be used in building the Temple of God. ³David supplied a large amount of iron to be used for making nails and hinges for the gate doors. He also supplied more bronze than could be weighed, ⁴and he supplied more cedar logs than could be counted. Much of the cedar had been brought to David by the people from Sidon and Tyre.

⁵David said, “We should build a great Temple for the Lord, which will be famous everywhere for its greatness and beauty. But my son Solomon is young. He hasn’t yet learned what he needs to know, so I will prepare for the building of it.” So David got many of the materials ready before he died.

⁶Then David called for his son Solomon and told him to build the Temple for the Lord, the God of Israel. ⁷David said to him, “My son, I wanted to build a temple for worshiping the Lord my God. ⁸But the Lord spoke his word to me, ‘David, you have killed many people. You have fought many wars. You cannot build a temple for worship to me, because you have killed many people. ⁹But, you will have a son, a man of peace and rest. I will give him rest from all his enemies around him. His name will be [Solomon](#), and I will give Israel peace and quiet while he is king. ¹⁰Solomon will build a temple for worship to me. He will be my son, and I will be his father. I will make his kingdom strong; someone from his family will rule Israel

forever.”

¹¹David said, “Now, my son, may the Lord be with you. May you build a temple for the Lord your God, as he said you would. ¹²He will make you the king of Israel. May the Lord give you wisdom and understanding so you will be able to obey the teachings of the Lord your God. ¹³Be careful to obey the rules and laws the Lord gave Moses for Israel. If you obey them, you will have success. Be strong and brave. Don’t be afraid or discouraged.

¹⁴“Solomon, I have worked hard getting many of the materials for building the Temple of the Lord. I have supplied about seven and one-half million pounds of gold, about seventy-five million pounds of silver, so much bronze and iron it cannot be weighed, and wood and stone. You may add to them. ¹⁵You have many workmen—stonecutters, bricklayers, carpenters, and people skilled in every kind of work. ¹⁶They are skilled in working with gold, silver, bronze, and iron. You have more craftsmen than can be counted. Now begin the work, and may the Lord be with you.”

¹⁷Then David ordered all the leaders of Israel to help his son Solomon. ¹⁸David said to them, “The Lord your God is with you. He has given you rest from our enemies. He has handed over to me the people living around us. The Lord and his people are in control of this land. ¹⁹Now give yourselves completely to obeying the Lord your God. Build the holy place of the Lord God; build the Temple for worship to the Lord. Then bring the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord and the holy items that belong to God into the Temple.”

The Levites

After David had lived long and was old, he made his son Solomon the new king of Israel. ²David gathered all the leaders of Israel, along with the priests and Levites. ³He counted the Levites who were thirty years old and older. In all, there were thirty-eight thousand Levites. ⁴David said, “Of these, twenty-four thousand Levites will direct the work of the Temple of the Lord, six thousand Levites will be officers and judges, ⁵four thousand Levites will be gatekeepers, and four thousand Levites will praise the Lord with musical instruments I made for giving praise.”

⁶David separated the Levites into three groups that were led by Levi’s three sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

The People of Gershon

⁷From the people of Gershon, there were Ladan and Shimei.

⁸Ladan had three sons. His first son was Jehiel, and his other sons were Zetham and Joel.

⁹Shimei’s sons were Shelomoth, Haziël, and Haran. These three sons were leaders of Ladan’s families. ¹⁰Shimei had four sons: Jahath, Ziza, Jeush, and Beriah. ¹¹Jahath was the first son, and Ziza was the second son. But Jeush and Beriah did not have many children, so they were counted as if they were one family.

The People of Kohath

¹²Kohath had four sons: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

¹³Amram's sons were Aaron and Moses. Aaron and his descendants were chosen to be special forever. They were chosen to prepare the holy things for the Lord's service, to offer sacrifices before the Lord, and to serve him as priests. They were to give blessings in his name forever.

¹⁴Moses was the man of God, and his sons were counted as part of the tribe of Levi. ¹⁵Moses' sons were Gershom and Eliezer. ¹⁶Gershom's first son was Shubael. ¹⁷Eliezer's first son was Rehabiah. Eliezer had no other sons, but Rehabiah had many sons.

¹⁸Izhar's first son was Shelomith.

¹⁹Hebron's first son was Jeriah, his second was Amariah, his third was Jahaziel, and his fourth was Jekameam.

²⁰Uzziel's first son was Micah and his second was Isshiah.

The People of Merari

²¹Merari's sons were Mahli and Mushi. Mahli's sons were Eleazar and Kish. ²²Eleazar died without sons; he had only daughters. Eleazar's daughters married their cousins, the sons of Kish. ²³Mushi's three sons were Mahli, Eder, and Jerimoth.

The Levites' Work

²⁴These were Levi's descendants listed by their families. They were the leaders of families. Each person who was twenty years old or older was listed. They served in the Lord's Temple.

²⁵David had said, "The Lord, the God of Israel, has given

rest to his people. He has come to live in Jerusalem forever.
²⁶So the Levites don't need to carry the Holy Tent or any of the things used in its services anymore.” ²⁷David's last instructions were to count the Levites who were twenty years old and older.

²⁸The Levites had the job of helping Aaron's descendants in the service of the Temple of the Lord. They cared for the Temple courtyard and side rooms, and they made all the holy things pure. Their job was to serve in the Temple of God.
²⁹They were responsible for putting the holy bread on the table, for the flour in the grain offerings, for the bread made without yeast, for the baking and mixing, and for the measuring. ³⁰The Levites also stood every morning and gave thanks and praise to the Lord. They also did this every evening. ³¹The Levites offered all the burnt offerings to the Lord on the special days of rest, at the New Moon festivals, and at all appointed feasts. They served before the Lord every day. They were to follow the rules for how many Levites should serve each time. ³²So the Levites took care of the Meeting Tent and the Holy Place. And they helped their relatives, Aaron's descendants, with the services at the Temple of the Lord.

The Groups of the Priests

These were the groups of Aaron's sons: Aaron's sons were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ²But Nadab and Abihu died before their father did, and they had no sons. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as the priests. ³David, with the help of Zadok, a descendant of Eleazar, and Ahimelech, a descendant of Ithamar, separated their family groups into two different groups. Each group had certain duties. ⁴There were more leaders from Eleazar's family than from Ithamar's—sixteen leaders from Eleazar's family and eight leaders from Ithamar's family. ⁵Men were chosen from Eleazar's and Ithamar's families by throwing lots. Some men from each family were chosen to be in charge of the Holy Place, and some were chosen to serve as priests.

⁶Shemaiah son of Nethanel, from the tribe of Levi, was the secretary. He recorded the names of those descendants in front of King David, the officers, Zadok the priest, Ahimelech son of Abiathar, and the leaders of the families of the priests and Levites. The work was divided by lots among the families of Eleazar and Ithamar. The following men with their groups were chosen.

⁷The first one chosen was Jehoiarib. The second was Jedaiah. ⁸The third was Harim. The fourth was Seorim. ⁹The fifth was Malkijah. The sixth was Mijamin. ¹⁰The seventh was Hakkoz. The eighth was Abijah. ¹¹The ninth was Jeshua. The tenth was Shecaniah. ¹²The eleventh was Eliashib. The twelfth was Jakim. ¹³The thirteenth was Huppah. The fourteenth was

Jeshebeab.¹⁴The fifteenth was Bilgah. The sixteenth was Immer.¹⁵The seventeenth was Hezir. The eighteenth was Happizzez.¹⁶The nineteenth was Pethahiah. The twentieth was Jehezkel.¹⁷The twenty-first was Jakin. The twenty-second was Gamul.¹⁸The twenty-third was Delaiah. The twenty-fourth was Maaziah.

¹⁹These were the groups chosen to serve in the Temple of the Lord. They obeyed the rules given them by Aaron, just as the Lord, the God of Israel, had commanded him.

The Other Levites

²⁰These are the names of the rest of Levi's descendants:

Shubael was a descendant of Amram, and Jehdeiah was a descendant of Shubael.

²¹Isshiah was the first son of Rehabiah.

²²From the Izhar family group, there was Shelomoth, and Jahath was a descendant of Shelomoth.

²³Hebron's first son was Jeriah, Amariah was his second, Jahaziel was his third, and Jekameam was his fourth.

²⁴Uzziel's son was Micah. Micah's son was Shamir.

²⁵Micah's brother was Isshiah, and Isshiah's son was Zechariah.

²⁶Merari's descendants were Mahli and Mushi. Merari's son was Jaaziah.²⁷Jaaziah son of Merari had sons named Shoham, Zaccur, and Ibri.²⁸Mahli's son was Eleazar, but Eleazar did not have any sons.

²⁹Kish's son was Jerahmeel.

³⁰Mushi's sons were Mahli, Eder, and Jerimoth.

These are the Levites, listed by their families.³¹ They were chosen for special jobs by throwing lots in front of King David, Zadok, Ahimelech, the leaders of the families of the priests, and the Levites. They did this just as their relatives, the priests, Aaron's descendants, had done. The families of the oldest brother and the youngest brother were treated the same.

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 25:1–27:34

Situation

King David hoped to build the Temple for God. In addition to planning and funding the Temple, David spent time preparing the Temple servants to be ready when Solomon finished the Temple.

Observation

David developed a plan so that operations would go smoothly. Each person fulfilled his or her role, working for the common good of God's people.

Inspiration

At a recent conference, I shared the platform with my friend, Camille. Actually, she doesn't speak. Camille is an interpreter for the deaf who often travels with me to sign my messages. As I talked, her hands were working a mile a minute just to keep up. I spoke for almost an hour, got a sore throat, and had to pop a lozenge.

During break time I noticed my friend Francie sitting with Camille, giving her hands a deep massage. Camille signed, "Joni, your throat may be sore, but my hands are sore from your talk. My tendons are tight and this handrub is as soothing as—well, that lozenge on your throat."

It never occurred to me that Camille's hands could get tired of talking, or I should say, signing. As I watched Francie give Camille back the "voice" in her hands, I thought, *What a beautiful picture of the*

body of Christ working together. One part can't do the job alone. When I speak, I need someone else's hands to push my chair to the platform. My deaf friends who are present can't hear unless Camille offers her hands to interpret. And Camille can't use her hands very long unless someone else gives her wrists and fingers a massage.

When it comes to giving the Gospel, it's always a cooperative effort of love and support. The Lord takes delight when His body works that way.

Someone needs you today. You could be the hands or the ears or the voice of someone who needs help. We're in this together so find a part of the body that can't be complete without you.

(From *Diamonds in the Dust* by Joni Eareckson Tada)

Application

The Holy Spirit has assigned gifts and opportunities for service to each Believer. How are you serving God with your abilities? Look for an opportunity today to honor God by giving of yourself to others.

Exploration

Serving God—[Isaiah 45:9](#); [Luke 12:47](#); [Acts 13:2; 26:16](#); [Romans 9:20–21](#); [1 Corinthians 12:4–7](#); [Ephesians 6:7](#).

The Music Groups

David and the commanders of the army chose some of the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun to preach and play harps, lyres, and cymbals. Here is a list of the men who served in this way:

²Asaph's sons who served were Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asarelah. King David chose Asaph to preach, and Asaph directed his sons.

³Jeduthun's sons who served were Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah. There were six of them, and Jeduthun directed them. He preached and used a harp to give thanks and praise to the Lord.

⁴Heman's sons who served were Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shubael, Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, Romamti-Ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, and Mahazioth.

⁵All these were sons of Heman, David's seer. God promised to make Heman strong, so Heman had many sons. God gave him fourteen sons and three daughters. ⁶Heman directed all his sons in making music for the Temple of the Lord with cymbals, lyres, and harps; that was their way of serving in the Temple of God. King David was in charge of Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman. ⁷These men and their relatives were trained and skilled in making music for the Lord. There were two hundred eighty-eight of them. ⁸Everyone threw lots to choose the time his family was to serve at the Temple. The young and the old, the

teacher and the student, had to throw lots.

⁹First, the lot fell to Joseph, from the family of Asaph.

Second, twelve men were chosen from Gedaliah, his sons and relatives.

¹⁰Third, twelve men were chosen from Zaccur, his sons and relatives.

¹¹Fourth, twelve men were chosen from Izri, his sons and relatives.

¹²Fifth, twelve men were chosen from Nethaniah, his sons and relatives.

¹³Sixth, twelve men were chosen from Bukkiah, his sons and relatives.

¹⁴Seventh, twelve men were chosen from Jesarelah, his sons and relatives.

¹⁵Eighth, twelve men were chosen from Jeshaiiah, his sons and relatives.

¹⁶Ninth, twelve men were chosen from Mattaniah, his sons and relatives.

¹⁷Tenth, twelve men were chosen from Shimei, his sons and relatives.

¹⁸Eleventh, twelve men were chosen from Azarel, his sons and relatives.

¹⁹Twelfth, twelve men were chosen from Hashabiah, his sons and relatives.

²⁰Thirteenth, twelve men were chosen from Shubael, his sons and relatives.

²¹Fourteenth, twelve men were chosen from Mattithiah, his sons and relatives.

²²Fifteenth, twelve men were chosen from Jerimoth, his sons and relatives.

²³Sixteenth, twelve men were chosen from Hananiah, his sons and relatives.

²⁴Seventeenth, twelve men were chosen from Joshbekashah, his sons and relatives.

²⁵Eighteenth, twelve men were chosen from Hanani, his sons and relatives.

²⁶Nineteenth, twelve men were chosen from Mallothi, his sons and relatives.

²⁷Twentieth, twelve men were chosen from Eliathah, his sons and relatives.

²⁸Twenty-first, twelve men were chosen from Hothir, his sons and relatives.

²⁹Twenty-second, twelve men were chosen from Giddalti, his sons and relatives.

³⁰Twenty-third, twelve men were chosen from Mahazioth, his sons and relatives.

³¹Twenty-fourth, twelve men were chosen from Romanti-Ezer, his sons and relatives.

The Gatekeepers

These are the groups of the gatekeepers. From the family of Korah, there was Meshelemiah son of Kore, who was from Asaph's family. ²Meshelemiah had sons. Zechariah was his first son, Jediah was second, Zebadiah was third, Jathniel was fourth, ³Elam was fifth, Jehohanan was sixth, and Eliehoenai was seventh.

⁴Obed-Edom had sons. Shemaiah was his first son, Jehozabad was second, Joah was third, Sacar was fourth, Nethanel was fifth, ⁵Ammiel was sixth, Issachar was seventh, and Peullethai was eighth. God blessed Obed-Edom with children.

⁶Obed-Edom's son Shemaiah also had sons. They were leaders in their father's family because they were capable men. ⁷Shemaiah's sons were Othni, Rephael, Obed, Elzabad, Elihu, and Semakiah. Elihu, and Semakiah were skilled workers. ⁸All these were Obed-Edom's descendants. They and their sons and relatives were capable men and strong workers. Obed-Edom had sixty-two descendants in all.

⁹Meshelemiah had sons and relatives who were skilled workers. In all, there were eighteen.

¹⁰From the Merari family, Hosah had sons. Shimri was chosen to be in charge. Although he was not the oldest son, his father chose him to be in charge. ¹¹Hilkiah was his second son, Tabaliah was third, and Zechariah was fourth. In all, Hosah had thirteen sons and relatives.

¹²These were the leaders of the groups of gatekeepers, and

they served in the Temple of the Lord. Their relatives also worked in the Temple. ¹³By throwing lots, each family chose a gate to guard. Young and old threw lots.

¹⁴Meshelemiah was chosen by lot to guard the East Gate. Then lots were thrown for Meshelemiah's son Zechariah. He was a wise counselor and was chosen for the North Gate. ¹⁵Obed-Edom was chosen for the South Gate, and Obed-Edom's sons were chosen to guard the storehouse. ¹⁶Shuppim and Hosah were chosen for the West Gate and the Shalleketh Gate on the upper road.

Guards stood side by side with guards. ¹⁷Six Levites stood guard every day at the East Gate; four Levites stood guard every day at the North Gate; four Levites stood guard every day at the South Gate; and two Levites at a time guarded the storehouse. ¹⁸There were two guards at the western court and four guards on the road to the court.

¹⁹These were the groups of the gatekeepers from the families of Korah and Merari.

Other Leaders

²⁰Other Levites were responsible for guarding the treasuries of the Temple of God and for the places where the holy items were kept.

²¹Ladan was Gershon's son and the ancestor of several family groups. Jehiel was a leader of one of the family groups.

²²His sons were Zetham and Joel his brother, and they were responsible for the treasuries of the Temple of the Lord.

²³Other leaders were chosen from the family groups of Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. ²⁴Shubael, the descendant of

Gershom, who was Moses' son, was the leader responsible for the treasuries.²⁵ These were Shubael's relatives from Eliezer: Eliezer's son Rehabiah, Rehabiah's son Jeshaiiah, Jeshaiiah's son Joram, Joram's son Zicri, and Zicri's son Shelomith.²⁶ Shelomith and his relatives were responsible for everything that had been collected for the Temple by King David, by the heads of families, by the commanders of a thousand men and of a hundred men, and by other army commanders.²⁷ They also gave some of the things they had taken in wars to be used in repairing the Temple of the Lord.²⁸ Shelomith and his relatives took care of all the holy items. Some had been given by Samuel the seer, Saul son of Kish, Abner son of Ner, and Joab son of Zeruiah.

²⁹Kenaniah was from the Izhar family. He and his sons worked outside the Temple as officers and judges in different places in Israel.

³⁰Hashabiah was from the Hebron family. He and his relatives were responsible for the Lord's work and the king's business in Israel west of the Jordan River. There were seventeen hundred skilled men in Hashabiah's group.³¹ The history of the Hebron family shows that Jeriah was their leader. In David's fortieth year as king, the records were searched, and some capable men of the Hebron family were found living at Jazer in Gilead.³² Jeriah had twenty-seven hundred relatives who were skilled men and leaders of families. King David gave them the responsibility of directing the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh in God's work and the king's business.

Army Divisions

This is the list of the Israelites who served the king in the army. Each division was on duty one month each year. There were leaders of families, commanders of a hundred men, commanders of a thousand men, and other officers. Each division had twenty-four thousand men.

²Jashobeam son of Zabdiel was in charge of the first division for the first month. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division. ³Jashobeam, one of the descendants of Perez, was leader of all the army officers for the first month.

⁴Dodai, from the Ahohites, was in charge of the division for the second month. Mikloth was a leader in the division. There were twenty-four thousand men in Dodai's division.

⁵The third commander, for the third month, was Benaiah son of Jehoiada the priest. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division. ⁶He was the Benaiah who was one of the [Thirty](#) soldiers. Benaiah was a brave warrior who led those men. Benaiah's son Ammizabad was in charge of Benaiah's division.

⁷The fourth commander, for the fourth month, was Asahel, the brother of Joab. Later, Asahel's son Zebadiah took his place as commander. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division.

⁸The fifth commander, for the fifth month, was Shamhuth, from Izrah's family. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division.

⁹The sixth commander, for the sixth month, was Ira son of Ikkes from the town of Tekoa. There were twenty-four

thousand men in his division.

¹⁰The seventh commander, for the seventh month, was Helez. He was from the Pelonites and a descendant of Ephraim. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division.

¹¹The eighth commander, for the eighth month, was Sibbecai. He was from Hushah and was from Zerah's family. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division.

¹²The ninth commander, for the ninth month, was Abiezer. He was from Anathoth in Benjamin. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division.

¹³The tenth commander, for the tenth month, was Maharai. He was from Netophah and was from Zerah's family. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division.

¹⁴The eleventh commander, for the eleventh month, was Benaiah. He was from Pirathon in Ephraim. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division.

¹⁵The twelfth commander, for the twelfth month, was Heldai. He was from Netophah and was from Othniel's family. There were twenty-four thousand men in his division.

Leaders of the Tribes

¹⁶These were the leaders of the tribes of Israel. Eliezer son of Zicri was over the tribe of Reuben. Shephatiah son of Maacah was over the tribe of Simeon. ¹⁷Hashabiah son of Kemuel was over the tribe of Levi. Zadok was over the people of Aaron. ¹⁸Elihu, one of David's brothers, was over the tribe of Judah. Omri son of Michael was over the tribe of Issachar. ¹⁹Ishmaiah son of Obadiah was over the tribe of Zebulun. Jerimoth son of Azriel was over the tribe of Naphtali. ²⁰Hoshea son of Azaziah

was over the tribe of Ephraim. Joel son of Pedaiah was over West Manasseh.²¹ Iddo son of Zechariah was over East Manasseh. Jaasiel son of Abner was over the tribe of Benjamin.²² Azarel son of Jeroham was over the tribe of Dan.

These were the leaders of the tribes of Israel.

²³The Lord had promised to make the Israelites as many as the stars in the sky. So David only counted the men who were twenty years old and older.²⁴ Joab son of Zeruiah began to count the people, but he did not finish. God became angry with Israel for counting the people, so the number of the people was not put in the history book about King David's rule.

The King's Directors

²⁵Azmaveth son of Adiel was in charge of the royal storehouses.

Jonathan son of Uzziah was in charge of the storehouses in the country, towns, villages, and towers.

²⁶Ezri son of Kelub was in charge of the field workers who farmed the land.

²⁷Shimei, from the town of Ramah, was in charge of the vineyards.

Zabdi, from Shapham, was in charge of storing the wine that came from the vineyards.

²⁸Baal-Hanan, from Geder, was in charge of the olive trees and sycamore trees in the western hills.

Joash was in charge of storing the olive oil.

²⁹Shitrai, from Sharon, was in charge of the herds that fed in the Plain of Sharon.

Shaphat son of Adlai was in charge of the herds in the

valleys.

³⁰Obil, an Ishmaelite, was in charge of the camels.

Jehdeiah, from Meronoth, was in charge of the donkeys.

³¹Jaziz, from the Hagrites, was in charge of the flocks.

All these men were the officers who took care of King David's property.

³²Jonathan was David's uncle, and he advised David. Jonathan was a wise man and a teacher of the law. Jehiel son of Hacmoni took care of the king's sons. ³³Ahithophel advised the king. Hushai, from the Arkite people, was the king's friend. ³⁴Jehoiada and Abiathar later took Ahithophel's place in advising the king. Jehoiada was Benaiah's son. Joab was the commander of the king's army.

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 28:1–29:30

Situation

As David grew old, he handed his Temple building plans to his son Solomon. God chose Solomon to reign after David (even though he wasn't the oldest son). David also gave Solomon wise advice about his relationship with God.

Observation

David's final words consisted of thanksgiving and praise. David recognized that even the gifts Israel presented to God came from the Lord.

Inspiration

God is committed to caring for our needs. Paul tells us that a man who won't feed his own family is worse than an unbeliever ([1 Timothy 5:8](#)). How much more will a holy God care for his children? After all, how can we fulfill his mission unless our needs are met? How can we teach or minister or influence unless we have our basic needs satisfied? Will God enlist us in his army and not provide a commissary? Of course not.

"I pray that the God of peace will give you every good thing you need so you can do what he wants" ([Hebrews 13:20](#)). Hasn't that prayer been answered in our life? We may not have had a feast, but haven't we always had food? Perhaps there was no banquet, but at least there was bread. And many times there was a banquet.

In fact, many of us in the United States have trouble relating to the phrase “Give us this day our daily bread” because our pantries are so packed and our bellies so full we seldom ask for food. We ask for self-control. We don’t say, “God let me eat.” We say, “God, help me not to eat so much.” You won’t find books in our stores on surviving starvation, but you’ll find shelves loaded with books on losing weight. This doesn’t negate the importance of this phrase, however. Just the opposite. For us, the blessed of belly, this prayer has double meaning.

We pray, only to find our prayer already answered! We are like the high school senior who decides to go to college and then learns the cost of tuition. He runs to his father and pleads, “I’m sorry to ask so much, Dad, but I have nowhere else to go. I want to go to college and I don’t have a penny.” The father puts his arms around the son and smiles and says, “Don’t worry, son. The day you were born I began saving for your education. I’ve already provided for your tuition.”

The boy made the request only to find the father had already met it. The same happens to you. At some point in your life it occurs to you that someone is providing for your needs. You take a giant step in maturity when you agree with David’s words in [1 Chronicles 29:14](#): “Everything comes from you; we have given you back what you gave us.” You may be writing a check and stirring the soup, but there’s more to putting food on the table than that. What about the ancient symbiosis of the seed and the soil and the

sun and the rain? Who created animals for food and minerals for metal? Long before you knew you needed someone to provide for your needs, God already had.

So the first rule in the kitchen is one of dependence. Ask God for whatever you need. He is committed to you. God lives with the self-assigned task of providing for his own, and so far, you've got to admit, he's done pretty well at the job. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you usually see yourself as self-sufficient or as someone whose needs are met directly by God? Acknowledge the fact that everything you have is a gift from God. Make a list of what you consider your “wants” and your “needs.” Thank him for his abundant goodness to you.

Exploration

Meeting Our Needs—[Matthew 6:8](#); [2 Corinthians 9:6–9](#); [Philippians 4:18–19](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:11–12](#); [1 John 3:17–18](#).

David's Plans for the Temple

David commanded all the leaders of Israel to come to Jerusalem. There were the leaders of the tribes, commanders of the divisions serving the king, commanders of a thousand men and of a hundred men, leaders who took care of the property and animals that belonged to the king and his sons, men over the palace, the powerful men, and all the brave warriors.

²King David stood up and said, "Listen to me, my relatives and my people. I wanted to build a place to keep the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord. I wanted it to be God's footstool. So I made plans to build a temple. ³But God said to me, 'You must not build a temple for worshipping me, because you are a soldier and have killed many people.'

⁴"But the Lord, the God of Israel, chose me from my whole family to be king of Israel forever. He chose the tribe of Judah to lead, and from the people of Judah, he chose my father's family. From that family God was pleased to make me king of Israel. ⁵The Lord has given me many sons, and from those sons he has chosen Solomon to be the new king of Israel. Israel is the Lord's kingdom. ⁶The Lord said to me, 'Your son Solomon will build my Temple and its courtyards. I have chosen Solomon to be my son, and I will be his father. ⁷He is obeying my laws and commands now. If he continues to obey them, I will make his kingdom strong forever.'"

⁸David said, "Now, in front of all Israel, the assembly of the

Lord, and in the hearing of God, I tell you these things: Be careful to obey all the commands of the Lord your God. Then you will keep this good land and pass it on to your descendants forever.

⁹“And you, my son Solomon, accept the God of your father. Serve him completely and willingly, because the Lord knows what is in everyone’s mind. He understands everything you think. If you go to him for help, you will get an answer. But if you turn away from him, he will leave you forever. ¹⁰Solomon, you must understand this. The Lord has chosen you to build the Temple as his holy place. Be strong and finish the job.”

¹¹Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for building the Temple and the courtyard around the Temple. They included its buildings, its storerooms, its upper rooms, its inside rooms, and the place where the people’s sins were removed. ¹²David gave him plans for everything he had in mind: the courtyards around the Lord’s Temple and all the rooms around it, the Temple treasuries, and the treasuries of the holy items used in the Temple. ¹³David gave Solomon directions for the groups of the priests and Levites. David told him about all the work of serving in the Temple of the Lord and about the items to be used in the Temple service ¹⁴that were made of gold or silver. David told Solomon how much gold or silver should be used to make each thing. ¹⁵David told him how much gold to use for each gold lampstand and its lamps and how much silver to use for each silver lampstand and its lamps. The different lampstands were to be used where needed. ¹⁶David told how much gold should be used for each table that held the holy bread and how much silver should be used for the silver tables. ¹⁷He told how much pure gold should be used

to make the forks, bowls, and pitchers and how much gold should be used to make each gold dish. He told how much silver should be used to make each silver dish ¹⁸and how much pure gold should be used for the altar of incense. He also gave Solomon the plans for the chariot of the golden creatures that spread their wings over the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord.

¹⁹David said, “All these plans were written with the Lord guiding me. He helped me understand everything in the plans.”

²⁰David also said to his son Solomon, “Be strong and brave, and do the work. Don’t be afraid or discouraged, because the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or leave you until all the work for the Temple of the Lord is finished. ²¹The groups of the priests and Levites are ready for all the work on the Temple of God. Every skilled worker is ready to help you with all the work. The leaders and all the people will obey every command you give.”

Gifts for Building the Temple

King David said to all the Israelites who were gathered, “God chose my son Solomon, who is young and hasn’t yet learned what he needs to know, but the work is important. This palace is not for people; it is for the Lord God. ²I have done my best to prepare for building the Temple of God. I have given gold for the things made of gold and silver for the things made of silver. I have given bronze for the things made of bronze and iron for the things made of iron. I have given wood for the things made of wood and onyx for the settings. I have given turquoise gems of many different colors, valuable stones, and white marble. I have given much of all these things. ³I have already given this for the Temple, but now I am also giving my own treasures of gold and silver, because I really want the Temple of my God to be built. ⁴I have given about two hundred twenty thousand pounds of pure gold from Ophir and about five hundred twenty thousand pounds of pure silver. They will be used to cover the walls of the buildings ⁵and for all the gold and silver work. Skilled men may use the gold and silver to make things for the Temple. Now, who is ready to give himself to the service of the Lord today?”

⁶The family leaders and the leaders of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of a thousand men and of a hundred men, and the leaders responsible for the king’s work gave their valuable things. ⁷They donated about three hundred eighty thousand pounds of gold, about seven hundred fifty thousand pounds of silver, about one million three hundred fifty thousand pounds of bronze, and about seven million five hundred

thousand pounds of iron to the Temple of God. ⁸People who had valuable gems gave them to the treasury of the Temple of the Lord, and Jehiel, from the Gershon family, took care of the valuable gems. ⁹The leaders gave willingly and completely to the Lord. The people rejoiced to see their leaders give so gladly, and King David was also very happy.

David's Prayer

¹⁰David praised the Lord in front of all the people who were gathered. He said:

“We praise you, Lord,
God of our father Israel.
We praise you forever and ever.
¹¹Lord, you are great and powerful.
You have glory, victory, and honor.
Everything in heaven and on earth belongs to you.
The kingdom belongs to you, Lord;
you are the ruler over everything.

¹²Riches and honor come from you.
You rule everything.
You have the power and strength
to make anyone great and strong.

¹³Now, our God, we thank you
and praise your glorious name.

¹⁴“These things did not really come from me and my people.

Everything comes from you;
we have given you back what you gave us.

¹⁵We are like foreigners and strangers,
as our ancestors were.

Our time on earth is like a shadow.

There is no hope.

¹⁶Lord our God, we have gathered all this
to build your Temple for worship to you.
But everything has come from you;
everything belongs to you.

¹⁷I know, my God, that you test people's hearts.

You are happy when people do what is right.

I was happy to give all these things,
and I gave with an honest heart.

Your people gathered here are happy to give to you,
and I rejoice to see their giving.

¹⁸Lord, you are the God of our ancestors,
the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Make your people want to serve you always,
and make them want to obey you.

¹⁹Give my son Solomon a desire to serve you.

Help him always obey your commands, laws, and rules.

Help him build the Temple
for which I have prepared.”

²⁰Then David said to all the people who were gathered,
“Praise the Lord your God.” So they all praised the Lord, the
God of their ancestors, and they bowed to the ground to give
honor to the Lord and the king.

Solomon Becomes King

²¹The next day the people sacrificed to the Lord. They offered burnt offerings to him of a thousand bulls, a thousand male sheep, and a thousand male lambs. They also brought drink offerings. Many sacrifices were made for all the people of Israel. ²²That day the people ate and drank with much joy, and the Lord was with them.

And they made David's son Solomon king for the second time. They poured olive oil on Solomon to appoint him king in the presence of the Lord. And they poured oil on Zadok to appoint him as priest. ²³Then Solomon sat on the Lord's throne as king and took his father David's place. Solomon was very successful, and all the people of Israel obeyed him. ²⁴All the leaders and soldiers and King David's sons accepted Solomon as king and promised to obey him. ²⁵The Lord made Solomon great before all the Israelites and gave Solomon much honor. No king of Israel before Solomon had such honor.

David's Death

²⁶David son of Jesse was king over all Israel. ²⁷He had ruled over Israel forty years—seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. ²⁸David died when he was old. He had lived a good, long life and had received many riches and honors. His son Solomon became king after him.

²⁹Everything David did as king, from beginning to end, is recorded in the records of Samuel the seer, the records of Nathan the prophet, and the records of Gad the seer. ³⁰Those writings tell what David did as king of Israel. They tell about his power and what happened to him and to Israel and to all the kingdoms around them.

Kittim His descendants were the people of Cyprus.

Mizraim This is another name for Egypt.

Peleg This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “divided.”

Israel Another name for Jacob.

Jabez This name in Hebrew sounds like the word for “pain.”

cities of safety A person who had accidentally killed someone could go to one of the six cities of safety to receive protection and a fair trial.

Beriah This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “trouble.”

Three Or maybe “Thirty.” These were David’s most powerful soldiers. See [2 Samuel 23:8](#).

Baal Perazim This name means “the Lord breaks through.”

Kerethites and Pelethites These were probably special units of the army that were responsible for the king’s safety, a kind of palace guard.

their king Or, “Milcom,” the god of the Ammonite people.

Beersheba to Dan Beersheba was the city farthest south in Israel. Dan was the city farthest north. So this means all the people of Israel.

Solomon This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “peace.”

Thirty These were David’s most powerful soldiers. See [2 Samuel 23:24](#).

THE BOOK OF 2 CHRONICLES

Introduction

A friend tells me of the time his five-year-old daughter took inventory of her friends.

Seems she took a tumble down the stairs and banged her head on the wall. Her mom rushed her to the emergency room and, though the injury wasn't severe, the doctor felt it wise to keep her overnight for observation. So the little girl spent the night in the hospital.

The next morning they took her home, and the dad carried her upstairs and put her in bed for a nap. As he closed the door he heard her voice. At first he thought she was speaking to him, so he stopped to listen.

"Sleepy? Grumpy? Dopey?"

My friend smiled. Painted on his daughter's bedroom wall were the characters from the Snow White story. For his daughter they were more than characters, however, they were friends. Every day she spent time talking to them. The dad knew what she was doing. "She was taking inventory of her friends," he said. "She'd been through a rough night and just wanted to make sure they were okay."

God has been known to do that. His people have a tendency to take tumbles. Some of those tumbles are severe. Second Chronicles will give you a few examples.

They aren't very pretty.

Some are very shameful. Still, they are his children and every so often he takes inventory of those who matter to him.

Buried in this large quarry called Chronicles are several jewels worth mining.

Here are two of the finest:

Then if my people, who are called by my name, are sorry for what they have done, if they pray and obey me and stop their evil ways, I will hear them from heaven. I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land ([7:14](#)).

The Lord searches all the earth for people who have given themselves completely to him. He wants to make them strong ([16:9](#)).

Keep those verses in your hip pocket. You never know when you may take a spill yourself. Those words might be just what you need to get back on your feet.

About This Book

Author:

Probably Ezra

Date Written:

500–400 B.C.

Key Themes:

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- One of Solomon's greatest achievements was the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem.
- As kings came and went in the divided kingdom, each king had to make a choice whether to follow God or not.
- As God had warned, the disobedience of each kingdom led to their eventual destruction and loss of their land.

Key Verse:

"If my people, who are called by my name, are

sorry for what they have done, if they pray and obey me and stop their evil ways, I will hear them from heaven. I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land” ([2 Chronicles 7:14](#)).

Contents:

1. Solomon’s Kingdom [1:1–9:31](#)
2. The Northern and Southern Tribes Struggle to Survive [10:1–35:27](#)
3. Judah Is Taken into Exile [36:1–23](#)

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 1:1-17

Situation

Solomon became king over Israel. God gave him an opportunity to ask for anything.

Observation

Put God first, and he will provide other needed resources.

Inspiration

Ever have trouble determining God's will for your future? You are not alone. "Do I move to Mobile or Minnesota?" "Do I retire or keep working?" "An engineer at IBM or a clerk at Sears?" "Do I marry or stay single?" The questions are endless. One follows another. Every new responsibility brings new decisions. "What college should my son attend?"...

How in the world do we know what God wants? Do we set out a fleece? Seek advice? Pray? Read the Bible? All these are right yet there is one decision that must be made first. (Hang on, it's a tough one.)

To know God's will, we must totally surrender to God's will. Our tendency is to make God's decision for him. I used to do that with my mom. As a child, I hated to get the flu for two reasons: (1) it hurt; (2) my mom was a nurse. Since she was an RN, she knew the fastest way to tackle the flu bug was with a needle ... in my bottom. Ouch! (I grew up thinking penicillin was a dirty word.)

When she would tell me "to go get the medicine,"

I would get everything but the dreaded needle. I'd come back with an armful: aspirin, Pepto Bismol, ear drops, nose drops, ankle wraps—anything but penicillin. But as good moms do, she always got her point across. “Now you know better,” she'd say with a smile, and would go get the (gulp) needle.

Here's the point. Don't go to God with options and expect him to choose one of your preferences. Go to him with empty hands—no hidden agendas, no crossed fingers, nothing behind your back. Go to him with a willingness to do whatever he says. If you surrender your will, then he will “equip you with everything good for doing his will” ([Hebrews 13:21](#)). It's a promise. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

If God asked you for a wish list, what would be your top three items? Pray about these priorities today—for God to refine the list to include items he desires for you.

Exploration

Asking—[Matthew 6:31–34](#); [7:7–8](#); [Luke 18:1–8](#); [John 14:13–14](#).

Solomon Asks for Wisdom

Solomon, David's son, became a powerful king, because the Lord his God was with him and made him very great.

²Solomon spoke to all the people of Israel—the commanders of a hundred men and of a thousand men, the judges, every leader in all Israel, and the leaders of the families.

³Then Solomon and all the people with him went to the place of worship at the town of Gibeon. God's Meeting Tent, which Moses the Lord's servant had made in the desert, was there.

⁴David had brought the Ark of God from Kiriath Jearim to Jerusalem, where he had made a place for it and had set up a tent for it. ⁵The bronze altar that Bezalel son of Uri, who was the son of Hur, had made was in Gibeon in front of the Holy Tent. So Solomon and the people worshiped there. ⁶Solomon went up to the bronze altar in the presence of the Lord at the Meeting Tent and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it.

⁷That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

⁸Solomon answered, "You have been very kind to my father David, and you have made me king in his place. ⁹Now, Lord God, may your promise to my father David come true. You have made me king of a people who are as many as the dust of the earth. ¹⁰Now give me wisdom and knowledge so I can lead these people in the right way, because no one can rule them without your help."

¹¹God said to Solomon, “You have not asked for wealth or riches or honor, or for the death of your enemies, or for a long life. But since you have asked for wisdom and knowledge to lead my people, over whom I have made you king, ¹²I will give you wisdom and knowledge. I will also give you more wealth, riches, and honor than any king who has lived before you or any who will live after you.”

¹³Then Solomon left the place of worship, the Meeting Tent, at Gibeon and went back to Jerusalem. There King Solomon ruled over Israel.

Solomon's Wealth

¹⁴Solomon had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses. He kept some in special cities for the chariots, and others he kept with him in Jerusalem. ¹⁵In Jerusalem Solomon made silver and gold as plentiful as stones and cedar trees as plentiful as the fig trees on the western hills. ¹⁶He imported horses from Egypt and Kue; his traders bought them in Kue. ¹⁷They imported chariots from Egypt for about fifteen pounds of silver apiece, and horses cost nearly four pounds of silver apiece. Then they sold the horses and chariots to all the kings of the Hittites and the Arameans.

Solomon Prepares for the Temple

Solomon decided to build a temple as a place to worship the Lord and also a palace for himself.²He chose seventy thousand men to carry loads, eighty thousand men to cut stone in the hill country, and thirty-six hundred men to direct the workers.

³Solomon sent this message to Hiram king of the city of Tyre: “Help me as you helped my father David by sending him cedar logs so he could build himself a palace to live in. ⁴I will build a temple for worshipping the Lord my God, and I will give this temple to him. There we will burn sweet-smelling spices in his presence. We will continually set out the holy bread in God’s presence. And we will burn sacrifices every morning and evening, on Sabbath days and New Moons, and on the other feast days commanded by the Lord our God. This is a rule for Israel to obey forever.

⁵“The temple I build will be great, because our God is greater than all gods. ⁶But no one can really build a house for our God. Not even the highest of heavens can hold him. How then can I build a temple for him except as a place to burn sacrifices to him?

⁷“Now send me a man skilled in working with gold, silver, bronze, and iron, and with purple, red, and blue thread. He must also know how to make engravings. He will work with my skilled craftsmen in Judah and Jerusalem, whom my father David chose.

⁸“Also send me cedar, pine, and juniper logs from Lebanon. I know your servants are experienced at cutting down the trees

in Lebanon, and my servants will help them. ⁹Send me a lot of wood, because the temple I am going to build will be large and wonderful. ¹⁰I will give your servants who cut the wood one hundred twenty-five thousand bushels of wheat, one hundred twenty-five thousand bushels of barley, one hundred fifteen thousand gallons of wine, and one hundred fifteen thousand gallons of oil.”

¹¹Then Hiram king of Tyre answered Solomon with this letter: “Solomon, because the Lord loves his people, he chose you to be their king.” ¹²Hiram also said: “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who made heaven and earth! He has given King David a wise son, one with wisdom and understanding, who will build a temple for the Lord and a palace for himself.

¹³“I will send you a skilled and wise man named Hiram-Abi. ¹⁴His mother was from the people of Dan, and his father was from Tyre. Hiram-Abi is skilled in working with gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone, and wood, and with purple, blue, and red thread, and expensive linen. He is skilled in making engravings and can make any design you show him. He will help your craftsmen and the craftsmen of your father David.

¹⁵“Now send my servants the wheat, barley, oil, and wine you promised. ¹⁶We will cut as much wood from Lebanon as you need and will bring it on rafts by sea to Joppa. Then you may carry it to Jerusalem.”

¹⁷Solomon counted all the foreigners living in Israel. (This was after the time his father David had counted the people.) There were one hundred fifty-three thousand six hundred foreigners in the country. ¹⁸Solomon chose seventy thousand of them to carry loads, eighty thousand of them to cut stone in the mountains, and thirty-six hundred of them to direct the

workers and to keep the people working.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 2:1–5:1

Situation

Solomon prepared to build a Temple in Jerusalem according to the plans his father, David, had given him. Only the best wood and precious metals were used for God's house.

Observation

God deserves the best we can give. God deserves our finest possessions, our most valuable time, and our precious money.

Inspiration

You don't give for God's sake. You give for your sake. The purpose of tithing is "so that you will learn to respect the Lord your God always" ([Deuteronomy 14:23](#)). How does tithing teach you? Consider the simple act of writing a check for the offering. First you enter the date. Already you are reminded that you are a timebound creature and every possession you have will rust or burn. Best to give it while you can.

Then you enter the name of the one to whom you are giving the money. If the bank would cash it, you'd write *God*. But they won't, so you write the name of the church or group that has earned your trust.

Next comes the amount. Ahh, the moment of truth. You're more than a person with a checkbook. You're David, placing a stone in the sling. You're Peter, one foot on the boat, one foot on the lake. You're a little

boy in a big crowd. A picnic lunch is all the Teacher needs, but it's all you have.

What will you do? Sling the Stone? Take the Step? Give the Meal?

Careful now, don't move too quickly. You aren't just entering an amount ... you are making a confession. A confession that God owns it all anyway.

And then the line in the lower left-hand corner on which you write what the check is for. Hard to know what to put. It's for the light bills and literature. A little bit of outreach. A little bit of salary.

Better yet, it's partial payment for what the church has done to help you raise your family ... keep your own priorities sorted out ... tune you in to his ever-neariness.

Or, perhaps, best yet, it's for you. It's a moment for you to clip yet another strand from the rope of earth so that when he returns you won't be tied up. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

Application

Name the charities to which you give. What do you know about their financial integrity? How much of every dollar goes to fundraising or administration? Call your charity and ask for this information. Good stewardship requires careful giving.

Exploration

Preparations—[Proverbs 15:22](#); [20:18](#); [Luke 14:28–32](#); [2 Corinthians 1:17](#).

Solomon Builds the Temple

Then Solomon began to build the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah. This was where the Lord had appeared to David, Solomon's father. Solomon built the Temple on the place David had prepared on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.²Solomon began building in the second month of the fourth year he ruled Israel.

³Solomon used these measurements for building the Temple of God. It was ninety feet long and thirty feet wide, using the old measurement.⁴The porch in front of the main room of the Temple was thirty feet long and thirty feet high.

He covered the inside of the porch with pure gold.⁵He put panels of pine on the walls of the main room and covered them with pure gold. Then he put designs of palm trees and chains in the gold.⁶He decorated the Temple with gems and gold from [Parvaim](#).⁷He put gold on the Temple's ceiling beams, doorposts, walls, and doors, and he carved creatures with wings on the walls.

⁸Then he made the Most Holy Place. It was thirty feet long and thirty feet wide, as wide as the Temple. He covered its walls with about forty-six thousand pounds of pure gold.⁹The gold nails weighed over a pound. He also covered the upper rooms with gold.

¹⁰He made two creatures with wings for the Most Holy Place and covered them with gold.¹¹The wings of the gold creatures were thirty feet across. One wing of one creature was seven and one-half feet long and touched the Temple wall. The

creature's other wing was also seven and one-half feet long, and it touched a wing of the second creature. ¹²One wing of the second creature touched the other side of the room and was also seven and one-half feet long. The second creature's other wing touched the first creature's wing, and it was also seven and one-half feet long. ¹³Together, the creatures' wings were thirty feet across. The creatures stood on their feet, facing the main room.

¹⁴He made the curtain of blue, purple, and red thread, and expensive linen, and he put designs of creatures with wings in it.

¹⁵He made two pillars to stand in front of the Temple. They were about fifty-two feet tall, and the capital of each pillar was over seven feet tall. ¹⁶He made a net of chains and put them on the tops of the pillars. He made a hundred pomegranates and put them on the chains. ¹⁷Then he put the pillars up in front of the Temple. One pillar stood on the south side, the other on the north. He named the south pillar He Establishes and the north pillar In Him Is Strength.

Things for the Temple

He made a bronze altar thirty feet long, thirty feet wide, and fifteen feet tall. ²Then he made from bronze a large round bowl, which was called the Sea. It was forty-five feet around, fifteen feet across, and seven and one-half feet deep. ³There were carvings of bulls under the rim of the bowl—ten bulls every eighteen inches. They were in two rows and were made in one piece with the bowl.

⁴The bowl rested on the backs of twelve bronze bulls that faced outward from the center of the bowl. Three bulls faced north, three faced west, three faced south, and three faced east. ⁵The sides of the bowl were four inches thick, and it held about seventeen thousand five hundred gallons. The rim of the bowl was like the rim of a cup or like a lily blossom.

⁶He made ten smaller bowls and put five on the south side and five on the north. They were for washing the animals for the burnt offerings, but the large bowl was for the priests to wash in.

⁷He made ten lampstands of gold, following the plans. He put them in the Temple, five on the south side and five on the north.

⁸He made ten tables and put them in the Temple, five on the south side and five on the north. And he used gold to make a hundred other bowls.

⁹He also made the priests' courtyard and the large courtyard. He made the doors that opened to the courtyard and covered them with bronze. ¹⁰Then he put the large bowl in the

southeast corner of the Temple.

¹¹Huram also made bowls, shovels, and small bowls. So he finished his work for King Solomon on the Temple of God:

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- ¹²two pillars;
- two large bowls for the capitals on top of the pillars;
- two nets to cover the two large bowls for the capitals on top of the pillars;
- ¹³four hundred pomegranates for the two nets (there were two rows of pomegranates for each net covering the bowls for the capitals on top of the pillars);
- ¹⁴the stands with a bowl on each stand;
- ¹⁵the large bowl with twelve bulls under it;
- ¹⁶the pots, shovels, forks, and all the things to go with them.

All the things that Hiram-Abi made for King Solomon for the Temple of the Lord were made of polished bronze. ¹⁷The king had these things poured into clay molds that were made in the plain of the Jordan River between Succoth and Zarethan. ¹⁸Solomon had so many things made that the total weight of all the bronze was never known.

¹⁹Solomon also made all the things for God's Temple: the golden altar; tables which held the bread that shows God's people are in his presence; ²⁰the lampstands and their lamps of pure gold, to burn in front of the Most Holy Place as planned; ²¹the flowers, lamps, and tongs of pure gold; ²²the pure gold wick trimmers, small bowls, pans, and dishes used to carry coals, the gold doors for the Temple, and the inside doors of the Most Holy Place and of the main room.

Finally all the work Solomon did for the Temple of the Lord was finished. He brought in everything his father David had set apart for the Temple—all the silver and gold and other articles. And he put everything in the treasuries of God's Temple.

The Ark Is Brought into the Temple

²Solomon called for the older leaders of Israel, the heads of the tribes, and the leaders of the families to come to him in Jerusalem. He wanted them to bring the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord from the older part of the city. ³So all the Israelites came together with the king during the festival in the seventh month.

⁴When all the older leaders of Israel arrived, the Levites lifted up the Ark. ⁵They carried the Ark of the Agreement, the Meeting Tent, and the holy utensils in it; the priests and the Levites brought them up. ⁶King Solomon and all the Israelites gathered before the Ark of the Agreement and sacrificed so many sheep and bulls no one could count them.

⁷Then the priests put the Ark of the Agreement with the Lord in its place inside the Most Holy Place in the Temple, under the wings of the golden creatures. ⁸The wings of these creatures were spread out over the place for the Ark, covering it and its carrying poles. ⁹The carrying poles were so long that anyone standing in the Holy Place in front of the Most Holy Place could see the ends of the poles. But no one could see them from outside the Holy Place. The poles are still there today. ¹⁰The only things inside the Ark were two [stone tablets](#) that Moses had put in the Ark at Mount Sinai. That was where the Lord made his agreement with the Israelites after they came

out of Egypt.

¹¹Then all the priests left the Holy Place. (All the priests from each group had made themselves ready to serve the Lord.) ¹²All the Levite musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and all their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar. They were dressed in white linen and played cymbals, harps, and lyres. With them were one hundred twenty priests who blew trumpets. ¹³Those who blew the trumpets and those who sang together sounded like one person as they praised and thanked the Lord. They sang as others played their trumpets, cymbals, and other instruments. They praised the Lord with this song:

“He is good;
his love continues forever.”

Then the Temple of the Lord was filled with a cloud. ¹⁴The priests could not continue their work because of the cloud, because the Lord’s glory filled the Temple of God.

Life Lessons

[2 Chronicles 5:2–7:22](#)

Situation

Solomon dedicated the new Temple in Jerusalem. He invited tribal elders and chiefs from throughout Israel. While the sacred furnishings from the Meeting Tent were moved inside the Temple, sacrifices began. Amid song, praise, and music, God’s glory filled the Temple.

Observation

The Lord appeared to Solomon and told him that his work on the Temple pleased him. He said that if his judgment fell on the nation due to sin, they could turn to the Lord in repentance. The Lord would then respond to true repentance by forgiving their sin and healing their land.

Inspiration

With each denial Peter inches closer to the edge of the canyon ... until the ground gives way and he falls.

Have you been there? Have you felt the ground of conviction give way beneath your feet? The ledge crumbles, your eyes widen, and down you go. *Poof!*

Now what do you do? You could stay in the canyon. Many do. Many live their lives in the shadows. Many never return. Some dismiss their deeds. "Well, everybody has a little slip now and then." Some deny their deeds. "Fall? Me? Are you kidding? These aren't bruises. These aren't cuts. I'm as healthy as I've ever been. Me and Jesus? We are tight." Some distort their deeds. "I'm not to blame. It's his fault. It's society's responsibility. If the people hadn't asked me, I wouldn't have answered. Don't point the finger at me."

When we fall, we can dismiss it. We can deny it. We can distort it. Or we can deal with it.

Luke adds a chilling phrase to his account of Peter's denial of Christ. When the cock crowed, "the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter" ([Luke 22:61](#)).

The rooster reminds Peter of Jesus' warning. Peter

lifts his eyes and looks across the courtyard, only to find Jesus looking at him. Jesus is being assailed by accusations, but he doesn't hear them. He hears only the denial of his friend.

If Peter ever thought he could keep his fall a secret, he now knows he can't. "Nothing in all the world can be hidden from God. Everything is clear and lies open before him, and to him we must explain the way we have lived" ([Hebrews 4:13](#)).

We keep no secrets from God. Confession is not telling God what we did. He already knows. Confession is simply agreeing with God that our acts were wrong. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

If you know there is unconfessed sin in your life, confess it now. Also ask the Lord to search you to see if there is anything in your life that might be keeping you from full fellowship with him. Remember that God wants to forgive your sinful deeds and thoughts through his wonderful grace.

Exploration

Confession of Sin—[Nehemiah 1:5-9](#); [Job 42:5-6](#); [Psalm 32:5](#); [James 5:16](#); [1 John 1:8-9](#).

Solomon Speaks to the People

Then Solomon said, “The Lord said he would live in the dark cloud. ²Lord, I have built a wonderful Temple for you—a place for you to live forever.”

³While all the Israelites were standing there, King Solomon turned to them and blessed them. ⁴Then he said, “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel. He has done what he promised to my father David. The Lord said, ⁵‘Since the time I brought my people out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city in any tribe of Israel where a temple will be built for me. I did not choose a man to lead my people Israel. ⁶But now I have chosen Jerusalem as the place I am to be worshiped, and I have chosen David to lead my people Israel.’

⁷“My father David wanted to build a temple for the Lord, the God of Israel. ⁸But the Lord said to my father David, ‘It was good that you wanted to build a temple for me. ⁹But you are not the one to build it. Your son, who comes from your own body, is the one who will build my temple.’

¹⁰“Now the Lord has kept his promise. I am the king now in place of David my father. Now I rule Israel as the Lord promised, and I have built the Temple for the Lord, the God of Israel. ¹¹There I have put the Ark, in which is the Agreement the Lord made with the Israelites.”

Solomon's Prayer

¹²Then Solomon stood facing the Lord's altar, and all the

Israelites were standing behind him. He spread out his hands.
¹³He had made a bronze platform seven and one-half feet long, seven and one-half feet wide, and seven and one-half feet high, and he had placed it in the middle of the outer courtyard. Solomon stood on the platform. Then he kneeled in front of all the people of Israel gathered there, and he spread out his hands toward the sky. ¹⁴He said, “Lord, God of Israel, there is no god like you in heaven or on earth. You keep your agreement of love with your servants who truly follow you. ¹⁵You have kept the promise you made to your servant David, my father. You spoke it with your own mouth and finished it with your hands today.

¹⁶“Now, Lord, God of Israel, keep the promise you made to your servant David, my father. You said, ‘If your sons are careful to obey my teachings as you have obeyed, there will always be someone from your family ruling Israel.’ ¹⁷Now, Lord, God of Israel, please continue to keep that promise you made to your servant.

¹⁸“But, God, can you really live here on the earth with people? The sky and the highest place in heaven cannot contain you. Surely this house which I have built cannot contain you. ¹⁹But please listen to my prayer and my request, because I am your servant. Lord my God, hear this prayer your servant prays to you. ²⁰Day and night please watch over this Temple where you have said you would be worshiped. Hear the prayer I pray facing this Temple. ²¹Hear my prayers and the prayers of your people Israel when we pray facing this place. Hear from your home in heaven, and when you hear, forgive us.

²²“If someone wrongs another person, he will be brought to

the altar in this Temple. If he swears an oath that he is not guilty, ²³then hear in heaven. Judge the case, punish the guilty, but declare that the innocent person is not guilty.

²⁴“When your people, the Israelites, sin against you, their enemies will defeat them. But if they come back to you and praise you and pray to you in this Temple, ²⁵then listen from heaven. Forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them back to the land you gave to them and their ancestors.

²⁶“When they sin against you, you will stop the rain from falling on their land. Then they will pray, facing this place and praising you; they will stop sinning when you make them suffer. ²⁷When this happens, hear their prayer in heaven, and forgive the sins of your servants, the Israelites. Teach them to do what is right. Then please send rain to this land you have given particularly to them.

²⁸“At times the land will get so dry that no food will grow, or a great sickness will spread among the people. Sometimes the crops will be destroyed by locusts or grasshoppers. Your people will be attacked in their cities by their enemies, or will become sick. ²⁹When any of these things happens, the people will become truly sorry. If your people spread their hands in prayer toward this Temple, ³⁰then hear their prayers from your home in heaven. Forgive and treat each person as he should be treated because you know what is in a person’s heart. Only you know what is in people’s hearts. ³¹Then the people will respect and obey you as long as they live in this land you gave our ancestors.

³²“People who are not Israelites, foreigners from other lands, will hear about your greatness and power. They will come from far away to pray at this Temple. ³³Then hear from

your home in heaven, and do whatever they ask you. Then people everywhere will know you and respect you, just as your people Israel do. Then everyone will know that I built this Temple as a place to worship you.

^{34c}When your people go out to fight their enemies along some road on which you send them, your people will pray to you, facing this city which you have chosen and the Temple I have built for you. ³⁵Then hear in heaven their prayers, and do what is right.

^{36c}Everyone sins, so your people will also sin against you. You will become angry with them and will hand them over to their enemies. Their enemies will capture them and take them away to a country far or near. ³⁷Your people will be sorry for their sins when they are held as prisoners in another country. They will be sorry and pray to you in the land where they are held as prisoners, saying, 'We have sinned. We have done wrong and acted wickedly.' ³⁸They will truly turn back to you in the land where they are captives. They will pray, facing this land you gave their ancestors, this city you have chosen, and the Temple I have built for you. ³⁹Then hear their prayers from your home in heaven and do what is right. Forgive your people who have sinned against you.

^{40c}Now, my God, look at us. Listen to the prayers we pray in this place.

⁴¹Now, rise, Lord God, and come to your resting place.

Come with the Ark of the Agreement that shows your strength.

Let your priests receive your salvation, Lord God,
and may your holy people be happy because of your goodness.

⁴²Lord God, do not reject your appointed one.
Remember your love for your servant David.”

The Temple Is Given to the Lord

When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from the sky and burned up the burnt offering and the sacrifices. The Lord's glory filled the Temple. ²The priests could not enter the Temple of the Lord, because the Lord's glory filled it. ³When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down from heaven and the Lord's glory on the Temple, they bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground. They worshiped and thanked the Lord, saying,

“He is good;
his love continues forever.”

⁴Then King Solomon and all the people offered sacrifices to the Lord. ⁵King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand cattle and one hundred twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people gave the Temple to God. ⁶The priests stood ready to do their work. The Levites also stood with the instruments of the Lord's music that King David had made for praising the Lord. The priests and Levites were saying, “His love continues forever.” The priests, who stood across from the Levites, blew their trumpets, and all the Israelites were standing.

⁷Solomon made holy the middle part of the courtyard, which is in front of the Temple of the Lord. There he offered whole burnt offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings. He offered them in the courtyard, because the bronze altar he had made could not hold the burnt offerings, grain offerings, and

fat.

⁸Solomon and all the Israelites celebrated the festival for seven days. There were many people, and they came from as far away as Lebo Hamath and the brook of Egypt. ⁹For seven days they celebrated giving the altar for the worship of God. Then they celebrated the festival for seven days. On the eighth day they had a meeting. ¹⁰On the twenty-third day of the seventh month Solomon sent the people home, full of joy. They were happy because the Lord had been so good to David, Solomon, and his people Israel.

The Lord Appears to Solomon

¹¹Solomon finished the Temple of the Lord and his royal palace. He had success in doing everything he planned in the Temple of the Lord and his own palace. ¹²Then the Lord appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself to be a Temple for sacrifices.

¹³"I may stop the sky from sending rain. I may command the locusts to destroy the land. I may send sicknesses to my people. ¹⁴Then if my people, who are called by my name, are sorry for what they have done, if they pray and obey me and stop their evil ways, I will hear them from heaven. I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land. ¹⁵Now I will see them, and I will listen to the prayers prayed in this place. ¹⁶I have chosen this Temple and made it holy. So I will be worshiped there forever. Yes, I will always watch over it and love it.

¹⁷"But you must serve me as your father David did. You must obey all I have commanded and keep my laws and rules.

¹⁸If you do, I will make your kingdom strong. This is the agreement I made with your father David, saying, ‘Someone from your family will always rule in Israel.’

¹⁹“But you must follow me and obey the laws and commands I have given you. You must not serve or worship other gods. ²⁰If you do, I will take the Israelites out of my land, the land I have given them, and I will leave this Temple that I have made holy. All the nations will make fun of it and speak evil about it. ²¹This Temple is honored now, but then, everyone who passes by will be shocked. They will ask, ‘Why did the Lord do this terrible thing to this land and this Temple?’ ²²People will answer, ‘This happened because they left the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God who brought them out of Egypt. They decided to follow other gods and worshiped and served them, so he brought all this disaster on them.’”

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 8:1–9:31

Situation

Solomon built Israel into a wealthy and powerful nation. Neighboring rulers came to visit him and sought to learn from his great wisdom. Solomon became caught up in worldly affairs, eventually marrying pagan women.

Observation

Solomon used his God-given wisdom to make Israel strong. But as Solomon became wealthy, he grew distant from God.

Inspiration

From the looks of things, you're pretty impressive. You've got a nice place. And I suppose your neighbors would agree that you're a hard worker ... climbing right on up that ladder toward success, right? I realize you're not into big bucks; but face it, nobody's going hungry. Far from it. Your job is fairly secure. Making more money than ever, you're on your way. But wait, I want to know about the "other half." These things I've mentioned are all external—physical and material stuff. What I want to know is how things are internally.

You look secure and successful, but the half has not been told, right? Part of you is insecure and fearful. Underneath, you're pretty weak. You appear to be happy, easy-going, and fulfilled; but the half has not been told, has it? You wonder about where all

this is leading you. Your restless drive for more and your desire for calm, peaceful contentment seem poles apart ... because they are poles apart. Deep down, nothing within you smiles.

Your salary is good and your material possessions are growing in number, but again, the half has not been told. The truth is that you are empty on the inside and you're faking it on the outside. Not one thing you own in all your "kingdom" has brought you the happiness you long for. So you're thinking, "Maybe if I could land that better job," or "get into that bigger house," or ... or ...

But don't allow the smoke screen of more money to blind your eyes to the truth. There's a lot more to being rich than making more money. Seneca, the Roman, was right, "Money has never yet made anyone rich." Do you want riches? Then listen to Jesus: But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

For the real riches, try switching kingdoms. (From *Living on the Ragged Edge* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Is wealth your aim? Put that dream aside and give priority to God. Do something today to curb the appetite for money, and be content with what you have.

Exploration

True Wealth—[Deuteronomy 4:40](#); [Mark 10:17-31](#); [Luke 12:33](#); [16:1-13](#).

Solomon's Other Achievements

By the end of twenty years, Solomon had built the Temple of the Lord and the royal palace.² Solomon rebuilt the towns that Hiram had given him, and Solomon sent Israelites to live in them.³ Then he went to Hamath Zobah and captured it.⁴ Solomon also built the town of Tadmor in the desert, and he built all the towns in Hamath as towns for storing grain and supplies.⁵ He rebuilt the towns of Upper Beth Horon and Lower Beth Horon, protecting them with strong walls, gates, and bars in the gates.⁶ He also rebuilt the town of Baalath. And he built all the other towns for storage and all the cities for his chariots and horses. He built all he wanted in Jerusalem, Lebanon, and everywhere he ruled.

⁷There were other people in the land who were not Israelites—the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.⁸ They were descendants of the people that the Israelites had not destroyed. Solomon forced them to be slave workers, as is still true today.⁹ But Solomon did not make slaves of the Israelites. They were his soldiers, chief captains, commanders of his chariots, and his chariot drivers.¹⁰ These were his most important officers. There were two hundred fifty of them to direct the people.

¹¹Solomon brought the daughter of the king of Egypt from the older part of Jerusalem to the palace he had built for her. Solomon said, “My wife must not live in King David’s palace,

because the places where the Ark of the Agreement has been are holy.”

¹²Then Solomon offered burnt offerings to the Lord on the altar he had built for the Lord in front of the Temple porch. ¹³He offered sacrifices every day as Moses had commanded. They were offered on the Sabbath days, New Moons, and the three yearly feasts—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Shelters. ¹⁴Solomon followed his father David’s instructions and chose the groups of priests for their service and the Levites to lead the praise and to help the priests do their daily work. And he chose the gatekeepers by their groups to serve at each gate, as David, the man of God, had commanded. ¹⁵They obeyed all of Solomon’s commands to the priests and Levites, as well as his commands about the treasuries.

¹⁶All Solomon’s work was done as he had said from the day the foundation of the Temple of the Lord was begun, until it was finished. So the Temple was finished.

¹⁷Then Solomon went to the towns of Ezion Geber and Elath near the Red Sea in the land of Edom. ¹⁸Hiram sent ships to Solomon that were commanded by his own men, who were skilled sailors. Hiram’s men went with Solomon’s men to Ophir and brought back about thirty-four thousand pounds of gold to King Solomon.

The Queen of Sheba Visits

When the queen of Sheba heard about Solomon's fame, she came to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions. She had a large group of servants with her and camels carrying spices, jewels, and much gold. When she came to Solomon, she talked with him about all she had in mind,² and Solomon answered all her questions. Nothing was too hard for him to explain to her.³ The queen of Sheba saw that Solomon was very wise. She saw the palace he had built,⁴ the food on his table, his many officers, the palace servants and their good clothes, the servants who served Solomon his wine and their good clothes. She saw the whole burnt offerings he made in the Temple of the Lord. All these things amazed her.

⁵So she said to King Solomon, "What I heard in my own country about your achievements and wisdom is true.⁶ I did not believe it then, but now I have come and seen it with my own eyes. I was not told even half of your great wisdom! You are much greater than I had heard.⁷ Your men and officers are very lucky, because in always serving you, they are able to hear your wisdom.⁸ Praise the Lord your God who was pleased to make you king. He has put you on his throne to rule for the Lord your God, because your God loves the people of Israel and supports them forever. He has made you king over them to keep justice and to rule fairly."

⁹Then she gave the king about nine thousand pounds of gold and many spices and jewels. No one had ever given such spices as the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

¹⁰Hiram's men and Solomon's men brought gold from Ophir, juniper wood, and jewels. ¹¹King Solomon used the juniper wood to build steps for the Temple of the Lord and the palace and to make lyres and harps for the musicians. No one in Judah had ever seen such beautiful things as these.

¹²King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba everything she wanted and asked for, even more than she had brought to him. Then she and her servants returned to her own country.

Solomon's Wealth

¹³Every year King Solomon received about fifty thousand pounds of gold. ¹⁴Besides that, he also received gold from traders and merchants. All the kings of Arabia and the governors of the land also brought gold and silver.

¹⁵King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold, each of which contained about seven and one-half pounds of hammered gold. ¹⁶He also made three hundred smaller shields of hammered gold, each of which contained about four pounds of gold. The king put them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon.

¹⁷The king built a large throne of ivory and covered it with pure gold. ¹⁸The throne had six steps on it and a gold footstool. There were armrests on both sides of the chair, and each armrest had a lion beside it. ¹⁹Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one lion at each end of each step. Nothing like this had ever been made for any other kingdom. ²⁰All of Solomon's drinking cups, as well as the dishes in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon, were made of pure gold. In Solomon's time people did not think silver was valuable.

²¹King Solomon had many ships that he sent out to trade, with Hiram's men as the crews. Every three years the ships returned, bringing back gold, silver, ivory, apes, and baboons.

²²King Solomon had more riches and wisdom than all the other kings on earth. ²³All the kings of the earth wanted to see Solomon and listen to the wisdom God had given him. ²⁴Year after year everyone who came brought gifts of silver and gold, clothes, weapons, spices, horses, and mules.

²⁵Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and he had twelve thousand horses. He kept some in special cities for the chariots, and others he kept with him in Jerusalem.

²⁶Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. ²⁷In Jerusalem the king made silver as common as stones and cedar trees as plentiful as the fig trees on the western hills. ²⁸Solomon imported horses from Egypt and all other countries.

Solomon's Death

²⁹Everything else Solomon did, from the beginning to the end, is written in the records of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer, who wrote about Jeroboam, Nebat's son. ³⁰Solomon ruled in Jerusalem over all Israel for forty years. ³¹Then Solomon died and was buried in Jerusalem, the city of David, his father. And Solomon's son Rehoboam became king in his place.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 10:1–11:17

Situation

King Solomon died. Rehoboam, in prideful youth, turned down the wisdom of older counselors. His blunder sparked the division of Israel.

Observation

God used Rehoboam's pride to accomplish his divine plan. Due to Solomon's sin, God planned to divide the kingdom. God uses our sinful decisions to accomplish his plan.

Inspiration

My kids pulled a fast one on me one Christmas years ago. They teamed up, pooled their vast financial resources, and bought me a little motto to set on my desk. It was more than cute ... it was convicting. In bold, black letters it read:

Diets Are For People Who Are Thick And Tired Of It

At first you thmle ... then it makes you thad. Especially if you're not thick of being thick!

There's another thickness that's just as bad. We could call it an "inner thickness." I'm referring to insensitivity ... being unaware, out of touch, lacking insight, failing to pay attention. The Hebrew Scriptures occasionally mention those who are foolish and simple, as in the book of Proverbs ([1:22–33](#)). The original term means "thick, dull, sluggish." It's the picture of mental dullness, one who is

virtually blind toward others ... failing to feel others' feelings, think others' thoughts, sense others' needs.

Professional insensitivity is painfully common. To some physicians you're case number twenty-three today ... a body, weighing so much ... a mouth, saying words ... a gall bladder, needing removal.

And how about insensitive teachers or speakers? Talk about painful! A block of information is dumped into your ears from their mouth. Whether it's interesting or well thought through is unimportant. The whole episode is about as memorable as changing a flat.

And have you come across an insensitive sales person lately? You can feel the thickness. Your exasperation leads to gross impatience ... and then, finally, confusion. You're not sure if the individual only understands Swahili ... or is recovering from advanced lockjaw.

Perhaps the most tragic shades of insensitivity occur in the home. Between mates, to begin with. Needs in the heart of a wife long to be discovered by her husband. She hides them until an appropriate moment ... but it never arrives. He's "too busy." What cursed words! "Other things are more important." Oh, really? Name one.

A husband wrestles with a matter down deep ... in the "combat zone" of his mind. Lacking perception, the preoccupied wife drives on—never pausing, never looking into his eyes, his soul-gate, reading the signs that spell

I A-M H-U-R-T-I-N-G.

... To be thick is understandable. To be thick and tired of it is commendable. To be thick and tired of it but unwilling to change—is inexcusable. (From *Come Before Winter* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

What is your reputation with family and friends? Do they see you as a sensitive person, or as a selfish person who has little time for their needs and concerns? Listen and be sensitive to their needs. Ask God for the opportunity to spend time with someone this week who needs a listening ear. Be prepared to respond when God sends someone.

Exploration

Concern for Others—[Psalm 103:13](#); [Luke 10:25–37](#); [Acts 20:35](#); [Galatians 6:2](#); [Philippians 2:3–4](#); [Hebrews 4:15](#); [James 1:27](#).

Israel Turns Against Rehoboam

Rehoboam went to Shechem, where all the Israelites had gone to make him king. ²Jeroboam son of Nebat was in Egypt, where he had gone to escape from King Solomon. When Jeroboam heard about Rehoboam being made king, he returned from Egypt. ³After the people sent for him, he and the people went to Rehoboam and said to him, ⁴“Your father forced us to work very hard. Now, make it easier for us, and don’t make us work as he did. Then we will serve you.”

⁵Rehoboam answered, “Come back to me in three days.” So the people left.

⁶King Rehoboam asked the older leaders who had advised Solomon during his lifetime, “How do you think I should answer these people?”

⁷They answered, “Be kind to these people. If you please them and give them a kind answer, they will serve you always.”

⁸But Rehoboam rejected this advice. Instead, he asked the young men who had grown up with him and who served as his advisers. ⁹Rehoboam asked them, “What is your advice? How should we answer these people who said, ‘Don’t make us work as hard as your father did’?”

¹⁰The young men who had grown up with him answered, “The people said to you, ‘Your father forced us to work very hard. Now make our work easier.’ You should tell them, ‘My little finger is bigger than my father’s legs. ¹¹He forced you to

work hard, but I will make you work even harder. My father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with whips that have sharp points.”

¹²Rehoboam had told the people, “Come back to me in three days.” So after three days Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam. ¹³King Rehoboam spoke cruel words to them, because he had rejected the advice of the older leaders. ¹⁴He followed the advice of the young men and said, “My father forced you to work hard, but I will make you work even harder. My father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with whips that have sharp points.” ¹⁵So the king did not listen to the people. God caused this to happen so that the Lord could keep the promise he had made to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah, a prophet from Shiloh.

¹⁶When all the Israelites saw that the king refused to listen to them, they said to the king,

“We have no share in David!
We have no part in the son of Jesse!
People of Israel, let’s go to our own homes!
Let David’s son rule his own people.”

So all the Israelites went home. ¹⁷But Rehoboam still ruled over the Israelites who lived in the towns of Judah.

¹⁸Adoniram was in charge of the forced labor. When Rehoboam sent him to the people, they threw stones at him until he died. But King Rehoboam ran to his chariot and escaped to Jerusalem. ¹⁹Since then, Israel has been against the family of David.

When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he gathered one hundred eighty thousand of the best soldiers from Judah and Benjamin. He wanted to fight Israel to take back his kingdom.² But the Lord spoke his word to Shemaiah, a man of God, saying,³ “Speak to Solomon’s son Rehoboam, the king of Judah, and to all the Israelites living in Judah and Benjamin. Say to them,⁴ “The Lord says you must not go to war against your brothers. Every one of you should go home, because I made all these things happen.” So they obeyed the Lord’s command and turned back and did not attack Jeroboam.

Rehoboam Makes Judah Strong

⁵Rehoboam lived in Jerusalem and built strong cities in Judah to defend it. ⁶He built up the cities of Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, ⁷Beth Zur, Soco, Adullam, ⁸Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, ⁹Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, ¹⁰Zorah, Aijalon, and Hebron. These were strong, walled cities in Judah and Benjamin. ¹¹When Rehoboam made those cities strong, he put commanders and supplies of food, oil, and wine in them. ¹²Also, Rehoboam put shields and spears in all the cities and made them very strong. Rehoboam kept the people of Judah and Benjamin under his control.

¹³The priests and the Levites from all over Israel joined Rehoboam. ¹⁴The Levites even left their pasturelands and property and came to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons refused to let them serve as priests to the Lord. ¹⁵Jeroboam chose his own priests for the places of worship and for the goat and calf idols he had made. ¹⁶There were people from all the tribes of Israel who wanted to obey the Lord, the God of Israel. So they went to Jerusalem with the Levites to

sacrifice to the Lord, the God of their fathers. ¹⁷These people made the kingdom of Judah strong, and they supported Solomon's son Rehoboam for three years. During this time they lived the way David and Solomon had lived.

Rehoboam's Family

¹⁸Rehoboam married Mahalath, the daughter of Jerimoth and Abihail. Jerimoth was David's son, and Abihail was the daughter of Eliab, Jesse's son. ¹⁹Mahalath gave Rehoboam these sons: Jeush, Shemariah, and Zham. ²⁰Then Rehoboam married Absalom's daughter Maacah, and she gave Rehoboam these children: Abijah, Attai, Ziza, and Shelomith. ²¹Rehoboam loved Maacah more than his other wives and slave women. Rehoboam had eighteen wives and sixty slave women and was the father of twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters.

²²Rehoboam chose Abijah son of Maacah to be the leader of his own brothers, because he planned to make Abijah king. ²³Rehoboam acted wisely. He spread his sons through all the areas of Judah and Benjamin, sending them to every strong, walled city. He gave plenty of supplies to his sons, and he also found wives for them.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 11:18–15:19

Situation

King Rehoboam showed wisdom after Israel and Judah split. He sought to honor God as his father and grandfather had done. But after becoming well

established, Rehoboam stopped depending on God. God used the ambitious king of Egypt to cause Rehoboam to look to God again. But the consequences of Rehoboam's decisions still followed him and affected the whole nation.

Observation

No matter what circumstance or temptation causes us to drift away from God, he still loves us and wants us back. God forgives us and calls us back to himself. Sometimes God uses a difficult situation to call us back, as in the case of Rehoboam. When we repent, we may still bear the consequences of our sin, but God forgives and restores us.

Inspiration

A lot of us live with a hidden fear that God is angry at us. Somewhere, sometime, some Sunday school class or some television show convinced us that God has a whip behind his back, a paddle in his back pocket, and he's going to nail us when we've gone too far. No concept could be more wrong! Your Savior's Father is very fond of you and only wants to share his love with you.

Could you use the genuine fresh air of God's forgiveness? Would you love to stand in the approval of God again? How do you do it? By genuinely admitting to God that you've made a mistake, knowing that God loves you more than he hates your mistakes. And knowing that he will forgive those mistakes.

Does the Word of God say, "There is *limited* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"? No.

Does it say, “There is *some* condemnation ...” ? No. It says, “There is *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Think of it—regardless of our sin, we are not guilty! (From *The Inspirational Bible*, “God Forgives”)

Application

By his nature God wants to forgive and restore you. He wants to meet your deepest longings. What does it mean to you that your Father is “very fond of you”? Think about that through the next day. Then, think of at least one person with whom you can share this good news.

Exploration

Forgiveness by God—[Luke 24:46–48](#); [Acts 10:43](#); [Ephesians 1:7](#); [1 John 1:9](#).

Shishak Attacks Jerusalem

After Rehoboam's kingdom was set up and he became strong, he and the people of Judah stopped obeying the teachings of the Lord.² During the fifth year Rehoboam was king, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem, because Rehoboam and the people were unfaithful to the Lord.³ Shishak had twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen. He brought troops of Libyans, Sukkites, and Cushites from Egypt with him, so many they couldn't be counted.⁴ Shishak captured the strong, walled cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem.

⁵Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the leaders of Judah who had gathered in Jerusalem because they were afraid of Shishak. Shemaiah said to them, "This is what the Lord says: 'You have left me, so now I will leave you to face Shishak alone.'"

⁶Then the leaders of Judah and King Rehoboam were sorry for what they had done. They said, "The Lord does what is right."

⁷When the Lord saw they were sorry for what they had done, the Lord spoke his word to Shemaiah, saying, "The king and the leaders are sorry. So I will not destroy them but will save them soon. I will not use Shishak to punish Jerusalem in my anger.⁸ But the people of Jerusalem will become Shishak's servants so they may learn that serving me is different than serving the kings of other nations."

⁹Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem and took the treasures from the Temple of the Lord and the king's palace. He

took everything, even the gold shields Solomon had made. ¹⁰So King Rehoboam made bronze shields to take their place and gave them to the commanders of the guards for the palace gates. ¹¹Whenever the king went to the Temple of the Lord, the guards went with him, carrying the shields. Later, they would put them back in the guardroom.

¹²When Rehoboam was sorry for what he had done, the Lord held his anger back and did not fully destroy Rehoboam. There was some good in Judah.

¹³King Rehoboam made himself a strong king in Jerusalem. He was forty-one years old when he became king, and he was king in Jerusalem for seventeen years. Jerusalem is the city that the Lord chose from all the tribes of Israel in which he was to be worshiped. Rehoboam's mother was Naamah from the country of Ammon. ¹⁴Rehoboam did evil because he did not want to obey the Lord.

¹⁵The things Rehoboam did as king, from the beginning to the end, are written in the records of Shemaiah the prophet and Iddo the seer, in the family histories. There were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the time they ruled. ¹⁶Rehoboam died and was buried in Jerusalem, and his son Abijah became king in his place.

Abijah King of Judah

Abijah became the king of Judah during the eighteenth year Jeroboam was king of Israel.²Abijah ruled in Jerusalem for three years. His mother was Maacah daughter of Uriel from the town of Gibeah.

And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam.³Abijah led an army of four hundred thousand capable soldiers into battle, and Jeroboam prepared to fight him with eight hundred thousand capable soldiers.

⁴Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim in the mountains of Ephraim and said, "Jeroboam and all Israel, listen to me! ⁵You should know that the Lord, the God of Israel, gave David and his sons the right to rule Israel forever by an agreement of salt. ⁶But Jeroboam son of Nebat, one of the officers of Solomon, David's son, turned against his master. ⁷Then worthless, evil men joined Jeroboam against Rehoboam, Solomon's son. He was young and didn't know what to do, so he could not stop them.

⁸"Now you people are making plans against the Lord's kingdom, which belongs to David's sons. There are many of you, and you have the gold calves Jeroboam made for you as gods. ⁹You have thrown out the Levites and the Lord's priests, Aaron's sons. You have chosen your own priests as people in other countries do. Anyone who comes with a young bull and seven male sheep can become a priest of idols that are not gods.

¹⁰"But as for us, the Lord is our God; we have not left him.

The priests who serve the Lord are Aaron's sons, and the Levites help them.¹¹ They offer burnt offerings and sweet-smelling incense to the Lord every morning and evening. They put the bread on the special table in the Temple. And they light the lamps on the gold lampstand every evening. We obey the command of the Lord our God, but you have left him.¹² God himself is with us as our ruler. His priests blow the trumpet to call us to war against you. Men of Israel, don't fight against the Lord, the God of your ancestors, because you won't succeed."

¹³But Jeroboam had sent some troops to sneak behind Judah's army. So while Jeroboam was in front of Judah's army, Jeroboam's soldiers were behind them.¹⁴ When the soldiers of Judah turned around, they saw Jeroboam's army attacking both in front and back. So they cried out to the Lord, and the priests blew the trumpets.¹⁵ Then the men of Judah gave a battle cry. When they shouted, God caused Jeroboam and the army of Israel to run away from Abijah and the army of Judah.¹⁶ When the army of Israel ran away from the men of Judah, God handed them over to Judah.¹⁷ Abijah's army struck Israel so that five hundred thousand of Israel's best men were killed.¹⁸ So at that time the people of Israel were defeated. And the people of Judah won, because they depended on the Lord, the God of their ancestors.

¹⁹Abijah's army chased Jeroboam's army and captured from him the towns of Bethel, Jeshanah, and Ephron, and the small villages near them.²⁰ Jeroboam never became strong again while Abijah was alive. The Lord struck Jeroboam, and he died.

²¹But Abijah became strong. He married fourteen women and was the father of twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters.

²²Everything else Abijah did—what he said and what he did—is recorded in the writings of the prophet Iddo.

Abijah died and was buried in Jerusalem. His son Asa became king in his place, and there was peace in the country for ten years during Asa's time.

Asa King of Judah

²Asa did what the Lord his God said was good and right. ³He removed the foreign altars and the places where gods were worshiped. He smashed the stone pillars that honored other gods, and he tore down the Asherah idols. ⁴Asa commanded the people of Judah to follow the Lord, the God of their ancestors, and to obey his teachings and commandments. ⁵He also removed the places where gods were worshiped and the incense altars from every town in Judah. So the kingdom had peace while Asa was king. ⁶Asa built strong, walled cities in Judah during the time of peace. He had no war in these years, because the Lord gave him peace.

God is the one who heals. He may use a branch of medicine and a branch of a hospital or a branch of a live oak tree, but he is the one who takes the poison out of the system. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

⁷Asa said to the people of Judah, "Let's build up these towns and put walls around them. Let's make towers, gates, and bars in the gates. This country is ours, because we have obeyed the Lord our God. We have followed him, and he has given us peace all around." So they built and had success.

⁸Asa had an army of three hundred thousand men from Judah and two hundred eighty thousand men from Benjamin. The men from Judah carried large shields and spears. The men from Benjamin carried small shields and bows and arrows. All

of them were brave fighting men.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: Our Physician

February 15, 1921. New York City. The operating room of the Kane Summit Hospital. A doctor is performing an appendectomy.

In many ways the events leading to the surgery are uneventful. The patient has complained of severe abdominal pain. The diagnosis is clear: an inflamed appendix. Dr. Evan O'Neill Kane is performing the surgery. In his distinguished thirty-seven-year medical career, he has performed nearly four thousand appendectomies, so this surgery will be uneventful in all ways except two ... The first novelty of this operation? The use of local anesthesia in major surgery... . The second is the patient. The courageous candidate for surgery by Dr. Kane was Dr. Kane.

To prove his point, Dr. Kane operated on himself!

A wise move. The doctor became a patient in order to convince the patients to trust the doctor.

... The story of the doctor who became his own patient is mild compared to the story of the God who became human. But Jesus did. So that you and I would believe that the Healer knows our hurts, he voluntarily became one of us. He placed himself in our position. He suffered our pains and felt our fears.

Rejection? He felt it. Temptation? He knew it. Loneliness? He experienced it. Death? He tasted it.

And stress? He could write a best-selling book about it.

Why did he do it? One reason. So that when you hurt you will go to him—your Father and your Physician—and let him heal. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

⁹Then Zerah from Cush came out to fight them with an enormous army and three hundred chariots. They came as far as the town of Mareshah. ¹⁰So Asa went out to fight Zerah and prepared for battle in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah.

¹¹Asa called out to the Lord his God, saying, “Lord, only you can help weak people against the strong. Help us, Lord our God, because we depend on you. We fight against this enormous army in your name. Lord, you are our God. Don’t let anyone win against you.”

¹²So the Lord defeated the Cushites when Asa’s army from Judah attacked them, and the Cushites ran away. ¹³Asa’s army chased them as far as the town of Gerar. So many Cushites were killed that the army could not fight again; they were crushed by the Lord and his army. Asa and his army carried many valuable things away from the enemy. ¹⁴They destroyed all the towns near Gerar, because the people living in these towns were afraid of the Lord. Since these towns had many valuable things, Asa’s army took them away. ¹⁵Asa’s army also attacked the camps where the shepherds lived and took many sheep and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

Asa's Changes

The Spirit of God entered Azariah son of Oded. ²Azariah went to meet Asa and said, "Listen to me, Asa and all you people of Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you obey him, you will find him, but if you leave him, he will leave you. ³For a long time Israel was without the true God and without a priest to teach them and without the teachings. ⁴But when they were in trouble, they turned to the Lord, the God of Israel. They looked for him and found him. ⁵In those days no one could travel safely. There was much trouble in all the nations. ⁶One nation would destroy another nation, and one city would destroy another city, because God troubled them with all kinds of distress. ⁷But you should be strong. Don't give up, because you will get a reward for your good work."

⁸Asa felt brave when he heard these words and the message from Azariah son of Oded the prophet. So he removed the hateful idols from all of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns he had captured in the hills of Ephraim. He repaired the Lord's altar that was in front of the porch of the Temple of the Lord.

⁹Then Asa gathered all the people from Judah and Benjamin and from the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were living in Judah. Many people came to Asa even from Israel, because they saw that the Lord, Asa's God, was with him.

¹⁰Asa and these people gathered in Jerusalem in the third

month of the fifteenth year of Asa's rule. ¹¹At that time they sacrificed to the Lord seven hundred bulls and seven thousand sheep and goats from the valuable things Asa's army had taken from their enemies. ¹²Then they made an agreement to obey the Lord, the God of their ancestors, with their whole being. ¹³Anyone who refused to obey the Lord, the God of Israel, was to be killed. It did not matter if that person was important or unimportant, a man or woman. ¹⁴Then Asa and the people made a promise before the Lord, shouting with a loud voice and blowing trumpets and sheep's horns. ¹⁵All the people of Judah were happy about the promise, because they had promised with all their heart. They looked for God and found him. So the Lord gave them peace in all the country.

¹⁶King Asa also removed Maacah, his grandmother, from being queen mother, because she had made a terrible Asherah idol. Asa cut down that idol, smashed it into pieces, and burned it in the Kidron Valley. ¹⁷But the places of worship to gods were not removed from Judah. Even so, Asa was faithful all his life.

¹⁸Asa brought into the Temple of God the gifts he and his father had given: silver, gold, and utensils.

¹⁹There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's rule.

Asa's Last Years

In the thirty-sixth year of Asa's rule, Baasha king of Israel attacked Judah. He made the town of Ramah strong so he could keep people from leaving or entering Judah, Asa's country.

²Asa took silver and gold from the treasuries of the Temple of the Lord and out of his own palace. Then he sent it with messengers to Ben-Hadad king of Aram, who lived in Damascus. Asa said, ³“Let there be a treaty between you and me as there was between my father and your father. I am sending you silver and gold. Break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so he will leave my land.”

⁴Ben-Hadad agreed with King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies to attack the towns of Israel. They defeated the towns of Ijon, Dan, and Abel Beth Maacah, and all the towns in Naphtali where treasures were stored. ⁵When Baasha heard about this, he stopped building up Ramah and left his work. ⁶Then King Asa brought all the people of Judah to Ramah, and they carried away the rocks and wood that Baasha had used. And they used them to build up Geba and Mizpah.

⁷At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, “You depended on the king of Aram to help you and not on the Lord your God. So the king of Aram's army escaped from you. ⁸The Cushites and Libyans had a large and powerful army and many chariots and horsemen. But you depended on the Lord to help you, so he handed them over to you. ⁹The Lord searches all the earth for people who have

given themselves completely to him. He wants to make them strong. Asa, you did a foolish thing, so from now on you will have wars.”

¹⁰Asa was angry with Hanani the seer because of what he had said; he was so angry that he put Hanani in prison. And Asa was cruel to some of the people at the same time.

¹¹Everything Asa did as king, from the beginning to the end, is written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. ¹²In the thirty-ninth year of his rule, Asa got a disease in his feet. Though his disease was very bad, he did not ask for help from the Lord, but only from the doctors. ¹³Then Asa died in the forty-first year of his rule. ¹⁴The people buried Asa in the tomb he had made for himself in Jerusalem. They laid him on a bed filled with spices and different kinds of mixed perfumes, and they made a large fire to honor him.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 16:1–19:3

Situation

Jehoshaphat feared and loved God. But he foolishly made an alliance with Ahab, the wicked king of Israel. Judah adopted Israel's evil practices, which led to judgment on both nations.

Observation

Partnerships with non-Christians can bring compromise if the believer does not constantly guard against this danger.

Inspiration

We live in an age in which everything is working

against the things we hold dear. Think about it. What force in our society is working to help you remain faithful to your partner? None that I can think of. The message of our world is just the opposite. What force in our society is working to help your kids remain true to principles the Bible sets forth in regard to sexual purity, honesty, loyalty, and the priority of character development? None! The message our kids are bombarded with is, "Acquire all you can and do whatever feels good." We don't live in a neutral world that beckons us to choose between right and wrong. The world we face everyday is one in which right has become wrong....

In addressing the believers of this city, Paul advised them to make the most of their time. That is, they should use their time carefully. Paul realized that it required absolutely no effort on their part to become like the world. They did not have to study or set goals or even make any plans to become worldly. All they had to do was get out in the world and live. If they took no precautions, it would be just a matter of time before they looked, acted, and thought just like the world. And that applies to us, too.

... In this evil day we need constant reminders of the truth. If we are not careful with our time, we will allow others to fill it up for us. There will be no time for God... . Wise men and women are careful with their time. They use their extra time to draw close to God....

If doing business with certain individuals or groups puts you in a position that causes you to

violate your convictions time and time again, quit doing business with them. If watching certain television shows causes you to lust, don't excuse them because of their entertainment value. Just quit watching them. If being with a particular group of people causes you to stumble, don't rationalize by saying, "But they are my friends." Get some new friends!

In every area of life, face up to what God would have you do. As long as you play games, as long as you ignore what you know in your heart God would have you do, you set yourself up to fail...

God wants control over every area of your life. Not partial control, total control. He wants you to be victorious over temptation. But He wants you to be victorious for His purposes, not yours. You may not have achieved victory over temptation because you are holding to the reins of your life and trying to get God to intervene in the rough spots. That isn't the way God works. He wants all of you. And when He knows you are His, He will do whatever He needs to make you into an effective servant for His kingdom. (From *Winning the War Within* by Charles Stanley)

Application

Evaluate your alliances in career, leisure, and finances. Which "allies" tempt you to compromise? Which "allies" help you know the Bible? Pray? Add a spiritual ally this week.

Exploration

Alliances—[Numbers 25:1](#); [1 Kings 3:1](#); [Isaiah 52:11](#); [2 Corinthians 6:14-18](#); [Ephesians 5:6-7](#);

Revelation 18:4.

Jehoshaphat King of Judah

Jehoshaphat, Asa's son, became king of Judah in his place. Jehoshaphat made Judah strong so they could fight against Israel. ²He put troops in all the strong, walled cities of Judah, in the land of Judah, and in the towns of Ephraim that his father Asa had captured.

³The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he lived as his ancestor David had lived when he first became king. Jehoshaphat did not ask for help from the Baal idols, ⁴but from the God of his father. He obeyed God's commands and did not live as the people of Israel lived. ⁵The Lord made Jehoshaphat a strong king over Judah. All the people of Judah brought gifts to Jehoshaphat, so he had much wealth and honor. ⁶He wanted very much to obey the Lord. He also removed the places for worshipping gods and the Asherah idols from Judah.

⁷During the third year of his rule, Jehoshaphat sent his officers to teach in the towns of Judah. These officers were Ben-Hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah. ⁸Jehoshaphat sent with them these Levites: Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tob-Adonijah. He also sent the priests Elishama and Jehoram. ⁹These leaders, Levites, and priests taught the people in Judah. They took the Book of the Teachings of the Lord and went through all the towns of Judah and taught the people.

¹⁰The nations near Judah were afraid of the Lord, so they did not start a war against Jehoshaphat. ¹¹Some of the

Philistines brought gifts and silver to Jehoshaphat as he demanded. Some Arabs brought him flocks: seventy-seven hundred sheep and seventy-seven hundred goats.

¹²Jehoshaphat grew more and more powerful. He built strong, walled cities and towns for storing supplies in Judah.

¹³He kept many supplies in the towns of Judah, and he kept trained soldiers in Jerusalem. ¹⁴These soldiers were listed by families. From the families of Judah, these were the commanders of groups of a thousand men: Adnah was the commander of three hundred thousand soldiers; ¹⁵Jehohanan was the commander of two hundred eighty thousand soldiers; ¹⁶Amasiah was the commander of two hundred thousand soldiers. Amasiah son of Zicri had volunteered to serve the Lord.

¹⁷These were the commanders from the families of Benjamin: Eliada, a brave soldier, had two hundred thousand soldiers who used bows and shields. ¹⁸And Jehozabad had one hundred eighty thousand men armed for war.

¹⁹All these soldiers served King Jehoshaphat. The king also put other men in the strong, walled cities through all of Judah.

Micaiah Warns King Ahab

Jehoshaphat had much wealth and honor, and he made an [agreement with King Ahab through marriage](#).² A few years later Jehoshaphat went to visit Ahab in Samaria. Ahab sacrificed many sheep and cattle as a great feast to honor Jehoshaphat and the people with him. He encouraged Jehoshaphat to attack Ramoth in Gilead.³ Ahab king of Israel asked Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "Will you go with me to attack Ramoth in Gilead?"

Jehoshaphat answered, "I will go with you, and my soldiers are yours. We will join you in the battle."⁴ Jehoshaphat also said to Ahab, "But first we should ask if this is the Lord's will."

⁵So King Ahab called four hundred prophets together and asked them, "Should we go to war against Ramoth in Gilead or not?"

They answered, "Go, because God will hand them over to you."

⁶But Jehoshaphat asked, "Isn't there a prophet of the Lord here? Let's ask him what we should do."

⁷Then King Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "There is one other prophet. We could ask the Lord through him, but I hate him. He never prophesies anything good about me, but always something bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah."

Jehoshaphat said, "King Ahab, you shouldn't say that!"

⁸So Ahab king of Israel told one of his officers to bring Micaiah to him at once.

⁹Ahab king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah had on their royal robes and were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor, near the entrance to the gate of Samaria. All the

prophets were standing before them speaking their messages.
¹⁰Zedekiah son of Kenaanah had made some iron horns. He said to Ahab, “This is what the Lord says: ‘You will use these horns to fight the Arameans until they are destroyed.’”

¹¹All the other prophets said the same thing, “Attack Ramoth in Gilead and win, because the Lord will hand the Arameans over to you.”

¹²The messenger who had gone to get Micaiah said to him, “All the other prophets are saying King Ahab will win. You should agree with them and give the king a good answer.”

¹³But Micaiah answered, “As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what my God says.”

¹⁴When Micaiah came to Ahab, the king asked him, “Micaiah, should we attack Ramoth in Gilead or not?”

Micaiah answered, “Attack and win! They will be handed over to you.”

¹⁵But Ahab said to Micaiah, “How many times do I have to tell you to speak only the truth to me in the name of the Lord?”

¹⁶So Micaiah answered, “I saw the army of Israel scattered over the hills like sheep without a shepherd. The Lord said, ‘They have no leaders. They should go home and not fight.’”

¹⁷Then Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “I told you! He never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad.”

¹⁸But Micaiah said, “Hear the message from the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with his heavenly army standing on his right and on his left. ¹⁹The Lord said, ‘Who will trick King Ahab of Israel into attacking Ramoth in Gilead where he will be killed?’

“Some said one thing; some said another. ²⁰Then one spirit

came and stood before the Lord and said, 'I will trick him.'

"The Lord asked, 'How will you do it?'

²¹"The spirit answered, 'I will go to Ahab's prophets and make them tell lies.'

"So the Lord said, 'You will succeed in tricking him. Go and do it.'"

²²Micaiah said, "Ahab, the Lord has made your prophets lie to you, and the Lord has decided that disaster should come to you."

²³Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up to Micaiah and slapped him in the face. Zedekiah said, "Has the Lord's Spirit left me to speak through you?"

²⁴Micaiah answered, "You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inside room."

²⁵Then Ahab king of Israel ordered, "Take Micaiah and send him to Amon, the governor of the city, and to Joash, the king's son. ²⁶Tell them I said to put this man in prison and give him only bread and water until I return safely from the battle."

²⁷Micaiah said, "Ahab, if you come back safely from the battle, the Lord has not spoken through me. Remember my words, all you people!"

Ahab Is Killed

²⁸So Ahab king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went to Ramoth in Gilead. ²⁹King Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "I will go into battle, but I will wear other clothes so no one will recognize me. But you wear your royal clothes." So Ahab wore other clothes, and they went into battle.

³⁰The king of Aram ordered his chariot commanders, "Don't

fight with anyone—important or unimportant—except the king of Israel.”³¹ When these commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought he was the king of Israel, so they turned to attack him. But Jehoshaphat began shouting, and the Lord helped him. God made the chariot commanders turn away from Jehoshaphat.³² When they saw he was not King Ahab, they stopped chasing him.

³³By chance, a soldier shot an arrow which hit Ahab king of Israel between the pieces of his armor. King Ahab said to his chariot driver, “Turn around and get me out of the battle, because I am hurt!”³⁴ The battle continued all day. King Ahab held himself up in his chariot and faced the Arameans until evening. Then he died at sunset.

Jehoshaphat king of Judah came back safely to his palace in Jerusalem.² Jehu son of Hanani, a seer, went out to meet him and said to the king, “Why did you help evil people? Why do you love those who hate the Lord? That is the reason the Lord is angry with you.³ But there is some good in you. You took the Asherah idols out of this country, and you have tried to obey God.”

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 19:4–21:3

Situation

Jehoshaphat concentrated on administration by appointing loyal, faithful, capable, and God-fearing judges throughout the land. To ensure justice, he laid down rules for judging the people.

Observation

Godly leaders focus on God’s power and answer to God for their judgments.

Inspiration

For many years I couldn’t talk without stammering and hesitating. This was very humiliating to me. That changed when I was forty-five years old, after I had known the Lord for twenty-five years.

I had been on the mission field for nearly twenty years when the Lord told me I must now learn to talk like the people in heaven. That meant I mustn’t grumble and complain anymore. I mustn’t talk about other people’s faults. I mustn’t say things behind their backs that I wouldn’t like them to say about me.

At that time I was accustomed to saying to a

fellow missionary, “Let’s have a little prayer together to help you change, to see if God will help you stop stumbling.” The Lord Jesus said to me, “In heaven we don’t talk about faults. When you pray like that, I have to get up quietly and go out of the room. That leaves you talking to the four walls.”

I said, “Lord, I’m forty-five years old and my habits are fixed, but you help me alter them.”

He said, “Hannah, you’re an addict. You find fault and talk about people’s faults and criticize others all the time. There are plenty of other people to talk about faults—I don’t need you to do so. But you are like an alcoholic. You don’t dare give in to it once. If you promise not to make any exceptions, I’ll help you.”

“Well,” I said, “only your grace could do that, Lord.”

And the Lord said, “I’m going to ask for one of the heavenly beings to take a coal from off the altar and to touch your lips with it.”

Jesus then told me all the things I should say—the kind, helpful good things they talk about in heaven. The language of heaven is called blessing. He taught me how lovely it is always to draw attention to what is good. Whenever Jesus spoke, the people “were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips” ([Luke 4:22](#)).

(From “The Language of Heaven” by Hannah Hurnard in *Practical Christianity*)

Application

We spend our whole life making judgments and

judging various situations and actions. How do you go about making these judgments? Josiah gives us some pointers: realize we are judging for the Lord; judge impartially, without injustice; serve faithfully and in the fear of the Lord ([19:6–7, 9](#)).

Exploration

Judging Others—[1 Samuel 16:7](#); [Isaiah 11:3–5](#); [Matthew 7:1–5](#); [John 8:7](#); [Acts 11:2–18](#); [1 Corinthians 5:12–13](#).

Jehoshaphat Chooses Judges

⁴Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem. He went out again to be with the people, from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim, and he turned them back to the Lord, the God of their ancestors.

⁵Jehoshaphat appointed judges in all the land, in each of the strong, walled cities of Judah. ⁶Jehoshaphat said to them, “Watch what you do, because you are not judging for people but for the Lord. He will be with you when you make a decision. ⁷Now let each of you fear the Lord. Watch what you do, because the Lord our God wants people to be fair. He wants all people to be treated the same, and he doesn’t want decisions influenced by money.”

⁸And in Jerusalem Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites, priests, and leaders of Israelite families to be judges. They were to decide cases about the law of the Lord and settle problems between the people who lived in Jerusalem.

⁹Jehoshaphat commanded them, “You must always serve the Lord completely, and you must fear him. ¹⁰Your people living in the cities will bring you cases about killing, about the teachings, commands, rules, or some other law. In all these cases you must warn the people not to sin against the Lord. If you don’t, he will be angry with you and your people. But if you warn them, you won’t be guilty.

¹¹“Amariah, the leading priest, will be over you in all cases about the Lord. Zebadiah son of Ishmael, a leader in the tribe of Judah, will be over you in all cases about the king. Also, the

Levites will serve as officers for you. Have courage. May the Lord be with those who do what is right.”

Jehoshaphat Faces War

Later the Moabites, Ammonites, and some Meunites came to start a war with Jehoshaphat.² Messengers came and told Jehoshaphat, “A large army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Dead Sea. They are already in Hazazon Tamar!” (Hazazon Tamar is also called En Gedi.)

³Jehoshaphat was afraid, so he decided to ask the Lord what to do. He announced that no one in Judah should eat during this special time of prayer to God.⁴ The people of Judah came together to ask the Lord for help; they came from every town in Judah.

⁵The people of Judah and Jerusalem met in front of the new courtyard in the Temple of the Lord. Then Jehoshaphat stood up,⁶ and he said, “Lord, God of our ancestors, you are the God in heaven. You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. You have power and strength, so no one can stand against you.⁷ Our God, you forced out the people who lived in this land as your people Israel moved in. And you gave this land forever to the descendants of your friend Abraham.⁸ They lived in this land and built a Temple for you. They said,⁹ ‘If trouble comes upon us, or war, punishment, sickness, or hunger, we will stand before you and before this Temple where you have chosen to be worshiped. We will cry out to you when we are in trouble. Then you will hear and save us.’

¹⁰“But now here are men from Ammon, Moab, and Edom. You wouldn’t let the Israelites enter their lands when the Israelites came from Egypt. So the Israelites turned away and

did not destroy them.¹¹ But see how they repay us for not destroying them! They have come to force us out of your land, which you gave us as our own.¹² Our God, punish those people. We have no power against this large army that is attacking us. We don't know what to do, so we look to you for help."

¹³All the men of Judah stood before the Lord with their babies, wives, and children.¹⁴ Then the Spirit of the Lord entered Jahaziel. (Jahaziel was Zechariah's son. Zechariah was Benaiah's son. Benaiah was Jeiel's son, and Jeiel was Mattaniah's son.) Jahaziel, a Levite and a descendant of Asaph, stood up in the meeting.¹⁵ He said, "Listen to me, King Jehoshaphat and all you people living in Judah and Jerusalem. The Lord says this to you: 'Don't be afraid or discouraged because of this large army. The battle is not your battle, it is God's.'¹⁶ Tomorrow go down there and fight those people. They will come up through the Pass of Ziz. You will find them at the end of the ravine that leads to the Desert of Jeruel.¹⁷ You won't need to fight in this battle. Just stand strong in your places, and you will see the Lord save you. Judah and Jerusalem, don't be afraid or discouraged, because the Lord is with you. So go out against those people tomorrow."

¹⁸Jehoshaphat bowed facedown on the ground. All the people of Judah and Jerusalem bowed down before the Lord and worshiped him.¹⁹ Then some Levites from the Kohathite and Korahite people stood up and praised the Lord, the God of Israel, with very loud voices.

²⁰Jehoshaphat's army went out into the Desert of Tekoa early in the morning. As they were starting out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, people of Judah and Jerusalem.

Have faith in the Lord your God, and you will stand strong. Have faith in his prophets, and you will succeed.”

²¹Jehoshaphat listened to the people’s advice. Then he chose men to be singers to the Lord, to praise him because he is holy and wonderful. As they marched in front of the army, they said,

“Thank the Lord,
because his love continues forever.”

²²As they began to sing and praise God, the Lord set ambushes for the people of Ammon, Moab, and Edom who had come to attack Judah. And they were defeated. ²³The Ammonites and Moabites attacked the Edomites, destroying them completely. After they had killed the Edomites, they killed each other.

²⁴When the men from Judah came to a place where they could see the desert, they looked at the enemy’s large army. But they only saw dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped. ²⁵When Jehoshaphat and his army came to take their valuables, they found many supplies, much clothing, and other valuable things. There was more than they could carry away; there was so much it took three days to gather it all. ²⁶On the fourth day Jehoshaphat and his army met in the Valley of Beracah and praised the Lord. That is why that place has been called the Valley of [Beracah](#) to this day.

²⁷Then Jehoshaphat led all the men from Judah and Jerusalem back to Jerusalem. The Lord had made them happy because their enemies were defeated. ²⁸They entered Jerusalem with harps, lyres, and trumpets and went to the Temple of the Lord.

²⁹When all the kingdoms of the lands around them heard

how the Lord had fought Israel's enemies, they feared God.
³⁰So Jehoshaphat's kingdom was not at war. His God gave him peace from all the countries around him.

Jehoshaphat's Rule Ends

³¹Jehoshaphat ruled over the country of Judah. He was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled in Jerusalem for twenty-five years. His mother's name was Azubah daughter of Shilhi. ³²Jehoshaphat was good like his father Asa, and he did what the Lord said was right. ³³But the places where gods were worshiped were not removed, and the people did not really want to follow the God of their ancestors.

³⁴The other things Jehoshaphat did as king, from the beginning to the end, are written in the records of Jehu son of Hanani, which are in the book of the kings of Israel.

³⁵Later, Jehoshaphat king of Judah made a treaty with Ahaziah king of Israel, which was a wrong thing to do. ³⁶Jehoshaphat agreed with Ahaziah to build trading ships, which they built in the town of Ezion Geber. ³⁷Then Eliezer son of Dodavahu from the town of Mareshah spoke against Jehoshaphat. He said, "Jehoshaphat, because you joined with Ahaziah, the Lord will destroy what you have made." The ships were wrecked so they could not sail out to trade.

Jehoshaphat died and was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, the city of David. Then his son Jehoram became king in his place.²Jehoram's brothers were Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariahu, Michael, and Shephatiah. They were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Judah.³Jehoshaphat gave his sons many gifts of silver, gold, and valuable things, and he gave them strong, walled cities in Judah. But Jehoshaphat gave the kingdom to Jehoram, because he was the first son.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 21:4–24:27

Situation

Under the guidance of Jehoiada the priest, Joash restored worship in the Temple and destroyed the altars of Baal. When Jehoiada died, Joash turned his back on God and felt God's punishment.

Observation

Surrounded by company that honored God, Joash made God-honoring decisions. When his counselor died, he failed to replace this voice in his life. When Joash sinned, God gave him many chances to repent.

Inspiration

I don't believe it is possible for a person to be regenerated until the Holy Spirit has convicted that person of sin. Man can't be moral on his own. Given a choice, we will always choose the sinful way. I thought I was a moral person, but it wasn't until the moral person died that the Spirit of God could come to work in me. I love what William James said: "The death of a moral man is his spiritual birthday."...

The conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit is the beginning. Without it, we cannot understand our need for God, and we cannot understand God's grace. We must not ever leave that out of our preaching, teaching, or understanding of Christianity. To omit it is to trivialize the work of Christ on the cross.

... If I were asked today to name the one doctrine of the Christian faith being preached about the least, I would have to say repentance. Repentance means change, and we don't want to threaten people with the need to change.

Repentance is commonly thought of as breast-beating, but it is not that at all. The Greek word used in the New Testament means simply, "change of mind." When you come to God, you have a change of mind, from exalting yourself to exalting Christ. Repentance means turning from man's ways to embrace God's ways. It means a desire to be different, to belong to Christ and to live as he commands us to live. Repentance, then, is the longing to turn away from the old self and to live a new life in Christ.

In my own life, repentance meant that I wanted to adopt new values. I wanted to be forgiven of what I'd done in the past and not continue doing those things, but rather be led by the Spirit to the kinds of things that God wants from my life. There is a certain sorrow that goes with repentance, a sorrow over your sins, a desire to restore where you have done harm in the past. One thing I did was to apologize to some of the people I had hurt in politics. I went to them to seek their forgiveness because I realized that God had

forgiven me and I should seek to restore my relationships with people I had injured. Some of them remained cynical about me. They had been political enemies, and they thought my seeking forgiveness was some sort of ploy. Some did not understand it. Others were deeply affected by it. And some people had trouble accepting my repentance. They would say, “Sure I forgive you,” but they were very uncomfortable because it convicted them as well.

A prime case of repentance leading to restoration is the well-known case of Cathleen Webb, who falsely accused Gary Dotson of raping her. When she came under the conviction of sin—six years later—she realized that she had to recant her story and tell the truth. You can just imagine the pain that was involved for that young girl in coming forward with the truth. I met with her, and I know that her decision was a moving of the Spirit. She was left with no choice but to confess.

That’s what happens when the conviction of sin leads to repentance. The yearning for God’s cleansing is so strong that we cannot find peace until we have accepted that “change of mind” and begin to walk in the new life with the Lord. (From “What it Means to Repent” by Charles Colson in *Practical Christianity*)

Application

What would be the hardest part of true repentance for you? What would be the most liberating part? Seek help from Christian friends who will pray with you through the process.

Exploration

Repentance—[1 Kings 21:29](#); [1 Chronicles 21:8](#); [Ezra 10:2–4](#), [11](#); [Psalm 80:3](#), [7](#), [19](#); [Matthew 3:1–6](#); [Luke 3:8–9](#); [19:1–10](#); [Acts 3:19](#); [2 Corinthians 7:10](#).

Jehoram King of Judah

⁴When Jehoram took control of his father's kingdom, he killed all his brothers with a sword and also killed some of the leaders of Judah. ⁵He was thirty-two years old when he began to rule, and he ruled eight years in Jerusalem. ⁶He followed in the ways of the kings of Israel, just as the family of Ahab had done, because he married Ahab's daughter. Jehoram did what the Lord said was wrong. ⁷But the Lord would not destroy David's family because of the agreement he had made with David. He had promised that one of David's descendants would always rule.

⁸In Jehoram's time, Edom broke away from Judah's rule and chose their own king. ⁹So Jehoram went to Edom with all his commanders and chariots. The Edomites surrounded him and his chariot commanders, but Jehoram got up and attacked the Edomites at night. ¹⁰From then until now the country of Edom has fought against the rule of Judah. At the same time the people of Libnah also broke away from Jehoram because Jehoram left the Lord, the God of his ancestors.

¹¹Jehoram also built places to worship gods on the hills in Judah. He led the people of Jerusalem to sin, and he led the people of Judah away from the Lord. ¹²Then Jehoram received this letter from Elijah the prophet:

This is what the Lord, the God of your ancestor David, says, "Jehoram, you have not lived as your father Jehoshaphat lived and as Asa king of Judah lived. ¹³But

you have lived as the kings of Israel lived, leading the people of Judah and Jerusalem to sin against God, as Ahab and his family did. You have killed your brothers, and they were better than you. ¹⁴So now the Lord is about to punish your people, your children, wives, and everything you own. ¹⁵You will have a terrible disease in your intestines that will become worse every day. Finally it will cause your intestines to come out.”

¹⁶The Lord caused the Philistines and the Arabs who lived near the Cushites to be angry with Jehoram. ¹⁷So the Philistines and Arabs attacked Judah and carried away all the wealth of Jehoram’s palace, as well as his sons and wives. Only Jehoram’s youngest son, Ahaziah, was left.

¹⁸After these things happened, the Lord gave Jehoram a disease in his intestines that could not be cured. ¹⁹After he was sick for two years, Jehoram’s intestines came out because of the disease, and he died in terrible pain. The people did not make a fire to honor Jehoram as they had done for his ancestors.

²⁰Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he ruled eight years in Jerusalem. No one was sad when he died. He was buried in Jerusalem, but not in the graves for the kings.

Ahaziah King of Judah

The people of Jerusalem chose Ahaziah, Jehoram's youngest son, to be king in his place. The robbers who had come with the Arabs to attack Jehoram's camp had killed all of Jehoram's older sons. So Ahaziah began to rule Judah.² Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he ruled one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri.³ Ahaziah followed the ways of Ahab's family, because his mother encouraged him to do wrong.⁴ Ahaziah did what the Lord said was wrong, as Ahab's family had done. They gave advice to Ahaziah after his father died, and their bad advice led to his death.⁵ Following their advice, Ahaziah went with Joram son of Ahab to Ramoth in Gilead, where they fought against Hazael king of Aram. The Arameans wounded Joram.⁶ So Joram returned to Jezreel to heal from the wounds he received at Ramoth when he fought Hazael king of Aram.

Ahaziah son of Jehoram and king of Judah went down to visit Joram son of Ahab at Jezreel because he had been wounded.

⁷God caused Ahaziah's death when he went to visit Joram. Ahaziah arrived and went out with Joram to meet Jehu son of Nimshi, whom the Lord had appointed to destroy Ahab's family.⁸ While Jehu was punishing Ahab's family, he found the leaders of Judah and the sons of Ahaziah's relatives who served Ahaziah, and Jehu killed them all.⁹ Then Jehu looked for Ahaziah. Jehu's men caught him hiding in Samaria, so they brought him to Jehu. Then they killed and buried him. They

said, “Ahaziah is a descendant of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat obeyed the Lord with all his heart.” No one in Ahaziah’s family had the power to take control of the kingdom of Judah.

Athaliah and Joash

¹⁰When Ahaziah’s mother, Athaliah, saw that her son was dead, she killed all the royal family in Judah. ¹¹But Jehosheba, King Jehoram’s daughter, took Joash, Ahaziah’s son. She stole him from among the other sons of the king who were going to be murdered and put him and his nurse in a bedroom. So Jehosheba, who was King Jehoram’s daughter and Ahaziah’s sister and the wife of Jehoiada the priest, hid Joash so Athaliah could not kill him. ¹²He hid with them in the Temple of God for six years. During that time Athaliah ruled the land.

In the seventh year Jehoiada decided to do something. He made an agreement with the commanders of the groups of a hundred men: Azariah son of Jeroham, Ishmael son of Jehohanan, Azariah son of Obed, Maaseiah son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat son of Zicri.² They went around in Judah and gathered the Levites from all the towns, and they gathered the leaders of the families of Judah. Then they went to Jerusalem.³ All the people together made an agreement with the king in the Temple of God.

Jehoiada said to them, “The king’s son will rule, as the Lord promised about David’s descendants.⁴ Now this is what you must do: You priests and Levites go on duty on the Sabbath. A third of you will guard the doors.⁵ A third of you will be at the king’s palace, and a third of you will be at the Foundation Gate. All the other people will stay in the courtyards of the Temple of the Lord.⁶ Don’t let anyone come into the Temple of the Lord except the priests and Levites who serve. They may come because they have been made ready to serve the Lord, but all the others must do the job the Lord has given them.⁷ The Levites must stay near the king, each man with his weapon in his hand. If anyone tries to enter the Temple, kill him. Stay close to the king when he goes in and when he goes out.”

Joash Becomes King

⁸The Levites and all the people of Judah obeyed everything Jehoiada the priest had commanded. He did not excuse anyone from the groups of the priests. So each commander took his men who came on duty on the Sabbath with those who went off duty on the Sabbath.⁹ Jehoiada gave the commanders of a

hundred men the spears and the large and small shields that had belonged to King David and that were kept in the Temple of God. ¹⁰Then Jehoiada told the men where to stand, each man with his weapon in his hand. There were guards from the south side of the Temple to the north side. They stood by the altar and the Temple and around the king.

¹¹Jehoiada and his sons brought out the king's son and put the crown on him and gave him a copy of the agreement. Then they appointed him king and poured olive oil on him and shouted, "Long live the king!"

¹²When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she went to them at the Temple of the Lord. ¹³She looked, and there was the king standing by his pillar at the entrance. The officers and the trumpeters were standing beside him, and all the people of the land were happy and blowing trumpets. The singers were playing musical instruments and leading praises. Then Athaliah tore her clothes and screamed, "Traitors! Traitors!"

¹⁴Jehoiada the priest sent out the commanders of a hundred men, who led the army. He said, "Surround her with soldiers and take her out of the Temple area. Kill with a sword anyone who follows her." He had said, "Don't put Athaliah to death in the Temple of the Lord." ¹⁵So they caught her when she came to the entrance of the Horse Gate near the palace. There they put her to death.

¹⁶Then Jehoiada made an agreement with the people and the king that they would be the Lord's special people. ¹⁷All the people went to the temple of Baal and tore it down, smashing the altars and idols. They killed Mattan, the priest of Baal, in front of the altars.

¹⁸Then Jehoiada chose the priests, who were Levites, to be responsible for the Temple of the Lord. David had given them duties in the Temple of the Lord. They were to offer the burnt offerings to the Lord as the Teachings of Moses commanded, and they were to offer them with much joy and singing as David had commanded. ¹⁹Jehoiada put guards at the gates of the Temple of the Lord so that anyone who was unclean in any way could not enter.

²⁰Jehoiada took with him the commanders of a hundred men, the important men, the rulers of the people, and all the people of the land to take the king out of the Temple of the Lord. They went through the Upper Gate into the palace, and then they seated the king on the throne. ²¹So all the people of the land were very happy, and Jerusalem had peace, because Athaliah had been put to death with the sword.

Joash Repairs the Temple

Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he ruled forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah, and she was from Beersheba.² Joash did what the Lord said was right as long as Jehoiada the priest was alive.³ Jehoiada chose two wives for Joash, and Joash had sons and daughters.

⁴Later, Joash decided to repair the Temple of the Lord. ⁵He called the priests and the Levites together and said to them, "Go to the towns of Judah and gather the money all the Israelites have to pay every year. Use it to repair the Temple of your God. Do this now." But the Levites did not hurry.

⁶So King Joash called for Jehoiada the leading priest and said to him, "Why haven't you made the Levites bring in from Judah and Jerusalem the tax money that Moses, the Lord's servant, and the people of Israel used for the Holy Tent?"

⁷In the past the sons of wicked Athaliah had broken into the Temple of God and used its holy things for worshiping the Baal idols.

⁸King Joash commanded that a box for contributions be made. They put it outside, at the gate of the Temple of the Lord. ⁹Then the Levites made an announcement in Judah and Jerusalem, telling people to bring to the Lord the tax money Moses, the servant of God, had made the Israelites give while they were in the desert. ¹⁰All the officers and people were happy to bring their money, and they put it in the box until the box was full. ¹¹When the Levites would take the box to the king's officers, they would see that it was full of money. Then

the king's royal secretary and the leading priest's officer would come and take out the money and return the box to its place. They did this often and gathered much money. ¹²King Joash and Jehoiada gave the money to the people who worked on the Temple of the Lord. And they hired stoneworkers and carpenters to repair the Temple of the Lord. They also hired people to work with iron and bronze to repair the Temple.

¹³The people worked hard, and the work to repair the Temple went well. They rebuilt the Temple of God to be as it was before, but even stronger. ¹⁴When the workers finished, they brought the money that was left to King Joash and Jehoiada. They used that money to make utensils for the Temple of the Lord, utensils for the service in the Temple and for the burnt offerings, and bowls and other utensils from gold and silver. Burnt offerings were given every day in the Temple of the Lord while Jehoiada was alive.

¹⁵Jehoiada grew old and lived many years. Then he died when he was one hundred thirty years old. ¹⁶Jehoiada was buried in Jerusalem with the kings, because he had done much good in Judah for God and his Temple.

Joash Does Evil

¹⁷After Jehoiada died, the officers of Judah came and bowed down to King Joash, and he listened to them. ¹⁸The king and these leaders stopped worshipping in the Temple of the Lord, the God of their ancestors. Instead, they began to worship the Asherah idols and other idols. Because they did wrong, God was angry with the people of Judah and Jerusalem. ¹⁹Even though the Lord sent prophets to the people to turn them back

to him and even though the prophets warned them, they refused to listen.

²⁰Then the Spirit of God entered Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. Zechariah stood before the people and said, “This is what God says: ‘Why do you disobey the Lord’s commands? You will not be successful. Because you have left the Lord, he has also left you.’”

²¹But the king and his officers made plans against Zechariah. At the king’s command they threw stones at him in the courtyard of the Temple of the Lord until he died. ²²King Joash did not remember Jehoiada’s kindness to him, so Joash killed Zechariah, Jehoiada’s son. Before Zechariah died, he said, “May the Lord see what you are doing and punish you.”

²³At the end of the year, the Aramean army came against Joash. They attacked Judah and Jerusalem, killed all the leaders of the people, and sent all the valuable things to their king in Damascus. ²⁴The Aramean army came with only a small group of men, but the Lord handed over to them a very large army from Judah, because the people of Judah had left the Lord, the God of their ancestors. So Joash was punished. ²⁵When the Arameans left, Joash was badly wounded. His own officers made plans against him because he had killed Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. So they killed Joash in his own bed. He died and was buried in Jerusalem but not in the graves of the kings.

²⁶The officers who made plans against Joash were Jozabad and Jehozabad. Jozabad was the son of Shimeath, a woman from Ammon. And Jehozabad was the son of Shimrith, a woman from Moab. ²⁷The story of Joash’s sons, the great prophecies against him, and how he repaired the Temple of

God are written in the book of the kings. Joash's son Amaziah became king in his place.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 25:1–26:23

Situation

Both Amaziah and Uzziah were God-fearing kings. As long as they acknowledged God's part in their achievements, they prospered. When ambition and pride caused them to forget God, they paid the price for their sin.

Observation

Pride causes us to set ourselves up as gods. Because of pride, we sin without regard to God's standards.

Inspiration

Do not be ashamed to serve others because of your love for Jesus Christ, or to appear poor in the world's eyes.

Do not count on your own strength; trust God. Do what you can, and God will supply the difference....

Take glory neither in money, if you have some, nor in influential friends, but in God who gives you everything and above all wants to give you himself.

Avoid boasting about the size or beauty of your body, which a little illness can disfigure or destroy.

Have no pride in your native wit and talent; that would displease God who gave you every good thing that you naturally possess.

Reject the thought that you are better than anyone else. If you think such haughty thoughts,

God (who knows what is in you) will consider you worse than they.

Pride about our good deeds is pointless. God has his own ideas regarding what is good, and he does not always agree with us. If there is anything good about you, believe better things of others. This will keep you humble.

It will not hurt you at all to consider yourself less righteous than others, but it will be disastrous for you to consider yourself better than even one person.

The humble are always at peace; the proud are often envious and angry. (From *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis)

Application

Pride and ambition may creep in and sweep away our devotion to God. Success often tries to squeeze God out of our mind. Check your attitudes. Resist pride. Focus on Christ.

Exploration

Pride—[Numbers 16:8–10](#); [Judges 8:1–3](#); [17:6](#); [Mark 9:34](#); [Luke 18:9–14](#); [Ephesians 2:11–13](#).

Amaziah King of Judah

Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled for twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddin, and she was from Jerusalem.² Amaziah did what the Lord said was right, but he did not really want to obey him.³ As soon as Amaziah took strong control of the kingdom, he executed the officers who had murdered his father the king.⁴ But Amaziah did not put to death their children. He obeyed what was written in the Book of Moses, where the Lord commanded, "Parents must not be put to death when their children do wrong, and children must not be put to death when their parents do wrong. Each must die for his own sins."

⁵ Amaziah gathered the people of Judah together. He grouped all the people of Judah and Benjamin by families, and he put commanders over groups of a thousand and over groups of a hundred. He counted the men who were twenty years old and older. In all there were three hundred thousand soldiers ready to fight and skilled with spears and shields.⁶ Amaziah also hired one hundred thousand soldiers from Israel for about seventy-five hundred pounds of silver.⁷ But a man of God came to Amaziah and said, "My king, don't let the army of Israel go with you. The Lord is not with Israel or the people from the tribe of Ephraim."⁸ You can make yourself strong for war, but God will defeat you. He has the power to help you or to defeat you."

⁹Amaziah said to the man of God, “But what about the seventy-five hundred pounds of silver I paid to the Israelite army?”

The man of God answered, “The Lord can give you much more than that.”

¹⁰So Amaziah sent the Israelite army back home to Ephraim. They were very angry with the people of Judah and went home angry.

¹¹Then Amaziah became very brave and led his army to the Valley of Salt in the country of Edom. There Amaziah’s army killed ten thousand Edomites. ¹²The army of Judah also captured ten thousand and took them to the top of a cliff and threw them off so that they split open.

¹³At the same time the Israelite troops that Amaziah had not let fight in the war were robbing towns in Judah. From Samaria to Beth Horon they killed three thousand people and took many valuable things.

¹⁴When Amaziah came home after defeating the Edomites, he brought back the idols they worshiped and started to worship them himself. He bowed down to them and offered sacrifices to them. ¹⁵The Lord was very angry with Amaziah, so he sent a prophet to him who said, “Why have you asked their gods for help? They could not even save their own people from you!”

¹⁶As the prophet spoke, Amaziah said to him, “We never gave you the job of advising the king. Stop, or you will be killed.”

The prophet stopped speaking except to say, “I know that God has decided to destroy you because you have done this. You did not listen to my advice.”

¹⁷Amaziah king of Judah talked with those who advised him. Then he sent a message to Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, who was the son of Jehu king of Israel. Amaziah said to Jehoash, “Come, let’s meet face to face.”

¹⁸Then Jehoash king of Israel answered Amaziah king of Judah, “A thornbush in Lebanon sent a message to a cedar tree in Lebanon. It said, ‘Let your daughter marry my son.’ But then a wild animal from Lebanon came by, walking on and crushing the thornbush. ¹⁹You say to yourself that you have defeated Edom, but you have become proud, and you brag. But you stay at home! Don’t ask for trouble, or you and Judah will be defeated.”

²⁰But Amaziah would not listen. God caused this to happen so that Jehoash would defeat Judah, because Judah asked for help from the gods of Edom. ²¹So Jehoash king of Israel went to attack. He and Amaziah king of Judah faced each other in battle at Beth Shemesh in Judah. ²²Israel defeated Judah, and every man of Judah ran away to his home. ²³At Beth Shemesh Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah. (Amaziah was the son of Joash, who was the son of Ahaziah.) Then Jehoash brought him to Jerusalem. Jehoash broke down the wall of Jerusalem, from the Gate of Ephraim to the Corner Gate, about six hundred feet. ²⁴He took all the gold and silver and all the utensils from the Temple of God that Obed-Edom had taken care of. He also took the treasures from the palace and some hostages. Then he returned to Samaria.

²⁵Amaziah son of Joash, the king of Judah, lived fifteen years after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, the king of Israel. ²⁶The other things Amaziah did as king, from the beginning to the end, are written in the book of the kings of

Judah and Israel. ²⁷When Amaziah stopped obeying the Lord, the people in Jerusalem made plans against him. So he ran away to the town of Lachish, but they sent men after him to Lachish and killed him. ²⁸They brought his body back on horses, and he was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, the city of David.

Uzziah King of Judah

Then all the people of Judah made [Uzziah](#) king in place of his father Amaziah. Uzziah was sixteen years old. ²He rebuilt the town of Elath and made it part of Judah again after Amaziah died.

³Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he ruled fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah, and she was from Jerusalem. ⁴He did what the Lord said was right, just as his father Amaziah had done. ⁵Uzziah obeyed God while Zechariah was alive, because he taught Uzziah how to respect and obey God. And as long as Uzziah obeyed the Lord, God gave him success.

I know that a struggle today will result in music tomorrow.
—Max Lucado (*A Gentle Thunder*)

⁶Uzziah fought a war against the Philistines. He tore down the walls around their towns of Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod and built new towns near Ashdod and in other places among the Philistines. ⁷God helped Uzziah fight the Philistines, the Arabs living in Gur Baal, and the Meunites. ⁸Also, the Ammonites made the payments Uzziah demanded. He was very powerful, so his name became famous all the way to the border of Egypt.

New Life in Christ

And as long as Uzziah obeyed the Lord, God gave him success. —[2 Chronicles 26:5](#)

Obedience to Jesus Leads to Success

We ... learn God's will by spending time in his

presence. The key to knowing God's heart is having a relationship with him. A *personal* relationship. God will speak to you differently than he will speak to others. Just because God spoke to Moses through a burning bush, that doesn't mean we should all sit next to a bush waiting for God to speak. God used a fish to convict Jonah. Does that mean we should have worship services at Sea World? No. God reveals his heart personally to each person.

For that reason, your walk with God is essential. His heart is not seen in an occasional chat or weekly visit. We learn his will as we take up residence in his house every single day.

If you were to take a name at random out of the phone book and ask me, "Max, how does Chester Whomever feel about adultery?" I couldn't answer. I don't know Chester Whomever. But if you were to ask me, "Max, how does Denalyn Lucado feel about adultery?" I wouldn't even have to call her. I know. She's my wife. We have walked together long enough that I know what she thinks.

The same is true with God. Walk with him long enough and you come to know his heart. When you spend time with him in his study, you see his passion. Welcome him to enter the gateway of your soul and you'll perceive his will. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Question: What is something you can do today to help you get to know God better?

For more on ["New Life in Christ."](#)

⁹Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate, the Valley Gate, and where the wall turned, and he made them strong. ¹⁰He also built towers in the desert and dug many wells, because he had many cattle on the western hills and in the plains. He had people who worked his fields and vineyards in the hills and in the fertile lands, because he loved the land.

¹¹Uzziah had an army of trained soldiers. They were counted and put in groups by Jeiel the royal secretary and Maaseiah the officer. Hananiah, one of the king's commanders, was their leader. ¹²There were twenty-six hundred leaders over the soldiers. ¹³They were in charge of an army of three hundred seven thousand five hundred men who fought with great power to help the king against the enemy. ¹⁴Uzziah gave his army shields, spears, helmets, armor, bows, and stones for their slings. ¹⁵In Jerusalem Uzziah made devices that were invented by clever men. These devices on the towers and corners of the city walls were used to shoot arrows and large rocks. So Uzziah became famous in faraway places, because he had much help until he became powerful.

¹⁶But when Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his ruin. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God; he went into the Temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar for incense. ¹⁷Azariah and eighty other brave priests who served the Lord followed Uzziah into the Temple. ¹⁸They told him he was wrong and said to him, "You don't have the right to burn incense to the Lord. Only the priests, Aaron's descendants, should burn the incense, because they have been made holy. Leave this holy place. You have been unfaithful, and the Lord God will not honor you for this."

¹⁹Uzziah was standing beside the altar for incense in the Temple of the Lord, and in his hand was a pan for burning incense. He was very angry with the priests. As he was standing in front of the priests, a skin disease broke out on his forehead. ²⁰Azariah, the leading priest, and all the other priests looked at him and saw the skin disease on his forehead. So they hurried him out of the Temple. Uzziah also rushed out, because the Lord was punishing him. ²¹So King Uzziah had the skin disease until the day he died. He had to live in a separate house and could not enter the Temple of the Lord. His son Jotham was in charge of the palace, and he governed the people of the land.

²²The other things Uzziah did as king, from beginning to end, were written down by the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. ²³Uzziah died and was buried near his ancestors in a graveyard that belonged to the kings. This was because people said, "He had a skin disease." And his son Jotham became king in his place.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 27:1–28:27

Situation

Although King Jotham obeyed God, his subjects did not. It seems he never encouraged them to walk in God's way.

Observation

God places people around us who can benefit from our influence.

Inspiration

Christianity roared across the civilized world because of integrity, not image. The best growth rates were the years without legal recognition or social clout. Why? Because God blessed authentic faith! Then, after the Edict of Constantine, when the Church received legal status and began to jockey for the support of political power, the Christian movement began to lose its steam.

We sometimes rely on “ministry by charisma.” We want preachers that can “wow” the audience. Let Christ be represented by a real charmer, someone who can bring in the crowds and excite the masses. Now, there is nothing wrong in utilizing God-given gifts of communication. But there is something wrong, even idolatrous, in replacing God's Holy Spirit with the force of human personality, or scholarship, or reputation....

We sometimes operate as if we expect kingdom growth through political posturing. We want to

headline Christians who can impress. Wouldn't it be great if the governor was a part of our church? Wouldn't it be something if we could get a movie star to testify at our services? Or how about a converted porno publisher?

The truth is, all people need the gospel. And God doesn't need just the "influential" to carry His message. If He has succeeded in communicating through donkeys and tornadoes, He can probably use ordinary Joes like us.

Some of us may occasionally be guilty of intimidation by information as we go out to blow away people with the Bible. We may fire off our barrage of biblical bullets from six feet above criticism, quoting our repertoire of verses and packaged answers ready-made for any situation....

The difference between the prophet in the Bible and the professional in the limelight dangerously resembles the difference between authentic Christianity and insincerity....

Possibly prophets are needed more urgently than professionals—prophets who deny themselves rather than professionals who exalt themselves; prophets who are weak rather than professionals who are polished; prophets who may get stoned rather than professionals who get pampered; prophets walking with Christ, who hunger for God in prayer and who weep over sins. Prophets! Not more slick professionals with Teflon exteriors that slough off the messy painful side of life.

An authentic walk with Christ makes us hunger

for God in prayer and weep over sins. God draws us toward the holiness of heaven. (From *Heaven Came Down* by Lynn Anderson)

Application

You can encourage other believers today! You can help unbelievers find Christ! How? Look for the hurting. Look for the lost. Watch for needs. Opportunities are plentiful. Accept the challenge of an opportunity and pray that God will help you be successful.

Exploration

Influence—[Genesis 6:9](#); [Matthew 5:13](#); [Romans 1:5](#); [1 Peter 3:1–2](#).

Jotham King of Judah

Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerusha daughter of Zadok. ²Jotham did what the Lord said was right, just as his father Uzziah had done. But Jotham did not enter the Temple of the Lord to burn incense as his father had. But the people continued doing wrong. ³Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of the Temple of the Lord, and he added greatly to the wall at Ophel. ⁴He also built towns in the hill country of Judah, as well as walled cities and towers in the forests.

⁵Jotham also fought the king of the Ammonites and defeated them. So each year for three years they gave Jotham about seventy-five hundred pounds of silver, about sixty-two thousand bushels of wheat, and about sixty-two thousand bushels of barley. ⁶Jotham became powerful, because he always obeyed the Lord his God.

⁷The other things Jotham did while he was king and all his wars are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. ⁸Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled sixteen years in Jerusalem. ⁹Jotham died and was buried in Jerusalem, the city of David. Then Jotham's son Ahaz became king in his place.

Ahaz King of Judah

Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he ruled sixteen years in Jerusalem. Unlike his ancestor David, he did not do what the Lord said was right.² Ahaz did the same things the kings of Israel had done. He made metal idols to worship Baal.³ He burned incense in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and made his children pass through the fire. He did the same hateful sins as the nations had done whom the Lord had forced out of the land ahead of the Israelites.⁴ Ahaz offered sacrifices and burned incense at the places where gods were worshiped, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

⁵So the Lord his God handed over Ahaz to the king of Aram. The Arameans defeated Ahaz and took many people of Judah as prisoners to Damascus.

He also handed over Ahaz to Pekah king of Israel, and Pekah's army killed many soldiers of Ahaz.⁶ The army of Pekah son of Remaliah killed one hundred twenty thousand brave soldiers from Judah in one day. Pekah defeated them because they had left the Lord, the God of their ancestors.⁷ Zicri, a warrior from Ephraim, killed King Ahaz's son Maaseiah. He also killed Azrikam, the officer in charge of the palace, and Elkanah, who was second in command to the king.⁸ The Israelite army captured two hundred thousand of their own relatives. They took women, sons and daughters, and many valuable things from Judah and carried them back to Samaria.⁹ But a prophet of the Lord named Oded was there. He met the Israelite army when it returned to Samaria and said to them, "The Lord, the God of your ancestors, handed Judah over to

you, because he was angry with those people. But God has seen the cruel way you killed them. ¹⁰Now you plan to make the people of Judah and Jerusalem your slaves, but you also have sinned against the Lord your God. ¹¹Now listen to me. Send back your brothers and sisters whom you captured, because the Lord is very angry with you.”

¹²Then some of the leaders in Ephraim—Azariah son of Jehohanan, Berekiah son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah son of Shallum, and Amasa son of Hadlai—met the Israelite soldiers coming home from war. ¹³They warned the soldiers, “Don’t bring the prisoners from Judah here. If you do, we will be guilty of sin against the Lord, and that will make our sin and guilt even worse. Our guilt is already so great that he is angry with Israel.”

¹⁴So the soldiers left the prisoners and valuable things in front of the officers and people there. ¹⁵The leaders who were named took the prisoners and gave those who were naked the clothes that the Israelite army had taken. They gave the prisoners clothes, sandals, food, drink, and medicine. They put the weak prisoners on donkeys and took them back to their families in Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned home to Samaria.

^{16–17}At that time the Edomites came again and attacked Judah and carried away prisoners. So King Ahaz sent to the king of Assyria for help. ¹⁸The Philistines also robbed the towns in the western hills and in southern Judah. They captured the towns of Beth Shemesh, Aijalon, Gederot, Soco, Timnah, and Gimzo, and the villages around them. Then the Philistines lived in those towns. ¹⁹The Lord brought trouble on Judah because Ahaz their king led the people of Judah to sin,

and he was unfaithful to the Lord.²⁰ Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came to Ahaz, but he gave Ahaz trouble instead of help.²¹ Ahaz took some valuable things from the Temple of the Lord, from the palace, and from the princes, and he gave them to the king of Assyria, but it did not help.

²²During Ahaz's troubles he was even more unfaithful to the Lord.²³ He offered sacrifices to the gods of the people of Damascus, who had defeated him. He thought, "The gods of the kings of Aram helped them. If I offer sacrifices to them, they will help me also." But this brought ruin to Ahaz and all Israel.

²⁴Ahaz gathered the things from the Temple of God and broke them into pieces. Then he closed the doors of the Temple of the Lord. He made altars and put them on every street corner in Jerusalem.²⁵ In every town in Judah, Ahaz made places for burning sacrifices to worship other gods. So he made the Lord, the God of his ancestors, very angry.

²⁶The other things Ahaz did as king, from beginning to end, are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.²⁷ Ahaz died and was buried in the city of Jerusalem, but not in the graves of the kings of Israel. Ahaz's son Hezekiah became king in his place.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 29:1–32:23

Situation

Kings who worshiped false gods ruled Judah. Hezekiah, however, followed God and desired to please him. He destroyed the pagan temples and altars that had become common in Judah and reopened the Temple in Jerusalem. He brought about a religious revival and sought to restore the nation to God.

Observation

God does not tolerate compromise with the pagans. The longer compromise goes unchecked, the harder it becomes to turn back.

Inspiration

Hezekiah, king of Israel, stirrer of religious revival in the land, calls upon the people to abandon false gods and return to the true God. He calls upon the people to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. But there are two problems.

One, it has been so long since the people partook of the Passover that no one is ceremonially clean. No one is prepared to partake. Even the priests have been worshiping idols and have failed to observe the necessary rituals for purity.

Two, God had commanded that the Passover be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month. By the time Hezekiah can assemble the people it is the second month.

So the Passover was kept a month late by impure participants.

Hezekiah prayed for them: “Lord, you are good.... Please forgive all those who try to obey you even if they did not make themselves clean as the rules of the Temple command.”

Do you see the dilemma?

What does God do when the motive is pure but the method is poor?

“The Lord listened to Hezekiah’s prayer, and he healed the people.”

The right heart with the wrong ritual is better than the wrong heart with the right ritual....

Some of you are scowling. “Wait a minute, Max. Are you saying that the method we use to approach God is immaterial? Are you saying that the only thing that matters is why we go to God and that how we approach him is relative?”

No, that’s not what I’m saying.... Ideally, we approach God with the right motive and the right method. And sometimes we do. Sometimes the words of our prayer are as beautiful as the motive behind the prayer. Sometimes the way we sing is as strong as the reason we sing.

But many times it isn’t. Many times our words falter. Many times our music suffers. Many times our worship is less than what we want it to be....

God didn’t tell Hezekiah to shut down the celebration.... Hezekiah did the best [he] could with what [he] had—and that was enough.

“You will search for me,” God declared. “And

when you search for me with all your heart, you will find me! I will let you find me.”

What a promise! (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

Application

Pray for national leaders today, local leaders tomorrow, world leaders the next day. Keep your prayer habit strong.

Exploration

Righteousness in Life and Prayer—[Genesis 6:9](#); [2 Kings 19:1–7](#); [Isaiah 26:7](#); [James 5:16](#).

Hezekiah Purifies the Temple

Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah.² Hezekiah did what the Lord said was right, just as his ancestor David had done.

³Hezekiah opened the doors of the Temple of the Lord and repaired them in the first month of the first year he was king.

⁴Hezekiah brought in the priests and Levites and gathered them in the courtyard on the east side of the Temple. ⁵Hezekiah said, "Listen to me, Levites. Make yourselves ready for the Lord's service, and make holy the Temple of the Lord, the God of your ancestors. Remove from the Temple everything that makes it impure. ⁶Our ancestors were unfaithful to God and did what the

Lord said was wrong. They left the Lord and stopped worshiping at the Temple where he lives. They rejected him.

⁷They shut the doors of the porch of the Temple, and they let the fire go out in the lamps. They stopped burning incense and offering burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel.

⁸So the Lord became very angry with the people of Judah and Jerusalem, and he punished them. Other people are frightened and shocked by what he did to them. So they insult the people of Judah. You know these things are true. ⁹That is why our ancestors were killed in battle and our sons, daughters, and wives were taken captive. ¹⁰Now I, Hezekiah, have decided to

make an agreement with the Lord, the God of Israel, so he will

not be angry with us anymore. ¹¹My sons, don't waste any more time. The Lord chose you to stand before him, to serve him, to be his servants, and to burn incense to him."

¹²These are the Levites who started to work. From the Kohathite family there were Mahath son of Amasai and Joel son of Azariah. From the Merarite family there were Kish son of Abdi and Azariah son of Jehallelel. From the Gershonite family there were Joah son of Zimmah and Eden son of Joah. ¹³From Elizaphan's family there were Shimri and Jeiel. From Asaph's family there were Zechariah and Mattaniah. ¹⁴From Heman's family there were Jehiel and Shimei. From Jeduthun's family there were Shemaiah and Uzziel.

¹⁵These Levites gathered their brothers together and made themselves holy for service in the Temple. Then they went into the Temple of the Lord to purify it. They obeyed the king's command that had come from the Lord. ¹⁶When the priests went into the Temple of the Lord to purify it, they took out all the unclean things they found in the Temple of the Lord and put them in the Temple courtyard. Then the Levites took these things out to the Kidron Valley. ¹⁷Beginning on the first day of the first month, they made the Temple holy for the Lord's service. On the eighth day of the month, they came to the porch of the Temple, and for eight more days they made the Temple of the Lord holy. So they finished on the sixteenth day of the first month.

¹⁸Then they went to King Hezekiah and said, "We have purified the entire Temple of the Lord, the altar for burnt offerings and its utensils, and the table for the holy bread and all its utensils. ¹⁹When Ahaz was king, he was unfaithful to God and removed some things from the Temple. But we have

put them back and made them holy for the Lord. They are now in front of the Lord's altar."

²⁰Early the next morning King Hezekiah gathered the leaders of the city and went up to the Temple of the Lord. ²¹They brought seven bulls, seven male sheep, seven lambs, and seven male goats. These animals were an offering to remove the sin of the people and the kingdom of Judah and to make the Temple ready for service to God. King Hezekiah commanded the priests, the descendants of Aaron, to offer these animals on the Lord's altar. ²²So the priests killed the bulls and sprinkled their blood on the altar. They killed the sheep and sprinkled their blood on the altar. Then they killed the lambs and sprinkled their blood on the altar. ²³Then the priests brought the male goats for the sin offering before the king and the people there. After the king and the people put their hands on the goats, ²⁴the priests killed them. With the goats' blood they made an offering on the altar to remove the sins of the Israelites so they would belong to God. The king had said that the burnt offering and sin offering should be made for all Israel.

²⁵King Hezekiah put the Levites in the Temple of the Lord with cymbals, harps, and lyres, as David, Gad, and Nathan had commanded. (Gad was the king's seer, and Nathan was a prophet.) This command came from the Lord through his prophets. ²⁶So the Levites stood ready with David's instruments of music, and the priests stood ready with their trumpets.

²⁷Then Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. When the burnt offering began, the singing to the Lord also began. The trumpets were blown, and the musical instruments of David king of Israel were played.

²⁸All the people worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters blew their trumpets until the burnt offering was finished.

²⁹When the sacrifices were completed, King Hezekiah and everyone with him bowed down and worshiped. ³⁰King Hezekiah and his officers ordered the Levites to praise the Lord, using the words David and Asaph the seer had used. So they praised God with joy and bowed down and worshiped.

³¹Then Hezekiah said, "Now that you people of Judah have given yourselves to the Lord, come near to the Temple of the Lord. Bring sacrifices and offerings, to show thanks to him." So the people brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and anyone who was willing also brought burnt offerings. ³²For burnt offerings they brought a total of seventy bulls, one hundred male sheep, and two hundred lambs; all these animals were sacrificed as burnt offerings to the Lord. ³³The holy offerings totaled six hundred bulls and three thousand sheep and goats.

³⁴There were not enough priests to skin all the animals for the burnt offerings. So their relatives the Levites helped them until the work was finished and other priests could be made holy. The Levites had been more careful to make themselves holy for the Lord's service than the priests. ³⁵There were many burnt offerings along with the fat of fellowship offerings and drink offerings. So the service in the Temple of the Lord began again.

³⁶And Hezekiah and the people were very happy that God had made it happen so quickly for his people.

The Passover Celebration

King Hezekiah sent messages to all the people of Israel and Judah, and he wrote letters to the people of Ephraim and Manasseh. Hezekiah invited all these people to come to the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover for the Lord, the God of Israel. ²King Hezekiah, his officers, and all the people in Jerusalem agreed to celebrate the Passover in the second month. ³They could not celebrate it at the normal time, because not enough priests had made themselves ready to serve the Lord, and the people had not yet gathered in Jerusalem. ⁴This plan satisfied King Hezekiah and all the people. ⁵So they made an announcement everywhere in Israel, from [Beersheba to Dan](#), telling the people to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover for the Lord, the God of Israel. For a long time most of the people had not celebrated the Passover as the law commanded. ⁶At the king's command, the messengers took letters from him and his officers all through Israel and Judah. This is what the letters said:

People of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. Then God will return to you who are still alive, who have escaped from the kings of Assyria. ⁷Don't be like your ancestors or your relatives. They turned against the Lord, the God of their ancestors, so he caused other people to be disgusted with them. You know this is true. ⁸Don't be stubborn as your ancestors were, but obey the Lord willingly. Come to the Temple, which he has made holy forever. Serve the Lord your God so he will not be angry with you. ⁹Come back to the Lord. Then the people

who captured your relatives and children will be kind to them and will let them return to this land. The Lord your God is kind and merciful. He will not turn away from you if you return to him.

¹⁰The messengers went to every town in Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the way to Zebulun, but the people laughed at them and made fun of them. ¹¹But some men from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun were sorry for what they had done and went to Jerusalem. ¹²And God united all the people of Judah in obeying King Hezekiah and his officers, because their command had come from the Lord.

¹³In the second month a large crowd came together in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. ¹⁴The people removed the altars and incense altars to gods in Jerusalem and threw them into the Kidron Valley.

¹⁵They killed the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. The priests and the Levites were ashamed, so they made themselves holy and brought burnt offerings into the Temple of the Lord. ¹⁶They took their regular places in the Temple as the Teachings of Moses, the man of God, commanded. The Levites gave the blood of the sacrifices to the priests, who sprinkled it on the altar. ¹⁷Since many people in the crowd had not made themselves holy, the Levites killed the Passover lambs for everyone who was not clean. The Levites made each lamb holy for the Lord. ¹⁸⁻¹⁹Although many people from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun had not purified themselves for the feast, they ate the Passover even though it was against the law. So Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "Lord, you are good. You are the Lord,

the God of our ancestors. Please forgive all those who try to obey you even if they did not make themselves clean as the rules of the Temple command.” ²⁰The Lord listened to Hezekiah’s prayer, and he healed the people. ²¹The Israelites in Jerusalem celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with great joy to the Lord. The Levites and priests praised the Lord every day with loud music. ²²Hezekiah encouraged all the Levites who showed they understood well how to do their service for the Lord. The people ate the feast for seven days, offered fellowship offerings, and praised the Lord, the God of their ancestors.

²³Then all the people agreed to stay seven more days, so they celebrated with joy for seven more days. ²⁴Hezekiah king of Judah gave one thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep to the people. The officers gave one thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep to the people. Many priests made themselves holy. ²⁵All the people of Judah, the priests, the Levites, those who came from Israel, the foreigners from Israel, and the foreigners living in Judah were very happy. ²⁶There was much joy in Jerusalem, because there had not been a celebration like this since the time of Solomon son of David and king of Israel. ²⁷The priests and Levites stood up and blessed the people, and God heard them because their prayer reached heaven, his holy home.

The Collection for the Priests

When the Passover celebration was finished, all the Israelites in Jerusalem went out to the towns of Judah. There they smashed the stone pillars used to worship gods. They cut down the Asherah idols and destroyed the altars and places for worshipping gods in all of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh. After they had destroyed all of them, the Israelites returned to their own towns and homes.

²King Hezekiah appointed groups of priests and Levites for their special duties. They were to offer burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, to worship, and to give thanks and praise at the gates of the Lord's house. ³Hezekiah gave some of his own animals for the burnt offerings, which were given every morning and evening, on Sabbath days, during New Moons, and at other feasts commanded in the Lord's Teachings.

⁴Hezekiah commanded the people living in Jerusalem to give the priests and Levites the portion that belonged to them. Then the priests and Levites could give all their time to the Lord's Teachings. ⁵As soon as the king's command went out to the Israelites, they gave freely of the first portion of their grain, new wine, oil, honey, and everything they grew in their fields. They brought a large amount, one-tenth of everything. ⁶The people of Israel and Judah who lived in Judah also brought one-tenth of their cattle and sheep and one-tenth of the holy things that were given to the Lord their God, and they put all of them in piles. ⁷The people began the piles in the third month and finished in the seventh month. ⁸When Hezekiah and his officers came and saw the piles, they praised the Lord and

his people, the people of Israel.⁹ Hezekiah asked the priests and Levites about the piles.¹⁰ Azariah, the leading priest from Zadok's family, answered Hezekiah, "Since the people began to bring their offerings to the Temple of the Lord, we have had plenty to eat and plenty left over, because the Lord has blessed his people. So we have all this left over."

¹¹Then Hezekiah commanded the priests to prepare the storerooms in the Temple of the Lord. So this was done. ¹²Then the priests brought in the offerings and the things given to the Lord and one-tenth of everything the people had given. Conaniah the Levite was in charge of these things, and his brother Shimei was second to him. ¹³Conaniah and his brother Shimei were over these supervisors: Jehiel, Azariah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismakiah, Mahath, and Benaiah. King Hezekiah and Azariah the officer in charge of the Temple of God had chosen them.

¹⁴Kore son of Imnah the Levite was in charge of the special gifts the people wanted to give to God. He was responsible for giving out the contributions made to the Lord and the holy gifts. Kore was the guard at the East Gate. ¹⁵Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah helped Kore in the towns where the priests lived. They gave from what was collected to the other groups of priests, both young and old.

¹⁶From what was collected, these men also gave to the males three years old and older who had their names in the Levite family histories. They were to enter the Temple of the Lord for their daily service, each group having its own responsibilities. ¹⁷The priests were given their part of the collection, by families, as listed in the family histories. The Levites twenty years old and older were given their part of the

collection, based on their responsibilities and their groups.
¹⁸The Levites' babies, wives, sons, and daughters also got part of the collection. This was done for all the Levites who were listed in the family histories, because they always kept themselves ready to serve the Lord.

¹⁹Some of Aaron's descendants, the priests, lived on the farmlands near the towns or in the towns. Men were chosen by name to give part of the collection to these priests. All the males and those named in the family histories of the Levites received part of the collection.

²⁰This is what King Hezekiah did in Judah. He did what was good and right and obedient before the Lord his God.
²¹Hezekiah tried to obey God in his service of the Temple of God, and he tried to obey God's teachings and commands. He gave himself fully to his work for God. So he had success.

Assyria Attacks Judah

After Hezekiah did all these things to serve the Lord, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and attacked Judah. He and his army surrounded and attacked the strong, walled cities, hoping to take them for himself.² Hezekiah knew that Sennacherib had come to Jerusalem to attack it.³ So Hezekiah and his officers and army commanders decided to cut off the water from the springs outside the city. So the officers and commanders helped Hezekiah.⁴ Many people came and cut off all the springs and the stream that flowed through the land. They said, “The king of Assyria will not find much water when he comes here.”⁵ Then Hezekiah made Jerusalem stronger. He rebuilt all the broken parts of the wall and put towers on it. He also built another wall outside the first one and strengthened the area that was filled in on the east side of the old part of Jerusalem. He also made many weapons and shields.

⁶Hezekiah put army commanders over the people and met with them at the open place near the city gate. Hezekiah encouraged them, saying,⁷ “Be strong and brave. Don’t be afraid or worried because of the king of Assyria or his large army. There is a greater power with us than with him.”⁸ He only has men, but we have the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles.” The people were encouraged by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

⁹After this King Sennacherib of Assyria and all his army surrounded and attacked Lachish. Then he sent his officers to Jerusalem with this message for King Hezekiah of Judah and all the people of Judah in Jerusalem:

¹⁰Sennacherib king of Assyria says this: “You have nothing to trust in to help you. It is no use for you to stay in Jerusalem under attack. ¹¹Hezekiah says to you, ‘The Lord our God will save us from the king of Assyria,’ but he is fooling you. If you stay in Jerusalem, you will die from hunger and thirst. ¹²Hezekiah himself removed your Lord’s places of worship and altars. He told you people of Judah and Jerusalem that you must worship and burn incense on only one altar.

¹³“You know what my ancestors and I have done to all the people in other nations. The gods of those nations could not save their people from my power. ¹⁴My ancestors destroyed those nations; none of their gods could save them from me. So your god cannot save you from my power. ¹⁵Do not let Hezekiah fool you or trick you, and do not believe him. No god of any nation or kingdom has been able to save his people from me or my ancestors. Your god is even less able to save you from me.”

¹⁶Sennacherib’s officers said worse things against the Lord God and his servant Hezekiah. ¹⁷King Sennacherib also wrote letters insulting the Lord, the God of Israel. They spoke against him, saying, “The gods of the other nations could not save their people from me. In the same way Hezekiah’s god won’t be able to save his people from me.” ¹⁸Then the king’s officers shouted in Hebrew, calling out to the people of Jerusalem who were on the city wall. The officers wanted to scare the people away so they could capture Jerusalem. ¹⁹They spoke about the God of Jerusalem as though he were like the gods the people of the world worshiped, which are made by human hands.

²⁰King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz prayed to heaven about this. ²¹Then the Lord sent an angel who killed all the soldiers, leaders, and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So the king went back to his own country in disgrace. When he went into the temple of his god, some of his own sons killed him with a sword.

²²So the Lord saved Hezekiah and the people in Jerusalem from Sennacherib king of Assyria and from all other people. He took care of them on every side. ²³Many people brought gifts for the Lord to Jerusalem, and they also brought valuable gifts to King Hezekiah of Judah. From then on all the nations respected Hezekiah.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 32:24–33:25

Situation

Hezekiah's son Manasseh succeeded him. Manasseh worshiped false gods as his ancestors had done. But God caused him to turn from his sin.

Observation

It was out of his great need that Manasseh turned to God. The Lord hears our prayers and shows great mercy.

Inspiration

You know the story of Peter, the first sailor. Let me tell you about the second, whose name was John.

He had served on the seas since he was eleven years old. His father, an English

shipmaster in the Mediterranean, took him aboard and trained him well for a life in the Royal Navy.

Yet what John gained in experience, he lacked in discipline. He mocked authority. Ran with the wrong crowd. Indulged in the sinful ways of a sailor. Although his training would have qualified him to serve as an officer, his behavior caused him to be flogged and demoted.

In his early twenties, he made his way to Africa, where he became intrigued with the lucrative slave trade. At age twenty-one, he made his living on the *Greyhound*, a slave ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean.

John ridiculed the moral and poked fun at the religious. He even made jokes about a book that would eventually help reshape his life: *The Imitation of Christ*. In fact, he was degrading that book a few hours before his ship sailed into an angry storm.

That night the waves pummeled the *Greyhound*, spinning the ship one minute on the top of a wave. Plunging her the next into a watery valley.

John awakened to find his cabin filled with water. A side of the *Greyhound* had collapsed. Ordinarily such damage would have sent a ship to the bottom in a matter of minutes. The *Greyhound*, however, was carrying buoyant cargo and remained afloat.

John worked at the pumps all night. For nine

hours, he and the other sailors struggled to keep the ship from sinking. But he knew that it was a losing cause. Finally, when his hopes were more battered than the vessel, he threw himself on the saltwater-soaked deck and pleaded, “If this will not do, then Lord have mercy on us all.”

John didn’t deserve mercy, but he received it. The *Greyhound* and her crew survived.

John never forgot God’s mercy shown on that tempestuous day in the roaring Atlantic. He returned to England where he became a prolific composer. You’ve sung his songs, like this one:

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

This slave-trader-turned-songwriter was John Newton.

Along with his hymn writing, he also became a powerful pulpiteer. For nearly fifty years, he filled pulpits and churches with the story of the Savior who meets you and me in the storm. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

Take the troubles you face today—disease, alcohol, kids in trouble, cash flow—and wrap them in a prayer: “Lord, have mercy, and teach me to see your way through the storm.”

Exploration

God Hears Us—[Psalm 18:6](#); [Isaiah 41:10](#);
[Hebrews 13:6](#).

Hezekiah Dies

²⁴At that time Hezekiah became so sick he almost died. When he prayed to the Lord, the Lord spoke to him and gave him a [sign](#). ²⁵But Hezekiah did not thank God for his kindness, because he was so proud. So the Lord was angry with him and the people of Judah and Jerusalem. ²⁶But later Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem were sorry and stopped being proud, so the Lord did not punish them while Hezekiah was alive.

²⁷Hezekiah had many riches and much honor. He made treasuries for his silver, gold, gems, spices, shields, and other valuable things. ²⁸He built storage buildings for grain, new wine, and oil and stalls for all the cattle and pens for the sheep. ²⁹He also built many towns. He had many flocks and herds, because God had given Hezekiah much wealth.

³⁰It was Hezekiah who cut off the upper pool of the Gihon spring and made those waters flow straight down to the west side of the older part of Jerusalem. And Hezekiah was successful in everything he did. ³¹But one time the leaders of Babylon sent messengers to Hezekiah, asking him about a strange sign that had happened in the land. When they came, [God left Hezekiah alone to test him so he could know everything that was in Hezekiah's heart](#).

³²Hezekiah's love for God and the other things he did as king are written in the vision of the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. This is in the book of the kings of Judah and

Israel. ³³Hezekiah died and was buried on a hill, where the graves of David's ancestors are. All the people of Judah and Jerusalem honored Hezekiah when he died, and his son Manasseh became king in his place.

Manasseh King of Judah

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he was king for fifty-five years in Jerusalem.² He did what the Lord said was wrong. He did the hateful things the nations had done—the nations that the Lord had forced out of the land ahead of the Israelites.³ Manasseh's father, Hezekiah, had torn down the places where gods were worshiped, but Manasseh rebuilt them. He also built altars for the Baal gods, and he made Asherah idols and worshiped all the stars of the sky and served them.⁴ The Lord had said about the Temple, "I will be worshiped in Jerusalem forever," but Manasseh built altars in the Temple of the Lord.⁵ He built altars to worship the stars in the two courtyards of the Temple of the Lord.⁶ He made his children pass through fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. He practiced magic and witchcraft and told the future by explaining signs and dreams. He got advice from mediums and fortune-tellers. He did many things the Lord said were wrong, which made the Lord angry.

⁷Manasseh carved an idol and put it in the Temple of God. God had said to David and his son Solomon about the Temple, "I will be worshiped forever in this Temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel."⁸ I will never again make the Israelites leave the land I gave to their ancestors. But they must obey everything I have commanded them in all the teachings, rules, and commands I gave them through Moses."⁹ But Manasseh led the people of Judah and Jerusalem to do wrong. They did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed ahead of the Israelites.

¹⁰The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they did not listen. ¹¹So the Lord brought the king of Assyria's army commanders to attack Judah. They captured Manasseh, put hooks in him, placed bronze chains on his hands, and took him to Babylon. ¹²As Manasseh suffered, he begged the Lord his God for help and humbled himself before the God of his ancestors. ¹³When Manasseh prayed, the Lord heard him and had pity on him. So the Lord let him return to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is the true God.

¹⁴After that happened, Manasseh rebuilt the outer wall of Jerusalem and made it higher. It was in the valley on the west side of the Gihon spring and went to the entrance of the Fish Gate and around the hill of Ophel. Then he put commanders in all the strong, walled cities in Judah.

¹⁵Manasseh removed the idols of other nations, including the idol in the Temple of the Lord. He removed all the altars he had built on the Temple hill and in Jerusalem and threw them out of the city. ¹⁶Then he set up the Lord's altar and sacrificed on it fellowship offerings and offerings to show thanks to God. Manasseh commanded all the people of Judah to serve the Lord, the God of Israel. ¹⁷The people continued to offer sacrifices at the places of worship, but their sacrifices were only to the Lord their God. ¹⁸The other things Manasseh did as king, his prayer to his God, and what the seers said to him in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel—all are recorded in the book of the history of the kings of Israel. ¹⁹Manasseh's prayer and God's pity for him, his sins, his unfaithfulness, the places he built for worshiping gods and the Asherah idols before he humbled himself—all are written in the book of the seers.

²⁰Manasseh died and was buried in his palace. Then Manasseh's son Amon became king in his place.

Amon King of Judah

²¹Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he was king for two years in Jerusalem. ²²He did what the Lord said was wrong, as his father Manasseh had done. Amon worshiped and offered sacrifices to all the carved idols Manasseh had made. ²³Amon did not humble himself before the Lord as his father Manasseh had done. Instead, Amon sinned even more.

²⁴King Amon's officers made plans against him and killed him in his palace. ²⁵Then the people of the land killed all those who had made plans to kill King Amon, and they made his son Josiah king in his place.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 34:1–28

Situation

As Josiah became king at age 8, he followed in his ancestor David's footsteps and obeyed God. One of the first steps he took was to remove all idols in the kingdom.

Observation

Faithful Christians love and obey God and should remove idols from their own lives.

Inspiration

It was the apostle John's final warning to his readers:

Little children, guard yourselves from idols ([1 John 5:21](#)).

"Watch out," says John. "Be on guard against anything that might occupy the place in your heart that should be reserved for God."

John never qualified that warning. The aged apostle deliberately refrained from classifying the idols or giving us a comprehensive list to follow. It's an unconditional command. *Any* idol, regardless of its beauty or usefulness or original purpose, is to be set aside so that Christ might reign supreme, without a single competitor.

I don't have many temptations to worship evil things. It's the *good* things that plague me. It isn't as difficult for me to reject something that is innately bad or wrong as it is to keep those good and wholesome

things off the throne. That, I believe, is where the battle line begins....

... You can make an idol out of anything or anyone in life. A church building can become an idol to us, when all the while it is simply a place to meet and worship our Lord—nothing more. Your child can become your idol ... in subtle ways you can so adore that little one that your whole life revolves around the child. Your mate or date can be given first place in your life and literally idolized. Your work can easily become your God ... as can some pursuit in life. A house, a lawn, an antique, a car, a letter in sports, an education, a trip abroad, an achievement, and even that goal of “retirement”....

Don’t miss my point. There’s nothing necessarily wrong with any of these good things. To possess them—any or all of them—is not sinful. But it is sinful when they *possess* us! Therein lies the difference....

Honestly now ... can you testify to the fact that you’ve destroyed the idols? ... That Christ reigns without a rival? Or would you have to admit to a personal shrine in your inner temple where you privately burn incense? ...

Your Lord and Savior wants to occupy first place. [Matthew 6:33](#) says that when he has it, everything else will be added to you. How long *has* it been since you’ve enlisted your Lord’s help in a private, personal, temple-cleansing session? It’s so easy to get attracted to idols—good things, inappropriately adorned. But when you have Jesus in the center of the room, everything else only junks up the decor.

(From *Come Before Winter* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

What or who are the “idols” that have been crowding out Jesus in your life? What has been keeping you from victory over sin? Have you really given your life to him? Let him take over each area: your past, present, and future. Allow him to direct your choice of school, job, and career.

Exploration

Worshiping Things Other Than God—[Exodus 20:4](#); [Deuteronomy 11:16–17](#); [Psalms 115:2–8](#); [Isaiah 42:8](#); [Matthew 6:24](#); [Romans 1:21–25](#).

Josiah King of Judah

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he ruled thirty-one years in Jerusalem. ²He did what the Lord said was right. He lived as his ancestor David had lived, and he did not stop doing what was right.

³In his eighth year as king while he was still young, Josiah began to obey the God of his ancestor David. In his twelfth year as king, Josiah began to remove from Judah and Jerusalem the gods, the places for worshiping gods, the Asherah idols, and the wooden and metal idols. ⁴The people tore down the altars for the Baal gods as Josiah directed. Then Josiah cut down the incense altars that were above them. He broke up the Asherah idols and the wooden and metal idols and beat them into powder. Then he sprinkled the powder on the graves of the people who had offered sacrifices to these gods. ⁵He burned the bones of their priests on their own altars. So Josiah removed idol worship from Judah and Jerusalem, ⁶and from the towns in the areas of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon all the way to Naphtali, and in the ruins near these towns. ⁷Josiah broke down the altars and Asherah idols and beat the idols into powder. He cut down all the incense altars in all of Israel. Then he went back to Jerusalem.

⁸In Josiah's eighteenth year as king, he made Judah and the Temple pure again. He sent Shaphan son of Azaliah, Maaseiah the city leader, and Joah son of Joahaz the recorder to repair

the Temple of the Lord, the God of Josiah. ⁹These men went to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him the money the Levite gatekeepers had gathered from the people of Manasseh, Ephraim, and all the Israelites who were left alive, and also from all the people of Judah, Benjamin, and Jerusalem. This is the money they had brought into the Temple of God. ¹⁰Then the Levites gave it to the supervisors of the work on the Temple of the Lord, and they paid the workers who rebuilt and repaired the Temple. ¹¹They gave money to carpenters and builders to buy cut stone and wood. The wood was used to rebuild the buildings and to make beams for them, because the kings of Judah had let the buildings fall into ruin. ¹²The men did their work well. Their supervisors were Jahath and Obadiah, who were Levites from the family of Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, who were from the family of Kohath. These Levites were all skilled musicians. ¹³They were also in charge of the workers who carried loads and all the other workers. Some Levites worked as secretaries, officers, and gatekeepers.

The Book of the Teachings Is Found

¹⁴The Levites brought out the money that was in the Temple of the Lord. As they were doing this, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Lord's Teachings that had been given through Moses. ¹⁵Hilkiah said to Shaphan the royal secretary, "I've found the Book of the Teachings in the Temple of the Lord!" Then he gave it to Shaphan.

¹⁶Shaphan took the book to the king and reported to Josiah, "Your officers are doing everything you told them to do.

¹⁷They have paid out the money that was in the Temple of the

Lord and have given it to the supervisors and the workers.”
¹⁸Then Shaphan the royal secretary told the king, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read from the book to the king.

¹⁹When the king heard the words of the Teachings, he tore his clothes to show how upset he was. ²⁰He gave orders to Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Acbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the royal secretary, and Asaiah, the king’s servant. These were the orders: ²¹“Go and ask the Lord about the words in the book that was found. Ask for me and for the people who are left alive in Israel and Judah. The Lord is very angry with us, because our ancestors did not obey the Lord’s word; they did not do everything this book says to do.”

²²So Hilkiah and those the king sent with him went to talk to Huldah the prophetess. She was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, who took care of the king’s clothes. Huldah lived in Jerusalem, in the new area of the city.

²³She said to them, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, ²⁴“This is what the Lord says: I will bring trouble to this place and to the people living here. I will bring all the curses that are written in the book that was read to the king of Judah. ²⁵The people of Judah have left me and have burned incense to other gods. They have made me angry by all the evil things they have made. So I will punish them in my anger, which will not be put out.’ ²⁶Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to ask the Lord, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says about the words you heard: ²⁷When you heard my words against this place and its people, you became sorry for what you had done and you humbled yourself before me. You tore your clothes to show how upset you were, and

you cried in my presence. This is why I have heard you, says the Lord. ²⁸So I will let you die and be buried in peace. You won't see all the trouble I will bring to this place and the people living here.'"

So they took her message back to the king.

²⁹Then the king gathered all the older leaders of Judah and Jerusalem together. ³⁰He went up to the Temple of the Lord, and all the people from Judah and from Jerusalem went with him. The priests, the Levites, and all the people—from the most important to the least important—went with him. He read to them all the words in the Book of the Agreement that was found in the Temple of the Lord. ³¹The king stood by his pillar and made an agreement in the presence of the Lord to follow the Lord and obey his commands, rules, and laws with his whole being and to obey the words of the agreement written in this book. ³²Then Josiah made all the people in Jerusalem and Benjamin promise to accept the agreement. So the people of Jerusalem obeyed the agreement of God, the God of their ancestors.

³³And Josiah threw out the hateful idols from all the land that belonged to the Israelites. He led everyone in Israel to serve the Lord their God. While Josiah lived, the people obeyed the Lord, the God of their ancestors.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 34:29–36:1

Situation

King Josiah led his people in committing their lives to God. He discovered the Mosaic law and celebrated the Passover on the plains of Megiddo.

Observation

Josiah, one of Judah's best kings, chose to focus on God. He did what the Lord said was right and "he did not stop doing what was right" ([34:2](#)).

Inspiration

There is a mystery, an aura about the living God that is designed to force us to trust Him, even when we cannot figure Him out (which is most of the time)

....

The mystery is purposeful, because His overall plan is profound ... His plan is not designed to make us uncomfortable; it's designed to make us more like Christ, to conform us to His will...

In this life, we have focus choices. We can focus on ourselves, we can focus on our circumstances, we can focus on other people, or we can focus on God. When you think biblically you focus first on God. Regardless of what you want, regardless of the circumstances you're under, regardless of what others say or think, regardless of how you feel, God and God alone is working out His great plan. And in the final tally, it will be fabulous! (From *Wisdom for the Way* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

You have choices in life, decisions to make. What are you pursuing now—God or some other pleasure? Where do you find your satisfaction? Take time to review the activities and pursuits that occupy your time. Ask God to help you discern what changes you may need to make to live a life that is truly God-focused.

Exploration

Pursuing God—[Genesis 6:8–9](#); [Psalms 27:4](#); [42:1–2](#); [Philippians 3:7–14](#).

Josiah Celebrates the Passover

King Josiah celebrated the Passover to the Lord in Jerusalem. The Passover lamb was killed on the fourteenth day of the first month.² Josiah chose the priests to do their duties, and he encouraged them as they served in the Temple of the Lord.³ The Levites taught the Israelites and were made holy for service to the Lord. Josiah said to them, "Put the Holy Ark in the Temple that David's son Solomon, the king of Israel, built. Do not carry it from place to place on your shoulders anymore. Now serve the Lord your God and his people Israel."⁴ Prepare yourselves by your family groups for service, and do the jobs that King David and his son Solomon gave you to do.

⁵"Stand in the holy place with a group of the Levites for each family group of the people."⁶ Kill the Passover lambs, and make yourselves holy to the Lord. Prepare the lambs for your relatives, the people of Israel, as the Lord through Moses commanded us to do."

⁷Josiah gave the Israelites thirty thousand sheep and goats to kill for the Passover sacrifices, and he gave them three thousand cattle. They were all his own animals.

⁸Josiah's officers also gave willingly to the people, the priests, and the Levites. Hilkiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, the officers in charge of the Temple, gave the priests twenty-six hundred lambs and goats and three hundred cattle for Passover sacrifices.⁹ Conaniah, his brothers Shemaiah and

Nethanel, and Hashabiah, Jeiel, and Jozabad gave the Levites five thousand sheep and goats and five hundred cattle for Passover sacrifices. These men were leaders of the Levites.

¹⁰When everything was ready for the Passover service, the priests and Levites went to their places, as the king had commanded. ¹¹The Passover lambs were killed. Then the Levites skinned the animals and gave the blood to the priests, who sprinkled it on the altar. ¹²Then they gave the animals for the burnt offerings to the different family groups so the burnt offerings could be offered to the Lord as was written in the book of Moses. They also did this with the cattle. ¹³The Levites roasted the Passover sacrifices over the fire as they were commanded, and they boiled the holy offerings in pots, kettles, and pans. Then they quickly gave the meat to the people. ¹⁴After this was finished, the Levites prepared meat for themselves and for the priests, the descendants of Aaron. The priests worked until night, offering the burnt offerings and burning the fat of the sacrifices.

¹⁵The Levite singers from Asaph's family stood in the places chosen for them by King David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, the king's seer. The gatekeepers at each gate did not have to leave their places, because their fellow Levites had prepared everything for them for the Passover.

¹⁶So everything was done that day for the worship of the Lord, as King Josiah commanded. The Passover was celebrated, and the burnt offerings were offered on the Lord's altar. ¹⁷The Israelites who were there celebrated the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days. ¹⁸The Passover had not been celebrated like this in Israel since the prophet Samuel was alive. None of the kings of Israel had ever

celebrated a Passover like it was celebrated by King Josiah, the priests, the Levites, the people of Judah and Israel who were there, and the people of Jerusalem.¹⁹ This Passover was celebrated in the eighteenth year Josiah was king.

The Death of Josiah

²⁰After Josiah did all this for the Temple, Neco king of Egypt led an army to attack Carchemish, a town on the Euphrates River. And Josiah marched out to fight against Neco. ²¹But Neco sent messengers to Josiah, saying, “King Josiah, there should not be war between us. I did not come to fight you, but my enemies. God told me to hurry, and he is on my side. So don’t fight God, or he will destroy you.”

²²But Josiah did not go away. He wore different clothes so no one would know who he was. Refusing to listen to what Neco said at God’s command, Josiah went to fight on the plain of Megiddo. ²³In the battle King Josiah was shot by archers. He told his servants, “Take me away because I am badly wounded.” ²⁴So they took him out of his chariot and put him in another chariot and carried him to Jerusalem. There he died and was buried in the graves where his ancestors were buried. All the people of Judah and Jerusalem were very sad because he was dead.

²⁵Jeremiah wrote some sad songs about Josiah. Even to this day all the men and women singers remember and honor Josiah with these songs. It became a custom in Israel to sing these songs that are written in the collection of sad songs.

²⁶⁻²⁷The other things Josiah did as king, from beginning to end, are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. It

tells how he loved what was written in the Lord's teachings.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 36:2–23

Situation

The final four evil kings of Judah reigned and fell into sin. Babylon conquered Jerusalem, looted, and burned the Temple. They carried God's people into exile. But in the end, Judah returned from exile in Babylon, ready to rebuild.

Observation

God used the exile to cause the people to repent, and he used a pagan king to rebuild Jerusalem's Temple.

Inspiration

The exile was the “crucible of Israel's faith.” They were pushed to the edge of existence where they thought they were hanging on by the skin of their teeth, and they found that in fact they had been pushed to the center, where God was. They experienced not bare survival but abundant life. Now they saw their previous life as subsistence living, a marginal existence absorbed in consumption and fashion, empty ritual and insensitive exploitation. Exile pushed them from the margins of life to the vortex where all the issues of life and death, love and meaning, purpose and value formed the dynamic everyday, participation-demanding realities of God's future with them.

It keeps on happening. Exile is the worst that reveals the best. “It's hard believing,” says Faulkner,

“but disaster seems to be good for people.” When the superfluous is stripped away we find the essential—and the essential is God....

All of us are given moments, days, months, years of exile. What will we do with them? Wish we were someplace else? Complain? Escape into fantasies? Drug ourselves into oblivion? Or build and plant and marry and seek the shalom of the place we inhabit and the people we are with? Exile reveals what really matters and frees us to pursue what really matters, which is to seek the Lord with all our hearts. (From *Run with the Horses* by Eugene Peterson)

Application

Do you feel as if you are in exile? Let disaster develop your character. Do not spend all your time seeking relief but reflect on what God wants to teach you. Ask him to show you what is really important.

Exploration

Restoration—[2 Chronicles 7:13–14](#); [Psalm 23:3](#); [Jeremiah 30:10–11](#); [Galatians 6:1–2](#).

Jehoahaz King of Judah

The people of Judah chose Josiah's son Jehoahaz and made him king in Jerusalem in his father's place.

²Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he was king in Jerusalem for three months. ³Then King Neco of Egypt removed Jehoahaz from being king in Jerusalem. Neco made the people of Judah pay about seventy-five hundred pounds of silver and about seventy-five pounds of gold. ⁴The king of Egypt made Jehoahaz's brother Eliakim the king of Judah and Jerusalem and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But Neco took his brother Jehoahaz to Egypt.

Jehoiakim King of Judah

⁵Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he was king in Jerusalem for eleven years. He did what the Lord his God said was wrong. ⁶King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon attacked Judah, captured Jehoiakim, put bronze chains on him, and took him to Babylon. ⁷Nebuchadnezzar removed some of the things from the Temple of the Lord, took them to Babylon, and put them in his own palace.

⁸The other things Jehoiakim did as king, the hateful things he did, and everything he was guilty of doing, are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. And Jehoiakim's son

Jehoiachin became king in his place.

Jehoiachin King of Judah

⁹Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king of Judah, and he was king in Jerusalem for three months and ten days. He did what the Lord said was wrong. ¹⁰In the spring King Nebuchadnezzar sent for Jehoiachin and brought him and some valuable treasures from the Temple of the Lord to Babylon. Then Nebuchadnezzar made Jehoiachin's uncle Zedekiah the king of Judah and Jerusalem.

Zedekiah King of Judah

¹¹Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king of Judah, and he was king in Jerusalem for eleven years. ¹²Zedekiah did what the Lord his God said was wrong. The prophet Jeremiah spoke messages from the Lord, but Zedekiah did not obey. ¹³Zedekiah turned against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had forced him to swear in God's name to be loyal to him. But Zedekiah became stubborn and refused to obey the Lord, the God of Israel. ¹⁴Also, all the leaders of the priests and the people of Judah became more wicked, following the evil example of the other nations. The Lord had made the Temple in Jerusalem holy, but the leaders made it unholy.

The Fall of Jerusalem

¹⁵The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent prophets again and

again to warn his people, because he had pity on them and on his Temple. ¹⁶But they made fun of God's prophets and hated God's messages. They refused to listen to the prophets until, finally, the Lord became so angry with his people that he could not be stopped. ¹⁷So God brought the king of Babylon to attack them. The king killed the young men even when they were in the Temple. He had no mercy on the young men or women, the old men or those who were sick. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁸Nebuchadnezzar carried away to Babylon all the things from the Temple of God, both large and small, and all the treasures from the Temple of the Lord and from the king and his officers. ¹⁹Nebuchadnezzar and his army set fire to God's Temple and broke down Jerusalem's wall and burned all the palaces. They took or destroyed every valuable thing in Jerusalem.

²⁰Nebuchadnezzar took captive to Babylon the people who were left alive, and he forced them to be slaves for him and his descendants. They remained there as slaves until the Persian kingdom defeated Babylon. ²¹And so what the Lord had told Israel through the prophet Jeremiah happened: The country was an empty wasteland for seventy years to make up for the years of [Sabbath rest](#) that the people had not kept.

²²In the first year Cyrus was king of Persia, the Lord had Cyrus send an announcement to his whole kingdom. This happened so the Lord's message spoken by Jeremiah would come true. He wrote:

²³This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has appointed me to build a Temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Now may the Lord

your God be with all of you who are his people. You are free to go to Jerusalem.

Parvaim There was much gold there. It may have been in the country of Ophir.

stone tablets They were the two stone tablets on which God wrote the Ten Commandments.

agreement ... through marriage Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram married Athaliah, Ahab's daughter. See [2 Chronicles 21:6](#).

Beracah This name means "blessing" or "praise."

"Parents ... sins." See [Deuteronomy 24:16](#).

Uzziah Also called Azariah.

Beersheba to Dan Dan was the city farthest north in Israel, and Beersheba was the city farthest south. So this means all the people of Israel.

sign See [Isaiah 38:1–8](#). It tells the story about the sign and how the Lord gave Hezekiah fifteen more years to live.

God ... heart See [2 Kings 20:12–19](#).

Sabbath rest The law said that every seventh year the land was not to be farmed. See [Leviticus 25:1–7](#).

[The Book of Ezra](#)

Introduction

Martin Luther you've heard of. Philipp Melanchthon, probably not. But Luther knew Melanchthon. And Luther was a better man as a result.

Melanchthon was the intellectual of the Reformation. He authored the Augsburg Confession. He was the first to put into writing an evangelical theology.

He was only eleven when his father died, only twelve when his grandfather presented him with a Bible and a Greek grammar. The next fifty years the three were inseparable. Melanchthon's one great love was to teach the Word of God.

He didn't just read the Bible, he devoured it. By the age of seventeen he was a faculty member at the University of Wittenberg. Though he was small of frame and frail of health, he was keen of mind.

And even more important, he was keen of purpose.

He lived to study and teach the Bible. He commanded the respect of Martin Luther. "I was born to fight," he said, "but Master Philipp, he comes along sowing with joy."

The prophet Ezra was the Philipp Melanchthon of his day.

Ezra was the second of three key leaders to leave Babylon for the reconstruction of Jerusalem. Zerubbabel was first. Then Ezra and then Nehemiah. Zerubbabel reconstructed the Temple, Nehemiah rebuilt the walls, and Ezra restored the worship.

Any person who has tackled the task of presenting the Bible to people will find a friend in Ezra. He was a student. He was an interpreter. In fact, the clearest Old Testament reference to exposition is attributed to Ezra. He was the head of the Levites who "read from the Book of the Teachings of God and

explained what it meant so the people understood what was being read” ([Nehemiah 8:8](#)).

Don’t you appreciate that last phrase, “and explained what it meant so the people understood ...”? Don’t you appreciate the person who can take the Word and reveal it for your life?

Perhaps you can do that. If so, stay faithful. There is no higher task.

Perhaps you have a teacher like that. If so, be grateful. There is no greater friend.

About This Book

Author:

Probably Ezra, the scribe

Date Written:

450–400 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- When the Hebrews were allowed to return home their spiritual restoration was as important as their national restoration.
- Restoring the Temple was a significant step in the spiritual restoration of the people.
- The idolatry of the Hebrews was rooted in foreign wives who continued to worship their false gods. This is why the men were asked to divorce their foreign wives.

Key Verse:

“Ezra had worked hard to know and obey the

Teachings of the Lord and to teach his rules and commands to the Israelites” ([Ezra 7:10](#)).

Contents:

1. The First Restoration Begins [1:1–4:24](#)
2. The Temple Is Rebuilt [5:1–6:22](#)
3. The Second Restoration with [Ezra 7:1–8:36](#)
4. Moral and Spiritual Reform [9:1–10:44](#)

Life Lessons

Ezra 1:1–2:70

Situation

Cyrus, King of Persia, allowed the captive Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. Cyrus blessed the venture and subsidized the journey back to their homeland.

Observation

Although Cyrus was not Jewish, God used this Persian king to restore his people and to rebuild Jerusalem.

Inspiration

The cross is the focal point in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Some think that God didn't want Christ to die, but was forced to adjust His plans to adapt to it. Scripture makes it very clear, however, that the cross was no afterthought with God. Christ was "delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God" ([Acts 2:23](#)).

God designed the cross to defeat Satan, who by deception had obtained squatters' rights to the title deed of the world. When Satan with all of his clever promises separated man from God in the Garden of Eden, he was more than the deceiver of Adam and Eve. In some mysterious manner he began to exert a kind of pseudosovereignty over man. In his arrogant violence, Satan unleashed his fiercest attack to stop Christ's ministry by seeing that He was murdered. But Satan was stopped by God and caught in his own

trap. He hadn't realized that God loved the world so intensely that He could let His own Son be subjected to the worst Satan could do... . (From *How to Be Born Again* by Billy Graham)

Application

Have you ever seen a good result come from something bad? Think of an episode in your life where God's will was revealed through an unlikely agent. Today, if you are buried under a set of problems, be encouraged that none of them is too complex for God to solve.

Exploration

God's Will—[Genesis 18:14](#); [20:6](#); [50:20](#); [Exodus 3:12](#); Esther [4:13–14](#); [Matthew 1:1–17](#).

Cyrus Helps the Captives Return

In the first year Cyrus was king of Persia, the Lord caused Cyrus to send an announcement to his whole kingdom and to put it in writing. This happened so the Lord's message spoken by Jeremiah would come true. He wrote:

²This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

The Lord, the God of heaven, has given all the kingdoms of the earth to me, and he has appointed me to build a Temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. ³May God be with all of you who are his people. You are free to go to Jerusalem in Judah and build the Temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, who is in Jerusalem. ⁴Those who stay behind, wherever they live, should support those who want to go. Give them silver and gold, supplies and cattle, and special gifts for the Temple of God in Jerusalem.

⁵Then the family leaders of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and Levites got ready to go to Jerusalem—everyone God had caused to want to go to Jerusalem to build the Temple of the Lord. ⁶All their neighbors helped them, giving them things made of silver and gold, along with supplies, cattle, valuable gifts, and special gifts for the Temple. ⁷Also, King Cyrus brought out the bowls and pans that belonged in the Temple of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his own god. ⁸Cyrus king of Persia had

Mithredath the treasurer bring them and count them out for Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

⁹He listed thirty gold dishes, one thousand silver dishes, twenty-nine pans, ¹⁰thirty gold bowls, four hundred ten matching silver bowls, and one thousand other pieces.

¹¹There was a total of fifty-four hundred pieces of gold and silver. Sheshbazzar brought all these things along when the captives went from Babylon to Jerusalem.

The Captives Who Returned

These are the people of the area who returned from captivity, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken away to Babylon. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each going back to his own town. ²These people returned with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

These are the people from Israel: ³the descendants of Parosh—2,172; ⁴the descendants of Shephatiah—372; ⁵the descendants of Arah—775; ⁶the descendants of Pahath-Moab (through the family of Jeshua and Joab)—2,812; ⁷the descendants of Elam—1,254; ⁸the descendants of Zattu—945; ⁹the descendants of Zaccai—760; ¹⁰the descendants of Bani—642; ¹¹the descendants of Bebai—623; ¹²the descendants of Azgad—1,222; ¹³the descendants of Adonikam—666; ¹⁴the descendants of Bigvai—2,056; ¹⁵the descendants of Adin—454; ¹⁶the descendants of Ater (through the family of Hezekiah)—98; ¹⁷the descendants of Bezai—323; ¹⁸the descendants of Jorah—112; ¹⁹the descendants of Hashum—223; ²⁰the descendants of Gibbar—95.

²¹These are the people from the towns: of Bethlehem—123; ²²of Netophah—56; ²³of Anathoth—128; ²⁴of Azmaveth—42; ²⁵of Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth—743; ²⁶of Ramah and Geba—621; ²⁷of Micmash—122; ²⁸of Bethel and Ai—223; ²⁹of Nebo—52; ³⁰of Magbish—156; ³¹of the other town of Elam—1,254; ³²of Harim—320; ³³of Lod, Hadid and Ono—725; ³⁴of Jericho—345; ³⁵of Senaah—3,630.

³⁶These are the priests: the descendants of Jedaiah (through the family of Jeshua)—973; ³⁷the descendants of Immer—1,052; ³⁸the descendants of Pashhur—1,247; ³⁹the descendants of Harim—1,017.

⁴⁰These are the Levites: the descendants of Jeshua and Kadmiel (through the family of Hodaviah)—74.

⁴¹These are the singers: the descendants of Asaph—128.

⁴²These are the gatekeepers of the Temple: the descendants of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai—139.

⁴³These are the Temple servants: the descendants of Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, ⁴⁴Keros, Siaha, Padon, ⁴⁵Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub, ⁴⁶Hagab, Shalmal, Hanan, ⁴⁷Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, ⁴⁸Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, ⁴⁹Uzza, Paseah, Besai, ⁵⁰Asnah, Meunim, Nephussim, ⁵¹Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, ⁵²Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, ⁵³Barkos, Sisera, Temah, ⁵⁴Neziah, and Hatipha.

⁵⁵These are the descendants of the servants of Solomon: the descendants of Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, ⁵⁶Jaala, Darkon, Giddel, ⁵⁷Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-Hazzebaim, and Ami.

⁵⁸The Temple servants and the descendants of the servants of Solomon numbered 392.

⁵⁹Some people came to Jerusalem from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon, and Immer, but they could not prove that their ancestors came from Israel. ⁶⁰They were the descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda—652.

⁶¹Also these priests: the descendants of Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai, who had married a daughter of Barzillai from Gilead and was called by her family name.

⁶²These people searched for their family records but could

not find them. So they could not be priests, because they were thought to be unclean. ⁶³The governor ordered them not to eat any of the food offered to God until a priest had settled this matter by using the Urim and Thummim.

⁶⁴The total number of those who returned was 42,360. ⁶⁵This is not counting their 7,337 male and female servants and the 200 male and female singers they had with them. ⁶⁶They had 736 horses, 245 mules, ⁶⁷435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

⁶⁸When they arrived at the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, some of the leaders of families gave offerings to rebuild the Temple of God on the same site as before. ⁶⁹They gave as much as they could to the treasury to rebuild the Temple—about 1,100 pounds of gold, about 6,000 pounds of silver, and 100 pieces of clothing for the priests.

⁷⁰All the Israelites settled in their hometowns. The priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and Temple servants, along with some of the other people, settled in their own towns as well.

Life Lessons

Ezra 3:1–4:24

Situation

Judah's jealous enemies to the north conspired to put an end to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. For several years, these enemies worked to hinder the Jews. Finally, they persuaded the Persian king, Artaxerxes, to stop the building.

Observation

When they had finished laying the foundation of the Temple of the Lord, great rejoicing took place. They praised the Lord and wept with joy. They recognized what God had done for them in the past and would do for them in the future.

Inspiration

Gratitude comes from having the right perspective. It's being able to look at what you have and being thankful for that, rather than longing for what you don't have.

Do you know why you should feel grateful? You are a part of God's plan, you are touched by God's tenderness, and you are a victor in God's victory. What greater blessing could there be?

It's incredible that anyone could look at the kindness of God, the faithfulness of God, and the goodness of God and not feel any emotion of gratitude.

Remember the Lord. Remember who is in control. Remember his goodness in the past. Remember God's

closeness in the present. Remember his power for the future. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, “Thankfulness”)

Application

Do you rejoice over what God has done in your life and what he will do for you in the future? Ask God to give you a daily heart of thanksgiving. List five things you are thankful for, and then give him praise.

Exploration

Thanksgiving—[Nehemiah 11:17](#); [Psalms 26:7](#); [100:4](#); [Ephesians 5:20](#); [Philippians 4:6–8](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:18](#).

Rebuilding the Altar

In the seventh month, after the Israelites were settled in their hometowns, they met together in Jerusalem. ²Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests joined Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and began to build the altar of the God of Israel where they could offer burnt offerings, just as it is written in the Teachings of Moses, the man of God. ³Even though they were afraid of the people living around them, they built the altar where it had been before. And they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord morning and evening. ⁴Then, to obey what was written, they celebrated the Feast of Shelters. They offered the right number of sacrifices for each day of the festival. ⁵After the Feast of Shelters, they had regular sacrifices every day, as well as sacrifices for the New Moon and all the festivals commanded by the Lord. Also there were special offerings brought as gifts to the Lord. ⁶On the first day of the seventh month they began to bring burnt offerings to the Lord, but the foundation of the Lord's Temple had not yet been laid.

Rebuilding the Temple

⁷Then they gave money to the bricklayers and carpenters. They also gave food, wine, and oil to the cities of Sidon and Tyre so they would float cedar logs from Lebanon to the

seacoast town of Joppa. Cyrus king of Persia had given permission for this.

⁸In the second month of the second year after their arrival at the Temple of God in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Jeshua son of Jozadak, their fellow priests and Levites, and all who had returned from captivity to Jerusalem began to work. They chose Levites twenty years old and older to be in charge of the building of the Temple of the Lord. ⁹These men were in charge of the work of building the Temple of God: Jeshua and his sons and brothers; Kadmiel and his sons who were the descendants of Hodaviah; and the sons of Henadad and their sons and brothers. They were all Levites.

¹⁰The builders finished laying the foundation of the Temple of the Lord. Then the priests, dressed in their robes, stood with their trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, stood with their cymbals. They all took their places and praised the Lord just as David king of Israel had said to do. ¹¹With praise and thanksgiving, they sang to the Lord:

“He is good;
his love for Israel continues forever.”

And then all the people shouted loudly, “Praise the Lord! The foundation of his Temple has been laid.” ¹²But many of the older priests, Levites, and family leaders who had seen the first Temple cried when they saw the foundation of this Temple. Most of the other people were shouting with joy. ¹³The people made so much noise it could be heard far away, and no one could tell the difference between the joyful shouting and the sad crying.

Enemies of the Rebuilding

When the enemies of the people of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned captives were building a Temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, ²they came to Zerubbabel and the leaders of the families. The enemies said, “Let us help you build, because we are like you and want to worship your God. We have been offering sacrifices to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.”

³But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the leaders of Israel answered, “You will not help us build a Temple to our God. We will build it ourselves for the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us to do.”

⁴Then the people around them tried to discourage the people of Judah by making them afraid to build. ⁵Their enemies hired others to delay the building plans during the time Cyrus was king of Persia. And it continued to the time Darius was king of Persia.

More Problems for the Builders

⁶When Xerxes first became king, those enemies wrote a letter against the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

⁷When Artaxerxes became king of Persia, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and those with them wrote a letter to Artaxerxes. It was written in the Aramaic language and translated.

⁸Rehum the governor and Shimshai the governor's

secretary wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king. It said:

⁹This letter is from Rehum the governor, Shimshai the secretary, and their fellow workers—the judges and important officers over the men who came from Tripolis, Persia, Erech, and Babylon, the Elamite people of Susa, ¹⁰and those whom the great and honorable Ashurbanipal forced out of their countries and settled in the city of Samaria and in other places of the Trans-Euphrates.

¹¹(This is a copy of the letter they sent to Artaxerxes.)
To King Artaxerxes.

From your servants who live in Trans-Euphrates.

¹²King Artaxerxes, you should know that the Jewish people who came to us from you have gone to Jerusalem to rebuild that evil city that refuses to obey. They are fixing the walls and repairing the foundations of the buildings.

¹³Now, King Artaxerxes, you should know that if Jerusalem is built and its walls are fixed, Jerusalem will not pay taxes of any kind. Then the amount of money your government collects will be less. ¹⁴Since we must be loyal to the government, we don't want to see the king dishonored. So we are writing to let the king know. ¹⁵We suggest you search the records of the kings who ruled before you. You will find out that the city of Jerusalem refuses to obey and makes trouble for kings and areas controlled by Persia. Since long ago it has been a place where disobedience has started. That is why it was destroyed. ¹⁶We want you to know, King Artaxerxes, that if this city is rebuilt and its walls fixed, you will be left with

nothing in Trans-Euphrates.

¹⁷King Artaxerxes sent this answer:

To Rehum the governor and Shimshai the secretary, to all their fellow workers living in Samaria, and to those in other places in Trans-Euphrates.

Greetings.

¹⁸The letter you sent to us has been translated and read to me. ¹⁹I ordered the records to be searched, and it was done. We found that Jerusalem has a history of disobedience to kings and has been a place of problems and trouble. ²⁰Jerusalem has had powerful kings who have ruled over the whole area of Trans-Euphrates, and taxes of all kinds have been paid to them. ²¹Now, give an order for those men to stop work. The city of Jerusalem will not be rebuilt until I say so. ²²Make sure you do this, because if they continue, it will hurt the government.

²³A copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes sent was read to Rehum and Shimshai the secretary and the others. Then they quickly went to the Jewish people in Jerusalem and forced them to stop building.

²⁴So the work on the Temple of God in Jerusalem stopped until the second year Darius was king of Persia.

Life Lessons

Ezra 5:1–6:22

Situation

The Gentiles in the area of Judah and Jerusalem tried to block the rebuilding of the Temple. But God used elders and prophets to secure permission to resume building.

Observation

God's influence supersedes the actions of secular authorities to accomplish his desires.

Inspiration

Nowadays, much of the time, life seems to have gone out of control. Several nations have the nuclear bomb, and several more will be developing it soon. History seems senseless. Men kill and order others to kill. Armies destroy and hurt. World leaders seem to do Satan's will, and Christians may wonder if God has lost control of his world.

He has not!

Although Satan is the prince of this world ([John 12:31](#)), he has been judged and condemned ([John 16:11](#)). God is sovereign over all men and nations, and all must make a final account with him. At the time of the final reckoning, every problem—personal and national—will be set right. But as of now, evil is a terrible thing, and until it is destroyed, life will sometimes appear out of control.

The trouble is that evil has burrowed into the human personality. It is in all of us. We don't always

act in the best interest of others. Feeling coerced by the political system, or by what others will think of us, or by the values of those around us, we surrender our Christian freedom and choose to do what we know is wrong. At the end of World War II, the world was horrified to discover that brilliant men with PhDs could build gas chambers. Their level of intelligence had nothing to do with their ability to choose to do right. One military leader after another at the Nuremberg trials said, “I was only taking orders.”

How can I say God is in control when all around me I see evil? Consider the ending of the book of Habakkuk. The prophet is living in a time of natural and military calamities. “Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted” ([1:3](#), [4](#)).

But Habakkuk had faith that, in the end, the Lord will save his people. He describes the future day of judgement when “you came out to deliver your people” ([3:13](#)), and he proclaims his faith that God is in control in spite of appearances... . No matter how things look, we can have faith that God will never abandon his world. He is always sovereign in this universe. (From “God Is in Control” by Calvin Miller in *Practical Christianity*)

Application

Governmental leaders, whether or not they are Christians, need our support. Do you honor those in government? Don’t be quick to cut them down. Pray

regularly for those in positions of authority.

Exploration

Opposition to God—[Isaiah 14:13–14](#); [Acts 13:10](#); [26:17–18](#); [Romans 16:20](#); [1 Thessalonians 2:18](#).

Tattenai's Letter to Darius

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jewish people in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them.² Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak started working again to rebuild the Temple of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were there, helping them.

³At that time Tattenai, the governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai, and their fellow workers went to the Jewish people and asked, "Who gave you permission to rebuild this Temple and fix these walls?" ⁴They also asked, "What are the names of the men working on this building?" ⁵But their God was watching over the older leaders of the Jewish people. The builders were not stopped until a report could go to King Darius and his written answer could be received.

⁶This is a copy of the letter that was sent to King Darius by Tattenai, the governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and the other important officers of Trans-Euphrates. ⁷This is what was said in the report they sent to him:

To King Darius.

Greetings. May you have peace.

⁸King Darius, you should know that we went to the district of Judah where the Temple of the great God is. The people are building that Temple with large stones, and

they are putting timbers in the walls. They are working very hard and are building very fast.

⁹We asked their older leaders, “Who gave you permission to rebuild this Temple and these walls?” ¹⁰We also asked for their names, and we wrote down the names of their leaders so you would know who they are.

¹¹This is the answer they gave to us: “We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth. We are rebuilding the Temple that a great king of Israel built and finished many years ago. ¹²But our ancestors made the God of heaven angry, so he handed them over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who destroyed this Temple and took the people to Babylon as captives.

¹³“Later, in the first year Cyrus was king of Babylon, he gave a special order for this Temple to be rebuilt. ¹⁴Cyrus brought out from the temple in Babylon the gold and silver bowls and pans that came from the Temple of God. Nebuchadnezzar had taken them from the Temple in Jerusalem and had put them in the temple in Babylon.

“Then King Cyrus gave them to Sheshbazzar, his appointed governor. ¹⁵Cyrus said to him, ‘Take these gold and silver bowls and pans, and put them back in the Temple in Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple of God where it was.’ ¹⁶So Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the Temple of God in Jerusalem. From that day until now the work has been going on, but it is not yet finished.”

¹⁷Now, if the king wishes, let a search be made in the royal records of Babylon. See if King Cyrus gave an order to rebuild this Temple in Jerusalem. Then let the king write us and tell us what he has decided.

The Order of Darius

So King Darius gave an order to search the records kept in the treasury in Babylon.²A scroll was found in Ecbatana, the capital city of Media. This is what was written on it:

Note:

³King Cyrus gave an order about the Temple of God in Jerusalem in the first year he was king. This was the order:

“Let the Temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices. Let its foundations be laid; it should be ninety feet high and ninety feet wide.⁴It must have three layers of large stones and then one layer of timbers. The costs should be paid from the king’s treasury.⁵The gold and silver utensils from the Temple of God should be put back in their places. Nebuchadnezzar took them from the Temple in Jerusalem and brought them to Babylon, but they are to be put back in the Temple of God in Jerusalem.”

⁶Now then, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and all the officers of that area, stay away from there.⁷Do not bother the work on that Temple of God. Let the governor of the Jewish people and the older Jewish leaders rebuild this Temple where it was before.

⁸Also, I order you to do this for those older leaders of the Jewish people who are building this Temple: The cost of the building is to be fully paid from the royal treasury, from taxes collected from Trans-Euphrates. Do this so the work will not stop.⁹Give those people anything they need

—young bulls, male sheep, or lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, or wheat, salt, wine, or olive oil. Give the priests in Jerusalem anything they ask for every day without fail. ¹⁰Then they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven, and they may pray for the life of the king and his sons.

¹¹Also, I give this order: If anyone changes this order, a wood beam is to be pulled from his house and driven through his body. Because of his crime, make his house a pile of ruins. ¹²God has chosen Jerusalem as the place he is to be worshiped. May he punish any king or person who tries to change this order and destroy this Temple.

I, Darius, have given this order. Let it be obeyed quickly and carefully.

Completion of the Temple

¹³So, Tattenai, the governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and their fellow workers carried out King Darius' order quickly and carefully. ¹⁴The older Jewish leaders continued to build and were successful because of the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the Temple as the God of Israel had commanded and as kings Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes of Persia had ordered. ¹⁵The Temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar in the sixth year Darius was king.

¹⁶Then the people of Israel celebrated and gave the Temple to God to honor him. Everybody was happy: the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the Jewish people who

had returned from captivity. ¹⁷They gave the Temple to God by offering a hundred bulls, two hundred male sheep, and four hundred lambs as sacrifices. And as an offering to forgive the sins of all Israel, they offered twelve male goats, one goat for each tribe in Israel. ¹⁸Then they put the priests and the Levites into their separate groups. Each group had a certain time to serve God in the Temple at Jerusalem as it is written in the Book of Moses.

The Passover Is Celebrated

¹⁹The Jewish people who returned from captivity celebrated the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. ²⁰The priests and Levites had made themselves clean. Then the Levites killed the Passover lambs for all the people who had returned from captivity, for their relatives the priests, and for themselves. ²¹So all the people of Israel who returned from captivity ate the Passover lamb. So did the people who had given up the unclean ways of their non-Jewish neighbors in order to worship the Lord, the God of Israel. ²²For seven days they celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread in a very joyful way. The Lord had made them happy by changing the mind of the king of Assyria so that he helped them in the work on the Temple of the God of Israel.

Life Lessons

Ezra 7:1–8:36

Situation

Sixty years elapsed between the events of [Ezra 6](#) and [7](#). Although Ezra had previously remained in Babylon compiling a historical record, he obtained permission to return to Jerusalem. He led the Jews to a spiritual renewal.

Observation

Ezra's careful study of Scripture throughout his life enabled him to be an effective minister to those in need.

Inspiration

There is a well-known local coach in Fullerton, California, whose thirty-five-plus years in athletics have been eminently successful... . His incredible career in Southern California speaks for itself. When he was interviewed by the *Los Angeles Times*, the sportswriter wanted to know his secret. What was it that made him so successful? Without hesitation Coach Sherbeck said that his credo could best be stated in words written by an anonymous author. Ever since he was a boy growing up in Big Sandy, Montana, he has lived by these words:

Press on.

Nothing in the world

Can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not;

Nothing is more common

Than unsuccessful men
With talent.
Genius will not;
Unrewarded genius
Is almost a proverb.
Education will not;
The world is full of
Educated derelicts.
Persistence and determination
Alone are omnipotent.

Coach Sherbeck had no quick and easy formula for success; he lives by his strong commitment to persistence and determination.

Don't misunderstand. I have in mind being determined to accomplish what is right... . When the objective is good and the motive is pure, there is nothing more valuable in the pathway leading to genuine success than persistence and determination. Following one's dream requires these disciplines... . The thing that makes for greatness is determination, persisting in the right direction over the long haul, following your dream, staying at the task. Just as there is no thing such as instant failure, neither is there automatic or instant success. But success is the direct result of a process that is long, arduous, and often unappreciated by others. It also includes a willingness to sacrifice... . In our world of instant everything, these thoughts are not very popular... . If we really want to soar like an eagle, we must keep on continually pursuing—we must keep on seeking. (From *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity* by

Charles Swindoll)

Application

Is there a specific goal you recently gave up? Reexamine your motive for doing so. Is it possible that you gave up too soon? Would God want you to persist? If so, recommit yourself to the task. Talk to a friend who can encourage you to reach your goal.

Exploration

Excellence in Obedience—[Leviticus 25:18–19](#); [Joshua 23:6](#); [Psalms 1:1–2](#); [18:21–23](#); [2 Corinthians 8:7](#); [James 1:25](#).

Ezra Comes to Jerusalem

After these things during the rule of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra came up from Babylon. Ezra was the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, ²the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, ³the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, ⁴the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, ⁵the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the high priest.

⁶This Ezra came to Jerusalem from Babylon. He was a teacher and knew well the Teachings of Moses that had been given by the Lord, the God of Israel. Ezra received everything he asked for from the king, because the Lord his God was helping him.

⁷In the seventh year of King Artaxerxes more Israelites came to Jerusalem. Among them were priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and Temple servants.

⁸Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of Artaxerxes' seventh year as king. ⁹Ezra had left Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, because God was helping him. ¹⁰Ezra had worked hard to know and obey the Teachings of the Lord and to teach his rules and commands to the Israelites.

Artaxerxes' Letter to Ezra

¹¹King Artaxerxes had given a letter to Ezra, a priest and teacher who taught about the commands and laws the Lord gave Israel. This is a copy of the letter:

¹²From Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven.

Greetings.

¹³Now I give this order: Any Israelite in my kingdom who wishes may go with you to Jerusalem, including priests and Levites. ¹⁴Ezra, you are sent by the king and the seven people who advise him to ask how Judah and Jerusalem are obeying the Law of your God, which you are carrying with you. ¹⁵Also take with you the silver and gold that the king and those who advise him have given freely to the God of Israel, whose Temple is in Jerusalem. ¹⁶Also take the silver and gold you receive from the area of Babylon. Take the offerings the Israelites and their priests have given as gifts for the Temple of your God in Jerusalem. ¹⁷With this money buy bulls, male sheep, and lambs, and the grain offerings and drink offerings that go with those sacrifices. Then sacrifice them on the altar in the Temple of your God in Jerusalem.

¹⁸You and your fellow Jews may spend the silver and gold left over as you want and as God wishes. ¹⁹Take to the God of Jerusalem all the utensils for worship in the Temple of your God, ²⁰which we have given you. Use the royal treasury to pay for anything else you need for the Temple of your God.

²¹Now I, King Artaxerxes, give this order to all the men in charge of the treasury of Trans-Euphrates: Give Ezra, a priest and a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven,

whatever he asks for.²² Give him up to seventy-five hundred pounds of silver, six hundred bushels of wheat, six hundred gallons of wine, and six hundred gallons of olive oil. And give him as much salt as he wants.²³ Carefully give him whatever the God of heaven wants for the Temple of the God of heaven. We do not want God to be angry with the king and his sons.²⁴ Remember, you must not make these people pay taxes of any kind: priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Temple servants, and other workers in this Temple of God.

²⁵ And you, Ezra, use the wisdom you have from your God to choose judges and lawmakers to rule the Jewish people of Trans-Euphrates. They know the laws of your God, and you may teach anyone who does not know them.²⁶ Whoever does not obey the law of your God or of the king must be punished. He will be killed, or sent away, or have his property taken away, or be put in jail.

²⁷ Praise the Lord, the God of our ancestors. He caused the king to want to honor the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem.²⁸ The Lord has shown me, Ezra, his love in the presence of the king, those who advise the king, and the royal officers. Because the Lord my God was helping me, I had courage, and I gathered the leaders of Israel to return with me.

Leaders Who Returned with Ezra

These are the leaders of the family groups and those who were listed with them who came back with me from Babylon during the rule of King Artaxerxes.

²From the descendants of Phinehas: Gershom.

From the descendants of Ithamar: Daniel.

From the descendants of David: Hattush³ of the descendants of Shecaniah.

From the descendants of Parosh: Zechariah, with one hundred fifty men.

⁴From the descendants of Pahath-Moab: Eliehoenai son of Zerahiah, with two hundred men.

⁵From the descendants of Zattu: Shecaniah son of Jahaziel, with three hundred men.

⁶From the descendants of Adin: Ebed son of Jonathan, with fifty men.

⁷From the descendants of Elam: Jeshaiah son of Athaliah, with seventy men.

⁸From the descendants of Shephatiah: Zebadiah son of Michael, with eighty men.

⁹From the descendants of Joab: Obadiah son of Jehiel, with two hundred eighteen men.

¹⁰From the descendants of Bani: Shelomith son of Josiphiah, with one hundred sixty men.

¹¹From the descendants of Bebai: Zechariah son of Bebai, with twenty-eight men.

¹²From the descendants of Azgad: Johanan son of

Hakkatan, with one hundred ten men.

¹³From the descendants of Adonikam, these were the last ones: Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, with sixty men.

¹⁴From the descendants of Bigvai: Uthai and Zaccur, with seventy men.

The Return to Jerusalem

¹⁵I called all those people together at the canal that flows toward Ahava, where we camped for three days. I checked all the people and the priests, but I did not find any Levites. ¹⁶So I called these leaders: Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And I called Joiarib and Elnathan, who were teachers. ¹⁷I sent these men to Iddo, the leader at Casiphia, and told them what to say to Iddo and his relatives, who are the Temple servants in Casiphia. I sent them to bring servants to us for the Temple of our God.

¹⁸Our God was helping us, so Iddo's relatives gave us Sherebiah, a wise man from the descendants of Mahli son of Levi, who was the son of Israel. And they brought Sherebiah's sons and brothers, for a total of eighteen men. ¹⁹And they brought to us Hashabiah and Jeshaiiah from the descendants of Merari, and his brothers and nephews. In all there were twenty men. ²⁰They also brought two hundred twenty of the Temple servants, a group David and the officers had set up to help the Levites. All of those men were listed by name.

²¹There by the Ahava Canal, I announced we would all give up eating and humble ourselves before our God. We would ask God for a safe trip for ourselves, our children, and all our possessions. ²²I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and

horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road. We had said to the king, "Our God helps everyone who obeys him, but he is very angry with all who reject him." ²³So we gave up eating and prayed to our God about our trip, and he answered our prayers.

²⁴Then I chose twelve of the priests who were leaders, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their relatives. ²⁵I weighed the offering of silver and gold and the utensils given for the Temple of our God, and I gave them to the twelve priests I had chosen. The king, the people who advised him, his officers, and all the Israelites there with us had given these things for the Temple. ²⁶I weighed out and gave them about fifty thousand pounds of silver, about seventy-five hundred pounds of silver objects, and about seventy-five hundred pounds of gold. ²⁷I gave them twenty gold bowls that weighed about nineteen pounds and two fine pieces of polished bronze that were as valuable as gold.

²⁸Then I said to the priests, "You and these utensils belong to the Lord for his service. The silver and gold are gifts to the Lord, the God of your ancestors. ²⁹Guard these things carefully. In Jerusalem, weigh them in front of the leading priests, Levites, and the leaders of the family groups of Israel in the rooms of the Temple of the Lord." ³⁰So the priests and Levites accepted the silver, the gold, and the utensils that had been weighed to take them to the Temple of our God in Jerusalem.

³¹On the twelfth day of the first month we left the Ahava Canal and started toward Jerusalem. Our God helped us and protected us from enemies and robbers along the way. ³²Finally we arrived in Jerusalem where we rested three days.

³³On the fourth day we weighed out the silver, the gold, and the utensils in the Temple of our God. We handed them to the

priest Meremoth son of Uriah. Eleazar son of Phinehas was with him, as were the Levites Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui. ³⁴We checked everything by number and by weight, and the total weight was written down.

³⁵Then the captives who returned made burnt offerings to the God of Israel. They sacrificed twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six male sheep, and seventy-seven lambs. For a sin offering there were twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to the Lord. ³⁶They took King Artaxerxes' orders to the royal officers and to the governors of Trans-Euphrates. Then these men gave help to the people and the Temple of God.

Life Lessons

[Ezra 9:1–10:44](#)

Situation

Israelite men intermarried with women from the surrounding pagan countries. This practice violated God's law ([Exodus 34:11–16](#)) and allowed idolatry to pollute the Israelites.

Observation

Ezra modeled how believers should hate sin and disobedience.

Inspiration

It is the holiness of God that compels our hearts to cry out for the grace of God.

Holiness produces humility of heart. Grace is then applied to the heart of humility. The depth of our confession is only as great as the clarity of our view of the holiness of God. Too much confession is rooted in comparison to other people. We can always justify our attitudes and actions by thinking we are not as bad as some other Christians. Such comparisons only produce pride in our hearts. However, when we focus on the holy God, we must cry out with Isaiah, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” ([Isaiah 6:5](#)).

Isaiah had a vision of the glory of God. That vision produced a deep brokenness, confession, and repentance in his life. There were several

characteristics of Isaiah's prayer that are important for us to recognize. They are the ingredients that result from a clear view of the holiness and grace of God.

Isaiah was transparent in his prayer. He did not try to impress God or anyone else with his piety. He was honest. He knew that God was able to search the heart of man. Because he knew that only truth would be pleasing to God, he was willing to admit his wrong.

This is one of the most difficult aspects of prayer. We live in a world that teaches us how to wear masks in order to impress others. We attempt to carry our masks into prayer. God's glory is only manifest, however, to the heart that has taken off its mask. We must come to the chamber of prayer with humility, honesty, and transparency....

Isaiah was also specific in his confession. There was a particular area of his life that needed the cleansing of God—the sin of an impure tongue. When he saw a holy, righteous, and glorious God, he could not help but ask God to purge and cleanse his lips. The high praises of God could never come from impure lips. Isaiah had an immensely high view of God. Such a view will spotlight the impurities of our lives.

Many Christians pray, "Forgive me of my sins." But such praying produces little repentance. Repentance is the forerunner of forgiveness, and God desires to forgive and cleanse His children. He loves us and wants to remove the burden of guilt. But we must be specific in our confession and repentance of

sin.

(From *The Prayer Factor* by Sammy Tippet)

Application

Ask God to help you identify overlooked sin in your life. Pray and confess any sin you may need to repent of.

Exploration

Confession to God—[Leviticus 26:40–42](#); [Numbers 5:5–7](#); [Psalm 51:2–7](#); [130:3–4](#); [Lamentations 3:40–42](#); [Daniel 9:20–21](#); [Acts 19:18](#); [1 John 1:9](#).

Ezra's Prayer

After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, “Ezra, the Israelites, including the priests and Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the people around us. Those neighbors do evil things, as the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites did.² The Israelite men and their sons have married these women. They have mixed the people who belong to God with the people around them. The leaders and officers of Israel have led the rest of the Israelites to do this unfaithful thing.”

³When I heard this, I angrily tore my robe and coat, pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat down in shock. ⁴Everyone who trembled in fear at the word of the God of Israel gathered around me because of the unfaithfulness of the captives who had returned. I sat there in shock until the evening sacrifice.

⁵At the evening sacrifice I got up from where I had shown my shame. My robe and coat were torn, and I fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the Lord my God. ⁶I prayed,

“My God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are so many. They are higher than our heads. Our guilt even reaches up to the sky.

⁷From the days of our ancestors until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we, our kings, and our priests have been punished by the sword and captivity. Foreign kings have

taken away our things and shamed us, even as it is today.

⁸“But now, for a short time, the Lord our God has been kind to us. He has let some of us come back from captivity and has let us live in safety in his holy place. And so our God gives us hope and a little relief from our slavery. ⁹Even though we are slaves, our God has not left us. He caused the kings of Persia to be kind to us and has given us new life. We can rebuild the Temple and repair its ruins. And he has given us a wall to protect us in Judah and Jerusalem.

¹⁰“But now, our God, what can we say after you have done all this? We have disobeyed your commands ¹¹that you gave through your servants the prophets. You said, ‘The land you are entering to own is ruined; the people living there have spoiled it by the evil they do. Their evil filled the land with uncleanness from one end to the other. ¹²So do not let your daughters marry their sons, and do not let their daughters marry your sons. Do not wish for their peace or success. Then you will be strong and eat the good things of the land. Then you can leave this land to your descendants forever.’

¹³“What has happened to us is our own fault. We have done evil things, and our guilt is great. But you, our God, have punished us less than we deserve; you have left a few of us alive. ¹⁴We should not again break your commands by allowing marriages with these wicked people. If we did, you would get angry enough to destroy us, and none of us would be left alive. ¹⁵Lord, God of Israel, by your goodness a few of us are left alive today. We admit that we are guilty and none of us should be allowed to stand before you.”

The People Confess Sin

As Ezra was praying and confessing and crying and throwing himself down in front of the Temple, a large group of Israelite men, women, and children gathered around him who were also crying loudly. ²Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel the Elamite said to Ezra, “We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying women from the peoples around us. But even so, there is still hope for Israel. ³Now let us make an agreement before our God. We will send away all these women and their children as you and those who respect the commands of our God advise. Let it be done to obey God’s Teachings. ⁴Get up, Ezra. You are in charge, and we will support you. Have courage and do it.”

⁵So Ezra got up and made the priests, Levites, and all the people of Israel promise to do what was suggested; and they promised. ⁶Then Ezra left the Temple and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While Ezra was there, he did not eat or drink, because he was still sad about the unfaithfulness of the captives who had returned.

⁷They sent an order in Judah and Jerusalem for all the captives who had returned to meet together in Jerusalem. ⁸Whoever did not come to Jerusalem within three days would lose his property and would no longer be a member of the community of the returned captives. That was the decision of the officers and older leaders.

⁹So within three days all the people of Judah and Benjamin gathered in Jerusalem. It was the twentieth day of the ninth month. All the people were sitting in the open place in front of the Temple and were upset because of the meeting and

because it was raining. ¹⁰Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have been unfaithful and have married non-Jewish women. You have made Israel more guilty. ¹¹Now, confess it to the Lord, the God of your ancestors. Do his will and separate yourselves from the people living around you and from your non-Jewish wives.”

¹²Then the whole group answered Ezra with a loud voice, “Ezra, you’re right! We must do what you say. ¹³But there are many people here, and it’s the rainy season. We can’t stand outside, and this problem can’t be solved in a day or two, because we have sinned badly. ¹⁴Let our officers make a decision for the whole group. Then let everyone in our towns who has married a non-Jewish woman meet with the older leaders and judges of each town at a planned time, until the hot anger of our God turns away from us.” ¹⁵Only Jonathan son of Asahel, Jahzeiah son of Tikvah, Meshullam, and Shabbethai the Levite were against the plan.

¹⁶So the returned captives did what was suggested. Ezra the priest chose men who were leaders of the family groups and named one from each family division. On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to study each case. ¹⁷By the first day of the first month, they had finished with all the men who had married non-Jewish women.

Those Guilty of Marrying Non-Jewish Women

¹⁸These are the descendants of the priests who had married foreign women:

From the descendants of Jeshua son of Jozadak and Jeshua’s brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah.

¹⁹(They all promised to divorce their wives, and each one brought a male sheep from the flock as a penalty offering.)

²⁰From the descendants of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah.

²¹From the descendants of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah.

²²From the descendants of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasa.

²³Among the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (also called Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

²⁴Among the singers: Eliashib.

Among the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

²⁵And among the other Israelites, these married non-Jewish women:

From the descendants of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malkijah, and Benaiah.

²⁶From the descendants of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah.

²⁷From the descendants of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza.

²⁸From the descendants of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai.

²⁹From the descendants of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth.

³⁰From the descendants of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh.

³¹From the descendants of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, ³²Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah.

³³From the descendants of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei.

³⁴From the descendants of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel,

³⁵Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi, ³⁶Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, ³⁷Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu.

³⁸From the descendants of Binnui: Shimei, ³⁹Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, ⁴⁰Macnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, ⁴¹Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, ⁴²Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph.

⁴³From the descendants of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.

⁴⁴All these men had married non-Jewish women, and some of them had children by these wives.

After these things There is a time period of about sixty years between chapters six and seven.

The Book of Nehemiah

Introduction

You are about to meet the Abraham Lincoln of the Old Testament. A respected leader with a tender heart. You will see his tears in the oval office as he weeps for people oppressed and vulnerable.

You are about to meet the General George Patton of the Old Testament. A rugged leader. Intolerant of compromise. Relentless in demanding perfection. He punished those who were soft by pushing them down and cursing their names.

You are about to meet the Winston Churchill of the Old Testament. A statesman. Tested and tried. Resisting the enemies who seek to lure him away from the task. Rising above the squabbling factions who could distract him.

The tenderness of Lincoln. The fire of Patton. The savvy of Churchill. All found in the same man.

Nehemiah.

When we meet him he is wearing the robe of royalty. He is the king's cupbearer. But though he was in a position of power, his heart beat for people in Israel. He was a Hebrew in Persia. When word reached him that the Temple was being reconstructed, he grew anxious. He knew there was no wall to protect it.

Nehemiah invited God to use him to save the city. God answered his prayer by softening the heart of the Persian king. Artaxerxes gave not only his blessing, but also supplies to be used in the project.

Nehemiah exchanged the royal robe for coveralls and got to work. The project took twelve years and was uphill all the way. He was accused of everything from allowing faulty

construction to being power-hungry. In spite of grumpy workers and lurking enemies, he made it. With the wall built and the enemy silent, the people rejoiced and Nehemiah went back to Persia.

After twelve years he returned. The walls were strong, but the people had gone to pot. Faith was forgotten and discipline was a bad word. So Nehemiah got busy again.

He went to his closet, hung up his royal robe, bypassed his coveralls, and dusted off his frock and set about the task of teaching the people a few things about morality. He didn't mince words. "I argued with those people, put curses on them, hit some of them, and pulled out their hair" ([13:25](#)). Not what you'd call a typical Bible class.

But Nehemiah wasn't what you'd call a typical fellow.

About This Book

Author:

Probably Nehemiah, with perhaps some editing from Ezra

Date Written:

450–400 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- Nehemiah was grieved that his homeland wasn't being resettled quickly.
- Nehemiah faced opposition in building the wall, but he overcame it through organization and the loyalty of his countrymen.

- Nehemiah dedicated the wall to the Lord before he returned to Babylon.

Key Verse:

“They read from the Book of the Teachings of God and explained what it meant so the people understood what was being read” ([Nehemiah 8:8](#)).

Contents:

1. The Wall Is Rebuilt [1:1–7:73](#)
2. Spiritual Renewal [8:1–10:39](#)
3. The People, Priests, and Levites [11:1–12:26](#)
4. Nehemiah Dedicates the Wall and Institutes Change [12:27–13:31](#)

Life Lessons

Nehemiah 1:1–2:10

Situation

Nehemiah, a Jew displaced by the Babylonian captivity, served in the king's court. When he heard of the decrepit condition of the gates and walls of Jerusalem, he wept and asked the king to send him to rebuild the walls.

Observation

When Nehemiah heard bad news, he prayed. He asked the Lord for success and kindness.

Inspiration

When God says to pray, he really means it. To pray is the most commonly mentioned command in Scripture. It is mentioned more than “love your neighbor,” more than “go to church,” and more than “evangelize.” More than anything else, God calls us to pray.

We should be people of great prayer. We should be prayer warriors. We should be people who use the ministry of prayer to its fullest capacity. The highest and greatest calling of Christians is the ministry of prayer.

I would like to encourage you, admonish you to make a decision to pray more and to set up some specific plans to support that decision. Will you determine in your heart to pray more? Will you start a prayer group in your home? Pray continually—live in a spirit of prayer. (From *The Inspirational Bible*,

“Prayer”)

Application

Many Christians feel that prayer is the weakest part of their Christian walk, yet it's vital for your relationship with the Lord. Set up a regular time each day to commune with the Lord. For many people, that's early in the morning before they become so busy. If you get tired easily, pray out loud. And establish regular prayer times with friends and family.

Exploration

Prayer—[Psalm 55:1](#); [Matthew 21:22](#); [Romans 12:12](#); [Ephesians 6:18](#); [Colossians 4:2](#).

Traveling light means trusting God with the burdens you were never intended to bear. —Max Lucado (*Traveling Light*)

Nehemiah's Prayer

These are the words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah.

In the month of Kislev in the [twentieth year](#), I, Nehemiah, was in the capital city of Susa.²One of my brothers named Hanani came with some other men from Judah. I asked them about Jerusalem and the Jewish people who lived through the captivity.

³They answered me, “Those who are left from the captivity are back in Judah, but they are in much trouble and are full of shame. The wall around Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned.”

⁴When I heard these things, I sat down and cried for several days. I was sad and ate nothing. I prayed to the God of heaven,⁵“Lord, God of heaven, you are the great God who is to be respected. You are loyal, and you keep your agreement with those who love you and obey your commands.⁶Look and listen carefully. Hear the prayer that I, your servant, am praying to you day and night for your servants, the Israelites. I confess the sins we Israelites have done against you. My father's family and I have sinned against you.⁷We have been wicked toward you and have not obeyed the commands, rules, and laws you gave your servant Moses.

⁸“Remember what you taught your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations. ⁹But if you return to me and obey my commands, I will gather your people from the far ends of the earth. And I will bring them from captivity to where I have chosen to be worshiped.’

¹⁰“They are your servants and your people, whom you have saved with your great strength and power. ¹¹Lord, listen carefully to the prayer of your servant and the prayers of your servants who love to honor you. Give me, your servant, success today; allow this king to show kindness to me.”

I was the one who served wine to the king.

Nehemiah Is Sent to Jerusalem

It was the month of Nisan in the twentieth year Artaxerxes was king. He wanted some wine, so I took some and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before.² So the king said, "Why does your face look sad even though you are not sick? Your heart must be sad."

Then I was very afraid.³ I said to the king, "May the king live forever! My face is sad because the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire."

⁴Then the king said to me, "What do you want?"

First I prayed to the God of heaven.⁵ Then I answered the king, "If you are willing and if I have pleased you, send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so I can rebuild it."

⁶The queen was sitting next to the king. He asked me, "How long will your trip take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me, so I set a time.

⁷I also said to him, "If you are willing, give me letters for the governors of Trans-Euphrates. Tell them to let me pass safely through their lands on my way to Judah."⁸ And may I have a letter for Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, telling him to give me timber? I will need it to make boards for the gates of the palace, which is by the Temple, and for the city wall, and for the house in which I will live." So the king gave me the letters, because God was showing kindness to me.⁹ Then I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and soldiers

on horses with me.

¹⁰When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite officer heard about this, they were upset that someone had come to help the Israelites.

Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem

¹¹I went to Jerusalem and stayed there three days. ¹²Then at night I started out with a few men. I had not told anyone what God had caused me to do for Jerusalem. There were no animals with me except the one I was riding.

¹³I went out at night through the Valley Gate. I rode toward the Dragon Well and the Trash Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and the gates that had been destroyed by fire. ¹⁴Then I rode on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for the animal I was riding to pass through. ¹⁵So I went up the valley at night, inspecting the wall. Finally, I turned and went back in through the Valley Gate. ¹⁶The guards did not know where I had gone or what I was doing. I had not yet said anything to the Jewish people, the priests, the important men, the officers, or any of the others who would do the work.

¹⁷Then I said to them, "You can see the trouble we have here. Jerusalem is a pile of ruins, and its gates have been burned. Come, let's rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so we won't be full of shame any longer." ¹⁸I also told them how God had been kind to me and what the king had said to me.

Then they answered, "Let's start rebuilding." So they began to work hard.

¹⁹But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite

officer, and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they made fun of us and laughed at us. They said, “What are you doing? Are you turning against the king?”

²⁰But I answered them, “The God of heaven will give us success. We, his servants, will start rebuilding, but you have no share, claim, or memorial in Jerusalem.”

Builders of the Wall

Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They gave it to the Lord's service and set its doors in place. They worked as far as the Tower of the Hundred and gave it to the Lord's service. Then they went on to the Tower of Hananel. ²Next to them, the men of Jericho built part of the wall, and Zaccur son of Imri built next to them.

³The sons of Hassenaah rebuilt the Fish Gate, laying its boards and setting its doors, bolts, and bars in place. ⁴Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, made repairs next to them. Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs next to Meremoth. And Zadok son of Baana made repairs next to Meshullam. ⁵The men from Tekoa made repairs next to them, but the leading men of Tekoa would not work under their supervisors.

⁶Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate. They laid its boards and set its doors, bolts, and bars in place. ⁷Next to them, Melatiah from Gibeon, other men from Gibeon and Mizpah, and Jadon from Meronoth made repairs. These places were ruled by the governor of Trans-Euphrates. ⁸Next to them, Uzziel son of Harhaiah, a goldsmith, made repairs. And next to him, Hananiah, a perfume maker, made repairs. These men rebuilt Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. ⁹The next part of the wall was repaired by Rephaiah son of Hur, the ruler of half of the district of Jerusalem. ¹⁰Next to him, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his own house. And next to him, Hattush son of

Hashabneiah made repairs.¹¹ Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-Moab repaired another part of the wall and the Tower of the Ovens.¹² Next to them Shallum son of Hallohesh, the ruler of half of the district of Jerusalem, and his daughters made repairs.

¹³Hanun and the people of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate, rebuilding it and setting its doors, bolts, and bars in place. They also repaired the five hundred yards of the wall to the Trash Gate.

¹⁴Malkijah son of Recab, the ruler of the district of Beth Hakkerem, repaired the Trash Gate. He rebuilt that gate and set its doors, bolts, and bars in place.

¹⁵Shallun son of Col-Hozeh, the ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it, put a roof over it, and set its doors, bolts, and bars in place. He also repaired the wall of the Pool of Siloam next to the King's Garden all the way to the steps that went down from the older part of the city.¹⁶ Next to Shallun was [Nehemiah](#) son of Azbuk, the ruler of half of the district of Beth Zur. He made repairs opposite the tombs of David and as far as the man-made pool and the House of the Heroes.

¹⁷Next to him, the Levites made repairs, working under Rehum son of Bani. Next to him, Hashabiah, the ruler of half of the district of Keilah, for his district.¹⁸ Next to him, Binnui son of Henadad and his Levites made repairs. Binnui was the ruler of the other half of the district of Keilah.¹⁹ Next to them, Ezer son of Jeshua, the ruler of Mizpah, repaired another part of the wall. He worked across from the way up to the armory, as far as the bend.²⁰ Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai worked hard on the wall that went from the bend to the entrance to the house

of Eliashib, the high priest.²¹Next to him, Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired the wall that went from the entrance to Eliashib's house to the far end of it.

²²Next to him worked the priests from the surrounding area.

²³Next to them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their own house. Next to them, Azariah son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his own house.²⁴Next to him, Binnui son of Henadad repaired the wall that went from Azariah's house to the bend and on to the corner.²⁵Palal son of Uzai worked across from the bend and by the tower on the upper palace, which is near the courtyard of the king's guard. Next to Palal, Pedaiah son of Parosh made repairs.²⁶The Temple servants who lived on the hill of Ophel made repairs as far as a point opposite the Water Gate. They worked toward the east and the tower that extends from the palace.²⁷Next to them, the people of Tekoa repaired the wall from the great tower that extends from the palace to the wall of Ophel.

²⁸The priests made repairs above the Horse Gate, each working in front of his own house.²⁹Next to them, Zadok son of Immer made repairs across from his own house. Next to him, Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the guard of the East Gate, made repairs.³⁰Next to him, Hananiah son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, made repairs on another part of the wall. Next to them, Meshullam son of Berekiah made repairs across from where he lived.³¹Next to him, Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs. He worked as far as the house of the Temple servants and the traders, which is across from the Inspection Gate, and as far as the room above the corner of the wall.³²The goldsmiths and the traders made repairs between the room above the corner of the wall and the Sheep Gate.

Life Lessons

Nehemiah 2:11–3:32

Situation

The king gave Nehemiah permission to travel to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of the city. In spite of opposition from the surrounding nations, Nehemiah led the people to complete the reconstruction.

Observation

We can trust in God to help us accomplish his will.

Inspiration

What does a child say when he is face to face with the neighborhood bully? “My brother is bigger than your brother.” “My dad is stronger than your dad.” Then adults get into the act...

What does a three-year-old do when he gets a knot in his shoelaces? He runs to Daddy. What does a five-year-old girl do when she falls and skins her knee? She cries to Mommy for comfort.

When faced with a problem, danger, difficulty or sadness, we naturally go to someone who is bigger, stronger, and more powerful. Just as a child wants to crawl up on Daddy’s lap or have Mommy’s arms wrapped around him, so we go to our heavenly Father. His is the fortress that protects us from attack, the refuge that grants us asylum from persecution, the safe harbor that shelters us from the storms of life.

(From *A Dad’s Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent)

Application

Do you feel like you are being attacked? Are you up against a difficult situation or an imposing problem? Run to God and know that he is with you and will protect you. Thank him for protecting you in every circumstance—especially the one you are facing right now.

Exploration

God's Protection—[Psalm 4:8](#); [Proverbs 18:10](#); [Isaiah 41:10](#); [John 17:11–12](#); [2 Thessalonians 3:3](#); [Hebrews 13:5–6](#).

You have a God who hears you, the power of love behind you, the Holy Spirit within you, and all of heaven ahead of you. —Max Lucado (*Traveling Light*)

Those Against the Rebuilding

When Sanballat heard we were rebuilding the wall, he was very angry, even furious. He made fun of the Jewish people. ²He said to his friends and those with power in Samaria, “What are these weak Jews doing? Will they rebuild the wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Can they finish it in one day? Can they bring stones back to life from piles of trash and ashes?”

³Tobiah the Ammonite, who was next to Sanballat, said, “If a fox climbed up on the stone wall they are building, it would break it down.”

⁴I prayed, “Hear us, our God. We are hated. Turn the insults of Sanballat and Tobiah back on their own heads. Let them be captured and stolen like valuables. ⁵Do not hide their guilt or take away their sins so that you can’t see them, because they have insulted the builders.”

⁶So we rebuilt the wall to half its height, because the people were willing to work.

⁷But Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the people from Ashdod were very angry when they heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls were continuing and that the holes in the wall were being closed. ⁸So they all made plans to come to Jerusalem and fight and stir up trouble. ⁹But we prayed to our God and appointed guards to watch for them day and night.

¹⁰The people of Judah said, “The workers are getting tired. There is so much trash we cannot rebuild the wall.”

¹¹And our enemies said, “The Jews won’t know or see

anything until we come among them and kill them and stop the work.”

¹²Then the Jewish people who lived near our enemies came and told us ten times, “Everywhere you turn, the enemy will attack us.” ¹³So I put people behind the lowest places along the wall—the open places—and I put families together with their swords, spears, and bows. ¹⁴Then I looked around and stood up and said to the important men, the leaders, and the rest of the people: “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and powerful. Fight for your brothers, your sons and daughters, your wives, and your homes.”

¹⁵Then our enemies heard that we knew about their plans and that God had ruined their plans. So we all went back to the wall, each to his own work.

¹⁶From that day on, half my people worked on the wall. The other half was ready with spears, shields, bows, and armor. The officers stood in back of the people of Judah ¹⁷who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and carried a weapon with the other. ¹⁸Each builder wore his sword at his side as he worked. The man who blew the trumpet to warn the people stayed next to me.

¹⁹Then I said to the important men, the leaders, and the rest of the people, “This is a very big job. We are spreading out along the wall so that we are far apart. ²⁰Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, assemble there. Our God will fight for us.”

²¹So we continued to work with half the men holding spears from sunrise till the stars came out. ²²At that time I also said to the people, “Let every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night. They can be our guards at night and workmen during

the day.” ²³Neither I, my brothers, my workers, nor the guards with me ever took off our clothes. Each person carried his weapon even when he went for water.

Life Lessons

Nehemiah 4:1–23

Situation

Sanballat and Tobiah were leaders in surrounding cities who wanted to spread their influence into Jerusalem. When the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s wall continued, they responded with opposition.

Observation

Taunted, ridiculed, threatened. Instead of giving in, Nehemiah and the Israelites chose to find new strength and determination through their faith in God.

Inspiration

After I spoke at a women’s retreat recently, a darling gal rushed up to me saying, “Oh, Barb, you are just SO LUCKY! You have come through all your trials with so much joy and victory! ...

I laughed and told the lady that I didn’t believe there was any such thing as luck for Christians....

Look at it this way: One family out of 500,000 lost a son in Vietnam ... we are one of those families. One family out of every 800 has a child killed by a drunk driver ... we experienced that, too. Statistics say that one family out of every ten will have a homosexual child ... we know all about that. And recently I became part of another set of statistics, namely that out of every forty women over middle-

age, one will develop adult-onset diabetes.

This is something that is brand new in my life. Although it is considered milder than juvenile-onset, it carries with it all the life-threatening complications... I said a lot more, but the main thrust was that I chose to look at what seemed *good* to me rather than to anticipate all the gruesome complications that can happen at some point... We are all going to have pain, but *misery is optional*. We can decide how we will react to the pain that inevitably comes to us all.

(From *Stick a Geranium in Your Hat and Be Happy* by Barbara Johnson)

Application

The Israelites teach us to regard God as our only source of confidence! Today, when your life encounters friction, pray first and believe that God will smooth the road.

Exploration

Confidence—[Joshua 1:9](#); [Jeremiah 29:11](#); [James 1:2–4](#).

Don't measure the size of the mountain; talk to the One who can move it. Instead of carrying the world on your shoulders, talk to the One who holds the universe on his.
—Max Lucado (*Traveling Light*)

Life Lessons

Nehemiah 5:1-19

Situation

When some of the people began exploiting the poor, Nehemiah cried foul. He considered the poor to be valuable members of society, and he protected them.

Observation

God concerns himself with poor and helpless people. People who have no power in society are not less important or less valuable but have great worth in God's eyes.

Inspiration

When Jesus chose his disciples, the persons who were to carry on his mission, all except Matthew were fishermen and other common folk. Those who think that only the rich and powerful change history continue to take offense at Jesus' preoccupation with the poor and weak.

Again we must oppose the view that God never uses rich, powerful people as his chosen instruments. He has and does. But we always choose such people. God, on the other hand, frequently selects the poor to carry out his most important tasks. He sees potential that we do not. And when the task is done, the poor and weak are less likely to boast that they deserve the credit. God's selection of the lowly to be his special messengers of salvation to the world is striking evidence of his special concern for them. And his

incarnation as a poor Galilean suggests that the frequent use of the poor as his special instruments is not insignificant historical trivia. It points to something significant about the very nature of God. (From *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* by Ronald Sider)

Application

What can you do in the next month to help the poor? Consider giving your time or money to help a friend, a relative, or even a stranger who needs something you can spare. Volunteer in a homeless shelter, give money to your church's benevolent fund, or help a friend or relative with a purchase they are struggling to make.

Exploration

God and the Poor—[Job 34:28](#); [Psalms 9:18](#); [14:4–7](#); [40:17](#); [Zechariah 7:10](#).

If we are to be just like Jesus—if we are to have ears that hear God’s voice—then we have just found two habits worth imitating: the habits of prayer and Bible reading. — Max Lucado (*Just Like Jesus*)

Nehemiah Helps Poor People

The men and their wives complained loudly against their fellow Jews. ²Some of them were saying, “We have many sons and daughters in our families. To eat and stay alive, we need grain.”

³Others were saying, “We are borrowing money against our fields, vineyards, and homes to get grain because there is not much food.”

⁴And still others were saying, “We are borrowing money to pay the king’s tax on our fields and vineyards. ⁵We are just like our fellow Jews, and our sons are like their sons. But we have to sell our sons and daughters as slaves. Some of our daughters have already been sold. But there is nothing we can do, because our fields and vineyards already belong to other people.”

⁶When I heard their complaints about these things, I was very angry. ⁷After I thought about it, I accused the important people and the leaders, “You are charging your own brothers too much interest.” So I called a large meeting to deal with them. ⁸I said to them, “As much as possible, we have bought freedom for our fellow Jews who had been sold to foreigners. Now you are selling your fellow Jews to us!” The leaders were

quiet and had nothing to say.

⁹Then I said, “What you are doing is not right. Don’t you fear God? Don’t let our foreign enemies shame us. ¹⁰I, my brothers, and my men are also lending money and grain to the people. But stop charging them so much for this. ¹¹Give back their fields, vineyards, olive trees, and houses right now. Also give back the extra amount you charged—the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine, and oil.”

¹²They said, “We will give it back and not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.”

Then I called for the priests, and I made the important men and leaders take an oath to do what they had said. ¹³Also I shook out the folds of my robe and said, “In this way may God shake out everyone who does not keep his promise. May God shake him out of his house and out of the things that are his. Let that person be shaken out and emptied!”

Then the whole group said, “Amen,” and they praised the Lord. So the people did what they had promised.

¹⁴I was appointed governor in the land of Judah in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes’ rule. I was governor of Judah for twelve years, until his thirty-second year. During that time neither my brothers nor I ate the food that was allowed for a governor. ¹⁵But the governors before me had placed a heavy load on the people. They took about one pound of silver from each person, along with food and wine. The governors’ helpers before me also controlled the people, but I did not do that, because I feared God. ¹⁶I worked on the wall, as did all my men who were gathered there. We did not buy any fields.

¹⁷Also, I fed one hundred fifty Jewish people and officers at my table, as well as those who came from the nations around

us.¹⁸ This is what was prepared every day: one ox, six good sheep, and birds. And every ten days there were all kinds of wine. But I never demanded the food that was due a governor, because the people were already working very hard.

¹⁹Remember to be kind to me, my God, for all the good I have done for these people.

Life Lessons

Nehemiah 6:1–7:73

Situation

Despite much opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, Nehemiah and the Israelites finished the wall of Jerusalem.

Observation

Satan tries to discourage us. But we can survive setbacks if we stay focused and fulfill God's purposes.

Inspiration

An altogether different person was the man who was my seatmate on a flight to St. Louis...

"I happen to be facing a crisis at this time," went on my seatmate. "Just what it is, is irrelevant, but to get ready for it my mind must be working at maximum, so I follow a procedure. First, I sharpen my mind by reading [the Bible]..."

"Then I affirm God's presence. I remind myself that the Lord is with me, for He said: 'I am with you always.' I spend a moment sensing and feeling the Lord's actual presence ... Next, I pray that my decisions will be right.

"Having completed those procedures, I then practice one of the wisest bits of advice in the Bible. Know what that is?"

"You tell me," I urged.

"'Having done all, to stand.' When you've done all you can do, what more can you do? Just put

everything confidently into God's hands. He will bring it out OK." (From *The Positive Power of Jesus Christ* by Norman Vincent Peale)

Application

What crises threaten to discourage you? The next time you face a crisis, imitate the person who discovered how to stay focused on God: read, meditate, pray, act, and wait.

Exploration

Examples of Faith—[Job 13:15; 19:25; Psalm 13:5; Daniel 3; 6:7-23; Matthew 9:18-25; Luke 7:36-50; Romans 4:18-24; Hebrews 11.](#)

But spend some time walking in the workshop of the heavens, seeing what God has done, and watch how your prayers are energized. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

More Problems for Nehemiah

Then Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and our other enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall and that there was not one gap in it. But I had not yet set the doors in the gates.² So Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: “Come, Nehemiah, let’s meet together in Kephirim on the plain of Ono.”

But they were planning to harm me.³ So I sent messengers to them with this answer: “I am doing a great work, and I can’t come down. I don’t want the work to stop while I leave to meet you.”⁴ Sanballat and Geshem sent the same message to me four times, and each time I sent back the same answer.

⁵The fifth time Sanballat sent his helper to me with the message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter. ⁶This is what was written:

A report is going around to all the nations, and Geshem says it is true, that you and the Jewish people are planning to turn against the king and that you are rebuilding the wall. They say you are going to be their king ⁷and that you have appointed prophets to announce in Jerusalem: “There is a king of Judah!” The king will hear about this. So come, let’s discuss this together.

⁸So I sent him back this answer: “Nothing you are saying is really happening. You are just making it up in your own mind.”

⁹Our enemies were trying to scare us, thinking, “They will get too weak to work. Then the wall will not be finished.”

But I prayed, “God, make me strong.”

¹⁰One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel. Shemaiah had to stay at home. He said, “Nehemiah, let’s meet in the Temple of God. Let’s go inside the Temple and close the doors, because men are coming at night to kill you.”

¹¹But I said, “Should a man like me run away? Should I run for my life into the Temple? I will not go.” ¹²I knew that God had not sent him but that Tobiah and Sanballat had paid him to prophesy against me. ¹³They paid him to frighten me so I would do this and sin. Then they could give me a bad name to shame me.

¹⁴I prayed, “My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat and what they have done. Also remember the prophetess Noadiah and the other prophets who have been trying to frighten me.”

The Wall Is Finished

¹⁵The wall of Jerusalem was completed on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul. It took fifty-two days to rebuild.

¹⁶When all our enemies heard about it and all the nations around us saw it, they were shamed. They then understood that the work had been done with the help of

our God.

¹⁷Also in those days the important men of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and he answered them. ¹⁸Many Jewish people had promised to be faithful to Tobiah, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah. And Tobiah's son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. ¹⁹These important men kept telling me about the good things Tobiah was doing, and then they would tell Tobiah what I said about him. So Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers, singers, and Levites were chosen.² I put my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah, the commander of the palace, in charge of Jerusalem. Hananiah was honest and feared God more than most people.³ I said to them, “The gates of Jerusalem should not be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty, have them shut and bolt the doors. Appoint people who live in Jerusalem as guards, and put some at guard posts and some near their own houses.”

The Captives Who Returned

⁴The city was large and roomy, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. ⁵Then my God caused me to gather the important men, the leaders, and the common people so I could register them by families. I found the family history of those who had returned first. This is what I found written there:

⁶These are the people of the area who returned from captivity, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken away. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each going back to his own town. ⁷These people returned with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah.

These are the people from Israel: ⁸the descendants of Parosh—2,172; ⁹the descendants of Shephatiah—372; ¹⁰the descendants of Arah—652; ¹¹the descendants of Pahath-Moab (through the family of Jeshua and Joab)—2,818; ¹²the descendants of Elam—1,254; ¹³the descendants of Zattu—845; ¹⁴the descendants of Zaccai—760; ¹⁵the descendants of Binnui

—648; ¹⁶the descendants of Bebai—628; ¹⁷the descendants of Azgad—2,322; ¹⁸the descendants of Adonikam—667; ¹⁹the descendants of Bigvai—2,067; ²⁰the descendants of Adin—655; ²¹the descendants of Ater (through Hezekiah)—98; ²²the descendants of Hashum—328; ²³the descendants of Bezai—324; ²⁴the descendants of Hariph—112; ²⁵the descendants of Gibeon—95.

²⁶These are the people from the towns of Bethlehem and Netophah—188; ²⁷of Anathoth—128; ²⁸of Beth Azmaveth—42; ²⁹of Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth—743; ³⁰of Ramah and Geba—621; ³¹of Micmash—122; ³²of Bethel and Ai—123; ³³of the other Nebo—52; ³⁴of the other Elam—1,254; ³⁵of Harim—320; ³⁶of Jericho—345; ³⁷of Lod, Hadid, and Ono—721; ³⁸of Senaah—3,930.

³⁹These are the priests: the descendants of Jedaiah (through the family of Jeshua)—973; ⁴⁰the descendants of Immer—1,052; ⁴¹the descendants of Pashhur—1,247; ⁴²the descendants of Harim—1,017.

⁴³These are the Levites: the descendants of Jeshua (through Kadmiel through the family of Hodaviah)—74.

⁴⁴These are the singers: the descendants of Asaph—148.

⁴⁵These are the gatekeepers: the descendants of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai—138.

⁴⁶These are the Temple servants: the descendants of Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, ⁴⁷Keros, Sia, Padon, ⁴⁸Lebana, Hagaba, Shalmi, ⁴⁹Hanan, Giddel, Gahar, ⁵⁰Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda, ⁵¹Gazzam, Uzza, Paseah, ⁵²Besai, Meunim, Nephussim, ⁵³Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, ⁵⁴Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, ⁵⁵Barkos, Sisera, Temah, ⁵⁶Neziah, and Hatipha.

⁵⁷These are the descendants of the servants of Solomon: the descendants of Sotai, Sophereth, Perida, ⁵⁸Jaala, Darkon, Giddel, ⁵⁹Shephathiah, Hattil, Pokereth-Hazzebaim, and Amon.

⁶⁰The Temple servants and the descendants of the servants of Solomon totaled 392 people.

⁶¹Some people came to Jerusalem from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon, and Immer, but they could not prove that their ancestors came from Israel. Here are their names and their number: ⁶²the descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda—642.

⁶³And these priests could not prove that their ancestors came from Israel: the descendants of Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai. (He had married a daughter of Barzillai from Gilead and was called by her family name.)

⁶⁴These people searched for their family records, but they could not find them. So they could not be priests, because they were thought to be unclean. ⁶⁵The governor ordered them not to eat any of the holy food until a priest settled this matter by using the Urim and Thummim.

⁶⁶The total number of those who returned was 42,360. ⁶⁷This is not counting their 7,337 male and female servants and the 245 male and female singers with them. ⁶⁸They had 736 horses, 245 mules, ⁶⁹435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

⁷⁰Some of the family leaders gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury about 19 pounds of gold, 50 bowls, and 530 pieces of clothing for the priests. ⁷¹Some of the family leaders gave about 375 pounds of gold and about 2,660 pounds of silver to the treasury for the work. ⁷²The total of what the other people gave was about 375 pounds of gold, about 2,250 pounds of silver, and 67 pieces of clothing for the

priests.⁷³ So these people all settled in their own towns: the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Temple servants, and all the other people of Israel.

Ezra Reads the Teachings

By the seventh month the Israelites were settled in their own towns.

Life Lessons

Nehemiah 8:1–18

Situation

Nehemiah and Ezra assembled the people in Jerusalem to hear the Law of Moses. Many wept when they realized how disobedient they had been. The assembly became a festive time when the people reclaimed their legacy as God's chosen people.

Observation

Nehemiah not only encouraged the people to consider the day sacred but also to rejoice in the Lord, their source of strength. They could seek God's holiness and be joyful at the same time.

Inspiration

Last night during family devotions, I called my daughters to the table and set a plate in front of each. In the center of the table I placed a collection of food: some fruit, some raw vegetables and some Oreo cookies. "Every day," I explained, "God prepares for us a plate of experiences. What kind of plate do you most enjoy?"

The answer was easy. Sara put three cookies on her plate. Some days are like that, aren't they? Some days are "three cookie days." Many are not. Sometimes our plate has nothing but vegetables—twenty-four hours of celery, carrots, and squash. Apparently God knows we need some strength, and though the portion may be hard to swallow, isn't it for our own good? Most days, however, have a bit of it

all. Vegetables, which are healthy but dull. Fruit, which tastes better and we enjoy. And even an Oreo, which does little for our nutrition, but a lot for our attitude.

All are important and all are from God. “We know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him” ([Romans 8:28](#)). We, like Paul, must learn the “secret of being happy at any time in everything that happens, when I have enough to eat and when I go hungry, when I have more than I need and when I do not have enough. I can do all things through Christ, because he gives me strength” ([Philippians 4:12](#)).

(From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Application

Seek to be holy as God is holy, and there find true inner joy. Are you a joyful Christian or a grumpy one? If you are the latter, see if there is something that is keeping you from the joy that the Holy Spirit would like you to experience. Ask God for contentment and joy in the midst of life’s experiences.

Exploration

Joy—[John 15:1–11](#); [Romans 14:17](#); [Galatians 5:22–23](#); [James 1:2–3](#); [1 John 1:1–4](#).

All the people of Israel gathered together in the square by the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the teacher to bring out the Book of the Teachings of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel.

²So on the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought out the Teachings for the crowd. Men, women, and all who could listen and understand had gathered. ³At the square by the Water Gate Ezra read the Teachings out loud from early morning until noon to the men, women, and everyone who could listen and understand. All the people listened carefully to the Book of the Teachings.

⁴Ezra the teacher stood on a high wooden platform that had been built just for this time. On his right were Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah. And on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

⁵Ezra opened the book in full view of everyone, because he was above them. As he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶Ezra praised the Lord, the great God, and all the people held up their hands and said, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

⁷These Levites explained the Teachings to the people as they stood there: Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah. ⁸They read from the Book of the Teachings of God and explained what it meant so the people understood what was being read.

⁹Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher,

and the Levites who were teaching said to all the people, “This is a holy day to the Lord your God. Don’t be sad or cry.” All the people had been crying as they listened to the words of the Teachings.

¹⁰Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy good food and sweet drinks. Send some to people who have none, because today is a holy day to the Lord. Don’t be sad, because the joy of the Lord will make you strong.”

¹¹The Levites helped calm the people, saying, “Be quiet, because this is a holy day. Don’t be sad.”

¹²Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send some of their food to others, and to celebrate with great joy. They finally understood what they had been taught.

¹³On the second day of the month, the leaders of all the families, the priests, and the Levites met with Ezra the teacher. They gathered to study the words of the Teachings. ¹⁴This is what they found written in the Teachings: The Lord commanded through Moses that the people of Israel were to live in shelters during the feast of the seventh month. ¹⁵The people were supposed to preach this message and spread it through all their towns and in Jerusalem: “Go out into the mountains, and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, myrtle trees, palms, and shade trees. Make shelters with them, as it is written.”

¹⁶So the people went out and got tree branches. They built shelters on their [roofs](#), in their courtyards, in the courtyards of the Temple, in the square by the Water Gate, and in the square next to the Gate of Ephraim. ¹⁷The whole group that had come back from captivity built shelters and lived in them. The Israelites had not done this since the time of Joshua son of

Nun. And they were very happy.

¹⁸Ezra read to them every day from the Book of the Teachings, from the first day to the last. The people of Israel celebrated the feast for seven days, and then on the eighth day the people gathered as the law said.

Israel Confesses Sins

On the twenty-fourth day of that same month, the people of Israel gathered. They did not eat, and they wore rough cloth and put dust on their heads to show their sadness.² Those people whose ancestors were from Israel had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood and confessed their sins and their ancestors' sins.³ For a fourth of the day they stood where they were and read from the Book of the Teachings of the Lord their God. For another fourth of the day they confessed their sins and worshiped the Lord their God.⁴ These Levites were standing on the stairs: Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Kenani. They called out to the Lord their God with loud voices.⁵ Then these Levites spoke: Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodia, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah. They said, "Stand up and praise the Lord your God, who lives forever and ever."

The People's Prayer

"Blessed be your wonderful name.

It is more wonderful than all blessing and praise.

⁶You are the only Lord.

You made the heavens, even the highest heavens,
with all the stars.

You made the earth and everything on it,
the seas and everything in them;
you give life to everything.

The heavenly army worships you.

⁷“You are the Lord,
the God who chose Abram
and brought him out of Ur in Babylonia
and named him Abraham.

⁸You found him faithful to you,
so you made an agreement with him
to give his descendants the land of the Canaanites,
Hittites, Amorites,
Perizzites, Jebusites, and Girgashites.
You have kept your promise,
because you do what is right.

⁹“You saw our ancestors suffering in Egypt
and heard them cry out at the Red Sea.

¹⁰You did signs and miracles against the king of Egypt,
and against all his officers and all his people,
because you knew how proud they were.
You became as famous as you are today.

¹¹You divided the sea in front of our ancestors;
they walked through on dry ground.

But you threw the people chasing them into the deep
water,

like a stone thrown into mighty waters.

¹²You led our ancestors with a pillar of cloud by day
and with a pillar of fire at night.

It lit the way
they were supposed to go.

¹³You came down to Mount Sinai
and spoke from heaven to our ancestors.

You gave them fair rules and true teachings,
good orders and commands.

¹⁴You told them about your holy Sabbath
and gave them commands, orders, and teachings
through your servant Moses.

¹⁵When they were hungry, you gave them bread from
heaven.

When they were thirsty, you brought them water from
the rock.

You told them to enter and take over
the land you had promised to give them.

¹⁶“But our ancestors were proud and stubborn
and did not obey your commands.

¹⁷They refused to listen;
they forgot the miracles you did for them.
So they became stubborn and turned against you,
choosing a leader to take them back to slavery.
But you are a forgiving God.

You are kind and full of mercy.

You do not become angry quickly, and you have great
love.

So you did not leave them.

¹⁸Our ancestors even made an idol of a calf for
themselves.

They said, ‘This is your god, Israel,
who brought you up out of Egypt.’

They spoke against you.

¹⁹“You have great mercy,
so you did not leave them in the desert.
The pillar of cloud guided them by day,

and the pillar of fire led them at night,
lighting the way they were to go.

²⁰You gave your good Spirit to teach them.

You gave them manna to eat
and water when they were thirsty.

²¹You took care of them for forty years in the desert;
they needed nothing.

Their clothes did not wear out,
and their feet did not swell.

²²“You gave them kingdoms and nations;
you gave them more land.

They took over the country of Sihon king of Heshbon
and the country of Og king of Bashan.

²³You made their children as many as the stars in the
sky,

and you brought them into the land
that you told their fathers to enter and take over.

²⁴So their children went into the land and took over.

The Canaanites lived there, but you defeated them for
our ancestors.

You handed over to them the Canaanites, their kings,
and the people of the land.

Our ancestors could do what they wanted with them.

²⁵They captured strong, walled cities and fertile land.

They took over houses full of good things,
wells that were already dug,

vineyards, olive trees, and many fruit trees.

They ate until they were full and grew fat;
they enjoyed your great goodness.

²⁶But they were disobedient and turned against you
and ignored your teachings.

Your prophets warned them to come back to you,
but they killed those prophets
and spoke against you.

²⁷So you handed them over to their enemies,
and their enemies treated them badly.

But in this time of trouble our ancestors cried out to
you,
and you heard from heaven.
You had great mercy
and gave them saviors who saved them from the power
of their enemies.

²⁸But as soon as they had rest,
they again did what was evil.
So you left them to their enemies
who ruled over them.

When they cried out to you again,
you heard from heaven.

Because of your mercy, you saved them again and
again.

²⁹You warned them to return to your teachings,
but they were proud and did not obey your commands.
If someone obeys your laws, he will live,
but they sinned against your laws.

They were stubborn, unwilling, and disobedient.

³⁰You were patient with them for many years
and warned them by your Spirit through the prophets,
but they did not pay attention.
So you handed them over to other countries.

³¹But because your mercy is great, you did not kill them all or leave them.

You are a kind and merciful God.

^{32c}And so, our God, you are the great and mighty and wonderful God.

You keep your agreement of love.

Do not let all our trouble seem unimportant to you.

This trouble has come to us, to our kings and our leaders,

to our priests and prophets,

to our ancestors and all your people

from the days of the kings of Assyria until today.

³³You have been fair in everything that has happened to us;

you have been loyal, but we have been wicked.

³⁴Our kings, leaders, priests, and ancestors did not obey your teachings;

they did not pay attention to the commands and warnings you gave them.

³⁵Even when our ancestors were living in their kingdom,

enjoying all the good things you had given them,

enjoying the land that was fertile and full of room,

they did not stop their evil ways.

^{36c}Look, we are slaves today

in the land you gave our ancestors.

They were to enjoy its fruit and its good things,

but look, we are slaves here.

³⁷The land's great harvest belongs to the kings you

have put over us
because of our sins.
Those kings rule over us and our cattle as they please,
so we are in much trouble.

The People's Agreement

³⁸“Because of all this, we are making an agreement in writing, and our leaders, Levites, and priests are putting their seals on it.”

Life Lessons

[Nehemiah 9:1–10:39](#)

Situation

Nehemiah helped the people to learn God's Law and to confess their sins. The people agreed to honor God in every aspect of their lives. They sought to eliminate relationships that would contaminate their culture and faith.

Observation

As the walls of Jerusalem were restored, the people renewed their devotion to God and his covenant.

Inspiration

Jesus told us we must be born again. The infinitive be is passive. It shows that it is something that must be done for us. No man can “born” himself. He must be born. The new birth is wholly foreign to our will. In other words, the new birth is a divine work

—we are born of God.

Even though the new birth seems mysterious, that does not make it untrue. We may not understand the how of electricity, but we know that it lights our homes, runs our television and radio sets. We do not understand how the sheep grows wool, the cow grows hair, or the fowl grows feathers—but we know they do. We do not understand many mysteries, but we accept by faith the fact that at the moment we repent of sin and turn by faith to Jesus Christ we are born again.

It is the infusion of divine life into the human soul. It is the implementation or impartation of divine nature into the human soul whereby we become the children of God. We receive the breath of God. Christ through the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts. We are attached to God for eternity. That means that if you have been born again, you will live as long as God lives, because you are now sharing His very life. The long-lost fellowship man had with God in the Garden of Eden has been restored....

This new nature that you receive from God is bent to the will of God. You will want to do only His will. You are utterly and completely devoted to Him. There is a new self-determination, inclination, disposition, a new principle of living, new choices. You seek to glorify God. You seek fellowship with other Christians in the church. You love the Bible. You love to spend time in prayer with God. Your whole disposition is changed. Whereas your life once was filled with unbelief, the root and foundation of all sin, and you

once doubted God, now you believe Him. Now you have utmost confidence and faith in God and His Word. (From *Peace with God* by Billy Graham)

Application

God saves us without expecting any additional payment. Those who love God, however, want to obey him. Repentance is the first step in placing our lives under his authority. What area of life do you want to turn over to God?

Exploration

Covenant—[Genesis 17:2–8](#); [Deuteronomy 5:1–3](#); [Isaiah 61:8](#); [Matthew 26:28](#).

These are the men who sealed the agreement:

Nehemiah the governor, son of Hacaliah.

Zedekiah,²Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,³Pashhur, Amariah, Malkijah,⁴Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch,⁵Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,⁶Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,⁷Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,⁸Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah. These are the priests.

⁹These are the Levites who sealed it: Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel,¹⁰and their fellow Levites: Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan,¹¹Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah,¹²Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,¹³Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu.

¹⁴These are the leaders of the people who sealed the agreement: Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani,¹⁵Bunni, Azgad, Bebai,¹⁶Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,¹⁷Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur,¹⁸Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai,¹⁹Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai,²⁰Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,²¹Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua,²²Pelathiah, Hanan, Anaiah,²³Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub,²⁴Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek,²⁵Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,²⁶Ahiah, Hanan, Anan,²⁷Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

²⁸The rest of the people took an oath. They were the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, Temple servants, all those who separated themselves from foreigners to keep the Teachings of God, and also their wives and their sons and daughters who could understand.²⁹They joined their fellow Israelites and their leading men in taking an oath, which was tied to a curse in case they broke the oath. They promised to follow the Teachings of God, which they had been given through Moses the servant of God, and to obey all the commands, rules, and laws of the Lord our God.

³⁰They said:

We promise not to let our daughters marry foreigners nor to let our sons marry their daughters.³¹ Foreigners may bring goods or grain to sell on the Sabbath, but we will not buy on the Sabbath or any holy day. Every seventh year we will not plant, and that year we will forget all that people owe us.

³²We will be responsible for the commands to pay for the service of the Temple of our God. We will give an eighth of an ounce of silver each year.³³ It is for the bread that is set out on the table; the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; the offerings on the Sabbaths, New Moon festivals, and special feasts; the holy offerings; the offerings to remove the sins of the Israelites so they will belong to God; and for the work of the Temple of our God.

³⁴We, the priests, the Levites, and the people, have thrown lots to decide at what time of year each family must bring wood to the Temple. The wood is for burning on the altar of the Lord our God, and we will do this as it is written in the Teachings.

³⁵We also will bring the first fruits from our crops and the first fruits of every tree to the Temple each year.

³⁶We will bring to the Temple our firstborn sons and cattle and the firstborn of our herds and flocks, as it is written in the Teachings. We will bring them to the priests who are serving in the Temple.

³⁷We will bring to the priests at the storerooms of the Temple the first of our ground meal, our offerings, the fruit from all our trees, and our new wine and oil. And we will bring a tenth of our crops to the Levites, who will collect these things in all the towns where we work.³⁸ A priest of

Aaron's family must be with the Levites when they receive the tenth of the people's crops. The Levites must bring a tenth of all they receive to the Temple of our God to put in the storerooms of the treasury. ³⁹The people of Israel and the Levites are to bring to the storerooms the gifts of grain, new wine, and oil. That is where the utensils for the Temple are kept and where the priests who are serving, the gatekeepers, and singers stay.

We will not ignore the Temple of our God.

New People Move into Jerusalem

The leaders of Israel lived in Jerusalem. But the rest of the people threw lots to choose one person out of every ten to come and live in Jerusalem, the holy city. The other nine could stay in their own cities.²The people blessed those who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

³These are the area leaders who lived in Jerusalem. (Some people lived on their own land in the cities of Judah. These included Israelites, priests, Levites, Temple servants, and descendants of Solomon's servants. ⁴Others from the families of Judah and Benjamin lived in Jerusalem.)

These are the descendants of Judah who moved into Jerusalem. There was Athaiah son of Uziah. (Uziah was the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah. Amariah was the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel. Mahalalel was a descendant of Perez.)⁵There was also Masseiah son of Baruch. (Baruch was the son of Col-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiah. Hazaiah was the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib. Joiarib was the son of Zechariah, a descendant of Shelah.)⁶All the descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem totaled 468 men. They were soldiers.

⁷These are descendants of Benjamin who moved into Jerusalem. There was Sallu son of Meshullam. (Meshullam was the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah. Pedaiah was the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah. Maaseiah was the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah.)⁸Following him were Gabbai and Sallai, for a total of 928 men. ⁹Joel son of Zicri was appointed over them, and Judah son of Hassenuah was second in charge of the new

area of the city.

¹⁰These are the priests who moved into Jerusalem. There was Jedaiah son of Joiarib, Jakin, ¹¹and Seraiah son of Hilkiah, the supervisor in the Temple. (Hilkiah was the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok. Zadok was the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub.) ¹²And there were others with them who did the work for the Temple. All together there were 822 men. Also there was Adaiah son of Jeroham. (Jeroham was the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi. Amzi was the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur. Pashhur was the son of Malkijah.) ¹³And there were family heads with him. All together there were 242 men. Also there was Amashsai son of Azarel. (Azarel was the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth. Meshillemoth was the son of Immer.) ¹⁴And there were brave men with Amashsai. All together there were 128 men. Zabdiel son of Haggadolim was appointed over them.

¹⁵These are the Levites who moved into Jerusalem. There was Shemaiah son of Hasshub. (Hasshub was the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah. Hashabiah was the son of Bunni.) ¹⁶And there were Shabbethai and Jozabad, two of the leaders of the Levites who were in charge of the work outside the Temple. ¹⁷There was Mattaniah son of Mica. (Mica was the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph.) Mattaniah was the director who led the people in thanksgiving and prayer. There was Bakkukiah, who was second in charge over his fellow Levites. And there was Abda son of Shammua. (Shammua was the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun.) ¹⁸All together 284 Levites lived in the holy city of Jerusalem.

¹⁹The gatekeepers who moved into Jerusalem were Akkub, Talmon, and others with them. There was a total of 172 men

who guarded the city gates.

²⁰The other Israelites, priests, and Levites lived on their own land in all the cities of Judah.

²¹The Temple servants lived on the hill of Ophel, and Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of them.

²²Uzzi son of Bani was appointed over the Levites in Jerusalem. (Bani was the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah. Mattaniah was the son of Mica.) Uzzi was one of Asaph's descendants, who were the singers responsible for the service of the Temple. ²³The singers were under the king's orders, which regulated them day by day.

²⁴Pethahiah son of Meshezabel was the king's spokesman. (Meshezabel was a descendant of Zerah, the son of Judah.)

²⁵Some of the people of Judah lived in villages with their surrounding fields. They lived in Kiriath Arba and its surroundings, in Dibon and its surroundings, in Jekabzeel and its surroundings, ²⁶in Jeshua, Moladah, Beth Pelet, ²⁷Hazar Shual, Beersheba and its surroundings, ²⁸in Ziklag and Meconah and its surroundings, ²⁹in En Rimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, ³⁰Zanoah, Adullam and their villages, in Lachish and the fields around it, and in Azekah and its surroundings. So they settled from Beersheba all the way to the Valley of Hinnom.

³¹The descendants of the Benjaminites from Geba lived in Micmash, Aija, Bethel and its surroundings, ³²in Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, ³³Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, ³⁴Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, ³⁵Lod, Ono, and in the Valley of the Craftsmen.

³⁶Some groups of the Levites from Judah settled in the land of Benjamin.

Life Lessons

Nehemiah 11:1–13:31

Situation

To resettle Jerusalem, Nehemiah required ten percent of the people to move from their villages to the city. Many people disliked this plan because it forced them to move.

Observation

For the good of the whole community, Nehemiah required some people to sacrifice.

Inspiration

If you're the kind of Christian who really wants the whole purpose of God, then you dare not leave out kingdom commitment. That means your motives must be investigated. For example, every time you make plans to acquire a sizable possession—a car, an expensive boat, a house, and such like—you must deal with it before God and ask: Is this His will? Would this honor Him? Would this glorify Him?

Am I suggesting that you take a vow of poverty? No, no that. My message is not that you go hungry and give up all nice things. I just say you give up *control* of them. Give all you have to the Lord God and trust Him to give back all that you need.

(From *Wisdom for the Way* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

What are you willing to give up? Would you be willing to move? Change jobs? Face new challenges? Be flexible so that God can move you easily. Give him control of your possessions.

Exploration

Sacrifice—[Leviticus 1:2](#); [1 Samuel 15:22](#); [Psalm 4:5](#); [Isaiah 1:10–17](#).

Priests and Levites

These are the priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and with Jeshua. There were Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra,² Amariah, Malluch, Hattush,³ Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth,⁴ Iddo, Ginnethon, Abijah,⁵ Mijamin, Moadiah, Bilgah,⁶ Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah,⁷ Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, and Jedaiah. They were the leaders of the priests and their relatives in the days of Jeshua.

⁸The Levites were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah. Mattaniah and his relatives were in charge of the songs of thanksgiving. ⁹Bakbukiah and Unni, their relatives, stood across from them in the services.

¹⁰Jeshua was the father of Joiakim. Joiakim was the father of Eliashib. Eliashib was the father of Joiada. ¹¹Joiada was the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan was the father of Jaddua.

¹²In the days of Joiakim, these priests were the leaders of the families of priests: Meraiah, from Seraiah's family; Hananiah, from Jeremiah's family; ¹³Meshullam, from Ezra's family; Jehohanan, from Amariah's family; ¹⁴Jonathan, from Malluch's family; Joseph, from Shecaniah's family; ¹⁵Adna, from Harim's family; Helkai, from Meremoth's family; ¹⁶Zechariah, from Iddo's family; Meshullam, from Ginnethon's family; ¹⁷Zicri, from Abijah's family; Piltai, from Miniamin's and Moadiah's families; ¹⁸Shammua, from Bilgah's family; Jehonathan, from Shemaiah's family; ¹⁹Mattenai, from Joiarib's family; Uzzi, from Jedaiah's family; ²⁰Kallai, from Sallu's family; Eber, from Amok's family; ²¹Hashabiah, from Hilkiyah's family;

and Nethanel, from Jedaiah's family.

²²The leaders of the families of the Levites and the priests were written down in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua, while Darius the Persian was king. ²³The family leaders among the Levites were written down in the history book, but only up to the time of Johanan son of Eliashib. ²⁴The leaders of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua son of Kadmiel, and their relatives. Their relatives stood across from them and gave praise and thanksgiving to God. One group answered the other group, as David, the man of God, had commanded.

²⁵These were the gatekeepers who guarded the storerooms next to the gates: Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub. ²⁶They served in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak. They also served in the days of Nehemiah the governor and Ezra the priest and teacher.

The Wall of Jerusalem

²⁷When the wall of Jerusalem was offered as a gift to God, they asked the Levites to come from wherever they lived to Jerusalem to celebrate with joy the gift of the wall. They were to celebrate with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps, and lyres. ²⁸They also brought together singers from all around Jerusalem, from the Netophathite villages, ²⁹from Beth Gilgal, and from the areas of Geba and Azmaveth. The singers had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. ³⁰The priests and Levites made themselves pure, and they also made the people, the gates, and the wall of Jerusalem pure.

³¹I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall, and I

appointed two large choruses to give thanks. One chorus went to the right on top of the wall, toward the Trash Gate.³² Behind them went Hoshaiah and half the leaders of Judah.³³ Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam,³⁴ Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah also went.³⁵ Some priests with trumpets also went, along with Zechariah son of Jonathan. (Jonathan was the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah. Mattaniah was the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur. Zaccur was the son of Asaph.)³⁶ Zechariah's relatives also went. They were Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani. These men played the musical instruments of David, the man of God, and Ezra the teacher walked in front of them.³⁷ They went from the Fountain Gate straight up the steps to the highest part of the wall by the older part of the city. They went on above the house of David to the Water Gate on the east.

³⁸The second chorus went to the left, while I followed them on top of the wall with half the people. We went from the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall,³⁹ over the Gate of Ephraim to the Old Gate and the Fish Gate, to the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred. We went as far as the Sheep Gate and stopped at the Gate of the Guard.

⁴⁰The two choruses took their places at the Temple. Half of the leaders and I did also.⁴¹ These priests were there with their trumpets: Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah.⁴² These people were also there: Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam, and Ezer. The choruses sang, led by Jezrahiah.⁴³ The people offered many sacrifices that day and were happy because God had given them great joy. The women and children were happy. The sound of happiness in Jerusalem could be heard far away.

⁴⁴At that time the leaders appointed men to be in charge of the storerooms. These rooms were for the gifts, the first fruits, and the ten percent that the people brought. The Teachings said they should bring a share for the priests and Levites from the fields around the towns. The people of Judah were happy to do this for the priests and Levites who served.⁴⁵They performed the service of their God in making things pure. The singers and gatekeepers also did their jobs, as David had commanded his son Solomon.⁴⁶Earlier, in the time of David and Asaph, there was a leader of the singers and of the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God.⁴⁷So it was in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah. All the people of Israel gave something to the singers and gatekeepers, and they also set aside part for the Levites. Then the Levites set aside part for the descendants of Aaron.

Foreign People Are Sent Away

On that day they read the Book of Moses to the people, and they found that it said no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be allowed in the meeting to worship.²The Ammonites and Moabites had not welcomed the Israelites with food and water. Instead, they had hired Balaam to put a curse on Israel. (But our God turned the curse into a blessing.)³When the people heard this teaching, they separated all foreigners from Israel.

Nehemiah Returns to Jerusalem

⁴Before that happened, Eliashib the priest, who was in charge of the Temple storerooms, was friendly with Tobiah. ⁵Eliashib let Tobiah use one of the large storerooms. Earlier it had been used for grain offerings, incense, the utensils, and the tenth offerings of grain, new wine, and olive oil that belonged to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers. It had also been used for gifts for the priests.

⁶I was not in Jerusalem when this happened. I had gone back to Artaxerxes king of Babylon in the thirty-second year he was king. Finally I asked the king to let me leave. ⁷When I returned to Jerusalem, I found out the evil Eliashib had done by letting Tobiah have a room in the Temple courtyard. ⁸I was very upset at this, so I threw all of Tobiah's goods out of the room. ⁹I ordered the rooms to be purified, and I brought back the utensils for God's Temple, the grain offerings, and the incense.

¹⁰Then I found out the people were not giving the Levites their shares. So the Levites and singers who served had gone back to their own farms. ¹¹I argued with the officers, saying, “Why haven’t you taken care of the Temple?” Then I gathered the Levites and singers and put them back at their places.

¹²All the people of Judah then brought to the storerooms a tenth of their crops, new wine, and olive oil. ¹³I put these men in charge of the storerooms: Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the teacher, and Pedaiah a Levite. I made Hanan son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah, their helper. Everyone knew they were honest men. They gave out the portions that went to their relatives.

¹⁴Remember me, my God, for this. Do not ignore my love for the Temple and its service.

¹⁵In those days I saw people in Judah working in the winepresses on the Sabbath day. They were bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys. And they were bringing loads of wine, grapes, and figs into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. So I warned them about selling food on that day. ¹⁶People from the city of Tyre who were living in Jerusalem brought in fish and other things and sold them there on the Sabbath day to the people of Judah. ¹⁷I argued with the important men of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing you are doing? You are ruining the Sabbath day. ¹⁸This is just what your ancestors did. So our God did terrible things to us and this city. Now you are making him even more angry at Israel by ruining the Sabbath day.”

¹⁹So I ordered that the doors be shut at sunset before the Sabbath and not be opened until the Sabbath was over. I put my servants at the gates so no load could come in on the

Sabbath.²⁰ Once or twice traders and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem.²¹ So I warned them, “Why are you spending the night by the wall? If you do it again, I will force you away.” After that, they did not come back on the Sabbath.²² Then I ordered the Levites to purify themselves and to guard the city gates to make sure the Sabbath remained holy.

Remember me, my God, for this. Have mercy on me because of your great love.

²³In those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab.²⁴ Half their children were speaking the language of Ashdod or some other place, and they couldn’t speak the language of Judah.²⁵ I argued with those people, put curses on them, hit some of them, and pulled out their hair. I forced them to make a promise to God, saying, “Do not let your daughters marry the sons of foreigners, and do not take the daughters of foreigners as wives for your sons or yourselves.”²⁶ Foreign women made King Solomon of Israel sin. There was never a king like him in any of the nations. God loved Solomon and made him king over all Israel, but foreign women made him sin.²⁷ And now you are not obedient when you do this evil thing. You are unfaithful to our God when you marry foreign wives.”

²⁸Joiada was the son of Eliashib the high priest. One of Joiada’s sons married a daughter of Sanballat the Horonite, so I sent him away from me.

²⁹Remember them, my God, because they made the priesthood unclean and the agreement of the priests and Levites unclean.

³⁰So I purified them of everything that was foreign. I

appointed duties for the priests and Levites, giving each man his own job.³¹ I also made sure wood was brought for the altar at regular times and that the first fruits were brought.

Remember me, my God; be kind to me.

twentieth year This is probably referring to the twentieth year King Artaxerxes I ruled Persia.

Nehemiah This is a different Nehemiah than the one who wrote this book.

roofs In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

The Book of Esther

Introduction

The Book of Esther. Some things about it you love. Some things you admire. But there is one thing about it that leaves you scratching your head.

You love the story. A Jewish girl raised in Persia by a cousin named Mordecai. She becomes the wife of the king by winning the Miss Persia contest. Her husband is Xerxes. (Better known to some as Ahasuerus, which sounds like something you do when you have a bad cold.)

It's a rags-to-riches romance, though you've got to wonder how much romance could occur when you are married to a guy who would chop your head off if you popped into his office without an appointment. But that's what Esther did. She took the chance at the chance it would save her nation.

That is the part of Esther you admire. Aside from being a beauty, she was gutsy. Xerxes' right-hand man is Haman. (A name that, as you'll soon see, sounds curiously close to "hangman.") Haman was a raging Nazi. Nothing would suit him better than annihilation of the Jews. One day he got his chance. Mordecai, Esther's foster father, refused to bow before Haman. Haman was so mad he convinced Xerxes to let him do away with the whole nation.

That's where Esther comes in. Literally. She comes into the king's chambers uninvited but not unprepared. After getting the Jews to pray and fast for three days, she puts on her royal robes and stands at the door. Xerxes likes what he sees and invites her in. One invitation leads to another, and by the time she finishes, Xerxes not only agrees to call off the massacre but orders Haman to hang from the same gallows Haman had

built for Mordecai.

Whew! Quite a lady, this Esther. You have to admire her courage. You have to love her story. But there is one thing that is tough to figure. God's name never appears in the entire book. His actions do. His thoughts do. His plan does. His fingerprints are on every page. But his name never appears. Could it be that God is more concerned about getting the job done than getting credit?

About This Book

Author:

Unknown, some say Mordecai

Date Written:

500–400 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- Esther became queen even though she was an exile in the land.
- Because Esther was queen she was in a position to help when her people were endangered.
- Mordecai, Esther's cousin, helped her have the courage to stand up for her people even though it was dangerous.

Key Verse:

“... and who knows, you may have been chosen queen for just such a time as this” (Esther [4:14](#)).

Contents:

1. Esther Becomes Queen [1:1–2:23](#)
2. Haman's Plot [3:1–7:10](#)
3. The Jews Are Delivered [8:1–10:3](#)

Life Lessons

Esther [1:1–2:23](#)

Situation

Trouble brewed in Persia. Queen Vashti refused to obey King Xerxes. In anger, the king banished the queen and got a new one. Esther, an adopted Jewish orphan, became queen of Persia because of her beauty.

Observation

God uses unlikely people in unusual situations to preserve his people.

Inspiration

John Egglan had never preached a sermon in his life. Never.

Wasn't that he didn't want to, just never needed to. But then one morning he did. The snow left his town of Colchester, England, buried in white. When he awoke on that January Sunday in 1850, he thought of staying home. Who would go to church in such weather?

But he reconsidered. He was, after all, a deacon. And if the deacons didn't go, who would? So he put on his boots, hat, and coat and walked the six miles to the Methodist Church.

He wasn't the only member who considered staying home. In fact, he was one of the few who came. Only thirteen people were present. Twelve members and one visitor. Even the minister was snowed in. Someone suggested they go home.

Egglan would hear none of that. They'd come this far; they would have a service. Besides, they had a visitor. A thirteen-year-old boy.

But who would preach? Egglan was the only deacon. It fell to him.

And so he did. His sermon lasted only ten minutes. It drifted and wandered and made no point in an effort to make several. But at the end, an uncharacteristic courage settled upon the man. He lifted his eyes and looked straight at the boy and challenged: "Young man, look to Jesus. Look! Look! Look!"

Did the challenge make a difference? Let the boy, now a man, answer. "I did look, and then and there the cloud on my heart lifted, the darkness rolled away, and at that moment I saw the sun."

The boy's name? Charles Haddon Spurgeon. England's prince of preachers. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

Application

God raised Esther to a royal position to save her people. Look at your surroundings. How could God use you? Perhaps he has placed you in your job, school, or family to reach someone for Jesus. Be bold (but not brash). Share your faith. Encourage others to look to Jesus.

Exploration

Respect Authority—[Ephesians 5:21–26](#); [Hebrews 13:17](#); [1 Peter 3:1–7](#); [5:5–6](#).

Queen Vashti Disobeys the King

This is what happened during the time of King Xerxes, the king who ruled the one hundred twenty-seven states from India to Cush.²In those days King Xerxes ruled from his capital city of Susa.³In the third year of his rule, he gave a banquet for all his important men and royal officers. The army leaders from the countries of Persia and Media and the important men from all Xerxes' empire were there.

⁴The banquet lasted one hundred eighty days. All during that time King Xerxes was showing off the great wealth of his kingdom and his own great riches and glory.⁵When the one hundred eighty days were over, the king gave another banquet. It was held in the courtyard of the palace garden for seven days, and it was for everybody in the palace at Susa, from the greatest to the least.⁶The courtyard had fine white curtains and purple drapes that were tied to silver rings on marble pillars by white and purple cords. And there were gold and silver couches on a floor set with tiles of white marble, shells, and gems.⁷Wine was served in gold cups of various kinds. And there was plenty of the king's wine, because he was very generous.⁸The king commanded that the guests be permitted to drink as much as they wished. He told the wine servers to serve each person what he wanted.

⁹Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes.

¹⁰On the seventh day of the banquet, King Xerxes was very happy, because he had been drinking much wine. He gave a command to the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas. ¹¹He commanded them to bring him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown. She was to come to show her beauty to the people and important men, because she was very beautiful. ¹²The eunuchs told Queen Vashti about the king's command, but she refused to come. Then the king became very angry; his anger was like a burning fire.

¹³It was a custom for the king to ask advice from experts about law and order. So King Xerxes spoke with the wise men who would know the right thing to do. ¹⁴The wise men the king usually talked to were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, seven of the important men of Persia and Media. These seven had special privileges to see the king and had the highest rank in the kingdom. ¹⁵The king asked them, "What does the law say must be done to Queen Vashti? She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes, which the eunuchs took to her."

¹⁶Then Memucan said to the king and the other important men, "Queen Vashti has not done wrong to the king alone. She has also done wrong to all the important men and all the people in all the empire of King Xerxes. ¹⁷All the wives of the important men of Persia and Media will hear about the queen's actions. Then they will no longer honor their husbands. They will say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought to him, but she refused to come.' ¹⁸Today the wives of the important men of Persia and Media have heard about the queen's actions. So they will speak in the same way to their husbands,

and there will be no end to disrespect and anger.

¹⁹“So, our king, if it pleases you, give a royal order, and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be changed. The law should say Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her place as queen to someone who is better than she is.”²⁰ And let the king’s order be announced everywhere in his enormous kingdom. Then all the women will respect their husbands, from the greatest to the least.”

²¹The king and his important men were happy with this advice, so King Xerxes did as Memucan suggested.²² He sent letters to all the states of the kingdom in the writing of each state and in the language of each group of people. These letters announced that each man was to be the ruler of his own family.

Esther Is Made Queen

Later, when King Xerxes was not so angry, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and his order about her. ²Then the king's personal servants suggested, "Let a search be made for beautiful young girls for the king." ³Let the king choose supervisors in every state of his kingdom to bring every beautiful young girl to the palace at Susa. They should be taken to the women's quarters and put under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the women. And let beauty treatments be given to them. ⁴Then let the girl who most pleases the king become queen in place of Vashti." The king liked this idea, so he did as they said.

⁵Now there was a Jewish man in the palace of Susa whose name was Mordecai son of Jair. Jair was the son of Shimei, the son of Kish. Mordecai was from the tribe of Benjamin, ⁶which had been taken captive from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. They were part of the group taken into captivity with Jehoiachin king of Judah. ⁷Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, who had no father or mother, so Mordecai took care of her. Hadassah was also called Esther, and she had a very pretty figure and face. Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

⁸When the king's command and order had been heard, many girls had been brought to the palace in Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther was also taken to the king's palace and put under the care of Hegai, who was in charge of the women. ⁹Esther pleased Hegai, and he liked her. So Hegai

quickly began giving Esther her beauty treatments and special food. He gave her seven servant girls chosen from the king's palace. Then he moved her and her seven servant girls to the best part of the women's quarters.

¹⁰Esther did not tell anyone about her family or who her people were, because Mordecai had told her not to. ¹¹Every day Mordecai walked back and forth near the courtyard where the king's women lived to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.

¹²Before a girl could take her turn with King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments that were ordered for the women. For six months she was treated with oil and myrrh and for six months with perfumes and cosmetics.

¹³Then she was ready to go to the king. Anything she asked for was given to her to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. ¹⁴In the evening she would go to the king's palace, and in the morning she would return to another part of the women's quarters. There she would be placed under the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch in charge of the slave women. The girl would not go back to the king again unless he was pleased with her and asked for her by name.

¹⁵The time came for Esther daughter of Abihail, Mordecai's uncle, who had been adopted by Mordecai, to go to the king. She asked for only what Hegai suggested she should take. (Hegai was the king's eunuch who was in charge of the women.) Everyone who saw Esther liked her. ¹⁶So Esther was taken to King Xerxes in the royal palace in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, during Xerxes' seventh year as king.

¹⁷And the king was pleased with Esther more than with any of the other girls. He liked her more than any of the other girls,

so he put a royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti.¹⁸ Then the king gave a great banquet for Esther and invited all his important men and royal officers. He announced a holiday for all the empire and had the government give away gifts.

Mordecai Discovers an Evil Plan

¹⁹Now Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate when the girls were gathered the second time.²⁰ Esther still had not told anyone about her family or who her people were, just as Mordecai had commanded her. She obeyed Mordecai just as she had done when she was under his care.

²¹Now Bigthana and Teresh were two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway. While Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, they became angry and began to make plans to kill King Xerxes.²² But Mordecai found out about their plans and told Queen Esther. Then Esther told the king how Mordecai had discovered the evil plan.²³ When the report was investigated, it was found to be true, and the two officers who had planned to kill the king were hanged. All this was written down in the daily court record in the king's presence.

Life Lessons

Esther [3:1–4:17](#)

Situation

Haman conspired to destroy all the Jews. Mordecai learned of Haman's plot and urged Esther to intercede on behalf of the Jews.

Observation

Esther resolved to carry out the wishes of Mordecai and go to the king even if it meant her death.

Inspiration

When Jesus told the story of the missing sheep, some of the people who were listening wiped away a tear because they knew how it feels to be lost among the crowd. Jesus wanted us to understand that we have a Father who sees and cares for each one of his children—that we are all equally valuable to him.

No one is useless to God. No one, at any point in his life, is useless to God—not a little child, not the unattractive, not the clumsy, not the tired, not the discouraged. God uses his children.

Our value is inherent—it's not based on the Ph.D. after our name or the amount of money in our bank account. We have value simply because we *are*. In the eyes of God, every human has value simply because he is the creation of the almighty God.

You belong to God's eternal dream. Now you may not feel motivated, you may not feel like you have a reason for living, but you must renew your mind with

the immovable fact that you are part of a commissioned people—you have a reason to be alive.

There is an eternal purpose. There is a great river of God's purpose that is moving toward an eternal home with him. You can't stop God's purpose. God's purpose is greater than you are, and if you are God's child, nothing is going to slow down God's purpose for your life. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, "You Are Worthwhile")

Application

Has someone harassed or persecuted you because you are a Christian? Stay loyal to God, even when it may be dangerous to do so. Acknowledge that he might put you in a particular situation to further his plans.

Exploration

Choosing God—[Joshua 24:15](#); [1 Samuel 7:3–4](#); [Matthew 6:24](#); [12:30](#).

The solution is not to avoid trouble but to change the way we see our troubles. God can correct your vision. —Max Lucado (*Just Like Jesus*)

Haman Plans to Destroy the Jewish People

After these things happened, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite. He gave him a new rank that was higher than all the important men.² All the royal officers at the king's gate would bow down and kneel before Haman, as the king had ordered. But Mordecai would not bow down or show him honor.

³Then the royal officers at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why don't you obey the king's command?" ⁴And they said this to him every day. When he did not listen to them, they told Haman about it. They wanted to see if Haman would accept Mordecai's behavior because Mordecai had told them he was Jewish.

⁵When Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow down to him or honor him, he became very angry. ⁶He thought of himself as too important to try to kill only Mordecai. He had been told who the people of Mordecai were, so he looked for a way to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jews, in all of Xerxes' kingdom.

⁷It was in the first month of the twelfth year of King Xerxes' rule—the month of Nisan. Pur (that is, the lot) was thrown before Haman to choose a day and a month. So the twelfth

month, the month of Adar, was chosen.

⁸Then Haman said to King Xerxes, “There is a certain group of people scattered among the other people in all the states of your kingdom. Their customs are different from those of all the other people, and they do not obey the king’s laws. It is not right for you to allow them to continue living in your kingdom. ⁹If it pleases the king, let an order be given to destroy those people. Then I will pay seven hundred fifty thousand pounds of silver to those who do the king’s business, and they will put it into the royal treasury.”

¹⁰So the king took his signet ring off and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jewish people. ¹¹Then the king said to Haman, “The money and the people are yours. Do with them as you please.”

¹²On the thirteenth day of the first month, the royal secretaries were called, and they wrote out all of Haman’s orders. They wrote to the king’s governors and to the captains of the soldiers in each state and to the important men of each group of people. The orders were written in the writing of each state and in the language of each people. They were written in the name of King Xerxes and sealed with his signet ring.

¹³Letters were sent by messengers to all the king’s empire ordering them to destroy, kill, and completely wipe out all the Jewish people. That meant young and old, women and little children, too. It was to happen on a single day—the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which was Adar. And they could take everything the Jewish people owned. ¹⁴A copy of the order was given out as a law in every state so all the people would be ready for that day.

¹⁵The messengers set out, hurried by the king’s command,

as soon as the order was given in the palace at Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was in confusion.

Mordecai Asks Esther to Help

When Mordecai heard about all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on rough cloth and ashes, and went out into the city crying loudly and painfully. ²But Mordecai went only as far as the king's gate, because no one was allowed to enter that gate dressed in rough cloth. ³As the king's order reached every area, there was great sadness and loud crying among the Jewish people. They gave up eating and cried out loud, and many of them lay down on rough cloth and ashes to show how sad they were.

⁴When Esther's servant girls and eunuchs came to her and told her about Mordecai, she was very upset and afraid. She sent clothes for Mordecai to put on instead of the rough cloth, but he would not wear them. ⁵Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs chosen by the king to serve her. Esther ordered him to find out what was bothering Mordecai and why.

⁶So Hathach went to Mordecai, who was in the city square in front of the king's gate. ⁷Mordecai told Hathach everything that had happened to him, and he told Hathach about the amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasury for the killing of the Jewish people. ⁸Mordecai also gave him a copy of the order to kill the Jewish people, which had been given in Susa. He wanted Hathach to show it to Esther and to tell her about it. And Mordecai told him to order Esther to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and to plead with him for her people.

⁹Hathach went back and reported to Esther everything

Mordecai had said.¹⁰ Then Esther told Hathach to tell Mordecai,¹¹ “All the royal officers and people of the royal states know that no man or woman may go to the king in the inner courtyard without being called. There is only one law about this: Anyone who enters must be put to death unless the king holds out his gold scepter. Then that person may live. And I have not been called to go to the king for thirty days.”

¹²Esther’s message was given to Mordecai.¹³ Then Mordecai sent back word to Esther: “Just because you live in the king’s palace, don’t think that out of all the Jewish people you alone will escape.¹⁴ If you keep quiet at this time, someone else will help and save the Jewish people, but you and your father’s family will all die. And who knows, you may have been chosen queen for just such a time as this.”

¹⁵Then Esther sent this answer to Mordecai:¹⁶ “Go and get all the Jewish people in Susa together. For my sake, give up eating; do not eat or drink for three days, night and day. I and my servant girls will also give up eating. Then I will go to the king, even though it is against the law, and if I die, I die.”

¹⁷So Mordecai went away and did everything Esther had told him to do.

Life Lessons

Esther 5:1–6:14

Situation

Esther gained an audience with King Xerxes, but delayed her request. Meanwhile, Haman unwittingly orchestrated his own death.

Observation

Esther's discretion contrasted with Haman's reckless conceit.

Inspiration

We must realize that the battle for self-control is fought primarily within our own minds; it is a battle with our passions, thoughts, and desires. In those areas where we have failed to curb our appetites and emotions, we seem to have invisible antennae sensitively attuned to the corresponding temptations. The proverbial “chip on his shoulder” describes the person whose antennae is constantly searching for the minor incident that he can magnify into an occasion for losing his temper. The person who habitually yields to some bodily appetite or lust is constantly alert for opportunities to indulge that carnal desire. We must learn to say no to those passions when they first enter our minds.

Above all, we must pray for the inner strength of will necessary to curb our passions and desires. It is God who works in us to will and to act. Our own particular areas of vulnerability must be made the subject of earnest, beseeching prayer for God's grace

to work in our wills. At the same time we must realize that the will is strengthened by obedience. The more we say no to sinful desires, the more we will be able to say no. But to experience this, we must persevere through many failures. A large part of learning self-control is breaking bad habits and replacing them with good ones....

As we grow in the grace of self-control, we will experience the liberation of those who, under the guidance and grace of the Holy Spirit, are freed from the shackles of self-indulgence and are brought into the freedom of true spiritual discipline. (From *The Practice of Godliness* by Jerry Bridges)

Application

Are you disciplined even under difficult circumstances? Say no to the temptation to indulge every appetite. Substitute an old habit with a new one: praise, don't complain; support, don't argue; encourage, don't brag.

Exploration

Self-Control—[Proverbs 1:1–4; 21:23; Ecclesiastes 5:1–2; Acts 24:25; Galatians 5:22–23.](#)

Esther Speaks to the King

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner courtyard of the king's palace, facing the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the doorway. ²When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the courtyard, he was pleased. He held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand, so Esther went forward and touched the end of it.

³The king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What do you want to ask me? I will give you as much as half of my kingdom."

⁴Esther answered, "My king, if it pleases you, come today with Haman to a banquet that I have prepared for him."

⁵Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly so we may do what Esther asks."

So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared for them. ⁶As they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther, "Now, what are you asking for? I will give it to you. What is it you want? I will give you as much as half of my kingdom."

⁷Esther answered, "This is what I want and what I ask for. ⁸My king, if you are pleased with me and if it pleases you, give me what I ask for and do what I want. Come with Haman tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for you. Then I will answer your question about what I want."

Haman's Plans Against Mordecai

⁹Haman left the king's palace that day happy and content. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and saw that Mordecai did not stand up or tremble with fear before him, Haman became very angry with Mordecai. ¹⁰But he controlled his anger and went home.

Then Haman called together his friends and his wife, Zeresh. ¹¹He told them how wealthy he was and how many sons he had. He also told them all the ways the king had honored him and how the king had placed him higher than his important men and his royal officers. ¹²He also said, "I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to come with the king to the banquet she gave. And tomorrow also the queen has asked me to be her guest with the king. ¹³But all this does not really make me happy when I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate."

¹⁴Then Haman's wife, Zeresh, and all his friends said, "Have a seventy-five foot platform built, and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then go to the banquet with the king and be happy." Haman liked this suggestion, so he ordered the platform to be built.

Mordecai Is Honored

That same night the king could not sleep. So he gave an order for the daily court record to be brought in and read to him.² It was found recorded that Mordecai had warned the king about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway and who had planned to kill the king.

³The king asked, "What honor and reward have been given to Mordecai for this?"

The king's personal servants answered, "Nothing has been done for Mordecai."

⁴The king said, "Who is in the courtyard?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace. He had come to ask the king about hanging Mordecai on the platform he had prepared.

⁵The king's personal servants said, "Haman is standing in the courtyard."

The king said, "Bring him in."

⁶So Haman came in. And the king asked him, "What should be done for a man whom the king wants very much to honor?"

And Haman thought to himself, "Whom would the king want to honor more than me?" ⁷So he answered the king, "This is what you could do for the man you want very much to honor. ⁸Have the servants bring a royal robe that the king himself has worn. And also bring a horse with a royal crown on its head, a horse that the king himself has ridden. ⁹Let the robe and the horse be given to one of the king's most important men. Let the servants put the robe on the man the king wants to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the city

streets. As they are leading him, let them announce: ‘This is what is done for the man whom the king wants to honor!’”

¹⁰The king commanded Haman, “Go quickly. Take the robe and the horse just as you have said, and do all this for Mordecai the Jew who sits at the king’s gate. Do not leave out anything you have suggested.”

¹¹So Haman took the robe and the horse, and he put the robe on Mordecai. Then he led him on horseback through the city streets, announcing before Mordecai: “This is what is done for the man whom the king wants to honor!”

¹²Then Mordecai returned to the king’s gate, but Haman hurried home with his head covered, because he was embarrassed and ashamed. ¹³He told his wife, Zeresh, and all his friends everything that had happened to him.

Haman’s wife and the men who gave him advice said, “You are starting to lose power to Mordecai. Since he is a Jew, you cannot win against him. You will surely be ruined.” ¹⁴While they were still talking, the king’s eunuchs came to Haman’s house and made him hurry to the banquet Esther had prepared.

Life Lessons

Esther [7:1-8:17](#)

Situation

Esther asked that her people be allowed to live. King Xerxes granted her request and had Haman hanged. The Jews were rescued.

Observation

God used individual people and governments to enact his will.

Inspiration

In our “bootstrap” society, where you tough it up and do it on your own and take pride in being a rugged individualist, the one thing that seems to escape us is being before God on our knees, being before God aware that we are helpless, and *allowing* him to assist us.

Can you say to Jesus, “This burden’s too heavy for me. I want you to be my coworker. I want you to carry this burden with me. I cannot do it any longer.” He says if you will come to him, if you’ll allow him to carry that burden with you, his promise is that you will receive rest.

Surrendering our life to Christ means going to him and saying, “I’m yours; use me however you want to.” Once you’ve done this, you can begin to seek his will for your life.

Once we’re honest with ourselves about who we are, then God can begin to remold our hearts ... in total surrender. (From *The Inspirational Bible*,

“Surrender”)

Application

Don't get so busy securing your rights or accomplishing your agenda that you miss the opportunity to serve. Surrender your life to God so that he can use you to accomplish his goals, agenda, and will for your life.

Exploration

Living Honorably—[Ephesians 2:10](#); [Colossians 1:10](#); [1 Thessalonians 2:10–12](#); [James 4:7–10](#).

I only know his timing is always right. I can only say he will do what is best. God will always give what is right to his people who cry to him night and day, and he will not be slow to answer them. —Max Lucado (*A Gentle Thunder*)

Haman Is Hanged

So the king and Haman went in to eat with Queen Esther. ²As they were drinking wine on the second day, the king asked Esther again, “What are you asking for? I will give it to you. What is it you want? I will give you as much as half of my kingdom.”

³Then Queen Esther answered, “My king, if you are pleased with me, and if it pleases you, let me live. This is what I ask. And let my people live, too. This is what I want. ⁴My people and I have been sold to be destroyed, to be killed and completely wiped out. If we had been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because that would not be enough of a problem to bother the king.”

⁵Then King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he? Who has done such a thing?”

⁶Esther said, “Our enemy and foe is this wicked Haman!”

Then Haman was filled with terror before the king and queen. ⁷The king was very angry, so he got up, left his wine, and went out into the palace garden. But Haman stayed inside to beg Queen Esther to save his life. He could see that the king

had already decided to kill him.

⁸When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, he saw Haman falling on the couch where Esther was lying. The king said, “Will he even attack the queen while I am in the house?”

As soon as the king said that, servants came in and covered Haman’s face. ⁹Harbona, one of the eunuchs there serving the king, said, “Look, a seventy-five foot platform stands near Haman’s house. This is the one Haman had prepared for Mordecai, who gave the warning that saved the king.”

The king said, “Hang Haman on it!” ¹⁰So they hanged Haman on the platform he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king was not so angry anymore.

The King Helps the Jewish People

That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther everything Haman, the enemy of the Jewish people, had left when he died. And Mordecai came in to see the king, because Esther had told the king how he was related to her. ²Then the king took off his signet ring that he had taken back from Haman, and he gave it to Mordecai. Esther put Mordecai in charge of everything Haman left when he died.

³Once again Esther spoke to the king. She fell at the king's feet and cried and begged him to stop the evil plan that Haman the Agagite had planned against the Jews. ⁴The king held out the gold scepter to Esther. So Esther got up and stood in front of him.

⁵She said, "My king, if you are pleased with me, and if it pleases you to do this, if you think it is the right thing to do, and if you are happy with me, let an order be written to cancel the letters Haman wrote. Haman the Agagite sent messages to destroy all the Jewish people in all of your kingdom. ⁶I could not stand to see that terrible thing happen to my people. I could not stand to see my family killed."

⁷King Xerxes answered Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, "Because Haman was against the Jewish people, I have given his things to Esther, and my soldiers have hanged him. ⁸Now, in the king's name, write another order to the Jewish people as it seems best to you. Then seal the order with the king's signet ring, because no letter written in the king's name and sealed with his signet ring can be canceled."

⁹At that time the king's secretaries were called. This was

the twenty-third day of the third month, which is Sivan. The secretaries wrote out all of Mordecai's orders to the Jews, to the governors, to the captains of the soldiers in each state, and to the important men of the one hundred twenty-seven states that reached from India to Cush. They wrote in the writing of each state and in the language of each people. They also wrote to the Jewish people in their own writing and language. ¹⁰Mordecai wrote orders in the name of King Xerxes and sealed the letters with the king's signet ring. Then he sent the king's orders by messengers on fast horses, horses that were raised just for the king.

¹¹These were the king's orders: The Jewish people in every city have the right to gather together to protect themselves. They may destroy, kill, and completely wipe out the army of any state or people who attack them. And they are to do the same to the women and children of that army. They may also take by force the property of their enemies. ¹²The one day set for the Jewish people to do this in all the empire of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. ¹³A copy of the king's order was to be sent out as a law in every state. It was to be made known to the people of every nation living in the kingdom so the Jewish people would be ready on that set day to strike back at their enemies.

¹⁴The messengers hurried out, riding on the royal horses, because the king commanded those messengers to hurry. And the order was also given in the palace at Susa.

¹⁵Mordecai left the king's presence wearing royal clothes of blue and white and a large gold crown. He also had a purple robe made of the best linen. And the people of Susa shouted for joy. ¹⁶It was a time of happiness, joy, gladness, and honor

for the Jewish people. ¹⁷As the king's order went to every state and city, there was joy and gladness among the Jewish people. In every state and city to which the king's order went, they were having feasts and celebrating. And many people through all the empire became Jews, because they were afraid of the Jewish people.

Life Lessons

Esther [9:1–10:3](#)

Situation

Israel defeated its enemies and initiated the feast of Purim to commemorate its deliverance.

Observation

God is always faithful to his people.

Inspiration

Upon God's faithfulness rests our whole hope of future blessedness. Only as He is faithful will His covenants stand and His promises be honored. Only as we have complete assurance that He is faithful may we live in peace and look forward with assurance to the life to come.

Every heart can make its own application of this truth and draw from it such conclusions as the truth suggests and its own needs bring into focus. The tempted, the anxious, the fearful, the discouraged may all find new hope and good cheer in the knowledge that our Heavenly Father is faithful. He will ever be true to His pledged word. The hard-pressed sons of the covenant may be sure that He will never remove His lovingkindness from them nor suffer His faithfulness to fail.

Happy the man whose hopes rely
On Israel's God; He made the sky,
And earth, and seas, with all their train;
His truth forever stands secure;
He saves the oppressed, He feeds the poor,

And none shall find His promise vain.

Isaac Watts

(From *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A. W. Tozer)

Application

What causes you to feel anxious, fearful, or discouraged? Remember that God faithfully loves you, faithfully cares for you, and faithfully provides for you. God is faithful in everything. Celebrate!

Exploration

God's Faithfulness—[Psalm 73:25–26](#); [139](#); [Isaiah 54:10](#); [Lamentations 3:22–24](#); [Zephaniah 3:17](#); [1 Corinthians 1:8–9](#).

Victory for the Jewish People

The order the king had commanded was to be done on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. That was the day the enemies of the Jewish people had hoped to defeat them, but that was changed. So the Jewish people themselves defeated those who hated them.²The Jews met in their cities in all the empire of King Xerxes in order to attack those who wanted to harm them. No one was strong enough to fight against them, because all the other people living in the empire were afraid of them.³All the important men of the states, the governors, captains of the soldiers, and the king's officers helped the Jewish people, because they were afraid of Mordecai.⁴Mordecai was very important in the king's palace. He was famous in all the empire, because he was becoming a leader of more and more people.

⁵And, with their swords, the Jewish people defeated all their enemies, killing and destroying them. And they did what they wanted with those people who hated them.⁶In the palace at Susa, they killed and destroyed five hundred men.⁷They also killed: Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha,⁸Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha,⁹Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha,¹⁰the ten sons of Haman, son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jewish people. But the Jewish people did not take their belongings.

¹¹On that day the number killed in the palace at Susa was reported to the king.¹²The king said to Queen Esther, "The

Jewish people have killed and destroyed five hundred people in the palace at Susa, and they have also killed Haman's ten sons. What have they done in the rest of the king's empire! Now what else are you asking? I will do it! What else do you want? It will be done!"

¹³Esther answered, "If it pleases the king, give the Jewish people who are in Susa permission to do again tomorrow what the king ordered for today. And let the bodies of Haman's ten sons be hanged on the platform."

¹⁴So the king ordered that it be done. A law was given in Susa, and the bodies of the ten sons of Haman were hanged.

¹⁵The Jewish people in Susa came together on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar. They killed three hundred people in Susa, but they did not take their belongings.

¹⁶At that same time, all the Jewish people in the king's empire also met to protect themselves and get rid of their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them, but they did not take their belongings. ¹⁷This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. On the fourteenth day they rested and made it a day of joyful feasting.

The Feast of Purim

¹⁸But the Jewish people in Susa met on the thirteenth and fourteenth days of the month of Adar. Then they rested on the fifteenth day and made it a day of joyful feasting.

¹⁹This is why the Jewish people who live in the country and small villages celebrate on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar. It is a day of joyful feasting and a day for exchanging gifts.

²⁰Mordecai wrote down everything that had happened. Then he sent letters to all the Jewish people in all the empire of King Xerxes, far and near. ²¹He told them to celebrate every year on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar, ²²because that was when the Jewish people got rid of their enemies. They were also to celebrate it as the month their sadness was turned to joy and their crying for the dead was turned into celebration. He told them to celebrate those days as days of joyful feasting and as a time for giving food to each other and presents to the poor.

²³So the Jewish people agreed to do what Mordecai had written to them, and they agreed to hold the celebration every year. ²⁴Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, was the enemy of all the Jewish people. He had made an evil plan against the Jewish people to destroy them, and he had thrown the Pur (that is, the lot) to choose a day to ruin and destroy them. ²⁵But when the king learned of the evil plan, he sent out written orders that the evil plans Haman had made against the Jewish people would be used against him. And those orders said that Haman and his sons should be hanged on the platform. ²⁶So these days were called Purim, which comes from the word "Pur" (the lot). Because of everything written in this letter and what they had seen and what happened to them, ²⁷the Jewish people set up this custom. They and their descendants and all those who join them are always to celebrate these two days every year. They should do it in the right way and at the time Mordecai had ordered them in the letter. ²⁸These two days should be remembered and celebrated from now on in every family, in every state, and in every city. These days of Purim should always be celebrated by the Jewish people, and their

descendants should always remember to celebrate them, too.

²⁹So Queen Esther daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote this second letter about Purim. Using the power they had, they wrote to prove the first letter was true. ³⁰And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jewish people in the one hundred twenty-seven states of the kingdom of Xerxes, writing them a message of peace and truth. ³¹He wrote to set up these days of Purim at the chosen times. Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had sent out the order for the Jewish people, just as they had set up things for themselves and their descendants: On these two days the people should give up eating and cry loudly. ³²Esther's letter set up the rules for Purim, and they were written down in the records.

The Greatness of Mordecai

King Xerxes demanded taxes everywhere, even from the cities on the seacoast.² And all the great things Xerxes did by his power and strength are written in the record books of the kings of Media and Persia. Also written in those record books are all the things done by Mordecai, whom the king made great.³ Mordecai the Jew was second in importance to King Xerxes, and he was the most important man among the Jewish people. His fellow Jews respected him very much, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the safety of all the Jewish people.

[The Book of Job](#)

Introduction

It's easy to thank God when he does what we want. But God doesn't always do what we want. Ask Job.

His empire collapsed, his children were killed, and what was a healthy body became a rage of boils. From whence came this torrent? From whence will come any help?

Not from his wife. You can't blame her for telling Job to curse God. But to curse God and die?

Then come his friends. They mean well, but they comfort poorly. They tell him he must have been pretty bad to get it so bad.

"With friends like you guys ...," Job says and then tells them to take their theology back to the dime store where they bought it. Getting no comfort from family or friend, he goes straight to God and pleads his case. His head hurts. His body hurts. His heart hurts. And he can't tolerate any more half-baked answers. "Why is this happening to me?" he demands.

And God answers. Not with answers but with questions. An ocean of questions. Space doesn't permit their listing, but one or two will convey the point. "*Can you shout an order to the clouds and cover yourself with a flood of water? Can you send lightning bolts on their way? Do they come to you and say, 'Here we are'?*" ([38:34-35](#)).

After several dozen of these, Job is left on the beach drenched and wide-eyed, knowing he will never argue with the ocean again. He lifts his hand and cries, "Enough." He has gotten the point. What is it?

God owes no one anything. No reasons. No explanations. Nothing. If he gave them, we couldn't understand them.

Which makes the conclusion of the book all the more moving. Even though God owed Job nothing, he gave him everything. New health, new business, new family. And most of all, new insight.

God is God. He knows what he is doing. When you can't trace his hand, trust his heart.

About This Book

Author:

Unknown, some say Job, some say Moses

Date Written:

Unknown

Key Themes:

-
- Satan accused Job of having faith only because his life was easy so God let Satan attack Job.
- Job lost everything, yet did not curse God.
- Job's friends tried to reason out why such misfortune had fallen on him, assuming it must be something Job had done.
- In the end, Job acknowledged God's wisdom and discretion as he had at the beginning.

Key Verse:

"Even if God kills me, I have hope in him; I will still defend my ways to his face" ([Job 13:15](#)).

Contents:

1. Background and Prologue [1:1–2:13](#)
2. Speeches of Job, His Friends, and God [3:1–42:6](#)
3. Job's Life Restored [42:7–17](#)

Life Lessons

Job 1:1–2:13

Situation

Satan hoped to convince God that Job was righteous only because of his comfortable life. God allowed Satan to bring disaster upon Job, but Job stayed loyal to God.

Observation

Suffering, of course, is one of the great subjects of this book. However, it also shows how a righteous man needed to repent.

Inspiration

Folks, if you're expecting to be given a fair shake in your life, forget it! You won't be. You're going to face illness. And your body is going to wear out. You may be the victim of someone else's mistake. But you can get through those tough times if you prepare your heart now, living to know and serve the Savior who loves you and died so that you might have an eternal home free of pain and sorrow.

The struggles that you're going through now—don't discard them. Listen to God as he teaches you so that you can teach others. You see, a time of suffering teaches us something we never knew before and may prepare us for a time of counsel that we will give someone years from now.

God is with you. God is with you! The same God that guided his Son through death and back to life said he will never leave us or forsake us. He is right

there with you, perhaps even more in times of crisis than any other time. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, “Suffering”)

Application

Trying to avoid suffering in this life is like trying to avoid breathing. It can't be done. As a matter of fact, the Bible says that those who desire to live a godly lifestyle will suffer. Ask God how your suffering can bring you closer to him. Then thank him that he is a good God no matter what you're going through.

Exploration

Suffering—[Psalm 34:10](#); [2 Timothy 2:3](#); [James 5:13](#); [1 Peter 4:12–16](#).

Job, the Good Man

A man named Job lived in the land of Uz. He was an honest and innocent man; he honored God and stayed away from evil.²Job had seven sons and three daughters.³He owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred teams of oxen, and five hundred female donkeys. He also had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

⁴Job's sons took turns holding feasts in their homes and invited their sisters to eat and drink with them.⁵After a feast was over, Job would send and have them made clean. Early in the morning Job would offer a burnt offering for each of them, because he thought, "My children may have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Job did this every time.

Satan Appears Before the Lord

⁶One day the angels came to show themselves before the Lord, and Satan was with them.⁷The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"

Satan answered the Lord, "I have been wandering around the earth, going back and forth in it."

⁸Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you noticed my servant Job? No one else on earth is like him. He is an honest

and innocent man, honoring God and staying away from evil.”

⁹But Satan answered the Lord, “Job honors God for a good reason. ¹⁰You have put a wall around him, his family, and everything he owns. You have blessed the things he has done. His flocks and herds are so large they almost cover the land. ¹¹But reach out your hand and destroy everything he has, and he will curse you to your face.”

¹²The Lord said to Satan, “All right, then. Everything Job has is in your power, but you must not touch Job himself.” Then Satan left the Lord’s presence.

¹³One day Job’s sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine together at the oldest brother’s house. ¹⁴A messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were eating grass nearby, ¹⁵when the Sabeans attacked and carried them away. They killed the servants with swords, and I am the only one who escaped to tell you!”

¹⁶The messenger was still speaking when another messenger arrived and said, “Lightning from God fell from the sky. It burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who escaped to tell you!”

¹⁷The second messenger was still speaking when another messenger arrived and said, “The Babylonians sent three groups of attackers that swept down and stole your camels and killed the servants. I am the only one who escaped to tell you!”

¹⁸The third messenger was still speaking when another messenger arrived and said, “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine together at the oldest brother’s house. ¹⁹Suddenly a great wind came from the desert, hitting all four corners of the house at once. The house fell in on the young people, and they are all dead. I am the only one who

escaped to tell you!”

²⁰When Job heard this, he got up and tore his robe and shaved his head to show how sad he was. Then he bowed down to the ground to worship God. ²¹He said:

“I was naked when I was born,
and I will be naked when I die.
The Lord gave these things to me,
and he has taken them away.
Praise the name of the Lord.”

²²In all this Job did not sin or blame God.

Satan Appears Before the Lord Again

On another day the angels came to show themselves before the Lord, and Satan was with them again. ²The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"

Satan answered the Lord, "I have been wandering around the earth, going back and forth in it."

³Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you noticed my servant Job? No one else on earth is like him. He is an honest and innocent man, honoring God and staying away from evil. You caused me to ruin him for no good reason, but he continues to be without blame."

⁴"One skin for another!" Satan answered. "A man will give all he has to save his own life. ⁵But reach out your hand and destroy his flesh and bones, and he will curse you to your face."

⁶The Lord said to Satan, "All right, then. Job is in your power, but you may not take his life."

⁷So Satan left the Lord's presence. He put painful sores on Job's body, from the top of his head to the soles of his feet.

⁸Job took a piece of broken pottery to scrape himself, and he sat in ashes in misery.

⁹Job's wife said to him, "Why are you trying to stay innocent? Curse God and die!"

¹⁰Job answered, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Should we take only good things from God and not trouble?" In spite of all this Job did not sin in what he said.

Job's Three Friends Come to Help

¹¹Now Job had three friends: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. When these friends heard about Job's troubles, they agreed to meet and visit him. They wanted to show their concern and to comfort him. ¹²They saw Job from far away, but he looked so different they almost didn't recognize him. They began to cry loudly and tore their robes and put dirt on their heads to show how sad they were. ¹³Then they sat on the ground with Job seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him because they saw how much he was suffering.

Life Lessons

Job 3:1–26

Situation

His wealth, gone. Children, dead. Health, failed. Despite these disasters, Job still held firmly to his faith. Friends came to visit and exhort him. Before they spoke, Job cursed the day he was born.

Observation

No matter how powerfully troubles crush, God's hold is more powerful.

Inspiration

Once the apostle Paul directly addressed the question of disappointment with God. He told the Corinthians that, in spite of incredible hardships, he did not “lose heart”: “Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary [!] troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

Paul endured trials and died a martyr, still anticipating his reward. Job endured trials, but received a fine reward in this life. So what, exactly, can we expect from God? Perhaps the best way to view the ending in Job is to see it not as a blueprint for what will happen to us in this life, but rather as a sign of what is to come. It stands as a sweet, satisfying symbol, a solution to one man's

disappointment that offers us all a foretaste of the future....

The worst mistake of all would be to conclude that God is somehow content to make a few minor adjustments to this tragic, unfair world.

Some people stake all their faith on a miracle, as if a miracle would eliminate all disappointment with God. It wouldn't! ... Miracles serve as signs pointing on to the future. They are appetizers that awaken a longing for something more, something permanent... . The good news at the end of Job and the good news of Easter at the end of the Gospels are previews of the good news described at the end of Revelation. (From *Disappointment with God* by Philip Yancey)

Application

Place your hope in God's eternal home, not heaven-on-earth. Read [Hebrews 11:32-40](#) and [Revelation 21:1-22:21](#) several times, and thank God for eternal rewards.

Exploration

God's Power—[Psalm 8](#); [Matthew 19:26](#); [James 1:16-18](#).

Job Curses His Birth

After seven days Job cried out and cursed the day he had been born, ²saying:

³“Let the day I was born be destroyed,
and the night it was said, ‘A boy is born!’

⁴Let that day turn to darkness.

Don’t let God care about it.

Don’t let light shine on it.

⁵Let darkness and gloom have that day.

Let a cloud hide it.

Let thick darkness cover its light.

⁶Let thick darkness capture that night.

Don’t count it among the days of the year
or put it in any of the months.

⁷Let that night be empty,
with no shout of joy to be heard.

⁸Let those who curse days curse that day.

Let them prepare to wake up the sea monster
Leviathan.

⁹Let that day’s morning stars never appear;
let it wait for daylight that never comes.

Don’t let it see the first light of dawn,

¹⁰because it allowed me to be born
and did not hide trouble from my eyes.

¹¹“Why didn’t I die as soon as I was born?
Why didn’t I die when I came out of the womb?
¹²Why did my mother’s knees receive me,
and my mother’s breasts feed me?
¹³If they had not been there,
I would be lying dead in peace;
I would be asleep and at rest
¹⁴with kings and wise men of the earth
who built places for themselves that are now ruined.
¹⁵I would be asleep with rulers
who filled their houses with gold and silver.
¹⁶Why was I not buried like a child born dead,
like a baby who never saw the light of day?
¹⁷In the grave the wicked stop making trouble,
and the weary workers are at rest.
¹⁸In the grave there is rest for the captives
who no longer hear the shout of the slave driver.
¹⁹People great and small are in the grave,
and the slave is freed from his master.

²⁰“Why is light given to those in misery?
Why is life given to those who are so unhappy?
²¹They want to die, but death does not come.
They search for death more than for hidden treasure.
²²They are very happy
when they get to the grave.
²³They cannot see where they are going.
God has hidden the road ahead.
²⁴I make sad sounds as I eat;
my groans pour out like water.

²⁵Everything I feared and dreaded
has happened to me.

²⁶I have no peace or quietness.
I have no rest, only trouble.”

Eliphaz Speaks

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered:

²“If someone tried to speak with you, would you be upset?

I cannot keep from speaking.

³Think about the many people you have taught
and the weak hands you have made strong.

⁴Your words have comforted those who fell,
and you have strengthened those who could not
stand.

⁵But now trouble comes to you, and you are
discouraged;

trouble hits you, and you are terrified.

⁶You should have confidence because you respect
God;

you should have hope because you are innocent.

⁷“Remember that the innocent will not die;
honest people will never be destroyed.

⁸I have noticed that people who plow evil
and plant trouble, harvest it.

⁹God’s breath destroys them,
and a blast of his anger kills them.

¹⁰Lions may roar and growl,
but when the teeth of a strong lion are broken,

¹¹that lion dies of hunger.

The cubs of the mother lion are scattered.

¹²“A word was brought to me in secret,
and my ears heard a whisper of it.

¹³It was during a nightmare
when people are in deep sleep.

¹⁴I was trembling with fear;
all my bones were shaking.

¹⁵A spirit glided past my face,
and the hair on my body stood on end.

¹⁶The spirit stopped,
but I could not see what it was.
A shape stood before my eyes,
and I heard a quiet voice.

¹⁷It said, ‘Can a human be more right than God?
Can a person be pure before his maker?’

¹⁸God does not trust his angels;
he blames them for mistakes.

¹⁹So he puts even more blame on people who live in
clay houses,

whose foundations are made of dust,
who can be crushed like a moth.

²⁰Between dawn and sunset many people are broken to
pieces;

without being noticed, they die and are gone forever.

²¹The ropes of their tents are pulled up,
and they die without wisdom.’

“Call if you want to, Job, but no one will answer you.
You can’t turn to any of the holy ones.

²Anger kills the fool,
and jealousy slays the stupid.

³I have seen a fool succeed,
but I cursed his home immediately.

⁴His children are far from safety
and are crushed in court with no defense.

⁵The hungry eat his harvest,
even taking what grew among the thorns,
and thirsty people want his wealth.

⁶Hard times do not come up from the ground,
and trouble does not grow from the earth.

⁷People produce trouble
as surely as sparks fly upward.

⁸“But if I were you, I would call on God
and bring my problem before him.

⁹God does wonders that cannot be understood;
he does so many miracles they cannot be counted.

¹⁰He gives rain to the earth
and sends water on the fields.

¹¹He makes the humble person important
and lifts the sad to places of safety.

¹²He ruins the plans of those who trick others
so they have no success.

¹³He catches the wise in their own clever traps
and sweeps away the plans of those who try to trick
others.

¹⁴Darkness covers them up in the daytime;
even at noon they feel around in the dark.

¹⁵God saves the needy from their lies
and from the harm done by powerful people.

¹⁶So the poor have hope,
while those who are unfair are silenced.

¹⁷“The one whom God corrects is happy,
so do not hate being corrected by the Almighty.

¹⁸God hurts, but he also bandages up;
he injures, but his hands also heal.

¹⁹He will save you from six troubles;
even seven troubles will not harm you.

²⁰God will buy you back from death in times of hunger,
and in battle he will save you from the sword.

²¹You will be protected from the tongue that strikes like
a whip,
and you will not be afraid when destruction comes.

²²You will laugh at destruction and hunger,
and you will not fear the wild animals,

²³because you will have an agreement with the stones
in the field,
and the wild animals will be at peace with you.

²⁴You will know that your tent is safe,
because you will check the things you own and find
nothing missing.

²⁵You will know that you will have many children,
and your descendants will be like the grass on the
earth.

²⁶You will come to the grave with all your strength,
like bundles of grain gathered at the right time.

²⁷“We have checked this, and it is true,

so hear it and decide what it means to you.”

Life Lessons

Job 4:1–7:21

Situation

Job’s friends failed to understand his situation and wrongly accused him of bringing his troubles upon himself through sin. Job defended himself against these accusations.

Observation

Be careful in your assumptions. Don’t judge too quickly, because only God knows all the details of every situation.

Inspiration

It is overpowering to think of all the knowledge of God. In our generation, we have witnessed an enormous knowledge explosion. In science, literature, philosophy, geography, history, and every other sphere, new books pour out in seemingly endless procession. Our libraries are glutted. Specialization is the name of the game. Experts are proficient in only a small field; they can never hope to cover the spectrum. But God has full knowledge of everything in heaven and on earth, and He doles this knowledge out to people in thimblefuls. Whenever He does, these people are promptly acclaimed as discoverers.

But there is still so much we do *not* know. Though we can travel to the moon, we can’t understand how a bee can fly. Though we can transplant human hearts,

we can't cure the common cold. We can conquer outer space, but we cannot conquer inner space. We can make war, but we cannot make peace. We know so much, and yet we know so little. With God there are no mysteries, no insoluble problems, no puzzles...

This attribute of God should have a profound effect on our lives. How we should honor the Lord as we muse on the infinite dimensions of His knowledge! How we should sing His praises! (From *Alone in Majesty* by William MacDonald)

Application

Are you knowledgeable in a certain area? Do people ask you for help, advice, or an opinion? Refuse to be proud. Use your knowledge as a gift from God for the good of others. Praise God because of this gift.

Exploration

Trust in God—[Psalm 37:3-7](#); [Proverbs 3:5-6](#); [Matthew 10:16-39](#); [Romans 11:33](#).

Job Answers Eliphaz

Then Job answered:

²“I wish my suffering could be weighed
and my misery put on scales.

³My sadness would be heavier than the sand of the
seas.

No wonder my words seem careless.

⁴The arrows of the Almighty are in me;
my spirit drinks in their poison;
God’s terrors are gathered against me.

⁵A wild donkey does not bray when it has grass to eat,
and an ox is quiet when it has feed.

⁶Tasteless food is not eaten without salt,
and there is no flavor in the white of an egg.

⁷I refuse to touch it;
such food makes me sick.

⁸“How I wish that I might have what I ask for
and that God would give me what I hope for.

⁹How I wish God would crush me
and reach out his hand to destroy me.

¹⁰Then I would have this comfort
and be glad even in this unending pain,
because I would know I did not reject the words of the
Holy One.

¹¹“I do not have the strength to wait.

There is nothing to hope for,
so why should I be patient?

¹²I do not have the strength of stone;
my flesh is not bronze.

¹³I have no power to help myself,
because success has been taken away from me.

¹⁴“They say, ‘A man’s friends should be kind to him
when he is in trouble,
even if he stops fearing the Almighty.’

¹⁵But my brothers cannot be counted on.
They are like streams that do not always flow,
streams that sometimes run over.

¹⁶They are made dark by melting ice
and rise with melting snow.

¹⁷But they stop flowing in the dry season;
they disappear when it is hot.

¹⁸Travelers turn away from their paths
and go into the desert and die.

¹⁹The groups of travelers from Tema look for water,
and the traders of Sheba look hopefully.

²⁰They are upset because they had been sure;
when they arrive, they are disappointed.

²¹You also have been no help.
You see something terrible, and you are afraid.

²²I have never said, ‘Give me a gift.
Use your wealth to pay my debt.

²³Save me from the enemy’s power.
Buy me back from the clutches of cruel people.’

²⁴“Teach me, and I will be quiet.

Show me where I have been wrong.

²⁵Honest words are painful,
but your arguments prove nothing.

²⁶Do you mean to correct what I say?

Will you treat the words of a troubled man as if they
were only wind?

²⁷You would even gamble for orphans
and would trade away your friend.

²⁸“But now please look at me.
I would not lie to your face.

²⁹Change your mind; do not be unfair;
think again, because my innocence is being
questioned.

³⁰What I am saying is not wicked;
I can tell the difference between right and wrong.

“People have a hard task on earth,
and their days are like those of a laborer.

²They are like a slave wishing for the evening
shadows,

like a laborer waiting to be paid.

³But I am given months that are empty,
and nights of misery have been given to me.

⁴When I lie down, I think, ‘How long until I get up?’
The night is long, and I toss until dawn.

⁵My body is covered with worms and scabs,
and my skin is broken and full of sores.

⁶“My days go by faster than a weaver’s tool,
and they come to an end without hope.

⁷Remember, God, that my life is only a breath.
My eyes will never see happy times again.

⁸Those who see me now will see me no more;
you will look for me, but I will be gone.

⁹As a cloud disappears and is gone,
people go to the grave and never return.

¹⁰They will never come back to their houses again,
and their places will not know them anymore.

¹¹“So I will not stay quiet;
I will speak out in the suffering of my spirit.
I will complain because I am so unhappy.

¹²I am not the sea or the sea monster.
So why have you set a guard over me?

¹³Sometimes I think my bed will comfort me
or that my couch will stop my complaint.

¹⁴Then you frighten me with dreams
and terrify me with visions.

¹⁵My throat prefers to be choked;
my bones welcome death.

¹⁶I hate my life; I don't want to live forever.
Leave me alone, because my days have no meaning.

¹⁷“Why do you make people so important
and give them so much attention?

¹⁸You examine them every morning
and test them every moment.

¹⁹Will you never look away from me
or leave me alone even long enough to swallow?

²⁰If I have sinned, what have I done to you,
you watcher of humans?

Why have you made me your target?
Have I become a heavy load for you?

²¹Why don't you pardon my wrongs
and forgive my sins?

I will soon lie down in the dust of death.
Then you will search for me, but I will be no more.”

Bildad Speaks to Job

Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:

²“How long will you say such things?

Your words are no more than wind.

³God does not twist justice;

the Almighty does not make wrong what is right.

⁴Your children sinned against God,

and he punished them for their sins.

⁵But you should ask God for help

and pray to the Almighty for mercy.

⁶If you are good and honest,

he will stand up for you

and bring you back where you belong.

⁷Where you began will seem unimportant,

because your future will be so successful.

⁸“Ask old people;

find out what their ancestors learned,

⁹because we were only born yesterday and know nothing.

Our days on earth are only a shadow.

¹⁰Those people will teach you and tell you

and speak about what they know.

¹¹Papyrus plants cannot grow where there is no swamp,

and reeds cannot grow tall without water.

¹²While they are still growing and not yet cut,

they will dry up quicker than grass.

¹³That is what will happen to those who forget God;
the hope of the wicked will be gone.

¹⁴What they hope in is easily broken;
what they trust is like a spider's web.

¹⁵They lean on the spider's web, but it breaks.
They grab it, but it does not hold up.

¹⁶They are like well-watered plants in the sunshine
that spread their roots all through the garden.

¹⁷They wrap their roots around a pile of rocks
and look for a place among the stones.

¹⁸But if a plant is torn from its place,
then that place rejects it and says, 'I never saw you.'

¹⁹Now joy has gone away;
other plants grow up from the same dirt.

²⁰“Surely God does not reject the innocent
or give strength to those who do evil.

²¹God will yet fill your mouth with laughter
and your lips with shouts of joy.

²²Your enemies will be covered with shame,
and the tents of the wicked will be gone.”

Life Lessons

Job 8:1–10:22

Situation

Bildad told Job that his children had died because they sinned against God. Bildad believed that if Job repented, God would restore his wealth.

Observation

Bildad's ignorance proved that not all advice is worth heeding. Be careful to choose counselors who can listen as well as advise.

Inspiration

Some time ago Denalyn [my wife] was gone for a couple of days and left me alone with the girls. Though the time was not without the typical children's quarrels and occasional misbehavior, it went fine.

"How were the girls?" Denalyn asked when she got home.

"Good. No problem at all."

Jenna overheard my response. "We weren't good, Daddy," she objected. "We fought once, we didn't do what you said once. We weren't good. How can you say we were good?"

Jenna and I had different perceptions of what pleases a father. She thought it depended upon what she did. It didn't. We think the same about God. We think his love rises and falls with our performance. It doesn't. I don't love Jenna for what she does. I love her for whose she is. She is mine.

God loves you for the same reason. He loves you for whose you are, you are his child. It was this love that pursued the Israelites. It was this love that sent the prophets. It was this love which wrapped itself in human flesh and descended the birth canal of Mary. It was this love which walked the hard trails of Galilee and spoke to the hard hearts of the religious.

"This is not normal, Lord God," David exclaimed

as he considered God's love. You are right, David. God's love is not normal love. It's not normal to love a murderer and adulterer, but God did when he loved David. It isn't normal to love a man who takes his eyes off you, but such was God's love for Solomon. It isn't normal to love people who love stone idols more than they love you, but God did when he refused to give up on Israel. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you wonder if God really cares? Do you feel like he has left you to face your problems alone? Trust God to work in your life day by day. Let God be your source of security.

Exploration

God's Faithfulness—[2 Kings 13:23](#); [Isaiah 42:16](#); [Hosea 2:19](#).

Job Answers Bildad

Then Job answered:

²“Yes, I know that this is true,
but how can anyone be right in the presence of God?

³Someone might want to argue with God,
but no one could answer God,
not one time out of a thousand.

⁴God’s wisdom is deep, and his power is great;
no one can fight him without getting hurt.

⁵God moves mountains without anyone knowing it
and turns them over when he is angry.

⁶He shakes the earth out of its place
and makes its foundations tremble.

⁷He commands the sun not to shine
and shuts off the light of the stars.

⁸He alone stretches out the skies
and walks on the waves of the sea.

⁹It is God who made the [Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades](#)
and the groups of stars in the southern sky.

¹⁰He does wonders that cannot be understood;
he does so many miracles they cannot be counted.

¹¹When he passes me, I cannot see him;
when he goes by me, I do not recognize him.

¹²If he snatches something away, no one can stop him
or say to him, ‘What are you doing?’

¹³God will not hold back his anger.

Even the helpers of the monster Rahab lie at his feet in fear.

¹⁴So how can I argue with God,
or even find words to argue with him?

¹⁵Even if I were right, I could not answer him;
I could only beg God, my Judge, for mercy.

¹⁶If I called to him and he answered,
I still don't believe he would listen to me.

¹⁷He would crush me with a storm
and multiply my wounds for no reason.

¹⁸He would not let me catch my breath
but would overwhelm me with misery.

¹⁹When it comes to strength, God is stronger than I;
when it comes to justice, no one can accuse him.

²⁰Even if I were right, my own mouth would say I was
wrong;

if I were innocent, my mouth would say I was guilty.

²¹“I am innocent,
but I don't care about myself.
I hate my own life.

²²It is all the same. That is why I say,
'God destroys both the innocent and the guilty.'

²³If the whip brings sudden death,
God will laugh at the suffering of the innocent.

Christ Through the Bible
Jesus: Mediator Between God and Men
No one but the high priest entered the Holy of

Holies. No one. To do so meant death. Two of Aaron's sons died when they entered the Holy of Holies in order to offer sacrifices to the Lord ([Leviticus 16:1-2](#)). In no uncertain terms, the curtain declared: "This far and no farther!"

What did fifteen hundred years of a curtain-draped Holy of Holies communicate? Simple. God is holy ... separate from us and unapproachable. Even Moses was told, "You cannot see my face, because no one can see me and live" ([Exodus 33:20](#)). God is holy, and we are sinners, and there is a distance between us.

Isn't this our problem? We know God is good. We know we are not, and we feel far from God. The ancient words of Job are ours, "I wish there were someone to make peace between us" ([Job 9:33](#)).

Oh, but there is! Jesus hasn't left us with an unapproachable God. Yes, God is holy. Yes, we are sinful. But, yes, yes, yes, Jesus is our mediator... Is not a mediator one who "goes between"? Wasn't Jesus the curtain between us and God? And wasn't his flesh torn?

What appeared to be the cruelty of man was actually the sovereignty of God....

We are welcome to enter into God's presence—any day, any time. God has removed the barrier that separates us from him. The barrier of sin? Down. He has removed the curtain. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

²⁴When the land falls into the hands of evil people,
he covers the judges' faces so they can't see it.
If it is not God who does this, then who is it?

²⁵“My days go by faster than a runner;
they fly away without my seeing any joy.

²⁶They glide past like paper boats.

They attack like eagles swooping down to feed.

²⁷Even though I say, ‘I will forget my complaint;
I will change the look on my face and smile,’

²⁸I still dread all my suffering.

I know you will hold me guilty.

²⁹I have already been found guilty,
so why should I struggle for no reason?

³⁰I might wash myself with soap
and scrub my hands with strong soap,

³¹but you would push me into a dirty pit,
and even my clothes would hate me.

³²“God is not a man like me, so I cannot answer him.
We cannot meet each other in court.

³³I wish there were someone to make peace between
us,

someone to decide our case.

³⁴Maybe he could remove God's punishment
so his terror would no longer frighten me.

³⁵Then I could speak without being afraid,
but I am not able to do that.

"I hate my life,
so I will complain without holding back;
I will speak because I am so unhappy.
²I will say to God: Do not hold me guilty,
but tell me what you have against me.
³Does it make you happy to trouble me?
Don't you care about me, the work of your hands?
Are you happy with the plans of evil people?
⁴Do you have human eyes
that see as we see?
⁵Are your days like the days of humans,
and your years like our years?
⁶You look for the evil I have done
and search for my sin.
⁷You know I am not guilty,
but no one can save me from your power.
⁸"Your hands shaped and made me.
Do you now turn around and destroy me?
⁹Remember that you molded me like a piece of clay.
Will you now turn me back into dust?
¹⁰You formed me inside my mother
like cheese formed from milk.
¹¹You dressed me with skin and flesh;
you sewed me together with bones and muscles.
¹²You gave me life and showed me kindness,
and in your care you watched over my life.

¹³"But in your heart you hid other plans.
I know this was in your mind.
¹⁴If I sinned, you would watch me

and would not let my sin go unpunished.

¹⁵How terrible it will be for me if I am guilty!

Even if I am right, I cannot lift my head.

I am full of shame

and experience only pain.

¹⁶If I hold up my head, you hunt me like a lion

and again show your terrible power against me.

¹⁷You bring new witnesses against me

and increase your anger against me.

Your armies come against me.

¹⁸“So why did you allow me to be born?

I wish I had died before anyone saw me.

¹⁹I wish I had never lived,

but had been carried straight from birth to the grave.

²⁰The few days of my life are almost over.

Leave me alone so I can have a moment of joy.

²¹Soon I will leave; I will not return

from the land of darkness and gloom,

²²the land of darkest night,

from the land of gloom and confusion,

where even the light is darkness.”

Life Lessons

Job 11:1–14:22

Situation

Unsympathetic, Zophar tried to convince Job that his troubles stemmed from a hidden sin. Zophar believed that God was punishing Job for this sin.

Observation

No one can claim complete understanding of God's ways.

Inspiration

Once there was an old man who lived in a tiny village. Although poor, he was envied by all, for he owned a beautiful white horse. Even the king coveted his treasure. A horse like this had never been seen before—such was its splendor, its majesty, its strength.

People offered fabulous prices for the steed, but the old man always refused. “This horse is not a horse to me,” he would tell them. “It is a person. How could you sell a person? He is a friend, not a possession. How could you sell a friend?” The man was poor and the temptation was great. But he never sold the horse.

One morning he found that the horse was not in the stable. All the village came to see him. “You old fool,” they scoffed, “we told you that someone would steal your horse. We warned you that you would be robbed. You are so poor. How could you ever hope to protect such a valuable animal? It would have been

better to have sold him. You could have gotten whatever price you wanted. No amount would have been too high. Now the horse is gone, and you've been cursed with misfortune."

The old man responded, "Don't speak too quickly. Say only that the horse is not in the stable. That is all we know; the rest is judgment. If I've been cursed or not, how can you know? How can you judge?"

The people contested, "Don't make us out to be fools! We may not be philosophers, but great philosophy is not needed. The simple fact that your horse is gone is a curse."

The old man spoke again. "All I know is that the stable is empty, and the horse is gone. The rest I don't know. Whether it be a curse or a blessing, I can't say. All we can see is a fragment. Who can say what will come next?"

The people of the village laughed. They thought that the man was crazy. They had always thought he was a fool; if he wasn't, he would have sold the horse and lived off the money. But instead, he was a poor woodcutter, an old man still cutting firewood and dragging it out of the forest and selling it. He lived hand to mouth in the misery of poverty. Now he had proven that he was, indeed, a fool.

After fifteen days, the horse returned. He hadn't been stolen; he had run away into the forest. Not only had he returned, he had brought a dozen wild horses with him. Once again the village people gathered around the woodcutter and spoke. "Old

man, you were right and we were wrong. What we thought was a curse was a blessing. Please forgive us.”

The man responded, “Once again, you go too far. Say only that the horse is back. State only that a dozen horses returned with him, but don’t judge. How do you know if this is a blessing or not? You see only a fragment. Unless you know the whole story, how can you judge? You read only one page of a book. Can you judge the whole book? You read only one word of a phrase. Can you understand the entire phrase?”

“Life is so vast, yet you judge all of life with one page or one word. All you have is a fragment! Don’t say that this is a blessing. No one knows. I am content with what I know. I am not perturbed by what I don’t.”

“Maybe the old man is right,” they said to one another. So they said little. But down deep, they knew he was wrong. They knew it was a blessing. Twelve wild horses had returned with one horse. With a little bit of work, the animals could be broken and trained and sold for much money.

The old man had a son, an only son. The young man began to break the wild horses. After a few days, he fell from one of the horses and broke both legs. Once again the villagers gathered around the old man and cast their judgments.

“You were right,” they said. “You proved you were right. The dozen horses were not a blessing. They were a curse. Your only son has broken his

legs, and now in your old age you have no one to help you. Now you are poorer than ever.”

The old man spoke again. “You people are obsessed with judging. Don’t go so far. Say only that my son broke his legs. Who knows if it is a blessing or a curse? No one knows. We only have a fragment. Life comes in fragments.”

It so happened that a few weeks later the country engaged in war against a neighboring country. All the young men of the village were required to join the army. Only the son of the old man was excluded, because he was injured. Once again the people gathered around the old man, crying and screaming because their sons had been taken. There was little chance that they would return. The enemy was strong, and the war would be a losing struggle. They would never see their sons again.

“You were right, old man,” they wept. “God knows you were right. This proves it. Your son’s accident was a blessing. His legs may be broken, but at least he is with you. Our sons are gone forever.”

The old man spoke again. “It is impossible to talk with you. You always draw conclusions. No one knows. Say only this. Your sons had to go to war, and mine did not. No one knows if it is a blessing or a curse. No one is wise enough to know. Only God knows.” (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

When someone else suffers, ask God for wisdom to be an instrument of healing. Remember that no

matter what you feel, God is always good!

Exploration

God Is Incomprehensible—[Deuteronomy 29:29](#); [Proverbs 25:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:11](#); [Isaiah 40:12–14](#); [55:8–9](#); [1 Corinthians 2:16](#). God Is Compassionate—[Exodus 22:27](#); [34:6](#); [Psalm 65:3](#); [78:38](#); [103:3](#); [106:1](#).

Zophar Speaks to Job

Then Zophar the Naamathite answered:

²“Should these words go unanswered?
Is this talker in the right?

³Your lies do not make people quiet;
people should correct you when you make fun of God.

⁴You say, ‘My teachings are right,
and I am clean in God’s sight.’

⁵I wish God would speak
and open his lips against you

⁶and tell you the secrets of wisdom,
because wisdom has two sides.

Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin.

⁷“Can you understand the secrets of God?
Can you search the limits of the Almighty?

⁸His limits are higher than the heavens; you cannot
reach them!

They are deeper than the grave; you cannot
understand them!

⁹His limits are longer than the earth
and wider than the sea.

¹⁰“If God comes along and puts you in prison

or calls you into court, no one can stop him.

¹¹God knows who is evil,
and when he sees evil, he takes note of it.

¹²A fool cannot become wise
any more than a wild donkey can be born tame.

¹³“You must give your whole heart to him
and hold out your hands to him for help.

¹⁴Put away the sin that is in your hand;
let no evil remain in your tent.

¹⁵Then you can lift up your face without shame,
and you can stand strong without fear.

¹⁶You will forget your trouble
and remember it only as water gone by.

¹⁷Your life will be as bright as the noonday sun,
and darkness will seem like morning.

¹⁸You will feel safe because there is hope;
you will look around and rest in safety.

¹⁹You will lie down, and no one will scare you.
Many people will want favors from you.

²⁰But the wicked will not be able to see,
so they will not escape.

Their only hope will be to die.”

Job Answers Zophar

Then Job answered:

²“You really think you are the only wise people
and that when you die, wisdom will die with you!

³But my mind is as good as yours;
you are not better than I am.
Everyone knows all these things.

⁴My friends all laugh at me
when I call on God and expect him to answer me;
they laugh at me even though I am right and innocent!

⁵Those who are comfortable don't care that others
have trouble;
they think it right that those people should have
troubles.

⁶The tents of robbers are not bothered,
and those who make God angry are safe.
They have their god in their pocket.

⁷“But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
or ask the birds of the air, and they will tell you.

⁸Speak to the earth, and it will teach you,
or let the fish of the sea tell you.

⁹Every one of these knows
that the hand of the Lord has done this.

¹⁰The life of every creature
and the breath of all people are in God's hand.

¹¹The ear tests words
as the tongue tastes food.

¹²Older people are wise,
and long life brings understanding.

¹³“But only God has wisdom and power,
good advice and understanding.

¹⁴What he tears down cannot be rebuilt;
anyone he puts in prison cannot be let out.

¹⁵If God holds back the waters, there is no rain;
if he lets the waters go, they flood the land.

¹⁶He is strong and victorious;
both the one who fools others and the one who is
fooled belong to him.

¹⁷God leads the wise away as captives
and turns judges into fools.

¹⁸He takes off chains that kings put on
and puts a garment on their bodies.

¹⁹He leads priests away naked
and destroys the powerful.

²⁰He makes trusted people be silent
and takes away the wisdom of older leaders.

²¹He brings disgrace on important people
and takes away the weapons of the strong.

²²He uncovers the deep things of darkness
and brings dark shadows into the light.

²³He makes nations great and then destroys them;
he makes nations large and then scatters them.

²⁴He takes understanding away from the leaders of the
earth

and makes them wander through a pathless desert.

²⁵They feel around in darkness with no light;

he makes them stumble like drunks.

“Now my eyes have seen all this;
my ears have heard and understood it.

²What you know, I also know.

You are not better than I am.

³But I want to speak to the Almighty
and to argue my case with God.

⁴But you smear me with lies.

You are worthless doctors, all of you!

⁵I wish you would just stop talking;
then you would really be wise!

⁶Listen to my argument,
and hear the pleading of my lips.

⁷You should not speak evil in the name of God;
you cannot speak God’s truth by telling lies.

⁸You should not unfairly choose his side against mine;
you should not argue the case for God.

⁹You will not do well if he examines you;
you cannot fool God as you might fool humans.

¹⁰God would surely scold you
if you unfairly took one person’s side.

¹¹His bright glory would scare you,
and you would be very much afraid of him.

¹²Your wise sayings are worth no more than ashes,
and your arguments are as weak as clay.

¹³“Be quiet and let me speak.

Let things happen to me as they will.

¹⁴Why should I put myself in danger
and take my life in my own hands?

¹⁵Even if God kills me, I have hope in him;

I will still defend my ways to his face.

¹⁶This is my salvation.

The wicked cannot come before him.

¹⁷Listen carefully to my words;
let your ears hear what I say.

¹⁸See, I have prepared my case,
and I know I will be proved right.

¹⁹No one can accuse me of doing wrong.
If someone can, I will be quiet and die.

²⁰“God, please just give me these two things,
and then I will not hide from you:

²¹Take your punishment away from me,
and stop frightening me with your terrors.

²²Then call me, and I will answer,
or let me speak, and you answer.

²³How many evil things and sins have I done?
Show me my wrong and my sin.

²⁴Don’t hide your face from me;
don’t think of me as your enemy.

²⁵Don’t punish a leaf that is blown by the wind;
don’t chase after straw.

²⁶You write down cruel things against me
and make me suffer for my boyhood sins.

²⁷You put my feet in chains
and keep close watch wherever I go.
You even mark the soles of my feet.

“Everyone wears out like something rotten,
like clothing eaten by moths.

¹³“I wish you would hide me in the grave;
hide me until your anger is gone.

I wish you would set a time
and then remember me!

¹⁴If a person dies, will he live again?

All my days are a struggle;

I will wait until my change comes.

¹⁵You will call, and I will answer you;

you will desire the creature your hands have made.

¹⁶Then you will count my steps,

but you will not keep track of my sin.

¹⁷My wrongs will be closed up in a bag,

and you will cover up my sin.

¹⁸“A mountain washes away and crumbles;

and a rock can be moved from its place.

¹⁹Water washes over stones and wears them down,

and rushing waters wash away the dirt.

In the same way, you destroy my hope.

²⁰You defeat a person forever, and he is gone;

you change his appearance and send him away.

²¹His sons are honored, but he does not know it;

his sons are disgraced, but he does not see it.

²²He only feels the pain of his body

and feels sorry for himself.”

Life Lessons

Job 15:1–17:16

Situation

Job's four friends gave their opinions concerning the reason for his troubles. Eliphaz argued that suffering resulted from sin. Job answered, hurt and grieved by his friend's harsh words.

Observation

Suffering is never easy to understand. Because he assumed that suffering resulted from sin, Eliphaz could not comfort his friend.

Inspiration

Some people see sin in every sickness. They make their friends miserable by probing for hidden sins whenever suffering enters their lives. Although there may be truth in their questioning, it also could be a cruel response to another's time of pain. They are like Job's so-called friends who pointed out all of his wrongs. Job called them "miserable comforters." ...

It is unkind to attribute every accident, every illness and sorrow to God's punishment for wrong behavior. It is appalling how many Christians approach suffering friends with that principle. They visit first with words of comfort, and then leave a load of guilt behind ("What could you have done to deserve this?") or pious advice ("Perhaps you need to pray harder").

Suffering people can be tormented with questions of guilt; however, if all suffering is punishment for

sin, then God's signals must be mixed, for accidents occur at random and disease strikes without any relationship to a person's moral or immoral lifestyle.

God's teaching does not attribute all suffering to sin or punishment for human mistakes. I have no right to tell a suffering person that it is because he sinned that his child died, or that he has cancer, or that his house burned.

In [John 9](#), the followers of Jesus pointed to a man born blind and asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Jesus told them that neither the man nor his parents sinned, "But this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." The disciples wanted to look back, to probe into the behavior of the blind man or his parents, but Jesus pointed them to the future and the hope that even suffering can be used to glorify God. (From *Hope for the Troubled Heart* by Billy Graham)

Application

Who among your friends, family, or coworkers needs comforting? Call, write a note, or pay a visit to let that person know you care.

Exploration

Suffering—[John 9:2-3](#); [Romans 8:18](#); [Philippians 1:29](#); [Hebrews 2:18](#); [1 Peter 5:10](#).

Eliphaz Answers Job

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered:

²“A wise person would not answer with empty words
or fill his stomach with the hot east wind.

³He would not argue with useless words
or make speeches that have no value.

⁴But you even destroy respect for God
and limit the worship of him.

⁵Your sin teaches your mouth what to say;
you use words to trick others.

⁶It is your own mouth, not mine, that shows you are
wicked;
your own lips testify against you.

⁷“You are not the first man ever born;
you are not older than the hills.

⁸You did not listen in on God’s secret council.
But you limit wisdom to yourself.

⁹You don’t know any more than we know.
You don’t understand any more than we understand.

¹⁰Old people with gray hair are on our side;
they are even older than your father.

¹¹Is the comfort God gives you not enough for you,
even when words are spoken gently to you?

¹²Has your heart carried you away from God?
Why do your eyes flash with anger?
¹³Why do you speak out your anger against God?
Why do these words pour out of your mouth?

¹⁴“How can anyone be pure?
How can someone born to a woman be good?
¹⁵God places no trust in his holy ones,
and even the heavens are not pure in his eyes.
¹⁶How much less pure is one who is terrible and rotten
and drinks up evil as if it were water!

¹⁷“Listen to me, and I will tell you about it;
I will tell you what I have seen.

¹⁸These are things wise men have told;
their fathers told them, and they have hidden nothing.
¹⁹(The land was given to their fathers only,
and no foreigner lived among them.)

²⁰The wicked suffer pain all their lives;
the cruel suffer during all the years saved up for them.

²¹Terrible sounds fill their ears,
and when things seem to be going well, robbers attack
them.

²²Evil people give up trying to escape from the
darkness;
it has been decided that they will die by the sword.

²³They wander around and will become food for
vultures.

They know darkness will soon come.

²⁴Worry and suffering terrify them;

they overwhelm them, like a king ready to attack,
²⁵because they shake their fists at God
and try to get their own way against the Almighty.
²⁶They stubbornly charge at God
with thick, strong shields.

²⁷“Although the faces of the wicked are thick with fat,
and their bellies are fat with flesh,
²⁸they will live in towns that are ruined,
in houses where no one lives,
which are crumbling into ruins.

²⁹The wicked will no longer get rich,
and the riches they have will not last;
the things they own will no longer spread over the
land.

³⁰They will not escape the darkness.
A flame will dry up their branches;
God’s breath will carry the wicked away.

³¹The wicked should not fool themselves by trusting
what is useless.

If they do, they will get nothing in return.

³²Their branches will dry up before they finish growing
and will never turn green.

³³They will be like a vine whose grapes are pulled off
before they are ripe,
like an olive tree that loses its blossoms.

³⁴People without God can produce nothing.

Fire will destroy the tents of those who take money to
do evil,

³⁵who plan trouble and give birth to evil,

whose hearts plan ways to trick others.”

Job Answers Eliphaz

Then Job answered:

²“I have heard many things like these.

You are all painful comforters!

³Will your long-winded speeches never end?

What makes you keep on arguing?

⁴I also could speak as you do

if you were in my place.

I could make great speeches against you

and shake my head at you.

⁵But, instead, I would encourage you,

and my words would bring you relief.

⁶“Even if I speak, my pain is not less,

and if I don’t speak, it still does not go away.

⁷God, you have surely taken away my strength

and destroyed my whole family.

⁸You have made me thin and weak,

and this shows I have done wrong.

⁹God attacks me and tears me with anger;

he grinds his teeth at me;

my enemy stares at me with his angry eyes.

¹⁰People open their mouths to make fun of me

and hit my cheeks to insult me.

They join together against me.

¹¹God has turned me over to evil people

and has handed me over to the wicked.

¹²Everything was fine with me,
but God broke me into pieces;
he held me by the neck and crushed me.

He has made me his target;

¹³his archers surround me.

He stabs my kidneys without mercy;
he spills my blood on the ground.

¹⁴Again and again God attacks me;
he runs at me like a soldier.

¹⁵“I have sewed rough cloth over my skin to show my
sadness

and have buried my face in the dust.

¹⁶My face is red from crying;

I have dark circles around my eyes.

¹⁷Yet my hands have never done anything cruel,
and my prayer is pure.

¹⁸“Earth, please do not cover up my blood.
Don’t let my cry ever stop being heard!

¹⁹Even now I have one who speaks for me in heaven;
the one who is on my side is high above.

²⁰The one who speaks for me is my friend.
My eyes pour out tears to God.

²¹He begs God on behalf of a human
as a person begs for his friend.

²²“Only a few years will pass
before I go on the journey of no return.

My spirit is broken;
the days of my life are almost gone.
The grave is waiting for me.

²Those who laugh at me surround me;
I watch them insult me.

³“God, make me a promise.
No one will make a pledge for me.

⁴You have closed their minds to understanding.
Do not let them win over me.

⁵A person might speak against his friends for money,
but if he does, the eyes of his children go blind.

⁶“God has made my name a curse word;
people spit in my face.

⁷My sight has grown weak because of my sadness,
and my body is as thin as a shadow.

⁸Honest people are upset about this;
innocent people are upset with those who do wrong.

⁹But those who do right will continue to do right,
and those whose hands are not dirty with sin will grow
stronger.

¹⁰“But, all of you, come and try again!
I do not find a wise person among you.

¹¹My days are gone, and my plans have been
destroyed,
along with the desires of my heart.

¹²These men think night is day;
when it is dark, they say, ‘Light is near.’

¹³If the only home I hope for is the grave,

if I spread out my bed in darkness,
¹⁴if I say to the grave, 'You are my father,'
and to the worm, 'You are my mother' or 'You are my
sister,'

¹⁵where, then, is my hope?

Who can see any hope for me?

¹⁶Will hope go down to the gates of death?

Will we go down together into the dust?"

Bildad Answers Job

Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:

²“When will you stop these speeches?

Be sensible, and then we can talk.

³You think of us as cattle,

as if we are stupid.

⁴You tear yourself to pieces in your anger.

Should the earth be vacant just for you?

Should the rocks move from their places?

⁵“The lamp of the wicked will be put out,
and the flame in their lamps will stop burning.

⁶The light in their tents will grow dark,
and the lamps by their sides will go out.

⁷Their strong steps will grow weak;
they will fall into their own evil traps.

⁸Their feet will be caught in a net
when they walk into its web.

⁹A trap will catch them by the heel
and hold them tight.

¹⁰A trap for them is hidden on the ground,
right in their path.

¹¹Terrible things startle them from every side
and chase them at every step.

¹²Hunger takes away their strength,
and disaster is at their side.

¹³Disease eats away parts of their skin;

death gnaws at their arms and legs.

¹⁴They are torn from the safety of their tents
and dragged off to Death, the King of Terrors.

¹⁵Their tents are set on fire,
and sulfur is scattered over their homes.

¹⁶Their roots dry up below ground,
and their branches die above ground.

¹⁷People on earth will not remember them;
their names will be forgotten in the land.

¹⁸They will be driven from light into darkness
and chased out of the world.

¹⁹They have no children or descendants among their
people,

and no one will be left alive where they once lived.

²⁰People of the west will be shocked at what has
happened to them,

and people of the east will be very frightened.

²¹Surely this is what will happen to the wicked;
such is the place of one who does not know God.”

Life Lessons

Job 18:1–19:29

Situation

Because Job rejected his advice, Bildad grew frustrated. In an effort to convince Job, he told of the horrible fate of sinners. Job firmly believed that in the end God would vindicate him because of his innocence.

Observation

Job listened to Bildad, even though he knew Bildad was incorrect. Only when Bildad was finished speaking did Job answer.

Inspiration

Let me introduce you to several kinds of people who express various forms of destructive criticism. First are the blamers. They avoid accepting responsibility for their actions by criticizing other people or blaming past experiences which cannot be changed or undone....

Another negative critic is the hurtful joker. Humor is a positive method of relating to others... . But hurtful jokers make others the butt of their humor. They specialize in laughing at people instead of laughing with them....

A third kind of critic is the fault-finder. This person seems to have an insatiable need to point out others' defects... . And do you know what is so maddening about this person? He usually does what he does with a smile, saying, "I'm just trying to be helpful." ...

Another kind of critic at large in the world today is the cannibal. These people don't criticize in a joking manner or settle for mere nitpicking. They go for the jugular... . They attack through the most severe forms of personal criticism and put downs with complete disregard for the feelings of others....

Destructive critics may say they are only interested in remodeling you into a better person by sharing a little constructive criticism. But in reality,

[these] critics ... are intent on putting you down, tearing you down, punishing you, and manipulating you. Their brand of criticism does not nourish; it poisons....

When you are the target of another person's destructive criticism, the natural response is to become defensive. But in reality, the least effective way to respond to criticism is to defend yourself, make excuses, or counterattack....

Remind yourself that you are responsible to answer to God and to yourself, not to the critical person. Being responsible to God, you look to Him for direction and approval. Being responsible to yourself, you take ownership of your feelings, attitudes, and behavior. If you are aligned with God and with what He wants you to be, you don't need to fear criticism or try to justify your position. You have the power to make your own choices and grow through the experience of criticism.

As a nondefensive person, you respect and feel good about yourself. You believe in your worth and your capabilities. You possess your own identity and sense of security. Being nondefensive, you can listen to others more objectively and evaluate better what they are saying, even when they express themselves in a negative manner. You can accept the critical person for who he is, even if you don't agree with him. You can accept his right to see the world as he sees it, whether or not it coincides with your view. You're able to relate to him without making disparaging comments or negative judgments about

him. (From *How to Get Along with Almost Anyone* by H. Norman Wright)

Application

What is your first response to criticism? Are you thin-skinned, touchy, or sensitive? Ask God to help you listen with interest. Take the criticism, evaluate it, and apply what will be helpful.

Exploration

Criticism—[Job 6:24](#); [19:3–5](#); [Proverbs 10:17](#); [27:6](#).

Job Answers Bildad

Then Job answered:

²“How long will you hurt me
and crush me with your words?

³You have insulted me ten times now
and attacked me without shame.

⁴Even if I have sinned,
it is my worry alone.

⁵If you want to make yourselves look better than I,
you can blame me for my suffering.

⁶Then know that God has wronged me
and pulled his net around me.

⁷“I shout, ‘I have been wronged!’

But I get no answer.

I scream for help

but I get no justice.

⁸God has blocked my way so I cannot pass;
he has covered my paths with darkness.

⁹He has taken away my honor
and removed the crown from my head.

¹⁰He beats me down on every side until I am gone;
he destroys my hope like a fallen tree.

¹¹His anger burns against me,
and he treats me like an enemy.

¹²His armies gather;
they prepare to attack me.

They camp around my tent.

¹³“God has made my brothers my enemies,
and my friends have become strangers.

¹⁴My relatives have gone away,
and my friends have forgotten me.

¹⁵My guests and my female servants treat me like a
stranger;

they look at me as if I were a foreigner.

¹⁶I call for my servant, but he does not answer,
even when I beg him with my own mouth.

¹⁷My wife can't stand my breath,
and my own family dislikes me.

¹⁸Even the little boys hate me
and talk about me when I leave.

¹⁹All my close friends hate me;
even those I love have turned against me.

²⁰I am nothing but skin and bones;
I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.

²¹Pity me, my friends, pity me,
because the hand of God has hit me.

²²Why do you chase me as God does?
Haven't you hurt me enough?

²³“How I wish my words were written down,
written on a scroll.

²⁴I wish they were carved with an iron pen into lead,
or carved into stone forever.

²⁵I know that my Defender lives,
and in the end he will stand upon the earth.

²⁶Even after my skin has been destroyed,
in my flesh I will see God.

²⁷I will see him myself;
I will see him with my very own eyes.
How my heart wants that to happen!

²⁸“If you say, ‘We will continue to trouble Job,
because the problem lies with him,’

²⁹you should be afraid of the sword yourselves.
God’s anger will bring punishment by the sword.
Then you will know there is judgment.”

Zophar Answers

Then Zophar the Naamathite answered:

²“My troubled thoughts cause me to answer,
because I am very upset.

³You correct me and I am insulted,
but I understand how to answer you.

⁴“You know how it has been for a long time,
ever since people were first put on the earth.

⁵The happiness of evil people is brief,
and the joy of the wicked lasts only a moment.

⁶Their pride may be as high as the heavens,
and their heads may touch the clouds,

⁷but they will be gone forever, like their own dung.
People who knew them will say, ‘Where are they?’

⁸They will fly away like a dream
and not be found again;
they will be chased away like a vision in the night.

⁹Those who saw them will not see them again;
the places where they lived will see them no more.

¹⁰Their children will have to pay back the poor,
and they will have to give up their wealth.

¹¹They had the strength of their youth in their bones,
but it will lie with them in the dust of death.

¹²“Evil may taste sweet in their mouths,
and they may hide it under their tongues.

¹³They cannot stand to let go of it;
they keep it in their mouths.

¹⁴But their food will turn sour in their stomachs,
like the poison of a snake inside them.

¹⁵They have swallowed riches, but they will spit them
out;

God will make them vomit their riches up.

¹⁶They will suck the poison of snakes,
and the snake's fangs will kill them.

¹⁷They will not admire the sparkling streams
or the rivers flowing with honey and cream.

¹⁸They must give back what they worked for without
eating it;

they will not enjoy the money they made from their
trading,

¹⁹because they troubled the poor and left them with
nothing.

They have taken houses they did not build.

²⁰“Evil people never lack an appetite,
and nothing escapes their selfishness.

²¹But nothing will be left for them to eat;
their riches will not continue.

²²When they still have plenty, trouble will catch up to
them,

and great misery will come down on them.

²³When the wicked fill their stomachs,
God will send his burning anger against them,
and blows of punishment will fall on them like rain.

²⁴The wicked may run away from an iron weapon,

but a bronze arrow will stab them.

²⁵They will pull the arrows out of their backs
and pull the points out of their livers.

Terrors will come over them;

²⁶total darkness waits for their treasure.

A fire not fanned by people will destroy them
and burn up what is left of their tents.

²⁷The heavens will show their guilt,
and the earth will rise up against them.

²⁸A flood will carry their houses away,
swept away on the day of God's anger.

²⁹This is what God plans for evil people;
this is what he has decided they will receive.”

Life Lessons

Job 20:1–21:34

Situation

Zophar joined Bildad in telling about the fate of the wicked. He assumed Job was a hypocrite.

Observation

God may allow one person to live in prosperity and health and another to die unhappy and with a bitter heart. In death, however, both are alike. We can't guess their character based on their wealth or health.

Inspiration

The key to forgiving others is to quit focusing on what they did to you and start focusing on what God did for you.

But, Max, that's not fair! Somebody has to pay for what he did.

I agree. Someone must pay, and Someone already has.

You don't understand, Max, this guy doesn't deserve grace. He doesn't deserve mercy. He's not worthy of forgiveness.

I'm not saying he is. But are you?

Besides, what other choice do you have? Hatred? The alternative is not appealing. Look what happens when we refuse to forgive, "The master was very angry and put the servant in prison to be punished until he could pay everything he owed" ([Matthew 18:34](#)).

Unforgiving servants always end up in prison. Prisons of anger, guilt, and depression. God doesn't have to put us in a jail; we create our own....

Oh, the gradual grasp of hatred. Its damage begins like the crack in my windshield. Thanks to a speeding truck on a gravel road, my window was chipped. With time the nick became a crack, and the crack became a winding tributary. Soon the windshield was a spider web of fragments. I couldn't drive my car without thinking of the jerk who drove too fast. Though I've never seen him, I could describe him. He is some deadbeat bum who cheats on his wife, drives with a six-pack on the seat, and keeps the television so loud the neighbors can't sleep. His carelessness blocked my vision. (Didn't do much for my view out the windshield either.)

Ever heard the expression "blind rage"?

Let me be very clear. Hatred will sour your outlook and break your back. The load of bitterness is simply too heavy. Your knees will buckle under the strain, and your heart will break beneath the weight. The mountain before you is steep enough without the heaviness of hatred on your back. The wisest choice—the only choice—is for you to drop the anger. You will never be called upon to give anyone more grace than God has already given you.

During World War I, a German soldier plunged into an out-of-the-way shell hole. There he found a wounded enemy. The fallen soldier was soaked with blood and only minutes from death. Touched by the plight of the man, the German soldier offered him water. Through this small kindness a bond was developed. The dying man pointed to his shirt pocket; the German soldier took from it a wallet and removed some family pictures. He held them so the wounded man could gaze at his loved ones one final time. With bullets raging over them and war all around them, these two enemies were, but for a few moments, friends.

What happened in that shell hole? Did all evil cease? Were all wrongs made right? No. What happened was simply this: Two enemies saw each other as humans in need of help. This is forgiveness. Forgiveness begins by rising above the war, looking beyond the uniform, and choosing to see the other, not as a foe or even as a friend, but simply as a fellow fighter longing to make it home safely. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Application

Are you harboring bitterness toward a friend, relative, or church member? Don't allow bitterness to spring up and destroy you (cf. [Hebrews 12:15](#)). Not only will the bitterness eat you alive, it will also negatively impact your spiritual life. Ask God to give you the ability to remove any bitterness you may be feeling.

Exploration

Bitterness—[Proverbs 14:10](#); [17:25](#); [Isaiah 38:15](#); [Ephesians 4:31](#).

Before he heard God, Job couldn't speak enough. After he heard God, he couldn't speak at all. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

Job Answers Zophar

Then Job answered:

²“Listen carefully to my words,
and let this be the way you comfort me.

³Be patient while I speak.

After I have finished, you may continue to make fun of
me.

⁴“My complaint is not just against people;
I have reason to be impatient.

⁵Look at me and be shocked;
put your hand over your mouth in shock.

⁶When I think about this, I am terribly afraid
and my body shakes.

⁷Why do evil people live a long time?
They grow old and become more powerful.

⁸They see their children around them;
they watch them grow up.

⁹Their homes are safe and without fear;
God does not punish them.

¹⁰Their bulls never fail to mate;
their cows have healthy calves.

¹¹They send out their children like a flock;
their little ones dance about.

¹²They sing to the music of tambourines and harps,
and the sound of the flute makes them happy.

¹³Evil people enjoy successful lives

and then go peacefully to the grave.

¹⁴They say to God, 'Leave us alone!

We don't want to know your ways.

¹⁵Who is the Almighty that we should serve him?

What would we gain by praying to him?'

¹⁶The success of the wicked is not their own doing.

Their way of thinking is different from mine.

¹⁷Yet how often are the lamps of evil people turned off?

How often does trouble come to them?

How often do they suffer God's angry punishment?

¹⁸How often are they like straw in the wind

or like chaff that is blown away by a storm?

¹⁹It is said, 'God saves up a person's punishment for his children.'

But God should punish the wicked themselves so they will know it.

²⁰Their eyes should see their own destruction,
and they should suffer the anger of the Almighty.

²¹They do not care about the families they leave behind

when their lives have come to an end.

²²'No one can teach knowledge to God;
he is the one who judges even the most important people.

²³One person dies while he still has all his strength,
feeling completely safe and comfortable.

²⁴His body was well fed,
and his bones were strong and healthy.

²⁵But another person dies with an unhappy heart,

never enjoying any happiness.

²⁶They are buried next to each other,
and worms cover them both.

²⁷“I know very well your thoughts
and your plans to wrong me.

²⁸You ask about me, ‘Where is this great man’s house?
Where are the tents where the wicked live?’

²⁹Have you never asked those who travel?
Have you never listened to their stories?

³⁰On the day of God’s anger and punishment,
it is the wicked who are spared.

³¹Who will accuse them to their faces?
Who will pay them back for the evil they have done?

³²They are carried to their graves,
and someone keeps watch over their tombs.

³³The dirt in the valley seems sweet to them.
Everybody follows after them,
and many people go before them.

³⁴“So how can you comfort me with this nonsense?
Your answers are only lies!”

Eliphaz Answers

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered:

²“Can anyone be of real use to God?

Can even a wise person do him good?

³Does it help the Almighty for you to be good?

Does he gain anything if you are innocent?

⁴Does God punish you for respecting him?

Does he bring you into court for this?

⁵No! It is because your evil is without limits
and your sins have no end.

⁶You took your brothers' things for a debt they didn't
owe;

you took clothes from people and left them naked.

⁷You did not give water to tired people,
and you kept food from the hungry.

⁸You were a powerful man who owned land;
you were honored and lived in the land.

⁹But you sent widows away empty-handed,
and you mistreated orphans.

¹⁰That is why traps are all around you
and sudden danger frightens you.

¹¹That is why it is so dark you cannot see
and a flood of water covers you.

¹²“God is in the highest part of heaven.
See how high the highest stars are!

¹³But you ask, ‘What does God know?’

Can he judge us through the dark clouds?

¹⁴Thick clouds cover him so he cannot see us
as he walks around high up in the sky.'

¹⁵Are you going to stay on the old path
where evil people walk?

¹⁶They were carried away before their time was up,
and their foundations were washed away by a flood.

¹⁷They said to God, 'Leave us alone!
The Almighty can do nothing to us.'

¹⁸But it was God who filled their houses with good
things.

Their way of thinking is different from mine.

¹⁹“Good people can watch and be glad;
the innocent can laugh at them and say,

²⁰“Surely our enemies are destroyed,
and fire burns up their wealth.’

²¹“Obey God and be at peace with him;
this is the way to happiness.

²²Accept teaching from his mouth,
and keep his words in your heart.

²³If you return to the Almighty, you will be blessed
again.

So remove evil from your house.

²⁴Throw your gold nuggets into the dust
and your fine gold among the rocks in the ravines.

²⁵Then the Almighty will be your gold
and the best silver for you.

²⁶You will find pleasure in the Almighty,

and you will look up to him.

²⁷You will pray to him, and he will hear you,
and you will keep your promises to him.

²⁸Anything you decide will be done,
and light will shine on your ways.

²⁹When people are made humble and you say, 'Have
courage,'

then the humble will be saved.

³⁰Even a guilty person will escape
and be saved because your hands are clean."

Job Answers

Then Job answered:

²“My complaint is still bitter today.
I groan because God’s heavy hand is on me.

³I wish I knew where to find God
so I could go to where he lives.

⁴I would present my case before him
and fill my mouth with arguments.

⁵I would learn how he would answer me
and would think about what he would say.

⁶Would he not argue strongly against me?
No, he would really listen to me.

⁷Then an honest person could present his case to God,
and I would be saved forever by my judge.

⁸“If I go to the east, God is not there;
if I go to the west, I do not see him.

⁹When he is at work in the north, I catch no sight of
him;

when he turns to the south, I cannot see him.

¹⁰But God knows the way that I take,
and when he has tested me, I will come out like gold.

¹¹My feet have closely followed his steps;
I have stayed in his way;
I did not turn aside.

¹²I have never left the commands he has spoken;
I have treasured his words more than my own.

¹³“But he is the only God.
Who can come against him?
He does anything he wants.
¹⁴He will do to me what he said he would do,
and he has many plans like this.
¹⁵That is why I am frightened of him;
when I think of this, I am afraid of him.
¹⁶God has made me afraid;
the Almighty terrifies me.
¹⁷But I am not hidden by the darkness,
by the thick darkness that covers my face.

Life Lessons

Job 22:1–24:25

Situation

Eliphaz exhorted Job to admit that his sufferings resulted from sin. Job disagreed. He began to question whether or not God had treated him fairly.

Observation

Job knew he was righteous before God. Job wondered why he had been afflicted and if God cared for him.

Inspiration

Most of us tend to have this idea that since God is sovereign, He’s supposed to make everything work out perfectly. Nothing is supposed to touch us as long as we’re walking with Him.

This is the very problem that leads many Christians to despair when they go through trials.

They can't imagine how God could ever let anything bad happen to them. They turn His sovereignty into a magic genie that's supposed to push all problems, trials, difficulties, and irritations away the moment we say "Go!" As a result, when we suddenly find ourselves in the midst of terrible circumstances, we crumble, blame God, and accuse Him of not caring, not being just, not acting in a loving manner, not having our best interests in mind.

We must come back to the truth that while God is in absolute control of all life, He is not the cause of all life's mishaps. Rather, His plan *allows* those mishaps for the great purpose of raising up "many brethren conformed to the image of Christ" ([Romans 8:29](#)).

Job's trial exposed this important misinterpretation on Job's part... . He couldn't understand how God could allow these things to continue—let alone happen... . We can all identify with Job... . The reason we see things this way is because we don't understand how God thinks; we can't comprehend the nature of His wisdom. "His thoughts are not our thoughts; His ways are not our ways," said Isaiah ([55:8](#)). When we're new in the faith, or immature, we tend to think that God will always do what is best for us. Indeed, He will. But what *we* think is best and what *He* does are as different as whipped cream and concrete. We think He'll make us happy. In effect, we envision these warm, fuzzy feelings. But He plans to make us holy. That often calls for plenty of knocks and raps....

Job's problem was just like ours. We have one

plan and God has another. But God's plan is the one that will be put into operation. And when those plans turn into real life circumstances, we can feel as though we've been drawn, quartered, and fed to the crows.

But it's through gaining God's perspective that we begin to see true wisdom. That was what God was bringing Job to understand. (From *When God Seems Far Away* by Mark R. Littleton)

Application

It is easy to question God in times of struggle. When you feel afflicted turn toward God, not away from him. Seek the counsel of Christian friends and remain active in your church.

Exploration

Suffering Has a Purpose—[Mark 8:31–32](#); [Luke 24:46–47](#); [Romans 8:17–18](#); [1 Peter 2:21](#); [4:12–13](#).

¹“I wish the Almighty would set a time for judging.
Those who know God do not see such a day.

²Wicked people take other people’s land;
they steal flocks and take them to new pastures.

³They chase away the orphan’s donkey
and take the widow’s ox when she has no money.

⁴They push needy people off the path;
all the poor of the land hide from them.

⁵The poor become like wild donkeys in the desert
who go about their job of finding food.

The desert gives them food for their children.

⁶They gather hay and straw in the fields
and pick up leftover grapes from the vineyard of the
wicked.

⁷They spend the night naked, because they have no
clothes,
nothing to cover themselves in the cold.

⁸They are soaked from mountain rains
and stay near the large rocks because they have no
shelter.

⁹The fatherless child is grabbed from its mother’s
breast;
they take a poor mother’s baby to pay for what she
owes.

¹⁰So the poor go around naked without any clothes;
they carry bundles of grain but still go hungry;

¹¹they crush olives to get oil
and grapes to get wine, but they still go thirsty.

¹²Dying people groan in the city,
and the injured cry out for help,

but God accuses no one of doing wrong.

¹³“Those who fight against the light
do not know God’s ways
or stay in his paths.

¹⁴When the day is over, the murderers get up
to kill the poor and needy.
At night they go about like thieves.

¹⁵Those who are guilty of adultery watch for the night,
thinking, ‘No one will see us,’
and they keep their faces covered.

¹⁶In the dark, evil people break into houses.
In the daytime they shut themselves up in their own
houses,

because they want nothing to do with the light.

¹⁷Darkness is like morning to all these evil people
who make friends with the terrors of darkness.

¹⁸“They are like foam floating on the water.
Their part of the land is cursed;
no one uses the road that goes by their vineyards.

¹⁹As heat and dryness quickly melt the snow,
so the grave quickly takes away the sinners.

²⁰Their mothers forget them,
and worms will eat their bodies.
They will not be remembered,
so wickedness is broken in pieces like a stick.

²¹These evil people abuse women who cannot have
children
and show no kindness to widows.

²²But God drags away the strong by his power.

Even though they seem strong, they do not know how long they will live.

²³God may let these evil people feel safe,
but he is watching their ways.

²⁴For a little while they are important, and then they die;

they are laid low and buried like everyone else;
they are cut off like the heads of grain.

²⁵If this is not true, who can prove I am wrong?
Who can show that my words are worth nothing?"

Bildad Answers

Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:

²“God rules and he must be honored;
he set up order in his high heaven.

³No one can count God’s armies.
His light shines on all people.

⁴So no one can be good in the presence of God,
and no one born to a woman can be pure.

⁵Even the moon is not bright
and the stars are not pure in his eyes.

⁶People are much less! They are like insects.
They are only worms!”

Job Answers Bildad

Then Job answered:

²“You are no help to the helpless!

You have not aided the weak!

³Your advice lacks wisdom!

You have shown little understanding!

⁴Who has helped you say these words?

And where did you get these ideas?

⁵“The spirits of the dead tremble,
those who are beneath and in the waters.

⁶Death is naked before God;
destruction is uncovered before him.

⁷God stretches the northern sky out over empty space
and hangs the earth on nothing.

⁸He wraps up the waters in his thick clouds,
but the clouds do not break under their weight.

⁹He covers the face of the moon,
spreading his clouds over it.

¹⁰He draws the horizon like a circle on the water
at the place where light and darkness meet.

¹¹Heaven’s foundations shake
when he thunders at them.

¹²With his power he quiets the sea;
by his wisdom he destroys Rahab, the sea monster.

¹³He breathes, and the sky clears.
His hand stabs the fleeing snake.

¹⁴And these are only a small part of God's works.
We only hear a small whisper of him.
Who could understand God's thundering power?"

Life Lessons

[Job 25:1–26:14](#)

Situation

The discussion between Job and his friends continued. Bildad replied to Job's claim of innocence. Job responded sarcastically to Bildad ([26:2–4](#)) because his advice lacked consolation.

Observation

Man cannot be compared with God. God's immensity cannot be measured.

Inspiration

Ever get a song on your mind? ... It happened to me last week... I found myself listening to what Watts wrote over two centuries ago:

Alas! and did my Savior bleed?

And did my Sovereign die?

Would he devote that sacred head

For such a worm as I?

I frowned as that last line faded away. "A worm"? Does God see people as "worms"? When Christ died did He "devote that sacred head" for *worms*? Now, obviously, Watts wanted to portray a vivid illustration of sinful mankind—lost, undeserving, spiritually worthless, wicked within. Dipping his brush in [Job 25](#) and [Isaiah 41](#), the hymnist painted

such a picture, using the very term Scripture uses—*worm*. He was biblical and therefore justified his choice of terms for the text. Frankly, we were worm-like when our righteous God found us—lowly, wandering, dirty, unattractive, grubby creatures.

But that doesn't mean we work hard at making ourselves into worms now. *A child of God is not a worm*. If God had wanted you to be a worm, He could have very easily made you one! ... When Watts wrote of worms he was merely using a word picture. Many others, however, have framed it as a model to follow, calling it humility. This “worm theology” creates enormous problems.

It wears many faces—all sad. It crawls out from between the mattress and springs in the morning, telling itself, “I’m nothing. I’m a worm. Woe, woe. I can’t do anything and even if I appear to be doing something, it’s not really me. Woe! I must annihilate self-respect ... crucify all motivation and ambition... . I’m a worm. Good for nothing except crawling very slowly, drowning in mud puddles, or getting stepped on. Woe, woe, woe.”

There’s one main problem with this sort of thinking—*it’s phony*. No matter how diligently we labor to appear genuinely humble, it amounts to nothing more than trying to look good in another way....

And therein lies the ugly sin: PRIDE.

Heretical though it may sound, no one who actually hates himself can adequately share the love of Christ. Our Lord taught that we were to love our

neighbors *as we love ourselves*....

Have you taken time this week to consider before your Lord who you really are? ...

Sinful? Oh yes. Undeserving? Absolutely. Imperfect? Who isn't. Selfish? Indeed! Wrong? More often than not.

But a *worm*? Useless? Unimportant? Spineless? Meaningless? No, not that. God declared us righteous. He lifted us out of miry clay and set us upon a rock. He invites us to approach Him with boldness. And He means it! (From *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Although God has vast power, he still cares greatly for his children. Explore the verses below. Copy two on an index card and place the card where you will see it often. Remember that God never forgets who you are and what you are facing.

Exploration

Value of People—[Genesis 1:26](#); [Job 32:8](#); [John 3:16](#); [1 Peter 1:18–19](#); [Revelation 1:5](#).

Life Lessons

Job 27:1–23

Situation

When Job claimed that his suffering did not result from sin, Bildad accused him of pride. Job responded with a passionate declaration of his integrity.

Observation

Despite the accusations being hurled at him, Job recognized that he had a clear conscience.

Inspiration

A few weeks ago, Roger's family was shopping for groceries. As they rounded a corner, he looked down at his two-year-old daughter who was riding in the basket. She was holding the carton of eggs. The carton was open and revealed that several of the eggs were broken and others were cracked. His first thought was, "Let's just put the carton back and get another. No one will notice."

Sometimes the same temptation occurs when one stays overnight in a motel. Occasionally, the thought comes to mind, "Why not watch one of those late night cable channels? Who's going to know?"

In both of these instances, and in countless others, it is helpful to ask yourself the question, "Who am I when no one's looking? Am I consistent, or do I act differently? Am I the same person Monday through Saturday that I am on Sunday? Will I be blameless and holy when I meet the Lord?" (From *A Dad's Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent)

Application

Do you act differently when no one is looking? Is your conscience clear? If not, ask God to forgive your sin and help you live a life of integrity. Tell a trusted friend of any problem areas. Ask that person to hold you accountable.

Exploration

Clear Conscience—[Acts 24:14–16](#); [Romans 9:1](#); [1 Timothy 3:9](#); [Hebrews 9:14](#); [1 Peter 3:16](#).

And Job continued speaking:

²“As surely as God lives, who has taken away my rights,

the Almighty, who has made me unhappy,

³as long as I am alive

and God’s breath of life is in my nose,

⁴my lips will not speak evil,

and my tongue will not tell a lie.

⁵I will never agree you are right;

until I die, I will never stop saying I am innocent.

⁶I will insist that I am right; I will not back down.

My conscience will never bother me.

⁷“Let my enemies be like evil people,

my foes like those who are wrong.

⁸What hope do the wicked have when they die,

when God takes their life away?

⁹God will not listen to their cries

when trouble comes to them.

¹⁰They will not find joy in the Almighty,

even though they call out to God all the time.

¹¹“I will teach you about the power of God

and will not hide the ways of the Almighty.

¹²You have all seen this yourselves.

So why are we having all this talk that means nothing?

¹³“Here is what God has planned for evil people,
and what the Almighty will give to cruel people:

¹⁴They may have many children, but the sword will kill
them.

Their children who are left will never have enough to
eat.

¹⁵Then they will die of disease and be buried,
and the widows will not even cry for them.

¹⁶The wicked may heap up silver like piles of dirt
and have so many clothes they are like piles of clay.

¹⁷But good people will wear what evil people have
gathered,
and the innocent will divide up their silver.

¹⁸The houses the wicked build are like a spider’s web,
like a hut that a guard builds.

¹⁹The wicked are rich when they go to bed,
but they are rich for the last time;
when they open their eyes, everything is gone.

²⁰Fears come over them like a flood,
and a storm snatches them away in the night.

²¹The east wind will carry them away, and then they are
gone,

because it sweeps them out of their place.

²²The wind will hit them without mercy
as they try to run away from its power.

²³It will be as if the wind is clapping its hands;
it will whistle at them as they run from their place.

Life Lessons

[Job 28:1–28](#)

Situation

Job continued his long reply to Bildad and his other friends. In his speech, Job claimed that God's wisdom supersedes all human wisdom.

Observation

Nature cannot tell everything about God's wisdom. For further insight we must look at God's Word.

Inspiration

God knows me! He knows every tear I cry. "Thou hast taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Thy bottle" [[Psalm 56:8](#), NASB]. God knows every trial we go through, and His wisdom allows each to happen....

God is perfect in His wisdom. As the sun cannot be without light, neither can God be without wisdom. He was wisdom *originally*. Men acquire wisdom through experience; God has it by essence. He does not have to study or gain more experience. God has wisdom *perfectly*. He has absolutely no ignorance. He has wisdom *universally*. Men are wise in various things. God is wise in all things. He has wisdom *perpetually*. Man's wisdom fades near death. God's wisdom is perpetual. His wisdom is *incomprehensible*. The wisdom of one man may be comprehended by another. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" [[Job 11:7](#), KJV]. His wisdom is

infallible. Even the wisest men fall short of their goals. God never fails. (From *The God You Can Know* by Dan DeHaan)

Application

To know more of God's wisdom, we must study the Bible. Develop a plan for daily study. Memorize one verse by rewriting it each day for a week. Reflect on your selected verse throughout the day.

Exploration

God's Wisdom—[Daniel 2:19–23](#); [Romans 16:27](#); [1 Corinthians 1:21–24](#); [Colossians 2:2–3](#).

²“There are mines where people dig silver
and places where gold is made pure.

³Iron is taken from the ground,
and copper is melted out of rocks.

⁴Miners bring lights
and search deep into the mines
for ore in thick darkness.

⁵Miners dig a tunnel far from where people live,
where no one has ever walked;
they work far from people, swinging and swaying from
ropes.

⁶Food grows on top of the earth,
but below ground things are changed as if by fire.

⁷Sapphires are found in rocks,
and gold dust is also found there.

⁸No hawk knows that path;
the falcon has not seen it.

⁹Proud animals have not walked there,
and no lions cross over it.

¹⁰Miners hit the rocks of flint
and dig away at the bottom of the mountains.

¹¹They cut tunnels through the rock
and see all the treasures there.

¹²They search for places where rivers begin
and bring things hidden out into the light.

¹³“But where can wisdom be found,
and where does understanding live?

¹³People do not understand the value of wisdom;
it cannot be found among those who are alive.

¹⁴The deep ocean says, 'It's not in me,'
the sea says, 'It's not in me.'

¹⁵Wisdom cannot be bought with gold,
and its cost cannot be weighed in silver.

¹⁶Wisdom cannot be bought with fine gold
or with valuable onyx or sapphire gems.

¹⁷Gold and crystal are not as valuable as wisdom,
and you cannot buy it with jewels of gold.

¹⁸Coral and jasper are not worth talking about,
and the price of wisdom is much greater than rubies.

¹⁹The topaz from Cush cannot compare to wisdom;
it cannot be bought with the purest gold.

²⁰“So where does wisdom come from,
and where does understanding live?

²¹It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing,
even from the birds of the air.

²²The places of destruction and death say,
‘We have heard reports about it.’

²³Only God understands the way to wisdom,
and he alone knows where it lives,

²⁴because he looks to the farthest parts of the earth
and sees everything under the sky.

²⁵When God gave power to the wind
and measured the water,

²⁶when he made rules for the rain
and set a path for a thunderstorm to follow,

²⁷then he looked at wisdom and decided its worth;

he set wisdom up and tested it.

²⁸Then he said to humans,

‘The fear of the Lord is wisdom;

to stay away from evil is understanding.’”

Job Continues

Job continued to speak:

²“How I wish for the months that have passed
and the days when God watched over me.

³God’s lamp shined on my head,
and I walked through darkness by his light.

⁴I wish for the days when I was strong,
when God’s close friendship blessed my house.

⁵The Almighty was still with me,
and my children were all around me.

⁶It was as if my path were covered with cream
and the rocks poured out olive oil for me.

⁷I would go to the city gate
and sit in the public square.

⁸When the young men saw me, they would step aside,
and the old men would stand up in respect.

⁹The leading men stopped speaking
and covered their mouths with their hands.

¹⁰The voices of the important men were quiet,
as if their tongues stuck to the roof of their mouths.

¹¹Anyone who heard me spoke well of me,
and those who saw me praised me,

¹²because I saved the poor who called out
and the orphan who had no one to help.

¹³The dying person blessed me,
and I made the widow’s heart sing.

¹⁴I put on right living as if it were clothing;
I wore fairness like a robe and a turban.

¹⁵I was eyes for the blind
and feet for the lame.

¹⁶I was like a father to needy people,
and I took the side of strangers who were in trouble.

¹⁷I broke the fangs of evil people
and snatched the captives from their teeth.

¹⁸“I thought, ‘I will live for as many days as there are
grains of sand,

and I will die in my own house.

¹⁹My roots will reach down to the water.
The dew will lie on the branches all night.

²⁰New honors will come to me continually,
and I will always have great strength.’

²¹“People listened to me carefully
and waited quietly for my advice.

²²After I finished speaking, they spoke no more.
My words fell very gently on their ears.

²³They waited for me as they would for rain
and drank in my words like spring rain.

²⁴I smiled at them when they doubted,
and my approval was important to them.

²⁵I chose the way for them and was their leader.
I lived like a king among his army,
like a person who comforts sad people.

“But now men who are younger than I
make fun of me.

I would not have even let their fathers
sit with my sheep dogs.

²What use did I have for their strength
since they had lost their strength to work?

³They were thin from hunger
and wandered the dry and ruined land at night.

⁴They gathered desert plants among the brush
and ate the root of the broom tree.

⁵They were forced to live away from people;
people shouted at them as if they were thieves.

⁶They lived in dried up streambeds,
in caves, and among the rocks.

⁷They howled like animals among the bushes
and huddled together in the brush.

⁸They are worthless people without names
and were forced to leave the land.

⁹“Now they make fun of me with songs;
my name is a joke among them.

¹⁰They hate me and stay far away from me,
but they do not mind spitting in my face.

¹¹God has taken away my strength and made me suffer,
so they attack me with all their anger.

¹²On my right side they rise up like a mob.
They lay traps for my feet
and prepare to attack me.

¹³They break up my road
and work to destroy me,

and no one helps me.

¹⁴They come at me as if through a hole in the wall,
and they roll in among the ruins.

¹⁵Great fears overwhelm me.

They blow my honor away as if by a great wind,
and my safety disappears like a cloud.

¹⁶“Now my life is almost over;
my days are full of suffering.

¹⁷At night my bones ache;
gnawing pains never stop.

¹⁸In his great power God grabs hold of my clothing
and chokes me with the collar of my coat.

¹⁹He throws me into the mud,
and I become like dirt and ashes.

²⁰“I cry out to you, God, but you do not answer;
I stand up, but you just look at me.

²¹You have turned on me without mercy;
with your powerful hand you attacked me.

²²You snatched me up and threw me into the wind
and tossed me about in the storm.

²³I know you will bring me down to death,
to the place where all living people must go.

²⁴“Surely no one would hurt a ruined man
when he cries for help in his time of trouble.

²⁵I cried for those who were in trouble;
I have been very sad for poor people.

²⁶But when I hoped for good, only evil came to me;
when I looked for light, darkness came.

²⁷I never stop being upset;
days of suffering are ahead of me.

²⁸I have turned black, but not by the sun.
I stand up in public and cry for help.

²⁹I have become a brother to wild dogs
and a friend to ostriches.

³⁰My skin has become black and peels off,
as my body burns with fever.

³¹My harp is tuned to sing a sad song,
and my flute is tuned to moaning.

“But I made an agreement with my eyes
not to look with desire at a girl.

²What has God above promised for people?
What has the Almighty planned from on high?

³It is ruin for evil people
and disaster for those who do wrong.

⁴God sees my ways
and counts every step I take.

⁵“If I have been dishonest
or lied to others,

⁶then let God weigh me on honest scales.
Then he will know I have done nothing wrong.

⁷If I have turned away from doing what is right,
or my heart has been led by my eyes to do wrong,
or my hands have been made unclean,

⁸then let other people eat what I have planted,
and let my crops be plowed up.

⁹“If I have desired another woman
or have waited at my neighbor’s door for his wife,

¹⁰then let my wife grind another man’s grain,
and let other men have sexual relations with her.

¹¹That would be shameful,
a sin to be punished.

¹²It is like a fire that burns and destroys;
all I have done would be plowed up.

¹³“If I have been unfair to my male and female slaves
when they had a complaint against me,

¹⁴how could I tell God what I did?

What will I answer when he asks me to explain what I've done?

¹⁵God made me in my mother's womb, and he also made them;

the same God formed both of us in our mothers' wombs.

¹⁶“I have never refused the appeals of the poor or let widows give up hope while looking for help.

¹⁷I have not kept my food to myself but have given it to the orphans.

¹⁸Since I was young, I have been like a father to the orphans.

From my birth I guided the widows.

¹⁹I have not let anyone die for lack of clothes or let a needy person go without a coat.

²⁰That person's heart blessed me, because I warmed him with the wool of my sheep.

²¹I have never hurt an orphan even when I knew I could win in court.

²²If I have, then let my arm fall off my shoulder and be broken at the joint.

²³I fear destruction from God, and I fear his majesty, so I could not do such things.

²⁴“I have not put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, ‘You are my security.’

²⁵I have not celebrated my great wealth or the riches my hands had gained.

²⁶I have not thought about worshiping the sun in its

brightness

nor admired the moon moving in glory

²⁷so that my heart was pulled away from God.

My hand has never offered the sun and moon a kiss of worship.

²⁸If I had, these also would have been sins to be punished,

because I would have been unfaithful to God.

²⁹“I have not been happy when my enemy fell or laughed when he had trouble.

³⁰I have not let my mouth sin by cursing my enemy’s life.

³¹The men of my house have always said, ‘Everyone has eaten all he wants of Job’s food.’

³²No stranger ever had to spend the night in the street, because I always let travelers stay in my home.

³³I have not hidden my sin as others do, secretly keeping my guilt to myself.

³⁴I was not so afraid of the crowd that I kept quiet and stayed inside because I feared being hated by other families.

³⁵“How I wish a court would hear my case! Here I sign my name to show I have told the truth.

Now let the Almighty answer me; let the one who accuses me write it down.

³⁶I would wear the writing on my shoulder; I would put it on like a crown.

³⁷I would explain to God every step I took, and I would come near to him like a prince.)

³⁸“If my land cries out against me
and its plowed rows are not wet with tears,
³⁹if I have taken the land’s harvest without paying
or have broken the spirit of those who worked the
land,
⁴⁰then let thorns come up instead of wheat,
and let weeds come up instead of barley.”
The words of Job are finished.

Life Lessons

Job 29:1–31:40

Situation

Job described his role in the community. He may have been a judge or city official. In his position he sought justice and cared for the needy.

Observation

Be careful to avoid pride because of your status. Job did not use his position for evil.

Inspiration

The little house made me think of pictures I’d seen of the United States during the Depression. Unlit kerosene lanterns (no electricity). Basins of water to wash up in (no running water). A wall lined with well-worn hoes, shovels, and picks (no modern equipment). The kitchen was a separate hut that sat next to the front door of the house. I was intrigued by the stove. It was made of hard, backed mud, molded in a long narrow piece about four feet long and three feet tall. A four or five inch trough ran down the

center to hold the wood. The ever-present pots cooking the beans and rice straddled the hot trough. I felt a long way from Rio.

Senor José took me on a tour through his segment of the world. For thirty-seven years he had plowed and tilled his two acres. It was obvious that he knew every hole and turn.

"I fed fourteen mouths off this land," he smiled, fingering a lettuce plant. "Where did you say you were from?"

"The U.S."

"What do you do there?"

I explained a bit about my work...

"A missionary, huh? Your job must be pretty easy."

"How's that?" I asked.

"I have no trouble believing in God. After I see what he has done on my little farm, year after year, it is easy to believe." He smiled another toothless grin and yelled to his wife to bring out some beans.

As we drove home, I couldn't help thinking about Senor José. My, what a simple life. No traffic jams, airline schedules, or long lines. Far removed from Wall Street, IRS, and mortgages. Unacquainted with Johannine theology, Martin Luther, or Christian evidences.

I thought of his faith, his ability to believe, and his surprise that there were some who couldn't. I compared his faith with others I knew had more difficulty believing; a university student, a wealthy import-export man, an engineer. There was such a

difference between José and the others.

His faith was rooted in the simple miracles that he witnessed every day:

A small seed becoming a towering tree.

A thin stalk pushing back the earth.

A rainbow arching in the midst of the thundercloud.

It was easy for him to believe. I can see why. Someone who witnesses God's daily display of majesty doesn't find the secret of Easter absurd. Someone who depends upon the mysteries of nature for his livelihood doesn't find it difficult to depend on an unseen God for his salvation. . . .

God's testimony. When was the last time you witnessed it? A stroll through knee-high grass in a green meadow. An hour listening to seagulls or looking at seashells on the beach. Or witnessing the shafts of sunlight brighten the snow on a crisp winter dawn. Miracles that almost match the magnitude of the empty tomb happen all around us; we only have to pay attention. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

Application

Look around. What can you observe that speaks mightily about God's care and concern in your family, in nature, and in world events? Use your simple discovery in a conversation with a younger person this week. Help that person to build trust in God.

Exploration

God's Care—[Psalm 10:17–18](#); [Proverbs 23:10–11](#); [1 Peter 3:15–16](#).

Don't think you are separated from God, he at the top end of a great ladder, you at the other. Dismiss any thought that God is on Venus while you are on earth. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

Elihu Speaks

These three men stopped trying to answer Job, because he was so sure he was right. ²But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, from the family of Ram, became very angry with Job, because Job claimed he was right instead of God. ³Elihu was also angry with Job's three friends who had no answer to show that Job was wrong, yet continued to blame him. ⁴Elihu had waited before speaking to Job, because the three friends were older than he was. ⁵But when Elihu saw that the three men had nothing more to say, he became very angry.

⁶So Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite said this:

“I am young,
and you are old.

That is why I was afraid
to tell you what I know.

⁷I thought, ‘Older people should speak,
and those who have lived many years should teach
wisdom.’

⁸But it is the spirit in a person,
the breath of the Almighty, that gives understanding.

⁹It is not just older people who are wise;
they are not the only ones who understand what is
right.

¹⁰So I say, listen to me.
I too will tell you what I know.

¹¹I waited while you three spoke,
and listened to your explanations.

While you looked for words to use,

¹²I paid close attention to you.

But not one of you has proved Job wrong;

none of you has answered his arguments.

¹³Don't say, 'We have found wisdom;

only God will show Job to be wrong, not people.'

¹⁴Job has not spoken his words against me,

so I will not use your arguments to answer Job.

¹⁵"These three friends are defeated and have no more
to say;

words have failed them.

¹⁶Now they are standing there with no answers for Job.

Now that they are quiet, must I wait to speak?

¹⁷No, I too will speak

and tell what I know.

¹⁸I am full of words,

and the spirit in me causes me to speak.

¹⁹I am like wine that has been bottled up;

I am ready to burst like a new leather wine bag.

²⁰I must speak so I will feel relief;

I must open my mouth and answer.

²¹I will be fair to everyone

and not flatter anyone.

²²I don't know how to flatter,

and if I did, my Maker would quickly take me away.

“Now, Job, listen to my words.
Pay attention to everything I say.

²I open my mouth
and am ready to speak.

³My words come from an honest heart,
and I am sincere in saying what I know.

⁴The Spirit of God created me,
and the breath of the Almighty gave me life.

⁵Answer me if you can;
get yourself ready and stand before me.

⁶I am just like you before God;
I too am made out of clay.

⁷Don't be afraid of me;
I will not be hard on you.

⁸“But I heard what you have said;
I heard every word.

⁹You said, ‘I am pure and without sin;
I am innocent and free from guilt.

¹⁰But God has found fault with me;
he considers me his enemy.

¹¹He locks my feet in chains
and closely watches everywhere I go.’

¹²“But I tell you, you are not right in saying this,
because God is greater than we are.

¹³Why do you accuse God
of not answering anyone?

¹⁴God does speak—sometimes one way and sometimes
another—

even though people may not understand it.

¹⁵He speaks in a dream or a vision of the night
when people are in a deep sleep,
lying on their beds.

¹⁶He speaks in their ears
and frightens them with warnings

¹⁷to turn them away from doing wrong
and to keep them from being proud.

¹⁸God does this to save a person from death,
to keep him from dying.

¹⁹A person may be corrected while in bed in great pain;
he may have continual pain in his very bones.

²⁰He may be in such pain that he even hates food,
even the very best meal.

²¹His body becomes so thin there is almost nothing left
of it,

and his bones that were hidden now stick out.

²²He is near death,
and his life is almost over.

²³“But there may be an angel to speak for him,
one out of a thousand, who will tell him what to do.

²⁴The angel will beg for mercy and say:
‘Save him from death.

I have found a way to pay for his life.’

²⁵Then his body is made new like a child’s.

It will return to the way it was when he was young.

²⁶That person will pray to God, and God will listen to
him.

He will see God’s face and will shout with happiness.

And God will set things right for him again.

²⁷Then he will say to others,

‘I sinned and twisted what was right,

but I did not receive the punishment I should have received.

²⁸God bought my life back from death,
and I will continue to enjoy life.’

²⁹“God does all these things to a person
two or even three times

³⁰so he won’t die as punishment for his sins
and so he may still enjoy life.

³¹“Job, pay attention and listen to me;
be quiet, and I will speak.

³²If you have anything to say, answer me;
speak up, because I want to prove you right.

³³But if you have nothing to say, then listen to me;
be quiet, and I will teach you wisdom.”

Then Elihu said:

²“Hear my words, you wise men;
listen to me, you who know a lot.

³The ear tests words
as the tongue tastes food.

⁴Let’s decide for ourselves what is right,
and let’s learn together what is good.

⁵“Job says, ‘I am not guilty,
and God has refused me a fair trial.

⁶Instead of getting a fair trial,
I am called a liar.

I have been seriously hurt,
even though I have not sinned.’

⁷There is no other man like Job;
he takes insults as if he were drinking water.

⁸He keeps company with those who do evil
and spends time with wicked men,

⁹because he says, ‘It is no use
to try to please God.’

¹⁰“So listen to me, you who can understand.
God can never do wrong!

It is impossible for the Almighty to do evil.

¹¹God pays a person back for what he has done
and gives him what his actions deserve.

¹²Truly God will never do wrong;
the Almighty will never twist what is right.

¹³No one chose God to rule over the earth
or put him in charge of the whole world.

¹⁴If God should decide
to take away life and breath,
¹⁵then everyone would die together
and turn back into dust.

¹⁶“If you can understand, hear this;
listen to what I have to say.

¹⁷Can anyone govern who hates what is right?
How can you blame God who is both fair and
powerful?

¹⁸God is the one who says to kings, ‘You are
worthless,’

or to important people, ‘You are evil.’

¹⁹He is not nicer to princes than other people,
nor kinder to rich people than poor people,
because he made them all with his own hands.

²⁰They can die in a moment, in the middle of the night.
They are struck down, and then they pass away;
powerful people die without help.

²¹“God watches where people go;
he sees every step they take.

²²There is no dark place or deep shadow
where those who do evil can hide from him.

²³He does not set a time
for people to come before him for judging.

²⁴Without asking questions, God breaks powerful
people into pieces
and puts others in their place.

²⁵Because God knows what people do,

he defeats them in the night, and they are crushed.

²⁶He punishes them for the evil they do
so that everyone else can watch,

²⁷because they stopped following God
and did not care about any of his ways.

²⁸The cry of the poor comes to God;
he hears the cry of the needy.

²⁹But if God keeps quiet, who can blame him?
If he hides his face, who can see him?
God still rules over both nations and persons alike.

³⁰He keeps the wicked from ruling
and from trapping others.

³¹“But suppose someone says to God,
‘I am guilty, but I will not sin anymore.

³²Teach me what I cannot see.
If I have done wrong, I will not do it again.’

³³So, Job, should God reward you as you want
when you refuse to change?

You must decide, not I,
so tell me what you know.

³⁴“Those who understand speak,
and the wise who hear me say,

³⁵‘Job speaks without knowing what is true;
his words show he does not understand.’

³⁶I wish Job would be tested completely,
because he answered like an evil man!

³⁷Job now adds to his sin by turning against God.
He claps his hands in protest,
speaking more and more against God.”

Life Lessons

Job 32:1–37:24

Situation

Elihu, the youngest of Job's friends, confronted Job. Elihu knew the advice of the other friends was wrong. Yet, he could not fully arrive at the right conclusion either.

Observation

Elihu turned Job's attention to some of God's attributes, including his eternality. Since God's years are innumerable, and since God is perfect, Job ought to turn reverently to the wonders of God's creation and turn from his rebellious ways.

Inspiration

Scripture says that the number of God's years is unsearchable ([Job 36:26](#)). We may search out the moment the first wave slapped on a shore or the first star burst in the sky, but we'll never find the first moment when God was God, for there is no moment when God was not God. He has never not been, for he is eternal. God is not bound by time.

But when Jesus came to the earth, all this changed. He heard for the first time a phrase never used in heaven: "Your time is up." As a child, he had to leave the Temple because his time was up. As a man, he had to leave Nazareth because his time was up. And as a Savior, he had to die because his time was up. For thirty-three years, the stallion of heaven lived in the corral of time.

That's certainly remarkable, but there is something even more so.

You want to see the brightest jewel in the treasure of incarnation? You might think it was the fact that he lived in a body. One moment he was a boundless spirit; the next he was flesh and bones. Remember these words of King David? "Where can I go to get away from your Spirit? Where can I run from you? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I lie down in the grave, you are there. If I rise with the sun in the east and settle in the west beyond the sea, even there you would guide me" ([Psalm 139:7–10](#)).

Our asking "Where is God?" is like a fish asking "Where is water?" or a bird asking "Where is air?" God is everywhere! Equally present in Peking and Peoria. As active in the lives of Icelanders as in the lives of Texans. The dominion of God is "from sea to sea, and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth" ([Psalm 72:8](#)). We cannot find a place where God is not. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Application

How do you react to that last sentence? How does that change your view of God? You can be comforted by the fact that God is everywhere. He cares about you no matter where you are or where you go.

Exploration

God's Eternity—[Psalm 29:10](#); [48:14](#); [90:2](#); [93:2](#); [Jeremiah 10:10](#).

Then Elihu said:

²“Do you think this is fair?
You say, ‘God will show that I am right,’
³but you also ask, ‘What’s the use?’
I don’t gain anything by not sinning.’

⁴“I will answer you
and your friends who are with you.

⁵Look up at the sky
and see the clouds so high above you.

⁶If you sin, it does nothing to God;
even if your sins are many, they do nothing to him.

⁷If you are good, you give nothing to God;
he receives nothing from your hand.

⁸Your evil ways only hurt a man like yourself,
and the good you do only helps other human beings.

⁹“People cry out when they are in trouble;
they beg for relief from powerful people.

¹⁰But no one asks, ‘Where is God, my Maker,
who gives us songs in the night,

¹¹who makes us smarter than the animals of the earth
and wiser than the birds of the air?’

¹²God does not answer evil people when they cry out,
because the wicked are proud.

¹³God does not listen to their useless begging;
the Almighty pays no attention to them.

¹⁴He will listen to you even less
when you say that you do not see him,
that your case is before him,

that you must wait for him,
¹⁵that his anger never punishes,
and that he doesn't notice evil.
¹⁶So Job is only speaking nonsense,
saying many words without knowing what is true.”

Elihu's Speech Continues

Elihu continued:

²“Listen to me a little longer, and I will show you that there is more to be said for God.

³What I know comes from far away.
I will show that my Maker is right.

⁴You can be sure that my words are not false;
one who really knows is with you.

⁵“God is powerful, but he does not hate people;
he is powerful and sure of what he wants to do.

⁶He will not keep evil people alive,
but he gives the poor their rights.

⁷He always watches over those who do right;
he sets them on thrones with kings
and they are honored forever.

⁸If people are bound in chains,
or if trouble, like ropes, ties them up,

⁹God tells them what they have done,
that they have sinned in their pride.

¹⁰God makes them listen to his warning
and commands them to change from doing evil.

¹¹If they obey and serve him,
the rest of their lives will be successful,
and the rest of their years will be happy.

¹²But if they do not listen,
they will die by the sword,

and they will die without knowing why.

¹³“Those who have wicked hearts hold on to anger.
Even when God punishes them, they do not cry for help.

¹⁴They die while they are still young,
and their lives end in disgrace.

¹⁵But God saves those who suffer through their suffering;

he gets them to listen through their pain.

¹⁶“God is gently calling you from the jaws of trouble
to an open place of freedom
where he has set your table full of the best food.

¹⁷But now you are being punished like the wicked;
you are getting justice.

¹⁸Be careful! Don’t be led away from God by riches;
don’t let much money turn you away.

¹⁹Neither your wealth nor all your great strength
will keep you out of trouble.

²⁰Don’t wish for the night
when people are taken from their homes.

²¹Be careful not to turn to evil,
which you seem to want more than suffering.

²²“God is great and powerful;
no other teacher is like him.

²³No one has planned his ways for him;
no one can say to God, ‘You have done wrong.’

²⁴Remember to praise his work,
about which people have sung.

²⁵Everybody has seen it;
people look at it from far off.

²⁶God is so great, greater than we can understand!
No one knows how old he is.

²⁷“He evaporates the drops of water from the earth
and turns them into rain.

²⁸The rain then pours down from the clouds,
and showers fall on people.

²⁹No one understands how God spreads out the clouds
or how he sends thunder from where he lives.

³⁰Watch how God scatters his lightning around him,
lighting up the deepest parts of the sea.

³¹This is the way God governs the nations;
this is how he gives us enough food.

³²God fills his hands with lightning
and commands it to strike its target.

³³His thunder announces the coming storm,
and even the cattle know it is near.

“At the sound of his thunder, my heart pounds
as if it will jump out of my chest.

²Listen! Listen to the thunder of God’s voice
and to the rumbling that comes from his mouth.

³He turns his lightning loose under the whole sky
and sends it to the farthest parts of the earth.

⁴After that you can hear the roar
when he thunders with a great sound.
He does not hold back the flashing
when his voice is heard.

⁵God’s voice thunders in wonderful ways;
he does great things we cannot understand.

⁶He says to the snow, ‘Fall on the earth,’
and to the shower, ‘Be a heavy rain.’

⁷With it, he stops everyone from working
so everyone knows it is the work of God.

⁸The animals take cover from the rain
and stay in their dens.

⁹The storm comes from where it was stored;
the cold comes with the strong winds.

¹⁰The breath of God makes ice,
and the wide waters become frozen.

¹¹He fills the clouds with water
and scatters his lightning through them.

¹²At his command they swirl around
over the whole earth,
doing whatever he commands.

¹³He uses the clouds to punish people
or to water his earth and show his love.

¹⁴“Joh listen to this·

JOB, listen to this.

Stop and notice God's miracles.

¹⁵Do you know how God controls the clouds
and makes his lightning flash?

¹⁶Do you know how the clouds hang in the sky?
Do you know the miracles of God, who knows
everything?

¹⁷You suffer in your clothes
when the land is silenced by the hot, south wind.

¹⁸You cannot stretch out the sky like God
and make it look as hard as polished bronze.

¹⁹Tell us what we should say to him;
we cannot get our arguments ready because we do not
have enough understanding.

²⁰Should God be told that I want to speak?
Would a person ask to be swallowed up?

²¹No one can look at the sun
when it is bright in the sky
after the wind has blown all the clouds away.

²²God comes out of the north in golden light,
in overwhelming greatness.

²³The Almighty is too high for us to reach.
He has great strength;
he is always right and never punishes unfairly.

²⁴That is why people honor him;
he does not respect those who say they are wise."

Life Lessons

[Job 38:1–41:34](#)

Situation

Job could not require God to give answers. Instead, through rhetorical questions, God revealed his power and perfection to Job. Job and his friends needed to decide how they would respond to God.

Observation

Elihu told Job that God was too powerful to communicate with people. God proved Elihu wrong by speaking to Job.

Inspiration

“God, why is this happening to me?”

So God speaks.

Out of the thunder, he speaks. Out of the sky, he speaks. For all of us who would put ditto marks under Job’s question and sign our names to it, he speaks. . . .

He speaks out of the storm and into the storm, for that is where Job is. That is where God is best heard.

God’s voice thunders in the room. Elihu sits down. Job sits up. And the two will never be the same again.

“Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?” [[Job 38:2](#), NIV].

Job doesn’t respond.

“Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me” [[Job 38:3](#), NIV].

“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much” [[Job 38:4](#),

^{TLB}].

One question would have been enough for Job, but it isn't enough for God.

"Do you know how its dimensions were determined and who did the surveying?" God asks. "What supports its foundations, and who laid its cornerstone, as the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?" [[Job 38:5-7](#), ^{TLB}].

Questions rush forth. They pour like sheets of rain out of the clouds. They splatter in the chambers of Job's heart with a wildness and a beauty and a terror that leave every Job who has ever lived drenched and speechless, watching the Master redefine who is who in the universe....

God's questions aren't intended to teach; they are intended to stun. They aren't intended to enlighten; they are intended to awaken. They aren't intended to stir the mind; they are intended to bend the knees....

Finally Job's feeble hand lifts, and God stops long enough for him to respond. "I am nothing—how could I ever find the answers? I lay my hand upon my mouth in silence. I have said too much already" [[Job 40:4-5](#), ^{TLB}]....

"I owe no one anything," God declares in the crescendo of the wind. "Everything under the heaven is mine" [[Job 41:11](#), ^{TLB}].

Job couldn't argue. God owes no one anything. No explanations. No excuses. No help. God has no debt, no outstanding balance, no favors to return. God owes no man anything.

Which makes the fact that he gave us everything

even more astounding. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

Consider your understanding of God. Do you acknowledge God as the almighty creator and absolute authority? Can you accept his love and special concern for you? Today, take note of events or insights that remind you of these truths. Tonight, prayerfully reflect on God's greatness.

Exploration

God and People—[Genesis 1:27](#); [Exodus 15:11](#); [Nehemiah 9:6](#); [Psalms 103:13–18](#); [Jeremiah 31:3](#); [Zephaniah 3:17](#); [Romans 3:23](#); [Philippians 2:5–11](#); [Hebrews 2:10–12](#); [1 John 3:1](#); [Revelation 1:8](#).

The Lord Questions Job

Then the Lord answered Job from the storm. He said:

²“Who is this that makes my purpose unclear
by saying things that are not true?

³Be strong like a man!

I will ask you questions,
and you must answer me.

⁴Where were you when I made the earth’s foundation?
Tell me, if you understand.

⁵Who marked off how big it should be?
Surely you know!

Who stretched a ruler across it?

⁶What were the earth’s foundations set on,
or who put its cornerstone in place

⁷while the morning stars sang together
and all the angels shouted with joy?

⁸“Who shut the doors to keep the sea in
when it broke through and was born,

⁹when I made the clouds like a coat for the sea
and wrapped it in dark clouds,

¹⁰when I put limits on the sea
and put its doors and bars in place,

¹¹when I said to the sea, ‘You may come this far, but no

farther;

this is where your proud waves must stop”?

¹²“Have you ever ordered the morning to begin,
or shown the dawn where its place was

¹³in order to take hold of the earth by its edges
and shake evil people out of it?

¹⁴At dawn the earth changes like clay being pressed by
a seal;

the hills and valleys stand out like folds in a coat.

¹⁵Light is not given to evil people;
their arm is raised to do harm, but it is broken.

¹⁶“Have you ever gone to where the sea begins
or walked in the valleys under the sea?

¹⁷Have the gates of death been opened to you?
Have you seen the gates of the deep darkness?

¹⁸Do you understand how wide the earth is?
Tell me, if you know all these things.

¹⁹“What is the path to light’s home,
and where does darkness live?

²⁰Can you take them to their places?
Do you know the way to their homes?

²¹Surely you know, if you were already born when all
this happened!

Have you lived that many years?

²²“Have you ever gone into the storehouse of the
snow

or seen the storehouses for hail,

²³which I save for times of trouble,
for days of war and battle?

²⁴Where is the place from which light comes?
Where is the place from which the east winds blow
over the earth?

²⁵Who cuts a waterway for the heavy rains
and sets a path for the thunderstorm?

²⁶Who waters the land where no one lives,
the desert that has no one in it?

²⁷Who sends rain to satisfy the empty land
so the grass begins to grow?

²⁸Does the rain have a father?
Who is father to the drops of dew?

²⁹Who is the mother of the ice?
Who gives birth to the frost from the sky

³⁰when the water becomes hard as stone,
and even the surface of the ocean is frozen?

³¹“Can you tie up the stars of the Pleiades
or loosen the ropes of the stars in Orion?

³²Can you bring out the stars on time
or lead out the stars of the Bear with its cubs?

³³Do you know the laws of the sky
and understand their rule over the earth?

³⁴“Can you shout an order to the clouds
and cover yourself with a flood of water?

³⁵Can you send lightning bolts on their way?
Do they come to you and say, ‘Here we are’?

³⁶Who put wisdom inside the mind

or understanding in the heart?

³⁷Who has the wisdom to count the clouds?

Who can pour water from the jars of the sky

³⁸when the dust becomes hard

and the clumps of dirt stick together?

³⁹“Do you hunt food for the female lion

to satisfy the hunger of the young lions

⁴⁰while they lie in their dens

or hide in the bushes waiting to attack?

⁴¹Who gives food to the birds

when their young cry out to God

and wander about without food?

“Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?
Do you watch when the deer gives birth to her fawn?

²Do you count the months until they give birth
and know the right time for them to give birth?

³They lie down, their young are born,
and then the pain of giving birth is over.

⁴Their young ones grow big and strong in the wild
country.

Then they leave their homes and do not return.

⁵“Who let the wild donkey go free?

Who untied its ropes?

⁶I am the one who gave the donkey the desert as its
home;

I gave it the desert lands as a place to live.

⁷The wild donkey laughs at the confusion in the city,
and it does not hear the drivers shout.

⁸It roams the hills looking for pasture,
looking for anything green to eat.

⁹“Will the wild ox agree to serve you
and stay by your feeding box at night?

¹⁰Can you hold it to the plowed row with a harness
so it will plow the valleys for you?

¹¹Will you depend on the wild ox for its great strength
and leave your heavy work for it to do?

¹²Can you trust the ox to bring in your grain
and gather it to your threshing floor?

¹³“The wings of the ostrich flap happily,
but they are not like the feathers of the stork.

¹⁴The ostrich lays its eggs on the ground
and lets them warm in the sand.

¹⁵It does not stop to think that a foot might step on
them and crush them;

it does not care that some animal might walk on them.

¹⁶The ostrich is cruel to its young, as if they were not
even its own.

It does not care that its work is for nothing,

¹⁷because God did not give the ostrich wisdom;
God did not give it a share of good sense.

¹⁸But when the ostrich gets up to run, it is so fast
that it laughs at the horse and its rider.

¹⁹“Job, are you the one who gives the horse its
strength

or puts a flowing mane on its neck?

²⁰Do you make the horse jump like a locust?

It scares people with its proud snorting.

²¹It paws wildly, enjoying its strength,
and charges into battle.

²²It laughs at fear and is afraid of nothing;
it does not run away from the sword.

²³The bag of arrows rattles against the horse's side,
along with the flashing spears and swords.

²⁴With great excitement, the horse races over the
ground;

and it cannot stand still when it hears the trumpet.

²⁵When the trumpet blows, the horse snorts, ‘Aha!’

It smells the battle from far away;

it hears the shouts of commanders and the battle cry.

²⁶“Is it through your wisdom that the hawk flies
and spreads its wings toward the south?

²⁷Are you the one that commands the eagle to fly
and build its nest so high?

²⁸It lives on a high cliff and stays there at night;
the rocky peak is its protected place.

²⁹From there it looks for its food;
its eyes can see it from far away.

³⁰Its young eat blood,
and where there is something dead, the eagle is there.”

The Lord said to Job:

²“Will the person who argues with the Almighty correct him?

Let the person who accuses God answer him.”

³Then Job answered the Lord:

⁴“I am not worthy; I cannot answer you anything,
so I will put my hand over my mouth.

⁵I spoke one time, but I will not answer again;
I even spoke two times, but I will say nothing more.”

⁶Then the Lord spoke to Job from the storm:

⁷“Be strong, like a man!
I will ask you questions,
and you must answer me.

⁸Would you say that I am unfair?
Would you blame me to make yourself look right?

⁹Are you as strong as God?
Can your voice thunder like his?

¹⁰If so, then decorate yourself with glory and beauty;
dress in honor and greatness as if they were clothing.

¹¹Let your great anger punish;
look at the proud and bring them down.

¹²Look at the proud and make them humble.
Crush the wicked wherever they are.

¹³Bury them all in the dirt together;
cover their faces in the grave.

¹⁴If you can do that, then I myself will praise you,

because you are strong enough to save yourself.

¹⁵“Look at the [behemoth](#),
which I made just as I made you.

It eats grass like an ox.

¹⁶Look at the strength it has in its body;
the muscles of its stomach are powerful.

¹⁷Its tail is like a cedar tree;
the muscles of its thighs are woven together.

¹⁸Its bones are like tubes of bronze;
its legs are like bars of iron.

¹⁹It is one of the first of God's works,
but its Maker can destroy it.

²⁰The hills, where the wild animals play,
provide food for it.

²¹It lies under the lotus plants,
hidden by the tall grass in the swamp.

²²The lotus plants hide it in their shadow;
the poplar trees by the streams surround it.

²³If the river floods, it will not be afraid;
it is safe even if the Jordan River rushes to its mouth.

²⁴Can anyone blind its eyes and capture it?
Can anyone put hooks in its nose?

“Can you catch the [leviathan](#) on a fish hook
or tie its tongue down with a rope?

²Can you put a cord through its nose
or a hook in its jaw?

³Will it keep begging you for mercy
and speak to you with gentle words?

⁴Will it make an agreement with you
and let you take it as your slave for life?

⁵Can you make a pet of the leviathan as you would a
bird

or put it on a leash for your girls?

⁶Will traders try to bargain with you for it?
Will they divide it up among the merchants?

⁷Can you stick darts all over its skin
or fill its head with fishing spears?

⁸If you put one hand on it,
you will never forget the battle,
and you will never do it again!

⁹There is no hope of defeating it;
just seeing it overwhelms people.

¹⁰No one is brave enough to make it angry,
so who would be able to stand up against me?

¹¹No one has ever given me anything that I must pay
back,

because everything under the sky belongs to me.

¹²“I will speak about Leviathan’s arms and legs,
its great strength and well-formed body.

¹³No one can tear off its outer hide
or poke through its double armor.

¹⁴No one can force open its great jaws;
they are filled with frightening teeth.

¹⁵It has rows of shields on its back
that are tightly sealed together.

¹⁶Each shield is so close to the next one
that no air can go between them.

¹⁷They are joined strongly to one another;
they hold on to each other and cannot be separated.

¹⁸When it snorts, flashes of light are thrown out,
and its eyes look like the light at dawn.

¹⁹Flames blaze from its mouth;
sparks of fire shoot out.

²⁰Smoke pours out of its nose,
as if coming from a large pot over a hot fire.

²¹Its breath sets coals on fire,
and flames come out of its mouth.

²²There is great strength in its neck.
People are afraid and run away.

²³The folds of its skin are tightly joined;
they are set and cannot be moved.

²⁴Its chest is as hard as a rock,
even as hard as a grinding stone.

²⁵The powerful fear its terrible looks
and draw back in fear as it moves.

²⁶The sword that hits it does not hurt it,
nor the arrows, darts, and spears.

²⁷It treats iron as if it were straw
and bronze metal as if it were rotten wood.

²⁸It does not run away from arrows;
stones from slings are like chaff to it.

²⁹Clubs feel like pieces of straw to it,
and it laughs when they shake a spear at it.

³⁰The underside of its body is like broken pieces of pottery.

It leaves a trail in the mud like a threshing board.

³¹It makes the deep sea bubble like a boiling pot;
it stirs up the sea like a pot of oil.

³²When it swims, it leaves a shining path in the water
that makes the sea look as if it had white hair.

³³Nothing else on earth is equal to it;
it is a creature without fear.

³⁴It looks down on all those who are too proud;
it is king over all proud creatures.”

Job Answers the Lord

Then Job answered the Lord:

²“I know that you can do all things
and that no plan of yours can be ruined.

³You asked, ‘Who is this that made my purpose
unclear by saying things that are not true?’

Surely I spoke of things I did not understand;
I talked of things too wonderful for me to know.

⁴You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak.
I will ask you questions,
and you must answer me.’

⁵My ears had heard of you before,
but now my eyes have seen you.

⁶So now I hate myself;
I will change my heart and life.

I will sit in the dust and ashes.”

End of the Story

⁷After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not said what is right about me, as my servant Job did. ⁸Now take seven bulls and seven male sheep, and go to my servant Job, and offer a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will listen to his prayer. Then I will not punish you for being foolish. You

have not said what is right about me, as my servant Job did.”
⁹So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite did as the Lord said, and the Lord listened to Job’s prayer.

¹⁰After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord gave him success again. The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had owned before. ¹¹Job’s brothers and sisters came to his house, along with everyone who had known him before, and they all ate with him there. They comforted him and made him feel better about the trouble the Lord had brought on him, and each one gave Job a piece of silver and a gold ring.

¹²The Lord blessed the last part of Job’s life even more than the first part. Job had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand teams of oxen, and a thousand female donkeys. ¹³Job also had seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴He named the first daughter Jemimah, the second daughter Keziah, and the third daughter Keren-Happuch. ¹⁵There were no other women in all the land as beautiful as Job’s daughters. And their father Job gave them land to own along with their brothers.

¹⁶After this, Job lived one hundred forty years. He lived to see his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren. ¹⁷Then Job died; he was old and had lived many years.

Life Lessons

Job 42:1–17

Situation

Job learned of God’s greatness and humbly

prayed. God graciously restored Job's material blessings and family.

Observation

We are better able to appreciate blessings if we endure hardship.

Inspiration

All his life, Job had been a good man. All his life, he had believed in God. All his life, he had discussed God, had notions about him, and had prayed to him.

But in the storm Job sees him!

He sees Hope. Lover. Destroyer. Giver. Taker. Dreamer. Deliverer. Job sees the tender anger of a God whose unending love is often received with peculiar mistrust. Job stands as a blade of grass against the consuming fire of God's splendor. Job's demands melt like wax as God pulls back the curtain and heaven's light falls uneclipsed across the earth.

Job sees God.

God could turn away at this point. The gavel has been slammed, the verdict has been rendered. The Eternal Judge has spoken.

Ah, but God is not angry with Job. Firm? Yes. Direct? No doubt. Clear and convincing? Absolutely. But angry? No.

God is never irritated by the candle of an honest seeker.

If you underline any passage in the Book of Job, underline this one: "My ears had heard of you before, but now my eyes have seen you" [[Job 42:5](#)].

Job sees God—and that is enough.

But it isn't enough for God.

The years to come find Job once again sitting behind his mahogany desk with health restored and profits up. His lap is once again full of children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren—for four generations!

If Job ever wonders why God doesn't bring back the children he had taken away, he doesn't ask. Maybe he doesn't ask because he knows that his children could never be happier than they are in the presence of this One he has seen so briefly.

Something tells me that Job would do it all again, if that's what it took to hear God's voice and stand in the Presence. Even if God left him with his bedsores and bills, Job would do it again.

For God gave Job more than Job ever dreamed. God gave Job himself. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

How have personal problems hindered your spiritual progress? What steps are you taking to know God better? Stand still and experience God's presence.

Exploration

Knowing God—[Jeremiah 9:24](#); [John 15:13–15](#); [17:3](#); [James 4:8](#); [1 John 2:14](#); [4:7–8](#).

clay houses This is probably talking about people's bodies.

Bear ... Pleiades Names of well-known groups of stars.

behemoth A large land animal. It could refer to the hippopotamus, the elephant, or a monster.

leviathan Possibly a crocodile or a sea monster.

The Book of Psalms

Introduction

Worship. In two thousand years we haven't worked out the kinks. We still struggle for the right words in prayer. We still fumble over Scripture. We don't know when to kneel. We don't know when to stand. We don't know how to pray.

Worship is a daunting task.

For that reason, God gave us the Psalms—a praisebook for God's people. The Psalms could be titled *God's Book of Common Prayer*. This collection of hymns and petitions are strung together by one thread—a heart hungry for God.

Some are defiant. Others are reverent. Some are to be sung. Others are to be prayed. Some are intensely personal. Others are written as if the whole world would use them. Some were penned in caves, others in temples.

But all have one purpose—to give us the words to say when we stand before God.

The very variety should remind us that worship is personal. No secret formula exists. What moves you may stymie another. Each worships differently. But each should worship.

This book will help you do just that.

Here is a hint. Don't just read the prayers of these saints, pray them. Experience their energy. Imitate their honesty. Enjoy their creativity. Let these souls lead you in worship.

And let's remember. The language of worship is not polished, perfect, or advanced. It's just honest.

About This Book

Author:

A variety of writers including David, Solomon, Asaph, and even Moses

Date Written:

1440–430 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- God is worthy of all worship.
- God will defend his people against their enemies.
- Being in relationship with God is the key to all joy and security.

Key Verse:

“I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart. I will tell all the miracles you have done. I will be happy because of you; God Most High, I will sing praises to your name” ([Psalm 9:1](#)).

Contents:

1. Book One [1:1–41:13](#)
2. Book Two [42:1–72:20](#)
3. Book Three [73:1–89:52](#)
4. Book Four [90:1–106:48](#)
5. Book Five [107:1–150:6](#)

Book 1

Life Lessons

[Psalms 1:1–3:8](#)

Situation

Life offers two roads to travel—the way of the righteous or the way of the wicked. God provides, protects, and nourishes the righteous.

Observation

Follow the faithful road. God’s rewards supersede the benefits of the wicked.

Inspiration

Many people in society want to live a more stable life. To those who are filled with anxiety and unable to cope with their circumstances, the world offers a myriad of solutions that don’t work.

Unfortunately, many churches have followed the world in believing that man can only solve his problems through secular psychology—a product that can’t live up to its promises.

Where can you find stability? The answer is in [Psalm 1](#). It begins, “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners!” (v. [1](#), NASB) and ends, “Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment ... For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish” (vv. [5–6](#)).

The person who walks with God knows stability, but the one who rejects Him flounders in meaningless existence. Which would you rather be?

(From *Truth for Today* by John MacArthur)

Application

God has set before you two choices. If you want the Lord to protect you, provide for you, and nourish you, why pursue the path that leads to judgment? Consider the path you now are on. What changes, if any, do you need to make in order to get back on the right track?

Exploration

Choices—[Deuteronomy 4:25–31](#); [11:26–28](#); [30:19–20](#); [Joshua 24:15](#); [1 Kings 18:21](#).

Two Ways to Live

Happy are those who don't listen to the wicked,
who don't go where sinners go,
who don't do what evil people do.

²They love the Lord's teachings,
and they think about those teachings day and night.

³They are strong, like a tree planted by a river.

The tree produces fruit in season,
and its leaves don't die.

Everything they do will succeed.

⁴But wicked people are not like that.

They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

⁵So the wicked will not escape God's punishment.
Sinners will not worship with God's people.

⁶This is because the Lord takes care of his people,
but the wicked will be destroyed.

The Lord's Chosen King

Why are the nations so angry?
Why are the people making useless plans?

²The kings of the earth prepare to fight,
and their leaders make plans together
against the Lord
and his appointed one.

³They say, "Let's break the chains that hold us back
and throw off the ropes that tie us down."

⁴But the one who sits in heaven laughs;
the Lord makes fun of them.

⁵Then the Lord warns them
and frightens them with his anger.

⁶He says, "I have appointed my own king
to rule in Jerusalem on my holy mountain, Zion."

⁷Now I will tell you what the Lord has declared:
He said to me, "You are my son.
Today I have become your father.

⁸If you ask me, I will give you the nations;
all the people on earth will be yours.

⁹You will rule over them with an iron rod.
You will break them into pieces like pottery."

¹⁰So, kings, be wise;
rulers, learn this lesson.

¹¹Obey the Lord with great fear.
Be happy, but tremble.

¹²Show that you are loyal to his son,
or you will be destroyed by his anger,
because he can quickly become angry.
But happy are those who trust him for protection.

A Morning Prayer

David sang this when he ran away from his son Absalom.

Lord, I have many enemies!
Many people have turned against me.
²Many are saying about me,
“God won’t rescue him.”

Selah

³But, Lord, you are my shield,
my wonderful God who gives me courage.
⁴I will pray to the Lord,
and he will answer me from his holy mountain.

Selah

⁵I can lie down and go to sleep,
and I will wake up again,
because the Lord gives me strength.
⁶Thousands of troops may surround me,
but I am not afraid.

⁷Lord, rise up!
My God, come save me!
You have struck my enemies on the cheek;
you have broken the teeth of the wicked.
⁸The Lord can save his people.
Lord, bless your people.

Selah

Life Lessons

Psalms 4:1–6:10

Situation

David rejoiced because of God's protection and peace. He encouraged others to trust in God.

Observation

Godly people can place their confidence in God because he listens to them and puts joy in their hearts.

Inspiration

In August of 1930, forty-five-year-old Joseph Crater waved goodbye to friends after an evening meal in a New York restaurant, flagged down a taxi, and rode off. He was never seen or heard from again....

A search of his apartment revealed one clue. It was a note attached to a check, and both were left for his wife. The check was for a sizable amount and the note simply read, "I am very weary. Love, Joe."

The note could have been nothing more than a thought at the end of a hard day. Or it could have meant a great deal more—the epitaph of a despairing man.

Weariness is tough. I don't mean the physical weariness that comes with mowing the lawn, or the mental weariness that follows a hard day of decisions and thinking. No, the weariness that attacked Judge Crater is much worse. It's the weariness that comes just before you give up. That feeling of honest

desperation. It's the dispirited father, the abandoned child, or the retiree with time on his hands. It's that stage in life when motivation disappears; the children grow up, a job is lost, a wife dies. The result is weariness—deep, lonely, frustrated weariness.

Only one man in history has claimed to have an answer for it. He stands before all the Joseph Craters of the world with the same promise: “Come to me, all you who are weary ... and I will give you rest” ([Matthew 11:28](#)). (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

Ask God for a new sense of joy and love. When tension mounts, pause to thank God for his love.

Exploration

Joy—[Psalm 16:9](#); [Matthew 5:3–12](#); [John 15:11](#); [Philippians 4:4](#).

An Evening Prayer

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm of David.

Answer me when I pray to you,
my God who does what is right.
Make things easier for me when I am in trouble.
Have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

²People, how long will you turn my honor into shame?
How long will you love what is false and look for new
lies?

Selah

³You know that the Lord has chosen for himself those
who are loyal to him.

The Lord listens when I pray to him.

⁴When you are angry, do not sin.
Think about these things quietly
as you go to bed.

Selah

⁵Do what is right as a sacrifice to the Lord
and trust the Lord.

⁶Many people ask,
“Who will give us anything good?”
Lord, be kind to us.

⁷But you have made me very happy,

happier than they are,
even with all their grain and new wine.
⁸I go to bed and sleep in peace,
because, Lord, only you keep me safe.

A Morning Prayer for Protection

For the director of music. For flutes. A psalm of David.

Lord, listen to my words.

Understand my sadness.

²Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God,
because I pray to you.

³Lord, every morning you hear my voice.
Every morning, I tell you what I need,
and I wait for your answer.

⁴You are not a God who is pleased with the wicked;
you do not live with those who do evil.

⁵Those people who make fun of you cannot stand
before you.

You hate all those who do evil.

⁶You destroy liars;
the Lord hates those who kill and trick others.

⁷Because of your great love,
I can come into your Temple.
Because I fear and respect you,
I can worship in your holy Temple.

⁸Lord, since I have many enemies,
show me the right thing to do.
Show me clearly how you want me to live.

⁹My enemies' mouths do not tell the truth;
in their hearts they want to destroy others.

Their throats are like open graves;
they use their tongues for telling lies.

¹⁰God, declare them guilty!

Let them fall into their own traps.

Send them away because their sins are many;
they have turned against you.

¹¹But let everyone who trusts you be happy;
let them sing glad songs forever.

Protect those who love you
and who are happy because of you.

¹²Lord, you bless those who do what is right;
you protect them like a soldier's shield.

A Prayer for Mercy in Troubled Times

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. Upon the sheminith. A psalm of David.

Lord, don't correct me when you are angry;
don't punish me when you are very angry.

²Lord, have mercy on me because I am weak.
Heal me, Lord, because my bones ache.

³I am very upset.
Lord, how long will it be?

⁴Lord, return and save me;
save me because of your kindness.

⁵Dead people don't remember you;
those in the grave don't praise you.

⁶I am tired of crying to you.
Every night my bed is wet with tears;
my bed is soaked from my crying.
⁷My eyes are weak from so much crying;
they are weak from crying about my enemies.

⁸Get away from me, all you who do evil,
because the Lord has heard my crying.

⁹The Lord has heard my cry for help;
the Lord will answer my prayer.

¹⁰All my enemies will be ashamed and troubled.
They will turn and suddenly leave in shame.

Life Lessons

Psalms 7:1–8:9

Situation

This psalm may have been David's response to slanderous accusations. Some accused him of trying to kill King Saul and seize the throne ([1 Samuel 24:9–11](#)).

Observation

Depend on God to bring justice. God judges perfectly when you are falsely accused.

Inspiration

God's power to take the most negative situations and turn them into positive realities worthy of His praise is demonstrated throughout biblical history. There is not a crisis that goes beyond the bounds of God's creative power. Whether the difficulties come from Satan or other people, or are self-inflicted, or are experienced in the process of our obedience, it is the prerogative of God to rearrange, reconstruct, reinterpret, and realign the situation to bring glory and praise to His name... Even Christ's death on the cross was transformed by the power of God into positive results and residual benefits of the redemption that many of us have come to know and enjoy. Since God is just, all that He permits is consistent with His justice... . God's justice guarantees that ultimately all that is unfair will be dealt with. We are naive to assume that all of life in its fallen condition is fair and just. It is only safe to

realize that God is just and that in His time and in His own way He will deal with both the injustice and those who have been unjust. (From *The Upside of Down* by Joseph Stowell)

Application

Think of a time when you were falsely accused. What did you do? Did you turn to God as David did, or did you take matters into your own hands? The next time you face injustice, remember that God perfectly judges all difficult matters. Turn the injustices over to him.

Exploration

Justice of God—[Exodus 34:6-7](#); [Deuteronomy 32:4](#); [Job 34:17-30](#); [Psalms 58:11](#); [140:12](#); [Luke 18:7-8](#).

A Prayer for Fairness

A shiggaion of David which he sang to the Lord about Cush, from the tribe of Benjamin.

Lord my God, I trust in you for protection.

Save me and rescue me
from those who are chasing me.

²Otherwise, like a lion they will tear me apart.
They will rip me to pieces, and no one can save me.

³Lord my God, what have I done?
Have my hands done something wrong?

⁴Have I done wrong to my friend
or stolen without reason from my enemy?

⁵If I have, let my enemy chase me and capture me.
Let him trample me into the dust
and bury me in the ground.

Selah

⁶Lord, rise up in your anger;
stand up against my enemies' anger.
Get up and demand fairness.

⁷Gather the nations around you
and rule them from above.

⁸Lord, judge the people.
Lord, defend me because I am right,
because I have done no wrong, God Most High.

⁹God, you do what is right.
You know our thoughts and feelings.
Stop those wicked actions done by evil people,
and help those who do what is right.

¹⁰God protects me like a shield;
he saves those whose hearts are right.

¹¹God judges by what is right,
and God is always ready to punish the wicked.

¹²If they do not change their lives,
God will sharpen his sword;
he will string his bow and take aim.

¹³He has prepared his deadly weapons;
he has made his flaming arrows.

¹⁴There are people who think up evil
and plan trouble and tell lies.

¹⁵They dig a hole to trap others,
but they will fall into it themselves.

¹⁶They will get themselves into trouble;
the violence they cause will hurt only themselves.

¹⁷I praise the Lord because he does what is right.
I sing praises to the Lord Most High.

The Lord's Greatness

For the director of music. On the gittith. A psalm of David.

Lord our Lord,
your name is the most wonderful name in all the earth!
It brings you praise in heaven above.
²You have taught children and babies
to sing praises to you
because of your enemies.
And so you silence your enemies
and destroy those who try to get even.

³I look at your heavens,
which you made with your fingers.
I see the moon and stars,
which you created.

⁴But why are people important to you?
Why do you take care of human beings?

⁵You made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.

⁶You put them in charge of everything you made.
You put all things under their control:

⁷all the sheep, the cattle,
and the wild animals,

⁸the birds in the sky,
the fish in the sea,
and everything that lives under water.

⁹Lord our Lord,

your name is the most wonderful name in all the earth!

Life Lessons

Psalms 9:1–10:18

Situation

David and other psalmists praised God as a way of saying thank you. God helped David and the Israelites. They knew God would show his constant care in the future, too.

Observation

God is never deaf to his children's cries for help.

Inspiration

The Bible is a Christian's guidebook, and I believe the knowledge it sheds on pain and suffering is the great antidote to fear for suffering people....

When I suffer pain over any length of time I try to reflect on the good which the Bible has promised pain is producing in me....

"How does suffering accomplish this?" I ask myself. It produces perseverance, or steadiness, by slowing me down, by forcing me to turn to God, by proving to me that I can survive a crisis....

The Bible is filled with resources available to one trying to stave off fears and helplessness. Reading Job's thrashings in fear about God's seeming lack of concern can make mine easier to bear... . And knowledge about prayer to a loving God can ward off frenzied efforts to "muster up faith" in hopes of impressing God—prayer does not work that way, as the Bible shows. God is already full of loving concern; we do not need to impress Him with spiritual

calisthenics....

Attitudes of fear and helplessness affect the quantity of suffering. At least we have the inspiring examples of those who have proved that the human spirit can ascend through the words of circumstances. And because man is both body and spirit, Christianity can offer a true and healing hope. (From *Where Is God When It Hurts* by Philip Yancey)

Application

Whenever you face a trial, pray for God's help. Pray that God will be glorified in the situation. And thank him for the care he shows.

Exploration

God as Help—[Psalm 30:10](#); [33:20](#); [54:4](#); [70:5](#); [115:9](#); [146:5](#).

Thanksgiving for Victory

For the director of music. To the tune of "The Death of the Son." A psalm of David.

I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart.

I will tell all the miracles you have done.

²I will be happy because of you;

God Most High, I will sing praises to your name.

³My enemies turn back;

they are overwhelmed and die because of you.

⁴You have heard my complaint;

you sat on your throne and judged by what was right.

⁵You spoke strongly against the foreign nations

and destroyed the wicked;

you wiped out their names forever and ever.

⁶The enemy is gone forever.

You destroyed their cities;

no one even remembers them.

⁷But the Lord rules forever.

He sits on his throne to judge,

⁸and he will judge the world in fairness;

he will decide what is fair for the nations.

⁹The Lord defends those who suffer;

he defends them in times of trouble.

¹⁰Those who know the Lord trust him,
because he will not leave those who come to him.

¹¹Sing praises to the Lord who is king on Mount Zion.
Tell the nations what he has done.

¹²He remembers who the murderers are;
he will not forget the cries of those who suffer.

¹³Lord, have mercy on me.

See how my enemies hurt me.

Do not let me go through the gates of death.

¹⁴Then, at the gates of Jerusalem, I will praise you;
I will rejoice because you saved me.

¹⁵The nations have fallen into the pit they dug.
Their feet are caught in the nets they laid.

¹⁶The Lord has made himself known by his fair
decisions;
the wicked get trapped by what they do.

Higgaion. Selah

¹⁷Wicked people will go to the grave,
and so will all those who forget God.

¹⁸But those who have troubles will not be forgotten.
The hopes of the poor will never die.

¹⁹Lord, rise up and judge the nations.
Don't let people think they are strong.

²⁰Teach them to fear you, Lord.
The nations must learn that they are only human.

Selah

A Complaint About Evil People

Lord, why are you so far away?
Why do you hide when there is trouble?

²Proudly the wicked chase down those who suffer.
Let them be caught in their own traps.

³They brag about the things they want.
They bless the greedy but hate the Lord.

⁴The wicked people are too proud.
They do not look for God;
there is no room for God in their thoughts.

⁵They always succeed.
They are far from keeping your laws;
they make fun of their enemies.

⁶They say to themselves, "Nothing bad will ever
happen to me;

I will never be ruined."

⁷Their mouths are full of curses, lies, and threats;
they use their tongues for sin and evil.

⁸They hide near the villages.
They look for innocent people to kill;
they watch in secret for the helpless.

⁹They wait in hiding like a lion.
They wait to catch poor people;
they catch the poor in nets.

¹⁰The poor are thrown down and crushed;
they are defeated because the others are stronger.

¹¹The wicked think, "God has forgotten us.
He doesn't see what is happening."

¹²But God will punish the wicked.

--Lord, rise up and punish the wicked.

Don't forget those who need help.

¹³Why do wicked people hate God?

They say to themselves, "God won't punish us."

¹⁴Lord, surely you see these cruel and evil things;
look at them and do something.

People in trouble look to you for help.

You are the one who helps the orphans.

¹⁵Break the power of wicked people.

Punish them for the evil they have done.

¹⁶The Lord is King forever and ever.

Destroy from your land those nations that do not
worship you.

¹⁷Lord, you have heard what the poor people want.

Do what they ask, and listen to them.

¹⁸Protect the orphans and put an end to suffering
so they will no longer be afraid of evil people.

Life Lessons

Psalms 11:1–13:6

Situation

David complained to God about the evil in society. The wicked seemed to prosper, while the righteous suffered.

Observation

God will punish evil at the proper time. Until then, he will protect us.

Inspiration

There are snowstorms. There are hailstorms. There are rainstorms. And there are doubtstorms.

Every so often a doubtstorm rolls into my life, bringing with it a flurry of questions and gale-force winds of fear. And, soon after it comes, a light shines through it.

Sometimes the storm comes after the evening news. Some nights I wonder why I watch it. Some nights it's just too much. From the steps of the Supreme Court to the steppes of South Africa, the news is usually gloomy ... thirty minutes of bite-sized tragedies. A handsome man in a nice suit with a warm voice gives bad news. They call him the anchorman. Good title. One needs an anchor in today's tempestuous waters....

Sometimes the storm comes when I'm at work. Story after story of homes that won't heal and hearts that won't melt. Always more hunger than food. More needs than money. More questions than answers. On

Sundays I stand before a church with a three-point outline in my hand, thirty minutes on the clock, and a prayer on my lips. I do my best to say something that will convince a stranger that an unseen God still hears.

And I sometimes wonder why so many hearts have to hurt.

Do you ever get doubtstorms? Some of you don't, I know. I've talked to you. Some of you have a "Davidish" optimism that defies any Goliath. I used to think that you were naive at best and phony at worst.

I don't think that anymore.

I think you are gifted. You are gifted with faith. You can see the rainbow before the clouds part. If you have this gift, then skip this chapter. I won't say anything you need to hear.

But others of you wonder ...

You wonder what others know that you don't. You wonder if you are blind or if they are. You wonder why some proclaim "Eureka" before the gold is found. You wonder why some shout "Land ho" before the fog has cleared. You wonder how some people believe so confidently while you believe so reluctantly.

As a result, you are a bit uncomfortable on the padded pew of blind belief. Your Bible hero is Thomas. Your middle name is Caution. Your queries are the bane of every Sunday school teacher.

"If God is so good, why do I sometimes feel so bad?"

"If his message is so clear, why do I get so

confused?”

“If the Father is in control, why do good people have gut-wrenching problems?”

You wonder if it is a blessing or a curse to have a mind that never rests...

Tough questions. Throwin-the-towel questions. Questions the disciples must have asked...

Where is God when his world is stormy?

Doubtstorms: turbulent days when the enemy is too big, the task too great, the future too bleak, and the answers too few...

“When God comes,” we doubters think, “all pain will flee. Life will be tranquil. No questions will remain.”

And because we look for the bonfire, we miss the candle. Because we listen for the shout, we miss the whisper.

But it is in burnished candles that God comes, and through whispered promises he speaks: “When you doubt, look around; I am closer than you think.”
(From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

In what ways do you see evil people prospering and righteous people suffering? Your challenge is to *wait*; to *trust* that God will one day balance the scales.

Exploration

God Judges the Wicked—[Zephaniah 3:1–8](#); [Malachi 3:13–4:3](#); [2 Peter 2:1–13](#); [Revelation 20](#).

Trust in the Lord

For the director of music. Of David.

I trust in the Lord for protection.

So why do you say to me,

“Fly like a bird to your mountain.

²Like hunters, the wicked string their bows;
they set their arrows on the bowstrings.

They shoot from dark places
at those who are honest.

³When all that is good falls apart,
what can good people do?”

⁴The Lord is in his holy temple;
the Lord sits on his throne in heaven.

He sees what people do;
he keeps his eye on them.

⁵The Lord tests those who do right,
but he hates the wicked and those who love to hurt
others.

⁶He will send hot coals and burning sulfur on the
wicked.

A whirlwind is what they will get.

⁷The Lord does what is right, and he loves justice,
so honest people will see his face.

A Prayer Against Liars

For the director of music. Upon the sheminith. A psalm of David.

Save me, Lord, because the good people are all gone;
no true believers are left on earth.

²Everyone lies to his neighbors;
they say one thing and mean another.

³The Lord will stop those flattering lips
and cut off those bragging tongues.

⁴They say, "Our tongues will help us win.
We can say what we wish; no one is our master."

⁵But the Lord says,
"I will now rise up,
because the poor are being hurt.
Because of the moans of the helpless,
I will give them the help they want."

⁶The Lord's words are pure,
like silver purified by fire,
like silver purified seven times over.

⁷Lord, you will keep us safe;
you will always protect us from such people.

⁸But the wicked are all around us;
everyone loves what is wrong.

A Prayer for God to Be Near

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

How long will you forget me, Lord? Forever?

How long will you hide from me?

²How long must I worry
and feel sad in my heart all day?

How long will my enemy win over me?

³Lord, look at me.

Answer me, my God;

tell me, or I will die.

⁴Otherwise my enemy will say, "I have won!"

Those against me will rejoice that I've been defeated.

⁵I trust in your love.

My heart is happy because you saved me.

⁶I sing to the Lord

because he has taken care of me.

Life Lessons

[Psalms 14:1–15:5](#)

Situation

David mourned or lamented. He may have written [Psalm 14](#) when enemies pressed in on him. David wrote [Psalm 15](#) in a liturgical style. Perhaps he taught this song to the Israelites as a reminder of godly living.

Observation

Evil, wickedness, and deceit define how a world without God behaves. Yet the righteous live according to God's commands. Truth, justice, and a passion for righteousness please God.

Inspiration

The goal of Christian growth is the achievement of righteousness. In the Christian world today such a statement may sound radical. Christians hardly ever talk about righteousness. The word has almost become a swear word. Nearly any other term is preferred to the word "righteousness." I have never had a student, a parishioner, or any other person come to me and ask, "How can I become righteous?"

To be spiritual has only one real purpose. It is a means to an end, not the end itself. The goal of all spiritual exercise must be the goal of righteousness. God calls us to be holy. Christ sets the priority of the Christian life: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." The goal is righteousness. (From *The*

Holiness of God by R. C. Sproul)

Application

Live according to God's high moral standards. Make decisions as if God were your companion in all your activities—for he is!

Exploration

Righteousness—[Daniel 4:27](#); [Hosea 10:12](#); [Matthew 5:20](#); [Ephesians 6:14](#); [Philippians 1:9–11](#); [1 Timothy 6:11](#); [2 Peter 3:11](#).

The Unbelieving Fool

For the director of music. Of David.

Fools say to themselves,
“There is no God.”
Fools are evil and do terrible things;
there is no one who does anything good.

²The Lord looked down from heaven on all people
to see if anyone understood,
if anyone was looking to God for help.

³But all have turned away.
Together, everyone has become evil.
There is no one who does anything good,
not even one.

⁴Don't the wicked understand?
They destroy my people as if they were eating bread.
They do not ask the Lord for help.

⁵But the wicked are filled with terror,
because God is with those who do what is right.

⁶The wicked upset the plans of the poor,
but the Lord will protect them.

⁷I pray that victory will come to Israel from Mount
Zion!

May the Lord bring them back.

Then the people of Jacob will rejoice,
and the people of Israel will be glad.

What the Lord Demands

A psalm of David.

Lord, who may enter your Holy Tent?
Who may live on your holy mountain?

²Only those who are innocent
and who do what is right.
Such people speak the truth from their hearts
³and do not tell lies about others.

They do no wrong to their neighbors
and do not gossip.

⁴They do not respect hateful people
but honor those who honor the Lord.
They keep their promises to their neighbors,
even when it hurts.

⁵They do not charge interest on money they lend
and do not take money to hurt innocent people.
Whoever does all these things will never be destroyed.

Life Lessons

Psalms 16:1–17:15

Situation

David's prayers revealed his trust in and reliance upon God, both in this life and in the life to come.

Observation

David's trust in God inspires Christians today.

Inspiration

The Bible tells us our God is so trustworthy that we are to throw our confidence on Him, not leaning on our own understanding ([Proverbs 3:5](#)). God has already proved how much His love can be trusted by sending Christ to die for us. Wasn't that enough? Not for me. I always wanted to be on the inside looking out—sitting with the Lord up in the control tower instead of down on the confusing ground level. He couldn't be trusted unless I was there to oversee things! What a low view of my Master and Creator I had held all these years! How could I have dared to assume that almighty God owed me explanations! Did I think that because I had done God the "favor" of becoming a Christian, He must now check things out with me? Was the Lord of the universe under obligation to show me how the trials of every human being fit into the tapestry of life? Had I never read [Deuteronomy 29:29](#), "There are secrets the Lord your God has not revealed to us" (LB)?

What made me think that even if He explained all His ways to me I would be able to understand them?

It would be like pouring million-gallon truths into my one-ounce brain. (From *A Step Further* by Joni Eareckson Tada)

Application

Find an enticing jigsaw puzzle and try putting it together. As you experience the challenge and frustration of finding the right pieces, stop and read these psalms again. Note the connections you can make with these psalms, the puzzle, and your life. Rest in the fact that God has already put together the “big picture” of your life.

Exploration

Trust—[Proverbs 3:5–7](#); Victory—[1 Timothy 1:18; 6:12](#); [2 Timothy 4:7](#).

The Lord Takes Care of His People

A miktam of David.

Protect me, God,
because I trust in you.

²I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord.
Every good thing I have comes from you."

³As for the godly people in the world,
they are the wonderful ones I enjoy.

⁴But those who turn to idols
will have much pain.
I will not offer blood to those idols
or even speak their names.

⁵No, the Lord is all I need.
He takes care of me.

⁶My share in life has been pleasant;
my part has been beautiful.

⁷I praise the Lord because he advises me.
Even at night, I feel his leading.

⁸I keep the Lord before me always.
Because he is close by my side,
I will not be hurt.

⁹So I rejoice and am glad.
Even my body has hope,

¹⁰because you will not leave me in the grave.
You will not let your holy one rot.

¹¹You will teach me how to live a holy life.
Being with you will fill me with joy;
at your right hand I will find pleasure forever.

A Prayer for Protection

A prayer of David.

Lord, hear me begging for fairness;
listen to my cry for help.

Pay attention to my prayer,
because I speak the truth.

²You will judge that I am right;
your eyes can see what is true.

³You have examined my heart;
you have tested me all night.

You questioned me without finding anything wrong;
I have not sinned with my mouth.

⁴I have obeyed your commands,
so I have not done what evil people do.

⁵I have done what you told me;
I have not failed.

⁶I call to you, God,
and you answer me.

Listen to me now,
and hear what I say.

⁷Your love is wonderful.

By your power you save those who trust you
from their enemies.

⁸Protect me as you would protect your own eye.
Hide me under the shadow of your wings.

⁹Keep me from the wicked who attack me,
from my enemies who surround me.

¹⁰They are selfish
and brag about themselves.

¹¹They have chased me until they have surrounded me.
They plan to throw me to the ground.

¹²They are like lions ready to kill;
like lions, they sit in hiding.

¹³Lord, rise up, face the enemy, and throw them down.
Save me from the wicked with your sword.

¹⁴Lord, save me by your power
from those whose reward is in this life.
They have plenty of food.
They have many sons
and leave much money to their children.

¹⁵Because I have lived right, I will see your face.
When I wake up, I will see your likeness and be
satisfied.

Life Lessons

[Psalm 18:1-50](#)

Situation

King David cried out to God in great distress. He recognized that God would save him through his mighty power.

Observation

In this beautiful praise song to the Lord, David acknowledged that help and deliverance come only from God. David also included the many reasons that God saves and helps his people.

Inspiration

May I share with you a favorite verse of mine? I like it so much I wrote it on the first page of my Bible.

“Because he delights in me, he saved me” ([Psalm 18:19](#)).

And you thought he saved you because of your decency. You thought he saved you because of your good works or good attitude or good looks. Sorry. If that were the case, your salvation would be lost when your voice went south or your works got weak. There are many reasons God saves you: to bring glory to himself, to appease his justice, to demonstrate his sovereignty. But one of the sweetest reasons God saved you is because he is fond of you. He likes having you around. He thinks you are the best thing to come down the pike in quite awhile. “As a man rejoices over his new wife, so your God will rejoice over you” ([Isaiah 62:5](#)).

If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If he had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, he'll listen. He can live anywhere in the universe, and he chose your heart. And the Christmas gift he sent you in Bethlehem? Face it, friend. He's crazy about you. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

When you feel overwhelmed and frightened by the “enemies” in your life, remember David’s song. God is your rock and your protector. He is able and willing to save you because he delights in you.

Exploration

God’s Delight in Us—[Psalm 37:23](#); [Isaiah 65:19](#); [Zephaniah 3:17](#).

A Song of Victory

For the director of music. By the Lord's servant, David. David sang this song to the Lord when the Lord had saved him from Saul and all his other enemies.

I love you, Lord. You are my strength.

²The Lord is my rock, my protection, my Savior.

My God is my rock.

I can run to him for safety.

He is my shield and my saving strength, my defender.

³I will call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise,
and I will be saved from my enemies.

⁴The ropes of death came around me;
the deadly rivers overwhelmed me.

⁵The ropes of death wrapped around me.
The traps of death were before me.

⁶In my trouble I called to the Lord.
I cried out to my God for help.
From his temple he heard my voice;
my call for help reached his ears.

⁷The earth trembled and shook.
The foundations of the mountains began to shake.
They trembled because the Lord was angry.

⁸Smoke came out of his nose,
and burning fire came out of his mouth.

Burning coals went before him.

⁹He tore open the sky and came down
with dark clouds under his feet.

¹⁰He rode a creature with wings and flew.
He raced on the wings of the wind.

¹¹He made darkness his covering, his shelter around
him,

surrounded by fog and clouds.

¹²Out of the brightness of his presence came clouds
with hail and lightning.

¹³The Lord thundered from heaven;
the Most High raised his voice,
and there was hail and lightning.

¹⁴He shot his arrows and scattered his enemies.
His many bolts of lightning confused them with fear.

¹⁵Lord, you spoke strongly.
The wind blew from your nose.
Then the valleys of the sea appeared,
and the foundations of the earth were seen.

¹⁶The Lord reached down from above and took me;
he pulled me from the deep water.

¹⁷He saved me from my powerful enemies,
from those who hated me, because they were too
strong for me.

¹⁸They attacked me at my time of trouble,
but the Lord supported me.

¹⁹He took me to a safe place.
Because he delights in me, he saved me.

²⁰The Lord spared me because I did what was right.

Because I have not done evil, he has rewarded me.

²¹I have followed the ways of the Lord;
I have not done evil by turning away from my God.

²²I remember all his laws
and have not broken his rules.

²³I am innocent before him;
I have kept myself from doing evil.

²⁴The Lord rewarded me because I did what was right,
because I did what the Lord said was right.

²⁵Lord, you are loyal to those who are loyal,
and you are good to those who are good.

²⁶You are pure to those who are pure,
but you are against those who are bad.

²⁷You save the humble,
but you bring down those who are proud.

²⁸Lord, you give light to my lamp.
My God brightens the darkness around me.

²⁹With your help I can attack an army.
With God's help I can jump over a wall.

³⁰The ways of God are without fault.
The Lord's words are pure.
He is a shield to those who trust him.

³¹Who is God? Only the Lord.
Who is the Rock? Only our God.

³²God is my protection.
He makes my way free from fault.

³³He makes me like a deer that does not stumble;
he helps me stand on the steep mountains.

³⁴He trains my hands for battle
so my arms can bend a bronze bow.
³⁵You protect me with your saving shield.
You support me with your right hand.
You have stooped to make me great.
³⁶You give me a better way to live,
so I live as you want me to.
³⁷I chased my enemies and caught them.
I did not quit until they were destroyed.
³⁸I crushed them so they couldn't rise up again.
They fell beneath my feet.
³⁹You gave me strength in battle.
You made my enemies bow before me.
⁴⁰You made my enemies turn back,
and I destroyed those who hated me.
⁴¹They called for help,
but no one came to save them.
They called to the Lord,
but he did not answer them.
⁴²I beat my enemies into pieces, like dust in the wind.
I poured them out like mud in the streets.

⁴³You saved me when the people attacked me.
You made me the leader of nations.
People I never knew serve me.
⁴⁴As soon as they hear me, they obey me.
Foreigners obey me.
⁴⁵They all become afraid
and tremble in their hiding places.

⁴⁶The Lord lives!

May my Rock be praised.

Praise the God who saves me!

⁴⁷God gives me victory over my enemies
and brings people under my rule.

⁴⁸He saves me from my enemies.

You set me over those who hate me.

You saved me from cruel men.

⁴⁹So I will praise you, Lord, among the nations.
I will sing praises to your name.

⁵⁰The Lord gives great victories to his king.
He is loyal to his appointed king,
to David and his descendants forever.

Life Lessons

Psalm 19:1-14

Situation

David praised God for the beauty of nature. David believed that rather than inhibiting actions, God's laws pointed out shortfalls and sins.

Observation

God's law helps us avoid sin and enjoy fellowship with him. The law does not prevent enjoyment but encourages it.

Inspiration

The Ten Commandments tell us not to covet or lust. However, all moral law is more than a test; it's for our own good. Every law which God has given has been for our benefit. If a person breaks it, he is not only rebelling against God, he is hurting himself. God gave "the law" because he loves man. It is for man's benefit. God's commandments were given to protect and promote man's happiness, not to restrict it. God wants the best for man. To ask God to revise his commandments would be to ask him to stop loving man....

In our universe, we live under God's law. In the physical realm, the planets move in split-second precision. There is no guesswork in the galaxies. We see in nature that everything is part of a plan which is harmonious, orderly, and obedient. Could a God who made the physical universe be any less exacting in the higher spiritual and moral order? God loves us

with an infinite love, but he cannot and will not approve of disorder. Consequently, he has laid down spiritual laws which, if obeyed, bring harmony and fulfillment, but, if disobeyed, bring discord and disorder. (From *How to Be Born Again* by Billy Graham)

Application

Think of a few laws in your town. Rewrite a few that begin with “Do not” to begin with “You must.” Write them so that keeping them brings law-abiding citizens enjoyment. Harder than you thought? Thank God today for laws that promote justice and peace. Write a letter of encouragement to your mayor or police chief.

Exploration

Law of God—[Exodus 15:26](#); [20:1–17](#); [Leviticus 20:22–23](#); [Galatians 2:16](#).

God's Works and Word

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

The heavens tell the glory of God,
and the skies announce what his hands have made.

²Day after day they tell the story;
night after night they tell it again.

³They have no speech or words;
they have no voice to be heard.

⁴But their message goes out through all the world;
their words go everywhere on earth.
The sky is like a home for the sun.

⁵The sun comes out like a bridegroom from his
bedroom.

It rejoices like an athlete eager to run a race.

⁶The sun rises at one end of the sky
and follows its path to the other end.
Nothing hides from its heat.

⁷The teachings of the Lord are perfect;
they give new strength.
The rules of the Lord can be trusted;
they make plain people wise.

⁸The orders of the Lord are right;
they make people happy.
The commands of the Lord are pure;

they light up the way.

⁹Respect for the Lord is good;

it will last forever.

The judgments of the Lord are true;

they are completely right.

¹⁰They are worth more than gold,

even the purest gold.

They are sweeter than honey,

even the finest honey.

¹¹By them your servant is warned.

Keeping them brings great reward.

¹²People cannot see their own mistakes.

Forgive me for my secret sins.

¹³Keep me from the sins of pride;

don't let them rule me.

Then I can be pure

and innocent of the greatest of sins.

¹⁴I hope my words and thoughts please you.

Lord, you are my Rock, the one who saves me.

Life Lessons

Psalms 20:1–22:31

Situation

Jesus quoted the first line of [Psalm 22](#) when he suffered on the cross.

Observation

This psalm prophesied Jesus' suffering on the cross. It described his emotional, spiritual, and physical anguish.

Inspiration

Lord?

Yes.

I may be stepping out of line by saying this, but I need to tell you something that's been on my mind.

Go ahead.

I don't like this verse: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" It doesn't sound like you; it doesn't sound like something you would say.

Usually I love it when you speak. I listen when you speak. I imagine the power of your voice, the thunder of your commands, the dynamism in your dictates.

That's what I like to hear.

Remember the creation song you sang into the soundless eternity? Ah, now that's you. That was the act of a God!

And when you ordained the waves to splash and they roared, when you declared that the stars be flung and they flew, when you proclaimed that life be

alive and it all began? ... Or the whisper of breath into the clay-caked Adam? That was you at your best. That's the way I like to hear you. That's the voice I love to hear.

That's why I don't like this verse....

Look at the sentence. There is a "why" at the beginning and a question mark at the end. You don't ask questions....

And as long as I'm shooting straight with you—I don't like to see the word *abandon*, either. The source of life ... abandoned? The giver of love ... alone? The father of it all ... isolated?

Come on. Surely you don't mean it. Could deity feel abandoned?

Could we change the sentence a bit? Not much. Just the verb.

What would you suggest?

How about *challenge*? "My God, my God, why did you challenge me?" Isn't that better? Now we can applaud. Now we can lift banners for your dedication. Now we can explain it to our children. It makes sense now. You see, that makes you a hero. A hero. History is full of heroes.

And who is a hero but someone who survives a challenge.

Or, if that's not acceptable, I have another one. Why not *afflict*? "My God, my God, why did you afflict me?" Yes, that's it. Now you are a martyr, taking a stand for truth. A patriot, pierced by evil. A noble soldier who took the sword all the way to the hilt; bloody and beaten, but victorious.

Afflicted is much better than *abandoned*. You are a martyr. Right up there with Patrick Henry and Abraham Lincoln.

You are God, Jesus! You couldn't be abandoned. You couldn't be left alone. You couldn't be deserted in your most painful moment.

Abandonment. That is the punishment for a criminal. Abandonment. That is the suffering borne by the most evil. Abandonment. That's for the vile—not for you. Not you, the King of kings. Not you, the Beginning and the End. Not you, the One Unborn. After all, didn't John call you the Lamb of God? ...

"Who has come to take away the sins of the world." Wait a minute. "To take away the sins ..." I'd never thought about those words.

I'd read them but never thought about them. I thought you just, I don't know, sent sin away. Banished it. I thought you'd just stood in front of the mountains of our sins and told them to begone. Just like you did to the demons. Just like you did to the hypocrites in the temple.

I just thought you commanded the evil out. I never noticed that you took it out. It never occurred to me that you actually touched it—or worse still that it touched you.

That must have been a horrible moment. I know what it's like to be touched by sin. I know what it's like to smell the stench of that stuff. Remember what I used to be like? Before I knew you, I wallowed in that mire. I didn't just touch sin, I loved it. I drank it. I danced with it. I was in the middle of it.

But why am I telling you? You remember. You were the one who saw me. You were the one who found me. I was lonely. I was afraid. Remember? “Why? Why me? Why has all this hurt happened?”

I know it wasn’t much of a question. It wasn’t the right question. But it was all I knew to ask. You see, God, I felt so confused. So desolate. Sin will do that to you. Sin leaves you shipwrecked, orphaned, adrift. Sin leaves you aban—

Oh. Oh, my.

My, goodness, God. Is that what happened? You mean sin did the same to you that it did to me?

Oh, I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I didn’t know. I didn’t understand. You really were alone, weren’t you?

Your question was real, wasn’t it, Jesus? You really were afraid. You really were alone. Just like I was. Only, I deserved it. You didn’t.

Forgive me, I spoke out of turn. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

Application

When was the last time you felt lonely? The next time you feel that way, look around. Everyone else may have deserted you, but God remains at your side.

Exploration

Victory Is the Lord’s—[1 Samuel 17:47](#); [Psalms 18:1–6](#); [28:7](#); [Proverbs 3:5–6](#); [Romans 8:37](#); [Hebrews 12:2](#).

A Prayer for the King

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

May the Lord answer you in times of trouble.

May the God of Jacob protect you.

²May he send you help from his Temple
and support you from Mount Zion.

³May he remember all your offerings
and accept all your sacrifices.

Selah

⁴May he give you what you want
and make all your plans succeed,

⁵and we will shout for joy when you succeed,
and we will raise a flag in the name of our God.
May the Lord give you all that you ask for.

⁶Now I know the Lord helps his appointed king.
He answers him from his holy heaven
and saves him with his strong right hand.

⁷Some trust in chariots, others in horses,
but we trust the Lord our God.

⁸They are overwhelmed and defeated,
but we march forward and win.

⁹Lord, save the king!
Answer us when we call for help.

Thanksgiving for the King

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

Lord, the king rejoices because of your strength;
he is so happy when you save him!

²You gave the king what he wanted
and did not refuse what he asked for.

Selah

³You put good things before him
and placed a gold crown on his head.

⁴He asked you for life,
and you gave it to him,
so his years go on and on.

⁵He has great glory because you gave him victories;
you gave him honor and praise.

⁶You always gave him blessings;
you made him glad because you were with him.

⁷The king truly trusts the Lord.
Because God Most High always loves him,
he will not be overwhelmed.

⁸Your hand is against all your enemies;
those who hate you will feel your power.

⁹When you appear,
you will burn them as in a furnace.
In your anger you will swallow them up,
and fire will burn them up.

¹⁰You will destroy their families from the earth;
their children will not live.

¹¹They made evil plans against you,
but their traps won't work.

¹²You will make them turn their backs
when you aim your arrows at them.

¹³Be supreme, Lord, in your power.
We sing and praise your greatness.

The Prayer of a Suffering Man

For the director of music. To the tune of "The Doe of Dawn." A psalm of David.

My God, my God, why have you rejected me?
You seem far from saving me,
far from the words of my groaning.
²My God, I call to you during the day,
but you do not answer.
I call at night;
I am not silent.

³You sit as the Holy One.
The praises of Israel are your throne.
⁴Our ancestors trusted you;
they trusted, and you saved them.
⁵They called to you for help
and were rescued.
They trusted you
and were not disappointed.

⁶But I am like a worm instead of a man.
People make fun of me and hate me.
⁷Those who look at me laugh.
They stick out their tongues and shake their heads.
⁸They say, "Turn to the Lord for help.
Maybe he will save you.
If he likes you,
maybe he will rescue you."

⁹You had my mother give birth to me.

You made me trust you
while I was just a baby.

¹⁰I have leaned on you since the day I was born;
you have been my God since my mother gave me birth.

¹¹So don't be far away from me.

Now trouble is near,
and there is no one to help.

¹²People have surrounded me like angry bulls.
Like the strong bulls of Bashan, they are on every side.

¹³Like hungry, roaring lions
they open their mouths at me.

¹⁴My strength is gone,
like water poured out onto the ground,
and my bones are out of joint.

My heart is like wax;
it has melted inside me.

¹⁵My strength has dried up like a clay pot,
and my tongue sticks to the top of my mouth.
You laid me in the dust of death.

¹⁶Evil people have surrounded me;
like dogs they have trapped me.
They have bitten my arms and legs.

¹⁷I can count all my bones;
people look and stare at me.

¹⁸They divided my clothes among them,
and they threw lots for my clothing.

¹⁹But, Lord, don't be far away.
You are my strength; hurry to help me.

²⁰Save me from the sword;
save my life from the dogs.

²¹Rescue me from the lion's mouth;
save me from the horns of the bulls.

²²Then I will tell my fellow Israelites about you;
I will praise you in the public meeting.

²³Praise the Lord, all you who respect him.
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him;
fear him, all you Israelites.

²⁴He does not ignore those in trouble.
He doesn't hide from them
but listens when they call out to him.

²⁵Lord, I praise you in the great meeting of your
people;

these worshipers will see me do what I promised.

²⁶Poor people will eat until they are full;
those who look to the Lord will praise him.
May your hearts live forever!

²⁷People everywhere will remember
and will turn to the Lord.

All the families of the nations
will worship him

²⁸because the Lord is King,
and he rules the nations.

²⁹All the powerful people on earth will eat and worship.
Everyone will bow down to him,
all who will one day die.

³⁰The people in the future will serve him;
they will always be told about the Lord.

³¹They will tell that he does what is right.
People who are not yet born
will hear what God has done.

Life Lessons

Psalms 23:1–24:10

Situation

David portrayed God as a caring shepherd. This shepherd protected his sheep from harm.

Observation

Although we may face stressful situations, God leads us safely through as a shepherd would do for his sheep.

Inspiration

“She’ll not live a day,” a physician told an attending nurse. Concerned, the nurse befriended the dying woman and in a few hours had won her confidence.

Motioning for the nurse to come near, the old woman said sorrowfully, “I have traveled all the way from California by myself, stopping at every city of importance between San Francisco and Boston. In each city I visit just two places: the police station and the hospital. You see, my boy ran away from home and I have no idea where he is. I’ve got to find him...”

The mother’s eyes seemed to flash a ray of hope as she added, “Someday he may even come into this very hospital, and if he does, please promise me you’ll tell him his two best friends never gave up on him” ...

Bending over the dying mother, the nurse whispered softly, “Tell me the names of those two

friends so I can tell your son if I ever see him.”

With trembling lips and her eyes filled with tears the mother responded, “Tell him those two friends were God and his mother,” and she closed her eyes and died.

God, even more than a forgiving mother, never gives up on one of His children. His forgiveness is uniquely infinite... . And since God is the quintessence of forgiveness, to think on God is to immerse oneself in thoughts of forgiveness rather than failure. (From *Living and Praying in Jesus’ Name* by Dick Eastman and Jack Hayford)

Application

Find your bearings today by following the Good Shepherd. Trust Jesus today to lead you to an eternal home.

Exploration

Shepherd—[Genesis 48:15](#); [Psalm 78:71–72](#); [Mark 6:34](#); [John 10:26–29](#).

The Lord the Shepherd

A psalm of David.

The Lord is my shepherd;
I have everything I need.

²He lets me rest in green pastures.
He leads me to calm water.

³He gives me new strength.
He leads me on paths that are right
for the good of his name.

⁴Even if I walk through a very dark valley,
I will not be afraid,
because you are with me.
Your rod and your [walking stick](#) comfort me.

⁵You prepare a meal for me
in front of my enemies.
You [pour oil on my head](#);
you fill my cup to overflowing.

⁶Surely your goodness and love will be with me
all my life,
and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

A Welcome for God into the Temple

A psalm of David.

The earth belongs to the Lord, and everything in it—
the world and all its people.

²He built it on the waters
and set it on the rivers.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The Shepherd Who Cares for Us and Guides Us

Aren't we glad Christ didn't call himself the Good Cowboy? But some do perceive God that way. A hard-faced, square-jawed ranch-hand from heaven who drives his church against its will to places it doesn't want to go.

But that's a wrong image. Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd. The Shepherd who knows his sheep by name and lays down his life for them. The Shepherd who protects, provides, and possesses his sheep. The Bible is replete with this picture of God....

Eighty percent of Jesus' listeners made their living off of the land. Many were shepherds. They lived on the mesa with the sheep. No flock ever grazed without a shepherd, and no shepherd was ever off duty. When sheep wandered, the shepherd found them. When they fell, he carried them. When they were hurt, he healed them.

Sheep aren't smart. They tend to wander into running creeks for water, then their wool grows heavy and they drown. They need a shepherd to lead them to "calm water" ([Psalm 23:2](#)). They have no natural defense—no claws, no horns, no fangs. They are helpless. Sheep need a shepherd with a "rod and ... walking stick" ([Psalm 23:4](#)) to protect them. They have no sense of direction. They need someone to lead them "on paths that are right" ([Psalm 23:3](#)).

So do we. We, too, tend to be swept away by waters we should have avoided. We have no defense against the evil lion who prowls about seeking who he might devour. We, too, get lost. "We all have wandered away like sheep; each of us has gone his own way" ([Isaiah 53:6](#)).

We need a shepherd. We don't need a cowboy to herd us; we need a shepherd to care for us and to guide us.

And we have one. One who knows us by name.
(From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

For more on "[Christ Through the Bible.](#)"

³Who may go up on the mountain of the Lord?
Who may stand in his holy Temple?

⁴Only those with clean hands and pure hearts,
who have not worshiped idols,
who have not made promises in the name of a false
god.

⁵They will receive a blessing from the Lord;
the God who saves them will declare them right.

⁶They try to follow God;
they look to the God of Jacob for help.

Selah

⁷Gates, open all the way.
Open wide, aged doors
so the glorious King will come in.

⁸Who is this glorious King?
The Lord, strong and mighty.
The Lord, the powerful warrior.

⁹Gates, open all the way.
Open wide, aged doors
so the glorious King will come in.

¹⁰Who is this glorious King?
The Lord All-Powerful—
he is the glorious King.

Selah

Life Lessons

Psalms 25:1–26:12

Situation

David prayed for God to give him mercy. He not only asked for forgiveness but for help to do right.

Observation

Trust God to forgive your sins. He shows us the right path to take and protects us from evil.

Inspiration

Poor memories are a part of the human condition. And so when God tells us that He will remember our sins no more, I'm puzzled. How could God possibly forget? That's our job! ...

Then why do we feel so bad about our past sins? Because we confuse sin with its impression. Got a notepad nearby? Let me show you how this can be so. Write the word "sin" on the page. Press hard. Now tear off that sheet of paper, crumple it up, and throw it across the room. That's how God forgets your sin.

Now take your pencil and rub it on the new page at an angle, back and forth, over the same location where you wrote. And guess what: The ghost of the word "sin" appears.

That's what our flawed memories do. We go back over the deep impression left by the transgressions in our life, and we feel just as guilty. It's as if the sin never left. But be encouraged, the impression of sin is not the same thing as sin. And with David you can

cry out, “I can’t forget my scars, it seems, Lord. But You have forgotten their cause. Look upon me with loving, kind eyes.”

It’s your choice. Will you continue to work over forgiven sin as with a pencil? Or will you let the Holy Spirit work His lovingkindness? (From *Diamonds in the Dust* by Joni Eareckson Tada)

Application

Is there a sin in your past that you keep remembering, regretting, and confessing to God? Decide today to do with that sin what God does with all sin that he forgives—forget it!

Exploration

Forgiveness—[Psalm 103:12](#); [Isaiah 43:25](#); [Micah 7:18–19](#); [Hebrews 8:12](#); [1 John 1:9](#)..

A Prayer for God to Guide

Of David.

Lord, I give myself to you;

²my God, I trust you.

Do not let me be disgraced;

do not let my enemies laugh at me.

³No one who trusts you will be disgraced,

but those who sin without excuse will be disgraced.

⁴Lord, tell me your ways.

Show me how to live.

⁵Guide me in your truth,

and teach me, my God, my Savior.

I trust you all day long.

⁶Lord, remember your mercy and love

that you have shown since long ago.

⁷Do not remember the sins

and wrong things I did when I was young.

But remember to love me always

because you are good, Lord.

⁸The Lord is good and right;

he points sinners to the right way.

⁹He shows those who are humble how to do right,

and he teaches them his ways.

¹⁰All the Lord's ways are loving and true
for those who follow the demands of his agreement.

¹¹For the sake of your name, Lord,
forgive my many sins.

¹²Are there those who respect the Lord?
He will point them to the best way.

¹³They will enjoy a good life,
and their children will inherit the land.

¹⁴The Lord tells his secrets to those who respect him;
he tells them about his agreement.

¹⁵My eyes are always looking to the Lord for help.
He will keep me from any traps.

¹⁶Turn to me and have mercy on me,
because I am lonely and hurting.

¹⁷My troubles have grown larger;
free me from my problems.

¹⁸Look at my suffering and troubles,
and take away all my sins.

¹⁹Look at how many enemies I have!
See how much they hate me!

²⁰Protect me and save me.
I trust you, so do not let me be disgraced.

²¹My hope is in you,
so may goodness and honesty guard me.

²²God, save Israel from all their troubles!

The Prayer of an Innocent Believer

Of David.

Lord, defend me because I have lived an innocent life.
I have trusted the Lord and never doubted.

²Lord, try me and test me;
look closely into my heart and mind.

³I see your love,
and I live by your truth.

⁴I do not spend time with liars,
nor do I make friends with those who hide their sin.

⁵I hate the company of evil people,
and I won't sit with the wicked.

⁶I wash my hands to show I am innocent,
and I come to your altar, Lord.

⁷I raise my voice in praise
and tell of all the miracles you have done.

⁸Lord, I love the Temple where you live,
where your glory is.

⁹Do not kill me with those sinners
or take my life with those murderers.

¹⁰Evil is in their hands,
and they do wrong for money.

¹¹But I have lived an innocent life,
so save me and have mercy on me.

¹²I stand in a safe place.
Lord, I praise you in the great meeting.

Life Lessons

Psalm 27:1–28:9

Situation

In [Psalm 27](#), David sought to be close to God. His No. 1 desire was to live in the constant presence of God, seeking the Lord's instruction, protection, and guidance.

Observation

God desires us to have singleness of purpose—to know him and abide with him.

Inspiration

If you could ask God for one thing, what would you request? David tells us what he would ask. He longs to *live* in the house of God. I emphasize the word “live,” because it deserves to be emphasized. David doesn't want to chat. He doesn't desire a cup of coffee on the back porch. He doesn't ask for a meal or to spend an evening in God's house. He wants to move in with him ... forever. He's asking for his own room ... permanently. He doesn't want to be stationed in God's house, he longs to retire there. He doesn't seek a temporary assignment, but rather lifelong residence.

When David says, “I will live in the house of the Lord forever” ([Psalm 23:6](#)), he's saying simply that he never wants to step away from God. He craves to remain in the aura, in the atmosphere, in the awareness that he is in God's house, wherever he is.

The Lord's Prayer is a floor plan of the house of

God: a step-by-step description of how God meets our needs when we dwell in him. Everything that occurs in a healthy house is described in this prayer. Protection, instruction, forgiveness, provision ... all occur under God's roof.

"Then why," you might ask, "don't more people feel protected, forgiven, or instructed?"

My answer is as simple as the question is direct. Most have not learned to dwell in the house. Oh, we visit it. We stop in for the day or even drop by for a meal. But abide here? This is God's desire.

Remember the promise of his Son, "If people love me, they will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" ([John 14:23](#)). (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you desire to spend all your time in God's presence? Are there activities, thoughts, even people that keep you from him? List three specific steps you can take to make knowing God your No. 1 priority.

Exploration

Abiding—[Psalm 23:6](#), [84:1-4](#); [John 8:31](#), [14:23](#); [Ephesians 3:17](#); [1 John 4:16](#); [Revelation 3:20](#); [21:3](#).

A Song of Trust in God

Of David.

The Lord is my light and the one who saves me.
I fear no one.

The Lord protects my life;
I am afraid of no one.

²Evil people may try to destroy my body.
My enemies and those who hate me attack me,
but they are overwhelmed and defeated.

³If an army surrounds me,
I will not be afraid.
If war breaks out,
I will trust the Lord.

⁴I ask only one thing from the Lord.
This is what I want:
Let me live in the Lord's house
all my life.

Let me see the Lord's beauty
and look with my own eyes at his Temple.

⁵During danger he will keep me safe in his shelter.
He will hide me in his Holy Tent,
or he will keep me safe on a high mountain.

⁶My head is higher than my enemies around me.
I will offer joyful sacrifices in his Holy Tent.

I will sing and praise the Lord.

⁷Lord, hear me when I call;
have mercy and answer me.

⁸My heart said of you, "Go, worship him."
So I come to worship you, Lord.

⁹Do not turn away from me.
Do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have helped me.

Do not push me away or leave me alone,
God, my Savior.

¹⁰If my father and mother leave me,
the Lord will take me in.

¹¹Lord, teach me your ways,
and guide me to do what is right
because I have enemies.

¹²Do not hand me over to my enemies,
because they tell lies about me
and say they will hurt me.

¹³I truly believe
I will live to see the Lord's goodness.

¹⁴Wait for the Lord's help.
Be strong and brave,
and wait for the Lord's help.

A Prayer in Troubled Times

Of David.

Lord, my Rock, I call out to you for help.

Do not be deaf to me.

If you are silent,

I will be like those in the grave.

²Hear the sound of my prayer,
when I cry out to you for help.

I raise my hands

toward your Most Holy Place.

³Don't drag me away with the wicked,
with those who do evil.

They say "Peace" to their neighbors,
but evil is in their hearts.

⁴Pay them back for what they have done,
for their evil deeds.

Pay them back for what they have done;
give them their reward.

⁵They don't understand what the Lord has done
or what he has made.

So he will knock them down
and not lift them up.

⁶Praise the Lord,
because he heard my prayer for help.

⁷The Lord is my strength and shield.
I trust him, and he helps me.

I am very happy,

and I praise him with my song.

⁸The Lord is powerful;
he gives victory to his chosen one.

⁹Save your people
and bless those who are your own.
Be their shepherd and carry them forever.

Life Lessons

Psalms 29:1–30:12

Situation

David applauded God for his protection and help. Though David still had problems, he knew that God was powerful and faithful and always worthy of praise.

Observation

God satisfies us because he holds all the power and protection we need. Trusting him brings contentment.

Inspiration

Satisfied? That is one thing we are not. We are not satisfied....

We push back from the Thanksgiving table and pat our round bellies. “I’m satisfied,” we declare. But look at us a few hours later, back in the kitchen picking the meat from the bone.

We take a vacation of a lifetime. For years we planned. For years we saved. And off we go. We satiate ourselves with sun, fun, and good food. But we are not even on the way home before we dread the end of the trip and begin planning another.

We are not satisfied.

As a child we say, “If only I were a teenager.” As a teen we say, “If only I were an adult.” As an adult, “If only I were married.” As a spouse, “If only I had kids.” As a parent, “If only my kids were grown.” In an empty house, “If only the kids would visit.” As a

retiree in the rocking chair with stiff joints and fading sight, “If only I were a child again.”

We are not satisfied. Contentment is a difficult virtue. Why?

Because there is nothing on earth that can satisfy our deepest longing. We long to see God. The leaves of life are rustling with the rumor that we will—and we won’t be satisfied until we do. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

Application

Enjoy your age, job, friends, and lifestyle. When you are tempted to be dissatisfied, pray, “God, help me to find my contentment in you.”

Exploration

Contentment—[Exodus 20:17](#); [Psalm 17:13–15](#); [Matthew 6:24](#); [Philippians 4:10–14](#).

God in the Thunderstorm

A psalm of David.

Praise the Lord, you angels;
praise the Lord's glory and power.

²Praise the Lord for the glory of his name;
worship the Lord because he is holy.

³The Lord's voice is heard over the sea.
The glorious God thunders;
the Lord thunders over the ocean.

⁴The Lord's voice is powerful;
the Lord's voice is majestic.

⁵The Lord's voice breaks the trees;
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

⁶He makes the land of Lebanon dance like a calf
and Mount Hermon jump like a baby bull.

⁷The Lord's voice makes the lightning flash.

⁸The Lord's voice shakes the desert;
the Lord shakes the Desert of Kadesh.

⁹The Lord's voice shakes the oaks
and strips the leaves off the trees.
In his Temple everyone says, "Glory to God!"

¹⁰The Lord controls the flood.
The Lord will be King forever.

¹¹The Lord gives strength to his people;

the Lord blesses his people with peace.

Thanksgiving for Escaping Death

A psalm of David. A song for giving the Temple to the Lord.

I will praise you, Lord,
because you rescued me.

You did not let my enemies laugh at me.

²Lord, my God, I prayed to you,
and you healed me.

³You lifted me out of the grave;
you spared me from going down to the place of the
dead.

⁴Sing praises to the Lord, you who belong to him;
praise his holy name.

⁵His anger lasts only a moment,
but his kindness lasts for a lifetime.
Crying may last for a night,
but joy comes in the morning.

⁶When I felt safe, I said,
“I will never fear.”

⁷Lord, in your kindness you made my mountain safe.
But when you turned away, I was frightened.

⁸I called to you, Lord,
and asked you to have mercy on me.

⁹I said, “What good will it do if I die
or if I go down to the grave?
Dust cannot praise you;
it cannot speak about your truth.

¹⁰Lord, hear me and have mercy on me.
Lord, help me.”

¹¹You changed my sorrow into dancing.
You took away my clothes of sadness,
and clothed me in happiness.

¹²I will sing to you and not be silent.
Lord, my God, I will praise you forever.

Life Lessons

[Psalm 31:1–24](#)

Situation

Although the writer of this psalm was grieved, his complete dedication to God caused him to thank God.

Observation

Throughout trials God provides a place of refuge. God provides stability in a broken world.

Inspiration

Anyone who has read my books or heard me speak knows the profound impact William Wilberforce has had on my Christian life. That's why I refer so consistently to his radical stand for Christ in his culture and why I quote so often from a letter written by John Wesley to Wilberforce—then a recent convert. Wesley, who was to die only days later, commissioned Wilberforce to lead the radical campaign against slavery. I've carried this excerpt from Wesley's letter in my Bible for the past seven years:

“Unless the Divine Power has raised you up to be as Athanasius, *contra mundum*, I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils, but if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God? Oh, be not weary in well doing.

Go on, in the name of the God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun, shall vanish away before it.”

Wilberforce took his stand, at first but a single, lonely voice against a business that was the mainstay of the lucrative West Indies trade, employing some 5,500 sailors and 160 ships worth 6,000,000 pounds sterling a year. For twenty years the radical Wilberforce ... fought the economic and political might of the British Empire. In the end, righteousness prevailed, and for the next half century a mighty revival swept across England and the Western world. (From *Loving God* by Charles Colson)

Application

Find a Christian who works for a worthy cause. Encourage the person. Pray for him or her. Help however you can. Praise God for his faithfulness.

Exploration

Faithfulness of God—[Lamentations 3:19–23](#);
Trust—[Proverbs 3:5–6](#); Assurance in Suffering—[1 John 4:4](#).

A Prayer of Faith in Troubled Times

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

Lord, I trust in you;
let me never be disgraced.
Save me because you do what is right.

²Listen to me
and save me quickly.
Be my rock of protection,
a strong city to save me.

³You are my rock and my protection.
For the good of your name, lead me and guide me.

⁴Set me free from the trap they set for me,
because you are my protection.

⁵I give you my life.
Save me, Lord, God of truth.

⁶I hate those who worship false gods.
I trust only in the Lord.

⁷I will be glad and rejoice in your love,
because you saw my suffering;
you knew my troubles.

⁸You have not handed me over to my enemies
but have set me in a safe place.

⁹Lord, have mercy, because I am in misery.

My eyes are weak from so much crying,
and my whole being is tired from grief.

¹⁰My life is ending in sadness,
and my years are spent in crying.
My troubles are using up my strength,
and my bones are getting weaker.

¹¹Because of all my troubles, my enemies hate me,
and even my neighbors look down on me.
When my friends see me,
they are afraid and run.

¹²I am like a piece of a broken pot.
I am forgotten as if I were dead.

¹³I have heard many insults.
Terror is all around me.
They make plans against me
and want to kill me.

¹⁴Lord, I trust you.
I have said, "You are my God."

¹⁵My life is in your hands.
Save me from my enemies
and from those who are chasing me.

¹⁶Show your kindness to me, your servant.
Save me because of your love.

¹⁷Lord, I called to you,
so do not let me be disgraced.
Let the wicked be disgraced
and lie silent in the grave.

¹⁸With pride and hatred
they speak against those who do right.

So silence their lying lips.

¹⁹How great is your goodness
that you have stored up for those who fear you,
that you have given to those who trust you.
You do this for all to see.

²⁰You protect them by your presence
from what people plan against them.
You shelter them from evil words.

²¹Praise the Lord.
His love to me was wonderful
when my city was attacked.

²²In my distress, I said,
“God cannot see me!”
But you heard my prayer
when I cried out to you for help.

²³Love the Lord, all you who belong to him.
The Lord protects those who truly believe,
but he punishes the proud as much as they have
sinned.

²⁴All you who put your hope in the Lord
be strong and brave.

Life Lessons

Psalms 32:1–33:22

Situation

In [Psalm 33](#), we can delight with the psalmist in a God who not only created everything, but whose plan for this world will stand forever.

Observation

Praise God whose plans stand forever and who triumphed over Satan at the cross.

Inspiration

Remember, Satan cannot penetrate the walls of the Great House of God.

Is it still hard to imagine how your struggle could lead to any good? Still hard to conceive how your disease or debt or death could be a tool for anything worthwhile? If so, then I've got one final example. While not wanting to minimize your struggle, I must say yours is a cakewalk compared to this one. A sinless Savior was covered with sin. The author of life was placed in the cave of death. Satan's victory appeared sure. Finally, the devil had scored on the right end of the court. And not only had he scored, he'd slam-dunked the MVP and left him lying on the floor. The devil had blown it with everyone from Sara to Peter, but this time he'd done it right. The whole world had seen it. The victory dance had already begun.

But all of a sudden there was a light in the tomb and a rumbling of the rock; then Friday's tragedy

emerged as Sunday's Savior, and even Satan knew he'd been had. He'd been a tool in the hand of the gardener. All the time he thought he was defeating heaven, he was helping heaven. God wanted to prove his power over sin and death, and that's exactly what he did. And guess who helped him do it? Once again Satan's lay-up becomes a foul-up. Only this time, he didn't give heaven some points, he gave heaven the championship game. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Application

Where are you struggling right now? Is there some area in your life where you are experiencing defeat? Remember the Cross and God's ultimate victory over Satan, sin, and death. Turn defeat into victory by praising and thanking God and trusting in him.

Exploration

Victory—[John 16:33](#); [Romans 8:37](#); [2 Corinthians 2:14](#); [1 John 4:4](#).

It Is Better to Confess Sin

A maskil of David.

Happy is the person
whose sins are forgiven,
whose wrongs are pardoned.

²Happy is the person
whom the Lord does not consider guilty
and in whom there is nothing false.

³When I kept things to myself,
I felt weak deep inside me.
I moaned all day long.

⁴Day and night you punished me.
My strength was gone as in the summer heat.

Selah

⁵Then I confessed my sins to you
and didn't hide my guilt.
I said, "I will confess my sins to the Lord,"
and you forgave my guilt.

Selah

⁶For this reason, all who obey you
should pray to you while they still can.
When troubles rise like a flood,
they will not reach them.

⁷You are my hiding place.
You protect me from my troubles
and fill me with songs of salvation.

Selah

⁸The Lord says, “I will make you wise and show you
where to go.

I will guide you and watch over you.

⁹So don’t be like a horse or donkey,
that doesn’t understand.

They must be led with bits and reins,
or they will not come near you.”

¹⁰Wicked people have many troubles,
but the Lord’s love surrounds those who trust him.

¹¹Good people, rejoice and be happy in the Lord.
Sing all you whose hearts are right.

Praise God Who Creates and Saves

Sing to the Lord, you who do what is right;
honest people should praise him.

²Praise the Lord on the harp;
make music for him on a ten-stringed lyre.

³Sing a new song to him;
play well and joyfully.

⁴God's word is true,
and everything he does is right.

⁵He loves what is right and fair;
the Lord's love fills the earth.

New Life in Christ

The Lord says, "I will make you wise and show you where to go."—[Psalm 32:8](#)

God Speaks to Us

There is no language he will not speak. Which leads us to a delightful question. What language is he speaking to you? I'm not referring to an idiom or dialect but to the day-to-day drama of your life. God does speak, you know. He speaks to us in whatever language we will understand.

There are times he speaks the "language of abundance." Is your tummy full? Are your bills paid? Got a little jingle in your pocket? Don't be so proud of what you have that you miss what you need to hear. Could it be you have much so you can give much? "God can give you more blessings than you need.

Then you will always have plenty of everything—enough to give to every good work” ([2 Corinthians 9:8](#)).

Is God talking in the “language of abundance”? Or are you hearing the “vernacular of want”? We’d rather he spoke the language of abundance, but he doesn’t always.

Are you hearing the “language of need”? Or how about the “language of affliction”? Talk about an idiom we avoid. But you and I both know how clearly God speaks in hospital hallways and sickbeds. We know what David meant with the words, “He *makes* me to lie down” ([Psalm 23:2](#), NKJV, italics mine). Nothing seems to turn our ears toward heaven like a frail body.

God speaks all languages—including yours. Has he not said, “I will ... show you where to go” ([Psalm 32:8](#))? Are we not urged to “accept teaching from his mouth” ([Job 22:22](#))? What language is God speaking to you?

And aren’t you glad he is speaking? Aren’t you grateful that he cares enough to talk? Isn’t it good to know that “the Lord tells his secrets to those who respect him” ([Psalm 25:14](#))? (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

Question: What language is God using to speak to you? What specific steps can you take in response?

For more on [“New Life in Christ.”](#)

⁶The sky was made at the Lord's command.
By the breath from his mouth, he made all the stars.
⁷He gathered the water of the sea into a heap.
He made the great ocean stay in its place.
⁸All the earth should worship the Lord;
the whole world should fear him.
⁹He spoke, and it happened.
He commanded, and it appeared.
¹⁰The Lord upsets the plans of nations;
he ruins all their plans.
¹¹But the Lord's plans will stand forever;
his ideas will last from now on.
¹²Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord,
the people he chose for his very own.
¹³The Lord looks down from heaven
and sees every person.
¹⁴From his throne he watches
all who live on earth.
¹⁵He made their hearts
and understands everything they do.
¹⁶No king is saved by his great army.
No warrior escapes by his great strength.
¹⁷Horses can't bring victory;
they can't save by their strength.
¹⁸But the Lord looks after those who fear him,
those who put their hope in his love.
¹⁹He saves them from death
and spares their lives in times of hunger.

²⁰So our hope is in the Lord.
He is our help, our shield to protect us.

²¹We rejoice in him,
because we trust his holy name.

²²Lord, show your love to us
as we put our hope in you.

Life Lessons

Psalm 34:1–22

Situation

David composed this psalm after he escaped King Achish in Gath by pretending to be insane ([1 Samuel 21:10–15](#)). David told how faithful God remained during a time of trouble.

Observation

God delivers those who persevere in their faith.

Inspiration

You may have heard it said that a person does not really know who his friends are until the bottom drops out. I think there is great truth to that. All of us have experienced the pain of discovering that people we thought would be faithful—no matter what—were simply “fair-weather friends.” You know, friends whose loyalty hinges upon the climate or circumstances. As long as the relationship is enjoyable, they are with you all the way. But when it begins to demand some sacrifice on their part, they are hard to find. The ultimate measure of friends is not where they stand in times of comfort and convenience, but where they stand in times of challenge and controversy. That being the case, apart from adversity of some kind, we would never know who our faithful friends really are.

In the same way, we will never know in a personal way the faithfulness of Christ apart from adversity. As a result, our faith in Him would never increase. It

would remain static. One of the primary reasons God allows us to face adversity is so that He can demonstrate His faithfulness and in turn increase our faith. If you are a believer, you have made a decision to trust Christ with your eternal destiny. But you will not experience His faithfulness in that particular area until you die. God wants more from you and for you than simple intellectual acknowledgement of His faithfulness. It is His will that you *experience* it now.

If our lives are free from pain, turmoil, and sorrow, our knowledge of God will remain purely academic. Our relationship with Him could be compared with that of a great-great-grandfather about whom we have heard stories, yet never met personally. We would have great admiration, but no intimacy, no fellowship. There would always be a sense of distance and mystery.

That is not the kind of relationship God wants with His children. Through the death of Christ, God has opened the way for us to have direct access to Him. He went to great lengths to clear the way so that nothing stands between Him and His children. There is potential now for intimacy between us and our Creator....

God is in the process of engineering circumstances through which He can reveal Himself to each of us. And both history as well as our personal testimonies bear witness to the fact that it is in times of adversity that we come to a greater realization of God's incredible faithfulness to us. (From *How to Handle Adversity* by Charles Stanley)

Application

Can you remember a time when you were in desperate circumstances? What was the cry of your heart? When you have the opportunity, do as David did—praise God. Tell someone else what you learned. Memorize verses [17–22](#).

Exploration

God's Goodness—[2 Chronicles 5:13](#); [6:41](#); [Psalm 31:19](#); [52:9](#); [Matthew 19:17](#); [James 1:17](#).

Praise God Who Judges and Saves

David's song from the time he acted crazy so Abimelech would send him away, and David did leave.

I will praise the Lord at all times;
his praise is always on my lips.

²My whole being praises the Lord.
The poor will hear and be glad.

³Glorify the Lord with me,
and let us praise his name together.

⁴I asked the Lord for help, and he answered me.
He saved me from all that I feared.

⁵Those who go to him for help are happy,
and they are never disgraced.

⁶This poor man called, and the Lord heard him
and saved him from all his troubles.

⁷The angel of the Lord camps around those who fear
God,
and he saves them.

⁸Examine and see how good the Lord is.
Happy is the person who trusts him.

⁹You who belong to the Lord, fear him!
Those who fear him will have everything they need.

¹⁰Even lions may get weak and hungry,
but those who look to the Lord will have every good

thing.

¹¹Children, come and listen to me.

I will teach you to worship the Lord.

¹²You must do these things
to enjoy life and have many happy days.

¹³You must not say evil things,
and you must not tell lies.

¹⁴Stop doing evil and do good.
Look for peace and work for it.

¹⁵The Lord sees the good people
and listens to their prayers.

¹⁶But the Lord is against those who do evil;
he makes the world forget them.

¹⁷The Lord hears good people when they cry out to
him,

and he saves them from all their troubles.

¹⁸The Lord is close to the brokenhearted,
and he saves those whose spirits have been crushed.

¹⁹People who do what is right may have many
problems,

but the Lord will solve them all.

²⁰He will protect their very bones;
not one of them will be broken.

²¹Evil will kill the wicked;
those who hate good people will be judged guilty.

²²But the Lord saves his servants' lives;
no one who trusts him will be judged guilty.

Life Lessons

Psalms 35:1–36:12

Situation

David begged God to rescue him from those who sought his demise. He recognized the wickedness of his enemies and asked God to intervene.

Observation

God fights on behalf of his children.

Inspiration

You feel unsafe, unsure.

You don't like to be alone.

You're frightened, and fear limits the joy you experience in your life. You're trapped in an adventureless existence. What are you afraid of? Pain? Rejection? Are you afraid of making a mistake? Of getting hurt? Of being robbed or killed? Of getting a disease?

... Did you know I am never afraid, worried, frenzied or never driven with terror? Did you know that your Lord is at peace always? Did you know my Spirit—the same as is in Me—lives in you?

I have built a wall of protection around you so that the invisible dragons of the night will not harm you....

I save you from the troubles and dangers of the daytime. I am for you. Who can be against you?

But you worry.

You worry because of past experiences when you were hurt. You are afraid to be hurt again. You are

afraid I won't keep my word. You are afraid I don't care about you. But I do care. Every hair on your head is numbered.

... See Me surrounding you and keeping you from evil. See Me bringing you up out of a horrible pit, lifting you gently out of the miry clay of fear and worry. See yourself completely safe, with your feet upon a rock, established in the ways of God. (From *His Thoughts Toward Me* by Marie Chapiro)

Application

When you face battles in life, write them in a prayer journal. Wait on your Defender and record his victory in your journal. This will build your faith.

Exploration

Fighting—[Exodus 14:13–14](#); [1 Samuel 17:45–47](#); [2 Chronicles 20:15–17](#); [Nehemiah 4:20](#); [Romans 12:19](#).

A Prayer for Help

Of David.

Lord, battle with those who battle with me.

Fight against those who fight against me.

²Pick up the shield and armor.

Rise up and help me.

³Lift up your spears, both large and small,

against those who chase me.

Tell me, "I will save you."

⁴Make those who want to kill me

be ashamed and disgraced.

Make those who plan to harm me

turn back and run away.

⁵Make them like chaff blown by the wind

as the angel of the Lord forces them away.

⁶Let their road be dark and slippery

as the angel of the Lord chases them.

⁷For no reason they spread out their net to trap me;

for no reason they dug a pit for me.

⁸So let ruin strike them suddenly.

Let them be caught in their own nets;

let them fall into the pit and die.

⁹Then I will rejoice in the Lord;

I will be happy when he saves me.

¹⁰Even my bones will say,
“Lord, who is like you?
You save the weak from the strong,
the weak and poor from robbers.”

¹¹Men without mercy stand up to testify.
They ask me things I do not know.

¹²They repay me with evil for the good I have done,
and they make me very sad.

¹³Yet when they were sick, I put on clothes of sadness
and showed my sorrow by going without food.
But my prayers were not answered.

¹⁴I acted as if they were my friends or brothers.
I bowed in sadness as if I were crying for my mother.

¹⁵But when I was in trouble, they gathered and
laughed;

they gathered to attack before I knew it.
They insulted me without stopping.

¹⁶They made fun of me and were cruel to me
and ground their teeth at me in anger.

¹⁷Lord, how long will you watch this happen?
Save my life from their attacks;
save me from these people who are like lions.

¹⁸I will praise you in the great meeting.
I will praise you among crowds of people.

¹⁹Do not let my enemies laugh at me;
they hate me for no reason.
Do not let them make fun of me;
they have no cause to hate me.

²⁰Their words are not friendly

but are lies about peace-loving people.

²¹They speak against me
and say, “Aha! We saw what you did!”

²²Lord, you have been watching. Do not keep quiet.
Lord, do not leave me alone.

²³Wake up! Come and defend me!
My God and Lord, fight for me!

²⁴Lord my God, defend me with your justice.
Don’t let them laugh at me.

²⁵Don’t let them think, “Aha! We got what we
wanted!”

Don’t let them say, “We destroyed him.”

²⁶Let them be ashamed and embarrassed,
because they were happy when I hurt.
Cover them with shame and disgrace,
because they thought they were better than I was.

²⁷May my friends sing and shout for joy.
May they always say, “Praise the greatness of the
Lord,
who loves to see his servants do well.”

²⁸I will tell of your goodness
and will praise you every day.

Wicked People and a Good God

For the director of music. Of David, the servant of the Lord.

Sin speaks to the wicked in their hearts.
They have no fear of God.

²They think too much of themselves
so they don't see their sin and hate it.

³Their words are wicked lies;
they are no longer wise or good.

⁴At night they make evil plans;
what they do leads to nothing good.
They don't refuse things that are evil.

⁵Lord, your love reaches to the heavens,
your loyalty to the skies.

⁶Your goodness is as high as the mountains.
Your justice is as deep as the great ocean.
Lord, you protect both people and animals.

⁷God, your love is so precious!
You protect people in the shadow of your wings.

⁸They eat the rich food in your house,
and you let them drink from your river of pleasure.

⁹You are the giver of life.
Your light lets us enjoy life.

¹⁰Continue to love those who know you
and to do good to those who are good.

¹¹Don't let proud people attack me
and the wicked force me away.

¹²Those who do evil have been defeated.
They are overwhelmed;
they cannot do evil any longer.

Life Lessons

Psalm 37:1-40

Situation

David used a number of expressions to contrast the righteous and the wicked. David said that good consequences are a result of good behavior.

Observation

God's people will receive "what they want" as they trust God, commit their lives to him, and delight in serving the Lord.

Inspiration

What are my longings? This question may surprise you. Perhaps you thought your longings had nothing to do with keeping your life on track. I couldn't disagree more. Your heart is crucial. [Psalm 37:4](#) says, "Enjoy serving the Lord, and he will give you what you want." When we submit to God's plans, we can trust our desires. Our assignment is found at the intersection of God's plan and our pleasures. What do you love to do? What brings you joy? What gives you a sense of satisfaction?

Some long to feed the poor. Others enjoy leading the church. Others relish singing or teaching or holding the hands of the sick or counseling the confused. Each of us has been made to serve God in a unique way.

"God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing" ([Ephesians](#))

[2:10](#)).

“You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body, and knit them together in my mother’s womb... . Your workmanship is marvelous... . You were there while I was being formed... . You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe” ([Psalm 139:13–16](#), TLB).

You are a custom design; you are tailor-made. God prescribed your birth. Regardless of the circumstances that surrounded your arrival, you are not an accident. God planned you before you were born.

The longings of your heart, then, are not incidental; they are critical messages. The desires of your heart are not to be ignored; they are to be consulted. As the wind turns the weather vane, so God uses your passions to turn your life. God is too gracious to ask you to do something you hate. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

What is God calling you to do? What do you enjoy doing? Is there a connection? Ask your pastor and your friends for advice. Discover and use your spiritual gifts. Then you will find joy in serving God.

Exploration

Spiritual Gifts—[Romans 12:6–8](#); [1 Corinthians 12:1–11](#); [Ephesians 4:7–13](#); [1 Peter 4:10–11](#).

God Will Reward Fairly

Of David.

Don't be upset because of evil people.
Don't be jealous of those who do wrong,
²because like the grass, they will soon dry up.
Like green plants, they will soon die away.

³Trust the Lord and do good.
Live in the land and feed on truth.

⁴Enjoy serving the Lord,
and he will give you what you want.

⁵Depend on the Lord;
trust him, and he will take care of you.

⁶Then your goodness will shine like the sun,
and your fairness like the noonday sun.

⁷Wait and trust the Lord.

Don't be upset when others get rich
or when someone else's plans succeed.

⁸Don't get angry.
Don't be upset; it only leads to trouble.

⁹Evil people will be sent away,
but those who trust the Lord will inherit the land.

¹⁰In a little while the wicked will be no more.
You may look for them, but they will be gone.

¹¹People who are not proud will inherit the land

and will enjoy complete peace.

¹²The wicked make evil plans against good people.
They grind their teeth at them in anger.

¹³But the Lord laughs at the wicked,
because he sees that their day is coming.

¹⁴The wicked draw their swords
and bend their bows
to kill the poor and helpless,
to kill those who are honest.

¹⁵But their swords will stab their own hearts,
and their bows will break.

¹⁶It is better to have little and be right

than to have much and be wrong.

¹⁷The power of the wicked will be broken,
but the Lord supports those who do right.

¹⁸The Lord watches over the lives of the innocent,
and their reward will last forever.

¹⁹They will not be ashamed when trouble comes.
They will be full in times of hunger.

²⁰But the wicked will die.

The Lord's enemies will be like the flowers of the
fields;

they will disappear like smoke.

²¹The wicked borrow and don't pay back,
but those who do right give freely to others.

²²Those whom the Lord blesses will inherit the land,
but those he curses will be sent away.

²³When a person's steps follow the Lord,

God is pleased with his ways.

²⁴If he stumbles, he will not fall,
because the Lord holds his hand.

²⁵I was young, and now I am old,
but I have never seen good people left helpless
or their children begging for food.

²⁶Good people always lend freely to others,
and their children are a blessing.

²⁷Stop doing evil and do good,
so you will live forever.

²⁸The Lord loves justice
and will not leave those who worship him.
He will always protect them,
but the children of the wicked will die.

²⁹Good people will inherit the land
and will live in it forever.

³⁰A good person speaks with wisdom,
and he says what is fair.

³¹The teachings of his God are in his heart,
so he does not fail to keep them.

³²The wicked watch for good people
so that they may kill them.

³³But the Lord will not take away his protection
or let good people be judged guilty.

³⁴Wait for the Lord's help
and follow him.
He will honor you and give you the land,
and you will see the wicked sent away.

³⁵I saw a wicked and cruel man
who looked strong like a healthy tree in good soil.

³⁶But he died and was gone;
I looked for him, but he couldn't be found.

³⁷Think of the innocent person,
and watch the honest one.
The man who has peace
will have children to live after him.

³⁸But sinners will be destroyed;
in the end the wicked will die.

³⁹The Lord saves good people;
he is their strength in times of trouble.

⁴⁰The Lord helps them and saves them;
he saves them from the wicked,
because they trust in him for protection.

Life Lessons

[Psalms 38:1–39:13](#)

Situation

David prayed when he suffered. He knew only God could bring forgiveness and healing.

Observation

In the midst of our loneliness, despair, and confusion, we find hope in God alone.

Inspiration

For many people, life is—well, life is a jungle. Not a jungle of trees and beasts. Would that it were so simple. Would that our jungles could be cut with a machete or our adversaries trapped in a cage. But our jungles are comprised of the thicker thickets of failing health, broken hearts, and empty wallets. Our forests are framed with hospital walls and divorce courts. We don't hear the screeching of birds or the roaring of lions, but we do hear the complaints of neighbors and the demands of bosses. Our predators are our creditors, and the brush that surrounds us is the rush that exhausts us.

It's a jungle out there.

And for some, even for many, hope is in short supply. Hopelessness is an odd bag. Unlike the others, it isn't full. It is empty, and its emptiness creates the burden. Unzip the top and examine all the pockets. Turn it upside down and shake it hard. The bag of hopelessness is painfully empty.

Not a very pretty picture, is it? Let's see if we can

brighten it up. We've imagined the emotions of being lost; you think we can do the same with being rescued? What would it take to restore your hope? What would you need to reenergize your journey?

Though the answers are abundant, three come quickly to mind.

The first would be a person. Not just any person. You don't need someone equally confused. You need someone who knows the way out.

And from him you need some vision. You need someone to lift your spirits. You need someone to look you in the face and say, "This isn't the end. Don't give up. There is a better place than this. And I'll lead you there."

And, perhaps most important, you need direction. If you have only a person but no renewed vision, all you have is company. If he has a vision but no direction, you have a dreamer for company. But if you have a person with direction—who can take you from this place to the right place—ah, then you have one who can restore your hope.

Or, to use David's words, "He restores my soul."

Our Shepherd majors in restoring hope to the soul. Whether you are a lamb lost on a craggy ledge or a city slicker alone in a deep jungle, everything changes when your rescuer appears.

Your loneliness diminishes, because you have fellowship.

Your despair decreases, because you have vision.

Your confusion begins to lift, because you have direction. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you feel hopeful or hopeless about the future? What kind of hope does the world provide? What kind of hope does your Shepherd provide? Ask God to diminish your loneliness, decrease your despair, and lift your confusion.

Exploration

Hope—[Job 13:15](#); [Psalm 62:5](#); [Romans 12:12](#); [1 Corinthians 13:13](#); [Hebrews 6:19](#).

A Prayer in Time of Sickness

A psalm of David to remember.

Lord, don't correct me when you are angry.

Don't punish me when you are furious.

²Your arrows have wounded me,
and your hand has come down on me.

³My body is sick from your punishment.
Even my bones are not healthy because of my sin.

⁴My guilt has overwhelmed me;
like a load it weighs me down.

⁵My sores stink and become infected
because I was foolish.

⁶I am bent over and bowed down;
I am sad all day long.

⁷I am burning with fever,
and my whole body is sore.

⁸I am weak and faint.
I moan from the pain I feel.

⁹Lord, you know everything I want;
my cries are not hidden from you.

¹⁰My heart pounds, and my strength is gone.
I am losing my sight.

¹¹Because of my wounds, my friends and neighbors

avoid me,
and my relatives stay far away.
¹²Some people set traps to kill me.
Those who want to hurt me plan trouble;
all day long they think up lies.

¹³I am like a deaf man; I cannot hear.
Like a mute, I cannot speak.
¹⁴I am like a person who does not hear,
who has no answer to give.
¹⁵I trust you, Lord.
You will answer, my Lord and God.
¹⁶I said, "Don't let them laugh at me
or brag when I am defeated."
¹⁷I am about to die,
and I cannot forget my pain.
¹⁸I confess my guilt;
I am troubled by my sin.
¹⁹My enemies are strong and healthy,
and many hate me for no reason.
²⁰They repay me with evil for the good I did.
They lie about me because I try to do good.

²¹Lord, don't leave me;
my God, don't go away.
²²Quickly come and help me,
my Lord and Savior.

Life Is Short

For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

I said, "I will be careful how I act
and will not sin by what I say.

I will be careful what I say
around wicked people."

²So I kept very quiet.

I didn't even say anything good,
but I became even more upset.

³I became very angry inside,
and as I thought about it, my anger burned.

So I spoke:

⁴"Lord, tell me when the end will come
and how long I will live.

Let me know how long I have.

⁵You have given me only a short life;
my lifetime is like nothing to you.

Everyone's life is only a breath.

Selah

⁶People are like shadows moving about.

All their work is for nothing;
they collect things but don't know who will get them.

⁷"So, Lord, what hope do I have?

You are my hope.

⁸Save me from all my sins.

Don't let wicked fools make fun of me.

⁹I am quiet; I do not open my mouth,
because you are the one who has done this.

¹⁰Quit punishing me;
your beating is about to kill me.

¹¹You correct and punish people for their sins;
like a moth, you destroy what they love.
Everyone's life is only a breath.

Selah

¹²“Lord, hear my prayer,
and listen to my cry.
Do not ignore my tears.
I am like a visitor with you.
Like my ancestors, I'm only here a short time.
¹³Leave me alone so I can be happy
before I leave and am no more.”

Life Lessons

Psalms 40:1–41:13

Situation

David fled from Saul prior to replacing him as king.

Observation

God delivers us from trouble. The wait may be difficult, but we can be thankful for the outcome and can tell others about it.

Inspiration

An old man walks down a Florida beach. The sun sets like an orange ball on the horizon. The waves slap the sand. The smell of saltwater stings the air. The beach is vacant. No sun to entice the sunbathers. Not enough light for the fishermen. So, aside from a few joggers and strollers, the gentleman is alone.

He carries a bucket in his bony hand. A bucket of shrimp. It's not for him. It's not for the fish. It's for the sea gulls.

He walks to an isolated pier cast in gold by the setting sun. He steps out to the end of the pier. The time has come for the weekly ritual.

He stands and waits.

Soon the sky becomes a mass of dancing dots. The evening silence gives way to the screeching of birds. They fill the sky and then cover the moorings. They are on a pilgrimage to meet the old man.

For a half hour or so, the bushy-browed, shoulder-bent gentleman will stand on the pier, surrounded by the birds of the sea, until his bucket is

empty.

But even after the food is gone, his feathered friends still linger. They linger as if they're attracted to more than just food. They perch on his hat. They walk on the pier. And they all share a moment together....

The old man on the pier couldn't go a week without saying "thank you."

His name was Eddie Rickenbacker. If you were alive in October 1943, you probably remember the day that he was reported missing at sea.

He had been sent on a mission to deliver a message to Gen. Douglas MacArthur. With a handpicked crew in a B-17 known as the "Flying Fortress," he set off across the South Pacific. Somewhere the crew became lost, the fuel ran out, and the plane went down.

All eight crew members escaped into the life rafts. They battled the weather, the water, the sharks, and the sun. But most of all, they battled the hunger. After eight days, their rations were gone. They ran out of options. It would take a miracle for them to survive.

And a miracle occurred.

After an afternoon devotional service, the men said a prayer and tried to rest. As Rickenbacker was dozing with his hat over his eyes, something landed on his head. He would later say that he knew it was a sea gull. He didn't know how he knew; he just knew. That gull meant food ... if he could catch it. And he did.

The flesh was eaten. The intestines were used as fish bait. And the crew survived.

What was a sea gull doing hundreds of miles away from land?

Only God knows.

But whatever the reason, Rickenbacker was thankful. As a result, every Friday evening this old captain walked to the pier, his bucket full of shrimp and his heart full of thanks.

We'd be wise to do the same. We've much in common with Rickenbacker. We, too, were saved by a Sacrificial Visitor.

We, too, were rescued by One who journeyed far from only God knows where.

And we, like the captain, have every reason to look into the sky ... and worship. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

Tired of waiting for a career break? A loving spouse? Children? Pray through this psalm when you feel impatient. Let God know your feelings, and tell him your frustrations.

Exploration

Waiting—[Psalm 5:3](#); [27:14](#); [130:5–6](#); [Isaiah 30:18](#); [Micah 7:7](#); [Luke 12:35–40](#); [James 5:7–8](#).

Remember, God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to have a hope-filled heart ... just like Jesus. —Max Lucado (*Just Like Jesus*)

Praise and Prayer for Help

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

I waited patiently for the Lord.
He turned to me and heard my cry.
²He lifted me out of the pit of destruction,
out of the sticky mud.
He stood me on a rock
and made my feet steady.
³He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many people will see this and worship him.
Then they will trust the Lord.

⁴Happy is the person
who trusts the Lord,
who doesn't turn to those who are proud
or to those who worship false gods.
⁵Lord my God, you have done many miracles.
Your plans for us are many.
If I tried to tell them all,
there would be too many to count.

⁶You do not want sacrifices and offerings.
But you have made a hole in my ear
to show that my body and life are yours.
You do not ask for burnt offerings
and sacrifices to take away sins.

⁷Then I said, "Look, I have come.
It is written about me in the book.

⁸My God, I want to do what you want.
Your teachings are in my heart."

⁹I will tell about your goodness in the great meeting of
your people.

Lord, you know my lips are not silent.

¹⁰I do not hide your goodness in my heart;
I speak about your loyalty and salvation.
I do not hide your love and truth
from the people in the great meeting.

¹¹Lord, do not hold back your mercy from me;
let your love and truth always protect me.

¹²Troubles have surrounded me;
there are too many to count.
My sins have caught me
so that I cannot see a way to escape.
I have more sins than hairs on my head,
and I have lost my courage.

¹³Please, Lord, save me.
Hurry, Lord, to help me.

¹⁴People are trying to kill me.
Shame them and disgrace them.
People want to hurt me.

Let them run away in disgrace.

¹⁵People are making fun of me.

Let them be shamed into silence.

¹⁶But let those who follow you
be happy and glad.

They love you for saving them.

May they always say, "Praise the Lord!"

¹⁷Lord, because I am poor and helpless,
please remember me.

You are my helper and savior.

My God, do not wait.

A Prayer in Time of Sickness

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

Happy is the person who thinks about the poor.
When trouble comes, the Lord will save him.

²The Lord will protect him and spare his life
and will bless him in the land.

He will not let his enemies take him.

³The Lord will give him strength when he is sick,
and he will make him well again.

⁴I said, "Lord, have mercy on me.

Heal me, because I have sinned against you."

⁵My enemies are saying evil things about me.

They say, "When will he die and be forgotten?"

⁶Some people come to see me,
but they lie.

They just come to get bad news.

Then they go and gossip.

⁷All my enemies whisper about me
and think the worst about me.

⁸They say, "He has a terrible disease.

He will never get out of bed again."

⁹My best and truest friend, who ate at my table,
has even turned against me.

¹⁰Lord, have mercy on me.

Give me strength so I can pay them back.

¹¹Because my enemies do not defeat me,

I know you are pleased with me.

¹²Because I am innocent, you support me
and will let me be with you forever.

¹³Praise the Lord, the God of Israel.
He has always been,
and he will always be.
Amen and amen.

Book 2

Life Lessons

Psalms 42:1–43:5

Situation

Psalms 42 and 43 were probably written as one psalm. Though the writer felt separated from God, he recognized that he should put his hope in God.

Observation

Seek God even in times of discouragement, and he will provide hope.

Inspiration

What do you need most today? Do you need just a word of hope? That's what we all need. And that's what the Word of God does that nothing and no one else can. The Word of God says to us that there is no hopeless situation, no hopeless illness, no hopeless marriage. If there were hopeless situations, then God would have given up long ago.

Having a Savior in Christ means that the hopeless have hope, the dead have life, and the abandoned have Good News.

Our hope is the anchor for the soul. "Where's your hope?" Jesus asks. It is the confident hope of the return of Christ. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, "Hope")

Application

List the circumstances or events in your life that are preventing you from hoping in God. Pray through each one of them, asking God to give you renewed hope in each situation.

Exploration

Hope—[Psalm 16:9–11](#); [31:24](#); [71:5](#); [Proverbs 14:32](#);
[Lamentations 3:21–24](#); [Romans 5:2](#); [Ephesians 1:18](#);
[Colossians 1:5](#).

Wishing to Be Near God

For the director of music. A maskil of the sons of Korah.

As a deer thirsts for streams of water,
so I thirst for you, God.

²I thirst for the living God.

When can I go to meet with him?

³Day and night, my tears have been my food.

People are always saying,

“Where is your God?”

⁴When I remember these things,

I speak with a broken heart.

I used to walk with the crowd

and lead them to God’s Temple

with songs of praise.

⁵Why am I so sad?

Why am I so upset?

I should put my hope in God

and keep praising him,

my Savior and ⁶my God.

I am very sad.

So I remember you where the Jordan River begins,

near the peaks of Hermon and Mount Mizar.

⁷Troubles have come again and again, sounding like

waterfalls.

Your waves are crashing all around me.

⁸The Lord shows his true love every day.

At night I have a song,
and I pray to my living God.

⁹I say to God, my Rock,

“Why have you forgotten me?

Why am I sad

and troubled by my enemies?”

¹⁰My enemies’ insults make me feel
as if my bones were broken.

They are always saying,

“Where is your God?”

¹¹Why am I so sad?

Why am I so upset?

I should put my hope in God

and keep praising him,

my Savior and my God.

A Prayer for Protection

God, defend me.

Argue my case against those who don't follow you.

Save me from liars and those who do evil.

²God, you are my strength.

Why have you rejected me?

Why am I sad

and troubled by my enemies?

³Send me your light and truth
to guide me.

Let them lead me to your holy mountain,
to where you live.

⁴Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God who is my joy and happiness.

I will praise you with a harp,
God, my God.

⁵Why am I so sad?

Why am I so upset?

I should put my hope in God
and keep praising him,
my Savior and my God.

Life Lessons

Psalm 44:1–26

Situation

The sons of Korah wrote this psalm after Israel lost a war. The Israelites did not understand what caused them to lose.

Observation

Although disappointed and confused, Israel kept trusting in God. They praised him and knew that he continued to be strong.

Inspiration

Two-year-old Sara sits on my lap. We are watching a comedy on television about a guy who has a mouse in his room. He is asleep. He opens one eye and finds himself peering into the face of the rodent...

I laugh, but Sara panics. She turns away from the screen and buries her face in my shoulder. Her arms encircle my neck and clamp like a vise. Her little body grows rigid. She thinks the mouse is going to get her.

"It's ok, Sara," I assure her...

She is afraid.

But with time, I convince her... . Sara has gone from white-faced fear to peaceful chuckles in a few moments. Why? Because her father spoke and she believed.

Would that we would do the same. Got any giant mice on your screen? Got any fears that won't go away? ...

I wish the fears were just television images. They aren't. They lurk in hospital rooms and funeral homes. They stare at us from divorce papers and eviction notices. They glare through the eyes of cruel parents or an abusive mate....

There are times when mice roar. There are times when we need a strong pair of arms. You need to know that the arms of God are there. (From *Tell Me the Story* by Max Lucado)

Application

What problem or fear do you need to trust God with today? Remember that God already knows your problem and wants you to trust him for strength to solve it. Tell God about your need.

Exploration

Trust God—[Proverbs 3:5](#); [Isaiah 26:3–4](#); [50:10](#); [Jeremiah 17:7–8](#); [Habakkuk 3:17–19](#); [Romans 15:13](#); [Hebrews 6:18–19](#).

A Prayer for Help

For the director of music. A maskil of the sons of Korah.

God, we have heard about you.
Our ancestors told us
what you did in their days,
in days long ago.

²With your power you forced the nations out of the
land

and placed our ancestors here.
You destroyed those other nations,
but you made our ancestors grow strong.
³It wasn't their swords that took the land.
It wasn't their power that gave them victory.
But it was your great power and strength.
You were with them because you loved them.

⁴My God, you are my King.
Your commands led Jacob's people to victory.
⁵With your help we pushed back our enemies.
In your name we trampled those who came against us.

⁶I don't trust my bow to help me,
and my sword can't save me.

⁷You saved us from our foes,
and you made our enemies ashamed.

⁸We will praise God every day;

we will praise your name forever.

Selah

⁹But you have rejected us and shamed us.
You don't march with our armies anymore.

¹⁰You let our enemies push us back,
and those who hate us have taken our wealth.

¹¹You gave us away like sheep to be eaten
and have scattered us among the nations.

¹²You sold your people for nothing
and made no profit on the sale.

¹³You made us a joke to our neighbors;
those around us laugh and make fun of us.

¹⁴You made us a joke to the other nations;
people shake their heads.

¹⁵I am always in disgrace,
and I am covered with shame.

¹⁶My enemy is getting even
with insults and curses.

¹⁷All these things have happened to us,
but we have not forgotten you
or failed to keep our agreement with you.

¹⁸Our hearts haven't turned away from you,
and we haven't stopped following you.

¹⁹But you crushed us in this place where wild dogs
live,
and you covered us with deep darkness.

²⁰If we had forgotten our God

or lifted our hands in prayer to foreign gods,

²¹God would have known,

because he knows what is in our hearts.

²²But for you we are in danger of death all the time.

People think we are worth no more than sheep to be killed.

²³Wake up, Lord! Why are you sleeping?

Get up! Don't reject us forever.

²⁴Why do you hide from us?

Have you forgotten our pain and troubles?

²⁵We have been pushed down into the dirt;

we are flat on the ground.

²⁶Get up and help us.

Because of your love, save us.

Life Lessons

Psalms 45:1–46:11

Situation

God's strength provided safety, security, and peace. His power guaranteed victory. ([Psalm 45](#) may have been written for a wedding).

Observation

Nothing occurs beyond the reach of God's power. Awareness of God's power provides rest and encouragement to Christians.

Inspiration

America is in a hurry. Time has skyrocketed in value. The value of any commodity depends on its scarcity. And time that once was abundant now is going to the highest bidder.

... "Time," according to pollster Louis Harris, "may have become the most precious commodity in the land."

Do we really have less time? Or is it just our imagination?

In 1965 a testimony before a Senate subcommittee claimed the future looked bright for free time in America. By 1985, predicted the report, Americans would be working twenty-two hours a week and would be able to retire at age thirty-eight.

The reason? The computer age would usher in a gleaming array of advances that would do our work for us while stabilizing our economy.

Take the household, they cited. Microwaves,

quick-fix foods, and food processors will pave the way into the carefree future. And the office? Well, you know that old stencil machine? It'll be replaced by a copier. And the files? Computers are the files of the future. And that electric typewriter? Don't get too attached to it; a computer will do its work, too.

And now, years later, we have everything the report promised. The computers are byting, the VCRs are recording, the fax machines are faxing. Yet the clocks are still ticking, and people are still running. The truth is, the average amount of leisure time has *shrunk* 37 percent since 1973. The average work week has *increased* from forty-one to forty-seven hours. (And, for many of you, forty-seven hours would be a calm week.)

Why didn't the forecast come true? What did the committee overlook? They misjudged the appetite of the consumer. As the individualism of the sixties led to the materialism of the eighties, the free time gained for us by technology didn't make us relax; it made us run. Gadgets provided more time ... more time meant more potential money ... more potential money meant more time needed ... and round and round it went. Lives grew louder as demands became greater. And as demands became greater, lives grew emptier.

"I've got so many irons in the fire, I can't keep any of them hot," complained one young father.

Can you relate?

When I was ten years old, my mother enrolled me in piano lessons. Now, many youngsters excel at the keyboard. Not me. Spending thirty minutes every

afternoon tethered to a piano bench was a torture just one level away from swallowing broken glass. The metronome inspected each second with glacial slowness before it was allowed to pass.

Some of the music, though, I learned to enjoy. I hammered the staccatos. I belabored the crescendos. The thundering finishes I kettle-drummed. But there was one instruction in the music I could never obey to my teacher's satisfaction. The rest. The zigzagged command to do nothing. Nothing! What sense does that make? Why sit at the piano and pause when you can pound?

"Because," my teacher patiently explained, "music is always sweeter after a rest."

It didn't make sense to me at age ten. But now, a few decades later, the words ring with wisdom—divine wisdom. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

Are you weary? Look to the protection and strength of God. The world can be overwhelming at times, but remember that God has everything under control. Relax in him.

Exploration

God's Strength for Us—[Exodus 15:2](#); [2 Samuel 22:33](#); [Psalms 28:8](#); [73:26](#); [81:1](#); [89:21](#).

A Song for the King's Wedding

For the director of music. To the tune of "Lilies." A maskil. A love song of the sons of Korah.

Beautiful words fill my mind.
I am speaking of royal things.
My tongue is like the pen of a skilled writer.

²You are more handsome than anyone,
and you are an excellent speaker,
so God has blessed you forever.

³Put on your sword, powerful warrior.
Show your glory and majesty.

⁴In your majesty win the victory
for what is true and right.
Your power will do amazing things.

⁵Your sharp arrows will enter
the hearts of the king's enemies.
Nations will be defeated before you.

⁶God, your throne will last forever and ever.
You will rule your kingdom with fairness.

⁷You love right and hate evil,
so God has chosen you from among your friends;
he has set you apart with much joy.

⁸Your clothes smell like myrrh, aloes, and cassia.
From palaces of ivory

music comes to make you happy.

⁹Kings' daughters are among your honored women.
Your bride stands at your right side
wearing gold from Ophir.

¹⁰Listen to me, daughter; look and pay attention.
Forget your people and your father's family.

¹¹The king loves your beauty.
Because he is your master, you should obey him.

¹²People from the city of Tyre have brought a gift.
Wealthy people will want to meet you.

¹³The princess is very beautiful.
Her gown is woven with gold.

¹⁴In her beautiful clothes she is brought to the king.
Her bridesmaids follow behind her,
and they are also brought to him.

¹⁵They come with happiness and joy;
they enter the king's palace.

¹⁶You will have sons to replace your fathers.
You will make them rulers through all the land.

¹⁷I will make your name famous from now on,
so people will praise you forever and ever.

God Protects His People

For the director of music. By alamoeth. A psalm of the sons of Korah.

God is our protection and our strength.
He always helps in times of trouble.

²So we will not be afraid even if the earth shakes,
or the mountains fall into the sea,
³even if the oceans roar and foam,
or the mountains shake at the raging sea.

Selah

⁴There is a river that brings joy to the city of God,
the holy place where God Most High lives.

⁵God is in that city, and so it will not be shaken.
God will help her at dawn.

⁶Nations tremble and kingdoms shake.
God shouts and the earth crumbles.

⁷The Lord All-Powerful is with us;
the God of Jacob is our defender.

Selah

⁸Come and see what the Lord has done,
the amazing things he has done on the earth.

⁹He stops wars everywhere on the earth.
He breaks all bows and spears
and burns up the chariots with fire.

¹⁰God says, "Be quiet and know that I am God.
I will be supreme over all the nations;
I will be supreme in the earth."

¹¹The Lord All-Powerful is with us;
the God of Jacob is our defender.

Selah

Life Lessons

[Psalms 47:1–49:20](#)

Situation

[Psalm 47](#) is a festive song, celebrating the universal reign of God.

Observation

God reigns over all the earth and every nation. He deserves our adoration.

Inspiration

Some people have problems with the Lord Jesus Christ's command to love Him with all of their hearts, all of their souls, and all of their minds. "I do not like someone—even if that Someone is God—commanding me to love Him. I want my love to come freely."

Such a reservation melts when you consider why God sets the commandment of love above all others. As we allow the Holy Spirit to love Him through us, we love God with all of our strength because He is worthy of our devotion.

The Lord created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, including you ([Genesis 1:1](#); [2:7](#), [22](#)). Christ has saved you from eternal destruction. He supplies all of your needs ([Philippians 4:19](#)). Christ Jesus died and rose again for you.

Understanding God's majesty and glory is the wellspring of your love. He has done so much for you. How can you not love such a One?

You also love God with all of your heart because

He knows that devotion given to any other person or things besides Himself is harmful. God created you for Himself. When your highest and noblest love is directed to something or someone else, you have been seduced into treachery. Loving God frees you from competing idols that only enslave you. (From *A Gift of Love* by Charles Stanley)

Application

If God deserves our adoration, what are you doing that reflects that? Ask God to put a song of worship in your heart. Start each day by spending a few moments in praise and adoration.

Exploration

Praise and Adoration—[Deuteronomy 10:21](#); [1 Chronicles 16:8–10](#); [Psalms 63:3–5](#); [66](#); [71:23](#); [Matthew 11:25–27](#); [Revelation 5:13](#).

God, the King of the World

For the director of music. A psalm of the sons of Korah.

Clap your hands, all you people.

Shout to God with joy.

²The Lord Most High is wonderful.

He is the great King over all the earth!

³He defeated nations for us

and put them under our control.

⁴He chose the land we would inherit.

We are the children of Jacob, whom he loved.

Selah

⁵God has risen with a shout of joy;

the Lord has risen as the trumpets sounded.

⁶Sing praises to God. Sing praises.

Sing praises to our King. Sing praises.

⁷God is King of all the earth,

so sing a song of praise to him.

⁸God is King over the nations.

God sits on his holy throne.

⁹The leaders of the nations meet

with the people of the God of Abraham,

because the leaders of the earth belong to God.

He is supreme.

Jerusalem, the City of God

A psalm of the sons of Korah.

The Lord is great; he should be praised
in the city of our God, on his holy mountain.

²It is high and beautiful
and brings joy to the whole world.

Mount Zion is like the high mountains of the north;
it is the city of the Great King.

³God is within its palaces;
he is known as its defender.

⁴Kings joined together
and came to attack the city.

⁵But when they saw it, they were amazed.
They ran away in fear.

⁶Fear took hold of them;
they hurt like a woman having a baby.

⁷You destroyed the large trading ships
with an east wind.

⁸First we heard
and now we have seen
that God will always keep his city safe.
It is the city of the Lord All-Powerful,
the city of our God

Selah

⁹God, we come into your Temple
to think about your love.

¹⁰God, your name is known everywhere;
all over the earth people praise you.
Your right hand is full of goodness.

¹¹Mount Zion is happy
and all the towns of Judah rejoice,
because your decisions are fair.

¹²Walk around Jerusalem
and count its towers.

¹³Notice how strong they are.
Look at the palaces.

Then you can tell your children about them.

¹⁴This God is our God forever and ever.
He will guide us from now on.

Trusting Money Is Foolish

For the director of music. A psalm of the sons of Korah.

Listen to this, all you nations;
listen, all you who live on earth.

²Listen, both great and small,
rich and poor together.

³What I say is wise,
and my heart speaks with understanding.

⁴I will pay attention to a wise saying;
I will explain my riddle on the harp.

⁵Why should I be afraid of bad days?
Why should I fear when evil men surround me?

⁶They trust in their money
and brag about their riches.

⁷No one can buy back the life of another.
No one can pay God for his own life,

⁸because the price of a life is high.
No payment is ever enough.

⁹Do people live forever?
Don't they all face death?

¹⁰See, even wise people die.
Fools and stupid people also die
and leave their wealth to others.

¹¹Their graves will always be their homes.
They will live there from now on,
even though they named places after themselves.

¹²Even rich people do not live forever;
like the animals, people die.

¹³This is what will happen to those who trust in
themselves
and to their followers who believe them.

Selah

¹⁴Like sheep, they must die,
and death will be their shepherd.
Honest people will rule over them in the morning,
and their bodies will rot in a grave far from home.

¹⁵But God will save my life
and will take me from the grave.

Selah

¹⁶Don't be afraid of rich people
because their houses are more beautiful.

¹⁷They don't take anything to the grave;
their wealth won't go down with them.

¹⁸Even though they were praised when they were alive

and people may praise you when you succeed—
¹⁹they will go to where their ancestors are.
They will never see light again.

²⁰Rich people with no understanding
are just like animals that die.

Life Lessons

Psalms 50:1–52:9

Situation

David repented after Nathan confronted him. Nathan rightly pointed to David's sin of adultery and murder ([2 Samuel 11–12](#)).

Observation

David pled for restoration and renewal. He asked that God would purify his heart.

Inspiration

When I was ten years old, I had a puppy named Tina. You would have loved her. She was the perfect pet. An irresistible, pug-nosed Pekingese pup. One ear fell over and the other ear stood straight up. She never tired of playing and yet never got in the way.

Her mother died when she was born so the rearing of the puppy fell to me. I fed her milk from a doll bottle and used to sneak out at night to see if she was warm. I'll never forget the night I took her to bed with me only to have her mess on my pillow. We made quite a pair. My first brush with parenthood.

One day I went into the backyard to give Tina her dinner. I looked around and spotted her in a corner near the fence. She had cornered a butterfly (as much as a butterfly can be cornered) and was playfully yelping and jumping in the air trying to catch the butterfly in her mouth. Amused, I watched her for a few minutes and then called to her.

“Tina! Come here, girl! It's time to eat!”

What happened next surprised me. Tina stopped her playing and looked at me. But instead of immediately scampering in my direction, she sat back on her haunches. Then she tilted her head back toward the butterfly, looked back at me, then back to the butterfly, and then back to me. For the first time in her life, she had to make a decision....

And do you know what she did? She chased the butterfly! Scurrying and barking, she ignored my call and chased that silly thing until it flew over the fence.

That is when the guilt hit.

She stopped at the fence for a long time, sitting back on her hind legs looking up in the air where the butterfly had made its exit. Slowly, the excitement of the chase was overshadowed by the guilt of disobedience.

She turned painfully and walked back to encounter her owner. (To be honest, I was a little miffed.) Her head was ducked as she regretfully trudged across the yard.

For the first time in her life, she felt guilty.

She had violated her “should” and had given in to her “want.” My heart melted, however, and I called her name again. Sensing forgiveness, Tina darted into my hands. (I always was a softy.)

Now, I may be overdoing it a bit. I don’t know if a dog can really feel guilty or not. But I do know a human can. And whether the sin is as slight as chasing a butterfly or as serious as sleeping with another man’s wife, the effects are the same....

Man cannot cope with guilt alone....

... I don't care how many worship services you attend or good deeds you do, your goodness is insufficient. You *can't* be good enough to deserve forgiveness. No one bats a thousand. No one bowls three hundred. No one. Not you, not me, not anyone....

... Listen. Quit trying to quench your own guilt. You can't do it. There's no way. Not with a bottle of whiskey or perfect Sunday School attendance. Sorry. I don't care how bad you are. You can't be bad enough to forget it. And I don't care how good you are. You can't be good enough to overcome it.

You need a Savior. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you think you have committed too great a sin for God to forget it? Do you think you have waited too long to ask for his pardon? Read this psalm to God as your own prayer. Experience God's forgiving grace as David did.

Exploration

Confession of Sin—[Ezra 9:5-7](#); [10:1](#); [Nehemiah 1:5-7](#); [Psalm 32:5](#); [41:4](#); [Luke 3:3](#); [Acts 3:19](#).

God Wants True Worship

A psalm of Asaph.

The God of gods, the Lord, speaks.
He calls the earth from the rising to the setting sun.

²God shines from Jerusalem,
whose beauty is perfect.

³Our God comes, and he will not be silent.
A fire burns in front of him,
and a powerful storm surrounds him.

⁴He calls to the sky above and to the earth
that he might judge his people.

⁵He says, "Gather around, you who worship me,
who have made an agreement with me, using a
sacrifice."

⁶God is the judge,
and even the skies say he is right.

Selah

⁷God says, "My people, listen to me;
Israel, I will testify against you.
I am God, your God.

⁸I do not scold you for your sacrifices.
You always bring me your burnt offerings.

⁹But I do not need bulls from your stalls
or goats from your pens,

¹⁰because every animal of the forest is already mine.
The cattle on a thousand hills are mine.

¹¹I know every bird on the mountains,
and every living thing in the fields is mine.

¹²If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
because the earth and everything in it are mine.

¹³I don't eat the meat of bulls
or drink the blood of goats.

¹⁴Give an offering to show thanks to God.
Give God Most High what you have promised.

¹⁵Call to me in times of trouble.
I will save you, and you will honor me."

¹⁶But God says to the wicked,
"Why do you talk about my laws?
Why do you mention my agreement?

¹⁷You hate my teachings
and turn your back on what I say.

¹⁸When you see a thief, you join him.
You take part in adultery.

¹⁹You don't stop your mouth from speaking evil,
and your tongue makes up lies.

²⁰You speak against your brother
and lie about your mother's son.

²¹I have kept quiet while you did these things,
so you thought I was just like you.
But I will scold you
and accuse you to your face.

²²"Think about this, you who forget God.

Otherwise, I will tear you apart,
and no one will save you.

²³Those people honor me
who bring me offerings to show thanks.
And I, God, will save those who do that.”

A Prayer for Forgiveness

For the director of music. A psalm of David when the prophet Nathan came to David after David's sin with Bathsheba.

God, be merciful to me
because you are loving.
Because you are always ready to be merciful,
wipe out all my wrongs.
²Wash away all my guilt
and make me clean again.

³I know about my wrongs,
and I can't forget my sin.
⁴You are the only one I have sinned against;
I have done what you say is wrong.
You are right when you speak
and fair when you judge.
⁵I was brought into this world in sin.
In sin my mother gave birth to me.

⁶You want me to be completely truthful,
so teach me wisdom.

⁷Take away my sin, and I will be clean.
Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

⁸Make me hear sounds of joy and gladness;
let the bones you crushed be happy again.

⁹Turn your face from my sins
and wipe out all my guilt.

¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, God,

and make my spirit right again.

¹¹Do not send me away from you
or take your Holy Spirit away from me.

¹²Give me back the joy of your salvation.
Keep me strong by giving me a willing spirit.

¹³Then I will teach your ways to those who do wrong,
and sinners will turn back to you.

¹⁴God, save me from the guilt of murder,
God of my salvation,
and I will sing about your goodness.

¹⁵Lord, let me speak
so I may praise you.

¹⁶You are not pleased by sacrifices, or I would give
them.

You don't want burnt offerings.

¹⁷The sacrifice God wants is a broken spirit.

God, you will not reject a heart that is broken and sorry
for sin.

¹⁸Do whatever good you wish for Jerusalem.
Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹Then you will be pleased with right sacrifices and
whole burnt offerings,
and bulls will be offered on your altar.

God Will Punish the Proud

For the director of music. A maskil of David. When Doeg the Edomite came to Saul and said to him, "David is in Ahimelech's house."

Mighty warrior, why do you brag about the evil you do?

God's love will continue forever.

²You think up evil plans.

Your tongue is like a sharp razor,
making up lies.

³You love wrong more than right
and lies more than truth.

Selah

⁴You love words that bite
and tongues that lie.

⁵But God will ruin you forever.

He will grab you and throw you out of your tent;
he will tear you away from the land of the living.

Selah

⁶Those who do right will see this and fear God.

They will laugh at you and say,

⁷"Look what happened to the man
who did not depend on God
but depended on his money.
He grew strong by his evil plans."

⁸But I am like an olive tree
growing in God's Temple.

I trust God's love
forever and ever.

⁹God, I will thank you forever for what you have done.

With those who worship you, I will trust you because
you are good.

Life Lessons

Psalms 53:1–55:23

Situation

People who denied God were foolish, for they denied the one who could save them. David prayed for salvation to reach his people. He praised God for giving favor to an unworthy nation.

Observation

Denying God doesn't detract from his majesty, but it does separate you from your divine Father. Avoid this tragedy!

Inspiration

One Sunday afternoon I was reading a biography of Bill Borden, a Yale University student many years ago.

... [Bill's] father had been a millionaire and had left his fortune to Bill. But I was unsettled when I learned that Bill gave away his inheritance to missionary societies ... so that more people would hear and accept the good news... I read that Bill had decided to become a missionary.

As I read on ... I learned that only a few weeks after arriving in Cairo to begin his work as a missionary ... [Bill] woke up one morning feeling sick ... because of a high fever. The fever didn't go away, but became worse.

I had heard and read enough missionary stories to know how God sometimes heals people, so I was completely unprepared to find out that God didn't

heal Bill. Instead, Bill died. I was utterly shocked....

God was unfair. God was ungrateful. *I would never serve a God like that*, I thought. So I decided, as I sat there reading, to go my own way and run my own life....

Then a strange thing happened. God had mercy on me. Even as I was defying Him and deciding to go my own way and do my own thing, my mind changed and I saw the fatal foolishness of that decision. A moment later I was down on my knees beside the chair where I had been reading. And I found myself praying and telling God that He could have my life, and I would do whatever He wanted me to do. It was as though He reached out for me as I was going over the edge and pulled me back and gave me a second chance.

From then on, although with some bumps, relapses, and detours along the way, I have stuck to my goal: to belong to Him alone and to be what He wants me to be, to do what He tells me to do. What happiness and joy I have had as a result! (From *Next Steps for New Christians* by Kenneth Taylor)

Application

Humanity has built tall buildings, gone to the moon, and transplanted organs. But we haven't overcome the penalty of sin. Such a challenge escapes us. Who has the cure for sin or for death? Open your heart to God today. Watch God accomplish changes in areas you have not been able to change.

Exploration

Denying God—[Exodus 11:9–10](#); [Matthew 10:32–33](#); [2 Timothy 2:12](#).

The Unbelieving Fool

For the director of music. By mahalath. A maskil of David.

Fools say to themselves,
“There is no God.”
Fools are evil and do terrible things;
none of them does anything good.

²God looked down from heaven on all people
to see if anyone was wise,
if anyone was looking to God for help.

³But all have turned away.
Together, everyone has become evil;
none of them does anything good.
Not a single person.

⁴Don't the wicked understand?
They destroy my people as if they were eating bread.
They do not ask God for help.

⁵The wicked are filled with terror
where there had been nothing to fear.
God will scatter the bones of your enemies.
You will defeat them,
because God has rejected them.

⁶I pray that victory will come to Israel from Mount
Zion!

May God bring them back.
Then the people of Jacob will rejoice,
and the people of Israel will be glad.

A Prayer for Help

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A maskil of David when the Ziphites went to Saul and said, "We think David is hiding among our people."

God, save me because of who you are.
By your strength show that I am innocent.

²Hear my prayer, God;
listen to what I say.

³Strangers turn against me,
and cruel men want to kill me.
They do not care about God.

Selah

⁴See, God will help me;
the Lord will support me.

⁵Let my enemies be punished with their own evil.
Destroy them because you are loyal to me.

⁶I will offer a sacrifice as a special gift to you.
I will thank you, Lord, because you are good.

⁷You have saved me from all my troubles,
and I have seen my enemies defeated.

A Prayer About a False Friend

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A maskil of David.

God, listen to my prayer
and do not ignore my cry for help.
²Pay attention to me and answer me.
I am troubled and upset
³by what the enemy says
and how the wicked look at me.
They bring troubles down on me,
and in anger they attack me.

⁴I am frightened inside;
the terror of death has attacked me.
⁵I am scared and shaking,
and terror grips me.
⁶I said, "I wish I had wings like a dove.
Then I would fly away and rest.
⁷I would wander far away
and stay in the desert.

Selah

⁸I would hurry to my place of escape,
far away from the wind and storm."
⁹Lord, destroy and confuse their words,
because I see violence and fighting in the city.
¹⁰Day and night they are all around its walls,
and evil and trouble are everywhere inside.
¹¹Destruction is everywhere in the city;

trouble and lying never leave its streets.

¹²It was not an enemy insulting me.
I could stand that.

It was not someone who hated me.
I could hide from him.

¹³But it is you, a person like me,
my companion and good friend.

¹⁴We had a good friendship
and walked together to God's Temple.

¹⁵Let death take away my enemies.
Let them die while they are still young
because evil lives with them.

¹⁶But I will call to God for help,
and the Lord will save me.

¹⁷Morning, noon, and night I am troubled and upset,
but he will listen to me.

¹⁸Many are against me,
but he keeps me safe in battle.

¹⁹God who lives forever
will hear me and punish them.

Selah

But they will not change;
they do not fear God.

²⁰The one who was my friend attacks his friends
and breaks his promises.

²¹His words are slippery like butter,
but war is in his heart.

His words are smoother than oil,
but they cut like knives.

²²Give your worries to the Lord,
and he will take care of you.
He will never let good people down.

²³But, God, you will bring down
the wicked to the grave.
Murderers and liars will live
only half a lifetime.
But I will trust in you.

Life Lessons

Psalms 56:1–57:11

Situation

David wrote [Psalm 56](#) when the Philistines captured him in Gath ([1 Samuel 21:10–15](#)). He wrote [Psalm 57](#) while hiding in a cave.

Observation

God is trustworthy. He is a rock, a hiding place, a fortress. We have safety and comfort in him.

Inspiration

Many years ago, Frederick Nolan was fleeing from his enemies during the North African persecution. Hounded by his pursuers over hill and valley with no place to hide, he fell exhausted into a wayside cave where he fully expected to be found. Awaiting his death, he saw a spider weaving a web. Within minutes, the little bug had woven a beautiful web across the mouth of the cave. The pursuers arrived and wondered if Nolan was hiding in there; but they thought it impossible for him to have entered the cave without dismantling the web. And so they went on. Having escaped, Nolan emerged from his hiding place and proclaimed, “Where God is, a spider’s web is like a wall. Where God is not, a wall is like a spider’s web.”

God is our wall of defense. He is the one who delivers us from those who want to hurt us. He is the one who gives us the comfort and strength we need to be courageous and to endure the trials and trouble

that enter our lives. (From *A Dad's Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent)

Application

Christians will be persecuted. In what ways are you persecuted? Who opposes you? When life gets hard, look to your refuge—God.

Exploration

God as Refuge—[2 Samuel 22:31](#); [Psalm 46:1](#); [59:16](#); [62:7](#); [Isaiah 25:4](#); [Jeremiah 16:19](#); [Joel 3:16](#); [Nahum 1:7](#).

Trusting God for Help

For the director of music. To the tune of "The Dove in the Distant Oak." A miktam of David when the Philistines captured him in Gath.

God, be merciful to me because people are chasing me;
the battle has pressed me all day long.

²My enemies have chased me all day;
there are many proud people fighting me.

³When I am afraid,
I will trust you.

⁴I praise God for his word.
I trust God, so I am not afraid.
What can human beings do to me?

New Life in Christ

When I am afraid, I will trust you.—[Psalm 56:3](#)

Trusting God With Your Fears

How did Jesus endure the terror of the crucifixion? He went first to the Father with his fears. He modeled the words of [Psalm 56:3](#): "When I am afraid, I will trust you."

Do the same with yours. Don't avoid life's Gardens of Gethsemane. Enter them. Just don't enter them alone. And while there, be honest. Pounding the ground is permitted. Tears are allowed. And if you

sweat blood, you won't be the first. Do what Jesus did; open your heart.

And be specific. Jesus was. "Take this cup," he prayed. Give God the number of the flight. Tell him the length of the speech. Share the details of the job transfer. He has plenty of time. He also has plenty of compassion.

He doesn't think your fears are foolish or silly. He won't tell you to "buck up" or "get tough." He's been where you are. He knows how you feel.

And he knows what you need. That's why we punctuate our prayers as Jesus did. "If you are willing ..."

Was God willing? Yes and no. He didn't take away the cross, but he took the fear. God didn't still the storm, but he calmed the sailor.

Who's to say he won't do the same for you?

"Do not worry about anything, but pray and ask God for everything you need, always giving thanks" ([Philippians 4:6](#)).

Don't measure the size of the mountain; talk to the One who can move it. Instead of carrying the world on your shoulders, talk to the One who holds the universe on his. Hope is a look away.

Now, what were you looking at? (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Question: What are some specific fears you are struggling with that you can pray about today to Jesus?

For more on ["New Life in Christ."](#)

⁵All day long they twist my words;
all their evil plans are against me.

⁶They wait. They hide.
They watch my steps,
hoping to kill me.

⁷God, do not let them escape;
punish the foreign nations in your anger.

⁸You have recorded my troubles.
You have kept a list of my tears.
Aren't they in your records?

⁹On the day I call for help, my enemies will be defeated.
I know that God is on my side.

¹⁰I praise God for his word to me;
I praise the Lord for his word.

¹¹I trust in God. I will not be afraid.
What can people do to me?

¹²God, I must keep my promises to you.
I will give you my offerings to thank you,
¹³because you have saved me from death.
You have kept me from being defeated.
So I will walk with God
in light among the living.

A Prayer in Troubled Times

For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." A miktam of David when he escaped from Saul in the cave.

Be merciful to me, God; be merciful to me
because I come to you for protection.
Let me hide under the shadow of your wings
until the trouble has passed.

²I cry out to God Most High,
to the God who does everything for me.
³He sends help from heaven and saves me.
He punishes those who chase me.

Selah

God sends me his love and truth.

⁴Enemies, like lions, are all around me;
I must lie down among them.
Their teeth are like spears and arrows,
their tongues as sharp as swords.

⁵God is supreme over the skies;
his majesty covers the earth.

⁶They set a trap for me.
I am very worried.
They dug a pit in my path,
but they fell into it themselves.

Selah

⁷My heart is steady, God; my heart is steady.
I will sing and praise you.

⁸Wake up, my soul.
Wake up, harp and lyre!
I will wake up the dawn.

⁹Lord, I will praise you among the nations;
I will sing songs of praise about you to all the nations.

¹⁰Your great love reaches to the skies,
your truth to the clouds.

¹¹God, you are supreme above the skies.
Let your glory be over all the earth.

Life Lessons

Psalms 58:1–59:17

Situation

David sang to God for his protection and justice. He asked God to stop the assault of evil people on the righteous.

Observation

God cares for people who try to live a life set apart for his service. He will bring the unrepentant to justice.

Inspiration

Many non-Christians try to convince themselves that they believe neither in the supernatural nor in the hereafter. Try as they will, however, there lingers the nagging, irrepressible realization that we have not been created just for time. We instinctively know that justice alone demands some judgment day. Unless we have knowingly settled the question of our sinful guilt, we are chronically beset by this fear. Until you acknowledge this fact, your fears will worsen. If you admit the possibility of the supernatural and acknowledge the facts of the gospel as they apply to your own life, you would find the fear of death removed and the glorious peace of believing present as a part of your life.

You can have peace in your heart and the personal and perennial assurance of salvation if you will humbly acknowledge yourself as a sinner in God's sight, ask for His forgiveness and cleansing by

the blood of Christ shed on the cross, and trust in Jesus, God's Son, as your Savior and Lord. Christ died to do all this...

... This can be your experience today as you turn in faith to Christ and give your life to Him. Don't let another day go by without committing your life to Christ. (From *Storm Warning* by Billy Graham)

Application

Commit your life to Christ. First, appeal to God's mercy in prayer, then ask Jesus to enter your life as Lord and Savior. Develop a relationship with him.

Exploration

Judgment—[Matthew 12:36](#); [Romans 14:10–12](#); [2 Corinthians 5:10](#); [Revelation 20:11–15](#). Salvation—[John 3:16](#); [Romans 3:23](#); [5:8](#); [6:23](#); [10:9–10](#).

Unfair Judges

For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." A miktam of David.

Do you rulers really say what is right?

Do you judge people fairly?

²No, in your heart you plan evil;
you think up violent crimes in the land.

³From birth, evil people turn away from God;
they wander off and tell lies as soon as they are born.

⁴They are like poisonous snakes,
like deaf cobras that stop up their ears

⁵so they cannot hear the music of the snake charmer
no matter how well he plays.

⁶God, break the teeth in their mouths!

Tear out the fangs of those lions, Lord!

⁷Let them disappear like water that flows away.

Let them be cut short like a broken arrow.

⁸Let them be like snails that melt as they move.

Let them be like a child born dead who never saw the
sun.

⁹His anger will blow them away alive
faster than burning thorns can heat a pot.

¹⁰Good people will be glad when they see him get even.
They will wash their feet in the blood of the wicked.

¹¹Then people will say,
“There really are rewards for doing what is right.
There really is a God who judges the world.”

A Prayer for Protection

For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." A miktam of David when Saul sent men to watch David's house to kill him.

God, save me from my enemies.
Protect me from those who come against me.
²Save me from those who do evil
and from murderers.

³Look, men are waiting to ambush me.
Cruel men attack me,
but I have not sinned or done wrong, Lord.

⁴I have done nothing wrong, but they are ready to
attack me.

Wake up to help me, and look.

⁵You are the Lord God All-Powerful, the God of Israel.
Arise and punish those people.
Do not give those traitors any mercy.

Selah

⁶They come back at night.
Like dogs they growl and roam around the city.

⁷Notice what comes from their mouths.
Insults come from their lips,
because they say, "Who's listening?"

⁸But, Lord, you laugh at them;
you make fun of all of them.

⁹God, my strength, I am looking to you,
because God is my defender.

¹⁰My God loves me, and he goes in front of me.
He will help me defeat my enemies.

¹¹Lord, our protector, do not kill them, or my people will forget.

With your power scatter them and defeat them.

¹²They sin by what they say;
they sin with their words.

They curse and tell lies,
so let their pride trap them.

¹³Destroy them in your anger;
destroy them completely!

Then they will know
that God rules over Israel
and to the ends of the earth.

Selah

¹⁴They come back at night.

Like dogs they growl
and roam around the city.

¹⁵They wander about looking for food,
and they howl if they do not find enough.

¹⁶But I will sing about your strength.
In the morning I will sing about your love.

You are my defender,
my place of safety in times of trouble.

¹⁷God, my strength, I will sing praises to you.
God, my defender, you are the God who loves me.

Life Lessons

Psalms 60:1–62:12

Situation

Life on earth was difficult for David. He found satisfaction only in his relationship with God. God refreshed and fulfilled him.

Observation

To find joy and fulfillment, we should pursue fellowship with God.

Inspiration

The only ultimate disaster that can befall us, I have come to realize, is to feel ourselves to be home on earth. As long as we are aliens, we cannot forget our true homeland.

Unhappiness on earth cultivates a hunger for heaven. By gracing us with a deep dissatisfaction, God holds our attention. The only tragedy, then, is to be satisfied prematurely. To settle for earth. To be content in a strange land....

We are not happy here because we are not at home here. We are not happy here because we are not supposed to be happy here. We are “like foreigners and strangers in this world” ([1 Peter 2:11](#)).

Take a fish and place him on the beach. Watch his gills gasp and scales dry. Is he happy? No! How do you make him happy? Do you cover him with a mountain of cash? Do you get a beach chair and sunglasses? Do you bring him a *Playfish* magazine and martini? Do you wardrobe him in double-breasted

fins and peopleskinned shoes?

Of course not. Then how do you make him happy? You put him back in his element. You put him back in the water. He will never be happy on the beach simply because he was not made for the beach.

And you will never be completely happy on earth simply because you were not made for earth. Oh, you will have moments of joy. You will catch glimpses of light. You will know moments or even days of peace. But they simply do not compare with the happiness that lies ahead. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

Application

Where do you seek fulfillment? Love? Work? Money? Entertainment? Education? Refreshment and contentment can be found only in God. Memorize [Psalm 62:1–2](#) and share it with a fellow believer.

Exploration

Rest—[Psalm 55:22](#); [91:1](#); [116:7](#); [Jeremiah 6:16](#); [Matthew 6:25–34](#); [Hebrews 4:9](#); [1 Peter 5:7](#); [1 John 3:19–20](#).

A Prayer After a Defeat

For the director of music. To the tune of "Lily of the Agreement." A miktam of David. For teaching. When David fought the Arameans of Northwest Mesopotamia and Zobah, and when Joab returned and defeated twelve thousand Edomites at the Valley of Salt.

God, you have rejected us and scattered us.

You have been angry, but please come back to us.

²You made the earth shake and crack.

Heal its breaks because it is shaking.

³You have given your people trouble.

You made us unable to walk straight, like people drunk with wine.

⁴You have raised a banner to gather those who fear you.

Now they can stand up against the enemy.

Selah

⁵Answer us and save us by your power
so the people you love will be rescued.

⁶God has said from his Temple,
"When I win, I will divide Shechem
and measure off the Valley of Succoth.

⁷Gilead and Manasseh are mine.

Ephraim is like my helmet.

Judah holds my royal scepter.

⁸Moab is like my washbowl.
I throw my sandals at Edom.
I shout at Philistia.”

⁹Who will bring me to the strong, walled city?
Who will lead me to Edom?

¹⁰God, surely you have rejected us;
you do not go out with our armies.

¹¹Help us fight the enemy.

Human help is useless,

¹²but we can win with God’s help.
He will defeat our enemies.

A Prayer for Protection

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. Of David.

God, hear my cry;
listen to my prayer.

²I call to you from the ends of the earth
when I am afraid.

Carry me away to a high mountain.

³You have been my protection,
like a strong tower against my enemies.

⁴Let me live in your Holy Tent forever.
Let me find safety in the shelter of your wings.

Selah

⁵God, you have heard my promises.
You have given me what belongs to those who fear
you.

⁶Give the king a long life;
let him live many years.

⁷Let him rule in the presence of God forever.
Protect him with your love and truth.

⁸Then I will praise your name forever,
and every day I will keep my promises.

Trust Only in God

For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

I find rest in God;
only he can save me.
²He is my rock and my salvation.
He is my defender;
I will not be defeated.

³How long will you attack someone?
Will all of you kill that person?
Who is like a leaning wall, like a fence ready to fall?
⁴They are planning to make that person fall.
They enjoy telling lies.
With their mouths they bless,
but in their hearts they curse.

Selah

⁵I find rest in God;
only he gives me hope.
⁶He is my rock and my salvation.
He is my defender;
I will not be defeated.
⁷My honor and salvation come from God.
He is my mighty rock and my protection.
⁸People, trust God all the time.
Tell him all your problems,
because God is our protection.

Selah

⁹The least of people are only a breath,
and even the greatest are just a lie.
On the scales, they weigh nothing;
together they are only a breath.

¹⁰Do not trust in force.
Stealing is of no use.
Even if you gain more riches,
don't put your trust in them.

¹¹God has said this,
and I have heard it over and over:
God is strong.

¹²The Lord is loving.
You reward people for what they have done.

Life Lessons

Psalms 63:1–65:13

Situation

David expressed joy and praise to God. He also wrote of his hope for God's protection from evildoers.

Observation

God meets every need and satisfies fully. You cannot improve on God's work.

Inspiration

It is ... weariness that makes the words of the carpenter so compelling. Listen to them. "Come to me, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads, and I will give you rest" [[Matthew 11:28](#)].

Come to me... . The invitation is to come to him. Why him?

He offers the invitation as a penniless rabbi in an oppressed nation. He has no political office, no connections with the authorities in Rome. He hasn't written a best-seller or earned a diploma.

Yet, he dares to look into the leathery faces of farmers and tired faces of housewives and offer rest. He looks into the disillusioned eyes of a preacher or two from Jerusalem. He gazes into the cynical stare of a banker and the hungry eyes of a bartender and makes this paradoxical promise: "Accept my teachings and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest for your lives" [[Matthew 11:29](#)].

The people came. They came out of the cul-de-

sacs and office complexes of their day. They brought him the burdens of their existence and he gave them, not religion, not doctrine, not systems, but rest.

As a result, they called him Lord.

As a result, they called him Savior.

Not so much because of what he said, but because of what he did.

What he did on the cross during six hours, one Friday....

Jesus was the only man to walk God's earth who claimed to have an answer for man's burdens. "Come to me," he invited them.

My prayer is that you, too, will find rest. And that you will sleep like a baby. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

Application

Make a list of five ways God has provided for you this past week. Go to God and praise him for those blessings.

Exploration

Provision—[Genesis 28:15](#); [Exodus 19:4](#); [Psalm 121](#); [Isaiah 41:10](#); [Matthew 28:20](#); [Hebrews 7:25](#).

Wishing to Be Near God

A psalm of David when he was in the desert of Judah.

God, you are my God.

I search for you.

I thirst for you

like someone in a dry, empty land

where there is no water.

²I have seen you in the Temple
and have seen your strength and glory.

³Because your love is better than life,
I will praise you.

⁴I will praise you as long as I live.

I will lift up my hands in prayer to your name.

⁵I will be content as if I had eaten the best foods.
My lips will sing, and my mouth will praise you.

⁶I remember you while I'm lying in bed;
I think about you through the night.

⁷You are my help.

Because of your protection, I sing.

⁸I stay close to you;
you support me with your right hand.

⁹Some people are trying to kill me,
but they will go down to the grave.

¹⁰They will be killed with swords
and eaten by wild dogs.

¹¹But the king will rejoice in his God.
All who make promises in his name will praise him,
but the mouths of liars will be shut.

A Prayer Against Enemies

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

God, listen to my complaint.

I am afraid of my enemies;

protect my life from them.

²Hide me from those who plan wicked things,
from that gang who does evil.

³They sharpen their tongues like swords
and shoot bitter words like arrows.

⁴From their hiding places they shoot at innocent
people;

they shoot suddenly and are not afraid.

⁵They encourage each other to do wrong.

They talk about setting traps,
thinking no one will see them.

⁶They plan wicked things and say,
“We have a perfect plan.”

The mind of human beings is hard to understand.

⁷But God will shoot them with arrows;
they will suddenly be struck down.

⁸Their own words will be used against them.
All who see them will shake their heads.

⁹Then everyone will fear God.

They will tell what God has done,
and they will learn from what he has done.

¹⁰Good people will be happy in the Lord
and will find protection in him.

Let everyone who is honest praise the Lord.

A Hymn of Thanksgiving

For the director of music. A psalm of David. A song.

God, you will be praised in Jerusalem.

We will keep our promises to you.

²You hear our prayers.

All people will come to you.

³Our guilt overwhelms us,
but you forgive our sins.

⁴Happy are the people you choose
and invite to stay in your court.

We are filled with good things in your house,
your holy Temple.

⁵You answer us in amazing ways,
God our Savior.

People everywhere on the earth
and beyond the sea trust you.

⁶You made the mountains by your strength;
you are dressed in power.

⁷You stopped the roaring seas,
the roaring waves,
and the uproar of the nations.

⁸Even those people at the ends of the earth fear your
miracles.

You are praised from where the sun rises to where it
sets.

⁹You take care of the land and water it;

you make it very fertile.
The rivers of God are full of water.
Grain grows because you make it grow.
¹⁰You send rain to the plowed fields;
you fill the rows with water.
You soften the ground with rain,
and then you bless it with crops.
¹¹You give the year a good harvest,
and you load the wagons with many crops.
¹²The desert is covered with grass
and the hills with happiness.
¹³The pastures are full of flocks,
and the valleys are covered with grain.
Everything shouts and sings for joy.

Life Lessons

Psalms 66:1–67:7

Situation

This songwriter praised God for blessing the people. The writer promised to praise and offer sacrifice to God because God had always remained faithful.

Observation

God is worthy of praise. He not only grants us our life, but he guides us as well.

Inspiration

We are living in a time when more and more Christians direct their prayers to Jesus. I do not remember any occasion in the Scriptures where people prayed to the Son of God, so I suggest we follow His instructions... . When [Jesus] taught His followers to pray, it was always to the Father. So if you wish to be absolutely biblical about it, pray to the Father and call Him that. It will help you in praying to picture Him in your mind as Father more than Friend, or more than just a distant Deity. But of all the titles we could choose to use, “Father” says it best. He is our heavenly Father. He cares for His children. He knows how to handle His family... . I urge you to slow your pace, to approach His “hallowed name” thoughtfully. Take time! Give Him the respect He deserves. Wait on God. In return, He will give you a clearer vision. Furthermore, He will soften your will and make you want to know and do His will. (From

Simple Faith by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Make this your “thank God” day. Focus on the blessings, whether they are as simple as a beautiful tree or as profound as peace of mind. Perhaps you could thank him for your older neighbor, your stubborn child, your gas-guzzling car, your boss—thank God for all things.

Exploration

Praise—[1 Chronicles 16:4](#); [2 Chronicles 5:13](#); [Psalm 61:8](#); [Isaiah 12:1](#); [Acts 16:22–25](#).

Praise God for What He Has Done

For the director of music. A song. A psalm.

Everything on earth, shout with joy to God!

²Sing about his glory!

Make his praise glorious!

³Say to God, “Your works are amazing!

Because your power is great,
your enemies fall before you.

⁴All the earth worships you

and sings praises to you.

They sing praises to your name.”

Selah

⁵Come and see what God has done,

the amazing things he has done for people.

⁶He turned the sea into dry land.

The people crossed the river on foot.

So let us rejoice because of what he did.

⁷He rules forever with his power.

He keeps his eye on the nations,
so people should not turn against him.

Selah

⁸You people, praise our God;

loudly sing his praise.

⁹He protects our lives

and does not let us be defeated.

¹⁰God, you have tested us;
you have purified us like silver.

¹¹You let us be trapped
and put a heavy load on us.

¹²You let our enemies walk on our heads.
We went through fire and flood,
but you brought us to a place with good things.

¹³I will come to your Temple with burnt offerings.

I will give you what I promised,

¹⁴things I promised when I was in trouble.

¹⁵I will bring you offerings of fat animals,
and I will offer sheep, bulls, and goats.

Selah

¹⁶All of you who fear God, come and listen,
and I will tell you what he has done for me.

¹⁷I cried out to him with my mouth
and praised him with my tongue.

¹⁸If I had known of any sin in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened to me.

¹⁹But God has listened;
he has heard my prayer.

²⁰Praise God,
who did not ignore my prayer
or hold back his love from me.

Everyone Should Praise God

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm. A song.

God, have mercy on us and bless us
and show us your kindness

Selah

²so the world will learn your ways,
and all nations will learn that you can save.

³God, the people should praise you;
all people should praise you.

⁴The nations should be glad and sing
because you judge people fairly.
You guide all the nations on earth.

Selah

⁵God, the people should praise you;
all people should praise you.

⁶The land has given its crops.
God, our God, blesses us.

⁷God blesses us
so people all over the earth will fear him.

Life Lessons

Psalms 68:1–69:36

Situation

David led a joyful procession when the Ark of the Lord came to Jerusalem ([2 Samuel 6:11–15](#)).

Observation

Praise God for the provision and protection he gives his people throughout all time.

Inspiration

How precious are the promises when we lie sick, gazing into an empty month, sorely tried and tempted through pain and weariness! All depressing circumstances lose their power for evil when our faith takes hold upon the promises of God....

If such be the greatness and value of the promises, let us joyfully accept and believe them. Shall I urge the child of God to do this? No, I will not so dishonor Him; surely He will believe His own Father! Surely, surely, it ought to be the easiest thing in the world for the sons and daughters of the Most High to believe in Him who gave them the power to become the children of God! ...

Furthermore, let us know the promises. Should we not carry them at our fingers' ends? Should we not know them better than anything else? The promises should be the classics of all believers.... We ought to be so versed in Scripture as always to have at the tip of our tongue the promise that most exactly meets our case. We ought to be transcripts of Scripture; the

divine promise should be as much written upon our hearts as upon the pages of the Book. (From “The Valuation of the Promises” by Charles H. Spurgeon in *They Walked with God*)

Application

Have you ever praised God for what he has done for his church? Isn't it easier to present your requests? During the next week, balance specific requests with specific thanks for deeds he has done.

Exploration

God's Power—[Exodus 9:16](#); [15:6](#); [Joshua 4:24](#); [Psalms 111:6](#); [135:5](#); [Luke 1:37](#); [Romans 4:20–21](#); [Revelation 4:8](#).

God changes your “n” into a “v.” You go from lonely to lovely. —Max Lucado (*Traveling Light*)

Praise God Who Saved the Nation

For the director of music. A psalm of David. A song.

Let God rise up and scatter his enemies;
let those who hate him run away from him.

²Blow them away as smoke
is driven away by the wind.

As wax melts before a fire,
let the wicked be destroyed before God.

³But those who do right should be glad
and should rejoice before God;
they should be happy and glad.

⁴Sing to God; sing praises to his name.

Prepare the way for him
who rides through the desert,
whose name is the Lord.

Rejoice before him.

⁵God is in his holy Temple.

He is a father to orphans,
and he defends the widows.

⁶God gives the lonely a home.

He leads prisoners out with joy,
but those who turn against God will live in a dry land.

⁷God, you led your people out

God, you led your people out
when you marched through the desert.

Selah

⁸The ground shook
and the sky poured down rain
before God, the God of Mount Sinai,
before God, the God of Israel.

⁹God, you sent much rain;
you refreshed your tired land.

¹⁰Your people settled there.
God, in your goodness
you took care of the poor.

¹¹The Lord gave the command,
and a great army told the news:

¹²“Kings and their armies run away.
In camp they divide the wealth taken in war.

¹³Those who stayed by the campfires
will share the riches taken in battle.”

¹⁴The Almighty scattered kings
like snow on Mount Zalmon.

¹⁵The mountains of Bashan are high;
the mountains of Bashan have many peaks.

¹⁶Why do you mountains with many peaks look with
envy
on the mountain that God chose for his home?
The Lord will live there forever.

¹⁷God comes with millions of chariots;
the Lord comes from Mount Sinai to his holy place.

¹⁸When you went up to the heights,

you led a parade of captives.
You received gifts from the people,
even from those who turned against you.
And the Lord God will live there.

¹⁹Praise the Lord, God our Savior,
who helps us every day.

Selah

²⁰Our God is a God who saves us;
the Lord God saves us from death.

²¹God will crush his enemies' heads,
the hairy skulls of those who continue to sin.

²²The Lord said, "I will bring the enemy back from
Bashan;

I will bring them back from the depths of the sea.

²³Then you can stick your feet in their blood,
and your dogs can lick their share."

²⁴God, people have seen your victory march;
God my King marched into the holy place.

²⁵The singers are in front and the instruments are
behind.

In the middle are the girls with the tambourines.

²⁶Praise God in the meeting place;
praise the Lord in the gathering of Israel.

²⁷There is the smallest tribe, Benjamin, leading them.
And there are the leaders of Judah with their group.
There also are the leaders of Zebulun and of Naphtali.

²⁸God, order up your power;

show the mighty power you have used for us before.

²⁹Kings will bring their wealth to you,
to your Temple in Jerusalem.

³⁰Punish Egypt, the beast in the tall grass along the
river.

Punish the leaders of nations, those bulls among the
cows.

Defeated, they will bring you their silver.
Scatter those nations that love war.

³¹Messengers will come from Egypt;
the people of Cush will pray to God.

³²Kingdoms of the earth, sing to God;
sing praises to the Lord.

Selah

³³Sing to the one who rides through the skies, which
are from long ago.

He speaks with a thundering voice.

³⁴Announce that God is powerful.

He rules over Israel,
and his power is in the skies.

³⁵God, you are wonderful in your Temple.

The God of Israel gives his people strength and power.
Praise God!

A Cry for Help

For the director of music. To the tune of "Lilies." A psalm of David.

God, save me,
because the water has risen to my neck.

²I'm sinking down into the mud,
and there is nothing to stand on.

I am in deep water,
and the flood covers me.

³I am tired from calling for help;
my throat is sore.

My eyes are tired from waiting
for God to help me.

⁴There are more people who hate me for no reason than
hairs on my head;
powerful enemies want to destroy me for no reason.
They make me pay back
what I did not steal.

⁵God, you know what I have done wrong;
I cannot hide my guilt from you.

⁶Lord God All-Powerful,
do not let those who hope in you be ashamed because
of me.

God of Israel,
do not let your worshipers be disgraced because of
me.

⁷For you, I carry this shame,
and my face is covered with disgrace.

⁸I am like a stranger to my closest relatives
and a foreigner to my mother's children.

⁹My strong love for your Temple completely controls
me.

When people insult you, it hurts me.

¹⁰When I cry and go without food,
they make fun of me.

¹¹When I wear clothes of sadness,
they joke about me.

¹²They make fun of me in public places,
and the drunkards make up songs about me.

¹³But I pray to you, Lord, for favor.
God, because of your great love, answer me.
You are truly able to save.

¹⁴Pull me from the mud,
and do not let me sink.
Save me from those who hate me
and from the deep water.

¹⁵Do not let the flood drown me
or the deep water swallow me
or the grave close its mouth over me.

¹⁶Lord, answer me because your love is so good.
Because of your great kindness, turn to me.

¹⁷Do not hide from me, your servant.
I am in trouble. Hurry to help me!

¹⁸Come near and save me;
rescue me from my enemies.

¹⁹You see my shame and disgrace.

You know all my enemies and what they have said.

²⁰Insults have broken my heart
and left me weak.

I looked for sympathy, but there was none;
I found no one to comfort me.

²¹They put poison in my food
and gave me vinegar to drink.

²²Let their own feasts cause their ruin;
let their feasts trap them and pay them back.

²³Let their eyes be closed so they cannot see
and their backs be forever weak from troubles.

²⁴Pour your anger out on them;
let your anger catch up with them.

²⁵May their place be empty;
leave no one to live in their tents.

²⁶They chase after those you have hurt,
and they talk about the pain of those you have
wounded.

²⁷Charge them with crime after crime,
and do not let them have anything good.

²⁸Wipe their names from the book of life,
and do not list them with those who do what is right.

²⁹I am sad and hurting.
God, save me and protect me.

³⁰I will praise God in a song
and will honor him by giving thanks.

³¹That will please the Lord more than offering him
cattle,

more than sacrificing a bull with horns and hoofs.

³²Poor people will see this and be glad.

Be encouraged, you who worship God.

³³The Lord listens to those in need
and does not look down on captives.

³⁴Heaven and earth should praise him,
the seas and everything in them.

³⁵God will save Jerusalem
and rebuild the cities of Judah.

Then people will live there and own the land.

³⁶The descendants of his servants will inherit that land,
and those who love him will live there.

Life Lessons

Psalms 70:1–71:24

Situation

These psalms were written as a cry for help in old age. Their writers longed to be testimonies of God's faithfulness and useful parts of God's work.

Observation

In the later years of his life, David looked for God's hand just as surely as he had during his younger years. His dependence on God did not lessen with age.

Inspiration

God had been [David's] trust and his hope from his youth—a remarkable distinction. His defense was God. His hope was God. In God he placed his trust.

This is what youth is seeking today: something that gives meaning to life, something to trust, a confident relationship with a protector, hope for an otherwise dull life. Youth has to feel his way through a maze of problems; and in finding himself, he needs a trust that does not waver.

Youth is a time filled with potentials. Every hour of it trembles with destiny. It would be tragic to twist and warp a life so soon begun. For its formation it should be given to God, like clay is given to the potter, for His own shaping and molding. The Scriptures bear out this suggestion....

Unless real quality is ingrained in youth's fiber, the years will expose them as ordinary stuff. Like

cheap cloth assumes a different appearance when washed, they too will shrink and fade when later tested and run through the wringer. (From *A Psalm In My Heart* by Leroy Brownlow)

Application

Are you young and looking for something to believe in? Are you older and looking for God's hand anew? God answers both needs. Look to him and no further.

Exploration

Encouragement and Examples for Old and Young
—[Psalm 119:9](#); [Proverbs 16:31](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:9](#); [12:1](#);
[Isaiah 46:4](#); [Lamentations 3:27](#); [1 Timothy 4:12](#); [Titus 2:2–3](#).

You cannot keep people from rejecting you. But you can keep rejections from enraging. —Max Lucado (*A Love Worth Giving*)

A Cry for God to Help Quickly

For the director of music. A psalm of David. To help people remember.

God, come quickly and save me.

Lord, hurry to help me.

²Let those who are trying to kill me
be ashamed and disgraced.

Let those who want to hurt me
run away in disgrace.

³Let those who make fun of me
stop because of their shame.

⁴But let all those who worship you
rejoice and be glad.

Let those who love your salvation
always say, "Praise the greatness of God."

⁵I am poor and helpless;

God, hurry to me.

You help me and save me.

Lord, do not wait.

An Old Person's Prayer

In you, Lord, is my protection.

Never let me be ashamed.

²Because you do what is right, save and rescue me;
listen to me and save me.

³Be my place of safety
where I can always come.

Give the command to save me,
because you are my rock and my strong, walled city.

⁴My God, save me from the power of the wicked
and from the hold of evil and cruel people.

⁵Lord, you are my hope.

Lord, I have trusted you since I was young.

⁶I have depended on you since I was born;
you helped me even on the day of my birth.
I will always praise you.

⁷I am an example to many people,
because you are my strong protection.

⁸I am always praising you;
all day long I honor you.

⁹Do not reject me when I am old;
do not leave me when my strength is gone.

¹⁰My enemies make plans against me,
and they meet together to kill me.

¹¹They say, "God has left him.
Go after him and take him,
because no one will save him."

¹²God, don't be far off

God, don't be late on.

My God, hurry to help me.

¹³Let those who accuse me
be ashamed and destroyed.

Let those who are trying to hurt me
be covered with shame and disgrace.

¹⁴But I will always have hope
and will praise you more and more.

¹⁵I will tell how you do what is right.
I will tell about your salvation all day long,
even though it is more than I can tell.

¹⁶I will come and tell about your powerful works, Lord
God.

I will remind people that only you do what is right.

¹⁷God, you have taught me since I was young.
To this day I tell about the miracles you do.

¹⁸Even though I am old and gray,
do not leave me, God.
I will tell the children about your power;
I will tell those who live after me about your might.

¹⁹God, your justice reaches to the skies.
You have done great things;
God, there is no one like you.

²⁰You have given me many troubles and bad times,
but you will give me life again.
When I am almost dead,
you will keep me alive.

²¹You will make me greater than ever,
and you will comfort me again.

²²I will praise you with the harp.

I trust you, my God.

I will sing to you with the lyre,

Holy One of Israel.

²³I will shout for joy when I sing praises to you.

You have saved me.

²⁴I will tell about your justice all day long.

And those who want to hurt me

will be ashamed and disgraced.

Life Lessons

Psalm 72:1–20

Situation

Solomon asked God to grant his son wisdom. In his prayer, he looked forward to the eternal, perfect reign of Christ.

Observation

Solomon asked God for sound judgment and goodness. The kings of Israel were called to help the poor. Even Jesus, the King of kings, ministered to those bound by oppression and poverty.

Inspiration

George is an evangelist in Malawi who uses an old badly battered wheelchair. Not long ago he wrote to ask me to send him my husband's used shirts—his were wearing out, and he wanted to dress his best as an ambassador for Christ.

George wheels himself from village to village over bumpy, rutted dirt roads that connect the small towns in Malawi... . Despite sore muscles and calluses on his hands, he keeps going. His deepest desire is to share Christ with others who are handicapped, to tell them that despite their poverty, God is in control for their good and His glory.

George is dirt poor. The people to whom he ministers are even more poor. But there is none so rich in faith as George.

Remember, Christ willed to be born poor, and He chose disciples who were living, for the most part, in

poverty. Christ made Himself a servant of poor people. And He reminds us that whatever we do to help the least of the brethren—those most poor—we are personally ministering to Him. (From *Diamonds in the Dust* by Joni Eareckson Tada)

Application

Are you following the example of Jesus? Do you reach out to the poor? Find a way to help someone this week in a personal and material way. Take that person out for a meal. Anonymously provide a bag of groceries. Help that person work on his or her car. Watch for an opportunity.

Exploration

Helping the Poor—[Proverbs 14:31](#); [19:17](#); [Matthew 25:35–40](#); [Luke 4:18](#); [1 John 3:17](#).

Hope is an olive leaf—evidence of dry land after a flood.
Proof to the dreamer that dreaming is worth the risk. —
Max Lucado (*A Love Worth Giving*)

A Prayer for the King

Of Solomon.

God, give the king your good judgment
and the king's son your goodness.

²Help him judge your people fairly
and decide what is right for the poor.

³Let there be peace on the mountains
and goodness on the hills for the people.

⁴Help him be fair to the poor
and save the needy
and punish those who hurt them.

⁵May they respect you as long as the sun shines
and as long as the moon glows.

⁶Let him be like rain on the grass,
like showers that water the earth.

⁷Let goodness be plentiful while he lives.
Let peace continue as long as there is a moon.

⁸Let his kingdom go from sea to sea,
and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.

⁹Let the people of the desert bow down to him,

and make his enemies lick the dust.

¹⁰Let the kings of Tarshish and the faraway lands
bring him gifts.

Let the kings of Sheba and Seba
bring their presents to him.

¹¹Let all kings bow down to him
and all nations serve him.

¹²He will help the poor when they cry out
and will save the needy when no one else will help.

¹³He will be kind to the weak and poor,
and he will save their lives.

¹⁴He will save them from cruel people who try to hurt
them,

because their lives are precious to him.

¹⁵Long live the king!

Let him receive gold from Sheba.

Let people always pray for him
and bless him all day long.

¹⁶Let the fields grow plenty of grain
and the hills be covered with crops.
Let the land be as fertile as Lebanon,
and let the cities grow like the grass in a field.

¹⁷Let the king be famous forever;
let him be remembered as long as the sun shines.
Let the nations be blessed because of him,
and may they all bless him.

¹⁸Praise the Lord God, the God of Israel,
who alone does such miracles.

¹⁹Praise his glorious name forever.
Let his glory fill the whole world.
Amen and amen.

²⁰This ends the prayers of David son of Jesse.

Book 3

Life Lessons

Psalm 73:1–28

Situation

Asaph, a choir director, questioned God's wisdom. Asaph saw the wicked prospering and the righteous suffering.

Observation

When we are confused by events in our lives, remember to look at circumstances from God's perspective. God welcomes our questions and doubts when we come to him honestly seeking answers.

Inspiration

A misconception people have in dealing with life's troubles is that it's wrong to ask *why*—that a Christian simply accepts and never questions. Abraham, Moses, and David all interceded and struggled to understand God. But the lives of these men model for us a total reliance on God, even in the midst of questioning.

It's not a sin to doubt. Disbelief is sin, but questioning—sincerely seeking—is acceptable to God, because in the presence of God you may ask any question you want.

God never turns his back on those who ask honest questions. He never did in the Old Testament; he never did in the New Testament. So if you are asking honest questions of God, he will not turn away from you.

Perhaps the reason that God doesn't always give

us the answer to the *whys* of our existence is that he knows we haven't got the capacity to understand the answer. In learning to depend on God, we must accept that we may not know all the answers, but we know who knows the answers. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, "Why?")

Application

Write down three questions that you are struggling with today. Talk to God about these situations. Ask him for wisdom to help you see these situations from his perspective.

Exploration

Wisdom—[Ecclesiastes 8:17](#); [Isaiah 55:6–9](#).
Guidance—[Psalms 48:14](#); [Isaiah 58:11](#).

The cure for jealousy? Trust. The cause of jealousy?
Distrust. —Max Lucado (*A Love Worth Giving*)

Should the Wicked Be Rich?

A psalm of Asaph.

God is truly good to Israel,
to those who have pure hearts.

²But I had almost stopped believing;

I had almost lost my faith

³because I was jealous of proud people.

I saw wicked people doing well.

⁴They are not suffering;
they are healthy and strong.

⁵They don't have troubles like the rest of us;
they don't have problems like other people.

⁶They wear pride like a necklace
and put on violence as their clothing.

⁷They are looking for profits
and do not control their selfish desires.

⁸They make fun of others and speak evil;
proudly they speak of hurting others.

⁹They brag to the sky.

They say that they own the earth.

¹⁰So their people turn to them

and give them whatever they want.

¹¹They say, "How can God know?
What does God Most High know?"

¹²These people are wicked,
always at ease, and getting richer.

¹³So why have I kept my heart pure?
Why have I kept my hands from doing wrong?

¹⁴I have suffered all day long;
I have been punished every morning.

¹⁵God, if I had decided to talk like this,
I would have let your people down.

¹⁶I tried to understand all this,
but it was too hard for me to see

¹⁷until I went to the Temple of God.
Then I understood what will happen to them.

¹⁸You have put them in danger;
you cause them to be destroyed.

¹⁹They are destroyed in a moment;
they are swept away by terrors.

²⁰It will be like waking from a dream.
Lord, when you rise up, they will disappear.

²¹When my heart was sad
and I was angry,

²²I was senseless and stupid.
I acted like an animal toward you.

²³But I am always with you;
you have held my hand.

²⁴You guide me with your advice,

and later you will receive me in honor.

²⁵I have no one in heaven but you;

I want nothing on earth besides you.

²⁶My body and my mind may become weak,
but God is my strength.

He is mine forever.

²⁷Those who are far from God will die;
you destroy those who are unfaithful.

²⁸But I am close to God, and that is good.

The Lord God is my protection.

I will tell all that you have done.

Life Lessons

Psalm 74:1-23

Situation

Asaph was tired of being stepped on. He felt rejected, defeated, and forgotten. He prayed that God would restore Israel and grant revenge.

Observation

We want revenge. But only God can bring about justice.

Inspiration

Bernhard Goetz was an American fantasy come true. He did what every citizen wants to do. He fought back. He “kicked the bully in the shins.” He “punched the villain in the nose.” He “clobbered evil over the head.” This unassuming hero embodied a nationwide, even worldwide anger: a passion for revenge.

The outpouring of support gives clear evidence. People are mad. People are angry. There is a pent-up, boiling rage that causes us to toast a man who fearlessly says, “I ain’t taking it no more!” and then comes out with a hot pistol in each hand....

Anger. It’s a peculiar yet predictable emotion. It begins as a drop of water. An irritant. A frustration. Nothing big, just an aggravation. Someone gets your parking place. Someone pulls in front of you on the freeway. A waitress is slow and you are in a hurry. The toast burns. Drops of water. Drip. Drip. Drip. Drip.

Yet, get enough of these seemingly innocent

drops of anger and before long you've got a bucket full of rage....

Reality makes us ask the questions: What good was done? Is that really the way to reduce the crime rate? ... No. Anger doesn't do that. Anger only feeds a primitive lust for revenge that feeds our anger....

Yet, what do we do? ... Jesus speaks about the mob that killed. "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Have you ever wondered how Jesus kept from retaliating? ... Here's the answer. It's the second part of the statement, "for they do not know what they are doing... ." It's as if Jesus considered this bloodthirsty, death-hungry crowd not as murderers, but as victims. It's ... as [if they were] "sheep without a shepherd."

"They don't know what they are doing."

And when you think about it, they didn't ...

And for the most part, neither do we. We are still, as much as we hate to admit it, shepherdless sheep. All we know is that we were born out of one eternity and are frighteningly close to another....

My point is this: Uncontrolled anger won't better our world, but sympathetic understanding will. Once we see the world and ourselves for what we are, we can help. Once we understand ourselves, we begin to operate not from a posture of anger but one of compassion and concern. We look at the world not with bitter frowns but with extended hands. We realize that the lights are out and a lot of people are stumbling in the darkness. So we light the candles....

Instead of fighting back we help out. We go to the ghettos. We teach in the schools. We build hospitals and help orphans ... we put away our guns.

“They do not know what they are doing.”

There is something about understanding the world that makes us want to save it, even to die for it. Anger? Anger never did anyone any good. Understanding? Well, the results are not as quick as the vigilante's bullet, but they are certainly much more constructive. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

Application

As you watch the news, what makes you angry? What makes you want to get revenge? Next time you are tempted to seek revenge, stop. See aggressors as people who need God. Pray that God will meet that need.

Exploration

Revenge Is God's-[Deuteronomy 32:43](#); [Psalm 58:10](#); [94:1](#); [Nahum 1:2](#).

A Nation in Trouble Prays

A maskil of Asaph.

God, why have you rejected us for so long?
Why are you angry with us, the sheep of your
pasture?

²Remember the people you bought long ago.
You saved us, and we are your very own.
After all, you live on Mount Zion.

³Make your way through these old ruins;
the enemy wrecked everything in the Temple.

⁴Those who were against you shouted in your meeting
place
and raised their flags there.

⁵They came with axes raised
as if to cut down a forest of trees.

⁶They smashed the carved panels
with their axes and hatchets.

⁷They burned your Temple to the ground;
they have made the place where you live unclean.

⁸They thought, "We will completely crush them!"
They burned every place where God was worshiped in
the land.

⁹We do not see any signs.
There are no more prophets,

and no one knows how long this will last.

¹⁰God, how much longer will the enemy make fun of you?

Will they insult you forever?

¹¹Why do you hold back your power?

Bring your power out in the open and destroy them!

¹²God, you have been our king for a long time.

You bring salvation to the earth.

¹³You split open the sea by your power
and broke the heads of the sea monster.

¹⁴You smashed the heads of the monster Leviathan
and gave him to the desert creatures as food.

¹⁵You opened up the springs and streams
and made the flowing rivers run dry.

¹⁶Both the day and the night are yours;
you made the sun and the moon.

¹⁷You set all the limits on the earth;
you created summer and winter.

¹⁸Lord, remember how the enemy insulted you.

Remember how those foolish people made fun of you.

¹⁹Do not give us, your doves, to those wild animals.
Never forget your poor people.

²⁰Remember the agreement you made with us,
because violence fills every dark corner of this land.

²¹Do not let your suffering people be disgraced.
Let the poor and helpless praise you.

²²God, arise and defend yourself.

Remember the insults that come from those foolish

people all day long.

²³Don't forget what your enemies said;
don't forget their roar as they rise against you always.

Life Lessons

Psalms 75:1–76:12

Situation

Asaph grew in confidence that God would bring the wicked to judgment. God would not let anyone deserving judgment slip free unnoticed.

Observation

God's holiness contrasts with our sinfulness. Without mercy from God, we all would be judged.

Inspiration

According to legend, the first American Indian to see the Grand Canyon tied himself to a tree in terror. According to Scripture, any man privileged to peek at God has felt the same.

Sheer terror. Remember the words of Isaiah after his vision of God? "Oh, no! I will be destroyed. I am not pure, and I live among people who are not pure, but I have seen the King, the Lord All-Powerful" ([Isaiah 6:5](#)).

Upon seeing God, Isaiah was terrified. Why such fear? Why did he tremble so? Because he was wax before the sun. A candle in a hurricane. A minnow at Niagara. God's glory was too great. His purity too sterling. His power too mighty. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

Application

God is much more than a cosmic buddy. Be careful not to think too little of God. When you pray, approach him with a respectful, humble attitude.

Exploration

Cup of God's Judgment—[Isaiah 51:17](#); [Jeremiah 25:15](#); [49:12](#); [Habakkuk 2:16](#); [Revelation 14:10](#); [16:19](#); [18:6](#).

God the Judge

*For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." A psalm of Asaph.
A song.*

God, we thank you;
we thank you because you are near.
We tell about the miracles you do.

²You say, "I set the time for trial,
and I will judge fairly.

³The earth with all its people may shake,
but I am the one who holds it steady.

Selah

⁴I say to those who are proud, 'Don't brag,'
and to the wicked, 'Don't show your power.

⁵Don't try to use your power against heaven.
Don't be stubborn.'"

⁶No one from the east or the west
or the desert can judge you.

⁷God is the judge;
he judges one person as guilty and another as
innocent.

⁸The Lord holds a cup of anger in his hand;
it is full of wine mixed with spices.
He pours it out even to the last drop,

and the wicked drink it all.

⁹I will tell about this forever;

I will sing praise to the God of Jacob.

¹⁰He will take all power away from the wicked,
but the power of good people will grow.

The God Who Always Wins

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm of Asaph. A song.

People in Judah know God;
his fame is great in Israel.

²His Tent is in Jerusalem;
his home is on Mount Zion.

³There God broke the flaming arrows,
the shields, the swords, and the weapons of war.

Selah

⁴God, how wonderful you are!
You are more splendid than the hills full of animals.

⁵The brave soldiers were stripped
as they lay asleep in death.

Not one warrior
had the strength to stop it.

⁶God of Jacob, when you spoke strongly,
horses and riders fell dead.

⁷You are feared;
no one can stand against you when you are angry.

⁸From heaven you gave the decision,
and the earth was afraid and silent.

⁹God, you stood up to judge
and to save the needy people of the earth.

Selah

¹⁰People praise you for your anger against evil.
Those who live through your anger are stopped from

doing more evil.

¹¹Make and keep your promises to the Lord your God.
From all around, gifts should come to the God we
worship.

¹²God breaks the spirits of great leaders;
the kings on earth fear him.

Life Lessons

Psalm 77:1–20

Situation

Asaph reviewed God's past miracles and mighty works on behalf of the Israelites when they went to the Promised Land. Asaph needed courage during a time of personal distress.

Observation

Remembering and meditating upon God's previous works can provide believers with courage during difficult times of struggle and trial.

Inspiration

What are we to do when even our trust in God seems shaky? When answers are not immediate and God seems far away? When we do not know how to tap His help and are left to wait passively for Him to answer, wishing for some spectacular flurry of divine activity to deliver us? What are we to do when that rescue doesn't come, and unfulfilled expectations for help from Him turn our hearts toward doubt? When we begin to slip back to the "Whys?"—"Why me? Why not them? Why now?"—and tend to doubt His goodness and may even then doubt that He actually does love and care for us....

Before that happens, we must turn to the entity over which we exercise exclusive control, our wills, to the choices we have to think correctly and respond constructively... . If we choose not to cultivate our hope in Him, where will we place our hope? Is there

anything greater, more just, more equitable, more powerful, more reliable, more true than God? (From *The Upside of Down* by Joseph Stowell)

Application

Does stress keep you from sleeping? Next time, when you are awake and miserable, do what Asaph did. Remember God's faithfulness to you and to others. Praise him for what he has done.

Exploration

Miracles—[Deuteronomy 34:10–12](#); [1 Kings 18:36–39](#); [Psalm 105:4–5](#); [John 10:37–38](#); [14:11](#); [Hebrews 2:2–4](#).

Remembering God's Help

For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of Asaph.

I cry out to God;
I call to God, and he will hear me.
²I look for the Lord on the day of trouble.
All night long I reach out my hands,
but I cannot be comforted.
³When I remember God, I become upset;
when I think, I become afraid.

Selah

⁴You keep my eyes from closing.
I am too upset to say anything.
⁵I keep thinking about the old days,
the years of long ago.
⁶At night I remember my songs.
I think and I ask myself:
⁷“Will the Lord reject us forever?
Will he never be kind to us again?
⁸Is his love gone forever?
Has he stopped speaking for all time?
⁹Has God forgotten mercy?
Is he too angry to pity us?”

Selah

¹⁰Then I say “This is what makes me sad:

For years the power of God Most High was with us.”

¹¹I remember what the Lord did;
I remember the miracles you did long ago.

¹²I think about all the things you did
and consider your deeds.

¹³God, your ways are holy.
No god is as great as our God.

¹⁴You are the God who does miracles;
you have shown people your power.

¹⁵By your power you have saved your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

Selah

¹⁶God, the waters saw you;
they saw you and became afraid;
the deep waters shook with fear.
¹⁷The clouds poured down their rain.
The sky thundered.
Your lightning flashed back and forth like arrows.

¹⁸Your thunder sounded in the whirlwind.
Lightning lit up the world.
The earth trembled and shook.

¹⁹You made a way through the sea
and paths through the deep waters,
but your footprints were not seen.

²⁰You led your people like a flock
by using Moses and Aaron.

Life Lessons

Psalm 78:1–72

Situation

Asaph recounted Israel's history from slavery in Egypt until the reign of King David. He retold the story in order that the Jewish people would remember their past and be reminded of the mercy that God had shown them.

Observation

While the Israelites continually complained and were unfaithful, God faithfully blessed them. God cared for his people even as they dishonored him.

Inspiration

We should banish from our minds forever the common but erroneous notion that justice and judgment characterize the God of Israel, while mercy and grace belong to the Lord of the Church. Actually there is in principle no difference between the Old Testament and the New. In the New Testament Scriptures there is a fuller development of redemptive truth, but one God speaks in both dispensations, and what He speaks agrees with what He is. Wherever and whenever God appears to men, He acts like Himself. Whether in the Garden of Eden or the Garden of Gethsemane, God is merciful as well as just. He has always dealt in mercy with mankind and will always deal in justice when His mercy is despised. Thus He did in antediluvian times; thus when Christ walked among men; thus He is doing today and will continue

always to do for no other reason than that He is God....

As judgment is God's justice confronting moral inequity, so mercy is the goodness of God confronting human suffering and guilt. Were there no guilt in the world, no pain and no tears, God would yet be infinitely merciful; but His mercy might well remain hidden in His heart, unknown to the created universe. No voice would be raised to celebrate the mercy of which none felt the need. It is human misery and sin that call forth the divine mercy. (From *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A. W. Tozer)

Application

Don't forget to praise God and thank him for what he has done. Prayerfully remember the steppingstones in your life. Thank God for molding you as he has seen fit throughout the years.

Exploration

God's Unfailing Mercy—[2 Samuel 24:14](#); [Nehemiah 9:31](#); [Psalms 25:6](#); [57:1](#); [Isaiah 63:9](#); [Ephesians 2:4-7](#); [Hebrews 4:16](#); [1 Peter 1:3](#).

God Saved Israel from Egypt

A maskil of Asaph.

My people, listen to my teaching;
listen to what I say.

²I will speak using stories;
I will tell secret things from long ago.

³We have heard them and known them
by what our ancestors have told us.

⁴We will not keep them from our children;
we will tell those who come later
about the praises of the Lord.

We will tell about his power
and the miracles he has done.

⁵The Lord made an agreement with Jacob
and gave the teachings to Israel,
which he commanded our ancestors
to teach to their children.

⁶Then their children would know them,
even their children not yet born.
And they would tell their children.

⁷So they would all trust God
and would not forget what he had done
but would obey his commands.

⁸They would not be like their ancestors
who were stubborn and disobedient.

Their hearts were not loyal to God,
and they were not true to him.

⁹The men of Ephraim had bows for weapons,
but they ran away on the day of battle.

¹⁰They didn't keep their agreement with God
and refused to live by his teachings.

¹¹They forgot what he had done
and the miracles he had shown them.

¹²He did miracles while their ancestors watched,
in the fields of Zoan in Egypt.

¹³He divided the Red Sea and led them through.
He made the water stand up like a wall.

¹⁴He led them with a cloud by day
and by the light of a fire by night.

¹⁵He split the rocks in the desert
and gave them more than enough water, as if from the
deep ocean.

¹⁶He brought streams out of the rock
and caused water to flow down like rivers.

¹⁷But the people continued to sin against him;
in the desert they turned against God Most High.

¹⁸They decided to test God
by asking for the food they wanted.

¹⁹Then they spoke against God,
saying, "Can God prepare food in the desert?"

²⁰When he hit the rock, water poured out
and rivers flowed down.

But can he give us bread also?

Will he provide his people with meat?"

²¹When the Lord heard them, he was very angry.

His anger was like fire to the people of Jacob;
his anger grew against the people of Israel.

²²They had not believed God
and had not trusted him to save them.

²³But he gave a command to the clouds above
and opened the doors of heaven.

²⁴He rained manna down on them to eat;
he gave them grain from heaven.

²⁵So they ate the bread of angels.
He sent them all the food they could eat.

²⁶He sent the east wind from heaven
and led the south wind by his power.

²⁷He rained meat on them like dust.
The birds were as many as the sand of the sea.

²⁸He made the birds fall inside the camp,
all around the tents.

²⁹So the people ate and became very full.
God had given them what they wanted.

³⁰While they were still eating,
and while the food was still in their mouths,

³¹God became angry with them.
He killed some of the healthiest of them;
he struck down the best young men of Israel.

³²But they kept on sinning;
they did not believe even with the miracles.

³³So he ended their days without meaning
and their years in terror.

³⁴Anytime he killed them, they would look to him for help;

they would come back to God and follow him.

³⁵They would remember that God was their Rock,
that God Most High had saved them.

³⁶But their words were false,
and their tongues lied to him.

³⁷Their hearts were not really loyal to God;
they did not keep his agreement.

³⁸Still God was merciful.

He forgave their sins

and did not destroy them.

Many times he held back his anger

and did not stir up all his anger.

³⁹He remembered that they were only human,
like a wind that blows and does not come back.

⁴⁰They turned against God so often in the desert
and grieved him there.

⁴¹Again and again they tested God
and brought pain to the Holy One of Israel.

⁴²They did not remember his power
or the time he saved them from the enemy.

⁴³They forgot the signs he did in Egypt
and his wonders in the fields of Zoan.

⁴⁴He turned their rivers to blood
so no one could drink the water.

⁴⁵He sent flies that bit the people.
He sent frogs that destroyed them.

⁴⁶He gave their crops to grasshoppers

and what they worked for to locusts.

⁴⁷He destroyed their vines with hail
and their sycamore trees with sleet.

⁴⁸He killed their animals with hail
and their cattle with lightning.

⁴⁹He showed them his hot anger.
He sent his strong anger against them,
his destroying angels.

⁵⁰He found a way to show his anger.
He did not keep them from dying
but let them die by a terrible disease.

⁵¹God killed all the firstborn sons in Egypt,
the oldest son of each family of [Ham](#).

⁵²But God led his people out like sheep
and he guided them like a flock through the desert.

⁵³He led them to safety so they had nothing to fear,
but their enemies drowned in the sea.

⁵⁴So God brought them to his holy land,
to the mountain country he took with his own power.

⁵⁵He forced out the other nations,
and he had his people inherit the land.
He let the tribes of Israel settle there in tents.

⁵⁶But they tested God
and turned against God Most High;
they did not keep his rules.

⁵⁷They turned away and were disloyal just like their
ancestors.

They were like a crooked bow that does not shoot
straight.

⁵⁸They made God angry by building places to worship gods;

they made him jealous with their idols.

⁵⁹When God heard them, he became very angry and rejected the people of Israel completely.

⁶⁰He left his dwelling at Shiloh,
the Tent where he lived among the people.

⁶¹He let the Ark, his power, be captured;
he let the Ark, his glory, be taken by enemies.

⁶²He let his people be killed;
he was very angry with his children.

⁶³The young men died by fire,
and the young women had no one to marry.

⁶⁴Their priests fell by the sword,
but their widows were not allowed to cry.

⁶⁵Then the Lord got up as if he had been asleep;
he awoke like a man who had been drunk with wine.

⁶⁶He struck down his enemies
and disgraced them forever.

⁶⁷But God rejected the family of Joseph;
he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim.

⁶⁸Instead, he chose the tribe of Judah
and Mount Zion, which he loves.

⁶⁹And he built his Temple high like the mountains.
Like the earth, he built it to last forever.

⁷⁰He chose David to be his servant
and took him from the sheep pens.

⁷¹He brought him from tending the sheep
so he could lead the flock, the people of Jacob,

his own people, the people of Israel.

⁷²And David led them with an innocent heart
and guided them with skillful hands.

Life Lessons

Psalms 79:1–80:19

Situation

Israel was attacked by a heathen nation. God's people cried out for divine intervention and judgment upon their persecutors.

Observation

Stress helps us realize how much we need God to steady our lives.

Inspiration

When you recognize God as Creator, you will admire him. When you recognize his wisdom, you will learn from him. When you discover his strength, you will rely on him. But only when he saves you will you worship him.

It's a "before and after" scenario. Before your rescue, you could easily keep God at a distance. Comfortably dismissed. Neatly shelved. Sure he was important, but so was your career. Your status. Your salary. He was high on your priority list, but he shared the spot with others.

Then came the storm ... the rage ... the fight ... the ripped moorings ... the starless night. Despair fell like a fog; your bearings were gone. In your heart, you knew there was no exit.

Turn to your career for help? Only if you want to hide from the storm ... not escape it. Lean on your status for strength? A storm isn't impressed with your title. Rely on your salary for rescue? Many try

... genuinely ask ... he will come.

And from that moment on, he is not just a deity to admire, a teacher to observe, or a master to obey. He is the Savior. The Savior to be worshiped.... (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

Name your current hardships and trials. What lessons could you learn from them? How could God use these circumstances to draw you closer to him? Make the most of your trials. Let them be opportunities for increased spiritual growth and faith.

Exploration

God is Our Strength and Salvation—[Psalm 106:8; 121:1–2; Jeremiah 3:23; Malachi 4:2.](#)

If you have the Shepherd, you have grace for every sin,
direction for every turn, a candle for every corner, and an
anchor for every storm. —Max Lucado (*Traveling Light*)

The Nation Cries for Jerusalem

A psalm of Asaph.

God, nations have come against your chosen people.
They have ruined your holy Temple.
They have turned Jerusalem into ruins.

²They have given the bodies of your servants as food
to the wild birds.

They have given the bodies of those who worship you
to the wild animals.

³They have spilled blood like water all around
Jerusalem.

No one was left to bury the dead.

⁴We are a joke to the other nations;
they laugh and make fun of us.

⁵Lord, how long will this last?
Will you be angry forever?

How long will your jealousy burn like a fire?

⁶Be angry with the nations that do not know you
and with the kingdoms that do not honor you.

⁷They have gobbled up the people of Jacob
and destroyed their land.

⁸Don't punish us for our past sins.
Show your mercy to us soon,
because we are helpless!

⁹God our Savior, help us
so people will praise you.
Save us and forgive our sins
so people will honor you.

¹⁰Why should the nations say,
"Where is their God?"
Tell the other nations in our presence
that you punish those who kill your servants.

¹¹Hear the moans of the prisoners.
Use your great power
to save those sentenced to die.

¹²Repay those around us seven times over
for their insults to you, Lord.

¹³We are your people, the sheep of your flock.
We will thank you always;
forever and ever we will praise you.

A Prayer to Bring Israel Back

For the director of music. To the tune of "Lilies of the Agreement." A psalm of Asaph.

Shepherd of Israel, listen to us.

You lead the people of Joseph like a flock.

You sit on your throne between the gold creatures
with wings.

Show your greatness ²to the people of Ephraim,
Benjamin, and Manasseh.

Use your strength,
and come to save us.

³God, take us back.

Show us your kindness so we can be saved.

⁴Lord God All-Powerful,
how long will you be angry
at the prayers of your people?

⁵You have fed your people with tears;
you have made them drink many tears.

⁶You made those around us fight over us,
and our enemies make fun of us.

⁷God All-Powerful, take us back.

Show us your kindness so we can be saved.

⁸You brought us out of Egypt as if we were a vine.

You forced out other nations and planted us in the
land.

⁹You cleared the ground for us.
Like a vine, we took root and filled the land.
¹⁰We covered the mountains with our shade.
We had limbs like the mighty cedar tree.
¹¹Our branches reached the Mediterranean Sea,
and our shoots went to the Euphrates River.

¹²So why did you pull down our walls?
Now everyone who passes by steals from us.
¹³Like wild pigs they walk over us;
like wild animals they feed on us.

¹⁴God All-Powerful, come back.
Look down from heaven and see.
Take care of us, your vine.

¹⁵You planted this shoot with your own hands
and strengthened this child.

¹⁶Now it is cut down and burned with fire;
you destroyed us by your angry looks.

¹⁷With your hand,
strengthen the one you have chosen for yourself.

¹⁸Then we will not turn away from you.
Give us life again, and we will call to you for help.

¹⁹Lord God All-Powerful, take us back.
Show us your kindness so we can be saved.

Life Lessons

Psalms 81:1–82:8

Situation

Asaph called Israel to sing praises to God and to obey God. The song was probably used as a hymn in the Temple.

Observation

“Please listen to me!” God pleaded with Israel to listen, but Israel ignored him.

Inspiration

You and I live in a loud world. To get someone’s attention is no easy task. He must be willing to set everything aside to listen: turn down the radio, turn away from the monitor, turn the corner of the page and set down the book. When someone is willing to silence everything else so he can hear us clearly, it is a privilege. A rare privilege, indeed.

So John’s message is critical. You can talk to God because God listens. Your voice matters in heaven. He takes you very seriously. When you enter his presence, the attendants turn to you to hear your voice. No need to fear that you will be ignored. Even if you stammer or stumble, even if what you have to say impresses no one, it impresses God—and he listens. He listens to the painful plea of the elderly in the rest home. He listens to the gruff confession of the death-row inmate. When the alcoholic begs for mercy, when the spouse seeks guidance, when the businessman steps off the street into the chapel, God

listens.

Intently. Carefully. The prayers are honored as precious jewels. Purified and empowered, the words rise in a delightful fragrance to our Lord. “The smoke from the incense went up from the angel’s hand to God” [[Revelation 8:4](#)]. Incredible. Your words do not stop until they reach the very throne of God.

Then, the angel “filled the incense pan with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth” ([Revelation 8:5](#)). One call and Heaven’s fleet appears. Your prayer on earth activates God’s power in heaven, and “God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven.”

You are the someone of God’s kingdom. You have access to God’s furnace. Your prayers move God to change the world. You may not understand the mystery of prayer. You don’t need to. But this much is clear: Actions in heaven begin when someone prays on earth. What an amazing thought! (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you take time to listen to God? What is God telling you to do? What is God asking you to change? The Israelites missed God’s best for them when they failed to listen. Take time out of each day to study God’s Word and listen for his direction.

Exploration

Listen and Obey—[Exodus 15:26](#); [Isaiah 65:12](#); [Hosea 9:17](#); [John 14:21–23](#).

A Song for a Holiday

For the director of music. By the gittith. A psalm of Asaph.

Sing for joy to God, our strength;
shout out loud to the God of Jacob.

²Begin the music. Play the tambourines.

Play pleasant music on the harps and lyres.

³Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon,
when the moon is full, when our feast begins.

⁴This is the law for Israel;
it is the command of the God of Jacob.

⁵He gave this rule to the people of Joseph
when they went out of the land of Egypt.

I heard a language I did not know, saying:

⁶“I took the load off their shoulders;

I let them put down their baskets.

⁷When you were in trouble, you called, and I saved
you.

I answered you with thunder.

I tested you at the waters of Meribah.

Selah

⁸My people, listen. I am warning you.

Israel, please listen to me!

⁹You must not have foreign gods;

you must not worship any false god.

¹⁰I, the Lord, am your God,
who brought you out of Egypt.
Open your mouth and I will feed you.

¹¹“But my people did not listen to me;
Israel did not want me.

¹²So I let them go their stubborn way
and follow their own advice.

¹³I wish my people would listen to me;
I wish Israel would live my way.

¹⁴Then I would quickly defeat their enemies
and turn my hand against their foes.

¹⁵Those who hate the Lord would bow before him.
Their punishment would continue forever.

¹⁶But I would give you the finest wheat
and fill you with honey from the rocks.”

A Cry for Justice

A psalm of Asaph.

God is in charge of the great meeting;
he judges among the “gods.”

²He says, “How long will you defend evil people?
How long will you show greater kindness to the
wicked?

Selah

³Defend the weak and the orphans;
defend the rights of the poor and suffering.

⁴Save the weak and helpless;
free them from the power of the wicked.

⁵“You know nothing. You don’t understand.
You walk in the dark,
while the world is falling apart.

⁶I said, ‘You are “gods.”
You are all sons of God Most High.’

⁷But you will die like any other person;
you will fall like all the leaders.”

⁸God, come and judge the earth,
because you own all the nations.

Life Lessons

Psalms 83:1–84:12

Situation

These songs celebrated God's strength, grace, and glory.

Observation

The blessings of God surely come to those who serve and trust in him...

Inspiration

Celebration praises God for His power and works, and it reinforces our confidence in Him to intervene in our lives.

With tears of joy, my friend Lori related, "I recently bought a house and last night three friends gave me a housewarming party to celebrate my new home. Looking around the room at the people who had gathered, I was in awe. God has been so good to me! I have a beautiful home and friends who really care about me. How much He has done for me! He has intervened in my life, time and time again, and has brought these people into my life. I am overwhelmed with love and gratitude for His kindness and for these friends!"

Celebrations not only praise God, but also they honor your friend for her desire to follow Jesus and her ability to make decisions or take steps that have brought positive changes in her life by His power.

Lori continued, "As I opened the housewarming gifts, I realized that the evening would never have

occurred if I had not allowed Jesus to work in my life. Most of the people gathered were friends I had made because of my decision to follow Jesus. The party was not just a celebration of a new home, but for me, it was a celebration of a new way of life!” (From *The Counsel of a Friend* by Lynda D. Elliott)

Application

Praise God for the friends he has brought you. Be a friend that someone would praise God for. If you do not have a friend, ask God to give you one.

Exploration

Joy in God Our Strength—[Exodus 15:2](#); [2 Samuel 22:33](#); [Psalms 28:8](#); [46:1](#); [73:26](#); [81:1](#); [89:21](#).

A Prayer Against the Enemies

A song. A psalm of Asaph.

God, do not keep quiet;

God, do not be silent or still.

²Your enemies are making noises;

those who hate you are getting ready to attack.

³They are making secret plans against your people;
they plot against those you love.

⁴They say, “Come, let’s destroy them as a nation.
Then no one will ever remember the name ‘Israel.’”

⁵They are united in their plan.

These have made an agreement against you:

⁶the families of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
Moab and the Hagrites,

⁷the people of Byblos, Ammon, Amalek,
Philistia, and Tyre.

⁸Even Assyria has joined them
to help Ammon and Moab, the descendants of Lot.

Selah

⁹God, do to them what you did to Midian,
what you did to Sisera and Jabin at the Kishon River.

¹⁰They died at Endor,
and their bodies rotted on the ground.

¹¹Do to their important leaders what you did to Oreb

and Zeeb.

Do to their princes what you did to Zebah and Zalmunna.

¹²They said, "Let's take for ourselves
the pasturelands that belong to God."

¹³My God, make them like tumbleweed,
like chaff blown away by the wind.

¹⁴Be like a fire that burns a forest
or like flames that blaze through the hills.

¹⁵Chase them with your storm,
and frighten them with your wind.

¹⁶Cover them with shame.

Then people will look for you, Lord.

¹⁷Make them afraid and ashamed forever.
Disgrace them and destroy them.

¹⁸Then they will know that you are the Lord,
that only you are God Most High over all the earth.

Wishing to Be in the Temple

For the director of music. On the gittith. A psalm of the sons of Korah.

Lord All-Powerful,
how lovely is your Temple!
²I want more than anything
to be in the courtyards of the Lord's Temple.
My whole being wants
to be with the living God.

³The sparrows have found a home,
and the swallows have nests.
They raise their young near your altars,
Lord All-Powerful, my King and my God.
⁴Happy are the people who live at your Temple;
they are always praising you.

Selah

⁵Happy are those whose strength comes from you,
who want to travel to Jerusalem.

⁶As they pass through the Valley of Baca,
they make it like a spring.
The autumn rains fill it with pools of water.

⁷The people get stronger as they go,
and everyone meets with God in Jerusalem.

⁸Lord God All-Powerful, hear my prayer;
God of Jacob, listen to me.

Selah

⁹God, look at our shield;

be kind to your appointed king.

¹⁰One day in the courtyards of your Temple is better
than a thousand days anywhere else.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the Temple of my
God

than live in the homes of the wicked.

¹¹The Lord God is like a sun and shield;
the Lord gives us kindness and honor.
He does not hold back anything good
from those whose lives are innocent.

¹²Lord All-Powerful,
happy are the people who trust you!

Life Lessons

Psalms 85:1–86:17

Situation

God confirmed that he had plans for Israel's future. No matter how difficult the circumstances, he promised to support them.

Observation

God faithfully restores his people after times of difficulty. We must be diligent by reading God's Word.

Inspiration

Be confident of this very thing, that the Father, who has begun a wonderful and good work in you will continue to work it in you and through you until He sends Me to the earth again to gather up My children.

Your heavenly Father never leaves a job half done, never walks away from a thing He has originated, leaving it unfinished.

I am the Alpha and Omega,
the beginning and the end.
I am altogether perfect.

My dealings with you are perfect. . . .

When you drink in My word and keep it in your mind continually, meditating on it day and night to observe and do according to all that is written in it, then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall deal wisely and have good success. (From *His Thoughts Toward Me* by Marie Chapian)

Application

The world trains you to think that success comes from demonstrating personal power and desire, and by networking with the right people. God says true success comes from knowing, contemplating, and memorizing his Word. Choose the best time for you to read your Bible and pray. Then do it faithfully every day.

Exploration

Restoration—[Psalm 91:14–16](#); [Isaiah 40:10–11](#); [58:11](#); [1 Corinthians 1:8–9](#); [Philippians 1:6](#).

A Prayer for the Nation

For the director of music. A psalm of the sons of Korah.

Lord, you have been kind to your land;
you brought back the people of Jacob.
²You forgave the guilt of the people
and covered all their sins.

Selah

³You stopped all your anger;
you turned back from your strong anger.

⁴God our Savior, bring us back again.
Stop being angry with us.

⁵Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you stay angry from now on?

⁶Won't you give us life again?
Your people would rejoice in you.

⁷Lord, show us your love,
and save us.

⁸I will listen to God the Lord.
He has ordered peace for those who worship him.
Don't let them go back to foolishness.

⁹God will soon save those who respect him,
and his glory will be seen in our land.

¹⁰Love and truth belong to God's people;

goodness and peace will be theirs.

¹¹On earth people will be loyal to God,
and God's goodness will shine down from heaven.

¹²The Lord will give his goodness,
and the land will give its crops.

¹³Goodness will go before God
and prepare the way for him.

A Cry for Help

A prayer of David.

Lord, listen to me and answer me.

I am poor and helpless.

²Protect me, because I worship you.

My God, save me, your servant who trusts in you.

³Lord, have mercy on me,
because I have called to you all day.

⁴Give happiness to me, your servant,
because I give my life to you, Lord.

⁵Lord, you are kind and forgiving
and have great love for those who call to you.

⁶Lord, hear my prayer,
and listen when I ask for mercy.

⁷I call to you in times of trouble,
because you will answer me.

⁸Lord, there is no god like you
and no works like yours.

⁹Lord, all the nations you have made
will come and worship you.
They will honor you.

¹⁰You are great and you do miracles.
Only you are God.

¹¹Lord, teach me what you want me to do,
and I will live by your truth.

Teach me to respect you completely.

¹²Lord, my God, I will praise you with all my heart,

and I will honor your name forever.

¹³You have great love for me.

You have saved me from death.

¹⁴God, proud men are attacking me;

a gang of cruel men is trying to kill me.

They do not respect you.

¹⁵But, Lord, you are a God who shows mercy and is kind.

You don't become angry quickly.

You have great love and faithfulness.

¹⁶Turn to me and have mercy.

Give me, your servant, strength.

Save me, the son of your female servant.

¹⁷Show me a sign of your goodness.

When my enemies look, they will be ashamed.

You, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

Life Lessons

[Psalms 87:1–88:18](#)

Situation

God was devoted to Jerusalem ([Psalm 87](#)). This psalm of celebration contrasted the heavy and sad tone of the subsequent psalm, which spoke of death and despair ([Psalm 88](#)).

Observation

God will hear your tearful prayers and heal your deepest wounds. His perfect love will reduce or take away anxiety.

Inspiration

When Becky Smith-Greer was growing up in North Carolina, she pretended she was Princess Rose and would someday marry the man of her dreams. Following a college romance, she married Sonny Smith, who became more than the husband of her fairy-tale fantasy. Sonny became her best friend and the loving father of their two children.

The Smiths became teachers in the Hendersonville, North Carolina, area. Sonny was the high school band director, and Becky taught kindergarten.

Then Becky's idyllic life was shattered when she heard the words, "There's been an accident!"

In one swift moment, she lost half her family—her husband and her 12-year-old son, Greg—in a plane crash. Two others also perished: Sonny's 26-year-old nephew, Richard, and his brother-in-law, Jack, the

pilot of the single-engine craft....

Our story begins [twelve] months later.

... My will to survive was almost gone.... When I tried to sleep, visions of blood and twisted metal often invaded my dreams....

Finally I threw back the covers and stumbled through the darkness to Greg's room... In utter desperation, I screamed aloud, "God, if You're there, and if You're real, You've got to help me! I can't go on like this!"

... Not long after that frightful night, God did come to visit me in an unexpected time and place. He slipped quietly beside me on the steps of my classroom and used a little boy named Mark to teach me about Himself....

I looked up to see Mark chasing several girls with a stick.

Mark was so tiny, I didn't think he had the strength to hurt them. Actually, I was glad to see him interacting at any level. Mark was my puzzle and challenge. His frail body was spaghetti thin, his brown eyes hauntingly blank. In the classroom, he usually sat on the floor, folded his bony knees together, and stared at the carpet. The only way I could look into his eyes was to pull him to me and cup his face in my hands. Even then, he would not look directly at me.

"You know, Mark, I had a little boy just like you. His name was Greg, but I don't have him anymore. He died." Mark looked up at me now as I talked. "Greg loved Matchbox cars. Do you like those cars?"

He nodded his head vigorously.

“I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. Tomorrow I’ll bring you one of Greg’s cars. Would you like that? I know Greg would like you to have one.”

Mark nodded again and gently relaxed. I felt some of the fight drain out of him. I began to hum and rock. In a while, his body went limp as he fell asleep. I cradled him in my arms and wiped the perspiration from his tiny forehead.

Ever so quietly, God crept into my heart and whispered to me softly, “Becky, you’re just like Mark. I’ve tried to talk with you all these months, but you kicked and screamed so loudly you couldn’t hear Me. It’s okay. I know you’re hurt. I’ve just had to hold you tightly until you calm down. If you let Me now, I’ll cradle you in My arms, and you can rest. You can trust Me. I won’t let you go.” (From *Keepsakes for the Heart* by Becky Smith-Greer)

Application

Picture yourself climbing up into God’s lap, feeling his arms wrap around you, and receiving his hug. Tell him of your grief, anger, and despair. Share with one other trusted friend this week what you told God in the darkness.

Exploration

Overcoming Spiritual Depression—[Job 42:1–6](#); [Psalms 42–43](#); [Romans 8:18–39](#); [1 Corinthians 15:12–19](#); [2 Corinthians 1:3–11](#); [1 Peter 1](#); [Revelation 21:1–8](#).

God Loves Jerusalem

A song. A psalm of the sons of Korah.

The Lord built Jerusalem on the holy mountain.

²He loves its gates more than any other place in Israel.

³City of God,
wonderful things are said about you.

Selah

⁴God says, "I will put Egypt and Babylonia
on the list of nations that know me.
People from Philistia, Tyre, and Cush
will be born there."

⁵They will say about Jerusalem,
"This one and that one were born there.
God Most High will strengthen her."

⁶The Lord will keep a list of the nations.
He will note, "This person was born there."

Selah

⁷They will dance and sing,
"All good things come from Jerusalem."

A Sad Complaint

A song. A psalm of the sons of Korah. For the director of music. By the mahalath leannoth. A maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.

Lord, you are the God who saves me.

I cry out to you day and night.

²Receive my prayer,
and listen to my cry.

³My life is full of troubles,
and I am nearly dead.

⁴They think I am on the way to my grave.
I am like a man with no strength.

⁵I have been left as dead,
like a body lying in a grave
whom you don't remember anymore,
cut off from your care.

⁶You have brought me close to death;
I am almost in the dark place of the dead.

⁷You have been very angry with me;
all your waves crush me.

Selah

⁸You have taken my friends away from me
and have made them hate me.

I am trapped and cannot escape.

⁹My eyes are weak from crying.

Lord, I have prayed to you every day;
I have lifted my hands in prayer to you.

¹⁰Do you show your miracles for the dead?
Do their spirits rise up and praise you?

Selah

¹¹Will your love be told in the grave?
Will your loyalty be told in the place of death?

¹²Will your miracles be known in the dark grave?
Will your goodness be known in the land of
forgetfulness?

¹³But, Lord, I have called out to you for help;
every morning I pray to you.

¹⁴Lord, why do you reject me?
Why do you hide from me?

¹⁵I have been weak and dying since I was young.
I suffer from your terrors, and I am helpless.

¹⁶You have been angry with me,
and your terrors have destroyed me.

¹⁷They surround me daily like a flood;
they are all around me.

¹⁸You have taken away my loved ones and friends.
Darkness is my only friend.

Life Lessons

Psalm 89:1-52

Situation

This psalm celebrated David's glorious reign. David's reign was successful because God sustained him.

Observation

One of David's descendants (Jesus Christ) would reign over God's people forever.

Inspiration

Children love to swing. There's nothing like it. Thrusting your feet toward the sky, leaning so far backward that everything looks upside down. Spinning trees, a stomach that jumps into your throat. Ah, swinging....

I learned a lot about trust on a swing. As a child, I only trusted certain people to push my swing. If I was being pushed by people I trusted (like Dad or Mom), they could do anything they wanted. They could twist me, turn me, stop me ... But let a stranger push my swing (which often happened at family reunions and Fourth of July picnics), and it was *hang on, baby!* Who knew what this newcomer would do? When a stranger pushes your swing, you tense up, ball up, and hang on....

We live in a stormy world. At this writing, wars rage in both hemispheres of our globe. World conflict is threatening all humanity. Jobs are getting scarce. Money continues to get tight. Families are coming

apart at the seams....

We must remember who is pushing the swing. We must put our trust in him. We can't grow fearful. He won't let us tumble out. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

When do you feel safe? When your spouse is with you? When the doors are locked? When the alarm is on? When you have enough money for any situation? All of these securities can fail. Ask God to help you depend on him for your security.

Exploration

God as Security—[Genesis 15:1](#); [Deuteronomy 33:29](#); [2 Samuel 22:3](#); [Psalm 7:10](#); [28:7](#); [33:20](#); [59:11](#); [84:11](#); [115:9](#); [144:2](#); [Proverbs 30:5](#).

A Song About God's Loyalty

A maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

I will always sing about the Lord's love;

I will tell of his loyalty from now on.

²I will say, "Your love continues forever;
your loyalty goes on and on like the sky."

³You said, "I made an agreement with the man of my
choice;

I made a promise to my servant David.

⁴I told him, 'I will make your family continue forever.
Your kingdom will go on and on.'"

Selah

⁵Lord, the heavens praise you for your miracles
and for your loyalty in the meeting of your holy ones.

⁶Who in heaven is equal to the Lord?
None of the angels is like the Lord.

⁷When the holy ones meet, it is God they fear.
He is more frightening than all who surround him.

⁸Lord God All-Powerful, who is like you?
Lord, you are powerful and completely trustworthy.

⁹You rule the mighty sea
and calm the stormy waves.

¹⁰You crushed the sea monster Rahab;
by your power you scattered your enemies.

¹¹The skies and the earth belong to you.
You made the world and everything in it.

¹²You created the north and the south.
Mount Tabor and Mount Hermon sing for joy at your
name.

¹³Your arm has great power.
Your hand is strong; your right hand is lifted up.

¹⁴Your kingdom is built on what is right and fair.
Love and truth are in all you do.

¹⁵Happy are the people who know how to praise you.
Lord, let them live in the light of your presence.

¹⁶In your name they rejoice
and continually praise your goodness.

¹⁷You are their glorious strength,
and in your kindness you honor our king.

¹⁸Our king, our shield, belongs to the Lord,
to the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁹Once, in a vision, you spoke
to those who worship you.
You said, "I have given strength to a warrior;
I have raised up a young man from my people.

²⁰I have found my servant David;
I appointed him by pouring holy oil on him.

²¹I will steady him with my hand
and strengthen him with my arm.

²²No enemy will make him give forced payments,
and wicked people will not defeat him.

²³I will crush his enemies in front of him;

I will defeat those who hate him.

²⁴My loyalty and love will be with him.

Through me he will be strong.

²⁵I will give him power over the sea
and control over the rivers.

²⁶He will say to me, 'You are my father,
my God, the Rock, my Savior.'

²⁷I will make him my firstborn son,
the greatest king on earth.

²⁸My love will watch over him forever,
and my agreement with him will never end.

²⁹I will make his family continue,
and his kingdom will last as long as the skies.

³⁰“If his descendants reject my teachings
and do not follow my laws,

³¹if they ignore my demands
and disobey my commands,

³²then I will punish their sins with a rod
and their wrongs with a whip.

³³But I will not hold back my love from David,
nor will I stop being loyal.

³⁴I will not break my agreement
nor change what I have said.

³⁵I have promised by my holiness,
I will not lie to David.

³⁶His family will go on forever.
His kingdom will last before me like the sun.

³⁷It will continue forever, like the moon,
like a dependable witness in the sky.”

Selah

³⁸But now you have refused and rejected your appointed king.

You have been angry with him.

³⁹You have abandoned the agreement with your servant

and thrown his crown to the ground.

⁴⁰You have torn down all his city walls;
you have turned his strong cities into ruins.

⁴¹Everyone who passes by steals from him.
His neighbors insult him.

⁴²You have given strength to his enemies
and have made them all happy.

⁴³You have made his sword useless;
you did not help him stand in battle.

⁴⁴You have kept him from winning
and have thrown his throne to the ground.

⁴⁵You have cut his life short
and covered him with shame.

Selah

⁴⁶Lord, how long will this go on?

Will you ignore us forever?

How long will your anger burn like a fire?

⁴⁷Remember how short my life is.

Why did you create us? For nothing?

⁴⁸What person alive will not die?

Who can escape the grave?

Selah

⁴⁹Lord, where is your love from times past,

which in your loyalty you promised to David?

⁵⁰Lord, remember how they insulted your servant;
remember how I have suffered the insults of the
nations.

⁵¹Lord, remember how your enemies insulted you
and how they insulted your appointed king wherever
he went.

⁵²Praise the Lord forever!

Amen and amen.

Book 4

Life Lessons

[Psalms 90:1–91:16](#)

Situation

In the only psalm attributed to him, Moses remembered his pain over the sins of the people (see [Exodus 32:9–14](#)).

Observation

[Psalm 90](#) reminds us that we are only here for a brief time and that we should ask God to help us wisely make use of each day.

Inspiration

We sometimes act as if the Christian life is a retirement cruise. We have little fuel but lots of entertainment. We are more concerned with looking snappy than with being prepared. We give more thought to table settings than to surviving the journey. We give little thought to the destination, but we make sure there's plenty of silver to go around ...

Your Father is preparing a place for you. A place with many rooms. An ample place. A place with space for you. There is a special room for you. You will be welcome.

We don't always feel welcome here on earth. We wonder if there is a place here for us. People can make us feel unwanted. Tragedy leaves us feeling like intruders. Strangers. Interlopers in a land not ours. We don't always feel welcome here.

We shouldn't. This isn't our home. To feel unwelcome is no tragedy. Indeed it is healthy. We are

not home here. This language we speak, it's not ours. This body we wear, it isn't us. And the world we live in, this isn't home.

Ours isn't finished yet.

But when it is, our brother will come and take us home. "I would not tell you this if it were not true. . . . I will come back," he said before he left, "and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am" ([John 14:2-3](#)).

General William Nelson was a Union general in the Civil War. Though he faced death every day, he never prepared for his own. Who knows what he was thinking as he rode into battle after battle? Maybe he was too busy staying alive to prepare for death.

All that changed, however, one day as he was relaxing in a house with his men. A brawl broke out, and he was shot in the chest. Knowing he was dying, he had only one request: "Send for a clergyman."

What had happened? Why the urgency? Did the general suddenly learn something about God that he had never known? No. But he did learn something about himself. He realized death was near. Suddenly only one thing mattered.

Why hadn't it mattered before? Couldn't he have said yes to God the week before or that very morning? Absolutely. Why didn't he? Why was the salvation of his soul so urgent after the shot and so optional before it? Why had he postponed his decision to accept Christ until his deathbed?

Because he assumed he had time.

A dangerous assumption. "Teach us how short

our lives really are,” prayed Moses, “so that we may be wise” ([Psalm 90:12](#)).

What fear strikes a man when the end is near and he’s not prepared. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

What would you like to do before you die? What fulfillment will it bring you? When you die, what lasting effects, if any, will it have? Invest your time in people and projects that will last. Be a friend, share the gospel, mentor a young person, donate time or money to a Christian ministry or charity.

Exploration

Humans Are Finite—[Genesis 6:3](#); [Job 34:14–15](#); [Psalm 78:39](#); [Isaiah 40:6–8](#); [Matthew 26:41](#).

God Is Eternal, and We Are Not

A prayer of Moses, the man of God.

Lord, you have been our home
since the beginning.

²Before the mountains were born
and before you created the earth and the world,
you are God.

You have always been, and you will always be.

³You turn people back into dust.
You say, "Go back into dust, human beings."

⁴To you, a thousand years
is like the passing of a day,
or like a few hours in the night.

⁵While people sleep, you take their lives.
They are like grass that grows up in the morning.

⁶In the morning they are fresh and new,
but by evening they dry up and die.

⁷We are destroyed by your anger;
we are terrified by your hot anger.

⁸You have put the evil we have done right in front of
you;
you clearly see our secret sins.

⁹All our days pass while you are angry.

Our years end with a moan.

¹⁰Our lifetime is seventy years
or, if we are strong, eighty years.
But the years are full of hard work and pain.
They pass quickly, and then we are gone.

¹¹Who knows the full power of your anger?
Your anger is as great as our fear of you should be.

¹²Teach us how short our lives really are
so that we may be wise.

¹³Lord, how long before you return
and show kindness to your servants?

¹⁴Fill us with your love every morning.
Then we will sing and rejoice all our lives.

¹⁵We have seen years of trouble.
Now give us as much joy as you gave us sorrow.

¹⁶Show your servants the wonderful things you do;
show your greatness to their children.

¹⁷Lord our God, treat us well.
Give us success in what we do;
yes, give us success in what we do.

Safe in the Lord

Those who go to God Most High for safety
will be protected by the Almighty.

²I will say to the Lord, “You are my place of safety and protection.

You are my God and I trust you.”

³God will save you from hidden traps
and from deadly diseases.

⁴He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you can hide.
His truth will be your shield and protection.

⁵You will not fear any danger by night
or an arrow during the day.

⁶You will not be afraid of diseases that come in the dark

or sickness that strikes at noon.

⁷At your side one thousand people may die,
or even ten thousand right beside you,
but you will not be hurt.

⁸You will only watch
and see the wicked punished.

⁹The Lord is your protection;
you have made God Most High your place of safety.

¹⁰Nothing bad will happen to you;
no disaster will come to your home.

¹¹He has put his angels in charge of you
to watch over you wherever you go.

¹²They will catch you in their hands
so that you will not hit your foot on a rock.

¹³You will walk on lions and cobras;
you will step on strong lions and snakes.

¹⁴The Lord says, “Whoever loves me, I will save.
I will protect those who know me.

¹⁵They will call to me, and I will answer them.
I will be with them in trouble;
I will rescue them and honor them.

¹⁶I will give them a long, full life,
and they will see how I can save.”

Life Lessons

Psalms 92:1–93:5

Situation

As king, David discerned between evil and righteousness by using God's character as the criterion.

Observation

God rules his creation perfectly. We must be thankful and faithful to him.

Inspiration

We know that God will fulfill every promise made to the prophets; we know that sinners will someday be cleansed out of the earth; we know that a ransomed company will enter into the joy of God and that the righteous will shine forth in the kingdom of their Father; we know that God's perfections will yet receive universal acclamation, that all created intelligences will own Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God the Father, that the present imperfect order will be done away, and a new heaven and a new earth be established forever.

Toward all this God is moving with infinite wisdom and perfect precision of action. No one can dissuade Him from His purposes; nothing can turn Him aside from His plans. Since He is omniscient, there can be no unforeseen circumstances, no accidents. As He is sovereign, there can be no countermanded orders, no breakdown in authority; and as He is omnipotent, there can be no want of

power to achieve His chosen ends. God is sufficient unto Himself for all these things. (From *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A. W. Tozer)

Application

Where in your life do you insist on calling the shots? In the kind of movies you watch? The employees you hire? Your spouse's behavior? Every choice your children make? Hand your need to control over to God—you'll be relieved by his loving administration!

Exploration

Sovereignty—[Psalm 1](#); [103:19–22](#); [Romans 11:33–36](#); [Revelation 1:5](#).

Thanksgiving for God's Goodness

A psalm. A song for the Sabbath day.

It is good to praise you, Lord,
to sing praises to God Most High.

²It is good to tell of your love in the morning
and of your loyalty at night.

³It is good to praise you with the ten-stringed lyre
and with the soft-sounding harp.

⁴Lord, you have made me happy by what you have
done;

I will sing for joy about what your hands have done.

⁵Lord, you have done such great things!
How deep are your thoughts!

⁶Stupid people don't know these things,
and fools don't understand.

⁷Wicked people grow like the grass.
Evil people seem to do well,
but they will be destroyed forever.

⁸But, Lord, you will be honored forever.

⁹Lord, surely your enemies,
surely your enemies will be destroyed,
and all who do evil will be scattered.

¹⁰But you have made me as strong as an ox.

You have poured fine oils on me.

¹¹When I looked, I saw my enemies;

I heard the cries of those who are against me.

¹²But good people will grow like palm trees;

they will be tall like the cedars of Lebanon.

¹³Like trees planted in the Temple of the Lord,
they will grow strong in the courtyards of our God.

¹⁴When they are old, they will still produce fruit;
they will be healthy and fresh.

¹⁵They will say that the Lord is good.

He is my Rock, and there is no wrong in him.

The Majesty of the Lord

The Lord is king. He is clothed in majesty.
The Lord is clothed in majesty
and armed with strength.
The world is set,
and it cannot be moved.

²Lord, your kingdom was set up long ago;
you are everlasting.

³Lord, the seas raise,
the seas raise their voice.
The seas raise up their pounding waves.

⁴The sound of the water is loud;
the ocean waves are powerful,
but the Lord above is much greater.

⁵Lord, your laws will stand forever.
Your Temple will be holy forevermore.

Life Lessons

Psalm 94:1–23

Situation

The psalm writer felt surrounded by people who did not seek after God. He rejoiced that God would protect and care for the righteous.

Observation

It is easy to grow weary and discouraged when we are surrounded by those who do not seek God. But God promises to be a shelter to those who are his children.

Inspiration

... Where do you turn when the bottom drops out of *your* life? Or when you face an issue that is embarrassing ... maybe even scandalous? ... What do you need when circumstances puncture your fragile dikes and threaten to engulf your life with pain and confusion?

You need a shelter. A listener. Someone who understands.

But to whom do you turn when there's no one to tell your troubles to? Where do you find encouragement? ...

Discouraged people don't need critics. They hurt enough already. They don't need more guilt or piled-on distress. They need encouragement. They need a refuge.

A place to hide and heal.

A willing, caring, available someone. A confidant

and comrade-at-arms. Can't find one? Why not share David's shelter? The One he called My Strength, Mighty Rock, Fortress, Stronghold, and High Tower.

David's Refuge *never* failed. Not even once. And he never regretted the times he dropped his heavy load and ran for cover.

Neither will you. (From *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Do you ever feel alone and discouraged in your faith? Become a part of a church and befriend a few other believers—people who will shelter you when you're facing life's storms.

Exploration

God's Protection—[Deuteronomy 33:27](#); [2 Samuel 22:3](#); [Psalms 17:8](#); [91:4](#); [Proverbs 14:26](#); [Luke 13:34](#).

God Will Pay Back His Enemies

The Lord is a God who punishes.
God, show your greatness and punish!

²Rise up, Judge of the earth,
and give the proud what they deserve.

³How long will the wicked be happy?
How long, Lord?

⁴They are full of proud words;
those who do evil brag about what they have done.

⁵Lord, they crush your people
and make your children suffer.

⁶They kill widows and foreigners
and murder orphans.

⁷They say, "The Lord doesn't see;
the God of Jacob doesn't notice."

⁸You stupid ones among the people, pay attention.
You fools, when will you understand?

⁹Can't the creator of ears hear?
Can't the maker of eyes see?

¹⁰Won't the one who corrects nations punish you?
Doesn't the teacher of people know everything?

¹¹The Lord knows what people think.
He knows their thoughts are just a puff of wind.

¹²Lord, those you correct are happy;

you teach them from your law.

¹³You give them rest from times of trouble
until a pit is dug for the wicked.

¹⁴The Lord won't leave his people
nor give up his children.

¹⁵Judgment will again be fair,
and all who are honest will follow it.

¹⁶Who will help me fight against the wicked?
Who will stand with me against those who do evil?

¹⁷If the Lord had not helped me,
I would have died in a minute.

¹⁸I said, "I am about to fall,"
but, Lord, your love kept me safe.

¹⁹I was very worried,
but you comforted me and made me happy.

²⁰Crooked leaders cannot be your friends.
They use the law to cause suffering.

²¹They join forces against people who do right
and sentence to death the innocent.

²²But the Lord is my defender;
my God is the rock of my protection.

²³God will pay them back for their sins
and will destroy them for their evil.

The Lord our God will destroy them.

Life Lessons

Psalms 95:1–96:13

Situation

Everything that has been created gives glory to God. The psalm writer encouraged the people to bring an offering of worship to God.

Observation

As Creator, God calls for submission from his creation.

Inspiration

Devotion to God is the first aspect of Godliness; Godlike character is the second. There may be some question about whether or not humility is a Godlike quality, since humility is a trait befitting the creature, not the Creator. But there is no question that God commends humility and delights in it in his people....

Not only does God commend humility in his people; our Lord displayed it in his humanity. “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” ([Philippians 2:8](#)). Jesus Christ exemplified humility in its utmost through his death for us. But he also exemplified humility throughout his life. He was born in the humblest of circumstances; he was obedient to his earthly parents; he called people to himself as one who was “gentle and humble in heart”; he said, “I am among you as one who serves”; he washed the disciples’ feet on the very night of his betrayal; and he taught, “he who humbles himself will

be exalted.” If we question whether humility is a Godlike trait (as we view God in his majesty), we certainly cannot question that it is a Christlike trait. And we are to be imitators of him as he lived out his human life on earth... . (From *The Practice of Godliness* by Jerry Bridges)

Application

Read an episode from the life of Christ. What were some of his character traits? Try to be more like Christ in these areas.

Exploration

Submission—[Isaiah 66:1–2](#); [Matthew 26:57–63](#); [James 4:7–10](#); [1 Peter 5:6](#).

A Call to Praise and Obedience

Come, let's sing for joy to the Lord.
Let's shout praises to the Rock who saves us.

²Let's come to him with thanksgiving.
Let's sing songs to him,

³because the Lord is the great God,
the great King over all gods.

⁴The deepest places on earth are his,
and the highest mountains belong to him.

⁵The sea is his because he made it,
and he created the land with his own hands.

⁶Come, let's worship him and bow down.
Let's kneel before the Lord who made us,

⁷because he is our God
and we are the people he takes care of
and the sheep that he tends.

Today listen to what he says:

⁸“Do not be stubborn, as your ancestors were at
Meribah,
as they were that day at Massah in the desert.

⁹There your ancestors tested me
and tried me even though they saw what I did.

¹⁰I was angry with those people for forty years.
I said, ‘They are not loyal to me

and have not understood my ways.’

¹¹I was angry and made a promise,

‘They will never enter my rest.’”

Praise for the Lord's Glory

Sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.

²Sing to the Lord and praise his name;
every day tell how he saves us.

³Tell the nations of his glory;
tell all peoples the miracles he does,

⁴because the Lord is great; he should be praised at all
times.

He should be honored more than all the gods,
⁵because all the gods of the nations are only idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.

⁶The Lord has glory and majesty;
he has power and beauty in his Temple.

⁷Praise the Lord, all nations on earth;
praise the Lord's glory and power.

⁸Praise the glory of the Lord's name.
Bring an offering and come into his Temple courtyards.

⁹Worship the Lord because he is holy.
Tremble before him, everyone on earth.

¹⁰Tell the nations, "The Lord is king."
The earth is set, and it cannot be moved.
He will judge the people fairly.

¹¹Let the skies rejoice and the earth be glad;
let the sea and everything in it shout.

¹²Let the fields and everything in them rejoice.
Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy

¹³before the Lord, because he is coming.
He is coming to judge the world;
he will judge the world with fairness
and the peoples with truth.

Life Lessons

Psalms 97:1–98:9

Situation

Like many psalms used at Jewish festivals, these psalms are a call to worship God our King, who reigns over all.

Observation

As we consider God's goodness, his justice, power, and sovereignty in our lives and in the world, we respond with worship that is meaningful and life changing.

Inspiration

You'll discover the purpose of worship—to change the face of the worshiper. This is exactly what happened to Christ on the mountain. Jesus' appearance was changed: "His face became bright like the sun" ([Matthew 17:2](#)).

The connection between the face and worship is more than coincidental. Our face is the most public part of our bodies, covered less than any other area. It is also the most recognizable part of our bodies. We don't fill a school annual with photos of people's feet but rather with photos of faces. God desires to take our faces, this exposed and memorable part of our bodies, and use them to reflect his goodness. Paul writes: "Our faces, then, are not covered. We all show the Lord's glory, and we are being changed to be like him. This change in us brings ever greater glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" ([2](#)

[Corinthians 3:18](#)).

God invites us to see his face so he can change ours. He uses our uncovered faces to display his glory. The transformation isn't easy. The sculptor of Mount Rushmore faced a lesser challenge than does God. But our Lord is up to the task. He loves to change the faces of his children. By his fingers, wrinkles of worry are rubbed away. Shadows of shame and doubt become portraits of grace and trust. He relaxes clenched jaws and smoothes furrowed brows. His touch can remove the bags of exhaustion from beneath the eyes and turn tears of despair into tears of peace.

How? Through worship.

We'd expect something more complicated, more demanding. A forty-day fast or the memorization of Leviticus perhaps. No. God's plan is simpler. He changes our faces through worship.

Exactly what is worship? I like King David's definition. "Oh magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together" ([Psalm 34:3](#), NASB). Worship is the act of magnifying God. Enlarging our vision of him. Stepping into the cockpit to see where he sits and observe how he works. Of course, his size doesn't change, but our perception of him does. As we draw nearer, he seems larger. Isn't that what we need? A big view of God? Don't we have big problems, big worries, big questions? Of course we do. Hence we need a big view of God.

Worship offers that. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

Next time you are in church, be purposeful about your worship. Allow the songs, the prayers, and the words spoken to change your attitude, your thoughts, your face. Ask God to help transform you as you worship him.

Exploration

Worship—[Exodus 34:14](#); [Luke 4:8](#); [John 4:20–24](#).

A Hymn About the Lord's Power

The Lord is king. Let the earth rejoice;
faraway lands should be glad.

²Thick, dark clouds surround him.
His kingdom is built on what is right and fair.

³A fire goes before him
and burns up his enemies all around.

⁴His lightning lights up the world;
when the people see it, they tremble.

⁵The mountains melt like wax before the Lord,
before the Lord of all the earth.

⁶The heavens tell about his goodness,
and all the people see his glory.

⁷Those who worship idols should be ashamed;
they brag about their gods.

All the gods should worship the Lord.

⁸When Jerusalem hears this, she is glad,
and the towns of Judah rejoice.

They are happy because of your judgments, Lord.

⁹You are the Lord Most High over all the earth;
you are supreme over all gods.

¹⁰People who love the Lord hate evil.

The Lord watches over those who follow him
and frees them from the power of the wicked.

¹¹Light shines on those who do right;
joy belongs to those who are honest.
¹²Rejoice in the Lord, you who do right.
Praise his holy name.

The Lord of Power and Justice

A psalm.

Sing to the Lord a new song,
because he has done miracles.
By his right hand and holy arm
he has won the victory.

²The Lord has made known his power to save;
he has shown the other nations his victory for his
people.

³He has remembered his love
and his loyalty to the people of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen
God's power to save.

⁴Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth;
burst into songs and make music.

⁵Make music to the Lord with harps,
with harps and the sound of singing.

⁶Blow the trumpets and the sheep's horns;
shout for joy to the Lord the King.

⁷Let the sea and everything in it shout;
let the world and everyone in it sing.

⁸Let the rivers clap their hands;
let the mountains sing together for joy.

⁹Let them sing before the Lord,
because he is coming to judge the world.
He will judge the world fairly;

he will judge the peoples with fairness.

Life Lessons

Psalms 99:1–101:8

Situation

Although [Psalms 99–100](#) have unknown authors, [Psalms 101](#) was written by David. Early in his reign, he recorded the standards of conduct he wanted to follow.

Observation

God can be praised and trusted by believers because he is holy, good, and perfect. All believers should be motivated to honorable conduct.

Inspiration

At some point in life, each one of us must decide what is his highest joy; for the thing that delights us directs us. Generally speaking, a child finds his delight in what he has; a youth in what he does; and an adult in what he is. The first lives for possessions, the second for the experiences, and the third for character. We do not condemn the child or the youth for so living, because neither has reached maturity; but we would certainly wonder at an adult who lived on those lower levels....

So, every person has an outlook on life; he is seeking his highest joy. Outlook determines outcome. Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the stars and became the friend of God by faith. Lot lifted up his eyes and saw Sodom and became the friend of the world. Abraham inherited the city prepared for him by God, the city he had been seeking ([Hebrews 11:13–](#)

[16](#)); but Lot lost everything when Sodom went up in smoke.

If life is to be rich and meaningful, then our joys must be the highest possible; and Jesus tells us that the highest joy possible is to see God. (From *Live Like a King* by Warren Wiersbe)

Application

Take time to assess and write down your priorities and what they reveal about your trust in God.

Exploration

God Is Trustworthy—[Deuteronomy 7:9](#); [1 Kings 8:56](#); [Psalms 33:4](#); [89:2](#); [138:8](#); [Lamentations 3:22–23](#); [1 Corinthians 1:9](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:23–24](#); [Hebrews 10:23](#).

The Lord, the Fair and Holy King

The Lord is king.

Let the peoples shake with fear.

He sits between the gold creatures with wings.

Let the earth shake.

²The Lord in Jerusalem is great;
he is supreme over all the peoples.

³Let them praise your name;
it is great, holy and to be feared.

⁴The King is powerful and loves justice.
Lord, you made things fair;
you have done what is fair and right
for the people of Jacob.

⁵Praise the Lord our God,
and worship at the Temple, his footstool.
He is holy.

⁶Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
and Samuel was among his worshippers.
They called to the Lord,
and he answered them.

⁷He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud.
They kept the rules and laws he gave them.

⁸Lord our God, you answered them.
You showed them that you are a forgiving God,
but you punished them for their wrongs.

⁹Praise the Lord our God,
and worship at his holy mountain,
because the Lord our God is holy.

A Call to Praise the Lord

A psalm of thanks.

Shout to the Lord, all the earth.

²Serve the Lord with joy;
come before him with singing.

³Know that the Lord is God.
He made us, and we belong to him;
we are his people, the sheep he tends.

⁴Come into his city with songs of thanksgiving
and into his courtyards with songs of praise.
Thank him and praise his name.

⁵The Lord is good. His love is forever,
and his loyalty goes on and on.

A Promise to Rule Well

A psalm of David.

I will sing of your love and fairness;

Lord, I will sing praises to you.

²I will be careful to live an innocent life.

When will you come to me?

I will live an innocent life in my house.

³I will not look at anything wicked.

I hate those who turn against you;

they will not be found near me.

⁴Let those who want to do wrong stay away from me;

I will have nothing to do with evil.

⁵If anyone secretly says things against his neighbor,

I will stop him.

I will not allow people

to be proud and look down on others.

⁶I will look for trustworthy people

so I can live with them in the land.

Only those who live innocent lives

will be my servants.

⁷No one who is dishonest will live in my house;

no liars will stay around me.

⁸Every morning I will destroy the wicked in the land.

I will rid the Lord's city of people who do evil.

Life Lessons

Psalms 102:1–28

Situation

The psalmist's distress is not hopeless. Through faith he saw a glorious future for unborn generations.

Observation

God will never die or forget about us. He will protect and restore his people today as in the past.

Inspiration

A brighter prospect is before the true believer—*restoration*. God has no intention of leaving His investment in a shambles. There will be a divine housecleaning. That is a foregone conclusion. This is the message of all the prophets. *But housecleaning is followed by restoration.*

We know for instance that we are going to have a cleansed and restored heavens. We have filled the air with violence, brutality, and threat. We know that the brute creation is to be restored to dignity—that "... the wolf and the lamb will feed together ..."

I think the most encouraging sign I have seen this year—a sign that is becoming more and more evident in a catalogue of different places—is *a dawning consciousness that we need something more than religious activity*. ... You can feel a stirring. It's coming ... not reformation, but restoration. It must come! ...

There will be a new day for the oil and wine of the gospel. The presence of the Holy Spirit and the

“good news” of abundant grace of God are the power of the gospel. Revival is not spurious, jazzed-up religious activity... . God is about to have His say in this world—and He is going to start with His Church. (From *Revivaltime Pulpit* by C. M. Ward)

Application

Don't suffer alone. When you feel attacked or overwhelmed, tell God. Then, look to another friend or family member who will help carry you through.

Exploration

Restoration—[Exodus 30:11–16](#); [Numbers 5:5–8](#); [Psalms 126:5–6](#); [Matthew 8:2–3](#); [2 Corinthians 2:5–11](#).

A Cry for Help

A prayer of a person who is suffering when he is discouraged and tells the Lord his complaints.

Lord, listen to my prayer;
let my cry for help come to you.

²Do not hide from me
in my time of trouble.

Pay attention to me.

When I cry for help, answer me quickly.

³My life is passing away like smoke,
and my bones are burned up with fire.

⁴My heart is like grass
that has been cut and dried.

I forget to eat.

⁵Because of my grief,
my skin hangs on my bones.

⁶I am like a desert owl,
like an owl living among the ruins.

⁷I lie awake.

I am like a lonely bird on a housetop.

⁸All day long enemies insult me;
those who make fun of me use my name as a curse.

⁹I eat ashes for food,
and my tears fall into my drinks.

¹⁰Because of your great anger,

you have picked me up and thrown me away.

¹¹My days are like a passing shadow;
I am like dried grass.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: A Good Shepherd Tends to His Sheep

Like the sheep, the rest of our wounds come just from living in the pasture. The pasture of the sheep, however, is much more appealing. The sheep have to face wounds from thorns and thistles. We have to face aging, loss, and illness. Some of us face betrayal and injustice. Live long enough in this world, and most of us will face deep, deep hurts of some kind or another.

So we, like the sheep, get wounded. And we, like the sheep, have a shepherd. Remember the words we read? “We belong to him; we are his people, the sheep he tends” ([Psalm 100:3](#)). He will do for you what the shepherd does for the sheep. He will tend to you.

If the Gospels teach us anything, they teach us that Jesus is a Good Shepherd. “I am the good shepherd,” Jesus announces. “The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep” ([John 10:11](#)).

Didn't Jesus spread the oil of prevention on his disciples? He prayed for them. He equipped them before he sent them out. He revealed to them the secrets of the parables. He interrupted their arguments and calmed their fears. Because he was a good shepherd, he protected them against

disappointments.

Not only did Jesus prevent wounds, he healed them. He touched the eyes of the blind man. He touched the disease of the leper. He touched the body of the dead girl. Jesus tends to his sheep. He touched the searching heart of Nicodemus. He touched the open heart of Zacchaeus. He touched the broken heart of Mary Magdalene. He touched the confused heart of Cleopas. And he touched the stubborn heart of Paul and the repentant heart of Peter. Jesus tends to his sheep. And he will tend to you. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

¹²But, Lord, you rule forever,
and your fame goes on and on.

¹³You will come and have mercy on Jerusalem,
because the time has now come to be kind to her;
the right time has come.

¹⁴Your servants love even her stones;
they even care about her dust.

¹⁵Nations will fear the name of the Lord,
and all the kings on earth will honor you.

¹⁶The Lord will rebuild Jerusalem;
there his glory will be seen.

¹⁷He will answer the prayers of the needy;
he will not reject their prayers.

¹⁸Write these things for the future
so that people who are not yet born will praise the
Lord.

¹⁹The Lord looked down from his holy place above;
from heaven he looked down at the earth.

²⁰He heard the moans of the prisoners,
and he freed those sentenced to die.

²¹The name of the Lord will be heard in Jerusalem;
his praise will be heard there.

²²People will come together,
and kingdoms will serve the Lord.

²³God has made me tired of living;
he has cut short my life.

²⁴So I said, “My God, do not take me in the middle of my life.

Your years go on and on.

²⁵In the beginning you made the earth,
and your hands made the skies.

²⁶They will be destroyed, but you will remain.
They will all wear out like clothes.

And, like clothes, you will change them
and throw them away.

²⁷But you never change,
and your life will never end.

²⁸Our children will live in your presence,
and their children will remain with you.”

Life Lessons

Psalm 103:1-22

Situation

David urged everyone to praise God. He told of God's faithfulness and praised him.

Observation

The first few verses set the tone for this psalm. David urged the reader to avoid allowing God to become so commonplace that he forgot to praise him.

Inspiration

Abraham Lincoln once listened to the pleas of the mother of a soldier who'd been sentenced to hang for treason. She begged the President to grant a pardon. Lincoln agreed. Yet, he's reported to have left the lady with the following words: "Still, I wish we could teach him a lesson. I wish we could give him just a little bit of hangin'."

I think I know what the old railsplitter had in mind. Yesterday, I got a little bit of hangin'.

We were having Sunday lunch at the home of a fellow missionary family. It was after the meal... Their three-year-old daughter Beth Ann was playing with our two-year-old Jenna in the front yard. All of a sudden Beth Ann rushed in with a look of panic on her face. "Jenna is in the pool!"

Paul was the first to arrive at the poolside ... [and] lifted her up out of the water to the extended hands of her mother. Jenna was simultaneously choking, crying, and coughing. She vomited a bellyful of water.

I held her as she cried. Denalyn began to weep. I began to sweat.

For the rest of the day I couldn't hold her enough, nor could we thank Beth Ann enough... I still can't thank God enough.

It was a little bit of hangin'... Because of it, I came face to face with one of the underground's slyest agents—the agent of familiarity...

To say that this agent of familiarity breeds contempt is to let him off easy. Contempt is just one of his offspring. He also sires broken hearts, wasted hours, and an insatiable desire for more... He won't take your children, he'll just make you too busy to notice them. His whispers to procrastinate are seductive. There is always next summer to coach the team, next month to go to the lake, and next week to teach Johnny how to pray. He'll make you forget that the faces around your table will soon be at tables of their own. Hence, books will go unread, games will go unplayed, hearts will go unnurtured, and opportunities will go ignored. All because the poison of the ordinary has deadened your senses to the magic of the moment...

On a shelf above my desk is a picture of two little girls. They're holding hands and standing in front of a swimming pool, the same pool from which the younger of the two had been pulled only minutes before. I put the picture where I would see it daily so I would remember what God doesn't want me to forget.

And you can bet this time I'm going to remember. I don't want any more hangin'. Not even a little bit.

(From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

Make [Psalm 103](#) your prayer. Pray this prayer throughout the day. Maintain an attitude of praise in all your activities.

Exploration

Cautions About Forgetting God—[Deuteronomy 4:9](#); [6:10–12](#); [Psalm 9:17](#); [50:22](#); [Isaiah 17:10](#); [51:13](#); [Jeremiah 3:21](#).

Praise to the Lord of Love

Of David.

My whole being, praise the Lord;
all my being, praise his holy name.

²My whole being, praise the Lord
and do not forget all his kindnesses.

³He forgives all my sins
and heals all my diseases.

⁴He saves my life from the grave
and loads me with love and mercy.

⁵He satisfies me with good things
and makes me young again, like the eagle.

⁶The Lord does what is right and fair
for all who are wronged by others.

⁷He showed his ways to Moses
and his deeds to the people of Israel.

⁸The Lord shows mercy and is kind.

He does not become angry quickly, and he has great
love.

⁹He will not always accuse us,
and he will not be angry forever.

¹⁰He has not punished us as our sins should be
punished;
he has not repaid us for the evil we have done.

¹¹As high as the sky is above the earth,
so great is his love for those who respect him.

¹²He has taken our sins away from us
as far as the east is from west.

¹³The Lord has mercy on those who respect him,
as a father has mercy on his children.

¹⁴He knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust.

¹⁵Human life is like grass;
we grow like a flower in the field.

¹⁶After the wind blows, the flower is gone,
and there is no sign of where it was.

¹⁷But the Lord's love for those who respect him
continues forever and ever,
and his goodness continues to their grandchildren

¹⁸and to those who keep his agreement
and who remember to obey his orders.

¹⁹The Lord has set his throne in heaven,
and his kingdom rules over everything.

²⁰You who are his angels, praise the Lord.
You are the mighty warriors who do what he says
and who obey his voice.

²¹You, his armies, praise the Lord;
you are his servants who do what he wants.

²²Everything the Lord has made
should praise him in all the places he rules.
My whole being, praise the Lord.

Life Lessons

Psalm 104:1-35

Situation

This anonymous songwriter appreciated God's creation. God created and sustains the universe.

Observation

The universe bears witness to God's majesty, splendor, and lordship.

Inspiration

Nature is God's workshop. The sky is his resume. The universe is his calling card. You want to know who God is? See what he has done. You want to know his power? Take a look at his creation. Curious about his strength? Pay a visit to his home address: 1 Billion Starry Sky Avenue. Want to know his size? Step out into the night and stare at starlight emitted one million years ago and then read [2 Chronicles 2:6](#), "No one can really build a house for our God. Not even the highest of heavens can hold him."

He is untainted by the atmosphere of sin, unbridled by the time line of history, unhindered by the weariness of the body.

What controls you doesn't control him. What troubles you doesn't trouble him. What fatigues you doesn't fatigue him. Is an eagle disturbed by traffic? No, he rises above it. Is the whale perturbed by a hurricane? Of course not, he plunges beneath it. Is the lion flustered by the mouse standing directly in his way? No, he steps over it.

How much more is God able to soar above, plunge beneath, and step over the troubles of the earth! “This is something people cannot do, but God can do all things” ([Matthew 19:26](#)). (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Application

Take a walk in the park. Gaze out the window at the clouds. Get away from the noise and listen to the sounds of nature. As you enjoy the beauty of creation, thank and praise God for his handiwork.

Exploration

God the Creator—[Genesis 1–2](#); [Nehemiah 9:6](#); [Job 26:7](#); [38–39](#); [Psalm 8:3–4](#); [102:25](#); [Acts 14:15](#); [Hebrews 11:3](#).

Praise to God Who Made the World

My whole being, praise the Lord.

Lord my God, you are very great.

You are clothed with glory and majesty;

²you wear light like a robe.

You stretch out the skies like a tent.

³You build your room above the clouds.

You make the clouds your chariot,
and you ride on the wings of the wind.

⁴You make the winds your messengers,
and flames of fire are your servants.

⁵You built the earth on its foundations
so it can never be moved.

⁶You covered the earth with oceans;
the water was above the mountains.

⁷But at your command, the water rushed away.
When you thundered your orders, it hurried away.

⁸The mountains rose; the valleys sank.
The water went to the places you made for it.

⁹You set borders for the seas that they cannot cross,
so water will never cover the earth again.

¹⁰You make springs pour into the ravines;
they flow between the mountains.

¹¹They water all the wild animals;

the wild donkeys come there to drink.

¹²Wild birds make nests by the water;
they sing among the tree branches.

¹³You water the mountains from above.
The earth is full of the things you made.

¹⁴You make the grass for cattle
and vegetables for the people.
You make food grow from the earth.

¹⁵You give us wine that makes happy hearts
and olive oil that makes our faces shine.
You give us bread that gives us strength.

¹⁶The Lord's trees have plenty of water;
they are the cedars of Lebanon, which he planted.

¹⁷The birds make their nests there;
the stork's home is in the fir trees.

¹⁸The high mountains belong to the wild goats.
The rocks are hiding places for the badgers.

¹⁹You made the moon to mark the seasons,
and the sun always knows when to set.

²⁰You make it dark, and it becomes night.
Then all the wild animals creep around.

²¹The lions roar as they attack.
They look to God for food.

²²When the sun rises, they leave
and go back to their dens to lie down.

²³Then people go to work
and work until evening.

²⁴Lord, you have made many things;
with your wisdom you made them all.

The earth is full of your riches.

²⁵Look at the sea, so big and wide,
with creatures large and small that cannot be counted.

²⁶Ships travel over the ocean,
and there is the sea monster Leviathan,
which you made to play there.

²⁷All these things depend on you
to give them their food at the right time.

²⁸When you give it to them,
they gather it up.

When you open your hand,
they are filled with good food.

²⁹When you turn away from them,
they become frightened.

When you take away their breath,
they die and turn to dust.

³⁰When you breathe on them,
they are created,
and you make the land new again.

³¹May the glory of the Lord be forever.

May the Lord enjoy what he has made.

³²He just looks at the earth, and it shakes.
He touches the mountains, and they smoke.

³³I will sing to the Lord all my life;
I will sing praises to my God as long as I live.

³⁴May my thoughts please him;
I am happy in the Lord.

³⁵Let sinners be destroyed from the earth,

and let the wicked live no longer.

My whole being, praise the Lord.
Praise the Lord.

Life Lessons

Psalm 105:1–45

Situation

David reminded the people of God's mighty deeds. God's past miracles encouraged Believers to remain loyal to him.

Observation

By recounting God's work in history, Christians can be encouraged to praise God—because he is trustworthy.

Inspiration

“In the beginning God *created* the heavens and the earth.” It doesn't say, “God *made* the heavens and the earth.” Nor does it say that he “Xeroxed” the heavens and the earth. Or “built” or “developed” or “mass-produced.” No, the word is “created.”

And that one word says a lot. Creating is something far different than constructing. The difference is pretty obvious. Constructing something engages only the hands while creating engages the heart and the soul...

Now, imagine God's creativity. Of all we don't know about the creation, there is one thing we do know—he did it with a smile. He must've had a blast. Painting the stripes on the zebra, hanging the stars in the sky, putting the gold in the sunset. What creativity! Stretching the neck of the giraffe, putting the flutter in the mockingbird's wings, planting the giggle in the hyena.

What a time he had. Like a whistling carpenter in his workshop, he loved every bit of it. He poured himself into the work...

And then, as a finale to a brilliant performance, he made man. With his typical creative flair, he began with a useless mound of dirt and ended up with an invaluable species called a human. A human who had the unique honor to bear the stamp, "in His Image."

At this point in the story one would be tempted to jump and clap. "Bravo!" "Encore!" "Unmatchable!" "Beautiful!"

But the applause would be premature. The Divine Artist has yet to unveil his greatest creation.

As the story unfolds, a devil of a snake feeds man a line and an apple, and gullible Adam swallows them both. This one act of rebellion sets in motion a dramatic and erratic courtship between God and man. Though the characters and scenes change, the scenario repeats itself endlessly. God, still the compassionate Creator, woos his creation. Man, the creation, alternately reaches out in repentance and runs in rebellion.

It is within this simple script that God's creativity flourishes. If you thought he was imaginative with the sea and stars, just wait until you read what he does to get his creation to listen to him!

For example:

A ninety-year-old woman gets pregnant.

Another woman turns to salt.

A flood blankets the earth.

A bush burns (but doesn't burn up!)

The Red Sea splits in two.
The walls of Jericho fall.
The sky rains fire.
A donkey talks.

You talk about special effects! But these acts, be they very ingenious, still couldn't compare with what was to come.

Nearing the climax of the story, God, motivated by love and directed by divinity, surprised everyone. He became a man. In an untouchable mystery, he disguised himself as a carpenter and lived in a dusty Judean village. Determined to prove his love for his creation, he walked incognito through his own world. His callused hands touched wounds and his compassionate tongue touched hearts. He became one of us. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

Application

Take a blank piece of paper and write "God is faithful" at the top. Then write as many instances as you can remember that show God's faithfulness to you. Use biblical examples and personal experiences. Don't stop until your page is full. Praise God for his faithfulness to you!

Exploration

Praise the Faithful God—[Psalm 31:21](#); [57:9](#); [59:16](#); [63:3](#); [86:12](#); [89:1](#); [100:4](#); [108:3](#); [117](#); [138:2](#).

God's Love for Israel

Give thanks to the Lord and pray to him.

Tell the nations what he has done.

²Sing to him; sing praises to him.

Tell about all his miracles.

³Be glad that you are his;

let those who seek the Lord be happy.

⁴Depend on the Lord and his strength;

always go to him for help.

⁵Remember the miracles he has done;

remember his wonders and his decisions.

⁶You are descendants of his servant Abraham,

the children of Jacob, his chosen people.

⁷He is the Lord our God.

His laws are for all the world.

⁸He will keep his agreement forever;

he will keep his promises always.

⁹He will keep the agreement he made with Abraham

and the promise he made to Isaac.

¹⁰He made it a law for the people of Jacob;

he made it an agreement with Israel to last forever.

¹¹The Lord said, "I will give you the land of Canaan,

and it will belong to you."

¹²Then God's people were few in number.

They were strangers in the land.

¹³They went from one nation to another,
from one kingdom to another.

¹⁴But the Lord did not let anyone hurt them;
he warned kings not to harm them.

¹⁵He said, “Don’t touch my chosen people,
and don’t harm my prophets.”

¹⁶God ordered a time of hunger in the land,
and he destroyed all the food.

¹⁷Then he sent a man ahead of them—
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.

¹⁸They put chains around his feet
and an iron ring around his neck.

¹⁹Then the time he had spoken of came,
and the Lord’s words proved that Joseph was right.

²⁰The king of Egypt sent for Joseph and freed him;
the ruler of the people set him free.

²¹He made him the master of his house;
Joseph was in charge of his riches.

²²He could order the princes as he wished.
He taught the older men to be wise.

²³Then his father Israel came to Egypt;
[Jacob](#) lived in [Egypt](#).

²⁴The Lord made his people grow in number,
and he made them stronger than their enemies.

²⁵He caused the Egyptians to hate his people
and to make plans against his servants.

²⁶Then he sent his servant Moses,
and Aaron, whom he had chosen.

²⁷They did many signs among the Egyptians and worked wonders in Egypt.

²⁸The Lord sent darkness and made the land dark, but the Egyptians turned against what he said.

²⁹So he changed their water into blood and made their fish die.

³⁰Then their country was filled with frogs, even in the bedrooms of their rulers.

³¹The Lord spoke and flies came, and gnats were everywhere in the country.

³²He made hail fall like rain and sent lightning through their land.

³³He struck down their grapevines and fig trees, and he destroyed every tree in the country.

³⁴He spoke and grasshoppers came; the locusts were too many to count.

³⁵They ate all the plants in the land and everything the earth produced.

³⁶The Lord also killed all the firstborn sons in the land, the oldest son of each family.

³⁷Then he brought his people out, and they carried with them silver and gold. Not one of his people stumbled.

³⁸The Egyptians were glad when they left, because the Egyptians were afraid of them.

³⁹The Lord covered them with a cloud and lit up the night with fire.

⁴⁰When they asked, he brought them quail and filled them with bread from heaven.

⁴¹God split the rock, and water flowed out;
it ran like a river through the desert.

⁴²He remembered his holy promise
to his servant Abraham.

⁴³So God brought his people out with joy,
his chosen ones with singing.

⁴⁴He gave them lands of other nations,
so they received what others had worked for.

⁴⁵This was so they would keep his orders
and obey his teachings.

Praise the Lord!

Life Lessons

[Psalm 106:1-48](#)

Situation

Israel's rebellion and Divine patience. This common theme in the Old Testament is detailed in [Psalm 106](#).

Observation

Because God forgives us, we can rejoice and sing about it.

Inspiration

Imagine the exhilaration of a former resident of death row who has just been pardoned by the governor. Condemned to death, he has been forgiven by the state and is released. Instead of waiting execution, he is free to leave and to live. He has been turned from death to life!

Sin drives a wedge in our relationship with God. Our disobedience breaks fellowship and scars our souls. And we sinners stand guilty, awaiting our deserved punishment. Like condemned murderers, we know that the just sentence is death.

But we can be pardoned, forgiven, set free. That's why David exclaims enthusiastically that we are *blessed*.

If you have given your life to Christ and are trusting in him alone for salvation, your transgressions are forgiven, your sins are covered by his blood. Thank God for his love and justice, and rejoice in your freedom. (From *On Eagle's Wings* by

Dave Veerman)

Application

Confess your sins to God. Accept his forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Respond to his mercy with heart-filled praise. Find a new way to worship God by singing a song or writing a poem.

Exploration

God's Forgiveness—[Psalm 78:38](#); [103:3](#); [Isaiah 43:25](#); [Joel 2:13](#); [Micah 7:18–19](#); [Ephesians 1:7](#); [Colossians 1:13–14](#); [1 John 1:9](#).

Israel's Failure to Trust God

Praise the Lord!

Thank the Lord because he is good.

His love continues forever.

²No one can tell all the mighty things the Lord has done;

no one can speak all his praise.

³Happy are those who do right,
who do what is fair at all times.

⁴Lord, remember me when you are kind to your people;
help me when you save them.

⁵Let me see the good things you do for your chosen people.

Let me be happy along with your happy nation;
let me join your own people in praising you.

⁶We have sinned just as our ancestors did.
We have done wrong; we have done evil.

⁷Our ancestors in Egypt
did not learn from your miracles.

They did not remember all your kindnesses,
so they turned against you at the Red Sea.

⁸But the Lord saved them for his own sake,
to show his great power.

⁹He commanded the Red Sea, and it dried up.
He led them through the deep sea as if it were a desert.

¹⁰He saved them from those who hated them.
He saved them from their enemies,

¹¹and the water covered their foes.
Not one of them escaped.

¹²Then the people believed what the Lord said,
and they sang praises to him.

¹³But they quickly forgot what he had done;
they did not wait for his advice.

¹⁴They became greedy for food in the desert,
and they tested God there.

¹⁵So he gave them what they wanted,
but he also sent a terrible disease among them.

¹⁶The people in the camp were jealous of Moses
and of Aaron, the holy priest of the Lord.

¹⁷Then the ground opened up and swallowed Dathan
and closed over Abiram's group.

¹⁸A fire burned among their followers,
and flames burned up the wicked.

¹⁹The people made a gold calf at Mount Sinai
and worshiped a metal statue.

²⁰They exchanged their glorious God
for a statue of a bull that eats grass.

²¹They forgot the God who saved them,
who had done great things in Egypt,

²²who had done miracles in [Egypt](#)
and amazing things by the Red Sea.

²³So God said he would destroy them.
But Moses, his chosen one, stood before him

and stopped God's anger from destroying them.

²⁴Then they refused to go into the beautiful land of Canaan;

they did not believe what God promised.

²⁵They grumbled in their tents

and did not obey the Lord.

²⁶So he swore to them

that they would die in the desert.

²⁷He said their children would be killed by other nations

and that they would be scattered among other countries.

²⁸They joined in worshiping Baal at Peor
and ate meat that had been sacrificed to lifeless statues.

²⁹They made the Lord angry by what they did,
so many people became sick with a terrible disease.

³⁰But Phinehas prayed to the Lord,
and the disease stopped.

³¹Phinehas did what was right,
and it will be remembered from now on.

³²The people also made the Lord angry at Meribah,
and Moses was in trouble because of them.

³³The people turned against the Spirit of God,
so Moses spoke without stopping to think.

³⁴The people did not destroy the other nations
as the Lord had told them to do.

³⁵Instead, they mixed with the other nations
and learned their customs.

³⁶They worshiped other nations' idols
and were trapped by them.

³⁷They even killed their sons and daughters
as sacrifices to demons.

³⁸They killed innocent people,
their own sons and daughters,
as sacrifices to the idols of Canaan.
So the land was made unholy by their blood.

³⁹The people became unholy by their sins;
they were unfaithful to God in what they did.

⁴⁰So the Lord became angry with his people
and hated his own children.

⁴¹He handed them over to other nations
and let their enemies rule over them.

⁴²Their enemies were cruel to them
and kept them under their power.

⁴³The Lord saved his people many times,
but they continued to turn against him.
So they became even more wicked.

⁴⁴But God saw their misery
when he heard their cry.

⁴⁵He remembered his agreement with them,
and he felt sorry for them because of his great love.

⁴⁶He caused them to be pitied
by those who held them captive.

⁴⁷Lord our God, save us

and bring us back from other nations.
Then we will thank you
and will gladly praise you.
⁴⁸Praise the Lord, the God of Israel.
He always was and always will be.
Let all the people say, "Amen!"
Praise the Lord!

Book 5

Life Lessons

Psalm 107:1-43

Situation

Wanderers, prisoners, sick and storm-tossed people all suffered but were saved when they called upon God. This psalm tells why people should give thanks and praise to their Savior and Deliverer.

Observation

God will rescue us from trials if we are faithful to ask him for help.

Inspiration

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” How wonderful is this provision! God knows our weaknesses, and Christ’s death for our sins included the sins we commit in the new life, as well as those before we came to Him for our salvation.

... He is faithful, that is, He doesn’t break His promise. And His promise to His Son is that all who receive His Son as Savior become God’s children, adopted into His own family. When a child does wrong, he isn’t kicked out of the family, though he may be disciplined... . He is faithful to His promise to His Son and to us to forgive us when we sin.

... To be just is to be fair. Is it really fair of God to forgive us no matter what sins we have committed? Don’t we have to be good enough to be saved?

No, I hope this is very clear to you by now—no

one is good enough to claim a right to heaven. Christ died for us to make us good in the sight of God. Because of what Christ did for us in dying on the cross and rising again from the dead, God has taken away all our guilt. The Scriptures declare, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

Though we had no right whatever, Christ has made a road to heaven for us, and He takes us with Him right into the throne room of God, right into His holy presence. There Christ presents each of us to His Father as a new child of God, as Christ’s new brother or sister. God welcomes us with warmth and excitement and joy as new members of His family. (From *Next Steps for New Christians* by Kenneth Taylor)

Application

Are any of the trials in this psalm yours? Are you without money for food? Are you discouraged? Miserable? In jail? In trouble? Find your answer in the psalm, too. Let God save you, give you peace, and work a miracle in your life.

Exploration

God’s Faithfulness—[Deuteronomy 7:9](#); [1 Kings 8:56](#); [Lamentations 3:22–23](#).

God Saves from Many Dangers

Thank the Lord because he is good.
His love continues forever.

²That is what those whom the Lord has saved should say.

He has saved them from the enemy
³and has gathered them from other lands,
from east and west, north and south.

⁴Some people had wandered in the desert lands.
They found no city in which to live.

⁵They were hungry and thirsty,
and they were discouraged.

⁶In their misery they cried out to the Lord,
and he saved them from their troubles.

⁷He led them on a straight road
to a city where they could live.

⁸Let them give thanks to the Lord for his love
and for the miracles he does for people.

⁹He satisfies the thirsty
and fills up the hungry.

¹⁰Some sat in gloom and darkness;
they were prisoners suffering in chains.

¹¹They had turned against the words of God
and had refused the advice of God Most High.

¹²So he broke their pride by hard work.
They stumbled, and no one helped.

¹³In their misery they cried out to the Lord,
and he saved them from their troubles.

¹⁴He brought them out of their gloom and darkness
and broke their chains.

¹⁵Let them give thanks to the Lord for his love
and for the miracles he does for people.

¹⁶He breaks down bronze gates
and cuts apart iron bars.

¹⁷Some fools turned against God
and suffered for the evil they did.

¹⁸They refused to eat anything,
so they almost died.

¹⁹In their misery they cried out to the Lord,
and he saved them from their troubles.

²⁰God gave the command and healed them,
so they were saved from dying.

²¹Let them give thanks to the Lord for his love
and for the miracles he does for people.

²²Let them offer sacrifices to thank him.
With joy they should tell what he has done.

²³Others went out to sea in ships
and did business on the great oceans.

²⁴They saw what the Lord could do,
the miracles he did in the deep oceans.

²⁵He spoke, and a storm came up,
which blew up high waves.

²⁶The ships were tossed as high as the sky and fell low to the depths.

The storm was so bad that they lost their courage.

²⁷They stumbled and fell like people who were drunk. They did not know what to do.

²⁸In their misery they cried out to the Lord, and he saved them from their troubles.

²⁹He stilled the storm and calmed the waves.

³⁰They were happy that it was quiet, and God guided them to the port they wanted.

³¹Let them give thanks to the Lord for his love and for the miracles he does for people.

³²Let them praise his greatness in the meeting of the people;
let them praise him in the meeting of the older leaders.

³³He changed rivers into a desert and springs of water into dry ground.

³⁴He made fertile land salty, because the people there did evil.

³⁵He changed the desert into pools of water and dry ground into springs of water.

³⁶He had the hungry settle there so they could build a city in which to live.

³⁷They planted seeds in the fields and vineyards, and they had a good harvest.

³⁸God blessed them, and they grew in number. Their cattle did not become fewer.

³⁹Because of disaster, troubles, and sadness,

-----, -----, -----,
their families grew smaller and weaker.

⁴⁰He showed he was displeased with their leaders
and made them wander in a pathless desert.

⁴¹But he lifted the poor out of their suffering
and made their families grow like flocks of sheep.

⁴²Good people see this and are happy,
but the wicked say nothing.

⁴³Whoever is wise will remember these things
and will think about the love of the Lord.

Life Lessons

[Psalms 108:1–109:31](#)

Situation

[Psalm 57:7–11](#) and [Psalm 60:5–12](#) were combined to form [Psalm 108](#). David celebrated his victory. He knew that without God, he would have been defeated.

Observation

With God on our side, we can do more than we think possible. God provides victory. We ought to praise God in both victory and defeat.

Inspiration

Christians are to rejoice. To do that, you need only to think of the great things God has done for you. Then we are told not to be anxious, but in our prayers to make our requests known to God. In your biggest problems, you have One that you can go to; and before Him you can pour out your heart with the assurance that He will not leave you without an answer to that great problem. Then we are to fill our minds with those things that are good. They are mentioned in the Scriptures as being things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, of good report, and of virtue. It is upon these things that we are to think. Live positively, not negatively. Once you learn that secret, God will have given you the victory. (From *Day by Day with Billy Graham* by Joan W. Brown)

Application

When were you worried last? When you received relief, did you praise God? Next time God gives you a

victory, give him praise.

Exploration

Victory—[1 Samuel 4:5–8](#); [1 Chronicles 18:13](#);
[Psalm 98:1–3](#); [Ephesians 4:8](#); [Colossians 2:15](#);
[Hebrews 11:32–35](#); [1 John 3:8–9](#); [4:4](#); [5:4](#).

A Prayer for Victory

A song. A psalm of David.

God, my heart is steady.

I will sing and praise you with all my being.

²Wake up, harp and lyre!

I will wake up the dawn.

³Lord, I will praise you among the nations;

I will sing songs of praise about you to all the nations.

⁴Your great love reaches to the skies,

your truth to the heavens.

⁵God, you are supreme above the skies.

Let your glory be over all the earth.

⁶Answer us and save us by your power

so the people you love will be rescued.

⁷God has said from his Temple,

“When I win, I will divide Shechem

and measure off the Valley of Succoth.

⁸Gilead and Manasseh are mine.

Ephraim is like my helmet.

Judah holds my royal scepter.

⁹Moab is like my washbowl.

I throw my sandals at Edom.

I shout at Philistia.”

¹⁰Who will bring me to the strong-walled city?

Who will bring me to the strong, walled city :

Who will lead me to Edom?

¹¹God, surely you have rejected us;
you do not go out with our armies.

¹²Help us fight the enemy.

Human help is useless,

¹³but we can win with God's help.

He will defeat our enemies.

A Prayer Against an Enemy

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

God, I praise you.

Do not be silent.

²Wicked people and liars have spoken against me;
they have told lies about me.

³They have said hateful things about me
and attack me for no reason.

⁴They attacked me, even though I loved them
and prayed for them.

⁵I was good to them, but they repay me with evil.
I loved them, but they hate me in return.

⁶They say about me, "Have an evil person work
against him,

and let an accuser stand against him.

⁷When he is judged, let him be found guilty,
and let even his prayers show his guilt.

⁸Let his life be cut short,
and let another man replace him as leader.

⁹Let his children become orphans
and his wife a widow.

¹⁰Make his children wander around, begging for food.
Let them be forced out of the ruins in which they live.

¹¹Let the people to whom he owes money take
everything he owns,

and let strangers steal everything he has worked for.

¹²Let no one show him love

or have mercy on his orphaned children.

¹³Let all his descendants die
and be forgotten by those who live after him.

¹⁴Lord, remember how wicked his ancestors were,
and don't let the sins of his mother be wiped out.

¹⁵Lord, always remember their sins.
Then make people forget about them completely.

¹⁶“He did not remember to be loving.
He hurt the poor, the needy, and those who were sad
until they were nearly dead.

¹⁷He loved to put curses on others,
so let those same curses fall on him.
He did not like to bless others,
so do not let good things happen to him.

¹⁸He cursed others as often as he wore clothes.
Cursing others filled his body and his life,
like drinking water and using olive oil.

¹⁹So let curses cover him like clothes
and wrap around him like a belt.”

²⁰May the Lord do these things to those who accuse
me,
to those who speak evil against me.

²¹But you, Lord God,
be kind to me so others will know you are good.
Because your love is good, save me.

²²I am poor and helpless
and very sad.

²³I am dying like an evening shadow;
I am shaken off like a locust.

²⁴My knees are weak from hunger,
and I have grown thin.

²⁵My enemies insult me;
they look at me and shake their heads.

²⁶Lord my God, help me;
because you are loving, save me.

²⁷Then they will know that your power has done this;
they will know that you have done it, Lord.

²⁸They may curse me, but you bless me.
They may attack me, but they will be disgraced.
Then I, your servant, will be glad.

²⁹Let those who accuse me be disgraced
and covered with shame like a coat.

³⁰I will thank the Lord very much;
I will praise him in front of many people.

³¹He defends the helpless
and saves them from those who accuse them.

Life Lessons

[Psalms 110:1–112:10](#)

Situation

Although the Jews lived near nations that worshiped idols, God reminded Israel to worship him only. God promised to send the Messiah, indicating that full deliverance was yet to come. [Psalms 111](#) and [112](#) begin each phrase with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Observation

Praise the true God! Reading Scripture helps us know God better. When we know him better, we are equipped to worship him more earnestly.

Inspiration

The apostle Paul points out in [Romans 1](#) that everyone knows that there is a God. His existence is revealed in creation; creation demands a Creator, and design demands a Designer. And it is revealed in conscience; we all have an innate consciousness of right and wrong....

The heathen do not *want* to retain the true God in their knowledge. They know that belief in such a God would cramp their lifestyles. So they turn to idolatry. They make images of people, birds, animals, and snakes and then worship them. Since each successive image represents a downward step in the scale of creation, it follows that they feel less and less responsible to live clean lives. If their god is a snake, it doesn't really matter how they live. This explains

the close link between idolatry and immorality. Idols made by human beings do not make moral demands on their worshipers....

Belief determines behavior. That is why it is so important to have true views of God. The higher our thoughts of Him, the more our lives will be exalted, holy, and glorious. (From *Alone in Majesty* by William MacDonald)

Application

Who is God? Answer the question by making a list of God's attributes from these psalms. Circle three from your list. Over the next three days, reflect on one attribute each day. As the day goes by, discover how this reality about God affects you.

Exploration

Knowing God—[Hosea 6:3](#); [Matthew 22:29](#); [John 4:24](#); [7:16–17](#); [8:31–32](#); [Romans 1:21–25](#); [Ephesians 4:14–15](#), [18](#); [2 Peter 3:18](#).

The Lord Appoints a King

A psalm of David.

The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit by me at my right side
until I put your enemies under your control.”

²The Lord will enlarge your kingdom beyond
Jerusalem,

and you will rule over your enemies.

³Your people will join you on your day of battle.
You have been dressed in holiness from birth;
you have the freshness of a child.

⁴The Lord has made a promise
and will not change his mind.
He said, “You are a priest forever,
a priest like Melchizedek.”

⁵The Lord is beside you to help you.
When he becomes angry, he will crush kings.

⁶He will judge those nations, filling them with dead
bodies;

he will defeat rulers all over the world.

⁷The king will drink from the brook on the way.
Then he will be strengthened.

Praise the Lord's Goodness

Praise the Lord!

I will thank the Lord with all my heart
in the meeting of his good people.

²The Lord does great things;
those who enjoy them seek them.

³What he does is glorious and splendid,
and his goodness continues forever.

⁴His miracles are unforgettable.
The Lord is kind and merciful.

⁵He gives food to those who fear him.
He remembers his agreement forever.

⁶He has shown his people his power
when he gave them the lands of other nations.

⁷Everything he does is good and fair;
all his orders can be trusted.

⁸They will continue forever.
They were made true and right.

⁹He sets his people free.
He made his agreement everlasting.
He is holy and wonderful.

¹⁰Wisdom begins with respect for the Lord;
those who obey his orders have good understanding.
He should be praised forever.

Honest People Are Blessed

Praise the Lord!

Happy are those who respect the Lord,
who want what he commands.

²Their descendants will be powerful in the land;
the children of honest people will be blessed.

³Their houses will be full of wealth and riches,
and their goodness will continue forever.

⁴A light shines in the dark for honest people,
for those who are merciful and kind and good.

⁵It is good to be merciful and generous.

Those who are fair in their business

⁶will never be defeated.

Good people will always be remembered.

⁷They won't be afraid of bad news;
their hearts are steady because they trust the Lord.

⁸They are confident and will not be afraid;
they will look down on their enemies.

⁹They give freely to the poor.

The things they do are right and will continue forever.
They will be given great honor.

¹⁰The wicked will see this and become angry;
they will grind their teeth in anger and then disappear.
The wishes of the wicked will come to nothing.

Life Lessons

Psalms 113:1–115:18

Situation

The next six psalms were used during the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, and other traditional Jewish festivals.

Observation

Although the Israelites set aside one day a week to revere God, they used many scriptures to encourage them to have a thankful, loving attitude toward God.

Inspiration

I had no problem recognizing the command to worship. My problem was understanding and obeying... . For years—too many years—I was content to let my local church define “worship” for me, accepting worship as practiced by my adult role models.

The word was used almost exclusively to refer to our Sunday morning services, which seemed to mark the last day of the week—an afterthought—rather than the first. There was a specific time and a place for worship. It happened on Sundays, it happened from 11:0 A.M. to noon, and it happened in “the sanctuary.”

As time passed, I became vaguely uneasy. Surely there had to be more to it than I and my role models understood.

Eventually, God’s patient and quickening Spirit

moved me from a vague and passive acknowledgment of worship to a proactive pilgrimage of discovery. I began to explore worship in the Bible and to mull over the writing of others who were on this same quest long before I was....

I saw that real worship is much more than a Sunday experience. First as an intellectual acknowledgment and then sinking eighteen inches down into my heart as a deep-seated experience: Worship occurs throughout the week in a variety of ways....

So what? Does it make any difference?

For an answer, look at the people around you. Unless you live in a Christian cocoon—and even there you are probably not exempt—you are surrounded by those for whom high times bring hedonism, low times bring languidness, and in-between times bring the blahs. Offend them, and whether they're on a high, a low, or an in-between, out comes profanity.

Now consider David, in the Old Testament. Whether he was on a high, a low, or an in-between, out came psalms! From boyhood to mature adult, it was the same.

While not ignoring his well-chronicled humanity, observe that worship permeated his life and overflowed from his heart, saturating his lifestyle. No wonder God considered him a man after His own heart ([Acts 13:22](#))!

In return, God took this man whose lifestyle of worship separated him from the ordinary, run-of-the-

mill lifestyles of those around him and gave him a significant, fulfilling leadership role in His plan for Israel. (From *Lifestyle Worship* by John Garmo)

Application

Learn to continually praise God. Praise God while you do dishes and while you drive your car. Fill everyday moments with praise.

Exploration

Unceasing Praise—[Psalm 71:14](#); [Romans 12:1](#); [Colossians 3:17](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:16–18](#); [Hebrews 13:15](#); [Revelation 4:8](#).

Praise for the Lord's Kindness

Praise the Lord!

Praise him, you servants of the Lord;
praise the name of the Lord.

²The Lord's name should be praised
now and forever.

³The Lord's name should be praised
from where the sun rises to where it sets.

⁴The Lord is supreme over all the nations;
his glory reaches to the skies.

⁵No one is like the Lord our God,
who rules from heaven,

⁶who bends down to look
at the skies and the earth.

⁷The Lord lifts the poor from the dirt
and takes the helpless from the ashes.

⁸He seats them with princes,
the princes of his people.

⁹He gives children to the woman who has none
and makes her a happy mother.

Praise the Lord!

God Brought Israel from Egypt

When the Israelites went out of Egypt,
the people of Jacob left that foreign country.

²Then Judah became God's holy place;
Israel became the land he ruled.

³The Red Sea looked and ran away;
the Jordan River turned back.

⁴The mountains danced like sheep
and the hills like little lambs.

⁵Sea, why did you run away?
Jordan, why did you turn back?

⁶Mountains, why did you dance like sheep?
Hills, why did you dance like little lambs?

⁷Earth, shake with fear before the Lord,
before the God of Jacob.

⁸He turned a rock into a pool of water,
a hard rock into a spring of water.

The One True God

It does not belong to us, Lord.
The glory belongs to you
because of your love and loyalty.

²Why do the nations ask,
“Where is their God?”

³Our God is in heaven.
He does what he pleases.

⁴Their idols are made of silver and gold,
the work of human hands.

⁵They have mouths, but they cannot speak.
They have eyes, but they cannot see.

⁶They have ears, but they cannot hear.
They have noses, but they cannot smell.

⁷They have hands, but they cannot feel.
They have feet, but they cannot walk.
No sounds come from their throats.

⁸People who make idols will be like them,
and so will those who trust them.

⁹Family of Israel, trust the Lord;
he is your helper and your protection.

¹⁰Family of Aaron, trust the Lord;
he is your helper and your protection.

¹¹You who respect the Lord should trust him;
he is your helper and your protection.

¹²The Lord remembers us and will bless us.

He will bless the family of Israel;
he will bless the family of Aaron.

¹³The Lord will bless those who respect him,
from the smallest to the greatest.

¹⁴May the Lord give you success,
and may he give you and your children success.

¹⁵May you be blessed by the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

¹⁶Heaven belongs to the Lord,
but he gave the earth to people.

¹⁷Dead people do not praise the Lord;
those in the grave are silent.

¹⁸But we will praise the Lord
now and forever.
Praise the Lord!

Life Lessons

Psalms 116:1–117:2

Situation

After a close call with death, this unknown psalmist thanked God for answering his prayers and praised God for his deliverance.

Observation

Praise should be the natural result of answered prayer.

Inspiration

Worshipping in spirit is the opposite of worshipping in merely external ways. It is the opposite of empty formalism and traditionalism. Worshipping in truth is the opposite of worship based on an inadequate view of God. Worship must have heart and head. Worship must engage emotions and thought.

Truth without emotion produces dead orthodoxy and a church full (or half-full) of artificial admirers (like people who write generic anniversary cards for a living). On the other hand, emotion without truth produces empty frenzy and cultivates shallow people who refuse the discipline of rigorous thought. But true worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine. Strong affections for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of biblical worship.

Perhaps we can tie things together with this picture: The fuel of worship is the truth of God, the furnace of worship is the spirit of man, and the heat of

worship is the vital affections of reverence, contrition, trust, gratitude, and joy.

But there is something missing from this picture. There is furnace, fuel and heat, but no *fire*. The fuel of truth in the furnace of our spirit does not automatically produce the heat of worship. There must be ignition and fire. This is the Holy Spirit... .

Now we can complete our picture. The fuel of worship is a true vision of the greatness of God; the fire that makes the fuel burn white-hot is the quickening of the Holy Spirit; the furnace made alive and warm by the flame of the truth is our renewed spirit; and the resulting heat of our affections is powerful worship, pushing its way out in confessions, longings, acclamations, tears, songs, shouts, bowed heads, lifted hands and obedient lives. (From *Desiring God* by John Piper)

Application

Have you ever been in a desperate situation? Did you ever thank God for saving you? It is never too late. Thank him. If you are at a loss for words, read this psalm as your prayer to God.

Exploration

Thankfulness—[2 Chronicles 7:3](#); [Psalm 8:2](#); [30:11–12](#); [107:31–32](#); [Luke 17:15–16](#); [1 Corinthians 15:56–57](#); [2 Corinthians 1:10–11](#); [Ephesians 5:19–20](#).

Thanksgiving for Escaping Death

I love the Lord,
because he listens to my prayers for help.
²He paid attention to me,
so I will call to him for help as long as I live.
³The ropes of death bound me,
and the fear of the grave took hold of me.
I was troubled and sad.
⁴Then I called out the name of the Lord.
I said, "Please, Lord, save me!"

⁵The Lord is kind and does what is right;
our God is merciful.
⁶The Lord watches over the foolish;
when I was helpless, he saved me.
⁷I said to myself, "Relax,
because the Lord takes care of you."
⁸Lord, you saved me from death.
You stopped my eyes from crying;
you kept me from being defeated.
⁹So I will walk with the Lord
in the land of the living.
¹⁰I believed, so I said,
"I am completely ruined."
¹¹In my distress I said,
"All people are liars."

¹²What can I give the Lord
for all the good things he has given to me?

¹³I will lift up the cup of salvation,
and I will pray to the Lord.

¹⁴I will give the Lord what I promised
in front of all his people.

¹⁵The death of one that belongs to the Lord
is precious in his sight.

¹⁶Lord, I am your servant;
I am your servant and the son of your female servant.
You have freed me from my chains.

¹⁷I will give you an offering to show thanks to you,
and I will pray to the Lord.

¹⁸I will give the Lord what I promised
in front of all his people,

¹⁹in the Temple courtyards
in Jerusalem.

Praise the Lord!

A Hymn of Praise

All you nations, praise the Lord.

All you people, praise him

²because the Lord loves us very much,
and his truth is everlasting.

Praise the Lord!

Life Lessons

Psalm 118:1-29

Situation

The psalmist understood that in the midst of calamity, God was with him. God promised to guard and cherish his people forever.

Observation

We can live in assurance and calm. Despite troubles around us, if we love and trust God, he will be with us. We have nothing to fear if we put our trust in our Guardian.

Inspiration

We have the assurance that in the storms of life today, Jesus Himself will be standing just outside the door waiting to be invited in. He is waiting to share a meal with us, waiting to share our sorrows, to renew our courage, to come in and talk intimately.

We are not alone. We never shall be. He has to be there; all we need do is open the door to Him. What is your need today? Do you need comfort in your personal trials? Christ is waiting. Do you need forgiveness for your sins? He is knocking. Do you need to make a new commitment to serve God with your life? Whatever your spiritual need, right now Christ is knocking at the door of your heart. He is Lord of the universe, and He wants to be Lord of your life as well. (From *Storm Warning* by Billy Graham)

Application

What will you depend on today for your needs?

Although you may be tempted to trust earthly means more than God, have more confidence in God than anything else.

Exploration

Assurance—[Psalm 46:1–3](#); [Isaiah 43:1–7](#); [Jeremiah 1:6–8](#); [1 Corinthians 2:4](#).

Thanksgiving for Victory

Thank the Lord because he is good.
His love continues forever.

²Let the people of Israel say,
“His love continues forever.”

³Let the family of Aaron say,
“His love continues forever.”

⁴Let those who respect the Lord say,
“His love continues forever.”

⁵I was in trouble, so I called to the Lord.
The Lord answered me and set me free.

⁶I will not be afraid, because the Lord is with me.
People can't do anything to me.

⁷The Lord is with me to help me,
so I will see my enemies defeated.

⁸It is better to trust the Lord
than to trust people.

⁹It is better to trust the Lord
than to trust princes.

¹⁰All the nations surrounded me,
but I defeated them in the name of the Lord.

¹¹They surrounded me on every side,
but with the Lord's power I defeated them.

¹²They surrounded me like a swarm of bees,

but they died as quickly as thorns burn.
By the Lord's power, I defeated them.

¹³They chased me until I was almost defeated,
but the Lord helped me.

¹⁴The Lord gives me strength and a song.
He has saved me.

¹⁵Shouts of joy and victory
come from the tents of those who do right:
"The Lord has done powerful things."

¹⁶The power of the Lord has won the victory;
with his power the Lord has done mighty things.

¹⁷I will not die, but live,
and I will tell what the Lord has done.

¹⁸The Lord has taught me a hard lesson,
but he did not let me die.

¹⁹Open for me the Temple gates.
Then I will come in and thank the Lord.

²⁰This is the Lord's gate;
only those who are good may enter through it.

²¹Lord, I thank you for answering me.
You have saved me.

²²The stone that the builders rejected
became the cornerstone.

²³The Lord did this,
and it is wonderful to us.

²⁴This is the day that the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad today!

²⁵Please, Lord, save us;
please, Lord, give us success.

²⁶God bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

We bless all of you from the Temple of the Lord.

²⁷The Lord is God,
and he has shown kindness to us.
With branches in your hands, join the feast.
Come to the corners of the altar.

²⁸You are my God, and I will thank you;
you are my God, and I will praise your greatness.

²⁹Thank the Lord because he is good.
His love continues forever.

Life Lessons

[Psalm 119:1-176](#)

Situation

This testimony exalted the Word of God—the complete and perfect standard of truth, values, reality, and behavior.

Observation

God's Word is wholly sufficient for godly living. By grasping its powerful message, God's children can be pure.

Inspiration

We need sound doctrine. The Spirit of holiness is also the Spirit of truth. Truth and righteousness go together....

Why? Why is sound doctrine necessary for sanctification? For real sanctification to occur in the Christian life at least three absolute changes are necessary. There must be a change in our consciousness. There must be a change in our convictions. There must be a change in our conscience. Consciousness, conviction, and conscience—these three are all vital to our sanctification.

Consciousness involves knowledge. Before we can willfully do what God commands and what pleases Him, we must first understand what it is that God requires. From the law comes a knowledge of sin. Also from the law comes a knowledge of righteousness.

A person could “accidentally” obey the law without doing so consciously. But such an action would have no moral virtue to it. Suppose a man enjoys driving his car at fifty miles an hour. It pleases him to ride at that rate of speed. He drives his car at fifty miles an hour in fifty-five-mile-per-hour zones and in fifteen-mile-per-hour zones. When he drives in the fifty-five-mile-per-hour zone, he is within the speed limit. He is obeying the law. But when he goes fifty in a fifteen-mile-per-hour-zone, he is a menace to those around him.

Suppose our mythical driver systematically refuses to look at speed limit signs. He averts his gaze from any sign that even appears to mark a speed limit. He keeps himself purposely unconscious of speed limits. At times he “happens” to obey the law, but purely by coincidence. If the man wants to achieve moral virtue as a driver and always drive within the speed limit, he must first become aware, he must become conscious of the law.

But consciousness is not enough. We all have seen people who are quite conscious of the speed limits while they are violating them. We don’t have to look beyond ourselves to discover the culprits. For our behavior to change we must move beyond consciousness to conviction.

Conviction is a matter of depth and intensity. It is one thing to be aware that a certain action is right. It is another to have a conviction about it. It is a lot easier for us to compromise our knowledge than to act against convictions. A conviction is knowledge

that is settled. It has a firm hold on us. It goes beyond our brains and penetrates the conscience.

Our conscience acts as a kind of governor upon our behavior. It is the inner voice that either accuses or excuses us. It monitors our behavior by way of approval or disapproval. The problem is that our conscience doesn't always tell us the truth. We are adept at training it in the direction of self-approval...

For the conscience to function in a godly way it must be influenced by godly convictions. To gain godly consciences, our consciousness of what is right and what is wrong must be sharpened. This involves the mind. It is a matter of doctrine. (From *Pleasing God* by R. C. Sproul)

Application

God's Word teaches us sound doctrine. When was the last time you memorized a verse? Memorize [Psalm 119:105](#). Consider memorizing one verse a week.

Exploration

God's Word—[2 Samuel 22:31](#); [Psalm 12:6](#); [Proverbs 30:5](#); [2 Timothy 3:16–17](#); [Hebrews 4:12](#).

Certain things no one can do for you. And one of those is spending time with God. Listening to God is a firsthand experience. —Max Lucado (*Just Like Jesus*)

The Word of God

Happy are those who live pure lives,
who follow the Lord's teachings.

²Happy are those who keep his rules,
who try to obey him with their whole heart.

³They don't do what is wrong;
they follow his ways.

⁴Lord, you gave your orders
to be obeyed completely.

⁵I wish I were more loyal
in obeying your demands.

⁶Then I would not be ashamed
when I study your commands.

⁷When I learned that your laws are fair,
I praised you with an honest heart.

⁸I will obey your demands,
so please don't ever leave me.

⁹How can a young person live a pure life?
By obeying your word.

¹⁰With all my heart I try to obey you.
Don't let me break your commands.

¹¹I have taken your words to heart

so I would not sin against you.

¹²Lord, you should be praised.

Teach me your demands.

¹³My lips will tell about
all the laws you have spoken.

¹⁴I enjoy living by your rules
as people enjoy great riches.

¹⁵I think about your orders
and study your ways.

¹⁶I enjoy obeying your demands,
and I will not forget your word.

¹⁷Do good to me, your servant, so I can live,
so I can obey your word.

¹⁸Open my eyes to see
the miracles in your teachings.

¹⁹I am a stranger on earth.
Do not hide your commands from me.

²⁰I wear myself out with desire
for your laws all the time.

²¹You scold proud people;
those who ignore your commands are cursed.

²²Don't let me be insulted and hated
because I keep your rules.

²³Even if princes speak against me,
I, your servant, will think about your demands.

²⁴Your rules give me pleasure;
they give me good advice.

²⁵I am about to die.

Give me life, as you have promised.

²⁶I told you about my life, and you answered me.

Teach me your demands.

²⁷Help me understand your orders.

Then I will think about your miracles.

²⁸I am sad and tired.

Make me strong again as you have promised.

²⁹Don't let me be dishonest;

have mercy on me by helping me obey your teachings.

³⁰I have chosen the way of truth;

I have obeyed your laws.

³¹I hold on to your rules.

Lord, do not let me be disgraced.

³²I will quickly obey your commands,

because you have made me happy.

³³Lord, teach me your demands,
and I will keep them until the end.

³⁴Help me understand, so I can keep your teachings,
obeying them with all my heart.

³⁵Lead me in the path of your commands,
because that makes me happy.

³⁶Make me want to keep your rules
instead of wishing for riches.

³⁷Keep me from looking at worthless things.
Let me live by your word.

³⁸Keep your promise to me, your servant,
so you will be respected.

³⁹Take away the shame I fear,
because your laws are good.

⁴⁰How I want to follow your orders.
Give me life because of your goodness.

⁴¹Lord, show me your love,
and save me as you have promised.

⁴²I have an answer for people who insult me,
because I trust what you say.

⁴³Never keep me from speaking your truth,
because I depend on your fair laws.

⁴⁴I will obey your teachings
forever and ever.

⁴⁵So I will live in freedom,
because I want to follow your orders.

⁴⁶I will discuss your rules with kings
and will not be ashamed.

⁴⁷I enjoy obeying your commands,
which I love.

⁴⁸I praise your commands, which I love,
and I think about your demands.

⁴⁹Remember your promise to me, your servant;
it gives me hope.

⁵⁰When I suffer, this comforts me:
Your promise gives me life.

⁵¹Proud people always make fun of me,
but I do not reject your teachings.

⁵²I remember your laws from long ago,
and they comfort me, Lord.

⁵³I become angry with wicked people
who do not keep your teachings.

⁵⁴I sing about your demands
wherever I live.

⁵⁵Lord, I remember you at night,
and I will obey your teachings.

⁵⁶This is what I do:
I follow your orders.

⁵⁷Lord, you are my share in life;
I have promised to obey your words.

⁵⁸I prayed to you with all my heart.
Have mercy on me as you have promised.

⁵⁹I thought about my life,
and I decided to follow your rules.

⁶⁰I hurried and did not wait
to obey your commands.

⁶¹Wicked people have tied me up,
but I have not forgotten your teachings.

⁶²In the middle of the night, I get up to thank you
because your laws are right.

⁶³I am a friend to everyone who fears you,
to anyone who obeys your orders.

⁶⁴Lord, your love fills the earth.
Teach me your demands.

⁶⁵You have done good things for your servant,
as you have promised, Lord.

⁶⁶Teach me wisdom and knowledge
because I trust your commands.

⁶⁷Before I suffered, I did wrong,
but now I obey your word.

⁶⁸You are good, and you do what is good.
Teach me your demands.

⁶⁹Proud people have made up lies about me,
but I will follow your orders with all my heart.

⁷⁰Those people have no feelings,
but I love your teachings.

⁷¹It was good for me to suffer
so I would learn your demands.

⁷²Your teachings are worth more to me
than thousands of pieces of gold and silver.

⁷³You made me and formed me with your hands.
Give me understanding so I can learn your commands.

⁷⁴Let those who respect you rejoice when they see me,
because I put my hope in your word.

⁷⁵Lord, I know that your laws are right
and that it was right for you to punish me.

⁷⁶Comfort me with your love,
as you promised me, your servant.

⁷⁷Have mercy on me so that I may live.
I love your teachings.

⁷⁸Make proud people ashamed because they lied about
me.

But I will think about your orders.

⁷⁹Let those who respect you return to me,
those who know your rules.

⁸⁰Let me obey your demands perfectly
so I will not be ashamed.

⁸¹I am weak from waiting for you to save me,

but I hope in your word.

⁸²My eyes are tired from looking for your promise.

When will you comfort me?

⁸³Even though I am like a wine bag going up in smoke,
I do not forget your demands.

⁸⁴How long will I live?

When will you judge those who are hurting me?

⁸⁵Proud people have dug pits to trap me.

They have nothing to do with your teachings.

⁸⁶All of your commands can be trusted.

Liars are hurting me. Help me!

⁸⁷They have almost put me in the grave,
but I have not rejected your orders.

⁸⁸Give me life by your love
so I can obey your rules.

⁸⁹Lord, your word is everlasting;
it continues forever in heaven.

⁹⁰Your loyalty will go on and on;
you made the earth, and it still stands.

⁹¹All things continue to this day because of your laws,
because all things serve you.

⁹²If I had not loved your teachings,
I would have died from my sufferings.

⁹³I will never forget your orders,
because you have given me life by them.

⁹⁴I am yours. Save me.

I want to obey your orders.

⁹⁵Wicked people are waiting to destroy me,
but I will think about your rules.

⁹⁶Everything I see has its limits,
but your commands have none.

⁹⁷How I love your teachings!
I think about them all day long.

⁹⁸Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,
because they are mine forever.

⁹⁹I am wiser than all my teachers,
because I think about your rules.

¹⁰⁰I have more understanding than the older leaders,
because I follow your orders.

¹⁰¹I have avoided every evil way
so I could obey your word.

¹⁰²I haven't walked away from your laws,
because you yourself are my teacher.

¹⁰³Your promises are sweet to me,
sweeter than honey in my mouth!

¹⁰⁴Your orders give me understanding,
so I hate lying ways.

¹⁰⁵Your word is like a lamp for my feet
and a light for my path.

¹⁰⁶I will do what I have promised
and obey your fair laws.

¹⁰⁷I have suffered for a long time.
Lord, give me life by your word.

¹⁰⁸Lord, accept my willing praise
and teach me your laws.

¹⁰⁹My life is always in danger,
but I haven't forgotten your teachings.

¹¹⁰Wicked people have set a trap for me,
but I haven't strayed from your orders.

¹¹¹I will follow your rules forever,
because they make me happy.

¹¹²I will try to do what you demand
forever, until the end.

¹¹³I hate disloyal people,
but I love your teachings.

¹¹⁴You are my hiding place and my shield;
I hope in your word.

¹¹⁵Get away from me, you who do evil,
so I can keep my God's commands.

¹¹⁶Support me as you promised so I can live.
Don't let me be embarrassed because of my hopes.

¹¹⁷Help me, and I will be saved.
I will always respect your demands.

¹¹⁸You reject those who ignore your demands,
because their lies mislead them.

¹¹⁹You throw away the wicked of the world like trash.
So I will love your rules.

¹²⁰I shake in fear of you;
I respect your laws.

¹²¹I have done what is fair and right.
Don't leave me to those who wrong me.

¹²²Promise that you will help me, your servant.
Don't let proud people wrong me.

¹²³My eyes are tired from looking for your salvation
and for your good promise.

¹²⁴Show your love to me, your servant,

and teach me your demands.

¹²⁵I am your servant. Give me wisdom
so I can understand your rules.

¹²⁶Lord, it is time for you to do something,
because people have disobeyed your teachings.

¹²⁷I love your commands
more than the purest gold.

¹²⁸I respect all your orders,
so I hate lying ways.

¹²⁹Your rules are wonderful.
That is why I keep them.

¹³⁰Learning your words gives wisdom
and understanding for the foolish.

¹³¹I am nearly out of breath.
I really want to learn your commands.

¹³²Look at me and have mercy on me
as you do for those who love you.

¹³³Guide my steps as you promised;
don't let any sin control me.

¹³⁴Save me from harmful people
so I can obey your orders.

¹³⁵Show your kindness to me, your servant.
Teach me your demands.

¹³⁶Tears stream from my eyes,
because people do not obey your teachings.

¹³⁷Lord, you do what is right,
and your laws are fair.

¹³⁸The rules you commanded are right

and completely trustworthy.

¹³⁹I am so upset I am worn out,
because my enemies have forgotten your words.

¹⁴⁰Your promises are proven,
so I, your servant, love them.

¹⁴¹I am unimportant and hated,
but I have not forgotten your orders.

¹⁴²Your goodness continues forever,
and your teachings are true.

¹⁴³I have had troubles and misery,
but I love your commands.

¹⁴⁴Your rules are always good.
Help me understand so I can live.

¹⁴⁵Lord, I call to you with all my heart.
Answer me, and I will keep your demands.

¹⁴⁶I call to you.
Save me so I can obey your rules.

¹⁴⁷I wake up early in the morning and cry out.
I hope in your word.

¹⁴⁸I stay awake all night
so I can think about your promises.

¹⁴⁹Listen to me because of your love;
Lord, give me life by your laws.

¹⁵⁰Those who love evil are near,
but they are far from your teachings.

¹⁵¹But, Lord, you are also near,
and all your commands are true.

¹⁵²Long ago I learned from your rules
that you made them to continue forever.

¹⁵³See my suffering and rescue me.

See my suffering and rescue me,
because I have not forgotten your teachings.

¹⁵⁴Argue my case and save me.

Let me live by your promises.

¹⁵⁵Wicked people are far from being saved,
because they do not want your demands.

¹⁵⁶Lord, you are very kind;
give me life by your laws.

¹⁵⁷Many enemies are after me,
but I have not rejected your rules.

¹⁵⁸I see those traitors, and I hate them,
because they do not obey what you say.

¹⁵⁹See how I love your orders.
Lord, give me life by your love.

¹⁶⁰Your words are true from the start,
and all your laws will be fair forever.

¹⁶¹Leaders attack me for no reason,
but I fear your law in my heart.

¹⁶²I am as happy over your promises
as if I had found a great treasure.

¹⁶³I hate and despise lies,
but I love your teachings.

¹⁶⁴Seven times a day I praise you
for your fair laws.

¹⁶⁵Those who love your teachings will find true peace,
and nothing will defeat them.

¹⁶⁶I am waiting for you to save me, Lord.
I will obey your commands.

¹⁶⁷I obey your rules,
and I love them very much.

¹⁶⁸I obey your orders and rules,
because you know everything I do.

¹⁶⁹Hear my cry to you, Lord.
Let your word help me understand.

¹⁷⁰Listen to my prayer;
save me as you promised.

¹⁷¹Let me speak your praise,
because you have taught me your demands.

¹⁷²Let me sing about your promises,
because all your commands are fair.

¹⁷³Give me your helping hand,
because I have chosen your commands.

¹⁷⁴I want you to save me, Lord.
I love your teachings.

¹⁷⁵Let me live so I can praise you,
and let your laws help me.

¹⁷⁶I have wandered like a lost sheep.

Look for your servant, because I have not forgotten
your commands.

Life Lessons

Psalms 120:1–123:4

Situation

Psalms 120–135 were sung during annual feasts. Pilgrims would also recite these psalms as they journeyed to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Observation

The writer (some believe Hezekiah) asked God to rescue him from false accusers.

Inspiration

All of us at times find ourselves and our futures seemingly in the hands of other people. Their decisions or their actions determine whether we get a good grade or a poor one, whether we are promoted or fired, whether our careers blossom or fold. I am not overlooking our own responsibility in these situations, but all of us know that even when we have, so to speak, done our best, we are still dependent upon the favor or frown of that teacher or boss or commanding officer. We are, from a human point of view, often at the mercy of other people and their decisions or actions....

Can we trust God that He can and will work in the heart of that individual to bring about His plan for us? Or consider the instance when someone is out to harm us, to ruin our reputation, or jeopardize our career: Can we trust God to intervene in the heart of that person so that he does not carry out his evil intent? According to the Bible, the answer in both

instances is yes. We can trust God. (From *Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges)

Application

Do you know someone who stirs up trouble? Have you seen that person develop enemies? What can you do? Can you help clear up a misunderstanding? Can you help make peace? If it is possible to resolve the conflict, be a peacemaker.

Exploration

Deceit—[Exodus 20:16](#); [Job 11:11](#); [Psalms 5:6](#); [43:1](#); [Proverbs 12:22](#); [Acts 5:7-9](#); [Ephesians 4:25](#); [Colossians 3:9](#).

A Prayer of Someone Far from Home

A psalm for going up to worship.

When I was in trouble, I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.

²Lord, save me from liars
and from those who plan evil.

³You who plan evil, what will God do to you?
How will he punish you?

⁴He will punish you with the sharp arrows of a warrior
and with burning coals of wood.

⁵How terrible it is for me to live in the land of Meshech,
to live among the people of Kedar.

⁶I have lived too long
with people who hate peace.

⁷When I talk peace,
they want war.

The Lord Guards His People

A song for going up to worship.

I look up to the hills,
but where does my help come from?
²My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

³He will not let you be defeated.
He who guards you never sleeps.

⁴He who guards Israel
never rests or sleeps.

⁵The Lord guards you.
The Lord is the shade that protects you from the sun.

⁶The sun cannot hurt you during the day,
and the moon cannot hurt you at night.

⁷The Lord will protect you from all dangers;
he will guard your life.

⁸The Lord will guard you as you come and go,
both now and forever.

Happy People in Jerusalem

A song for going up to worship. Of David.

I was happy when they said to me,
“Let’s go to the Temple of the Lord.”

²Jerusalem, we are standing
at your gates.

³Jerusalem is built as a city
with the buildings close together.

⁴The tribes go up there,
the tribes who belong to the Lord.
It is the rule in Israel
to praise the Lord at Jerusalem.

⁵There the descendants of David
set their thrones to judge the people.

⁶Pray for peace in Jerusalem:

“May those who love her be safe.

⁷May there be peace within her walls
and safety within her strong towers.”

⁸To help my relatives and friends,
I say, “Let Jerusalem have peace.”

⁹For the sake of the Temple of the Lord our God,
I wish good for her.

A Prayer for Mercy

A song for going up to worship.

Lord, I look upward to you,
you who live in heaven.

²Slaves depend on their masters,
and a female servant depends on her mistress.
In the same way, we depend on the Lord our God;
we wait for him to show us mercy.

³Have mercy on us, Lord. Have mercy on us,
because we have been insulted.

⁴We have suffered many insults from lazy people
and much cruelty from the proud.

Life Lessons

Psalms 124:1–127:5

Situation

God rescued the Israelites from their enemies. Although the odds were against God's people, he saved them.

Observation

We should not seek strength in weapons, economic might, or political strength. Real power comes from God.

Inspiration

God has done everything possible to bring you salvation; you can add nothing to what He has done. He has shown us the vision of the coming storm to give advance warning of the judgment so that we can flee from His wrath and come to Him. If you wish to be saved and go to heaven, you can, by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior.

Jesus Christ rose from the dead to be alive forever. Because He is alive and because He can be everywhere at once, He is right there where you're reading. All you have to do is take Him, receive Him, accept Him personally into your heart as your Lord and Savior....

What more could you desire, ask, or ever hope for than that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you forever? (From *Storm Warning* by Billy Graham)

Application

How do you relieve stress? Do you take a nap,

reach for a drink, read a book, or play a round of golf? Put a bookmark in this psalm. When you feel swamped with problems, call on a friend to help you avoid inappropriate ways to relieve stress. Review this psalm when you feel pressured. Then face the problem with God's help.

Exploration

Deliverance—[Exodus 12:17, 23](#); [14:21–31](#); [Judges 4:3](#); [Mark 4:38–40](#).

The Lord Saves His People

A song for going up to worship. Of David.

What if the Lord had not been on our side?
(Let Israel repeat this.)

²What if the Lord had not been on our side
when we were attacked?

³When they were angry with us,
they would have swallowed us alive.

⁴They would have been like a flood drowning us;
they would have poured over us like a river.

⁵They would have swept us away like a mighty stream.

⁶Praise the Lord,
who did not let them chew us up.

⁷We escaped like a bird
from the hunter's trap.

The trap broke,
and we escaped.

⁸Our help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

God Protects Those Who Trust Him

A song for going up to worship.

Those who trust the Lord are like Mount Zion,
which sits unmoved forever.

²As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
the Lord surrounds his people
now and forever.

³The wicked will not rule
over those who do right.
If they did, the people who do right
might use their power to do evil.

⁴Lord, be good to those who are good,
whose hearts are honest.

⁵But, Lord, when you remove those who do evil,
also remove those who stop following you.
Let there be peace in Israel.

Lord, Bring Your People Back

A song for going up to worship.

When the Lord brought the prisoners back to
Jerusalem,

it seemed as if we were dreaming.

²Then we were filled with laughter,
and we sang happy songs.

Then the other nations said,

“The Lord has done great things for them.”

³The Lord has done great things for us,
and we are very glad.

⁴Lord, return our prisoners again,
as you bring streams to the desert.

⁵Those who cry as they plant crops
will sing at harvest time.

⁶Those who cry
as they carry out the seeds
will return singing
and carrying bundles of grain.

All Good Things Come from God

A song for going up to worship. Of Solomon.

If the Lord doesn't build the house,
the builders are working for nothing.

If the Lord doesn't guard the city,
the guards are watching for nothing.

²It is no use for you to get up early
and stay up late,
working for a living.

The Lord gives sleep to those he loves.

³Children are a gift from the Lord;
babies are a reward.

⁴Children who are born to a young man
are like arrows in the hand of a warrior.

⁵Happy is the man
who has his bag full of arrows.

They will not be defeated
when they fight their enemies at the city gate.

Life Lessons

Psalms 128:1–131:3

Situation

Possibly written by King Hezekiah, these lyrics were often sung at Israelite weddings.

Observation

If you allow God to be head of your home, he will bless your family life.

Inspiration

Perhaps the most taxing of all, are the years a family finds itself in and out of crisis situations. Little babies that cooed and gurgled grow up into challenging, independent-thinking adolescents. The protective, sheltered environment of the home is broken into by the school, new friends, alien philosophies, financial strain, illness, accidents, hard questions, constant decisions, and busy schedules ... and it isn't difficult to feel the pressure mounting—especially when you add dating, new drivers in the family, leaving for college, talk of marriage, and moving out. Whew! And what does God say about these years? ...

He says we'll be "blessed." We'll be "happy." It will "be well" with us during these years... . In the family portrayed on this scriptural canvas, "the Lord" is still central...

Even before you finish, ... it may be the right time for you to come to terms with the truth regarding your family. I must be honest with you, in most of the

family conflicts I have dealt with involving trouble with teenagers, the problem has been more with parents who were either too liberal and permissive or too inflexible, distant, rigid (and sometimes hypocritical) than with teenagers who were unwilling to cooperate. When the modeling is as it should be, there is seldom much trouble from those who fall under the shadow of the leader. Strengthening your grip on the family may start with an unguarded appraisal of the leadership your family is expected to follow. (From *Strengthening Your Grip* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Do you look forward to going home or do you dread it? Is God the head of your home? Pray for your family daily. Memorize a favorite psalm as a family. After dinner, read a chapter from the Bible every day for a month.

Exploration

Marriage and Family—[Genesis 2:18–25](#); [Exodus 20:12](#); [Matthew 19:5–6](#); [Mark 7:9–13](#); [Ephesians 5:22–33](#).

The Happy Home

A song for going up to worship.

Happy are those who respect the Lord and obey him.

²You will enjoy what you work for,
and you will be blessed with good things.

³Your wife will give you many children,
like a vine that produces much fruit.
Your children will bring you much good,
like olive branches that produce many olives.

⁴This is how the man who respects the Lord
will be blessed.

⁵May the Lord bless you from Mount Zion;
may you enjoy the good things of Jerusalem all your
life.

⁶May you see your grandchildren.
Let there be peace in Israel.

A Prayer Against the Enemies

A song for going up to worship.

They have treated me badly all my life.

(Let Israel repeat this.)

²They have treated me badly all my life,
but they have not defeated me.

³Like farmers plowing, they plowed over my back,
making long wounds.

⁴But the Lord does what is right;
he has set me free from those wicked people.

⁵Let those who hate Jerusalem
be turned back in shame.

⁶Let them be like the grass on the roof
that dries up before it has grown.

⁷There is not enough of it to fill a hand
or to make into a bundle to fill one's arms.

⁸Let those who pass by them not say,
"May the Lord bless you.
We bless you by the power of the Lord."

A Prayer for Mercy

A song for going up to worship.

Lord, I am in great trouble,
so I call out to you.

²Lord, hear my voice;
listen to my prayer for help.

³Lord, if you punished people for all their sins,
no one would be left, Lord.

⁴But you forgive us,
so you are respected.

⁵I wait for the Lord to help me,
and I trust his word.

⁶I wait for the Lord to help me
more than night watchmen wait for the dawn,
more than night watchmen wait for the dawn.

⁷People of Israel, put your hope in the Lord
because he is loving
and able to save.

⁸He will save Israel
from all their sins.

Childlike Trust in the Lord

A song for going up to worship. Of David.

Lord, my heart is not proud;
I don't look down on others.
I don't do great things,
and I can't do miracles.

²But I am calm and quiet,
like a baby with its mother.
I am at peace, like a baby with its mother.

³People of Israel, put your hope in the Lord
now and forever.

Life Lessons

Psalms 132:1–134:3

Situation

These songs of worship, written by various writers, were also sung by pilgrims on their way to the Temple.

Observation

Honoring and worshipping God not only causes God's people to rejoice, it also unifies them.

Inspiration

I had a vision one day while our church was worshipping. As I looked around at the people I have come to love, I saw that each was an earthen vessel, a real mud pot... But as I continued to look, in prayer and worship, I looked “into” each mud pot, and what I saw was exquisite molten gold. Each person, frail, vulnerable, and half-fashioned, had a treasure inside. But then I saw something more—each pot was cracked. Finally I looked again and saw something miraculous: the molten gold was oozing through the cracks. That is how ministry comes into the world, not poured out of expensive vases, but through the orifice of the faults and weaknesses of real people who are being transfigured by Christ....

Relational life is not a mere accessory to spirituality or ministry, but the heart of it. Finding unity within diversity because of the diversity, and not in spite of it, is an important link with the unity within God himself and is both a mark of spirituality

and true ministry. (From *Disciplines of the Hungry Heart* by Paul Stevens)

Application

Work to become unified. Don't avoid conversations that are necessary to make peace, but resist the temptation to become angry. Be quick to forgive and careful in your response. Hear the whole story first, then respond. Your opinions may differ, but part as friends.

Exploration

God as Potter—[Isaiah 64:8](#). God's People as Clay—[2 Corinthians 4:7–11](#). God's Love and Ours—[1 John 4:7–21](#).

In Praise of the Temple

A song for going up to worship.

Lord, remember David
and all his suffering.

²He made an oath to the Lord,
a promise to the Mighty God of Jacob.

³He said, "I will not go home to my house,
or lie down on my bed,

⁴or close my eyes,
or let myself sleep

⁵until I find a place for the Lord.

I want to provide a home for the Mighty God of
Jacob."

⁶We heard about the Ark in Bethlehem.
We found it at Kiriath Jearim.

⁷Let's go to the Lord's house.
Let's worship at his footstool.

⁸Rise, Lord, and come to your resting place;
come with the Ark that shows your strength.

⁹May your priests do what is right.
May your people sing for joy.

¹⁰For the sake of your servant David,
do not reject your appointed king.

¹¹The Lord made a promise to David,
a sure promise that he will not take back.
He promised, "I will make one of your descendants
rule as king after you.

¹²If your sons keep my agreement
and the rules that I teach them,
then their sons after them will rule
on your throne forever and ever."

¹³The Lord has chosen Jerusalem;
he wants it for his home.

¹⁴He says, "This is my resting place forever.
Here is where I want to stay.

¹⁵I will bless her with plenty;
I will fill her poor with food.

¹⁶I will cover her priests with salvation,
and those who worship me will really sing for joy.

¹⁷"I will make a king come from the family of David.
I will provide my appointed one descendants to rule
after him.

¹⁸I will cover his enemies with shame,
but his crown will shine."

The Love of God's People

A song for going up to worship. Of David.

It is good and pleasant
when God's people live together in peace!
²It is like perfumed oil poured on the priest's head
and running down his beard.
It ran down Aaron's beard
and on to the collar of his robes.
³It is like the dew of Mount Hermon
falling on the hills of Jerusalem.
There the Lord gives his blessing
of life forever.

Temple Guards, Praise the Lord

A song for going up to worship.

Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord,
you who serve at night in the Temple of the Lord.

²Raise your hands in the Temple
and praise the Lord.

³May the Lord bless you from Mount Zion,
he who made heaven and earth.

Life Lessons

Psalm 135:1-21

Situation

This writer praised God because God chose Israel as his people, God created a beautiful world, and God has greater power than any other god.

Observation

God's children worship only him, while the heathen worship idols in vain.

Inspiration

We usually think of an idol as a religious figure carved out of wood or stone, perhaps in some primitive tribe, far removed from civilization. But we have our "idols" today, because an idol is something that you worship in place of the living God. Some people worship the idol of beauty or sexual pleasure. Some people worship the idol of money and security—although I have observed that the more money some people have the more insecure they become. Some people worship at the shrine of power, constantly scheming for ways they can dominate others.

... What is your idol? What really, honestly, dominates your life? What are your priorities, and what are the real (although perhaps hidden) motives in your everyday living? Is Christ on the throne of your life, or is it self? You don't have to practice voodoo or be a follower of a strange cult to have been deceived... . Anything that entices you away

from a wholehearted commitment to Christ is being used of Satan to deceive you. (From *Approaching Hoofbeats* by Billy Graham)

Application

What inhibits your relationship with God? Get rid of distractions: pay off your credit cards, turn off the television for a night, and leave the motor home parked for the weekend. Take time to improve your friendship with God this week.

Exploration

Idols—[Deuteronomy 32:16](#); [Psalms 96:5](#); [Isaiah 2:8–9](#); [Colossians 3:5–6](#); [Revelation 9:20](#).

The Lord Saves, Idols Do Not

Praise the Lord!

Praise the name of the Lord;
praise him, you servants of the Lord,
²you who stand in the Lord's Temple
and in the Temple courtyards.

³Praise the Lord, because he is good;
sing praises to him, because it is pleasant.

⁴The Lord has chosen the people of Jacob for himself;
he has chosen the people of Israel for his very own.

⁵I know that the Lord is great.
Our Lord is greater than all the gods.

⁶The Lord does what he pleases,
in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and the deep oceans.

⁷He brings the clouds from the ends of the earth.
He sends the lightning with the rain.
He brings out the wind from his storehouses.

⁸He destroyed the firstborn sons in Egypt
the firstborn of both people and animals.

⁹He did many signs and miracles in Egypt
against the king and his servants.

¹⁰He defeated many nations
and killed powerful kings:

¹¹Sihon king of the Amorites,
Og king of Bashan,
and all the kings of Canaan.

¹²Then he gave their land as a gift,
a gift to his people, the Israelites.

¹³Lord, your name is everlasting;
Lord, you will be remembered forever.

¹⁴The Lord defends his people
and has mercy on his servants.

¹⁵The idols of other nations are made of silver and
gold,
the work of human hands.

¹⁶They have mouths, but they cannot speak.
They have eyes, but they cannot see.

¹⁷They have ears, but they cannot hear.
They have no breath in their mouths.

¹⁸People who make idols will be like them,
and so will those who trust them.

¹⁹Family of Israel, praise the Lord.
Family of Aaron, praise the Lord.

²⁰Family of Levi, praise the Lord.
You who respect the Lord should praise him.

²¹You people of Jerusalem, praise the Lord on Mount
Zion.

Praise the Lord!

Life Lessons

Psalm 136:1-26

Situation

People cannot put a limit on God's patient care. He painstakingly created every detail of the universe and patiently provides for his people.

Observation

Thank God because he has more resources than we can ever exhaust.

Inspiration

We should never take any blessing for granted, but accept everything as a gift from the Father of Lights. Whole days may be spent occasionally in the holy practice of being thankful. We should write on a tablet one by one the things for which we are grateful to God and to our fellow men. And a constant return to this thought during the day as our minds get free will serve to fix the habit in our hearts....

In trying to count our many blessings, the difficulty is not to find things to count, but to find time to enumerate them all. Personally, I have gotten great help from the practice of talking over with God the many kindnesses I have received from my fellow men. To my parents I owe my life and my upbringing. To my teachers I owe that patient line-upon-line instruction that took me when I was a young, ignorant pagan and enabled me to read and write. To the patriots and statesmen of the past I owe the liberties I now enjoy. To numerous and unknown

soldiers who shed their blood to keep our country free I owe a debt I can never pay. And I please God and enlarge my own heart when I remind the Lord that I am grateful for them. For every man and woman of every race and nationality who may have contributed anything to my peace and welfare I am grateful, and I shall not let God forget that I am. (From *The Root of Righteousness* by A. W. Tozer)

Application

How has God blessed you? How have others contributed to your life? Take time to thank God for ten blessings today.

Exploration

Thanksgiving—[2 Chronicles 20:21–22](#); [Psalm 103:1–5](#); [Revelation 4:9–11](#).

God's Love Continues Forever

Give thanks to the Lord because he is good.
His love continues forever.

²Give thanks to the God of gods.
His love continues forever.

³Give thanks to the Lord of lords.
His love continues forever.

⁴Only he can do great miracles.
His love continues forever.

⁵With his wisdom he made the skies.
His love continues forever.

⁶He spread out the earth on the seas.
His love continues forever.

⁷He made the sun and the moon.
His love continues forever.

⁸He made the sun to rule the day.
His love continues forever.

⁹He made the moon and stars to rule the night.
His love continues forever.

¹⁰He killed the firstborn sons of the Egyptians.
His love continues forever.

¹¹He brought the people of Israel out of Egypt.
His love continues forever.

¹²He did it with his great power and strength.

His love continues forever.

¹³He parted the water of the Red Sea.

His love continues forever.

¹⁴He brought the Israelites through the middle of it.

His love continues forever.

¹⁵But the king of Egypt and his army drowned in the Red Sea.

His love continues forever.

¹⁶He led his people through the desert.

His love continues forever.

¹⁷He defeated great kings.

His love continues forever.

¹⁸He killed powerful kings.

His love continues forever.

¹⁹He defeated Sihon king of the Amorites.

His love continues forever.

²⁰He defeated Og king of Bashan.

His love continues forever.

²¹He gave their land as a gift.

His love continues forever.

²²It was a gift to his servants, the Israelites.

His love continues forever.

²³He remembered us when we were in trouble.

His love continues forever.

²⁴He freed us from our enemies.

His love continues forever.

²⁵He gives food to every living creature.

His love continues forever.

²⁶Give thanks to the God of heaven.
His love continues forever.

Life Lessons

Psalms 137:1–138:8

Situation

During the Babylon captivity, the Israelites mourned for their lost land.

Observation

In times of trouble it is easy to wonder if God hears us. God does hear our prayers, and he carries us through the difficulties.

Inspiration

Since God is more moved by our hurt than our eloquence, he respond[s]. That's what fathers do.

That's exactly what Jim Redmond did.

His son Derek, a twenty-six-year-old Briton, was favored to win the four-hundred-meter race in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Halfway into his semifinal heat, a fiery pain seared through his right leg. He crumpled to the track with a torn hamstring.

As the medical attendants were approaching, Redmond fought to his feet. "It was animal instinct," he would later say. He set out hopping, pushing away the coaches in a crazed attempt to finish the race.

When he reached the stretch, a big man pushed through the crowd. He was wearing a t-shirt that read "Have you hugged your child today?" and a hat that challenged, "Just Do It." The man was Jim Redmond, Derek's father.

"You don't have to do this," he told his weeping son.

“Yes, I do,” Derek declared.

“Well, then,” said Jim, “we’re going to finish this together.”

And they did. Jim wrapped Derek’s arm around his shoulder and helped him hobble to the finish line. Fighting off security men, the son’s head sometimes buried in the father’s shoulder, they stayed in Derek’s lane to the end.

The crowd clapped, then stood, then cheered, and then wept as the father and the son finished the race.

What made the father do it? What made the father leave the stands to meet his son on the track? Was it the strength of his child? No, it was the pain of his child. His son was hurt and fighting to complete the race. So the father came to help him finish.

God does the same. Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

God wants us to pray to him without getting bogged down in proper words and phrases. Forget the fancy words and eloquent phrases. Don’t get caught up using the right prayer words. Pour out your joys, fears, concerns, and requests. He hears and will aid and comfort you.

Exploration

God Hears His People—[Exodus 2:23–25](#); [22:27](#); [Psalm 18:6](#); [145:18](#); [Isaiah 65:24](#); [Jeremiah 33:3](#); [Romans 10:12–13](#).

Israelites in Captivity

By the rivers in Babylon we sat and cried
when we remembered Jerusalem.

²On the poplar trees nearby
we hung our harps.

³Those who captured us asked us to sing;
our enemies wanted happy songs.
They said, “Sing us a song about Jerusalem!”

⁴But we cannot sing songs about the Lord
while we are in this foreign country!

⁵Jerusalem, if I forget you,
let my right hand lose its skill.

⁶Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth
if I do not remember you,
if I do not think about Jerusalem
as my greatest joy.

⁷Lord, remember what the Edomites did
on the day Jerusalem fell.
They said, “Tear it down!
Tear it down to its foundations!”

⁸People of Babylon, you will be destroyed.
The people who pay you back for what you did to us
will be happy.

⁹They will grab your babies

and throw them against the rocks.

A Hymn of Thanksgiving

A psalm of David.

Lord, I will thank you with all my heart;
I will sing to you before the gods.

²I will bow down facing your holy Temple,
and I will thank you for your love and loyalty.
You have made your name and your word
greater than anything.

³On the day I called to you, you answered me.
You made me strong and brave.

⁴Lord, let all the kings of the earth praise you
when they hear the words you speak.

⁵They will sing about what the Lord has done,
because the Lord's glory is great.

⁶Though the Lord is supreme,
he takes care of those who are humble,
but he stays away from the proud.

⁷Lord, even when I have trouble all around me,
you will keep me alive.

When my enemies are angry,
you will reach down and save me by your power.

⁸Lord, you do everything for me.
Lord, your love continues forever.
Do not leave us, whom you made.

Life Lessons

Psalm 139:1-24

Situation

David acknowledged that God knows everything, is everywhere, and is the creator and author of all life.

Observation

David recognized that the days of his life were written in God's book before he was even born.

Inspiration

Seated at the great desk, the Author opens the large book. It has no words. It has no words because no words exist. No words exist because no words are needed. There are no ears to hear them, no eyes to read them. The Author is alone.

And so he takes the great pen and begins to write. Like an artist gathers his colors and a woodcarver his tools, the Author assembles his words.

There are three. Three single words. Out of these three will pour a million thoughts. But on these three words, the story will suspend.

He takes his quill and spells the first. *T-i-m-e*.

Time did not exist until he wrote it. He, himself, is timeless, but his story would be encased in time. The story would have a first rising of the sun, a first shifting of the sand. A beginning ... and an end. A final chapter. He knows it before he writes it.

Time. A footspan on eternity's trail.

Slowly, tenderly, the Author writes the second word. A name. *A-d-a-m*.

As he writes, he sees him, the first Adam. Then he sees all the others. In a thousand eras in a thousand lands, the Author sees them. Each Adam. Each child. Instantly loved. Permanently loved. To each he assigns a time. To each he appoints a place. No accidents. No coincidences. Just design.

The Author makes a promise to these unborn: In my image, I will make you. You will be like me. You will laugh. You will create. You will never die. And you will write.

They must. For each life is a book, not to be read, but rather a story to be written. The Author starts each life story, but each life will write his or her own ending.

What a dangerous liberty. How much safer it would have been to finish the story for each Adam. To script every option. It would have been simpler. It would have been safer. But it would not have been love. Love is only love if chosen.

So the Author decides to give each child a pen. "Write carefully," he whispers.

Lovingly, deliberately, he writes the third word, already feeling the pain. *E-m-m-a-n-u-e-l*.

The greatest mind in the universe imagined time. The truest judge granted Adam a choice. But it was love that gave Emmanuel, God with us.

The Author would enter his own story.

The Word would become flesh. He, too, would be born. He, too, would be human. He, too, would have feet and hands. He, too, would have tears and trials.

And most importantly, he, too, would have a

choice. Emmanuel would stand at the crossroads of life and death and make a choice.

The Author knows well the weight of that decision. He pauses as he writes the page of his own pain. He could stop. Even the Author has a choice. But how can a Creator not create? How can a Writer not write? And how can Love not love? So he chooses life, though it means death, with hope that his children will do the same.

And so the Author of Life completes the story. He drives the spike in the flesh and rolls the stone over the grave. Knowing the choice he will make, knowing the choice all Adams will make, he pens, “The End,” then closes the book and proclaims the beginning.

“Let there be light!” (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

What is your life story at this point? Write a psalm acknowledging, as David did, the Creator and Author of your life and how he has shaped and guided you. Thank him for designing you in a unique fashion.

Exploration

Known by God—[1 Chronicles 28:9](#); [Psalms 17:3](#); [Proverbs 20:27](#); [John 10:27–28](#); [2 Corinthians 5:17](#); [Hebrews 4:13](#).

God Knows Everything

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

Lord, you have examined me
and know all about me.

²You know when I sit down and when I get up.
You know my thoughts before I think them.

³You know where I go and where I lie down.
You know thoroughly everything I do.

⁴Lord, even before I say a word,
you already know it.

⁵You are all around me—in front and in back—
and have put your hand on me.

⁶Your knowledge is amazing to me;
it is more than I can understand.

⁷Where can I go to get away from your Spirit?
Where can I run from you?

⁸If I go up to the heavens, you are there.
If I lie down in the grave, you are there.

⁹If I rise with the sun in the east
and settle in the west beyond the sea,

¹⁰even there you would guide me.
With your right hand you would hold me.

¹¹I could say, “The darkness will hide me.

Let the light around me turn into night.”

¹²But even the darkness is not dark to you.

The night is as light as the day;

darkness and light are the same to you.

¹³You made my whole being;

you formed me in my mother’s body.

¹⁴I praise you because you made me in an amazing and wonderful way.

What you have done is wonderful.

I know this very well.

¹⁵You saw my bones being formed

as I took shape in my mother’s body.

When I was put together there,

¹⁶you saw my body as it was formed.

All the days planned for me

were written in your book

before I was one day old.

¹⁷God, your thoughts are precious to me.

They are so many!

¹⁸If I could count them,

they would be more than all the grains of sand.

When I wake up,

I am still with you.

¹⁹God, I wish you would kill the wicked!

Get away from me, you murderers!

²⁰They say evil things about you.

Your enemies use your name thoughtlessly.

²¹Lord, I hate those who hate you;

I hate those who rise up against you.

²²I feel only hate for them;
they are my enemies.

²³God, examine me and know my heart;
test me and know my nervous thoughts.

²⁴See if there is any bad thing in me.
Lead me on the road to everlasting life.

Life Lessons

Psalms 140:1–144:15

Situation

David prayed for God's strength when he felt overwhelmed.

Observation

God gives us the endurance we need to face whatever situation life brings us.

Inspiration

When I was a boy ... I told people that my father was stronger than anyone else in the world....

So I would go out on the front porch and roar to the neighborhood: "My daddy's arm is as strong as trucks! The strongest man in the world." ...

In those days a cherry tree grew in our backyard. This was my hiding place. Ten feet above the ground a stout limb made a horizontal fork, a cradle on which I could lie facedown, reading, thinking, being alone. Nobody bothered me here. Even my parents didn't know where I went to hide. Sometimes Daddy would come out and call, "Wally? Wally?" but he didn't see me in the leaves.

I felt very tricky.

Then came the thunderstorm ...

One day suddenly, a wind tore through the backyard and struck my cherry tree with such force that it ripped the book from my hands and nearly threw me from the limb. I locked my arms around the forking branches and hung on. My head hung down

between them. I tried to wind my legs around the limb, but the whole tree was wallowing in the wind....

“Daddeeeeeeee !”

There he was... . The branches swept up and down, like huge waves on an ocean—and Daddy saw me, and right away he came out into the wind and the weather, and I felt so relieved because I just took it for granted that he would climb right up the tree to get me.

But that wasn’t his plan at all.

He came to a spot right below me and lifted his arms and shouted, “Jump.”

“What?”

“Jump. I’ll catch you.”

Jump? I had a crazy man for a father. He was standing six or seven miles beneath me, holding up two skinny arms and telling me to jump. If I jumped, he’d miss. I’d hit the ground and die....

But the wind and the rain slapped that cherry tree, bent it back, and cracked my limb at the trunk. I dropped a foot. My eyes flew open. Then the wood whined and splintered and sank, and so did I, in bloody terror.

No, I did not jump. I let go. I surrendered.

I fell.

In a fast, eternal moment I despaired and plummeted. *This*, I thought, *is what it’s like to die—*

But my father caught me....

Now, in such a storm the tree which was our stable world is shaken, and instinct makes us grab it tighter: by our own strength we grip the habits that

have helped us in the past, repeating them, believing them. We'd rather trust what *is* than what *might be*: that is, our power, our reason and feeling and endurance... . We spend a long time screaming *No!*

...

But always, God is present. God has always been present. And it is God who says, "Jump." (From *Mourning Into Dancing* by Walt Wangerin, Jr.)

Application

What is your endurance quota? Do you need to improve it? Perhaps you need more patience, or strength to face a physical challenge. God can help you to endure all of life's struggles.

Exploration

God Our Help—[Deuteronomy 33:26–29](#); [Psalms 30:2](#); [46:1](#); [Isaiah 41:9–10](#); [Jonah 2:2](#).

A Prayer for Protection

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

Lord, rescue me from evil people;
protect me from cruel people
²who make evil plans,
who always start fights.
³They make their tongues sharp as a snake's;
their words are like snake poison.

Selah

⁴Lord, guard me from the power of wicked people;
protect me from cruel people
who plan to trip me up.
⁵The proud hid a trap for me.
They spread out a net beside the road;
they set traps for me.

Selah

⁶I said to the Lord, "You are my God."
Lord, listen to my prayer for help.
⁷Lord God, my mighty savior,
you protect me in battle.
⁸Lord, do not give the wicked what they want.
Don't let their plans succeed,
or they will become proud.

Selah

⁹Those around me have planned trouble.
Now let it come to them.

¹⁰Let burning coals fall on them.
Throw them into the fire
or into pits from which they cannot escape.

¹¹Don't let liars settle in the land.
Let evil quickly hunt down cruel people.

¹²I know the Lord will get justice for the poor
and will defend the needy in court.

¹³Good people will praise his name;
honest people will live in his presence.

A Prayer Not to Sin

A psalm of David.

Lord, I call to you. Come quickly.

Listen to me when I call to you.

²Let my prayer be like incense placed before you,
and my praise like the evening sacrifice.

³Lord, help me control my tongue;
help me be careful about what I say.

⁴Take away my desire to do evil
or to join others in doing wrong.
Don't let me eat tasty food
with those who do evil.

⁵If a good person punished me, that would be kind.
If he corrected me, that would be like perfumed oil on
my head.

I shouldn't refuse it.

But I pray against those who do evil.

⁶Let their leaders be thrown down the cliffs.

Then people will know that I have spoken correctly:

⁷"The ground is plowed and broken up.
In the same way, our bones have been scattered at the
grave."

⁸God, I look to you for help.

I trust in you, Lord. Don't let me die.

⁹Protect me from the traps they set for me

and from the net that evil people have spread.

¹⁰Let the wicked fall into their own nets,
but let me pass by safely.

A Prayer for Safety

A maskil of David when he was in the cave. A prayer.

I cry out to the Lord;
I pray to the Lord for mercy.
²I pour out my problems to him;
I tell him my troubles.

³When I am afraid,
you, Lord, know the way out.
In the path where I walk,
a trap is hidden for me.

⁴Look around me and see.
No one cares about me.
I have no place of safety;
no one cares if I live.

⁵Lord, I cry out to you.
I say, "You are my protection.
You are all I want in this life."

⁶Listen to my cry,
because I am helpless.
Save me from those who are chasing me,
because they are too strong for me.

⁷Free me from my prison,
and then I will praise your name.
Then good people will surround me,
because you have taken care of me.

A Prayer Not to Be Killed

A psalm of David.

Lord, hear my prayer;
listen to my cry for mercy.

Answer me

because you are loyal and good.

²Don't judge me, your servant,
because no one alive is right before you.

³My enemies are chasing me;
they crushed me to the ground.
They made me live in darkness
like those long dead.

⁴I am afraid;
my courage is gone.

⁵I remember what happened long ago;
I consider everything you have done.
I think about all you have made.

⁶I lift my hands to you in prayer.
As a dry land needs rain, I thirst for you.

Selah

⁷Lord, answer me quickly,
because I am getting weak.
Don't turn away from me,
or I will be like those who are dead.

⁸Tell me in the morning about your love,
because I trust you.
Show me what I should do,

because my prayers go up to you.

⁹Lord, save me from my enemies;

I hide in you.

¹⁰Teach me to do what you want,

because you are my God.

Let your good Spirit

lead me on level ground.

¹¹Lord, let me live

so people will praise you.

In your goodness

save me from my troubles.

¹²In your love defeat my enemies.

Destroy all those who trouble me,

because I am your servant.

A Prayer for Victory

Of David.

Praise the Lord, my Rock,
who trains me for war,
who trains me for battle.

²He protects me like a strong, walled city, and he loves
me.

He is my defender and my Savior,
my shield and my protection.
He helps me keep my people under control.

³Lord, why are people important to you?
Why do you even think about human beings?

⁴People are like a breath;
their lives are like passing shadows.

⁵Lord, tear open the sky and come down.
Touch the mountains so they will smoke.

⁶Send the lightning and scatter my enemies.
Shoot your arrows and force them away.

⁷Reach down from above.
Save me and rescue me out of this sea of enemies,
from these foreigners.

⁸They are liars;
they are dishonest.

⁹God, I will sing a new song to you;
I will play to you on the ten-stringed harp.

¹⁰You give victory to kings.
You save your servant David from cruel swords.
¹¹Save me, rescue me from these foreigners.
They are liars; they are dishonest.

¹²Let our sons in their youth
grow like plants.
Let our daughters be
like the decorated stones in the Temple.

¹³Let our barns be filled
with crops of all kinds.
Let our sheep in the fields have
thousands and tens of thousands of lambs.

¹⁴Let our cattle be strong.
Let no one break in.
Let there be no war,
no screams in our streets.

¹⁵Happy are those who are like this;
happy are the people whose God is the Lord.

Life Lessons

Psalms 145:1–150:6

Situation

Some psalms directed people to praise God. The last four psalms were directed to God. They begin and end with *hallelujah*, the Hebrew word for “Praise the Lord.”

Observation

Praise God for his abundant provision, his greatness, and his love.

Inspiration

“The crowd,” Matthew wrote, “was amazed when they saw that people who could not speak before were now able to speak. The crippled were made strong. The lame could walk, and the blind could see” ([Matthew 15:31](#)).

... Then Matthew, still the great economizer of words, gave us another phrase on which I wish he would have elaborated:

“They praised the God of Israel.”

I wonder how they did that? I feel more certain of what they *didn't* do than of what they did do. I feel confident that they didn't form a praise committee. I feel confident that they didn't make any robes. I feel confident that they didn't sit in rows and stare at the back of each other's heads.

I doubt seriously if they wrote a creed on how they were to praise this God they had never before worshiped. I can't picture them getting into an

argument over technicalities. I doubt if they felt it had to be done indoors.

And I know they didn't wait until the Sabbath to do it...

I can imagine throngs of people pushing and shoving. Wanting to get close. Not to request anything or demand anything, but just to say "thank you."

... However they did it, they did it. And Jesus was touched, so touched that he insisted they stay for a meal before they left....

Worship is the "thank you" that refuses to be silenced.

We have tried to make a science out of worship. We can't do that. We can't do that any more than we can "sell love" or "negotiate peace."

Worship is a voluntary act of gratitude offered by the saved to the Savior, by the healed to the Healer, and by the delivered to the Deliverer. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

Find a new way to praise God. Learn to play an instrument. Take up a new activity that will help you learn more about God or his creation. Sing a song of praise in your car. Praise the Lord!

Exploration

Spontaneous Praise—[Nehemiah 8:5–6](#); [Isaiah 12:6](#); [55:12](#); [Luke 2:20](#); [19:37–40](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:18](#); [Hebrews 13:15](#); [Revelation 7:9–12](#).

Praise to God the King

A psalm of praise. Of David.

I praise your greatness, my God the King;
I will praise you forever and ever.

²I will praise you every day;
I will praise you forever and ever.

³The Lord is great and worthy of our praise;
no one can understand how great he is.

⁴Parents will tell their children what you have done.
They will retell your mighty acts,
⁵wonderful majesty, and glory.
And I will think about your miracles.

⁶They will tell about the amazing things you do,
and I will tell how great you are.

⁷They will remember your great goodness
and will sing about your fairness.

⁸The Lord is kind and shows mercy.
He does not become angry quickly but is full of love.

⁹The Lord is good to everyone;
he is merciful to all he has made.

¹⁰Lord, everything you have made will praise you;
those who belong to you will bless you.

¹¹They will tell about the glory of your kingdom

and will speak about your power.

¹²Then everyone will know the mighty things you do
and the glory and majesty of your kingdom.

¹³Your kingdom will go on and on,
and you will rule forever.

The Lord will keep all his promises;
he is loyal to all he has made.

¹⁴The Lord helps those who have been defeated
and takes care of those who are in trouble.

¹⁵All living things look to you for food,
and you give it to them at the right time.

¹⁶You open your hand,
and you satisfy all living things.

¹⁷Everything the Lord does is right.
He is loyal to all he has made.

¹⁸The Lord is close to everyone who prays to him,
to all who truly pray to him.

¹⁹He gives those who respect him what they want.
He listens when they cry, and he saves them.

²⁰The Lord protects everyone who loves him,
but he will destroy the wicked.

²¹I will praise the Lord.
Let everyone praise his holy name forever.

Praise God Who Helps the Weak

Praise the Lord!

My whole being, praise the Lord.

²I will praise the Lord all my life;

I will sing praises to my God as long as I live.

³Do not put your trust in princes
or other people, who cannot save you.

⁴When people die, they are buried.

Then all of their plans come to an end.

⁵Happy are those who are helped by the God of Jacob.
Their hope is in the Lord their God.

⁶He made heaven and earth,
the sea and everything in it.
He remains loyal forever.

⁷He does what is fair for those who have been
wronged.

He gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free.

⁸The Lord gives sight to the blind.

The Lord lifts up people who are in trouble.

The Lord loves those who do right.

⁹The Lord protects the foreigners.

He defends the orphans and widows,
but he blocks the way of the wicked.

¹⁰The Lord will be King forever.

Jerusalem, your God is everlasting.

Praise the Lord!

Praise God Who Helps His People

Praise the Lord!

It is good to sing praises to our God;
it is good and pleasant to praise him.

²The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem;
he brings back the captured Israelites.

³He heals the brokenhearted
and bandages their wounds.

⁴He counts the stars
and names each one.

⁵Our Lord is great and very powerful.
There is no limit to what he knows.

⁶The Lord defends the humble,
but he throws the wicked to the ground.

⁷Sing praises to the Lord;
praise our God with harps.

⁸He fills the sky with clouds
and sends rain to the earth
and makes grass grow on the hills.

⁹He gives food to cattle
and to the little birds that call.

¹⁰He does not enjoy the strength of a horse
or the strength of a man.

¹¹The Lord is pleased with those who respect him,
with those who trust his love.

¹²Jerusalem, praise the Lord;

Jerusalem, praise your God.

¹³He makes your city gates strong
and blesses your children inside.

¹⁴He brings peace to your country
and fills you with the finest grain.

¹⁵He gives a command to the earth,
and it quickly obeys him.

¹⁶He spreads the snow like wool
and scatters the frost like ashes.

¹⁷He throws down hail like rocks.
No one can stand the cold he sends.

¹⁸Then he gives a command, and it melts.
He sends the breezes, and the waters flow.

¹⁹He gave his word to Jacob,
his laws and demands to Israel.

²⁰He didn't do this for any other nation.
They don't know his laws.
Praise the Lord!

The World Should Praise the Lord

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord from the skies.

Praise him high above the earth.

²Praise him, all you angels.

Praise him, all you armies of heaven.

³Praise him, sun and moon.

Praise him, all you shining stars.

⁴Praise him, highest heavens
and you waters above the sky.

⁵Let them praise the Lord,
because they were created by his command.

⁶He put them in place forever and ever;
he made a law that will never change.

⁷Praise the Lord from the earth,
you large sea animals and all the oceans,

⁸lightning and hail, snow and mist,
and stormy winds that obey him,

⁹mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,

¹⁰wild animals and all cattle,
crawling animals and birds,

¹¹kings of the earth and all nations,
princes and all rulers of the earth,

¹²young men and women,
old people and children.

¹³Praise the Lord,
because he alone is great.

He is more wonderful than heaven and earth.

¹⁴God has given his people a king.

He should be praised by all who belong to him;

he should be praised by the Israelites, the people
closest to his heart.

Praise the Lord!

Praise the God of Israel

Praise the Lord!

Sing a new song to the Lord;
sing his praise in the meeting of his people.

²Let the Israelites be happy because of God, their
Maker.

Let the people of Jerusalem rejoice because of their
King.

³They should praise him with dancing.

They should sing praises to him with tambourines and
harps.

⁴The Lord is pleased with his people;
he saves the humble.

⁵Let those who worship him rejoice in his glory.
Let them sing for joy even in bed!

⁶Let them shout his praise
with their two-edged swords in their hands.

⁷They will punish the nations
and defeat the people.

⁸They will put those kings in chains
and those important men in iron bands.

⁹They will punish them as God has written.
God is honored by all who worship him.
Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord with Music

Praise the Lord!

Praise God in his Temple;
praise him in his mighty heaven.

²Praise him for his strength;
praise him for his greatness.

³Praise him with trumpet blasts;
praise him with harps and lyres.

⁴Praise him with tambourines and dancing;
praise him with stringed instruments and flutes.

⁵Praise him with loud cymbals;
praise him with crashing cymbals.

⁶Let everything that breathes praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord!

walking stick The stick a shepherd uses to guide and protect his sheep.

pour oil ... head This can mean that God gave him great wealth and blessed him.

Ham The people in Egypt were descendants of Ham, one of Noah's sons. See [Genesis 10:6](#).

Jacob Also called Israel.

Egypt Literally, "the land of Ham." Also in verse [27](#). The people in Egypt were descendants of Ham, one of Noah's sons. See [Genesis 10:6](#).

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[The Book of Proverbs](#)

Introduction

Proverbs is a collection of lamps.

Not spotlights that blind. Not bonfires that blaze. But lamps. Lamps that do for your heart what the lamps in your house do for your eyes. They chase away the darkness.

“These commands are like a lamp,” wrote Solomon. “This teaching is like a light. And the correction that comes from them will help you have life” ([6:23](#)).

Reading Proverbs turns on the lamps in the dark corners of life.

Corners such as: Foolishness. Wisdom. Pride. Humility. Fear. Insecurity. Wealth. Mercy. Lust. Diligence. Laziness. Prudence. Anger. Flattery. Gossip. Violence.

And that’s just a start.

Having trouble with an enemy? Turn on the lamp of patience:

A gentle answer will calm a person’s anger, but an unkind answer will cause more anger ([15:1](#)).

Having trouble with greed? Flip the switch of prudence:

It is better to be poor and respect the Lord than to be wealthy and have much trouble ([15:16](#)).

Anxious about tomorrow? Sit under the light of trust:

Depend on the Lord in whatever you do, and your plans will succeed ([16:3](#)).

See what I mean? Time spent with Proverbs makes a heart wise. It’s a practical guide for getting along with others. Whereas Psalms tells you how to get along with God, Proverbs tells you how to get along with people. Whereas Psalms is a book for Sunday, Proverbs is a book for Monday.

Why don't you flip on a few lights and see for yourself?

About This Book

Authors:

Solomon, Agur, and Lemuel

Date Written:

950–700 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- To live according to God's law is to live wisely.
- Righteousness and wisdom are to be pursued.
- Avoiding evil and evil people is a necessity.

Key Verse:

“Knowledge begins with respect for the Lord, but fools hate wisdom and self-control” ([Proverbs 1:7](#)).

Contents:

1. Wisdom [1:1–9:18](#)
2. Righteous Living [10:1–16:33](#)
3. The Understanding of Life [17:1–24:34](#)
4. General Instructions [25:1–29:27](#)
5. Words from Agur and a Mother's Advice [30:1–31:31](#)

Life Lessons

Proverbs 1:1–33

Situation

Proverbs provide wisdom and guidance for living an obedient life. Simple words and common sense give us guidelines for daily life.

Observation

The Proverbs contain many instructions to help steer readers away from sin. Listen to this advice and grow in wisdom.

Inspiration

I've thought about what the Scriptures are teaching on wisdom and I've come up with this: Wisdom is the God-given ability to see life with rare objectivity and to handle life with rare stability.

When we operate in the sphere of the wisdom of God, when it is at work in our mind and in our life, we look at life through lenses of perception, and we respond to it in calm confidence. There's a remarkable absence of fear. We are not seized with panic. We can either lose our jobs or we can be promoted in our work, and neither will derail us. Why? Because we see it with God-given objectivity. And we handle it in His wisdom.

We can dip into an unexpected valley or we can soar to the pinnacle of prosperity, and we can cope with both extremes. His wisdom provides us the necessary objectivity and stability. That's the way life is when it is lived in the palm of His hand. This is

not some dreamland fantasy. It is reality. It is the ability to live above the drag of human opinion and horizontal perspective. It is what happens within us when wisdom goes to work. (From *Living on the Ragged Edge* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Today you may be bombarded by people giving advice—talk show hosts, psychics, psychologists. Take more time to listen to God than to television. At the end of the day, assess which words of wisdom you applied (or should have).

Exploration

Wisdom—[1 Kings 3:6–12](#); [Proverbs 1:7](#); [4:7–8](#); [Luke 2:40](#).

The Importance of Proverbs

These are the wise words of Solomon son of David, king of Israel.

²They teach wisdom and self-control;
they will help you understand wise words.

³They will teach you how to be wise and self-controlled
and will teach you to do what is honest and fair and right.

⁴They make the uneducated smarter
and give knowledge and sense to the young.

⁵Wise people can also listen and learn;
even smart people can find good advice in these words.

⁶Then anyone can understand wise words and stories,
the words of the wise and their riddles.

⁷Knowledge begins with respect for the Lord,
but fools hate wisdom and self-control.

Warnings Against Evil

⁸My child, listen to your father's teaching

and do not forget your mother's advice.

⁹Their teaching will be like flowers in your hair
or a necklace around your neck.

¹⁰My child, if sinners try to lead you into sin,
do not follow them.

¹¹They will say, "Come with us.
Let's ambush and kill someone;
let's attack some innocent people just for fun.

¹²Let's swallow them alive, as death does;
let's swallow them whole, as the grave does.

¹³We will take all kinds of valuable things
and fill our houses with stolen goods.

¹⁴Come join us,
and we will share with you stolen goods."

¹⁵My child, do not go along with them;
do not do what they do.

¹⁶They are eager to do evil
and are quick to kill.

¹⁷It is useless to spread out a net
right where the birds can see it.

¹⁸But sinners will fall into their own traps;
they will only catch themselves!

¹⁹All greedy people end up this way;
greed kills selfish people.

Wisdom Speaks

²⁰Wisdom is like a woman shouting in the street;

she raises her voice in the city squares.

²¹She cries out in the noisy street
and shouts at the city gates:

²²“You fools, how long will you be foolish?
How long will you make fun of wisdom
and hate knowledge?

²³If only you had listened when I corrected you,
I would have told you what’s in my heart;
I would have told you what I am thinking.

²⁴I called, but you refused to listen;
I held out my hand, but you paid no attention.

²⁵You did not follow my advice
and did not listen when I corrected you.

²⁶So I will laugh when you are in trouble.
I will make fun when disaster strikes you,

²⁷when disaster comes over you like a storm,
when trouble strikes you like a whirlwind,
when pain and trouble overwhelm you.

²⁸“Then you will call to me,
but I will not answer.
You will look for me,
but you will not find me.

²⁹It is because you rejected knowledge
and did not choose to respect the Lord.

³⁰You did not accept my advice,
and you rejected my correction.

³¹So you will get what you deserve;
you will get what you planned for others.

³²Fools will die because they refuse to listen;

they will be destroyed because they do not care.
³³But those who listen to me will live in safety
and be at peace, without fear of injury.”

Life Lessons

Proverbs 2:1–22

Situation

Solomon warned his readers to heed God's word. He exhorted them to learn about God, who would help them to choose the right path.

Observation

Rebelling against God's wisdom leads to immorality and spiritual death. God's wisdom keeps us from living an immoral and defeated life.

Inspiration

The secret is making the right choices. Here's what I mean. In the light of truth, you and I are able to see both truth and lie, both light and darkness—that which is simple, pure, and clear and that which is deceptive. But enslaved to darkness and plunged into the pit of the lie, we no longer see the truth. We have no other option but to believe the lie. We become victimized in our addiction—in “sin's foul bondage.”

The secret, of course, is making the right choices every day. So? Watch those choices! Watch your decisions! ...

We need to keep asking ourselves, Does this honor the Savior? Does this exalt my Lord? Does this bring glory to His name? Does this lift Him up? How powerful is our focus! ...

Once you decide to trust God in simple faith and allow Him complete freedom to carry out His plan and purpose in you as well as through you, you need

only relax and count on Him to take care of things you once tried to keep under control.

(From *Simple Faith* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

As you read the Bible this week, select a Proverb each day that will help you make wise decisions. Make a list of these Proverbs. Carry the list with you so you can remind yourself to use this wisdom.

Exploration

Moral Choices—[Exodus 23:24–25](#); [2 Kings 17:27–29](#); [2 Chronicles 13:8](#); [Romans 1:25](#); [1 Corinthians 6:19–20](#).

Rewards of Wisdom

My child, listen to what I say
and remember what I command you.

²Listen carefully to wisdom;
set your mind on understanding.

³Cry out for wisdom,
and beg for understanding.

⁴Search for it like silver,
and hunt for it like hidden treasure.

⁵Then you will understand respect for the Lord,
and you will find that you know God.

⁶Only the Lord gives wisdom;
he gives knowledge and understanding.

⁷He stores up wisdom for those who are honest.
Like a shield he protects the innocent.

⁸He makes sure that justice is done,
and he protects those who are loyal to him.

⁹Then you will understand what is honest and fair
and what is the good and right thing to do.

¹⁰Wisdom will come into your mind,
and knowledge will be pleasing to you.

¹¹Good sense will protect you;
understanding will guard you.

¹²It will keep you from the wicked,
from those whose words are bad,

¹³who don't do what is right
but what is evil.

¹⁴They enjoy doing wrong
and are happy to do what is crooked and evil.

¹⁵What they do is wrong,
and their ways are dishonest.

¹⁶It will save you from the unfaithful wife
who tries to lead you into adultery with pleasing
words.

¹⁷She leaves the husband she married when she was
young.

She ignores the promise she made before God.

¹⁸Her house is on the way to death;
those who took that path are now all dead.

¹⁹No one who goes to her comes back
or walks the path of life again.

²⁰But wisdom will help you be good
and do what is right.

²¹Those who are honest will live in the land,
and those who are innocent will remain in it.

²²But the wicked will be removed from the land,
and the unfaithful will be thrown out of it.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 3:1–35

Situation

God promises to guide those who obey and trust him. Those who obey must actively explore God's Word.

Observation

Depend on God in every part of your life, and he will guide, protect, and comfort you.

Inspiration

This expression “God’s guidance,” or “God’s will,” is really quite confusing. It seems so far removed from selling insurance, cleaning house, or taking the dog to the vet for his shot. It seems to imply being constantly ecstatic over “finding Jesus,” or living on Cloud Nine without interruption. I suppose this could be part of it. But so many Christians, new and old alike, drape so much glamorous ecclesiastical jargon around it, that it gives the impression of being for an elite few “spiritual” or “saintly” people. That would leave out most of us, wouldn’t it, God? ... Jesus told His disciples that He was going away and would send someone to carry on for Him. This one would be a Comforter, a Helper, to remind and to guide. If He wasn’t supposed to guide us in all things, how would we know when He was guiding and when He wasn’t?

It occurs to me that if I’m tuned in to You, Jesus, I’m guided in everything I do. It could include simple

things at the office, housework, even answering the presumptuous ring of the telephone to give some lonely forgotten soul a bit of myself.

After a lot of trial and error, God, I think I've learned something about Your will in my life. And the key is so simple. So often I have stubbornly knocked and banged my head against a door of decision or opportunity I wanted to push open. And so often nothing happened. The door just wouldn't budge. At other times when You and I were tuned in to the same channel, I barely touched the latch, and the door swung open. Everything poured out: happinesses, opportunities for creativity, spiritual presents, deeper relationships with friends, and, when the timing was right, a chance to share Your love with someone... . Your guidance kind of snowballs, God, from relying on You for dozens of little actions and decisions, we learn to seek Your guidance in times of big events, even tragedies, in our lives. Gradually we begin to rely on You in everything we do, no matter how insignificant. (From *Struggles of a Sinner-Saint* by Lucille Lavender)

Application

Is your life like a hotel, with certain rooms marked "Do Not Disturb"? Open one of those rooms to God. If you are a pianist, give your practice or performance to God. If you are a basketball referee, give your game to God. No matter what your role in life or your occupation, live every aspect of your life to honor God.

Exploration

Guidance—[Joshua 1:9](#); [Psalm 48:14](#); [118:8](#);
[Proverbs 2:1–5](#); [Matthew 2:13](#); [Luke 9:23–25](#); [John](#)
[4:13–14](#); [Acts 8:26](#).

Advice to Children

My child, do not forget my teaching,
but keep my commands in mind.

²Then you will live a long time,
and your life will be successful.

³Don't ever forget kindness and truth.
Wear them like a necklace.
Write them on your heart as if on a tablet.

⁴Then you will be respected
and will please both God and people.

⁵Trust the Lord with all your heart,
and don't depend on your own understanding.

⁶Remember the Lord in all you do,
and he will give you success.

⁷Don't depend on your own wisdom.
Respect the Lord and refuse to do wrong.

⁸Then your body will be healthy,
and your bones will be strong.

⁹Honor the Lord with your wealth
and the firstfruits from all your crops.

¹⁰Then your barns will be full,
and your wine barrels will overflow with new wine.

11 My child, do not reject the Lord's discipline -

My child, do not reject the Lord's discipline,
and don't get angry when he corrects you.

¹²The Lord corrects those he loves,
just as parents correct the child they delight in.

¹³Happy is the person who finds wisdom,
the one who gets understanding.

¹⁴Wisdom is worth more than silver;
it brings more profit than gold.

¹⁵Wisdom is more precious than rubies;
nothing you could want is equal to it.

¹⁶With her right hand wisdom offers you a long life,
and with her left hand she gives you riches and honor.

¹⁷Wisdom will make your life pleasant
and will bring you peace.

¹⁸As a tree produces fruit, wisdom gives life to those
who use it,
and everyone who uses it will be happy.

¹⁹The Lord made the earth, using his wisdom.
He set the sky in place, using his understanding.

²⁰With his knowledge, he made springs flow into rivers
and the clouds drop rain on the earth.

²¹My child, hold on to wisdom and good sense.
Don't let them out of your sight.

²²They will give you life
and beauty like a necklace around your neck.

²³Then you will go your way in safety,
and you will not get hurt.

²⁴When you lie down, you won't be afraid;

when you lie down, you will sleep in peace.

²⁵You won't be afraid of sudden trouble;
you won't fear the ruin that comes to the wicked,
²⁶because the Lord will keep you safe.
He will keep you from being trapped.

²⁷Whenever you are able,
do good to people who need help.

²⁸If you have what your neighbor asks for,
don't say, "Come back later.
I will give it to you tomorrow."

²⁹Don't make plans to hurt your neighbor
who lives nearby and trusts you.

³⁰Don't accuse a person for no good reason;
don't accuse someone who has not harmed you.

³¹Don't be jealous of those who use violence,
and don't choose to be like them.

³²The Lord hates those who do wrong,
but he is a friend to those who are honest.

³³The Lord will curse the evil person's house,
but he will bless the home of those who do right.

³⁴The Lord laughs at those who laugh at him,
but he gives grace to those who are not proud.

³⁵Wise people will receive honor,
but fools will be disgraced.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 4:1-27

Situation

The author emphasized that God's wisdom has been tested through the generations. These time-tested truths can help everyone avoid evil.

Observation

Listening and following the words of a wise father help children learn how to act.

Inspiration

Many passages in the Old Testament deal with the concept of wisdom. The book of Proverbs is especially concerned with it. Here are some general comments:

“Only the Lord gives wisdom; he gives knowledge and understanding. He stores up wisdom for those who are honest. Like a shield he protects the innocent” ([Proverbs 2:6-7](#)).

“Happy is the person who finds wisdom, the one who gets understanding. Wisdom is worth more than silver; it brings more profit than gold” ([Proverbs 3:13-14](#)).

“My child, hold on to wisdom and good sense. Don't let them out of your sight” ([Proverbs 3:20-21](#)).

There are really too many to include here. The book of Proverbs itself is worthy of a study on this subject, but I think you get some idea of what it has to say about wisdom.

One of the best passages dealing with this

concept, however, is found in the New Testament. In [Ephesians 5:3–14](#), the apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesian believers to live moral lives. He made it clear to them that they were neither to participate in evil nor to speak of it. On the contrary, he commanded them to expose immoral deeds of evil persons.

... Practically speaking, our goal as believers cannot simply be not to sin. Rather it must be to walk wisely because walking wisely is the means by which moral living is carried out. Wise living provides a safety factor. It is like putting a fence around a pit with a Keep Out sign on it. The fence serves as a means of keeping people out of the pit. As the fence is to the pit, so wisdom is to sin. When followed, wisdom keeps us out of trouble by eliminating the possibility in the first place. (From *How to Keep Your Kids on Your Team* by Charles Stanley)

Application

Did you ever read about different thinkers or philosophers? Did you ever notice that their ideas seem to go out of style after a few years? God's wisdom doesn't! Make living by God's Word your highest priority. Read it, memorize it, think about it often, and let it change your life every day.

Exploration

Listen and Obey—[Proverbs 30:5](#); [Isaiah 30:21](#).

Wisdom Is Important

My children, listen to your father's teaching;
pay attention so you will understand.

²What I am telling you is good,
so do not forget what I teach you.

³When I was a young boy in my father's house
and like an only child to my mother,

⁴my father taught me and said,
“Hold on to my words with all your heart.
Keep my commands and you will live.

⁵Get wisdom and understanding.
Don't forget or ignore my words.

⁶Hold on to wisdom, and it will take care of you.
Love it, and it will keep you safe.

⁷Wisdom is the most important thing; so get wisdom.
If it costs everything you have, get understanding.

⁸Treasure wisdom, and it will make you great;
hold on to it, and it will bring you honor.

⁹It will be like flowers in your hair
and like a beautiful crown on your head.”

¹⁰My child, listen and accept what I say.
Then you will have a long life.

¹¹I am guiding you in the way of wisdom,
and I am leading you on the right path.

¹²Nothing will hold you back;

you will not be overwhelmed.

¹³Always remember what you have been taught,
and don't let go of it.

Keep all that you have learned;
it is the most important thing in life.

¹⁴Don't follow the ways of the wicked;
don't do what evil people do.

¹⁵Avoid their ways, and don't follow them.
Stay away from them and keep on going,

¹⁶because they cannot sleep until they do evil.
They cannot rest until they harm someone.

¹⁷They feast on wickedness and cruelty
as if they were eating bread and drinking wine.

¹⁸The way of the good person is like the light of dawn,
growing brighter and brighter until full daylight.

¹⁹But the wicked walk around in the dark;
they can't even see what makes them stumble.

²⁰My child, pay attention to my words;
listen closely to what I say.

²¹Don't ever forget my words;
keep them always in mind.

²²They are the key to life for those who find them;
they bring health to the whole body.

²³Be careful what you think,
because your thoughts run your life.

²⁴Don't use your mouth to tell lies;
don't ever say things that are not true.

²⁵Keep your eyes focused on what is right,

and look straight ahead to what is good.

²⁶Be careful what you do,
and always do what is right.

²⁷Don't turn off the road of goodness;
keep away from evil paths.

Warning About Adultery

My son, pay attention to my wisdom;
listen to my words of understanding.

²Be careful to use good sense,
and watch what you say.

New Life in Christ

Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life.—[Proverbs 4:23](#)

Guarding Our Hearts

Jesus guarded his heart. If he did, shouldn't we do the same? Most certainly! "Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life" ([Proverbs 4:23](#)). Jesus wants your heart to be fertile and fruitful. He wants you to have a heart like his. That is God's goal for you. He wants you to "think and act like Christ Jesus" ([Philippians 2:5](#)). But how? The answer is surprisingly simple. We can be transformed if we make one decision: *I will submit my thoughts to the authority of Jesus.*

It's easy to overlook a significant claim made by Christ at the conclusion of Matthew's gospel. "All power in heaven and on earth is given to me" ([Matthew 28:18](#)). Jesus claims to be the CEO of heaven and earth. He has the ultimate say on everything, especially our thoughts. He has more authority, for example, than your parents. Your parents may say you are no good, but Jesus says you

are valuable, and he has authority over parents. He even has more authority over you than you do. You may tell yourself that you are too bad to be forgiven, but Jesus has a different opinion. If you give him authority over you, then your guilty thoughts are no longer allowed.

Jesus also has authority over your ideas. Suppose you have an idea that you want to rob a grocery store. Jesus, however, has made it clear that stealing is wrong. If you have given him authority over your ideas, then the idea of stealing cannot remain in your thoughts.

See what I mean by authority? To have a pure heart, we must submit all thoughts to the authority of Christ. If we are willing to do that, he will change us to be like him. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Question: What thoughts do you need to submit to Jesus' authority today?

For more on ["New Life in Christ."](#)

¹⁴Be faithful to your own wife,
just as you drink water from your own well.

¹⁶Don't pour your water in the streets;
don't give your love to just any woman.

¹⁷These things are yours alone
and shouldn't be shared with strangers.

¹⁸Be happy with the wife you married when you were
young.

She gives you joy, as your fountain gives you water.

¹⁹She is as lovely and graceful as a deer.
Let her love always make you happy;
let her love always hold you captive.

²⁰My son, don't be held captive by a woman who takes
part in adultery.

Don't hug another man's wife.

²¹The Lord sees everything you do,
and he watches where you go.

²²An evil man will be caught in his wicked ways;
the ropes of his sins will tie him up.

²³He will die because he does not control himself,
and he will be held captive by his foolishness.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 5:1–6:35

Situation

Solomon warned his son of the sin of adultery. He urged him to remember what he was taught and to avoid the temptation of having sex outside of

marriage. Rather, he encouraged him to enjoy the love of his own wife.

Observation

Do not be seduced by lust. Falling prey to lust only leads to moral ruin and spiritual death.

Inspiration

As the national sales manager for his securities firm, Jeremy was on the road at least three days out of every five. After two years of countless hotel rooms, he found the boredom setting in. Retiring to his hotel room at night, he began channel surfing with the television, searching for something to catch his interest. Like a moth to a flame, he became increasingly curious about the X-rated cable channels.

Not wanting to give in, he asked the men in his Saturday morning Bible study to hold him accountable to three things. When he arrived at the hotel, he would ask the desk clerk to disconnect his television. The second was that he would maintain a list of and be accountable about the books and magazines that he bought and was currently reading. Finally, whenever he felt tempted morally, he asked permission to call one of the other men, regardless of where he was or the time of day. (From *A Dad's Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent)

Application

When do you struggle with lust? How can you avoid those situations? Don't allow sexual thoughts to occupy your mind. If you are married, avoid anything that causes you to desire anyone other than

your own spouse and take extra time to demonstrate love to your spouse.

Exploration

Lust—[Proverbs 6:23–29](#); [Matthew 5:27–30](#);
[Colossians 3:5](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:3](#); [1 John 2:16](#).

Dangers of Being Foolish

My child, be careful about giving a guarantee for somebody else's loan,

about promising to pay what someone else owes.

²You might get trapped by what you say;
you might be caught by your own words.

³My child, if you have done this and are under your neighbor's control,
here is how to get free.

Don't be proud. Go to your neighbor
and beg to be free from your promise.

⁴Don't go to sleep

or even rest your eyes,

⁵but free yourself like a deer running from a hunter,
like a bird flying away from a trapper.

⁶Go watch the ants, you lazy person.

Watch what they do and be wise.

⁷Ants have no commander,
no leader or ruler,

⁸but they store up food in the summer
and gather their supplies at harvest.

⁹How long will you lie there, you lazy person?
When will you get up from sleeping?

¹⁰You sleep a little; you take a nap.

You fold your hands and lie down to rest.

¹¹So you will be as poor as if you had been robbed;
you will have as little as if you had been held up.

¹²Some people are wicked and no good

Some people are wicked and no good.
They go around telling lies,
¹³winking with their eyes, tapping with their feet,
and making signs with their fingers.
¹⁴They make evil plans in their hearts
and are always starting arguments.
¹⁵So trouble will strike them in an instant;
suddenly they will be so hurt no one can help them.

¹⁶There are six things the Lord hates.
There are seven things he cannot stand:
¹⁷a proud look,
a lying tongue,
hands that kill innocent people,
¹⁸a mind that thinks up evil plans,
feet that are quick to do evil,
¹⁹a witness who lies,
and someone who starts arguments among families.

Warning About Adultery

²⁰My son, keep your father's commands,
and don't forget your mother's teaching.
²¹Keep their words in mind forever
as though you had them tied around your neck.
²²They will guide you when you walk.
They will guard you when you sleep.
They will speak to you when you are awake.
²³These commands are like a lamp;

this teaching is like a light.

And the correction that comes from them
will help you have life.

²⁴They will keep you from sinful women
and from the pleasing words of another man's
unfaithful wife.

²⁵Don't desire her because she is beautiful.
Don't let her capture you by the way she looks at you.

²⁶A prostitute will treat you like a loaf of bread,
and a woman who takes part in adultery may cost you
your life.

²⁷You cannot carry hot coals against your chest
without burning your clothes,

²⁸and you cannot walk on hot coals
without burning your feet.

²⁹The same is true if you have sexual relations with
another man's wife.

Anyone who does so will be punished.

³⁰People don't hate a thief
when he steals because he is hungry.

³¹But if he is caught, he must pay back seven times
what he stole,
and it may cost him everything he owns.

³²A man who takes part in adultery has no sense;
he will destroy himself.

³³He will be beaten up and disgraced,
and his shame will never go away.

³⁴Jealousy makes a husband very angry,
and he will have no pity when he gets revenge.

³⁵He will accept no payment for the wrong;
he will take no amount of money.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 7:1-27

Situation

The writer of Proverbs warned against yielding to the temptation of extramarital sex and other sins.

Observation

Beware of being entrapped in the lies of the world that promise sensuality as the means of happiness and significance.

Inspiration

As I work on this manuscript, I'm seated at a desk in a hotel room. I'm away from home. Away from people who know me.

Voices that encourage and affirm are distant.

But voices that tantalize and entice are near. Although the room is quiet, if I listen, their voices are crystal clear.

A placard on my nightstand invites me to a lounge in the lobby, where I can "make new friends in a relaxing atmosphere." An advertisement on top of the television promises me that with the request of a late-night adult movie my "fantasies will come true." In the phone book, several columns of escort services offer "love away from home." ... On television a talk-show host discusses the day's topic: "How to succeed at sex in the office."

Voices. Some for pleasure. Some for power.

The world rams at your door; Jesus taps at your door. The voices scream for your allegiance; Jesus

softly and tenderly requests it. The world promises flashy pleasure; Jesus promises a quiet dinner ... with God. "I will come in and eat."

Which voice do you hear?

(From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

We cannot stand firm against the lies of the world unless we are firmly grounded in Christ. Be diligent to read God's Word, and pray often. Promise yourself to pray at three different times today.

Exploration

Follow the Lord—[Deuteronomy 4:30](#); [Psalm 111:10](#); [Proverbs 8](#); [Luke 9:35](#); [Revelation 3:20](#).

The Woman of Adultery

My son, remember what I say, and treasure my commands.

²Obey my commands, and you will live.

Guard my teachings as you would your own eyes.

³Remind yourself of them;

write them on your heart as if on a tablet.

⁴Treat wisdom as a sister,

and make understanding your closest friend.

⁵Wisdom and understanding will keep you away from adultery,

away from the unfaithful wife and her pleasing words.

⁶Once while I was at the window of my house

I looked out through the shutters

⁷and saw some foolish, young men.

I noticed one of them had no wisdom.

⁸He was walking down the street near the corner

on the road leading to her house.

⁹It was the twilight of the evening;

the darkness of the night was just beginning.

¹⁰Then the woman approached him,

dressed like a prostitute

and planning to trick him.

¹¹She was loud and stubborn

and never stayed at home.

¹²She was always out in the streets or in the city squares,

waiting around on the corners of the streets.

¹³She grabbed him and kissed him.

Without shame she said to him,

¹⁴“I made my fellowship offering and took some of the meat home.

Today I have kept my special promises.

¹⁵So I have come out to meet you;

I have been looking for you and have found you.

¹⁶I have covered my bed

with colored sheets from Egypt.

¹⁷I have made my bed smell sweet

with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.

¹⁸Come, let's make love until morning.

Let's enjoy each other's love.

¹⁹My husband is not home;

he has gone on a long trip.

²⁰He took a lot of money with him

and won't be home for weeks.”

²¹By her clever words she made him give in;

by her pleasing words she led him into doing wrong.

²²All at once he followed her,

like an ox led to the butcher,

like a deer caught in a trap

²³and shot through the liver with an arrow.

Like a bird caught in a trap,

he didn't know what he did would kill him.

²⁴Now, my sons, listen to me;

pay attention to what I say.

²⁵Don't let yourself be tricked by such a woman;
don't go where she leads you.

²⁶She has ruined many good men,
and many have died because of her.

²⁷Her house is on the road to death,
the road that leads down to the grave.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 8:1–36

Situation

God's wisdom called the readers of Proverbs to make right choices rather than wicked ones.

Observation

God always makes his wisdom available to us. Human wisdom will fail.

Inspiration

Everything God made—even human beings—has as its key purpose the reflection of the honor of God.

Unfortunately, the power of sin has tarnished the capacity of some aspects of creation to reflect that honor. In fact, sin first appears to have done its job on humanity; then, through men and women, sin systematically tarnished everything else in creation. But where man has not been able to confuse the issue, the creation continues to shout out its message: God the Creator be praised!

The growing mind, filled with the love of Christ, searches creation for these messages. Because of our spiritual and natural gifts, each of us is able to see and hear them in particular areas more than in others. And we are enabled to take this creation material and identify it, shape it, reconfigure it, or in other ways use it so that God is further glorified. The carpenter works with wood; the physician listens to the body; the musician shapes sounds; the executive manages people; the educator trains youth; the researcher

analyzes, innovates, and implements with the elements of the universe.

We develop our minds for these tasks and rejoice as we do them for all that God is revealing to us out of His loving heart. (From *Ordering Your Private World* by Gordon MacDonald)

Application

What is your toughest decision today? After you have prayed and searched God's Word for advice, call a Christian friend who can help.

Exploration

Wisdom's Call—[Psalm 119:97–104](#); [Proverbs 1:20–28](#); [2:3–6](#); [4:5–8](#).

Listen to Wisdom

Wisdom calls to you like someone shouting;
understanding raises her voice.

²On the hilltops along the road
and at the crossroads, she stands calling.

³Beside the city gates,
at the entrances into the city, she calls out:

⁴“Listen, everyone, I’m calling out to you;
I am shouting to all people.

⁵You who are uneducated, be smarter.
You who are foolish, get understanding.

⁶Listen, because I have important things to say,
and what I tell you is right.

⁷What I say is true,
I refuse to speak evil.

⁸Everything I say is honest;
nothing I say is crooked or false.

⁹People with good sense know what I say is true;
and those with knowledge know my words are right.

¹⁰Choose my teachings instead of silver,
and knowledge rather than the finest gold.

¹¹Wisdom is more precious than rubies.
Nothing you could want is equal to it.

¹²“I am wisdom, and I am smart.
I also have knowledge and good sense.

¹³If you respect the Lord, you will also hate evil.
I hate pride and bragging,
evil ways and lies.

¹⁴I have good sense and advice,
and I have understanding and power.

¹⁵I help kings to govern
and rulers to make fair laws.

¹⁶Princes use me to lead,
and so do all important people who judge fairly.

¹⁷I love those who love me,
and those who seek me find me.

¹⁸Riches and honor are mine to give.
So are wealth and lasting success.

¹⁹What I give is better than the finest gold,
better than the purest silver.

²⁰I do what is right
and follow the path of justice.

²¹I give wealth to those who love me,
filling their houses with treasures.

²²“I, wisdom, was with the Lord when he began his
work,

long before he made anything else.

²³I was created in the very beginning,
even before the world began.

²⁴I was born before there were oceans,
or springs overflowing with water,

²⁵before the hills were there,
before the mountains were put in place.

²⁶God had not made the earth or fields,

not even the first dust of the earth.

²⁷I was there when God put the skies in place,
when he stretched the horizon over the oceans,
²⁸when he made the clouds above
and put the deep underground springs in place.

²⁹I was there when he ordered the sea
not to go beyond the borders he had set.
I was there when he laid the earth's foundation.

³⁰I was like a child by his side.
I was delighted every day,
enjoying his presence all the time,
³¹enjoying the whole world,
and delighted with all its people.

^{32c}Now, my children, listen to me,
because those who follow my ways are happy.
³³Listen to my teaching, and you will be wise;
do not ignore it.

³⁴Happy are those who listen to me,
watching at my door every day,
waiting at my open doorway.

³⁵Those who find me find life,
and the Lord will be pleased with them.

³⁶Those who do not find me hurt themselves.
Those who hate me love death."

Life Lessons

Proverbs 9:1–18

Situation

By contrasting the invitations of wisdom and foolishness, chapter 9 provides a summary statement of the first eight chapters of Proverbs.

Observation

God's wisdom leads to life. Foolishness, personified by the adulteress, leads to death.

Inspiration

"If Satan were to blow you out of the water," he asked, "how do you think he would do it?"

"I'm not sure I know," I answered. "All sorts of ways, I suppose; but I know there's one way he wouldn't get me."

"What's that?"

"He'd never get me in the area of my personal relationships. That's one place where I have no doubt that I'm as strong as you can get."

A few years after that conversation my world broke wide open. A chain of seemingly innocent choices became destructive, and it was my fault. And then my world broke—in the very area I had predicted I was safe—and my world had to be rebuilt. . . .

I wondered why until I realized from personal experience that where we perceive ourselves to be the strongest is where we're least likely to be prepared for a battle that isn't psychological or emotional. It's spiritual! Let no person ever say, "I can't be taken."

Or as St. Paul wrote, “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” ([1 Corinthians 10:12](#)). (From *Rebuilding Your Broken World* by Gordon MacDonald)

Application

Have you been nurturing a “harmless” habit? If so, you are like the man who continually passes in front of the prostitute’s house, thinking he can withstand her alluring invitations! Stop that compromising habit today and return to God before it is too late!

Exploration

Avoiding Sin—[Job 31:1](#); [Proverbs 4:14–15](#); [6:20–26](#); [8:13](#); [1 Corinthians 10:12–13](#); [2 Timothy 2:22](#); [James 1:13–15](#).

Being Wise or Foolish

Wisdom has built her house; she has made its seven columns.

²She has prepared her food and wine;
she has set her table.

³She has sent out her servant girls,
and she calls out from the highest place in the city.

⁴She says to those who are uneducated,
“Come in here, you foolish people!

⁵Come and eat my food
and drink the wine I have prepared.

⁶Stop your foolish ways, and you will live;
take the road of understanding.

⁷“If you correct someone who makes fun of wisdom,
you will be insulted.

If you correct an evil person, you will get hurt.

⁸Do not correct those who make fun of wisdom, or they
will hate you.

But correct the wise, and they will love you.

⁹Teach the wise, and they will become even wiser;
teach good people, and they will learn even more.

¹⁰“Wisdom begins with respect for the Lord,
and understanding begins with knowing the Holy One.

¹¹If you live wisely, you will live a long time;
wisdom will add years to your life.

¹²The wise person is rewarded by wisdom,
but whoever makes fun of wisdom will suffer for it.”

¹³Foolishness is like a loud woman;
she does not have wisdom or knowledge.

¹⁴She sits at the door of her house
at the highest place in the city.

¹⁵She calls out to those who are passing by,
who are going along, minding their own business.

¹⁶She says to those who are uneducated,
“Come in here, you foolish people!

¹⁷Stolen water is sweeter,
and food eaten in secret tastes better.”

¹⁸But these people don't know that everyone who
goes there dies,
that her guests end up deep in the grave.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 10:1–32

Situation

This chapter begins a collection of proverbs attributed to Solomon.

Observation

The actions of wise and good people are contrasted with the deeds of foolish and evil people. Solomon emphasizes the need for honesty and the wise choice of words.

Inspiration

Insensitivity makes a wound that heals slowly.

If someone hurts your feelings intentionally, you know how to react. You know the source of the pain. But if someone accidentally bruises your soul, it's difficult to know how to respond.

Someone at work criticizes the new boss, who also happens to be your dear friend. “Oh, I’m sorry—I forgot the two of you were so close.”

A joke is told at a party about overweight people. You’re overweight. You hear the joke. You smile politely while your heart sinks.

What was intended to be a reprimand for a decision or action becomes a personal attack. “You have a history of poor decisions, John.”

Someone chooses to wash your dirty laundry in public. “Sue, is it true that you and Jim are separated?”

Insensitive comments. Thoughts that should have

remained thoughts. Feelings which had no business being expressed. Opinions carelessly tossed like a grenade into a crowd.

And if you were to tell the one who threw these thoughtless darts about the pain they caused, his response would be “Oh, but I had no intention... I didn’t realize you were so sensitive!” or “I forgot you were here.”

In a way, the words are comforting, until you stop to think about them (which is not recommended). For when you start to think about insensitive slurs, you realize they come from an infamous family whose father has bred generations of pain. His name? Egotism. His children? Three sisters: disregard, disrespect, and disappointment.

These three witches have combined to poison countless relationships and break innumerable hearts. Listed among their weapons are Satan’s cruelest artillery: gossip, accusations, resentment, impatience, and on and on....

God’s Word has strong medicine for those who carelessly wag their tongues. The message is clear: He who dares to call himself God’s ambassador is not afforded the luxury of idle words. Excuses such as “I didn’t know you were here” or “I didn’t realize this was so touchy” are shallow when they come from those who claim to be followers and imitators of the Great Physician. We have an added responsibility to guard our tongues. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

Evaluate the words you have spoken in the past week. What statements have been sinful or harmful? Did your words build up or tear down? Were they critical? Were they vulgar? If so, ask for God's forgiveness and seek the forgiveness of anyone you have offended. Ask for God's help to use your words wisely.

Exploration

Helpful Words—[Proverbs 16:24](#); [25:11](#);
[Ecclesiastes 10:12](#); [Isaiah 50:4](#); [Ephesians 4:29](#);
[Colossians 4:6](#).

The Wise Words of Solomon

These are the wise words of Solomon:

A wise son makes his father happy,
but a foolish son makes his mother sad.

²Riches gotten by doing wrong have no value,
but right living will save you from death.

³The Lord does not let good people go hungry,
but he keeps evil people from getting what they want.

⁴A lazy person will end up poor,
but a hard worker will become rich.

⁵Those who gather crops on time are wise,
but those who sleep through the harvest are a
disgrace.

⁶Good people will have rich blessings,
but the wicked will be overwhelmed by violence.

⁷Good people will be remembered as a blessing,
but evil people will soon be forgotten.

⁸The wise do what they are told,
but a talkative fool will be ruined.

⁹The honest person will live in safety,
but the dishonest will be caught.

¹⁰A wink may get you into trouble,
and foolish talk will lead to your ruin.

¹¹The words of a good person give life, like a fountain
of water,
but the words of the wicked contain nothing but
violence.

¹²Hatred stirs up trouble,
but love forgives all wrongs.

¹³Smart people speak wisely,
but people without wisdom should be punished.

¹⁴The wise don't tell everything they know,
but the foolish talk too much and are ruined.

¹⁵Having lots of money protects the rich,
but having no money destroys the poor.

¹⁶Good people are rewarded with life,
but evil people are paid with punishment.

¹⁷Whoever accepts correction is on the way to life,
but whoever ignores correction will lead others away
from life.

¹⁸Whoever hides hate is a liar.
Whoever tells lies is a fool.

¹⁹If you talk a lot, you are sure to sin;
if you are wise, you will keep quiet.

²⁰The words of a good person are like pure silver,
but an evil person's thoughts are worth very little.

²¹Good people's words will help many others,
but fools will die because they don't have wisdom.

²²The Lord's blessing brings wealth,
and no sorrow comes with it.

²³A foolish person enjoys doing wrong,
but a person with understanding enjoys doing what is
wise.

²⁴Evil people will get what they fear most,
but good people will get what they want most.

²⁵A storm will blow the evil person away,
but a good person will always be safe.

²⁶A lazy person affects the one he works for
like vinegar on the teeth or smoke in the eyes.

²⁷Whoever respects the Lord will have a long life,
but the life of an evil person will be cut short.

²⁸A good person can look forward to happiness,
but an evil person can expect nothing.

²⁹The Lord will protect good people
but will ruin those who do evil.

³⁰Good people will always be safe,
but evil people will not remain in the land.

³¹A good person says wise things,
but a liar's tongue will be stopped.

³²Good people know the right thing to say,
but evil people only tell lies.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 11:1-31

Situation

Solomon gave practical words of wisdom that would ensure long life to those who heed them.

Observation

Solomon contrasted righteous and wicked behavior, paying special attention to the best use of money.

Inspiration

I know two men who work for a nonprofit organization. Both travel on expense accounts. One lives as a friend of God; the other does not. Circumstances are the same for both, but their responses to those circumstances are opposite. This is how the difference shows:

“Go ahead and order the steak.”

“But I don’t eat like this at home; I can’t afford it.”

“You’re not at home; it’s going on your expense account.”

“No.”

“You work hard; you’ve earned it.”

“I’m paid to work hard. I am not paid to exploit.”

When those two men started their work, both had strong convictions about the high calling of their vocations. They felt a sense of mission in a worthwhile organization, one that helped people in need. They kept costs down so that the money could be used as the donors expected it to be used. But

then they began to notice that others in their group weren't so fussy. After a while it became easier for one of those men to change from a high view of commitment to the rationalization, "You won't be appreciated any more if you don't take." Even worse, he gave in to the charge, "You make the rest of us look bad when we turn in our expenses."

... But the other man won't bend....

He just goes on, one day at a time, trying to do what is expected of him by God. And usually that's all we have to go on as we try to be a friend of God. What others say cannot be the measure of what is ethical, moral, or right, even if it is legal. The view of the majority is not necessarily the view of God. (From *Enjoying the Closeness of God* by Roger Palms)

Application

Take a minute to look through your checkbook. How do you spend your money? Where does extra money go—eating out, golf, movies? Over the next month, skip one of these extras and give the money you save to a Christian ministry.

Exploration

The Rich Ruler—[Luke 18:18–30](#). The Faithful, Wise Servant—[Luke 12:42–48](#).

The Lord hates dishonest scales, but he is pleased with honest weights.

²Pride leads only to shame;
it is wise to be humble.

³Good people will be guided by honesty;
dishonesty will destroy those who are not trustworthy.

⁴Riches will not help when it's time to die,
but right living will save you from death.

⁵The goodness of the innocent makes life easier,
but the wicked will be destroyed by their wickedness.

⁶Doing right brings freedom to honest people,
but those who are not trustworthy will be caught by
their own desires.

⁷When the wicked die, hope dies with them;
their hope in riches will come to nothing.

⁸The good person is saved from trouble;
it comes to the wicked instead.

⁹With words an evil person can destroy a neighbor,
but a good person will escape by being smart.

¹⁰When good people succeed, the city is happy.
When evil people die, there are shouts of joy.

¹¹Good people bless and build up their city,
but the wicked can destroy it with their words.

¹²People without good sense find fault with their
neighbors,
but those with understanding keep quiet.

¹³Gossips can't keep secrets,
but a trustworthy person can.

¹⁴Without leadership a nation falls,
but lots of good advice will save it.

¹⁵Whoever guarantees to pay somebody else's loan
will suffer.
It is safer to avoid such promises.

¹⁶A kind woman gets respect,
but cruel men get only wealth.

¹⁷Kind people do themselves a favor,
but cruel people bring trouble on themselves.

¹⁸An evil person really earns nothing,
but a good person will surely be rewarded.

¹⁹Those who are truly good will live,
but those who chase after evil will die.

²⁰The Lord hates those with evil hearts
but is pleased with those who are innocent.

²¹Those who are good will certainly be rewarded.

²¹Evil people will certainly be punished,
but those who do right will be set free.

²²A beautiful woman without good sense
is like a gold ring in a pig's snout.

²³Those who do right only wish for good,
but the wicked can expect to be defeated by God's
anger.

²⁴Some people give much but get back even more.
Others don't give what they should and end up poor.

²⁵Whoever gives to others will get richer;
those who help others will themselves be helped.

²⁶People curse those who keep all the grain,
but they bless the one who is willing to sell it.

²⁷Whoever looks for good will find kindness,
but whoever looks for evil will find trouble.

²⁸Those who trust in riches will be ruined,
but a good person will be healthy like a green leaf.

²⁹Whoever brings trouble to his family
will be left with nothing but the wind.
A fool will be a servant to the wise.

³⁰A good person gives life to others;
the wise person teaches others how to live.

³¹Good people will be rewarded on earth,

and the wicked and the sinners will be punished.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 12:1–13:25

Situation

Solomon gave instruction about life. He contrasted good with evil, wisdom with foolishness, and labor with laziness.

Observation

Do right and you will succeed. Wickedness leads to failure and death. Foolishness and laziness lead to ruin.

Inspiration

You want success? Here's your model. You want achievement? Here's your prototype. You want bright lights, pageants and media attention? Consider the front-page, center article of the nation's largest daily newspaper.

It is a caricature of "Miss America." The vital data of the fifty-one participants has been compiled to present the perfect woman. She has brown hair. She has brown eyes. She knows how to sing and has a perfect figure: 35–24–35. She is Miss America.

The message trumpets off the page: "This is the standard for American women." The implication is clear: Do what it takes to be like her. Firm your thighs. Deepen your cleavage. Pamper your hair. Improve your walk.

No reference is made to her convictions ... to her honesty ... to her ... faith ... or to her God. But you are told her hip size.

In a small photo, four inches to the left, is another woman. Her face is thin. Her skin is wrinkled, almost leathery. No makeup ... no blush ... no lipstick. There is a faint smile on her lips and a glint in her eyes. She looks pale. Perhaps it's my imagination or perhaps it's time. The caption reads, "Mother Teresa: In serious condition."

Mother Teresa. You know her story. When she won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985, she gave the two hundred thousand dollars to the poor of Calcutta. When a business man bought her a new car, she sold it and gave the money to the underprivileged. She owns nothing. She owes nothing.

Two women: Miss America and Mother Teresa. One walks the boardwalk; the other walks the alley. Two voices. One promises crowns, flowers, and crowds. The other promises service, surrender, and joy.

Now I have nothing against beauty pageants (although I have my reservations about them). But I do have something against the lying voices that noise our world.

You've heard them. They tell you to swap your integrity for a new sale. To barter your convictions for an easy deal. To exchange your devotion for a quick thrill.

They whisper. They woo. They taunt. They tantalize. They flirt. They flatter. "Go ahead, it's O.K." "Just wait until tomorrow." "Don't worry, no one will know." "How could anything that feels so right be so wrong?" ...

For amidst the fleeting promises of pleasure is the timeless promise of [God's] presence.

“I will be with you always, even until the end of this age” ([Matthew 28:20](#)).

“I will never leave you; I will never forget you” ([Hebrews 13:5](#)).

There is no chorus so loud that the voice of God cannot be heard ... if we will but listen. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

What matters to you: looks or love, your job or service to God, wealth or sacrifice? Pattern your life after wise, spiritual, and devoted workers.

Exploration

Righteousness—[Psalm 1](#); [Proverbs 10:2](#); [Romans 4:3](#).

Anyone who loves learning accepts correction,
but a person who hates being corrected is stupid.

²The Lord is pleased with a good person,
but he will punish anyone who plans evil.

³Doing evil brings no safety at all,
but a good person has safety and security.

⁴A good wife is like a crown for her husband,
but a disgraceful wife is like a disease in his bones.

⁵The plans that good people make are fair,
but the advice of the wicked will trick you.

⁶The wicked talk about killing people,
but the words of good people will save them.

⁷Wicked people die and they are no more,
but a good person's family continues.

⁸The wisdom of the wise wins praise,
but there is no respect for the stupid.

⁹A person who is not important but has a servant is
better off
than someone who acts important but has no food.

¹⁰Good people take care of their animals,
but even the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.

¹¹Those who work their land will have plenty of food,
but the one who chases empty dreams is not wise.

¹²The wicked want what other evil people have stolen,
but good people want to give what they have to
others.

¹³Evil people are trapped by their evil talk,
but good people stay out of trouble.

¹⁴People will be rewarded for what they say,
and they will also be rewarded for what they do.

¹⁵Fools think they are doing right,
but the wise listen to advice.

¹⁶Fools quickly show that they are upset,
but the wise ignore insults.

¹⁷An honest witness tells the truth,
but a dishonest witness tells lies.

¹⁸Careless words stab like a sword,
but wise words bring healing.

¹⁹Truth will continue forever,
but lies are only for a moment.

²⁰Those who plan evil are full of lies,
but those who plan peace are happy.

²¹No harm comes to a good person,

but an evil person's life is full of trouble.

²²The Lord hates those who tell lies
but is pleased with those who keep their promises.

²³Wise people keep what they know to themselves,
but fools can't keep from showing how foolish they
are.

²⁴Hard workers will become leaders,
but those who are lazy will be slaves.

²⁵Worry is a heavy load,
but a kind word cheers you up.

²⁶Good people take advice from their friends,
but an evil person is easily led to do wrong.

²⁷The lazy catch no food to cook,
but a hard worker will have great wealth.

²⁸Doing what is right is the way to life,
but there is another way that leads to death.

Wise children take their parents' advice,
but whoever makes fun of wisdom won't listen to
correction.

²People will be rewarded for what they say,
but those who can't be trusted want only violence.

³Those who are careful about what they say protect
their lives,
but whoever speaks without thinking will be ruined.

⁴The lazy will not get what they want,
but those who work hard will.

⁵Good people hate what is false,
but the wicked do shameful and disgraceful things.

⁶Doing what is right protects the honest person,
but doing evil ruins the sinner.

⁷Some people pretend to be rich but really have
nothing.
Others pretend to be poor but really are wealthy.

⁸The rich may have to pay a ransom for their lives,
but the poor will face no such danger.

⁹Good people can look forward to a bright future,
but the future of the wicked is like a flame going out.

¹⁰Pride only leads to arguments,
but those who take advice are wise.

¹¹Money that comes easily disappears quickly,
but money that is gathered little by little will grow.

¹²It is sad not to get what you hoped for.
But wishes that come true are like eating fruit from the
tree of life.

¹³Those who reject what they are taught will pay for it,
but those who obey what they are told will be
rewarded.

¹⁴The teaching of a wise person gives life.
It is like a fountain that can save people from death.

¹⁵People with good understanding will be well liked,
but the lives of those who are not trustworthy are
hard.

¹⁶Every wise person acts with good sense,
but fools show how foolish they are.

¹⁷A wicked messenger brings nothing but trouble,
but a trustworthy one makes everything right.

¹⁸A person who refuses correction will end up poor
and disgraced,
but the one who accepts correction will be honored.

¹⁹It is so good when wishes come true,
but fools hate to stop doing evil.

²⁰Spend time with the wise and you will become wise,

but the friends of fools will suffer.

²¹Trouble always comes to sinners,
but good people enjoy success.

²²Good people leave their wealth to their grandchildren,
but a sinner's wealth is stored up for good people.

²³A poor person's field might produce plenty of food,
but others often steal it away.

²⁴If you do not punish your children, you don't love
them,
but if you love your children, you will correct them.

²⁵Good people have enough to eat,
but the wicked will go hungry.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 14:1–35

Situation

Each proverb in this section was written to capture interest through contrast. Each one highlights the life of the wise and righteous person in contrast to life of the foolish and wicked.

Observation

If we choose to live by God's standards, we will be righteous. But if we choose to live by our own standards, we will be wicked and will face God's wrath.

Inspiration

The natural man is spiritually dead, separated from God. He has neither the presence of God in His life nor the knowledge of God's ways. He has learned to live his life independently of God. Essentially, this is what constitutes the "flesh." His mind has been conformed to this world. The brain, which is physical and part of the body, functions like a computer. The mind is the programmer. The body picks up data from the world through its five senses. The mind chooses and interprets the data, and the brain stores it. The emotions are essentially a product of how the mind chooses to think and interpret life's events.

When we are born again, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our life. Because we are now spiritually alive and united with Christ, we have the mind of Christ. We have become a partaker of the divine

nature. However, nobody pushed the clear button in the computer. The brain is still programmed to live independently of God....

The battle is for the mind: "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another" ([Galatians 5:17](#)). God has given us the responsibility to choose. The carnal Christian chooses to walk according to the flesh. What governs his behavior are the old habit patterns and thoughts that were programmed over time. The spiritually defeated Christian fails to put on the armor of God, and ends up paying attention to deceiving spirits. The spiritual man has crucified the flesh and put on the armor of God; he chooses to think upon that which is true.

We are to be renewed in the spirit of our minds ([Ephesians 4:23](#)). The Holy Spirit discloses the mind of Christ. We must choose to no longer be conformed to this world. We are to be diligent to present ourselves approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth ([2 Timothy 2:15](#)). When we do, we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. We choose to think the truth, and the Holy Spirit enables our thoughts and renews our minds with the *logos*. Then the peace of God guards our hearts and minds. We let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts by letting the word of Christ richly dwell in us ([Colossians 3:15-16](#)). We are now equipped to discern.

(From *Walking in the Light* by Neil Anderson)

Application

Do you have a quick temper? Do you respond selfishly to others? Reread this chapter substituting the word “I” for the subject in sentences that deal with righteousness (“I strengthen my family ... I live a good life ... I am a truthful witness”). With each statement, ask, “Is this true of me?” When you answer no, look for ways to make it true!

Exploration

Wisdom—[1 Kings 3:6–9, 12](#); [Psalm 119:97–104](#); [Proverbs 1:23–28](#); [2:3–6, 9–10](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:1](#); [Luke 2:40](#); [James 1:5](#).

A wise woman strengthens her family,
but a foolish woman destroys hers by what she does.

²People who live good lives respect the Lord,
but those who live evil lives don't.

³Fools will be punished for their proud words,
but the words of the wise will protect them.

⁴When there are no oxen, no food is in the barn.
But with a strong ox, much grain can be grown.

⁵A truthful witness does not lie,
but a false witness tells nothing but lies.

⁶Those who make fun of wisdom look for it and do not
find it,
but knowledge comes easily to those with
understanding.

⁷Stay away from fools,
because they can't teach you anything.

⁸A wise person will understand what to do,
but a foolish person is dishonest.

⁹Fools don't care if they sin,
but honest people work at being right.

¹⁰No one else can know your sadness,

and strangers cannot share your joy.

¹¹The wicked person's house will be destroyed,
but a good person's tent will still be standing.

¹²Some people think they are doing right,
but in the end it leads to death.

¹³Someone who is laughing may be sad inside,
and joy may end in sadness.

¹⁴Evil people will be paid back for their evil ways,
and good people will be rewarded for their good ones.

¹⁵Fools will believe anything,
but the wise think about what they do.

¹⁶Wise people are careful and stay out of trouble,
but fools are careless and quick to act.

¹⁷Someone with a quick temper does foolish things,
but someone with understanding remains calm.

¹⁸Fools are rewarded with nothing but more
foolishness,
but the wise are rewarded with knowledge.

¹⁹Evil people will bow down to those who are good;
the wicked will bow down at the door of those who do
right.

²⁰The poor are rejected, even by their neighbors,

but the rich have many friends.

²¹It is a sin to hate your neighbor,
but being kind to the needy brings happiness.

²²Those who make evil plans will be ruined,
but those who plan to do good will be loved and
trusted.

²³Those who work hard make a profit,
but those who only talk will be poor.

²⁴Wise people are rewarded with wealth,
but fools only get more foolishness.

²⁵A truthful witness saves lives,
but a false witness is a traitor.

²⁶Those who respect the Lord will have security,
and their children will be protected.

²⁷Respect for the Lord gives life.
It is like a fountain that can save people from death.

²⁸A king is honored when he has many people to rule,
but a prince is ruined if he has none.

²⁹Patient people have great understanding,
but people with quick tempers show their foolishness.

³⁰Peace of mind means a healthy body,
but jealousy will rot your bones.

³¹Whoever mistreats the poor insults their Maker,
but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

³²The wicked are ruined by their own evil,
but those who do right are protected even in death.

³³Wisdom lives in those with understanding,
and even fools recognize it.

³⁴Doing what is right makes a nation great,
but sin will bring disgrace to any people.

³⁵A king is pleased with a wise servant,
but he will become angry with one who causes him
shame.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 15:1–33

Situation

Wise and prudent followers of God solve their problems while pleasing God. The corrupt and foolish may gain wealth, but they also gain God's wrath.

Observation

We should seek God's wisdom in every part of life. A wise person solves problems peacefully.

Inspiration

"People who work for peace in a peaceful way plant a good crop of right-living" [[James 3:18](#)].

The principle for peace is the same as the principle for crops: Never underestimate the power of a seed.

The story of Heinz is a good example. Europe, 1934. Hitler's plague of anti-Semitism was infecting a continent. Some would escape it. Some would die from it. But eleven-year-old Heinz would learn from it. He would learn the power of sowing seeds of peace.

Heinz was a Jew.

The Bavarian village of Furth, where Heinz lived, was being overrun by Hitler's young thugs. Heinz's father, a schoolteacher, lost his job. Recreational activities ceased. Tension mounted on the streets.

The Jewish families clutched the traditions that held them together—the observance of the Sabbath, of Rosh Hashanah, of Yom Kippur. Old ways took on new significance. As the clouds of persecution swelled and blackened, these ancient precepts were a

precious cleft in a mighty rock.

And as the streets became a battleground, such security meant survival.

Hitler youth roamed the neighborhoods looking for trouble. Young Heinz learned to keep his eyes open. When he saw a band of troublemakers, he would step to the other side of the street. Sometimes he would escape a fight—sometimes not.

One day, in 1934, a pivotal confrontation occurred. Heinz found himself face-to-face with a Hitler bully. A beating appeared inevitable. This time, however, he walked away unhurt—not because of what he did, but because of what he said. He didn't fight back; he spoke up. He convinced the troublemakers that a fight was not necessary. His words kept battle at bay. And Heinz saw firsthand how the tongue can create peace.

He learned the skill of using words to avoid conflict. And for a young Jew in Hitler-ridden Europe, that skill had many opportunities to be honed.

Fortunately, Heinz's family escaped from Bavaria and made their way to America. Later in life, he would downplay the impact those adolescent experiences had on his development.

But one has to wonder. For after Heinz grew up, his name became synonymous with peace negotiations. His legacy became that of a bridgebuilder. Somewhere he had learned the power of the properly placed word of peace. And one has to wonder if his training didn't come on the streets of Bavaria.

You don't know him as Heinz. You know him by his Anglicized name, Henry. Henry Kissinger.

Never underestimate the power of a seed. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

This chapter has nine proverbs that deal directly with your relationship with God. Select three of them to help you improve your relationship with him.

Exploration

Continual Devotion—[Psalm 119:147–148](#); [Matthew 13:44–46](#); [Mark 12:28–30](#); [Romans 12:11–12](#); [Galatians 6:9](#).

A gentle answer will calm a person's anger,
but an unkind answer will cause more anger.

²Wise people use knowledge when they speak,
but fools pour out foolishness.

³The Lord's eyes see everything;
he watches both evil and good people.

⁴As a tree gives fruit, healing words give life,
but dishonest words crush the spirit.

⁵Fools reject their parents' correction,
but anyone who accepts correction is wise.

⁶Much wealth is in the houses of good people,
but evil people get nothing but trouble.

⁷Wise people use their words to spread knowledge,
but there is no knowledge in the thoughts of fools.

⁸The Lord hates the sacrifice that the wicked offer,
but he likes the prayers of honest people.

⁹The Lord hates what evil people do,
but he loves those who do what is right.

¹⁰The person who quits doing what is right will be
punished,
and the one who hates to be corrected will die.

¹¹The Lord knows what is happening in the world of the dead,
so he surely knows the thoughts of the living.

¹²Those who make fun of wisdom don't like to be corrected;
they will not ask the wise for advice.

¹³Happiness makes a person smile,
but sadness can break a person's spirit.

¹⁴People with understanding want more knowledge,
but fools just want more foolishness.

¹⁵Every day is hard for those who suffer,
but a happy heart is like a continual feast.

¹⁶It is better to be poor and respect the Lord
than to be wealthy and have much trouble.

¹⁷It is better to eat vegetables with those who love you
than to eat meat with those who hate you.

¹⁸People with quick tempers cause trouble,
but those who control their tempers stop a quarrel.

¹⁹A lazy person's life is like a patch of thorns,
but an honest person's life is like a smooth highway.

²⁰A wise son makes his father happy,
but a foolish son disrespects his mother.

²¹A woman who is soft and kind will bring her family to ruin.

²¹A person without wisdom enjoys being foolish,
but someone with understanding does what is right.

²²Plans fail without good advice,
but they succeed with the advice of many others.

²³People enjoy giving good advice.
Saying the right word at the right time is so pleasing.

²⁴Wise people's lives get better and better.
They avoid whatever would cause their death.

²⁵The Lord will tear down the proud person's house,
but he will protect the widow's property.

²⁶The Lord hates evil thoughts
but is pleased with kind words.

²⁷Greedy people bring trouble to their families,
but the person who can't be paid to do wrong will live.

²⁸Good people think before they answer,
but the wicked simply pour out evil.

²⁹The Lord does not listen to the wicked,
but he hears the prayers of those who do right.

³⁰Good news makes you feel better.
Your happiness will show in your eyes.

³¹If you listen to correction to improve your life,
you will live among the wise.

⁵²Those who refuse correction hate themselves,
but those who accept correction gain understanding.

³³Respect for the Lord will teach you wisdom.
If you want to be honored, you must be humble.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 16:1–33

Situation

Solomon knew that when his actions and motives pleased God, God rewarded him with peace. When pride and greed entered his heart, he began to travel down the road to chaos and destruction.

Observation

No matter what good we do, God knows our motivation for doing it. God judges our motives, not simply our actions.

Inspiration

Conscience is like a compass. If a compass is faulty, you'll quickly get off course. A conscience gets its signals from the heart, which can be dulled, hardened, or calloused. Furthermore, a conscience can be overly sensitive or can even drive one mad....

In order for one's conscience to be a good guide, one the Spirit can direct, it needs to be healthy, sensitive, and capable of getting God's message and truth.

... When one realizes the true condition of the heart without God and ponders the impact of his or her sinfulness, there is an emotional reaction—greater in some than in others. But there is an emotional reaction. *I have offended. I have grieved the heart of God. I have driven nails into Christ's hands with my sins.* That does something to my emotions when I, as a sinner, realize that. When the truth of forgiveness

and grace and God's overwhelming love pour over me, there is an emotional reaction. And I must admit that. When I realize that God has reserved a home in heaven for me—a reprobate sinner who was running in the other direction when He stopped me, turned me around in grace, and brought me to Himself—that brings an emotional response. Don't deny those emotions! ...

God gave you a mind. Use it to know Him better. Study the doctrines that put steel into the cement of your faith. Exercise your mind!

God gave you a will. Use it to obey Him. Make decisions that honor Him and please Him. Exercise your will!

And God gave you emotions. Don't be afraid of them. Let them out. Allow your heart to show through. Exercise your emotions!

If we refuse to open up, to allow the full prism of His love and truth to shine through our lives, we will miss much of the color life has to offer. (From *Flying Closer to the Flame* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Are you fooling God? It can't be done! You can't just "go through the motions." Live a genuine life of faith today by praying that God will guide your heart and mind. Then he will direct your actions.

Exploration

Heart—[1 Samuel 16:7](#); [Proverbs 4:23](#); [Jeremiah 17:9-10](#); [Luke 6:45](#).

People may make plans in their minds,
but only the Lord can make them come true.

²You may believe you are doing right,
but the Lord will judge your reasons.

³Depend on the Lord in whatever you do,
and your plans will succeed.

⁴The Lord makes everything go as he pleases.
He has even prepared a day of disaster for evil people.

⁵The Lord hates those who are proud.
They will surely be punished.

⁶Love and truth bring forgiveness of sin.
By respecting the Lord you will avoid evil.

⁷When people live so that they please the Lord,
even their enemies will make peace with them.

⁸It is better to be poor and right
than to be wealthy and dishonest.

⁹People may make plans in their minds,
but the Lord decides what they will do.

¹⁰The words of a king are like a message from God,
so his decisions should be fair.

¹¹The Lord wants honest balances and scales;

all the weights are his work.

¹²Kings hate those who do wrong,
because governments only continue if they are fair.

¹³Kings like honest people;
they value someone who speaks the truth.

¹⁴An angry king can put someone to death,
so a wise person will try to make him happy.

¹⁵A smiling king can give people life;
his kindness is like a spring shower.

¹⁶It is better to get wisdom than gold,
and to choose understanding rather than silver!

¹⁷Good people stay away from evil.
By watching what they do, they protect their lives.

¹⁸Pride will destroy a person;
a proud attitude leads to ruin.

¹⁹It is better to be humble and be with those who suffer
than to share stolen property with the proud.

²⁰Whoever listens to what is taught will succeed,
and whoever trusts the Lord will be happy.

²¹The wise are known for their understanding.
Their pleasant words make them better teachers.

²²Understanding is like a fountain which gives life to

those who use it,
but foolishness brings punishment to fools.

²³Wise people's minds tell them what to say,
and that helps them be better teachers.

²⁴Pleasant words are like a honeycomb,
making people happy and healthy.

²⁵Some people think they are doing right,
but in the end it leads to death.

²⁶The workers' hunger helps them,
because their desire to eat makes them work.

²⁷Useless people make evil plans,
and their words are like a burning fire.

²⁸A useless person causes trouble,
and a gossip ruins friendships.

²⁹Cruel people trick their neighbors
and lead them to do wrong.

³⁰Someone who winks is planning evil,
and the one who grins is planning something wrong.

³¹Gray hair is like a crown of honor;
it is earned by living a good life.

³²Patience is better than strength.
Controlling your temper is better than capturing a city.

³³People throw lots to make a decision,
but the answer comes from the Lord.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 17:1–28

Situation

God judges every person by the same standard. He condemns evil.

Observation

Wisdom does not come naturally. We gain it by respecting God and making careful choices.

Inspiration

The God who has shown himself to be for us, will also to be with us. He is infinitely capable and desirous of relating himself to every person who freely opens himself to such a relationship. God wills this as the means of fulfilling his purpose in us, enabling us to become the kind of persons he intends us to be.

The divine capacity to be personally related to us is rooted in the richness and complexity of the very being of God. “God in Three Persons!” Transcendent above and eminent in all that exists. Disclosing himself dramatically and painfully in our history. Intimately and profoundly present with each who will open himself to the Spirit.

And we are built so that we may deeply receive his Spirit. We bear his image. Our person is patterned after his Person. Our spirit, at its deepest level, is kin to his Spirit.

As we, then, accept the loving knowledge of God made possible through Christ, we are drawn by the

Spirit into a deeper knowledge which becomes trust, commitment, growth, fulfillment.

(From *With Good Reason* by Chester A. Pennington)

Application

Avoid the mistakes others have made. Spend time with a Christian older than you. Gain wisdom by hearing of that person's success and failures. Find answers to questions like: "What has helped you get to know God better? How do you resist temptation? How do you respond to stress?"

Exploration

Faith—[Psalm 20:7](#); [John 14:14–17](#); [Hebrews 11:1](#).

It is better to eat a dry crust of bread in peace
than to have a feast where there is quarreling.

²A wise servant will rule over the master's disgraceful
child

and will even inherit a share of what the master leaves
his children.

³A hot furnace tests silver and gold,
but the Lord tests hearts.

⁴Evil people listen to evil words.
Liars pay attention to cruel words.

⁵Whoever mistreats the poor insults their Maker;
whoever enjoys someone's trouble will be punished.

⁶Old people are proud of their grandchildren,
and children are proud of their parents.

⁷Fools should not be proud,
and rulers should not be liars.

⁸Some people think they can pay others to do anything
they ask.

They think it will work every time.

⁹Whoever forgives someone's sin makes a friend,
but gossiping about the sin breaks up friendships.

¹⁰A wise person will learn more from a warning than a fool will learn from a hundred lashings.

¹¹Disobedient people look only for trouble, so a cruel messenger will be sent against them.

¹²It is better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than to meet a fool doing foolish things.

¹³Whoever gives evil in return for good will always have trouble at home.

¹⁴Starting a quarrel is like a leak in a dam, so stop it before a fight breaks out.

¹⁵The Lord hates both of these things: freeing the guilty and punishing the innocent.

¹⁶It won't do a fool any good to try to buy wisdom, because he doesn't have the ability to be wise.

¹⁷A friend loves you all the time, and a brother helps in time of trouble.

¹⁸It is not wise to promise to pay what your neighbor owes.

¹⁹Whoever loves to argue loves to sin. Whoever brags a lot is asking for trouble.

²⁰A person with an evil heart will find no success, and the person whose words are evil will get into

trouble.

²¹It is sad to have a foolish child;
there is no joy in being the parent of a fool.

²²A happy heart is like good medicine,
but a broken spirit drains your strength.

²³When the wicked accept money to do wrong
there can be no justice.

²⁴The person with understanding is always looking for
wisdom,
but the mind of a fool wanders everywhere.

²⁵A foolish son makes his father sad
and causes his mother great sorrow.

²⁶It is not good to punish the innocent
or to beat leaders for being honest.

²⁷The smart person says very little,
and one with understanding stays calm.

²⁸Even fools seem to be wise if they keep quiet;
if they don't speak, they appear to understand.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 18:1–24

Situation

For Jews, the individual was not separate from the community. Antisocial behavior was considered a terrible crime in Israel and Judah.

Observation

There are three warnings in this chapter against forming hasty opinions.

Inspiration

We aren't good enough to judge. Can the hungry accuse the beggar? Can the sick mock the ill? Can the blind judge the deaf? Can the sinner condemn the sinner? No. Only One can judge, and that One is neither writing nor reading this book.

Not only are we unworthy, we are unqualified. We don't know enough about the person to judge him. We don't know enough about his past. We condemn a man for stumbling this morning, but we didn't see the blows he took yesterday. We judge a woman for the limp in her walk but cannot see the tack in her shoe. We mock the fear in their eyes but have no idea how many stones they have ducked or darts they have dodged.

Are they too loud? Perhaps they fear being neglected again. Are they too timid? Perhaps they fear failing again. Too slow? Perhaps they fell the last time they hurried. You don't know. Only one who has followed yesterday's steps can be their judge.

Not only are we ignorant about yesterday, we are ignorant about tomorrow. Dare we judge a book while chapters are yet unwritten? Should we pass a verdict on a painting while the artist still holds the brush? How can you dismiss a soul until God's work is complete? "God began doing a good work in you, and I am sure he will continue it until it is finished when Jesus Christ comes again" ([Philippians 1:6](#)).

Be careful! The Peter who denies Jesus at tonight's fire may proclaim him with fire at tomorrow's Pentecost. The Samson who is blind and weak today may use his final strength to level the pillars of godlessness. A stammering shepherd in this generation may be the mighty Moses of the next. Don't call Noah a fool, you may be asking him for a lift. "Do not judge before the right time; wait until the Lord comes" ([1 Corinthians 4:5](#)).

A condemned criminal was sent to his death by his country. In his final moments, he asked for mercy. Had he asked for mercy from the people, it would have been denied. Had he asked it of the government, it would have been declined. Had he asked it of his victims, they would have turned a deaf ear. But it wasn't to these he turned for grace. He turned instead to the bloodied form of the One who hung on the cross next to his and pleaded, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus answered by saying, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" ([Luke 23:43](#)). (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Application

Are you consciously or subconsciously judging someone? Try to determine what is behind your attitude. Are you jumping to conclusions? Do you know the whole story? List a number of reasons why you are unqualified to be that person's judge. Ask God to give you a heart of compassion instead.

Exploration

Warnings Against Judging—[Matthew 7:1–5](#); [1 Corinthians 4:5](#); [James 4:11–12](#).

Unfriendly people are selfish
and hate all good sense.

²Fools do not want to understand anything.
They only want to tell others what they think.

³Do something evil, and people won't like you.
Do something shameful, and they will make fun of you.

⁴Spoken words can be like deep water,
but wisdom is like a flowing stream.

⁵It is not good to honor the wicked
or to be unfair to the innocent.

⁶The words of fools start quarrels.
They make people want to beat them.

⁷The words of fools will ruin them;
their own words will trap them.

⁸The words of a gossip are like tasty bits of food.
People like to gobble them up.

⁹A person who doesn't work hard
is just like someone who destroys things.

¹⁰The Lord is like a strong tower;
those who do right can run to him for safety.

11 But the wicked are like a reed that sways in the wind.

¹¹Rich people trust their wealth to protect them.
They think it is like the high walls of a city.

¹²Proud people will be ruined,
but the humble will be honored.

¹³Anyone who answers without listening
is foolish and confused.

¹⁴The will to live can get you through sickness,
but no one can live with a broken spirit.

¹⁵The mind of a person with understanding gets
knowledge;
the wise person listens to learn more.

¹⁶Taking a gift to an important man
will help get you in to see him.

¹⁷The person who tells one side of a story seems right,
until someone else comes and asks questions.

¹⁸Throwing lots can settle arguments
and keep the two sides from fighting.

¹⁹A brother who has been insulted is harder to win
back than a walled city,
and arguments separate people like the barred gates of
a palace.

²⁰People will be rewarded for what they say;
they will be rewarded by how they speak.

²¹What you say can mean life or death.
Those who speak with care will be rewarded.

²²When a man finds a wife, he finds something good.
It shows that the Lord is pleased with him.

²³The poor beg for mercy,
but the rich give rude answers.

²⁴Some friends may ruin you,
but a real friend will be more loyal than a brother.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 19:1–29

Situation

Solomon contrasted foolishness with wisdom, wealth with poverty, and falsehood with truth.

Observation

Keep the highest standards for God in your thoughts and actions.

Inspiration

Jesus summarized the Christian life in the simplest summation of all: “Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise” ([Luke 6:31](#)). This we call the Golden Rule—the law of gold, a gold more precious than diamonds and rubies. Any child can recite the Golden Rule, but to make it an active part of daily living is no mean feat.

... Our response to petty criticism is often to retaliate in kind, instead of in kindness. This is where the Golden Rule touches life. Here is where Jesus spoke of not returning evil for evil. Doing to others what we want others to do to us is simply a matter of kindness. It involves being thoughtful and considerate. But it is more than mere politeness. It is doing what is right. It is doing what pleases God.

Righteousness means right living. It means treating people right. It means living with personal integrity. A righteous person is one whom we can trust. His integrity is consistent. It is not for sale. A righteous person is moral without being moralistic. He

is pious without being pietistic. He has a sense of concern for other peoples' feelings. He wants to treat people right because he has the overarching desire to please a loving God. (From *Pleasing God* by R.C. Sproul)

Application

Do you give more than you take in your family, at church, and with friends? Do you look at any of these as people who “owe you” rather than you “owing them”? Put their needs ahead of your own. Practice the principles of [Proverbs 19](#) with each of them.

Exploration

Obedying God's Principles—[Matthew 7:24–27](#); [1 Corinthians 2:14–16](#); [James 1:22–25](#); [1 Peter 1:13–16](#).

It is better to be poor and honest
than to be foolish and tell lies.

²Enthusiasm without knowledge is not good.
If you act too quickly, you might make a mistake.

³People's own foolishness ruins their lives,
but in their minds they blame the Lord.

⁴Wealthy people are always finding more friends,
but the poor lose all theirs.

⁵A witness who lies will not go free;
liars will never escape.

⁶Many people want to please a leader,
and everyone is friends with those who give gifts.

⁷Poor people's relatives avoid them;
even their friends stay far away.
They run after them, begging,
but they are gone.

⁸Those who get wisdom do themselves a favor,
and those who love learning will succeed.

⁹A witness who lies will not go free,
liars will die.

¹⁰A fool should not live in luxury.

A slave should not rule over princes.

¹¹Smart people are patient;
they will be honored if they ignore insults.

¹²An angry king is like a roaring lion,
but his kindness is like the dew on the grass.

¹³A foolish son will ruin his father,
and a quarreling wife is like dripping water.

¹⁴Houses and wealth are inherited from parents,
but a wise wife is a gift from the Lord.

¹⁵Lazy people sleep a lot,
and idle people will go hungry.

¹⁶Those who obey the commands protect themselves,
but those who are careless will die.

¹⁷Being kind to the poor is like lending to the Lord;
he will reward you for what you have done.

¹⁸Correct your children while there is still hope;
do not let them destroy themselves.

¹⁹People with quick tempers will have to pay for it.
If you help them out once, you will have to do it again.

²⁰Listen to advice and accept correction,
and in the end you will be wise.

²¹People can make all kinds of plans.

but only the Lord's plan will happen.

²²People want others to be loyal,
so it is better to be poor than to be a liar.

²³Those who respect the Lord will live
and be satisfied, unbothered by trouble.

²⁴Though the lazy person puts his hand in the dish,
he won't lift the food to his mouth.

²⁵Whip those who make fun of wisdom, and perhaps
foolish people will gain some wisdom.

Correct those with understanding, and they will gain
knowledge.

²⁶A son who robs his father and sends away his
mother
brings shame and disgrace on himself.

²⁷Don't stop listening to correction, my child,
or you will forget what you have already learned.

²⁸An evil witness makes fun of fairness,
and wicked people love what is evil.

²⁹People who make fun of wisdom will be punished,
and the backs of foolish people will be beaten.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 20:1–30

Situation

Solomon wrote more proverbs. If readers followed these words of wisdom, Solomon promised that God would approve of their lives.

Observation

Sin takes many forms: gossip, laziness, drunkenness, and dishonesty.

Inspiration

My spiritual battleground is not over a pack of cigarettes or a bottle of port. It's not in a disco or a movie theater. My spiritual battleground is not a backyard fence over which I gossip to my neighbor, nor is it a fast car I race past the speed limit. My paralysis prevents me from reaching for the common temptations. That's why my spiritual battleground is on the field of my thoughts.

I possess a very unlovely trait: I waste precious time in idle daydreams. I hate it because wasteful fantasies distract me from the real concerns of life, causing me to feel restless and dissatisfied with the way things are.

... The very fact that I am ashamed of myself drives me to God. I lie in the dust of my self-despair at His feet and find safety and acceptance. My lazy thoughts make me contrite and repentant, and I am humbled that I have to come so often to God for cleansing.

If we are to have power with the Lord, to be dear to Him, if our prayers are to prevail and if we are to be most useful to Him, we must jerk rightside up those wrong and unlovely traits in our lives.

Amy Carmichael has said, “No word can declare with what longings Divine Love waits until the heart, all weary and sick of itself, turns to the Lord and says, “Take full possession.” (From *Diamonds in the Dust* by Joni Eareckson Tada)

Application

What sin do you wrestle with? How long has it been a problem? Seek God for victory. Ask him to help you throw that habit out of your life today.

Exploration

Victory over Sin and Temptation—[Proverbs 1:10](#); [Daniel 1:8](#); [Romans 6:13](#); [1 Corinthians 10:13](#); [1 John 5:3–5](#).

Wine and beer make people loud and uncontrolled;
it is not wise to get drunk on them.

²An angry king is like a roaring lion.
Making him angry may cost you your life.

³Foolish people are always fighting,
but avoiding quarrels will bring you honor.

⁴Lazy farmers don't plow when they should;
they expect a harvest, but there is none.

⁵People's thoughts can be like a deep well,
but someone with understanding can find the wisdom
there.

⁶Many people claim to be loyal,
but it is hard to find a trustworthy person.

⁷The good people who live honest lives
will be a blessing to their children.

⁸When a king sits on his throne to judge,
he knows evil when he sees it.

⁹No one can say, "I am innocent;
I have never done anything wrong."

¹⁰The Lord hates both these things:
dishonest weights and dishonest measures.

¹¹Even children are known by their behavior;
their actions show if they are innocent and good.

¹²The Lord has made both these things:
ears to hear and eyes to see.

¹³If you love to sleep, you will be poor.
If you stay awake, you will have plenty of food.

¹⁴Buyers say, “This is bad. It’s no good.”
Then they go away and brag about what they bought.

¹⁵There is gold and plenty of rubies,
but only a few people speak with knowledge.

¹⁶Take the coat of someone who promises to pay a
stranger’s debts,
and keep it until he pays what the stranger owes.

¹⁷Stolen food may taste sweet at first,
but later it will feel like a mouth full of gravel.

¹⁸Get advice if you want your plans to work.
If you go to war, get the advice of others.

¹⁹Gossips can’t keep secrets,
so avoid people who talk too much.

²⁰Those who curse their father or mother
will be like a light going out in darkness.

²¹Wealth inherited quickly in the beginning

will do you no good in the end.

²²Don't say, "I'll pay you back for the wrong you did."
Wait for the Lord, and he will make things right.

²³The Lord hates dishonest weights,
and dishonest scales do not please him.

²⁴The Lord decides what a person will do;
no one understands what his life is all about.

²⁵It's dangerous to promise something to God too
quickly.
After you've thought about it, it may be too late.

²⁶A wise king sorts out the evil people,
and he punishes them as they deserve.

²⁷The Lord looks deep inside people
and searches through their thoughts.

²⁸Loyalty and truth keep a king in power;
he continues to rule if he is loyal.

²⁹Young men glory in their strength,
and old men are honored for their gray hair.

³⁰Hard punishment will get rid of evil,
and whippings can change an evil heart.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 21:1-31

Situation

Solomon gave advice to moral people and warnings to the wicked ones. A God-honoring lifestyle will bring God's reward, but a selfish, wicked lifestyle leads to ruin.

Observation

The wicked are marked by arrogance and pride. The righteous are marked by humility.

Inspiration

Be quick to applaud the success of others. To the Romans, Paul gives this counsel: "Give each other more honor than you want for yourselves" ([Romans 12:10](#)).

William Barclay tells of a respected educator of a century past. He was known not just for his success but the way he handled it. On one occasion as he stepped to a seat on a platform, the public noticed who he was and began to applaud. Shocked, he turned and asked the man behind him to go ahead. He then began to applaud the man, assuming the applause was for him, and he was quite willing to share in it.

The humble heart honors others.

Again, is Jesus not our example? Content to be known as a carpenter. Happy to be mistaken for the gardener. He served his followers by washing their feet. He serves us by doing the same. Each morning

he gifts us with beauty. Each Sunday he calls us to his table. Each moment he dwells in our hearts. And does he not speak of the day when he as “the master will dress himself to serve and tell the servants to sit at the table, and he will serve them” ([Luke 12:37](#))?

If Jesus is so willing to honor us, can we not do the same for others? Make people a priority. Accept your part in his plan. Be quick to share the applause. And, most of all, regard others as more important than yourself. Love does. For love “does not boast, it is not proud” ([1 Corinthians 13:4](#), NIV).

Someone is piecing this all together. His thoughts are something like this: If I think you are more important than I am ... and you think I am more important than you are ... and he thinks she is more important than he is ... and she thinks he is more important than she is ... then in the end everyone feels important but no one acts important.

H'm. You think that's what God had in mind? (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

Application

In what ways do you accept, respect, and honor those who have more than you? Practice humility not by putting yourself down, but by building others up. What friend, relative, or coworker can you regard as more important than yourself this week? Think of at least three specific ways you can build that person up this week.

Exploration

Humility—[Proverbs 15:33](#); [18:12](#); [Philippians 2:1–11](#); [Colossians 3:12](#); [1 Peter 5:5](#).

The Lord can control a king's mind as he controls a river;
he can direct it as he pleases.

²You may believe you are doing right,
but the Lord judges your reasons.

³Doing what is right and fair
is more important to the Lord than sacrifices.

⁴Proud looks, proud thoughts,
and evil actions are sin.

⁵The plans of hard-working people earn a profit,
but those who act too quickly become poor.

⁶Wealth that comes from telling lies
vanishes like a mist and leads to death.

⁷The violence of the wicked will destroy them,
because they refuse to do what is right.

⁸Guilty people live dishonest lives,
but honest people do right.

⁹It is better to live in a corner on the [roof](#)
than inside the house with a quarreling wife.

¹⁰Evil people only want to harm others.
Their neighbors get no mercy from them.

¹¹If you punish those who make fun of wisdom, a foolish person may gain some wisdom.

But if you teach the wise, they will get knowledge.

¹²God, who is always right, watches the house of the wicked

and brings ruin on every evil person.

¹³Whoever ignores the poor when they cry for help will also cry for help and not be answered.

¹⁴A secret gift will calm an angry person;
a present given in secrecy will quiet great anger.

¹⁵When justice is done, good people are happy,
but evil people are ruined.

¹⁶Whoever does not use good sense
will end up among the dead.

¹⁷Whoever loves pleasure will become poor;
whoever loves wine and perfume will never be rich.

¹⁸Wicked people will suffer instead of good people,
and those who cannot be trusted will suffer instead of
those who do right.

¹⁹It is better to live alone in the desert
than with a quarreling and complaining wife.

²⁰Wise people's houses are full of the best foods and
olive oil,

but fools waste everything they have.

²¹Whoever tries to live right and be loyal
finds life, success, and honor.

²²A wise person can defeat a city full of warriors
and tear down the defenses they trust in.

²³Those who are careful about what they say
keep themselves out of trouble.

²⁴People who act with stubborn pride
are called “proud,” “bragger,” and “mocker.”

²⁵Lazy people’s desire for sleep will kill them,
because they refuse to work.

²⁶All day long they wish for more,
but good people give without holding back.

²⁷The Lord hates sacrifices brought by evil people,
particularly when they offer them for the wrong
reasons.

²⁸A lying witness will be forgotten,
but a truthful witness will speak on.

²⁹Wicked people are stubborn,
but good people think carefully about what they do.

³⁰There is no wisdom, understanding, or advice
that can succeed against the Lord.

³¹You can get the horses ready for battle

You can get the horses ready for battle,
but it is the Lord who gives the victory.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 22:1–29

Situation

The proverbs in this chapter point to the way for proper living. The promised rewards are more than just earthly accolades.

Observation

Having a good reputation is wise. People should desire to have a good name, not because this brings status but because it honors God.

Inspiration

Each year we have a student recognition day at our church. On the Sunday between Christmas and New Year's Day, we ask the young people of our church who are students at colleges and universities to give us reports of how their educational experiences have been going. It is a very special Sunday because ours is a Black Baptist church. The older members of our congregation have not had the educational opportunities that our young people enjoy. Consequently, they love to hear about what their children and grandchildren are learning.

On one such Sunday, after half a dozen students had given their reports, my pastor got up and delivered some closing words. "Children," he said, "you are going to die! You may not think you're going to die. But you're going to die. One of these days, they're going to take you out to the cemetery, drop you in a hole, throw some dirt on your face, and

go back to the church and eat potato salad.”

“When you were born,” he said, “you alone were crying and everybody else was happy. The important question I want to ask is this: When you die are you alone going to be happy, leaving everybody else crying? The answer depends on whether you live to get titles or you live to get testimonies. When they lay you in the grave, are people going to stand around reciting the fancy titles you earned, or are they going to stand around giving testimonies of the good things you did for them? Will they list your degrees and awards, or will they tell about what a blessing you were to them? Will you leave behind just a newspaper column telling people how important you were, or will you leave crying people who give testimonies of how they’ve lost the best friend they ever had? There’s nothing wrong with titles. Titles are good things to have. But if it ever comes down to a choice between a title or a testimony—go for the testimony.” (From *Who Switched the Price Tags?* by Tony Campolo)

Application

What are some of your goals for the next five years? Do they promise human recognition or a life that is faithful to God? Remember that a good, respected name does not always mean one of status, but rather one of stature and accomplishment for God.

Exploration

A Good Name—[1 Samuel 18:30](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:1](#); [Acts 6:3](#); [10:22](#); [16:2](#); [22:12](#); [2 Corinthians 8:18](#); [3 John 12](#).

Being respected is more important than having great riches.

To be well thought of is better than silver or gold.

²The rich and the poor are alike
in that the Lord made them all.

³The wise see danger ahead and avoid it,
but fools keep going and get into trouble.

⁴Respecting the Lord and not being proud
will bring you wealth, honor, and life.

⁵Evil people's lives are like paths covered with thorns
and traps.

People who guard themselves don't have such
problems.

⁶Train children how to live right,
and when they are old, they will not change.

⁷The rich rule over the poor,
and borrowers are servants to lenders.

⁸Those who plan evil will receive trouble.
Their cruel anger will come to an end.

⁹Generous people will be blessed,
because they share their food with the poor.

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¹⁰Get rid of the one who makes fun of wisdom.
Then fighting, quarrels, and insults will stop.

¹¹Whoever loves pure thoughts and kind words
will have even the king as a friend.

¹²The Lord guards knowledge,
but he destroys false words.

¹³The lazy person says, “There’s a lion outside!
I might get killed out in the street!”

¹⁴The words of an unfaithful wife are like a deep trap.
Those who make the Lord angry will get caught by
them.

¹⁵Every child is full of foolishness,
but punishment can get rid of it.

¹⁶Whoever gets rich by mistreating the poor,
and gives presents to the wealthy, will become poor.

Other Wise Sayings

¹⁷Listen carefully to what wise people say;
pay attention to what I am teaching you.

¹⁸It will be good to keep these things in mind
so that you are ready to repeat them.

¹⁹I am teaching them to you now
so that you will put your trust in the Lord.

²⁰I have written thirty sayings for you,
which give knowledge and good advice.

²¹I am teaching you true and reliable words
so that you can give true answers to anyone who asks.

²²Do not abuse poor people because they are poor,
and do not take away the rights of the needy in court.

²³The Lord will defend them in court
and will take the life of those who take away their
rights.

²⁴Don't make friends with quick-tempered people
or spend time with those who have bad tempers.

²⁵If you do, you will be like them.
Then you will be in real danger.

²⁶Don't promise to pay what someone else owes,
and don't guarantee anyone's loan.

²⁷If you cannot pay the loan,
your own bed may be taken right out from under you.

²⁸Don't move an old stone that marks a border,
because those stones were set up by your ancestors.

²⁹Do you see people skilled in their work?
They will work for kings, not for ordinary people.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 23:1–35

Situation

Solomon exhorted his hearers to avoid gluttony and drunkenness. He also advised them to respect older people.

Observation

Younger people can gain wisdom by learning from those who are older.

Inspiration

Don't you hate it when someone else reminds you?

The barber: "Getting a little thin on top here, Joe."

The stylist: "Next time you come in, Sue, we'll do something about these gray streaks."

The invitation: "You are invited to your thirtieth high school reunion."

Your doctor: "Nothing to worry about, Bill. Your condition is common for folks in their mid-age."

The dawning of old age. The first pages of the final chapters. A golden speck appears on the green leaves of your life, and you are brought face to wrinkled face with the fact that you are getting older....

Everything hurts when you wake up. What doesn't hurt, doesn't work.

Your parents begin acting like your children.

The smile lines don't go away when you stop smiling.

And then—boom! The rain becomes a torrent. The gentle taps become thunder. Cardiac arrest. Empty nest. Forty candles. Bifocals. Boom. Boom! BOOM!

Now there is no denial. Ponce de Leon didn't find the fountain of youth, and neither will you. Oh, but how we try. Barbells get pumped. Black hair gone gray goes black again, or better yet, blond. The van is traded in on a truck, a four-wheel-drive monster that will tackle the treacherous ravines of the interstate. The face gets stretched. The chin gets tucked. Breasts get a lift.

But try as we might, the calendar pages still turn. The clocks still tick. And the body still grows older. And with every new pill we take we are reminded that growing old is a pill that has to be swallowed....

But the real pain is deeper. For some it is the hollowness of success. Life at the top of the ladder can be lonely. Mahogany desks grow cold. Sales awards tarnish. Diplomas fade. Sometimes a dream-come-true world has come true and it's less than you'd hoped....

It can get even worse. Regret can lead to rebellion. Rebellion against the demands. Rebellion against the mundane. Rebellion against the ho-hum. Rebellion against whatever ties you down: your job, your government, your station wagon, or worse still ... your family....

Let me be very clear with my point: Growing old can be dangerous. The trail is treacherous and the pitfalls are many. One is wise to be prepared. You

know it's coming. It's not like God kept the process a secret. It's not like you are blazing a trail as you grow older. It's not as if no one has ever done it before. Look around you. You have ample opportunity to prepare and ample case studies to consider. If growing old catches you by surprise, don't blame God. He gave you plenty of warning. He also gave you plenty of advice....

Read Jesus' admonition. "Those who want to save their lives will give up true life. But those who give up their lives for me will have true life" [[Luke 9:24](#)].

Your last chapters can be your best. Your final song can be your greatest. It could be that all of your life has prepared you for a grand exit. God's oldest have always been among his choicest....

As we get older, our vision should improve. Not our vision of earth but our vision of heaven. Those who have spent their life looking for heaven gain a skip in their step as the city comes into view....

And I hope you'll be ready when you get home. For you, age is no enemy. Age is a mile-marker—a gentle reminder that home has never been so near.

Tell that to your barber.

(From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you listen to the wisdom of the elderly? Take time this week to talk with an older person and gain wisdom from that individual.

Exploration

Overindulgence—[Deuteronomy 21:20–21](#);

Proverbs 20:1; 28:7; Isaiah 5:11, 22; Habakkuk 2:15–16; Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13–14; 1 Thessalonians 5:7–8.

If you sit down to eat with a ruler,
notice the food that is in front of you.

²Control yourself
if you have a big appetite.

³Don't be greedy for his fine foods,
because that food might be a trick.

⁴Don't wear yourself out trying to get rich;
be wise enough to control yourself.

⁵Wealth can vanish in the wink of an eye.
It can seem to grow wings
and fly away like an eagle.

⁶Don't eat the food of selfish people;
don't be greedy for their fine foods.

⁷Selfish people are always worrying
about how much the food costs.
They tell you, "Eat and drink,"
but they don't really mean it.

⁸You will throw up the little you have eaten,
and you will have wasted your kind words.

⁹Don't speak to fools;
they will only ignore your wise words.

¹⁰Don't move an old stone that marks a border,
and don't take fields that belong to orphans.

¹¹God, their defender, is strong;
he will take their side against you.

¹²Remember what you are taught,
and listen carefully to words of knowledge.

¹³Don't fail to punish children.
If you spank them, they won't die.

¹⁴If you spank them,
you will save them from death.

¹⁵My child, if you are wise,
then I will be happy.

¹⁶I will be so pleased
if you speak what is right.

¹⁷Don't envy sinners,
but always respect the Lord.

¹⁸Then you will have hope for the future,
and your wishes will come true.

¹⁹Listen, my child, and be wise.
Keep your mind on what is right.

²⁰Don't drink too much wine
or eat too much food.

²¹Those who drink and eat too much become poor.
They sleep too much and end up wearing rags.

²²Listen to your father, who gave you life,
and do not forget your mother when she is old.

²³Learn the truth and never reject it.
Get wisdom, self-control, and understanding.

²⁴The father of a good child is very happy;
parents who have wise children are glad because of

them.

²⁵Make your father and mother happy;
give your mother a reason to be glad.

²⁶My son, pay attention to me,
and watch closely what I do.

²⁷A prostitute is as dangerous as a deep pit,
and an unfaithful wife is like a narrow well.

²⁸They ambush you like robbers
and cause many men to be unfaithful to their wives.

²⁹Who has trouble? Who has pain?
Who fights? Who complains?
Who has unnecessary bruises?
Who has bloodshot eyes?

³⁰It is people who drink too much wine,
who try out all different kinds of strong drinks.

³¹Don't stare at the wine when it is red,
when it sparkles in the cup,
when it goes down smoothly.

³²Later it bites like a snake
with poison in its fangs.

³³Your eyes will see strange sights,
and your mind will be confused.

³⁴You will feel dizzy as if you're in a storm on the
ocean,
as if you're on top of a ship's sails.

³⁵You will think, "They hit me, but I'm not hurt.
They beat me up, but I don't remember it.
I wish I could wake up.
Then I would get another drink."

Life Lessons

Proverbs 24:1–34

Situation

Solomon admonished and warned, but he also motivated and encouraged.

Observation

Don't be jealous of evil people. Instead, live wisely—exemplify justice, honesty, and hard work.

Inspiration

The sluggard never seems to have time for the things that really matter, especially things that require discipline. But before he realizes it, his time and opportunities are lost. As [Proverbs 24:33–34](#) observes, “A little sleep, a little slumber, . . .” Notice that it's just a “little” sleep, a “little” slumber, a “little” folding of the hands to rest that brought the ruin of lost time and opportunity. It's so easy to lose so much. You don't have to do anything to lose time.

Many people value time as silver was appraised in the days of Solomon. It is said of him in [1 Kings 10:27](#), “The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones.” Time appears to be so plentiful that losing much of it seems inconsequential. But money is easily wasted as well. And if people threw away their money as thoughtlessly as they throw away their time, we would think them insane. Yet time is infinitely more precious than money because money can't buy time. But you can minimize the loss and waste of time by disciplining yourself for the purpose of Godliness . . .

If you suddenly realized that you had no more time, would you regret how you have spent your time in the past and how you spend it now? The way you have used your time can be of comfort to you in your last hour. You may not be happy with some of the ways you used your time, but won't you be pleased then for all the times of Spirit-filled living, for all occasions when you have obeyed Christ? Won't you be glad then for those parts of your life that you spent in the Scriptures, prayer, worship, evangelism, serving, fasting, etc., for the purpose of becoming more like the One before whom you are about to stand in judgment ([John 5:22–29](#))? What great wisdom there is in living as Jonathan Edwards resolved to live: “Resolved, that I will live so, as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.”

Why not do something about it while you still have time? (From *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney)

Application

Approach your day in a new way. How much time do you spend driving, working, or eating? What time is wasted? Replace wasted time with an activity that has value in the kingdom of God.

Exploration

Laziness—[Proverbs 6:6–11](#); [18:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:18](#); [Romans 12:11](#); [2 Thessalonians 3:11–12](#); [Hebrews 6:11–12](#).

Don't envy evil people
or try to be friends with them.

²Their minds are always planning violence,
and they always talk about making trouble.

³It takes wisdom to have a good family,
and it takes understanding to make it strong.

⁴It takes knowledge to fill a home
with rare and beautiful treasures.

⁵Wise people have great power,
and those with knowledge have great strength.

⁶So you need advice when you go to war.
If you have lots of good advice, you will win.

⁷Foolish people cannot understand wisdom.
They have nothing to say in a discussion.

⁸Whoever makes evil plans
will be known as a troublemaker.

⁹Making foolish plans is sinful,
and making fun of wisdom is hateful.

¹⁰If you give up when trouble comes,
it shows that you are weak.

¹¹Save those who are being led to their death;
rescue those who are about to be killed.

¹²If you say, "We don't know anything about this,"

God, who knows what's in your mind, will notice.
He is watching you, and he will know.
He will reward each person for what he has done.

¹³My child, eat honey because it is good.
Honey from the honeycomb tastes sweet.

¹⁴In the same way, wisdom is pleasing to you.
If you find it, you have hope for the future,
and your wishes will come true.

¹⁵Don't be wicked and attack a good family's house;
don't rob the place where they live.

¹⁶Even though good people may be bothered by
trouble seven times, they are never defeated,
but the wicked are overwhelmed by trouble.

¹⁷Don't be happy when your enemy is defeated;
don't be glad when he is overwhelmed.

¹⁸The Lord will notice and be displeased.
He may not be angry with them anymore.

¹⁹Don't envy evil people,
and don't be jealous of the wicked.

²⁰An evil person has nothing to hope for;
the wicked will die like a flame that is put out.

²¹My child, respect the Lord and the king.
Don't join those people who refuse to obey them.

²²The Lord and the king will quickly destroy such
people.

Those two can cause great disaster!

More Words of Wisdom

²³These are also sayings of the wise:
It is not good to take sides when you are the judge.

²⁴Don't tell the wicked that they are innocent;
people will curse you, and nations will hate you.

²⁵But things will go well if you punish the guilty,
and you will receive rich blessings.

²⁶An honest answer is as pleasing
as a kiss on the lips.

²⁷First, finish your outside work
and prepare your fields.
After that, you can build your house.

²⁸Don't testify against your neighbor for no good
reason.

Don't say things that are false.

²⁹Don't say, "I'll get even;
I'll do to him what he did to me."

³⁰I passed by a lazy person's field
and by the vineyard of someone with no sense.

³¹Thorns had grown up everywhere.
The ground was covered with weeds,
and the stone walls had fallen down.

³²I thought about what I had seen;
I learned this lesson from what I saw.

³³You sleep a little; you take a nap.
You fold your hands and lie down to rest.

³⁴Soon you will be as poor as if you had been robbed;
you will have as little as if you had been held up.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 25:1–28

Situation

Solomon encouraged his hearers to be wise and careful in their conversations.

Observation

Learning to control the tongue is an important step in self-control.

Inspiration

The tongue—what a study in contrasts! To the physician it's merely a two-ounce slab of mucous membrane enclosing a complex array of muscles and nerves that enable our bodies to chew, taste, and swallow. How helpful! Equally significant, it is the major organ of communication that enables us to articulate distinct sounds so we can understand each other. How essential!

... But the tongue is as volatile as it is vital. It was Washington Irving who first said, "A sharp tongue is the only edge tool that grows keener with constant use." It was James, the half brother of Jesus, who first warned:

The tongue is a fire ... a restless evil and full of deadly poison ([James 3:6, 8](#)).

Verbal cyanide. A lethal, relentless, flaming missile which assaults with hellish power, blistering and destroying at will.

And yet it doesn't look anything like the brutal beast it is. Neatly hidden behind ivory palace gates,

its movements are an intriguing study of coordination. It can curl itself either into a cheery whistle or manipulate a lazy, afternoon yawn. With no difficulty it can flick a husk of popcorn from between two jaw teeth or hold a thermometer just so. And it is *tricky*! It can help you enjoy the flavor of a stick of peppermint as it switches from side to side without once getting nipped. Moments later it can follow the directions of a trumpeter, allowing him to play “Flight of the Bumble Bee” without a single miscue.

But watch out! Let your thumb get smashed with a hammer or your toe get clobbered on a chair and that slippery creature in your mouth will suddenly play the flip side of its nature.

Not only is the tongue untamed, it's *untamable*! Meaning what? Meaning as long as you live it will never gain control of itself. It defies being tamed. Incredible! We can tame Flipper and Trigger and Shamu and Lassie ... but the tongue? Impossible to train!

... [I]t takes ... a tight, conscious muzzle on the muscle in your mouth. Harnessing such a wily creature requires a determined mindset... . It's a project you've put off long enough. (From *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Have words ever popped out of your mouth before you thought about them? Think before you respond. Never just blurt out an answer. Don't insult someone or carelessly criticize. Never be sarcastic, and be careful how you tease.

Exploration

The Tongue and Self-control—[Psalm 34:13](#);
[Proverbs 10:19](#); [21:23](#); [Galatians 5:22–23](#); [James 1:26](#);
[3:5–10](#); [2 Peter 1:5–7](#).

More Wise Sayings of Solomon

These are more wise sayings of Solomon, copied by the men of Hezekiah king of Judah.

²God is honored for what he keeps secret.
Kings are honored for what they can discover.

³No one can measure the height of the skies or the depth of the earth.
So also no one can understand the mind of a king.

⁴Remove the scum from the silver,
so the silver can be used by the silversmith.

⁵Remove wicked people from the king's presence;
then his government will be honest and last a long time.

⁶Don't brag to the king
and act as if you are great.

⁷It is better for him to give you a higher position
than to bring you down in front of the prince.
Because of something you have seen,

⁸do not quickly take someone to court.
What will you do later
when your neighbor proves you wrong?

⁹If you have an argument with your neighbor,
don't tell other people what was said.

¹⁰Whoever hears it might shame you,
and you might not ever be respected again.

¹¹The right word spoken at the right time
is as beautiful as gold apples in a silver bowl.

¹²A wise warning to someone who will listen
is as valuable as gold earrings or fine gold jewelry.

¹³Trustworthy messengers refresh those who send
them,
like the coolness of snow in the summertime.

¹⁴People who brag about gifts they never give
are like clouds and wind that give no rain.

¹⁵With patience you can convince a ruler,
and a gentle word can get through to the hard-headed.

¹⁶If you find honey, don't eat too much,
or it will make you throw up.

¹⁷Don't go to your neighbor's house too often;
too much of you will make him hate you.

¹⁸When you lie about your neighbors,
it hurts them as much as a club, a sword, or a sharp
arrow.

¹⁹Trusting unfaithful people when you are in trouble
is like eating with a broken tooth or walking with a

crippled foot.

²⁰Singing songs to someone who is sad
is like taking away his coat on a cold day
or pouring vinegar on soda.

²¹If your enemy is hungry, feed him.
If he is thirsty, give him a drink.

²²Doing this will be like pouring burning coals on his
head,
and the Lord will reward you.

²³As the north wind brings rain,
telling gossip brings angry looks.

²⁴It is better to live in a corner on the [roof](#)
than inside the house with a quarreling wife.

²⁵Good news from a faraway place
is like a cool drink when you are tired.

²⁶A good person who gives in to evil
is like a muddy spring or a dirty well.

²⁷It is not good to eat too much honey,
nor does it bring you honor to brag about yourself.

²⁸Those who do not control themselves
are like a city whose walls are broken down.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 26:1–28

Situation

Solomon warned: Beware of negative people who can hurt you. The fool, the lazy, and the gossip bring nothing but damage to your life.

Observation

If you can't help them change, detach yourself from people with a negative attitude.

Inspiration

If it were not for the restraining presence of the Spirit, you and I would be the personification of wickedness. No sin would be too extreme. No act of disobedience too rebellious....

Before we go further, perhaps I should clarify the meaning of the phrase, “those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” [[Galatians 5:21](#)].

Paul selects words very carefully. For example, “practice.” The tense of the original verb suggests “habitually practice.” In other words, it refers to one whose entire life is consumed by such evil....

But before we cluck our tongues at those who “habitually practice” such things, let's keep in mind that our old nature remains just as dark and depraved as theirs, even though the Spirit resides within us. Were it not for the presence of God's Spirit, our wickedness would know no bounds.

... The good news is: We don't have to serve the

old master any longer! Now that we have our Lord's divine, dynamic presence perpetually living within us, we can live above all that ... and we can do so on a consistent basis. By the Spirit's filling, evidences of our new nature emerge.

... By turning the controls of our life over to Him who lives within, we begin to model the life Christ modeled when He lived and walked on earth...

(From *Flying Closer to the Flame* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Put the brakes on gossip this week. Squash it like an intruding spider.

Exploration

Negative People—[Leviticus 26:14–35](#); [Nehemiah 13:25–29](#); [Psalms 57:4](#); [Matthew 7:1–5](#).

It shouldn't snow in summer or rain at harvest.
Neither should a foolish person ever be honored.

²Curses will not harm someone who is innocent;
they are like sparrows or swallows that fly around and
never land.

³Whips are for horses, and harnesses are for donkeys,
so paddles are good for fools.

⁴Don't give fools a foolish answer,
or you will be just like them.

⁵But answer fools as they should be answered,
or they will think they are really wise.

⁶Sending a message by a foolish person
is like cutting off your feet or drinking poison.

⁷A wise saying spoken by a fool
is as useless as the legs of a crippled person.

⁸Giving honor to a foolish person
is like tying a stone in a slingshot.

⁹A wise saying spoken by a fool
is like a thorn stuck in the hand of a drunk.

¹⁰Hiring a foolish person or anyone just passing by
is like an archer shooting at just anything.

¹¹A fool who repeats his foolishness
is like a dog that goes back to what it has thrown up.

¹²There is more hope for a foolish person than for those who think they are wise.

¹³The lazy person says, “There’s a lion in the road!
There’s a lion in the streets!”

¹⁴Like a door turning back and forth on its hinges,
the lazy person turns over and over in bed.

¹⁵Lazy people may put their hands in the dish,
but they are too tired to lift the food to their mouths.

¹⁶The lazy person thinks he is wiser than seven people who give sensible answers.

¹⁷Interfering in someone else's quarrel as you pass by is like grabbing a dog by the ears.

¹⁸Like a madman shooting
deadly, burning arrows

¹⁹is the one who tricks a neighbor and then says, “I was just joking.”

²⁰Without wood, a fire will go out,
and without gossip, quarreling will stop.

²¹Just as charcoal and wood keep a fire going,
a quarrelsome person keeps an argument going.

²²The words of a gossip are like tasty bits of food;
people like to gobble them up.

²³Kind words from a wicked mind
are like a shiny coating on a clay pot.

²⁴Those who hate you may try to fool you with their
words,

but in their minds they are planning evil.

²⁵People's words may be kind, but don't believe them,
because their minds are full of evil thoughts.

²⁶Lies can hide hate,
but the evil will be plain to everyone.

²⁷Whoever digs a pit for others will fall into it.

Whoever tries to roll a boulder down on others will be
crushed by it.

²⁸Liars hate the people they hurt,
and false praise can ruin others.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 27:1–27

Situation

Many of these proverbs affirm the value of friends who will be honest about one's strengths and weaknesses.

Observation

Wise friends facilitate growth. Be a wise friend and help others grow.

Inspiration

Inwardly my soul was crying out for someone who would listen—someone who could listen without responding—without judging. Someone who could help me translate the meaningless jumble of scrambled thoughts without taking offense or being critical.

I was too closed, too masked, too threatened. I had never really bared my soul to anyone, not even myself. I was so afraid to take it out that again I slammed the lid shut and guarded it with all the emotional strength I had at my disposal.

Emery then told me a story.

“A man was walking in a wilderness. He became lost and was unable to find his way out. Another man met him. ‘Sir, I am lost, can you show me the way out of this wilderness?’ ‘No,’ said the stranger, ‘I cannot show you the way out of this wilderness, but maybe if I walk with you, we can find our way out together.’”
(From *Depression* by Donald Baker and Emery

Nester)

Application

You can benefit from a close friend in your Christian life. Find a friend who will share your deepest concerns. Share together over lunch and commit to helping each other.

Exploration

Christian Friendships—[Proverbs 15:31; 16:21, 24;](#)
[Ecclesiastes 4:9–12; Romans 15:14; Galatians 2:11–16;](#)
[Colossians 1:28–29; Hebrews 10:24–25; 13:7.](#)

Don't brag about tomorrow;
you don't know what may happen then.

²Don't praise yourself. Let someone else do it.
Let the praise come from a stranger and not from your
own mouth.

³Stone is heavy, and sand is weighty,
but a complaining fool is worse than either.

⁴Anger is cruel and destroys like a flood,
but no one can put up with jealousy!

⁵It is better to correct someone openly
than to have love and not show it.

⁶The slap of a friend can be trusted to help you,
but the kisses of an enemy are nothing but lies.

⁷When you are full, not even honey tastes good,
but when you are hungry, even something bitter tastes
sweet.

⁸A person who leaves his home
is like a bird that leaves its nest.

⁹The sweet smell of perfume and oils is pleasant,
and so is good advice from a friend.

¹⁰Don't forget your friend or your parent's friend.

Don't always go to your family for help when trouble comes.

A neighbor close by is better than a family far away.

¹¹Be wise, my child, and make me happy.
Then I can respond to any insult.

¹²The wise see danger ahead and avoid it,
but fools keep going and get into trouble.

¹³Take the coat of someone who promises to pay a stranger's loan,
and keep it until he pays what the stranger owes.

¹⁴If you loudly greet your neighbor early in the morning,
he will think of it as a curse.

¹⁵A quarreling wife is as bothersome
as a continual dripping on a rainy day.

¹⁶Stopping her is like stopping the wind
or trying to grab oil in your hand.

¹⁷As iron sharpens iron,
so people can improve each other.

¹⁸Whoever tends a fig tree gets to eat its fruit,
and whoever takes care of his master will receive honor.

¹⁹As water reflects your face,
so your mind shows what kind of person you are.

²⁰People will never stop dying and being destroyed,
and they will never stop wanting more than they have.

²¹A hot furnace tests silver and gold,
and people are tested by the praise they receive.

²²Even if you ground up a foolish person like grain in a
bowl,
you couldn't remove the foolishness.

²³Be sure you know how your sheep are doing,
and pay attention to the condition of your cattle.

²⁴Riches will not go on forever,
nor do governments go on forever.

²⁵Bring in the hay, and let the new grass appear.
Gather the grass from the hills.

²⁶Make clothes from the lambs' wool,
and sell some goats to buy a field.

²⁷There will be plenty of goat's milk
to feed you and your family
and to make your servant girls healthy.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 28:1–28

Situation

God wanted the Israelites to govern themselves with justice and wisdom.

Observation

The writers of Proverbs saw sin as a reality. [Proverbs 28:13](#) says that confession of sin results in God's mercy and forgiveness.

Inspiration

We must face the fact that there is something beastly within each and every one of us. Something beastly that makes us do things that surprise even us. Haven't you surprised yourself? Haven't you reflected on an act and wondered, "What got into me?"

The Bible has a three-letter answer for that question: S-I-N. There is something bad—beastly—within each of us. In theological terms, we are "totally depraved." Though made in God's image, we have fallen. We're corrupt at the core. The very center of our being is selfish and perverse. David said, "I was brought into this world in sin. In sin my mother gave birth to me" ([Psalms 51:5](#)). Could any of us say any less? Each one of us was born with a tendency to sin. Depravity is a universal condition.

Some would disagree with such strong words. They look around and say, "Compared to everyone else, I'm a decent person." You know, a pig might say

something similar. He might look at his trough partners and announce, “I’m just as clean as everyone else.” Compared to humans, however, that pig needs help. Compared to God, we humans need the same. The standard for sinlessness isn’t found at the pig troughs of earth but at the throne of heaven. God, himself, is the standard.

We are beasts. As French essayist Michel de Montaigne said, “There is no man so good, who, were he to submit all his thoughts and actions to the laws, would not deserve hanging ten times in his life.” Our deeds are ugly. Our actions are harsh. We don’t do what we want to do, we don’t like what we do, and what’s worse—yes, there is something worse—we can’t change.

We try, oh, how we try. But “Can a leopard change his spots? In the same way, Jerusalem, you cannot change and do good, because you are accustomed to doing evil” ([Jeremiah 13:23](#)).

Still disagree? Still think the assessment is too harsh? If so, accept this challenge. For the next twenty-four hours lead a sinless life. I’m not asking for a perfect decade or year or even a perfect month. Just one perfect day. Can you do it? Can you live without sin for one day?

No? How about one hour? Could you promise that for the next sixty minutes you will have only pure thoughts and actions?

Still hesitant? Then how about the next five minutes? Five minutes of worry-free, anger-free, unselfish living—can you do it?

No? Nor can I.

Then we have a problem: We are sinners, and “the wages of sin is death” ([Romans 6:23](#), NIV).

We have a problem: We are not holy, and “anyone whose life is not holy will never see the Lord” ([Hebrews 12:14](#)).

We have a problem: We are evil, and “evil people are paid with punishment” ([Proverbs 10:16](#)). (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Application

What sins do you need to confess in your life? Take time daily to come before God and ask him for forgiveness. Remember, he already knows your thoughts, your actions, everything you have done. There is nothing you can bring before him that will shock him. Ask for forgiveness and receive his grace and mercy thankfully.

Exploration

Confessing Sins—[Psalm 32:1–5](#); [51:1–9](#); [Luke 11:4](#); [James 5:16](#); [1 John 1:5–10](#).

Evil people run even though no one is chasing them,
but good people are as brave as a lion.

²When a country is lawless, it has one ruler after another;

but when it is led by a man with understanding and knowledge, it continues strong.

³Rulers who mistreat the poor
are like a hard rain that destroys the crops.

⁴Those who disobey what they have been taught
praise the wicked,

but those who obey what they have been taught are
against them.

⁵Evil people do not understand justice,
but those who follow the Lord understand it
completely.

⁶It is better to be poor and innocent
than to be rich and wicked.

⁷Children who obey what they have been taught are
smart,

but friends of troublemakers disgrace their parents.

⁸Some people get rich by overcharging others,
but their wealth will be given to those who are kind to

the poor.

⁹If you refuse to obey what you have been taught,
your prayers will not be heard.

¹⁰Those who lead good people to do wrong
will be ruined by their own evil,
but the innocent will be rewarded with good things.

¹¹Rich people may think they are wise,
but the poor with understanding will prove them
wrong.

¹²When good people triumph, there is great happiness,
but when the wicked get control, everybody hides.

¹³If you hide your sins, you will not succeed.
If you confess and reject them, you will receive mercy.

¹⁴Those who are always respectful will be happy,
but those who are stubborn will get into trouble.

¹⁵A wicked ruler is as dangerous to poor people
as a roaring lion or a charging bear.

¹⁶A ruler without wisdom will be cruel,
but the one who refuses to take dishonest money will
rule a long time.

¹⁷Don't help those who are guilty of murder;
let them run until they die.

¹⁸Innocent people will be kept safe

innocent people will be kept safe,
but those who are dishonest will suddenly be ruined.

¹⁹Those who work their land will have plenty of food,
but the ones who chase empty dreams instead will end
up poor.

²⁰A truthful person will have many blessings,
but those eager to get rich will be punished.

²¹It is not good for a judge to take sides,
but some will sin for only a piece of bread.

²²Selfish people are in a hurry to get rich
and do not realize they soon will be poor.

²³Those who correct others will later be liked
more than those who give false praise.

²⁴Whoever robs his father or mother
and says, “It’s not wrong,”
is just like someone who destroys things.

²⁵A greedy person causes trouble,
but the one who trusts the Lord will succeed.

²⁶Those who trust in themselves are foolish,
but those who live wisely will be kept safe.

²⁷Whoever gives to the poor will have everything he
needs,
but the one who ignores the poor will receive many
curses.

²⁸When the wicked get control, everybody hides,
but when they die, good people do well.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 29:1–27

Situation

Without the love and fear of God, Israel made mistakes. Without restraint and discipline, sin took over.

Observation

God's standards are crucial to our lives. Those who ignore them drift apart from God, but loving, God-fearing people prosper.

Inspiration

I used to wonder how to remember all the commandments of God. As a child I memorized the Ten Commandments in the Bible, but there are so many other commandments in the Bible—hundreds of them. Then I discovered a wonderful fact, that the first and greatest commandment is to love God....

So it isn't as complicated as I had thought! Love God completely, and do to your neighbor as you, in your best moments, want him or her to do to you. If we obey only these two basic laws, we will be obeying all the others, too.

It is wonderful of God to tell us what He allows and what He prohibits, what He likes and dislikes, for we might otherwise be unsure of ourselves, and unsure whether or not we are loving God by obeying Him. (From *Next Steps for New Christians* by Kenneth Taylor)

Application

God has set the example for parents. Children need rules to guide and protect them. If you are a parent, set clear, fair guidelines. Then be firm in implementing them.

Exploration

God's Law—[Exodus 15:25; 31:18; Deuteronomy 4:8; Galatians 2:15–16.](#)

Whoever is stubborn after being corrected many times
will suddenly be hurt beyond cure.

²When good people do well, everyone is happy,
but when evil people rule, everyone groans.

³Those who love wisdom make their parents happy,
but friends of prostitutes waste their money.

⁴If a king is fair, he makes his country strong,
but if he takes gifts dishonestly, he tears his country
down.

⁵Those who give false praise to their neighbors
are setting a trap for them.

⁶Evil people are trapped by their own sin,
but good people can sing and be happy.

⁷Good people care about justice for the poor,
but the wicked are not concerned.

⁸People who make fun of wisdom cause trouble in a
city,
but wise people calm anger down.

⁹When a wise person takes a foolish person to court,
the fool only shouts or laughs, and there is no peace.

¹⁰Murderers hate an honest person

and try to kill those who do right.

¹¹Foolish people lose their tempers,
but wise people control theirs.

¹²If a ruler pays attention to lies,
all his officers will become wicked.

¹³The poor person and the cruel person are alike
in that the Lord gave eyes to both of them.

¹⁴If a king judges poor people fairly,
his government will continue forever.

¹⁵Correction and punishment make children wise,
but those left alone will disgrace their mother.

¹⁶When there are many wicked people, there is much
sin,
but those who do right will see them destroyed.

¹⁷Correct your children, and you will be proud;
they will give you satisfaction.

¹⁸Where there is no word from God, people are
uncontrolled,
but those who obey what they have been taught are
happy.

¹⁹Words alone cannot correct a servant,
because even if he understands, he won't respond.

²⁰Do you see people who speak too quickly?

Do you see people who speak too quickly :
There is more hope for a foolish person than for them.

²¹If you spoil your servants when they are young,
they will bring you grief later on.

²²An angry person causes trouble;
a person with a quick temper sins a lot.

²³Pride will ruin people,
but those who are humble will be honored.

²⁴Partners of thieves are their own worst enemies.
If they have to testify in court, they are afraid to say
anything.

²⁵Being afraid of people can get you into trouble,
but if you trust the Lord, you will be safe.

²⁶Many people want to speak to a ruler,
but justice comes only from the Lord.

²⁷Good people hate those who are dishonest,
and the wicked hate those who are honest.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 30:1–33

Situation

Agur was a descendant from Abraham's son, Ishmael. Agur came from the Ancient Near East, which was famous for its wisdom.

Observation

In verses 11–14 Agur described four kinds of people: those who are disrespectful, hypocritical, arrogant, and oppressive. From such seeds, all types of conflicts can evolve.

Inspiration

Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional. Use your God-given creative energy to solve conflict before it escalates into combat.

Perhaps the seeds you sow in your areas of conflict won't reach maturity tomorrow, next week or even for a generation. Does that mean you shouldn't sow the seeds? No! It means you should sow the seeds *immediately*. Never underestimate the power of a seed of peace: the power of a kind word, a seed of apology, a phone call, an explanation. This is the way we serve a God of peace. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, "Conflict")

Application

List the ways in which you are sowing conflict and the ways in which you are sowing peace. If you are experiencing conflict with another person, ask God, a friend, or a pastor to intercede. Think of three

ways you can begin to sow seeds of peace with that person.

Exploration

Reconciliation—[Matthew 5:24](#); [Luke 15](#); [Romans 5:9–11](#); [1 Corinthians 7:11](#); [2 Corinthians 5:18–20](#); [Ephesians 2:13–22](#).

Wise Words from Agur

These are the words of Agur son of Jakeh.

This is his message to Ithiel and Ucal:

²“I am the most stupid person there is,
and I have no understanding.

³I have not learned to be wise,
and I don’t know much about God, the Holy One.

⁴Who has gone up to heaven and come back down?

Who can hold the wind in his hand?

Who can gather up the waters in his coat?

Who has set in place the ends of the earth?

What is his name or his son’s name?

Tell me, if you know!

⁵“Every word of God is true.

He guards those who come to him for safety.

⁶Do not add to his words,
or he will correct you and prove you are a liar.

⁷“I ask two things from you, Lord.

Don’t refuse me before I die.

⁸Keep me from lying and being dishonest.

And don’t make me either rich or poor;
just give me enough food for each day.

⁹If I have too much, I might reject you
and say, ‘I don’t know the Lord.’

If I am poor, I might steal
and disgrace the name of my God.

¹⁰“Do not say bad things about servants to their masters,
or they will curse you, and you will suffer for it.

¹¹“Some people curse their fathers
and do not bless their mothers.

¹²Some people think they are pure,
but they are not really free from evil.

¹³Some people have such a proud look!
They look down on others.

¹⁴Some people have teeth like swords;
their jaws seem full of knives.
They want to remove the poor from the earth
and the needy from the land.

¹⁵“Greed has two daughters
named ‘Give’ and ‘Give.’
There are three things that are never satisfied,
really four that never say, ‘I’ve had enough!’:
¹⁶the cemetery, the childless mother,
the land that never gets enough rain,
and fire that never says, ‘I’ve had enough!’

¹⁷“If you make fun of your father
and refuse to obey your mother,
the birds of the valley will peck out your eyes,
and the vultures will eat them.

¹⁸“There are three things that are too hard for me.

There are three things that are too hard for me,
really four I don't understand:

¹⁹the way an eagle flies in the sky,
the way a snake slides over a rock,
the way a ship sails on the sea,
and the way a man and a woman fall in love.

²⁰“This is the way of a woman who takes part in
adultery:

She acts as if she had eaten and washed her face;
she says, ‘I haven’t done anything wrong.’

²¹“There are three things that make the earth tremble,
really four it cannot stand:

²²a servant who becomes a king,
a foolish person who has plenty to eat,
²³a hated woman who gets married,
and a maid who replaces her mistress.

²⁴“There are four things on earth that are small,
but they are very wise:

²⁵Ants are not very strong,
but they store up food in the summer.

²⁶Rock badgers are not very powerful,
but they can live among the rocks.

²⁷Locusts have no king,
but they all go forward in formation.

²⁸Lizards can be caught in the hand,
but they are found even in kings’ palaces.

²⁹“There are three things that strut proudly,
really four that walk as if they were important:

³⁰a lion, the proudest animal,
which is strong and runs from nothing,
³¹a rooster, a male goat,
and a king when his army is around him.

³²“If you have been foolish and proud,
or if you have planned evil, shut your mouth.
³³Just as stirring milk makes butter,
and twisting noses makes them bleed,
so stirring up anger causes trouble.”

Life Lessons

Proverbs 31:1-31

Situation

Proverbs began with a command to respect the Lord ([1:7](#)) and ended with the description of a woman who fulfilled this command.

Observation

A woman who respects God deserves more praise than one who is just physically beautiful.

Inspiration

Very little was said about the virtuous woman's outward appearance, quite in contrast from the lengthy description of the bride in the Song of Solomon. Apparently this writer was so impressed with the woman's inner qualities and her outward actions that he did not notice her looks.

The writer did mention that her clothing was of fine linen and purple, but just a few lines later he noted that strength and honor were her real clothing. It seems that her inner qualities showed in her face and stature. She even carried herself with regal bearing. How many millions of dollars do we women spend to look beautiful on the outside? True beauty comes from inner strength of character and cannot be bought or applied with expensive creams.

This description of the wise woman ended with the testimony of those who knew her best: her children and her husband. Her children blessed her for their early training as they grew up and went out

into public life. “Many daughters have done well,” said her husband. “But you excel them all.” No one could give this woman greater compliments.

I could have plaques on my wall inscribed with flowery words of praise from the Chamber of Commerce, the Ladies Missionary Society, the PTA, the Girl Scouts, and my sorority alumnae group, but what would these mean in comparison with the praise of those who know me best? When people who live with me day in and day out say I have blessed them, it means something! Today as I sat writing about this woman, Jody came into the room and said, “Honey, you’re a fantastic wife.” Would ten thousand words from someone else have meant as much?

By now I’m sure you are thinking, *This woman was perfect! I could never be like her!* She was incredible, but God would not use her as an example of the “excellent wife” unless we, too, could grow to become like her.

As you look at the praise given to this woman and learn about her inward character, you should be encouraged to remember that she had grown children. Her inner qualities did not appear overnight but were hammered out in the trials of life as she trusted God and obeyed Him.

After giving us this long list of the woman’s virtues and the testimonies of her family’s praise, the writer ended by answering the important questions: How was the virtuous wife so perfect? How was she able to benefit her family, herself, and others?

The key to her success was that she feared the

Lord. The writer said, “Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, But a woman who fears God is truly charming and lovely.” The virtuous wife first and foremost feared and worshiped God. She was trustworthy, industrious, organized, loving, and much more. The key to becoming like this wife, to becoming a *creative counterpart*, is to begin where she did, with a vital relationship with God. (From *Creative Counterpart* by Linda Dillow)

Application

What would those who know you best say about you? The husband and children of this good wife spoke well of her; they praised her. Why? She respected God. You can see it in her actions. Look at the actions of your life. What reveals your respect for God?

Exploration

Respecting the Lord—[Proverbs 1:7](#). Good Wife—[Ruth 3:11](#); [Proverbs 31:10–31](#).

Wise Words of King Lemuel

These are the words of King Lemuel, the message his mother taught him:

²“My son, I gave birth to you.

You are the son I prayed for.

³Don't waste your strength on women
or your time on those who ruin kings.

⁴“Kings should not drink wine, Lemuel,
and rulers should not desire beer.

⁵If they drink, they might forget the law
and keep the needy from getting their rights.

⁶Give beer to people who are dying
and wine to those who are sad.

⁷Let them drink and forget their need
and remember their misery no more.

⁸“Speak up for those who cannot speak for
themselves;

defend the rights of all those who have nothing.

⁹Speak up and judge fairly,
and defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

The Good Wife

¹⁰It is hard to find a good wife,
because she is worth more than rubies.

¹¹Her husband trusts her completely.
With her, he has everything he needs.

¹²She does him good and not harm
for as long as she lives.

¹³She looks for wool and flax
and likes to work with her hands.

¹⁴She is like a trader's ship,
bringing food from far away.

¹⁵She gets up while it is still dark
and prepares food for her family
and feeds her servant girls.

¹⁶She inspects a field and buys it.
With money she earned, she plants a vineyard.

¹⁷She does her work with energy,
and her arms are strong.

¹⁸She knows that what she makes is good.
Her lamp burns late into the night.

¹⁹She makes thread with her hands
and weaves her own cloth.

²⁰She welcomes the poor
and helps the needy.

²¹She does not worry about her family when it snows,
because they all have fine clothes to keep them warm.

²²She makes coverings for herself;
her clothes are made of linen and other expensive
material.

²³Her husband is known at the city meetings,
where he makes decisions as one of the leaders of the
land.

²⁴She makes linen clothes and sells them
and provides belts to the merchants.

²⁵She is strong and is respected by the people.
She looks forward to the future with joy.

²⁶She speaks wise words
and teaches others to be kind.

²⁷She watches over her family
and never wastes her time.

²⁸Her children speak well of her.
Her husband also praises her,

²⁹saying, "There are many fine women,
but you are better than all of them."

³⁰Charm can fool you, and beauty can trick you,
but a woman who respects the Lord should be praised.

³¹Give her the reward she has earned;
she should be praised in public for what she has done.

roof In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

roof In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

[The Book of Ecclesiastes](#)

Introduction

She didn't want to share her name, just her pain. So I cradled the phone against my shoulder and listened. Her husband had cheated. She was angry. Angry at him. Angry at God. Angry at herself for being angry. In two months she'd gone through three bottles of antidepressants. She didn't want to leave her room or see her friends. Weak and bitter she finally asked, "Max, will I ever be happy again?"

She's not the first to wonder.

As the drinker orders a double, he wonders.

As the achiever logs another eighteen-hour day, she wonders.

As the boss reaches for his secretary's hand, both wonder.

"Will I ever be happy again?"

There is a great dissatisfaction across the land. Hand after hand reaching out to quench thirsts and scratch itches. But the thirst lingers, the itch remains. As one man told me, "I learned that once I had what I wanted, I found I didn't want what I had."

Solomon could have said those words. He was unlimited in what he could do. Unbridled in what he could own. Unharnessed in what he could experience. So he set out to do it all.

He tried knowledge ([1:13](#)), pleasure, possessions, and projects ([2:3–8](#)). He was serious about each. He built a Temple and a palace. He owned forty thousand horses with twelve thousand horsemen. He married the daughter of Pharaoh and built her a house (which was good because he had six hundred and ninety-nine more wives so *his* place was crowded).

In spite of it all, or because of it all, he was restless. “I hated life,” he journaled. He was isolated ([3:22](#)), frustrated ([5:17](#)), and longed for the good old days when things were simpler and the wine was sweeter.

For some reason, Solomon kept a record of his longings. And somehow, they became public. Maybe he knew that he wasn’t the only one to get to the top of the ladder only to find it against the wrong building.

If that’s where you are, or might be, this book is for you.

About This Book

Author:

Solomon, though he is not mentioned by name

Date Written:

c. 935 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- Trying to find meaning in life from possessions is meaningless.
- Living your life and enjoying your work is a gift from God.
- Connecting with God through faith and worship is the key to a meaningful life.

Key Verse:

“What do people really gain from all the hard work they do here on earth?” ([Ecclesiastes 1:3](#)).

Contents:

1. Life's Meaning [1:1–5:7](#)
2. Possessions [5:8–6:12](#)
3. Practical Wisdom [7:1–11:8](#)
4. Remember Your Creator [11:9–12:14](#)

Life Lessons

Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:26

Situation

The writer of Ecclesiastes wanted to help those who would live after him lead a fulfilling life. He taught lessons learned from his own life.

Observation

Without God, all of our work, pleasure, and wisdom are useless. Lasting fulfillment comes from honoring God in all we do.

Inspiration

It is as if we are on an ocean beach called Earth. We are frantic. We build castles—or at least we think we do. But what we are really doing is just throwing up sand piles as fast as we can before the next big wave comes in. And that wave is coming. We can't run from it; there's no escaping it. We will stay on the beach building our castles higher, bigger, more elaborate. We won't enjoy them. There will be no time for that. The wave is coming....

People have always built sand castles, and those castles have always crumbled. There have always been those who grabbed for things that break. But now it is like the beginning of the end, like the first moments of a stock market crash, and the scramble is on....

We have made Jesus to be our Jesus, and we are so accustomed to responding to “our” Jesus that we have forgotten how to respond to the Son of the

living God.

His teachings have been taken with the pragmatic view of “helping me,” not followed because we must obey and can do nothing else. His words have been diluted by so many diverse therapies that all we know to respond to is a “feel-good” deity, a piece of religious plastic which we label “God.”

To reject God out of hand is one thing, but to acknowledge Him and then to live as if He is neither Lord nor God is a horrible existence. Then all we have left is sand.

God expects us to be disciplined. It is not the unnatural but rather the natural thing to be. We were created to be disciplined, put on this earth by God at this time and in this place not for personal gain or personal pleasure but for His purpose.

God is here in our world now. He has been all the time. He calls to scrambling, grasping people like us through the words of Jesus Christ. He says, “Come unto me.”

It is time for us to do what He asks. (From *Enjoying the Closeness of God* by Roger Palms)

Application

How do you seek intellectual knowledge? What pleasures do you seek? Solomon warns that these activities will never bring fulfillment by themselves. Learn to live your life so every detail pleases God. Mow the lawn, clean up your house, or enjoy a hobby in order to please God.

Exploration

Coming to God—[Matthew 11:28–30](#). Persevering

—[Jude 20–25](#). Heavenly Wisdom—[James 3:17–18](#).

These are the words of the Teacher, a son of David, king in Jerusalem.

²The Teacher says,
“Useless! Useless!
Completely useless!
Everything is useless.”

³What do people really gain
from all the hard work they do here on earth?

Things Never Change

⁴People live, and people die,
but the earth continues forever.

⁵The sun rises, the sun sets,
and then it hurries back to where it rises again.

⁶The wind blows to the south;
it blows to the north.

It blows from one direction and then another.

Then it turns around and repeats the same pattern,
going nowhere.

⁷All the rivers flow to the sea,
but the sea never becomes full.

⁸Everything is boring,
so boring that you don't even want to talk about it.

Words come again and again to our ears,
but we never hear enough,
nor can we ever really see all we want to see.

⁹All things continue the way they have been since the beginning.

What has happened will happen again;
there is nothing new here on earth.

¹⁰Someone might say,
“Look, this is new,”
but really it has always been here.
It was here before we were.

¹¹People don’t remember what happened long ago,
and in the future people will not remember what happens now.

Even later, other people will not remember what was done before them.

Does Wisdom Bring Happiness?

¹²I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³I decided to use my wisdom to learn about everything that happens on earth. I learned that God has given us terrible things to face. ¹⁴I looked at everything done on earth and saw that it is all useless, like chasing the wind.

¹⁵If something is crooked,
you can’t make it straight.
If something is missing,
you can’t say it is there.

¹⁶I said to myself, “I have become very wise and am now wiser than anyone who ruled Jerusalem before me. I know what wisdom and knowledge really are.” ¹⁷So I decided to find out about wisdom and knowledge and also about foolish thinking, but this turned out to be like chasing the wind.

¹⁸With much wisdom comes much disappointment;
the person who gains more knowledge also gains more
sorrow.

Does “Having Fun” Bring Happiness?

I said to myself, “I will try having fun. I will enjoy myself.” But I found that this is also useless.²It is foolish to laugh all the time, and having fun doesn’t accomplish anything.³I decided to cheer myself up with wine while my mind was still thinking wisely. I wanted to find a way to enjoy myself and see what was good for people to do during their few days of life.

Does Hard Work Bring Happiness?

⁴Then I did great things: I built houses and planted vineyards for myself.⁵I made gardens and parks, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.⁶I made pools of water for myself and used them to water my growing trees.⁷I bought male and female slaves, and slaves were also born in my house. I had large herds and flocks, more than anyone in Jerusalem had ever had before.⁸I also gathered silver and gold for myself, treasures from kings and other areas. I had male and female singers and all the women a man could ever want.⁹I became very famous, even greater than anyone who had lived in Jerusalem before me. My wisdom helped me in all this.

¹⁰Anything I saw and wanted, I got for myself;
I did not miss any pleasure I desired.
I was pleased with everything I did,
and this pleasure was the reward for all my hard work.

¹¹But then I looked at what I had done,
and I thought about all the hard work.
Suddenly I realized it was useless, like chasing the
wind.

There is nothing to gain from anything we do here on
earth.

Maybe Wisdom Is the Answer

¹²Then I began to think again about being wise,
and also about being foolish and doing crazy things.
But after all, what more can anyone do?
He can't do more than what the other king has already
done.

¹³I saw that being wise is certainly better than being
foolish,
just as light is better than darkness.

¹⁴Wise people see where they are going,
but fools walk around in the dark.

Yet I saw that
both wise and foolish people end the same way.

¹⁵I thought to myself,
“What happens to a fool will happen to me, too,
so what is the reward for being wise?”

I said to myself,
“Being wise is also useless.”

¹⁶The wise person and the fool
will both die,
and no one will remember either one for long.

In the future, both will be forgotten.

Is There Real Happiness in Life?

¹⁷So I hated life. It made me sad to think that everything here on earth is useless, like chasing the wind. ¹⁸I hated all the things I had worked for here on earth, because I must leave them to someone who will live after me. ¹⁹Someone else will control everything for which I worked so hard here on earth, and I don't know if he will be wise or foolish. This is also useless. ²⁰So I became sad about all the hard work I had done here on earth. ²¹People can work hard using all their wisdom, knowledge, and skill, but they will die, and other people will get the things for which they worked. They did not do the work, but they will get everything. This is also unfair and useless. ²²What do people get for all their work and struggling here on earth? ²³All of their lives their work is full of pain and sorrow, and even at night their minds don't rest. This is also useless.

²⁴The best that people can do is eat, drink, and enjoy their work. I saw that even this comes from God, ²⁵because no one can eat or enjoy life without him. ²⁶If people please God, God will give them wisdom, knowledge, and joy. But sinners will get only the work of gathering and storing wealth that they will have to give to the ones who please God. So all their work is useless, like chasing the wind.

Life Lessons

[Ecclesiastes 3:1–5:17](#)

Situation

The author gives insights on values. He encourages the reader to use time wisely by making right choices.

Observation

One of the key words in this section is the word “time.” Solomon said that God has an appropriate time for every activity and for every stage of life. How we use our time reflects our values and our understanding of our eternal destination.

Inspiration

You have an eternal address fixed in your mind as well. God has “set eternity in the hearts of men” ([Ecclesiastes 3:11](#), NIV). Down deep you know you are not home yet.

So be careful not to act like you are. Don’t lower the duffel bag too soon. Would you hang pictures on the wall of a Greyhound bus? Do you set up a bedroom at the roadside rest stop? Do you load your king-size bed on a commercial flight?

Would you treat this world like home? It isn’t. The greatest calamity is not to feel far from home when you are, but to feel right at home when you are not. Don’t quench, but rather, stir this longing for heaven.

God’s home is a forever home. “And I will live in the house of the Lord forever” ([Psalm 23:6](#)).

My friends Jeff and Carol just adopted two small

children. Christopher, the older, is only three, but he knows the difference between Jeff's house and the foster home from which he came. He tells all visitors, "This is my forever home."

Won't it be great when we say the same? Couldn't we use a forever home? This home we're in won't last forever. Birthdays remind us of that.

During the writing of this book I turned forty-six. I'm closer to ninety than I am to infancy. All those things they say about aging are coming true. I'm patting myself less on the back and more under the chin. I have everything I had twenty years ago, except now it's all lower. The other day I tried to straighten out the wrinkles in my socks and found out I wasn't wearing any.

Aging. It's no fun. The way we try to avoid it, you'd think we could. We paint the body, preserve the body, protect the body. And well we should. These bodies are God's gifts. We should be responsible. But we should also be realistic. This body must die so the new body can live. "Flesh and blood cannot have a part in the kingdom of God. Something that will ruin cannot have a part in something that never ruins" ([1 Corinthians 15:50](#)).

Aging is God's idea. It's one of the ways he keeps us headed homeward. We can't change the process, but we can change our attitude.

(From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

Application

Eternity seems like a long way away for some people. If you're avoiding thinking about it, start

looking at your own mortality. What does it mean for you to live today in the knowledge that God has set eternity in your heart? What changes can you make in your lifestyle based on that knowledge?

Exploration

Eternity—[Psalm 89:47](#); [139:24](#); [Isaiah 26:4](#); [John 5:39](#); [Galatians 6:8](#); [1 Timothy 6:12](#).

There Is a Time for Everything

There is a time for everything,
and everything on earth has its special season.

²There is a time to be born
and a time to die.

There is a time to plant
and a time to pull up plants.

³There is a time to kill
and a time to heal.

There is a time to destroy
and a time to build.

⁴There is a time to cry
and a time to laugh.

There is a time to be sad
and a time to dance.

⁵There is a time to throw away stones
and a time to gather them.

There is a time to hug
and a time not to hug.

⁶There is a time to look for something
and a time to stop looking for it.

There is a time to keep things
and a time to throw things away.

⁷There is a time to tear apart
and a time to sew together.

There is a time to be silent

and a time to speak.
⁸There is a time to love
and a time to hate.
There is a time for war
and a time for peace.

God Controls His World

⁹Do people really gain anything from their work? ¹⁰I saw the hard work God has given people to do. ¹¹God has given them a desire to know the future. He does everything just right and on time, but people can never completely understand what he is doing. ¹²So I realize that the best thing for them is to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live. ¹³God wants all people to eat and drink and be happy in their work, which are gifts from God. ¹⁴I know that everything God does will continue forever. People cannot add anything to what God has done, and they cannot take anything away from it. God does it this way to make people respect him.

¹⁵What happens now has happened in the past,
and what will happen in the future has happened
before.

God makes the same things happen again and again.

Unfairness on Earth

¹⁶I also saw this here on earth:
Where there should have been justice, there was evil;

where there should have been right, there was wrong.

¹⁷I said to myself,

God has planned a time for every thing and every action,

so he will judge both good people and bad.

¹⁸I decided that God leaves it the way it is to test people and to show them they are just like animals. ¹⁹The same thing happens to animals and to people; they both have the same breath, so they both die. People are no better off than the animals, because everything is useless. ²⁰Both end up the same way; both came from dust and both will go back to dust. ²¹Who can be sure that the human spirit goes up to God and that the spirit of an animal goes down into the ground? ²²So I saw that the best thing people can do is to enjoy their work, because that is all they have. No one can help another person see what will happen in the future.

Is It Better to Be Dead?

Again I saw all the people who were mistreated here on earth.

I saw their tears
and that they had no one to comfort them.
Cruel people had all the power,
and there was no one to comfort those they hurt.

²I decided that the dead
are better off than the living.

³But those who have never been born
are better off still;
they have not seen the evil
that is done here on earth.

Why Work So Hard?

⁴I realized the reason people work hard and try to succeed:
They are jealous of each other. This, too, is useless, like
chasing the wind.

⁵Some say it is foolish to fold your hands and do
nothing,

because you will starve to death.

⁶Maybe so, but I say it is better to be content
with what little you have.

Otherwise, you will always be struggling for more,
and that is like chasing the wind.

⁷Again I saw something here on earth that was

useless:

⁸I saw a man who had no family,
no son or brother.
He always worked hard
but was never satisfied with what he had.
He never asked himself, "For whom am I working so
hard?
Why don't I let myself enjoy life?"
This also is very sad and useless.

Friends and Family Give Strength

⁹Two people are better than one,
because they get more done by working together.
¹⁰If one falls down,
the other can help him up.
But it is bad for the person who is alone and falls,
because no one is there to help.
¹¹If two lie down together, they will be warm,
but a person alone will not be warm.
¹²An enemy might defeat one person,
but two people together can defend themselves;
a rope that is woven of three strings is hard to break.

Fame and Power Are Useless

¹³A poor but wise boy is better than a foolish but old king who
doesn't listen to advice. ¹⁴A boy became king. He had been

born poor in the kingdom and had even gone to prison before becoming king. ¹⁵I watched all the people who live on earth follow him and make him their king. ¹⁶Many followed him at first, but later, they did not like him, either. So fame and power are useless, like chasing the wind.

Be Careful About Making Promises

Be careful when you go to worship at the Temple. It is better to listen than to offer foolish sacrifices without even knowing you are doing wrong.

²Think before you speak,
and be careful about what you say to God.
God is in heaven,
and you are on the earth,
so say only a few words to God.

³The saying is true: Bad dreams come from too much worrying,
and too many words come from foolish people.

⁴If you make a promise to God, don't be slow to keep it. God is not happy with fools, so give God what you promised. ⁵It is better not to promise anything than to promise something and not do it. ⁶Don't let your words cause you to sin, and don't say to the priest at the Temple, "I didn't mean what I promised." If you do, God will become angry with your words and will destroy everything you have worked for. ⁷Many useless promises are like so many dreams; they mean nothing. You should respect God.

Officers Cheat Each Other

⁸In some places you will see poor people mistreated. Don't be surprised when they are not treated fairly or given their rights.

One officer is cheated by a higher officer who in turn is cheated by even higher officers.⁹ The wealth of the country is divided up among them all. Even the king makes sure he gets his share of the profits.

Wealth Cannot Buy Happiness

¹⁰Whoever loves money
will never have enough money;
Whoever loves wealth
will not be satisfied with it.
This is also useless.

¹¹The more wealth people have,
the more friends they have to help spend it.
So what do people really gain?
They gain nothing except to look at their riches.

¹²Those who work hard sleep in peace;
it is not important if they eat little or much.
But rich people worry about their wealth
and cannot sleep.

¹³I have seen real misery here on earth:
Money saved is a curse to its owners.

¹⁴They lose it all in a bad deal
and have nothing to give to their children.

¹⁵People come into this world with nothing,
and when they die they leave with nothing.
In spite of all their hard work,
they leave just as they came.

¹⁶This, too, is real misery:
They leave just as they came.

So what do they gain from chasing the wind?

¹⁷All they get are days full of sadness and sorrow, and they end up sick, defeated, and angry.

Life Lessons

Ecclesiastes 5:18–8:17

Situation

Although people cannot fully understand all of God's plan, the author of Ecclesiastes believed people could find some of God's goodness.

Observation

In this passage, Solomon made it clear that wealth cannot buy happiness and that enjoying your work and life is a God-given gift.

Inspiration

Take your seat in the chair, and look across the table at the psalmist David. He motions for you to lean forward. "I have a secret to tell you," he whispers, "the secret of satisfaction. 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want'" ([Psalm 23:1](#), NKJV).

David has found the pasture where discontent goes to die. It's as if he is saying, "What I have in God is greater than what I don't have in life."

You think you and I could learn to say the same?

Think for just a moment about the things you own. Think about the house you have, the car you drive, the money you've saved. Think about the jewelry you've inherited and the stocks you've traded and the clothes you've purchased. Envision all

your stuff, and let me remind you of two biblical truths.

Your stuff isn't yours. Ask any coroner. Ask any embalmer. Ask any funeral-home director. No one takes anything with him. When one of the wealthiest men in history, John D. Rockefeller, died, his accountant was asked, "How much did John D. leave?" The accountant's reply? "All of it."

"People come into this world with nothing, and when they die they leave with nothing. In spite of all their hard work, they leave just as they came" ([Ecclesiastes 5:15](#)).

All that stuff—it's not yours. And you know what else about all that stuff? It's not you. Who you are has nothing to do with the clothes you wear or the car you drive. "Then Jesus said to them, 'Be careful and guard against all kinds of greed. Life is not measured by how much one owns'" ([Luke 12:15](#)). Heaven does not know you as the fellow with the nice suit or the woman with the big house or the kid with the new bike. Heaven knows your heart. "God does not see the same way people see. People look at the outside of a person, but the Lord looks at the heart" ([1 Samuel 16:7](#)). When God thinks of you, he may see your compassion, your devotion, your tenderness or quick mind, but he doesn't think of your things.

And when you think of you, you shouldn't either. Define yourself by your stuff, and you'll feel good when you have a lot and bad when you don't. Contentment comes when we can honestly say with

Paul: “I have learned to be satisfied with the things I have... . I know how to live when I am poor, and I know how to live when I have plenty” ([Philippians 4:11–12](#)).

(From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

Application

Make a list of the ten most valuable possessions that you own. Now make a list of what God has given you. Consider which list contains the greater gifts. Take time to reflect on what changes you need to make in your attitude toward what God has given you and your earthly possessions.

Exploration

Contentment—[2 Corinthians 9:8](#); [Philippians 4:10–13](#); [1 Timothy 6:6](#); [Hebrews 13:5](#).

Enjoy Your Life's Work

¹⁸I have seen what is best for people here on earth. They should eat and drink and enjoy their work, because the life God has given them on earth is short. ¹⁹God gives some people the ability to enjoy the wealth and property he gives them, as well as the ability to accept their state in life and enjoy their work. ²⁰They do not worry about how short life is, because God keeps them busy with what they love to do.

I have seen something else wrong here on earth that causes serious problems for people. ²God gives great wealth, riches, and honor to some people; they have everything they want. But God does not let them enjoy such things; a stranger enjoys them instead. This is useless and very wrong. ³A man might have a hundred children and live a long time, but what good is it if he can't enjoy the good God gives him or have a proper burial? I say a baby born dead is better off than he is. ⁴A baby born dead is useless. It returns to darkness without even a name. ⁵That baby never saw the sun and never knew anything, but it finds more rest than that man. ⁶Even if he lives two thousand years, he doesn't enjoy the good God gives him. Everyone is going to the same place.

⁷People work just to feed themselves,
but they never seem to get enough to eat.

⁸In this way a wise person
is no better off than a fool.

Then, too, it does a poor person little good
to know how to get along in life.

⁹It is better to see what you have
than to want more.

Wanting more is useless—
like chasing the wind.

Who Can Understand God's Plan?

¹⁰Whatever happens was planned long ago.
Everyone knows what people are like.

No one can argue with God,
who is stronger than anyone.

¹¹The more you say,
the more useless it is.
What good does it do?

¹²People have only a few useless days of life on the earth;
their short life passes like a shadow. Who knows what is best
for them while they live? Who can tell them what the future will
bring?

Some Benefits of Serious Thinking

It is better to have respect than good perfume.
The day of death is better than the day of birth.

²It is better to go to a funeral
than to a party.

We all must die,
and everyone living should think about this.

³Sorrow is better than laughter,
and sadness has a good influence on you.

⁴A wise person thinks about death,
but a fool thinks only about having a good time.

⁵It is better to be criticized by a wise person
than to be praised by a fool.

⁶The laughter of fools
is like the crackling of thorns in a cooking fire.
Both are useless.

⁷Even wise people are fools
if they let money change their thinking.

⁸It is better to finish something
than to start it.

It is better to be patient
than to be proud.

⁹Don't become angry quickly,
because getting angry is foolish.

¹⁰Don't ask, "Why was life better in the 'good old days'?"

It is not wise to ask such questions.

¹¹Wisdom is better when it comes with money.
They both help those who are alive.

¹²Wisdom is like money:
they both help.
But wisdom is better,
because it can save whoever has it.
¹³Look at what God has done:
No one can straighten what he has bent.
¹⁴When life is good, enjoy it.
But when life is hard, remember:
God gives good times and hard times,
and no one knows what tomorrow will bring.

It Is Impossible to Be Truly Good

¹⁵In my useless life I have seen both of these:
I have seen good people die in spite of their goodness
and evil people live a long time in spite of their evil.
¹⁶Don't be too right,
and don't be too wise.
Why destroy yourself?
¹⁷Don't be too wicked,
and don't be foolish.
Why die before your time?
¹⁸It is good to grab the one and not let go of the other;
those who honor God will hold them both.
¹⁹Wisdom makes a person stronger
than ten leaders in a city.
²⁰Surely there is not a good person on earth
who always does good and never sins.
²¹Don't listen to everything people say,

or you might hear your servant insulting you.

²²You know that many times
you have insulted others.

²³I used wisdom to test all these things.
I wanted to be wise,
but it was too hard for me.

²⁴I cannot understand why things are as they are.
It is too hard for anyone to understand.

²⁵I studied and tried very hard to find wisdom,
to find some meaning for everything.
I learned that it is foolish to be evil,
and it is crazy to act like a fool.

²⁶I found that some women are worse than death
and are as dangerous as traps.
Their love is like a net,
and their arms hold men like chains.

A man who pleases God will be saved from them,
but a sinner will be caught by them.

²⁷The Teacher says, "This is what I learned:
I added all these things together
to find some meaning for everything.

²⁸While I was searching,
I did not find one man among the thousands I found.
Nor did I find a woman among all these.

²⁹One thing I have learned:
God made people good,
but they have found all kinds of ways to be bad."

Obey the King

No one is like the wise person
who can understand what things mean.
Wisdom brings happiness;
it makes sad faces happy.

²Obey the king's command, because you made a promise to God. ³Don't be too quick to leave the king. Don't support something that is wrong, because the king does whatever he pleases. ⁴What the king says is law; no one tells him what to do.

⁵Whoever obeys the king's command will be safe.
A wise person does the right thing at the right time.
⁶There is a right time and a right way for everything,
yet people often have many troubles.
⁷They do not know what the future holds,
and no one can tell them what will happen.
⁸No one can control the wind
or stop his own death.
No soldier is released in times of war,
and evil does not set free those who do evil.

Justice, Rewards, and Punishment

⁹I saw all of this as I considered all that is done here on earth.
Sometimes men harm those they control. ¹⁰I saw the funerals of
evil people who used to go in and out of the holy place. They

were honored in the same towns where they had done evil. This is useless, too.

¹¹When evil people are not punished right away, it makes others want to do evil, too. ¹²Though a sinner might do a hundred evil things and might live a long time, I know it will be better for those who honor God. ¹³I also know it will not go well for evil people, because they do not honor God. Like a shadow, they will not last. ¹⁴Sometimes something useless happens on earth. Bad things happen to good people, and good things happen to bad people. I say that this is also useless. ¹⁵So I decided it was more important to enjoy life. The best that people can do here on earth is to eat, drink, and enjoy life, because these joys will help them do the hard work God gives them here on earth.

We Cannot Understand All God Does

¹⁶I tried to understand all that happens on earth. I saw how busy people are, working day and night and hardly ever sleeping. ¹⁷I also saw all that God has done. Nobody can understand what God does here on earth. No matter how hard people try to understand it, they cannot. Even if wise people say they understand, they cannot; no one can really understand it.

Life Lessons

Ecclesiastes 9:1–12:14

Situation

Every person must face death. Those who are righteous and wise rest in God's hands.

Observation

Work hard, enjoy what you have in life, and seek wisdom. Wisdom provides greater assets than power. Although you still face death, you can be comforted to know that those who follow God will live forever with him.

Inspiration

Remarkable.

Each morning I climb into a truck that weighs half a ton and take it out on an interstate where I—and a thousand other drivers—turn our vehicles into sixty-mile-per-hour missiles. Although I've had a few scares and mishaps, I still whistle while I drive at a speed that would have caused my great-grandfather to pass out.

Remarkable.

Every day I have the honor of sitting down with a book that contains the words of the One who created me. Every day I have the opportunity to let him give me a thought or two on how to live.

If I don't do what he says, he doesn't burn the book or cancel my subscription. If I disagree with what he says, lightning doesn't split my swivel chair or an angel doesn't mark my name off the holy list. If I

don't understand what he says, he doesn't call me a dummy.

In fact, he calls me "Son," and on a different page explains what I don't understand.

Remarkable.

At the end of the day when I walk through the house, I step into the bedrooms of three little girls. Their covers are usually kicked off, so I cover them up. Their hair usually hides their faces, so I brush it back. And one by one, I bend over and kiss the foreheads of the angels God has loaned me. Then I stand in the doorway and wonder why in the world he would entrust a stumbling, fumbling fellow like me with the task of loving and leading such treasures.

Remarkable.

Then I go and crawl into bed with a woman far wiser than I ... a woman who deserves a man much better looking than I ... but a woman who would argue that fact and tell me from the bottom of her heart that I'm the best thing to come down her pike.

After I think about the wife I have, and when I think that I get to be with her for a lifetime, I shake my head and thank the God of grace for grace and think, *Remarkable*.

In the morning, I'll do it all again. I'll drive down the same road. Go to the same office. Call on the same bank. Kiss the same girls. And crawl into bed with the same woman. But I'm learning not to take these everyday miracles for granted....

I'm discovering many things: traffic jams eventually clear up, sunsets are for free, Little League

is a work of art, and most planes take off and arrive on time. I'm learning that most folks are good folks who are just as timid as I am about starting a conversation....

I'm learning that if I look ... if I open my eyes and observe ... there are many reasons to take off my hat, look at the source of it all, and just say thanks. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you feel like you are falling behind in the rat race? Do you wonder how you will catch up? Look at your remarkable blessings, and give God thanks for what you *do* have.

Exploration

Life—[Genesis 9:5–6](#); [Deuteronomy 8:3](#); [Psalms 90:12](#); [144:3–4](#); [Matthew 10:39](#); [Mark 8:35–37](#); [John 4:13–14](#); [Acts 20:24](#).

Is Death Fair?

I thought about all this and tried to understand it. I saw that God controls good people and wise people and what they do, but no one knows if they will experience love or hate.

²Good and bad people end up the same—
those who are right and those who are wrong,
those who are good and those who are evil,
those who are clean and those who are unclean,
those who sacrifice and those who do not.
The same things happen to a good person
as happen to a sinner,
to a person who makes promises to God
and to one who does not.

³This is something wrong that happens here on earth: What happens to one happens to all. So people's minds are full of evil and foolish thoughts while they live. After that, they join the dead. ⁴But anyone still alive has hope; even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!

⁵The living know they will die,
but the dead know nothing.
Dead people have no more reward,
and people forget them.

⁶After people are dead,
they can no longer love or hate or envy.

They will never again share
in what happens here on earth.

Enjoy Life While You Can

⁷So go eat your food and enjoy it;
drink your wine and be happy,
because that is what God wants you to do.

⁸Put on nice clothes
and make yourself look good.

⁹Enjoy life with the wife you love. Enjoy all the useless days of this useless life God has given you here on earth, because it is all you have. So enjoy the work you do here on earth. ¹⁰Whatever work you do, do your best, because you are going to the grave, where there is no working, no planning, no knowledge, and no wisdom.

Time and Chance

¹¹I also saw something else here on earth:
The fastest runner does not always win the race,
the strongest soldier does not always win the battle,
the wisest does not always have food,
the smartest does not always become wealthy,
and the talented one does not always receive praise.
Time and chance happen to everyone.

¹²No one knows what will happen next.

Like a fish caught in a net,
or a bird caught in a trap,
people are trapped by evil
when it suddenly falls on them.

Wisdom Does Not Always Win

¹³I also saw something wise here on earth that impressed me.
¹⁴There was a small town with only a few people in it. A great king fought against it and put his armies all around it. ¹⁵Now there was a poor but wise man in the town who used his wisdom to save his town. But later on, everyone forgot about him. ¹⁶I still think wisdom is better than strength. But those people forgot about the poor man's wisdom and stopped listening to what he said.

¹⁷The quiet words of a wise person are better
than the shouts of a foolish ruler.

¹⁸Wisdom is better than weapons of war,
but one sinner can destroy much good.

Dead flies can make even perfume stink.
In the same way, a little foolishness can spoil wisdom.

²The heart of the wise leads to right,
but the heart of a fool leads to wrong.

³Even in the way fools walk along the road,
they show they are not wise;
they show everyone how stupid they are.

⁴Don't leave your job
just because your boss is angry with you.
Remaining calm solves great problems.

⁵There is something else wrong that happens here on
earth.

It is the kind of mistake rulers make:

⁶Fools are given important positions
while gifted people are given lower ones;

⁷I have seen servants ride horses
while princes walk like servants on foot.

⁸Anyone who digs a pit might fall into it;
anyone who knocks down a wall might be bitten by a
snake;

⁹anyone who moves boulders might be hurt by them;
and anyone who cuts logs might be harmed by them.

¹⁰A dull ax means
harder work.

Being wise will make it easier.

¹¹If a snake bites the tamer before it is tamed,
what good is the tamer?

¹²The words of the wise bring them praise,
but the words of a fool will destroy them.

¹³A fool begins by saying foolish things

and ends by saying crazy and wicked things.

¹⁴A fool talks too much.

No one knows the future,
and no one can tell what will happen after death.

¹⁵Work wears fools out;
they don't even know how to get home.

The Value of Work

¹⁶How terrible it is for a country whose king is a child
and whose leaders eat all morning.

¹⁷How lucky a country is whose king comes from a
good family,
whose leaders eat only at mealtime
and for strength, not to get drunk.

¹⁸If someone is lazy, the roof will begin to fall.
If he doesn't fix it, the house will leak.

¹⁹A party makes you feel good,
wine makes you feel happy,
and money buys anything.

²⁰Don't make fun of the king,
and don't make fun of rich people, even in your
bedroom.

A little bird might carry your words;
a bird might fly and tell what you said.

Boldly Face the Future

Invest what you have,
because after a while you will get a return.

²Invest what you have in several different businesses,
because you don't know what disasters might happen.

³If clouds are full of rain,
they will shower on the earth.

A tree can fall to the north or south,
but it will stay where it falls.

⁴Those who wait for perfect weather
will never plant seeds;
those who look at every cloud
will never harvest crops.

⁵You don't know where the wind will blow,
and you don't know how a baby grows inside the
mother.

In the same way, you don't know what God is doing,
or how he created everything.

⁶Plant early in the morning,
and work until evening,
because you don't know if this or that will succeed.
They might both do well.

Serve God While You Are Young

⁷Sunshine is sweet;
it is good to see the light of day.

⁸People ought to enjoy every day of their lives,
no matter how long they live.

But they should also remember this:

You will be dead a long time.

Everything that happens then is useless.

⁹Young people, enjoy yourselves while you are young;
be happy while you are young.

Do whatever your heart desires,
whatever you want to do.

But remember that God will judge you
for everything you do.

¹⁰Don't worry,
and forget the troubles of your body,
because youth and childhood are useless.

The Problems of Old Age

Remember your Creator
while you are young,
before the days of trouble come
and the years when you say,
“I find no pleasure in them.”

²When you get old,
the light from the sun, moon, and stars will grow dark;
the rain clouds will never seem to go away.

³At that time your arms will shake
and your legs will become weak.
Your teeth will fall out so you cannot chew,
and your eyes will not see clearly.

⁴Your ears will be deaf to the noise in the streets,
and you will barely hear the millstone grinding grain.
You'll wake up when a bird starts singing,
but you will barely hear singing.

⁵You will fear high places
and will be afraid to go for a walk.

Your hair will become white like the flowers on an
almond tree.

You will limp along like a grasshopper when you walk.
Your appetite will be gone.

Then you will go to your everlasting home,
and people will go to your funeral.

⁶Soon your life will snap like a silver chain
or break like a golden bowl.
You will be like a broken pitcher at a spring,
or a broken wheel at a well.

⁷You will turn back into the dust of the earth again,
but your spirit will return to God who gave it.

⁸Everything is useless!

The Teacher says that everything is useless.

Conclusion: Honor God

⁹The Teacher was very wise and taught the people what he knew. He very carefully thought about, studied, and set in order many wise teachings. ¹⁰The Teacher looked for just the right words to write what is dependable and true.

¹¹Words from wise people are like sharp sticks used to guide animals. They are like nails that have been driven in firmly. Altogether they are wise teachings that come from one Shepherd. ¹²So be careful, my son, about other teachings. People are always writing books, and too much study will make you tired.

¹³Now, everything has been heard,
so I give my final advice:
Honor God and obey his commands,
because this is all people must do.

¹⁴God will judge everything,
even what is done in secret,
the good and the evil.

The Book of Song of Solomon

Introduction

Remember your love notes of young romance?

Come on, now. Think about it.

Flip back through the scrapbook of your heart. You'll find one.

You thought *he* was the only one. You knew *she* was the reason for creation. And with youthful passion, you expressed your love.

"I'll love you forever."

"You are my one and only."

"Had I the pen of a poet, had I the stars to give you, even then I couldn't show it ..."

Ahhh, the words of romance. (That last verse? That was mine, proving that even a crusty West Texan can be romantic.)

But the most daring Romeos will blush at what you are about to read—"The Song of Solomon." A love poem that chronicles the passion between starstruck Solomon and his spellbound bride.

It's unlike anything in the Bible. For that reason, it should be read differently than any book in the Bible. Don't take it literally. Don't search for hidden codes or submerged messages. Love letters are to be appreciated, not analyzed.

Appreciate this one. Don't get hung up on the ancient terms of affection. Sure, they sound strange. My wife wouldn't appreciate being told her neck was like David's tower ([4:4](#)) or that her limbs were like pomegranates ([4:13](#)). Just remember that these words were not written for you.

You are opening someone else's shoebox of letters and reading the correspondence between two people madly in love.

I guess God knew we needed a reminder that romance was his idea.

About This Book

Author:

Solomon

Date Written:

c. 935 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- Love and sexual attraction are powerful forces in the world.
- A marriage is a celebration of those forces.

Key Verse:

“I belong to my lover, and he desires only me”
([Song of Solomon 7:10](#)).

Contents:

1. Love Begins and Grows [1:1–3:5](#)
2. The Wedding [3:6–5:1](#)
3. The Bride [5:2–7:13](#)
4. The Wonder of Love [8:1–14](#)

Life Lessons

Song of Solomon 1:1–2:7

Situation

Solomon's Song describes a relationship between a bride and groom. Solomon and the Shulamnite woman were about to be married in the king's palace. The woman was a peasant worker from Shunem, a farming town sixty miles north of Jerusalem.

Observation

God gives marriage as a gift. It is a gift based on unquestioning commitment and unconditional acceptance.

Inspiration

I sensed it as we were lying on the bed. It blew over me mixed with the sweet fragrance of fresh rain. My wife was lying silently at my side. Jenna was using my stomach for a pillow. She, too, was quiet. Our second child, only a month from birth, rested within the womb of her mother. They must have sensed it, for no one spoke. It entered our presence as if introduced by God himself. And no one dared stir for fear it leave prematurely.

What was it? An eternal instant.

An instant in time that had no time. A picture that froze in mid-frame, demanding to be savored. A minute that refused to die after sixty seconds. A moment that was lifted off the timeline and amplified into a forever so all the angels could witness its majesty.

An eternal instant.

A moment that reminds you of the treasures surrounding you. Your home. Your peace of mind. Your health. A moment that tenderly rebukes you for spending so much time on temporal preoccupations such as savings accounts, houses, and punctuality. A moment that can bring a mist to the manliest of eyes and perspective to the darkest life.

Eternal instants have dotted history.

It was an eternal instant when the Creator smiled and said, "It is good." It was a timeless moment when Abraham pleaded for mercy from the God of mercy, "But if there are just ten faithful." It was a moment without time when Noah pushed open the rain-soaked hatch and breathed in the clean air. And it was a moment in the "fullness of time" when a carpenter, some smelly shepherds, and an exhausted young mother stood in silent awe at the sight of the infant in the manger.

Eternal instants. You've had them. We all have.

Sharing a porch swing on a summer evening with your grandchild.

Seeing *her* face in the glow of a candle.

Putting your arm into your husband's as you stroll through the golden leaves and breathe the brisk autumn air.

Listening to your six year old thank God for everything from goldfish to Grandma.

Such moments are necessary because they remind us that everything is okay. The King is still on the throne and life is still worth living. Eternal instants

remind us that love is still the greatest possession and the future is nothing to fear.

The next time an instant in your life begins to be eternal, let it. Put your head back on the pillow and soak it in. Resist the urge to cut it short. Don't interrupt the silence or shatter the solemnity. You are, in a very special way, on holy ground. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

Schedule a night to get away from pressing commitments. Create a time when you put the cares of the world on hold, and simply enjoy your family.

Exploration

Husbands and Wives—[Genesis 2:23–24](#); [Proverbs 5:15–19](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:9](#); [1 Corinthians 7:3–5](#); [Ephesians 5:21–29](#), [33](#).

Solomon's Greatest Song.

The Woman Speaks to the Man She Loves

²Kiss me with the kisses of your mouth,
because your love is better than wine.
³The smell of your perfume is pleasant,
and your name is pleasant like expensive perfume.
That's why the young women love you.
⁴Take me with you; let's run together.
The king takes me into his rooms.

Friends Speak to the Man

We will rejoice and be happy with you;
we praise your love more than wine.
With good reason, the young women love you.

The Woman Speaks

⁵I'm dark but lovely,
women of Jerusalem,
dark like the tents of Kedar,

like the curtains of Solomon.

⁶Don't look at how dark I am,
at how dark the sun has made me.
My brothers were angry with me
and made me tend the vineyards,
so I haven't tended my own vineyard!

⁷Tell me, you whom I love,
where do you feed your sheep?
Where do you let them rest at noon?
Why should I look for you near your friend's sheep,
like a woman who wears a [veil](#)?

The Man Speaks to the Woman

⁸You are the most beautiful of women.
Surely you know to follow the sheep
and feed your young goats
near the shepherds' tents.

⁹My darling, you are like a mare
among the king's stallions.

¹⁰Your cheeks are beautiful with ornaments,
and your neck with jewels.

¹¹We will make for you gold earrings
with silver hooks.

The Woman Speaks

¹²The smell of my perfume spreads out

to the king on his couch.

¹³My lover is like a bag of myrrh
that lies all night between my breasts.

¹⁴My lover is like a bunch of flowers
from the vineyards at En Gedi.

The Man Speaks

¹⁵My darling, you are beautiful!
Oh, you are beautiful,
and your eyes are like doves.

The Woman Answers the Man

¹⁶You are so handsome, my lover,
and so pleasant!
Our bed is the grass.
¹⁷Cedar trees form our roof;
our ceiling is made of juniper wood.

The Woman Speaks Again

I am a rose in the Plain of Sharon,
a lily in the valleys.

The Man Speaks Again

²Among the young women, my darling
is like a lily among thorns!

The Woman Answers

³Among the young men, my lover
is like an apple tree in the woods!
I enjoy sitting in his shadow;
his fruit is sweet to my taste.

⁴He brought me to the banquet room,
and his banner over me is love.

⁵Strengthen me with raisins,
and refresh me with apples,
because I am weak with love.

⁶My lover's left hand is under my head,
and his right arm holds me tight.

The Woman Speaks to the Friends

⁷Women of Jerusalem, promise me
by the gazelles and the deer
not to awaken
or excite my feelings of love
until it is ready.

Life Lessons

Song of Solomon 2:8–3:4

Situation

Solomon's lover recalled their early courtship days and even remembered a dream that caused her concern about Solomon's whereabouts.

Observation

Good memories of courtship can keep fresh and alive the gift of love that God has given to partners in a marriage relationship.

Inspiration

Stacy and I rarely make big occasions out of anniversaries, but two years ago we took an exception. We decided to cash in airline mileage on a special trip to England to celebrate our fifteen years together.

The grandparents came to take care of their grandchildren, and we gathered our travel brochures and camera and headed off for a week... And we did have a good time... But I had to admit that our trip hardly resembled the pictures in the advertisements.

For one thing, the prices were almost double those we remembered from ten years previous. Rain

or unexpected crowds canceled a number of our plans. And those little Cotswald cottages had beds made for two of the seven dwarfs... . Not exactly a second honeymoon....

Our trip—and our marriage—had been different from what we expected... . Having children and renovating houses, straining to find each of our career niches—our relationship was more than the sum of those parts, just as our vacation couldn't be defined by the places we visited....

The point was, we had made the trip *together*. We were beginning to learn something about what it meant to keep company on cold nights....

We discovered a love that is valuable precisely because it has been costly. (From *The Cleavers Don't Live Here Anymore* by Paula Rinehart)

Application

What could you do to strengthen your relationship? Ask God to show you how.

Exploration

Married Love—[Genesis 2:23–24](#); [24:67](#); [29:20](#); [Ruth 2–4](#); [Proverbs 18:22](#); [1 Corinthians 11:11](#); [Ephesians 5:25–30](#), [33](#).

The Woman Speaks Again

⁸I hear my lover's voice.

Here he comes jumping across the mountains,
skipping over the hills.

⁹My lover is like a gazelle or a young deer.

Look, he stands behind our wall
peeking through the windows,
looking through the blinds.

¹⁰My lover spoke and said to me,

“Get up, my darling;
let's go away, my beautiful one.

¹¹Look, the winter is past;
the rains are over and gone.

¹²Blossoms appear through all the land.

The time has come to sing;
the cooing of doves is heard in our land.

¹³There are young figs on the fig trees,
and the blossoms on the vines smell sweet.

Get up, my darling;
let's go away, my beautiful one.”

The Man Speaks

¹⁴My beloved is like a dove hiding in the cracks of the
rock,

in the secret places of the cliff.
Show me your face,
and let me hear your voice.
Your voice is sweet,
and your face is lovely.
¹⁵Catch the foxes for us—
the little foxes that ruin the vineyards
while they are in blossom.

The Woman Speaks

¹⁶My lover is mine, and I am his.
He feeds among the lilies
¹⁷until the day dawns
and the shadows disappear.
Turn, my lover.
Be like a gazelle or a young deer
on the mountain valleys.

The Woman Dreams

At night on my bed,
I looked for the one I love;
I looked for him, but I could not find him.

²I got up and went around the city,
in the streets and squares,
looking for the one I love.

I looked for him, but I could not find him.

³The watchmen found me as they patrolled the city,
so I asked, "Have you seen the one I love?"

⁴As soon as I had left them,
I found the one I love.

I held him and would not let him go
until I brought him to my mother's house,
to the room where I was born.

The Woman Speaks to the Friends

⁵Women of Jerusalem, promise me
by the gazelles and the deer
not to awaken
or excite my feelings of love
until it is ready.

⁶Who is this coming out of the desert
like a cloud of smoke?
Who is this that smells like myrrh, incense,
and other spices?

⁷Look, it's Solomon's [couch](#)

with sixty soldiers around it,
the finest soldiers of Israel.

⁸These soldiers all carry swords
and have been trained in war.
Every man wears a sword at his side
and is ready for the dangers of the night.

⁹King Solomon had a couch made for himself
of wood from Lebanon.

¹⁰He made its posts of silver
and its braces of gold.
The seat was covered with purple cloth
that the women of Jerusalem wove with love.

¹¹Women of Jerusalem, go out and see King Solomon.
He is wearing the crown his mother put on his head
on his wedding day,
when his heart was happy!

Life Lessons

Song of Solomon 3:5–5:1

Situation

Solomon recalled the occasion when he declared his love to his bride. He offered his hand in marriage, and she accepted.

Observation

The Song of Solomon attests to the joy that comes from following guidelines from God.

Inspiration

There is no greater love than the love of God. However, here on earth God has given us certain

relationships that give us a taste of or a glimpse into His divine love.

The first relationship that was created and ordained by God to help us understand in some small measure the greatness of His love is the marriage relationship. A well-balanced, loving marriage relationship is the nearest thing to “heaven on earth,” as so many of our writers have reminded us. Scripture includes many comparisons between our relationship with God and the marriage relationship.

I believe that one of the reasons that I came to know and love the Lord at an early age was because I saw His love manifest in the marriage relationship around me. From the time I was a very young girl, I knew Mother and Daddy loved each other. They were obviously sweethearts, and after almost sixty years of marriage, they are lovers still....

Mother and Daddy's marriage is an exception and not necessarily an example. God picked a very special woman and a very special man to do a very special job. Young Christians today can't look at Ruth and Billy Graham as an example of a “normal” marriage. So in that sense, I don't know whether I was fortunate or unfortunate. But from the moment I could sense things, I knew Mother and Daddy loved each other deeply and dearly. Even today in their older age, whenever I'm with them, Daddy's eyes light up and his whole demeanor changes when Mother is in the room. And Mother's eyes light up and she becomes happy and excited when he comes into the room. So I know there is a real love match there. It was a great

sacrifice for them to be apart so much of the time because they were and are deeply in love....

One of the major magazines came out with an issue of the one hundred greatest love stories of the century. All kinds of celebrities were featured. And tucked in with the rest was a very small picture of Mother and Daddy. I looked at the other “great love stories” and thought, *Most of these so-called love stories have ended in divorce, and many are not even married, so what exactly does this culture perceive as love?*

Here is a couple who have been married almost sixty years, still together and still in love. They have endured ups and downs, hardships, stress, separations, sadness, and loneliness, as well as happy times. And their love story is tucked in between notorious love stories that have not lasted. Which is the true example of love? (From *A Quiet Knowing* by Gigi Graham Tchividjian)

Application

Think of a couple you know at church or within your family whose marriage relationship you admire. Ask them how they have been able to maintain a healthy marriage. Study the passages below and make your own list of guidelines that God gives for having a strong marriage.

Exploration

Love and Marriage—[Genesis 2:24–25](#); [Proverbs 5:18–20](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:9–10](#); [9:9](#); [Ephesians 5:22–33](#); [Hebrews 13:4](#).

The Man Speaks to the Woman

How beautiful you are, my darling!

Oh, you are beautiful!

Your eyes behind your veil are like doves.

Your hair is like a flock of goats streaming down
Mount Gilead.

²Your teeth are white like newly sheared sheep
just coming from their bath.

Each one has a twin,
and none of them is missing.

³Your lips are like red silk thread,
and your mouth is lovely.

Your cheeks behind your veil
are like slices of a pomegranate.

⁴Your neck is like David's tower,
built with rows of stones.

A thousand shields hang on its walls;
each shield belongs to a strong soldier.

⁵Your breasts are like two fawns,
like twins of a gazelle,
feeding among the lilies.

⁶Until the day dawns
and the shadows disappear,
I will go to that mountain of myrrh
and to that hill of incense.

⁷My darling, everything about you is beautiful,
and there is nothing at all wrong with you.

⁸Come with me from Lebanon, my bride.
Come with me from Lebanon,

from the top of Mount Amana,
from the tops of Mount Senir and Mount Hermon.
Come from the lions' dens
and from the leopards' hills.

⁹My sister, my bride,
you have thrilled my heart;
you have thrilled my heart
with a glance of your eyes,
with one sparkle from your necklace.

¹⁰Your love is so sweet, my sister, my bride.
Your love is better than wine,
and your perfume smells better than any spice.

¹¹My bride, your lips drip honey;
honey and milk are under your tongue.
Your clothes smell like the cedars of Lebanon.

¹²My sister, my bride, you are like a garden locked up,
like a walled-in spring, a closed-up fountain.

¹³Your limbs are like an orchard
of pomegranates with all the best fruit,
filled with flowers and nard,

¹⁴nard and saffron, calamus, and cinnamon,
with trees of incense, myrrh, and aloes—
all the best spices.

¹⁵You are like a garden fountain—
a well of fresh water
flowing down from the mountains of Lebanon.

The Woman Speaks

¹⁰Awake, north wind.
Come, south wind.
Blow on my garden,
and let its sweet smells flow out.
Let my lover enter the garden
and eat its best fruits.

The Man Speaks

I have entered my garden, my sister, my bride.
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.
I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey.
I have drunk my wine and my milk.

The Friends Speak

Eat, friends, and drink;
yes, drink deeply, lovers.

Life Lessons

[Song of Solomon 5:2–6:3](#)

Situation

Misunderstandings sprang up between Solomon and his wife. The bride took steps to heal the marriage breach. The growing maturity in this marriage was indicated by references to friendship and an understanding that Solomon and his bride belong exclusively to each other.

Observation

Marriage has several elements: love, commitment, sexual desire, admiration, and friendship. As a marriage matures, so does the commitment to resolve problems and to deepen the friendship.

Inspiration

The other night I fell into bed with a miserable cold. Mind you, I am not able to blow my nose because I can't use my hands, and I can't really cough because I have no chest muscles. I knew I was going to face a rough night. But not as rough as Ken.

I woke up at 3:0 a.m. and groaned, "Ken, please get up. Help me sit up so I can cough." The poor guy threw back the covers, stumbled out of bed, and sat me up to pound on my back. He held a tissue to my nose as I coughed and sputtered.

An hour-and-a-half later, we repeated the routine. We were both dead tired and somewhere in between squeezing my ribs and reaching for another tissue, he moaned, "Did our wedding vows include this stuff?"

I sniffed and reminded him, "Remember that part about 'for better or for worse'? Well, this is the worst part. And remember when we said we'd love each other through thick and thin?"

"I know, I know," Ken sighed. "This is the thin part."

Every couple agrees that marriage has its ups and downs. The up times are when love is as plain as day and fully visible. The down times are when love goes undercover and incognito. So commonplace are the ups and downs that one wonders why they aren't written into the wedding vows. But they are. When a husband and wife vow to love for better or for worse, it includes the full extent of the ups and downs.

Marriage will always ask you to prove love. To be married is not to be taken off the front lines of love but to be plunged into the thick and thin of the ups

and downs.

(From *Diamonds in the Dust* by Joni Eareckson Tada)

Application

Marriage—and every other relationship in our lives—has ups and downs. How do you respond to problems or challenges in your friendships or in your marriage? It may be hard to work through problems, but it is the right way! Work it out. Don't give up!

Exploration

Commitment—[Ruth 1:16–17](#); [1 Samuel 20:17](#); [Proverbs 17:17](#); [18:24](#); [27:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:9–10](#); [Mark 10:6–9](#); [John 15:13](#); [Romans 12:5](#); [Ephesians 5:25–33](#).

The Woman Dreams

²I sleep, but my heart is awake.
I hear my lover knocking.
“Open to me, my sister, my darling,
my dove, my perfect one.
My head is wet with dew,
and my hair with the dampness of the night.”
³I have taken off my garment
and don’t want to put it on again.
I have washed my feet
and don’t want to get them dirty again.
⁴My lover put his hand through the opening,
and I felt excited inside.
⁵I got up to open the door for my lover.
Myrrh was dripping from my hands
and flowing from my fingers,
onto the handles of the lock.
⁶I opened the door for my lover,
but my lover had left and was gone.
When he spoke, he took my breath away.
I looked for him, but I could not find him;
I called for him, but he did not answer.
⁷The watchmen found me
as they patrolled the city.
They hit me and hurt me;
the guards on the wall took away my veil.

⁸Promise me, women of Jerusalem,
if you find my lover,
tell him I am weak with love.

The Friends Answer the Woman

⁹How is your lover better than other lovers,
most beautiful of women?
How is your lover better than other lovers?
Why do you want us to promise this?

The Woman Answers the Friends

¹⁰My lover is healthy and tan,
the best of ten thousand men.
¹¹His head is like the finest gold;
his hair is wavy and black like a raven.
¹²His eyes are like doves
by springs of water.
They seem to be bathed in cream
and are set like jewels.
¹³His cheeks are like beds of spices;
they smell like mounds of perfume.
His lips are like lilies
flowing with myrrh.
¹⁴His hands are like gold hinges,
filled with jewels.

His body is like shiny ivory
covered with sapphires.

¹⁵His legs are like large marble posts,
standing on bases of fine gold.
He is like a cedar of Lebanon,
like the finest of the trees.

¹⁶His mouth is sweet to kiss,
and I desire him very much.
Yes, daughters of Jerusalem,
this is my lover
and my friend.

The Friends Speak to the Woman

Where has your lover gone,
most beautiful of women?
Which way did your lover turn?
We will look for him with you.

The Woman Answers the Friends

²My lover has gone down to his garden,
to the beds of spices,
to feed in the gardens
and to gather lilies.
³I belong to my lover,
and my lover belongs to me.
He feeds among the lilies.

Life Lessons

[Song of Solomon 6:4–7:9](#)

Situation

King Solomon expressed his love for his bride.

Observation

The Song of Solomon is traditionally considered to be a love poem. God used marriage as an illustration of Christ's love for the church.

Inspiration

What is more beautiful than a bride? One of the

side benefits of being a minister is that I get an early glimpse of the bride as she stands at the top of the aisle. And I have to say that I have never seen an ugly bride. I've seen some grooms that could use an alteration or two, but never a bride. Maybe it is the aura of whiteness that clings to her as dew clings to a rose. Or perhaps it is the diamonds that glisten in her eyes. Or maybe it's the blush of love that pinks her cheeks or the bouquet of promises she carries. Whatever it is, there is the feeling that when you see a bride you are seeing the purest beauty the world can boast.

A bride. A commitment robed in elegance. "I'll be with you forever." Tomorrow bringing hope to today. Promised purity faithfully delivered.

When you read that our heavenly home is similar to a bride, tell me, doesn't it make you want to go home? (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

What are you doing to get ready for your spiritual wedding with Christ? Will you be pure, sinless, clean, without a spot? Get ready by being faithful today. When someone asks you to compromise your standards, say no. If they ask you to help them with something questionable, refuse.

Exploration

Bride and Bridegroom—[Isaiah 62:5](#); [Ezekiel 16:8](#).

The Man Speaks to the Woman

⁴My darling, you are as beautiful as the city of Tirzah,
as lovely as the city of Jerusalem,
like an army flying flags.

⁵Turn your eyes from me,
because they excite me too much.
Your hair is like a flock of goats
streaming down Mount Gilead.

⁶Your teeth are white like sheep
just coming from their bath;
each one has a twin,
and none of them is missing.

⁷Your cheeks behind your veil
are like slices of a pomegranate.

⁸There may be sixty queens and eighty slave women
and so many girls you cannot count them,

⁹but there is only one like my dove, my perfect one.
She is her mother's only daughter,
the brightest of the one who gave her birth.

The young women saw her and called her happy;
the queens and the slave women also praised her.

The Young Women Praise the Woman

¹⁰Who is that young woman

that shines out like the dawn?
She is as pretty as the moon,
as bright as the sun,
as wonderful as an army flying flags.

The Man Speaks

¹¹I went down into the orchard of nut trees
to see the blossoms of the valley,
to look for buds on the vines,
to see if the pomegranate trees had bloomed.
¹²Before I realized it, my desire for you made me feel
like a prince in a chariot.

The Friends Call to the Woman

¹³Come back, come back, woman of Shulam.
Come back, come back,
so we may look at you!

The Woman Answers the Friends

Why do you want to look at the woman of Shulam
as you would at the dance of two armies?

The Man Speaks to the Woman

Your feet are beautiful in sandals,
you daughter of a prince.

Your round thighs are like jewels
shaped by an artist.

²Your navel is like a round drinking cup
always filled with wine.

Your stomach is like a pile of wheat
surrounded with lilies.

³Your breasts are like two fawns,
like twins of a gazelle.

⁴Your neck is like an ivory tower.
Your eyes are like the pools in Heshbon
near the gate of Bath Rabbim.
Your nose is like the mountain of Lebanon
that looks down on Damascus.

⁵Your head is like Mount Carmel,
and your hair is like purple cloth;
the king is captured in its folds.

⁶You are beautiful and pleasant;
my love, you are full of delights.

⁷You are tall like a palm tree,
and your breasts are like its bunches of fruit.

⁸I said, "I will climb up the palm tree
and take hold of its fruit."

Let your breasts be like bunches of grapes,
the smell of your breath like apples,

⁹and your mouth like the best wine.

The Woman Speaks to the Man

Let this wine go down sweetly for my lover;
may it flow gently past the lips and teeth.

¹⁰I belong to my lover,
and he desires only me.

¹¹Come, my lover,
let's go out into the country
and spend the night in the fields.

¹²Let's go early to the vineyards
and see if the buds are on the vines.
Let's see if the blossoms have already opened
and if the pomegranates have bloomed.
There I will give you my love.

¹³The mandrake flowers give their sweet smell,
and all the best fruits are at our gates.
I have saved them for you, my lover,
the old delights and the new.

Life Lessons

Song of Solomon 7:10–8:4

Situation

King Solomon knew that love between a husband and wife should be enjoyed and celebrated. God made human bodies to be enjoyable to their spouses.

Observation

Enjoy your spouse! Celebrate love! Never awaken these passions outside of marriage, and never let

anything interfere with your enjoyment.

Inspiration

We all have some hurt that loves to come back and steal our joy. It sits on the back of our memory waiting for an opportunity to be recalled. It's always there, and no matter how hard we try, we can't remove it. There are a myriad of advantages of being human rather than a computer, but sometimes it would be nice to have all of our painful memories stored on a floppy disc stuck in the side of our head. A simple command could erase the hurt.

Even though we can't erase the hurts that lie stored in the file drawers of our memory, we *can* offset their negative impact. In chemistry, if I want to neutralize an acid, I must counter with the equivalent of an opposite substance. Forgiveness works like that. It's an alkaline nullifying the acidic nature of bitterness. It's that balancing presence that says "You can remind me of my pain, but you can't rob me of my rest."

If we don't deal with our unresolved conflicts, they'll deal with us. Bitterness is a slavemaster. It controls us. It demands too much.

(From *Little House on the Freeway* by Tim Kimmel)

Application

When you think about a memory with your spouse, does it still make you angry? It is time to resolve the conflict. True love cannot hold a grudge.

Exploration

Forgiveness—[Matthew 6:12–15](#); [18:21–35](#); [Luke](#)

17:3.

I wish you were like my brother
who fed at my mother's breasts.
If I found you outside,
I would kiss you,
and no one would look down on me.
²I would lead you and bring you
to my mother's house;
she is the one who taught me.
I would give you a drink of spiced wine
from my pomegranates.

The Woman Speaks to the Friends

³My lover's left hand is under my head,
and his right arm holds me tight.
⁴Women of Jerusalem,
promise not to awaken
or excite my feelings of love
until it is ready.

Life Lessons

[Song of Solomon 8:5-14](#)

Situation

Solomon described love as strong, jealous, unquenchable, priceless, and irresistible.

Observation

The power of love that bonds husband and wife

together provides them with satisfaction and enjoyment.

Inspiration

Relationships. America's most precious resource. Take our oil, take our weapons, but don't take what holds us together—relationships. A nation's strength is measured by the premium it puts on its own people. When people value people, an impenetrable web is drawn, a web of vitality and security.

A relationship. The delicate fusion of two human beings. The intricate weaving of two lives; two sets of moods, mentalities, and temperaments. Two intermingling hearts, both seeking solace and security.

A relationship. It has more power than any nuclear bomb and more potential than any promising seed. Nothing will drive a man to greater courage than a relationship. Nothing will spawn greater devotion than a relationship. Nothing will fire the heat of a patriot or purge the cynicism of a rebel like a relationship....

What matters most in life is not what ladders we climb or what ownings we accumulate. What matters most is a relationship.

What steps are you taking to protect your "possessions"? What measures are you using to insure that your relationships are strong and healthy? What are you doing to solidify the bridges between you and those in your world?

Do you resolve conflict as soon as possible, or do you "allow the sun to go down on your wrath"? Do

you verbalize your love every day to your mate and children? Do you look for chances to forgive? Do you pray daily for those in your life? Do you count the lives of your family members and friends more important than your own?

Our Master knew the value of a relationship. It was through relationships that he changed the world. His movement thrived not on personality or power, but on championing the value of a person. He built bridges and crossed them. Touching the leper ... uniting the estranged ... exalting the prostitute. And what was that he said about loving your neighbor as yourself?

It's a wise man who values people above possessions. Many wealthy men have died paupers because they gave their lives to things and not to people. And many paupers have left this earth in contentment because they loved their neighbors. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

How can you show love by giving up your desires in order to be more available for your family? How could you put your friends' needs before your own? Could you do this for an enemy?

Exploration

Love—[John 3:16](#); [10:10-11](#); [Romans 5:8](#); [Ephesians 5:1-2](#); [Philippians 2:6-8](#); [1 Peter 4:8](#); [1 John 3:18](#); [4:10](#).

The Friends Speak

⁵Who is this coming out of the desert,
leaning on her lover?

The Man Speaks to the Woman

I woke you under the apple tree
where you were born;
there your mother gave birth to you.

⁶Put me like a seal on your heart,
like a seal on your arm.
Love is as strong as death;
jealousy is as strong as the grave.
Love bursts into flames
and burns like a hot fire.

⁷Even much water cannot put out the flame of love;
floods cannot drown love.
If a man offered everything in his house for love,
people would totally reject it.

The Woman's Brothers Speak

⁸We have a little sister,

and her breasts are not yet grown.
What should we do for our sister
on the day she becomes engaged?
⁹If she is a wall,
we will put silver towers on her.
If she is a door,
we will protect her with cedar boards.

The Woman Speaks

¹⁰I am a wall,
and my breasts are like towers.
So I was to him,
as one who brings happiness.

¹¹Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon.
He rented the vineyards for others to tend,
and everyone who rented had to pay
twenty-five pounds of silver for the fruit.

¹²But my own vineyard is mine to give.
Solomon, the twenty-five pounds of silver are for you,
and five pounds are for those who tend the fruit.

The Man Speaks to the Woman

¹³You who live in the gardens,
my friends are listening for your voice;
let me hear it.

The Woman Speaks to the Man

¹⁴Hurry, my lover,
be like a gazelle
or a young deer
on the mountains where spices grow.

veil This was the way a prostitute usually dressed.**couch** Something like a bed carried by slaves on which the king lay or sat while traveling.

couch Something like a bed carried by slaves on which the king lay or sat while traveling.

[The Book of Isaiah](#)

Introduction

Isaiah was a blueblood among the prophets. His Hebrew was classic. His style was noble. His circles were influential. But his message was bare-knuckled.

Through the reigns of four kings he proclaimed one message: God will not forever wink at wrong.

He spoke with a grit in his gut and a fire in his eyes like one who had stood in hell and seen heaven, for that is exactly what had happened. Isaiah saw God.

Whether what he saw was in the sky or in his head matters little compared to the truth that it was in his heart. The lights danced and the angels chanted back and forth, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” as if they had nothing else to say, and they didn’t—for that is all you can say before him who is holy.

There are those who boast about having a vision of God like they boast about seeing the president. Not so with Isaiah. When he saw God he didn’t update his resume, he begged for mercy.

“Oh, no! I will be destroyed. I am not pure, and I live among people who are not pure, but I have seen the King, the Lord All-Powerful” ([6:5](#)).

No sooner is the mercy requested than it is received. An angel purges his mouth with a hot coal, teaching us that the only mouth worthy of speaking for God is the one cleansed by God.

Isaiah was never the same after that. *Send me!* he volunteered. And so God sent. And so Isaiah preached. He preached with the passion and fury of a man who’d seen his life pass before his eyes.

For he had. He preached with the passion and fury of a man sent by God. For he was.

And he preached with the passion and fury of a man who longed to join the angels and spend eternity singing, “Holy, Holy, Holy” at the top of his lungs.

Something tells me that’s what he is doing right now.

About This Book

Author:

The prophet Isaiah

Date Written: 700–650 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- God’s purposes will stand against all earthly forces.
- God promised a Savior through Isaiah’s prophecy, which was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.
- God’s salvation would be available to all people.

Key Verse:

“We all have wandered away like sheep; each of us has gone his own way. But the Lord has put on him the punishment for all the evil we have done” ([Isaiah 53:6](#)).

Contents:

1. Local Prophecies [1:1–35:10](#)
2. Hezekiah’s Reign [36:1–39:8](#)
3. The Coming Messiah [40:1–56:12](#)

4. The Messiah for All People [57:1–66:24](#)

Life Lessons

Isaiah 1:1-31

Situation

Isaiah revealed Judah's impending doom. God vowed not to listen to the prayers of his people because of their excessive sin. But God assured he would restore Israel after purging it of sin.

Observation

A loving and patient God continued to offer hope to the Israelites. He offered forgiveness if they repented.

Inspiration

In fact, it seems [God's] favorite word is "come."

"*Come*, let us talk about these things. Though your sins are like scarlet, they can be as white as snow."

"All you who are thirsty, *come* and drink."

"*Come* to me all, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads, and I will give you rest."

"*Come* to the wedding feast."

"*Come* follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

"Let anyone who is thirsty *come* to me and drink."

God is a God who invites. God is a God who calls. God is a God who opens the door and waves his hand pointing pilgrims to a full table.

His invitation is not just for a meal, however, it is for life. An invitation to come into his kingdom and take up residence in a tearless, graveless, painless

world. Who can come? Whoever wishes. The invitation is at once universal and personal. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

Application

To repent means being both remorseful for your sin and also acting so that you do not repeat the sin again. What sin are you enjoying? Repent of it. Then put the past behind and live a new day.

Exploration

God's Forgiveness—[Genesis 50:15–21](#); [1 Chronicles 21:8](#); [Luke 11:4](#); [Acts 8:18–23](#); [Romans 12:17–21](#); [1 John 1:9](#).

We will never be pure until we admit we are filthy. And we will never be able to wash the feet of those who have hurt us until we allow Jesus, the one we have hurt, to wash ours. —Max Lucado (*A Gentle Thunder*)

This is the vision Isaiah son of Amoz saw about what would happen to Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah saw these things while Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah.

God's Case Against His Children

²Heaven and earth, listen,
because the Lord is speaking:
“I raised my children and helped them grow up,
but they have turned against me.

³An ox knows its master,
and a donkey knows where its owner feeds it,
but the people of Israel do not know me;
my people do not understand.”

⁴How terrible! Israel is a nation of sin,
a people loaded down with guilt,
a group of children doing evil,
children who are full of evil.

They have left the Lord;
they hate God, the Holy One of Israel,
and have turned away from him as if he were a
stranger.

⁵Why should you continue to be punished?
Why do you continue to turn against him?
Your whole head is hurt,
and your whole heart is sick.

⁶There is no healthy spot
from the bottom of your foot to the top of your head;
you are covered with wounds, hurts, and open sores
that are not cleaned and covered,
and no medicine takes away the pain.

⁷Your land is ruined;
your cities have been burned with fire.
While you watch,
your enemies are stealing everything from your land;
it is ruined like a country destroyed by enemies.

⁸Jerusalem is left alone
like an empty shelter in a vineyard,
like a hut left in a field of melons,
like a city surrounded by enemies.

⁹The Lord All-Powerful
allowed a few of our people to live.
Otherwise we would have been completely destroyed
like the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

¹⁰Jerusalem, your rulers are like those of Sodom,
and your people are like those of Gomorrah.
Hear the word of the Lord;
listen to the teaching of our God!

¹¹The Lord says,
“I do not want all these sacrifices.
I have had enough of your burnt sacrifices

of male sheep and fat from fine animals.
I am not pleased
by the blood of bulls, lambs, and goats.

¹²You come to meet with me,
but who asked you to do
all this running in and out of my Temple's rooms?

¹³Don't continue bringing me worthless sacrifices!
I hate the incense you burn.

I can't stand your New Moons, Sabbaths, and other
feast days;

I can't stand the evil you do in your holy meetings.

¹⁴I hate your New Moon feasts
and your other yearly feasts.
They have become a heavy weight on me,
and I am tired of carrying it.

¹⁵When you raise your arms to me in prayer,
I will refuse to look at you.
Even if you say many prayers,
I will not listen to you,
because your hands are full of blood.

¹⁶Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean.
Stop doing the evil things I see you do.
Stop doing wrong.

¹⁷Learn to do good.
Seek justice.
Punish those who hurt others.
Help the orphans.
Stand up for the rights of widows."

¹⁸The Lord says,
"Come, let us talk about these things.

Though your sins are like scarlet,
they can be as white as snow.

Though your sins are deep red,
they can be white like wool.

¹⁹If you become willing and obey me,
you will eat good crops from the land.

²⁰But if you refuse to obey and if you turn against me,
you will be destroyed by your enemies' swords."

The Lord himself said these things.

Jerusalem Is Not Loyal to God

²¹The city of Jerusalem once followed the Lord,
but she is no longer loyal to him.

She used to be filled with fairness;
people there lived the way God wanted.

But now, murderers live there.

²²Jerusalem, you have become like the scum left when
silver is purified;

you are like wine mixed with water.

²³Your rulers are rebels
and friends of thieves.

They all accept money for doing wrong,
and they are paid to cheat people.

They don't seek justice for the orphans
or listen to the widows' needs.

²⁴So the Lord God All-Powerful,
the Mighty One of Israel, says:

"You, my enemies, will not cause me any more trouble.

I will pay you back for what you did.

²⁵I will turn against you

and clean away all your wrongs as if with soap;

I will take all the worthless things out of you.

²⁶I will bring back judges as you had long ago;

your counselors will be like those you had in the beginning.

Then you will be called the City That Is Right with God,
the Loyal City.”

²⁷By doing what is fair,

Jerusalem will be free again.

By doing what is right,

her people who come back to the Lord will have freedom.

²⁸But sinners and those who turn against him will be destroyed;

those who have left the Lord will die.

²⁹“You will be ashamed,

because you have worshiped gods under the oak trees.

You will be disgraced,

because you have worshiped idols in your gardens.

³⁰You will be like an oak whose leaves are dying

or like a garden without water.

³¹Powerful people will be like small, dry pieces of wood,
and their works will be like sparks.

They will burn together,

and no one will be able to put out that fire.”

Life Lessons

Isaiah 2:1–4:6

Situation

Isaiah's vision told both of God's judgment of the wicked and the promise of his coming kingdom for the righteous.

Observation

God can never approve of sin, but he longs to reward those who follow him.

Inspiration

In the moral conflict now raging around us, whoever is on God's side is on the winning side and cannot lose; whoever is on the other side is on the losing side and cannot win. Here there is no chance, no gamble. There is freedom to choose which side we shall be on but no freedom to negotiate the results of the choice once it is made. By the mercy of God we may repent a wrong choice and alter the consequences by making a new and right choice. Beyond that we cannot go.

The whole matter of moral choice centers around Jesus Christ. Christ stated it plainly: "He that is not with me is against me," and "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." The gospel message embodies three distinct elements: an announcement, a command, and a call. It announces the good news of redemption accomplished in mercy; it commands all men everywhere to repent, and it calls all men to surrender to the terms of grace by believing on Jesus

Christ as Lord and Saviour.

We must all choose whether we will obey the gospel or turn away in unbelief and reject its authority. Our choice is our own, but the consequences of the choice have already been determined by the sovereign will of God, and from this there is no appeal. (From *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A. W. Tozer)

Application

Are you inside God's kingdom or do you find yourself peeking in, to see if it is for you? You cannot have one foot in and one foot out. Choose to be in God's kingdom. It will mean eternal rewards and fellowship with God.

Exploration

Wickedness or Righteousness—[Psalm 1](#); [Proverbs 3:33](#); [Ezekiel 18:20–21](#); [Malachi 3:18](#); [Matthew 25:46](#); [1 Peter 3:12](#).

Our guilty conscience becomes a curtain that separates us from God. As a result, we hide from our Master. —Max Lucado (*He Chose the Nails*)

The Message About Jerusalem

Isaiah son of Amoz saw this message about Judah and Jerusalem:

²In the last days
the mountain on which the Lord's Temple stands
will become the most important of all mountains.
It will be raised above the hills,
and people from all nations will come streaming to it.
³Many nations will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the Temple of the God of Jacob.
Then God will teach us his ways,
and we will obey his teachings."
His teachings will go out from Jerusalem;
the message of the Lord will go out from Jerusalem.
⁴He will settle arguments among the nations
and will make decisions for many nations.
Then they will make their swords into plows
and their spears into hooks for trimming trees.
Nations will no longer fight other nations,
nor will they train for war anymore.

⁵Come, family of Jacob,
and let us follow the way of the Lord.

A Terrible Day Is Coming

⁶Lord, you have left your people,
the family of Jacob,
because they have become filled with wrong ideas
from people in the East.

They try to tell the future like the Philistines,
and they have completely accepted those foreign
ideas.

⁷Their land has been filled with silver and gold;
there are a great many treasures there.
Their land has been filled with horses;
there are many chariots there.

⁸Their land is full of idols.

The people worship these idols they made with their
own hands

and shaped with their own fingers.

⁹People will not be proud any longer
but will bow low with shame.
God, do not forgive them.

¹⁰Go into the caves of the cliffs;
dig holes and hide in the ground
from the anger of the Lord
and from his great power!

¹¹Proud people will be made humble,

and they will bow low with shame.
At that time only the Lord will still be praised.

¹²The Lord All-Powerful has a certain day planned
when he will punish the proud and those who brag,
and they will no longer be important.

¹³He will bring down the tall cedar trees from Lebanon
and the great oak trees of Bashan,

¹⁴all the tall mountains
and the high hills,

¹⁵every tall tower
and every high, strong wall,

¹⁶all the trading ships
and the beautiful ships.

¹⁷At that time proud people will be made humble,
and they will bow low with shame.

At that time only the Lord will be praised,

¹⁸but all the idols will be gone.

¹⁹People will run to caves in the rocky cliffs
and will dig holes and hide in the ground
from the anger of the Lord
and his great power,
when he stands to shake the earth.

²⁰At that time people will throw away
their gold and silver idols,
which they made for themselves to worship;
they will throw them away to the bats and moles.

²¹Then the people will hide in caves
and cracks in the rocks
from the anger of the Lord

and his great power,
when he stands to shake the earth.

²²You should stop trusting in people to save you,
because people are only human;
they aren't able to help you.

God Will Punish Judah and Jerusalem

Understand this:

The Lord God All-Powerful
will take away everything Judah and Jerusalem need—
all the food and water,

²the heroes and great soldiers,
the judges and prophets,
people who do magic and older leaders,

³the military leaders and government leaders,
the counselors, the skilled craftsmen, and those who
try to tell the future.

⁴The Lord says, “I will cause young boys to be your
leaders,
and foolish children will rule over you.

⁵People will be against each other; everyone will be
against his neighbor.

Young people will not respect older people,
and common people will not respect important people.”

⁶At that time a man will grab one of his brothers
from his own family and say,

“You have a coat, so you will be our leader.
These ruins will be under your control.”

⁷But that brother will stand up and say,
“I cannot help you,
because I do not have food or clothes in my house.
You will not make me your leader.”

⁸This will happen because Jerusalem has stumbled,

and Judah has fallen.

The things they say and do are against the Lord;
they turn against him.

⁹The look on their faces shows they are guilty;
like the people of Sodom, they are proud of their sin.
They don't care who sees it.

How terrible it will be for them,
because they have brought much trouble on
themselves.

¹⁰Tell those who do what is right that things will go
well for them,
because they will receive a reward for what they do.

¹¹But how terrible it will be for the wicked!
They will be punished for all the wrong they have
done.

¹²Children treat my people cruelly,
and women rule over them.
My people, your guides lead you in the wrong way
and turn you away from what is right.

¹³The Lord takes his place in court
and stands to judge the people.

¹⁴The Lord presents his case
against the older leaders and other leaders of his
people:

“You have burned the vineyard.
Your houses are full of what you took from the poor.

¹⁵What gives you the right to crush my people
and grind the faces of the poor into the dirt?”
The Lord God All-Powerful says this.

A Warning to Women of Jerusalem

¹⁶The Lord says,
“The women of Jerusalem are proud.
They walk around with their heads held high,
and they flirt with their eyes.
They take quick, short steps,
making noise with their ankle bracelets.”

¹⁷So the Lord will put sores on the heads of those
women in Jerusalem,
and he will make them lose their hair.

¹⁸At that time the Lord will take away everything that makes
them proud: their beautiful ankle bracelets, their headbands,
their necklaces shaped like the moon, ¹⁹their earrings, bracelets,
and veils, ²⁰their scarves, ankle chains, the cloth belts worn
around their waists, their bottles of perfume, and charms, ²¹their
signet rings, nose rings, ²²their fine robes, capes, shawls, and
purses, ²³their mirrors, linen dresses, turbans, and long shawls.

²⁴Instead of wearing sweet-smelling perfume, they will
stink.

Instead of fine cloth belts, they will wear the ropes of
captives.

Instead of having their hair fixed in fancy ways, they
will be bald.

Instead of fine clothes, they will wear clothes of
sadness.

Instead of being beautiful, they will wear the brand of a captive.

²⁵At that time your men will be killed with swords,
and your heroes will die in war.

²⁶There will be crying and sadness near the city gates.
Jerusalem will be like a woman who has lost everything
and sits on the ground.

At that time seven women will grab one man
and say, “We will eat our own bread
and make our own clothes,
but please marry us!
Please, take away our shame.”

The Branch of the Lord

²At that time the Lord’s branch will be very beautiful and great. The people still living in Israel will be proud of what the land grows. ³Those who are still living in Jerusalem will be called holy; their names are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. ⁴The Lord will wash away the filth from the women of Jerusalem. He will wash the bloodstains out of Jerusalem and clean the city with the spirit of fairness and the spirit of fire. ⁵Then the Lord will cover Mount Zion and the people who meet there with a cloud of smoke during the day and with a bright, flaming fire at night. There will be a covering over every person. ⁶This covering will protect the people from the heat of the sun and will provide a safe place to hide from the storm and rain.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 5:1–30

Situation

In this passage, God condemns the nation of Israel for turning its back on the poor and exploiting them. He expected his people to be just and generous, a source of blessing, not proud and sinful, and a source of bloodshed.

Observation

God provides the means to be generous. Therefore, generosity gives glory to God. Most of all, God wants to see us give cheerfully.

Inspiration

In the earliest days of the church, the generosity of God's people was notorious ([Acts 4:32–35](#)).

There they were, a flock of sheep struggling for survival in a hostile world of Christ-hating citizens and politicians. They had every reason to live frightened, selfish lives of isolation and secrecy. Not so! Do you know why? We just read the answer:

Because “abundant grace was upon them all.” That prompted a spirit of generosity, a genuine desire to meet needs. Can you believe the results? “There was not a needy person among them...”

An atmosphere of grace creates an absence of selfishness. After all, it isn't your money, it's God's money. So you give it. It isn't your church, it's God's church; so you share it. They aren't your people, pastor, they're God's people; so you release them. It

isn't your project, it's God's project; so you rely on Him. Even though you could raise twice the amount in the energy of the flesh, you refused to do so. You won't do it! You will trust God to work in His way and in His time....

By the way, I've noticed that words like *mine* and *keep* and *ours* are not heard in ministries of grace. Neither does a suspicious kind of spirit pervade a place where there is grace. Instead, there is open-handed generosity....

Another characteristic of a grace-awakening ministry is *encouragement in unusual situations* (absence of predictability). Where grace abounds you will not only find generosity with personal possessions, you will also find encouragement in unusual settings. Grace keeps us flexible, willing to adapt.

(From *The Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Our gifts not only help others, but they encourage us, too. How have you been helped by giving? How have you been blessed by receiving?

Exploration

Generosity—[Psalm 37:21–26](#); [112:5](#); [Proverbs 11:25](#); [22:9](#); [1 Timothy 6:18](#).

Israel, the Lord's Vineyard

Now I will sing for my friend a song about his vineyard.

My friend had a vineyard
on a hill with very rich soil.

²He dug and cleared the field of stones
and planted the best grapevines there.
He built a tower in the middle of it
and cut out a winepress as well.
He hoped good grapes would grow there,
but only bad ones grew.

³My friend says, "You people living in Jerusalem,
and you people of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.

⁴What more could I have done for my vineyard
than I have already done?
Although I expected good grapes to grow,
why were there only bad ones?

⁵Now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard:
I will remove the hedge,
and it will be burned.
I will break down the stone wall,
and it will be walked on.

⁶I will ruin my field.
It will not be trimmed or hoed,
and weeds and thorns will grow there.
I will command the clouds
not to rain on it.”

⁷The vineyard belonging to the Lord All-Powerful
is the nation of Israel;
the garden that he loves
is the people of Judah.
He looked for justice, but there was only killing.
He hoped for right living, but there were only cries of
pain.

⁸How terrible it will be for you who add more houses to
your houses
and more fields to your fields
until there is no room left for other people.
Then you are left alone in the land.

⁹The Lord All-Powerful said this to me:

“The fine houses will be destroyed;
the large and beautiful houses will be left empty.

¹⁰At that time a ten-acre vineyard will make only six
gallons of wine,
and ten bushels of seed will grow only half a bushel of
grain.”

¹¹How terrible it will be for people who rise early in the
morning

to look for strong drink,
who stay awake late at night,
becoming drunk with wine.

¹²At their parties they have lyres, harps,
tambourines, flutes, and wine.
They don't see what the Lord has done
or notice the work of his hands.

¹³So my people will be captured and taken away,
because they don't really know me.
All the great people will die of hunger,
and the common people will die of thirst.

¹⁴So the place of the dead wants more and more
people,
and it opens wide its mouth.
Jerusalem's important people and common people will
go down into it,
with their happy and noisy ones.

¹⁵So the common people and the great people will be
brought down;
those who are proud will be humbled.

¹⁶The Lord All-Powerful will receive glory by judging
fairly;
the holy God will show himself holy by doing what is
right.

¹⁷Then the sheep will go anywhere they want,
and lambs will feed on the land that rich people once
owned.

¹⁸How terrible it will be for those people!
They pull their guilt and sins behind them
as people pull wagons with ropes.

¹⁹They say, “Let God hurry;
let him do his work soon
so we may see it.
Let the plan of the Holy One of Israel happen soon
so that we will know what it is.”

²⁰How terrible it will be for people who call good things
bad
and bad things good,
who think darkness is light
and light is darkness,
who think sour is sweet
and sweet is sour.

²¹How terrible it will be for people who think they are
wise
and believe they are clever.

²²How terrible it will be for people who are famous for
drinking wine
and are champions at mixing drinks.

²³They take money to set the guilty free
and don't allow good people to be judged fairly.

²⁴They will be destroyed
just as fire burns straw or dry grass.

They will be destroyed
like a plant whose roots rot
and whose flower dies and blows away like dust.

They have refused to obey the teachings of the Lord
All-Powerful
and have hated the message from the Holy God of

Israel.

²⁵So the Lord has become very angry with his people,
and he has raised his hand to punish them.
Even the mountains are frightened.
Dead bodies lie in the streets like garbage.
But the Lord is still angry;
his hand is still raised to strike down the people.

²⁶He raises a banner for the nations far away.
He whistles to call those people from the ends of the
earth.

Look! The enemy comes quickly!

²⁷Not one of them becomes tired or falls down.
Not one of them gets sleepy and falls asleep.
Their weapons are close at hand,
and their sandal straps are not broken.

²⁸Their arrows are sharp,
and all of their bows are ready to shoot.
The horses' hoofs are hard as rocks,
and their chariot wheels move like a whirlwind.

²⁹Their shout is like the roar of a lion;
it is loud like a young lion.

They growl as they grab their captives.

There is no one to stop them from taking their captives
away.

³⁰On that day they will roar
like the waves of the sea.
And when people look at the land,
they will see only darkness and pain;
all light will become dark in this thick cloud.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 6:1–7:25

Situation

Isaiah recalled the commission God had given him. Isaiah carried a message of both hope and judgment. He described and predicted the coming Messiah: Jesus Christ.

Observation

We are commissioned to tell others about God and his plan for salvation.

Inspiration

It is no frivolous matter to hear the voice of God; and certainly it is an awesome trust to deign to speak for Him. Luther said that preaching made his knees knock. Spurgeon, the brilliant British preacher, said he “trembled” lest he should misinterpret the Word.

So, the only way we can ever speak with confidence is to speak from the Word. Jesus gives us the best example; He knew the Scriptures, drew His authority from them, and based His words upon them. Those who follow Him must do the same ... [T]he quiet, often unnoticed actions of “ordinary” Christians who believe and obey speak far more loudly than all the bombast of so-called religious leaders. Who speaks for God? He does quite nicely for Himself. Through His holy and infallible Word—and the quiet obedience of His servants.

(From *Who Speaks for God?* by Charles Colson)

Application

Have you known someone for some time but have never shared Christ with that person? Create an opportunity to share about the most important aspect of your life.

Exploration

The Road to Salvation—[Romans 3:23](#); [5:8](#); [6:23](#); [10:10–13](#).

Isaiah Becomes a Prophet

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a very high throne. His long robe filled the Temple. ²Heavenly creatures of fire stood above him. Each creature had six wings: It used two wings to cover its face, two wings to cover its feet, and two wings for flying. ³Each creature was calling to the others:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord All-Powerful.
His glory fills the whole earth.”

⁴Their calling caused the frame around the door to shake, as the Temple filled with smoke.

⁵I said, “Oh, no! I will be destroyed. I am not pure, and I live among people who are not pure, but I have seen the King, the Lord All-Powerful.”

⁶One of the heavenly creatures used a pair of tongs to take a hot coal from the altar. Then he flew to me with the hot coal in his hand. ⁷The creature touched my mouth with the hot coal and said, “Look, your guilt is taken away, because this hot coal has touched your lips. Your sin is taken away.”

⁸Then I heard the Lord’s voice, saying, “Whom can I send? Who will go for us?”

So I said, “Here I am. Send me!”

⁹Then the Lord said, “Go and tell this to the people:

‘You will listen and listen, but you will not understand.
You will look and look, but you will not learn.’

¹⁰Make the minds of these people dumb.

Shut their ears. Cover their eyes.

Otherwise, they might really understand
what they see with their eyes
and hear with their ears.

They might really understand in their minds
and come back to me and be healed.”

¹¹Then I asked, “Lord, how long should I do this?”
He answered,

“Until the cities are destroyed
and the people are gone,
until there are no people left in the houses,
until the land is destroyed and left empty.

¹²The Lord will send the people far away,
and the land will be left empty.

¹³One-tenth of the people will be left in the land,
but it will be destroyed again.

These people will be like an oak tree
whose stump is left when the tree is chopped down.

The people who remain will be like a stump that will
sprout again.”

Trouble with Aram

Now Ahaz was the son of Jotham, who was the son of Uzziah. When Ahaz was king of Judah, Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to fight against it. But they were not able to defeat the city.

²Ahaz king of Judah received a message saying, “The armies of Aram and [Israel](#) have joined together.”

When Ahaz heard this, he and the people were frightened. They shook with fear like trees of the forest blown by the wind.

³Then the Lord told Isaiah, “You and your son [Shear-Jashub](#) should go and meet Ahaz at the place where the water flows into the upper pool, on the road where people do their laundry. ⁴Tell Ahaz, ‘Be careful. Be calm and don’t worry. Don’t let those two men, Rezin and Pekah son of Remaliah, scare you. Don’t be afraid of their anger or Aram’s anger, because they are like two barely burning sticks that are ready to go out. ⁵They have made plans against you, saying, ⁶“Let’s fight against Judah and tear it apart. We will divide the land for ourselves and make the son of Tabeel the new king of Judah.”

⁷But I, the Lord God, say,

““Their plan will not succeed;
it will not happen,

⁸because Aram is led by the city of Damascus,
and Damascus is led by its weak king, Rezin.

Within sixty-five years Israel will no longer be a nation.

⁹Israel is led by the city of Samaria,

and Samaria is led by its weak king, the son of Remaliah.

If your faith is not strong,
you will not have strength enough to last.”

Immanuel—God Is with Us

¹⁰Then the Lord spoke to Ahaz again, saying, ¹¹“Ask for a sign from the Lord your God to prove to yourself that these things are true. It may be a sign from as deep as the place of the dead or as high as the heavens.”

¹²But Ahaz said, “I will not ask for a sign or test the Lord.”

¹³Then Isaiah said, “Ahaz, descendant of David, listen carefully! Isn’t it bad enough that you wear out the patience of people? Do you also have to wear out the patience of my God?

¹⁴The Lord himself will give you a sign: The [virgin](#) will be pregnant. She will have a son, and she will name him [Immanuel](#).

¹⁵He will be eating milk curds and honey when he learns to reject what is evil and to choose what is good. ¹⁶You are afraid of the kings of Israel and Aram now. But before the child learns to choose good and reject evil, the lands of Israel and Aram will be empty. ¹⁷The Lord will bring troubled times to you, your people, and to the people of your father’s family. They will be worse than anything that has happened since Israel separated from Judah. The Lord will bring the king of Assyria to fight against you.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: Immanuel, God With Us

He could have given up. No one would have

known otherwise. Jesus could have given up.

One look at the womb could have discouraged him. God is as unbridled as the air and limitless as the sky. Would he reduce his world to the belly of a girl for nine months?

And nine months? There is another reason to quit. Heaven has no months. Heaven has no time. Or, perhaps better said, heaven has all the time. It's we who are running out. Ours passes so quickly that we measure it by the second. Wouldn't Christ rather stay on the other side of the ridge of time? ...

And the stable. Is that not yet another reason for Christ to back out? Stables are smelly, dirty. Stables have no linoleum floors or oxygen tanks. How are they going to cut the umbilical cord? And who is going to cut the umbilical cord? Joseph? A small-time carpenter from a one-camel town? Is there not a better father for God? Someone with an education, a pedigree. Someone with a bit of clout? This fellow couldn't even swing a room at the hotel. You think he's got what it takes to be the father to the Maker of the universe? ...

Jesus could have given up. Imagine the change he had to make, the distance he had to travel. What would it be like to become flesh?

Love goes the distance ... and Christ traveled from limitless eternity to be confined by time in order to become one of us. He didn't have to. He could have given up. At any step along the way he could have called it quits.

He didn't, because he is love. And "love ...

endures all things” ([1 Corinthians 13:4-7](#), NKJV). He endured the distance. What’s more, he endured the resistance.

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory” ([John 1:14](#), NIV).
(From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

¹⁸“At that time the Lord will whistle for the Egyptians, and they will come like flies from Egypt’s faraway streams. He will call for the Assyrians, and they will come like bees. ¹⁹These enemies will camp in the deep ravines and in the cliffs, by the thornbushes and watering holes. ²⁰The Lord will hire Assyria and use it like a razor to punish Judah. It will be as if the Lord is shaving the hair from Judah’s head and legs and removing Judah’s beard.

²¹“At that time a person will be able to keep only one young cow and two sheep alive. ²²There will be only enough milk for that person to eat milk curds. All who remain in the land will go back to eating just milk curds and honey. ²³In this land there are now vineyards that have a thousand grapevines, which are worth about twenty-five pounds of silver. But these fields will become full of weeds and thorns. ²⁴The land will become wild and useful only as a hunting ground. ²⁵People once worked and grew food on these hills, but at that time people will not go there, because the land will be filled with weeds and thorns. Only sheep and cattle will go to those places.”

Life Lessons

Isaiah 8:1–10:34

Situation

Isaiah brought a shocking announcement that God planned to deliver Israel into the hands of Assyria. Israel would experience difficult days ahead. But during these hard times, God would not forget about his people.

Observation

God judges sin. But he also restores his people into a peaceful relationship with himself.

Inspiration

The struggle we have with a holy God is rooted in the conflict between God's righteousness and our unrighteousness. He is just and we are unjust. This tension creates fear, hostility, and anger within us toward God. The unjust person does not desire the company of a just judge. We become fugitives fleeing from the presence of One whose glory can blind us and whose justice can condemn us. We are at war with Him unless or until we are justified....

I remember the sultry summer day in 1945 when I was busy playing stickball in the streets of Chicago. At that time my world consisted of the piece of real estate that extended from one manhole cover to the next. All that was important to me was that my turn at bat had finally come. I was most annoyed when the first pitch was interrupted by an outbreak of chaos and noise all around me. People started running out

of apartment doors screaming and beating dishpans with wooden spoons. I thought for a moment it might be the end of the world. It was certainly the end of my stickball game. In the riotous confusion I saw my mother rushing toward me with tears streaming down her face. She scooped me up in her arms and squeezed me, sobbing over and over again, "It's over, it's over, it's over!"

It was VJ Day, 1945. I wasn't sure what it all meant, but one thing was clear. It meant that the war had ended and my father was coming home. No more airmail to faraway countries. No more listening to the daily news reports about battle casualties.... The war was over and peace had come at last.

That moment of jubilation left a lasting impression in my childhood brain. I learned that peace was an important thing, a cause for unbridled celebration when it was established and for bitter remorse when it was lost....

When God signs a peace treaty, it is a sign for perpetuity. The war is over forever and ever. Of course we still sin; we still rebel; we still commit acts of hostility toward God. But God is not a co-belligerent. He will not be drawn into warfare with us. We have an advocate with the Father. We have a mediator who keeps the peace. He rules over the peace because He is both the Prince of Peace and He is our peace. (From *The Holiness of God* by R. C. Sproul)

Application

Rejoice because you have peace with God!

Celebrate God's forgiveness for you. Demonstrate God's peace to others through your relationships. Help your coworkers and family to meet their needs. Relieve the disappointments of others.

Exploration

Peace—[Psalm 29:11](#); [119:165](#); [Isaiah 26:3](#); [48:18](#); [John 14:27](#); [Romans 5:1](#); [Ephesians 2:14](#); [Philippians 4:7](#); [Colossians 1:20](#).

Assyria Will Come Soon

The Lord told me, “Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen: ‘Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.’ ²I will gather some men to be reliable witnesses: Uriah the priest and Zechariah son of Jeberekiah.”

³Then I went to the prophetess, and she became pregnant and had a son. The Lord told me, “Name the boy [Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz](#), ⁴because the king of Assyria will take away all the wealth and possessions of Damascus and Samaria before the boy learns to say ‘my father’ or ‘my mother.’”

⁵Again the Lord spoke to me, saying,

⁶“These people refuse to accept
the slow-moving waters of the pool of Shiloah
and are terrified of Rezin
and Pekah son of Remaliah.

⁷So I, the Lord, will bring
the king of Assyria and all his power against them,
like a powerful flood of water from the Euphrates River.
The Assyrians will be like water rising over the banks
of the river,
flowing over the land.

⁸That water will flow into Judah and pass through it,
rising to Judah’s throat.
Immanuel, this army will spread its wings like a bird
until it covers your whole country.”

⁹Be broken, all you nations,
and be smashed to pieces.
Listen, all you faraway countries.
Prepare for battle and be smashed to pieces!
Prepare for battle and be smashed to pieces!
¹⁰Make your plans for the fight,
but they will be defeated.
Give orders to your armies,
but they will be useless,
because God is with us.

Warnings to Isaiah

¹¹The Lord spoke to me with his great power and warned me
not to follow the lead of the rest of the people. He said,
¹²“People are saying that others make plans against
them,
but you should not believe them.
Don’t be afraid of what they fear;
do not dread those things.
¹³But remember that the Lord All-Powerful is holy.
He is the one you should fear;
he is the one you should dread.
¹⁴Then he will be a place of safety for you.
But for the two families of Israel,
he will be like a stone that causes people to stumble,
like a rock that makes them fall.
He will be like a trap for the people of Jerusalem,
and he will catch them in his trap.

¹⁵Many people will fall over this rock.
They will fall and be broken;
they will be trapped and caught.”

¹⁶Make an agreement.
Seal up the teaching while my followers are watching.
¹⁷I will wait for the Lord to help us,
the Lord who is ashamed of the family of Israel.
I will wait for him.

¹⁸I am here, and with me are the children the Lord has given me. We are signs and proofs for the people of Israel from the Lord All-Powerful, who lives on Mount Zion.

¹⁹Some people say, “Ask the mediums and fortune-tellers, who whisper and mutter, what to do.” But I tell you that people should ask their God for help. Why should people who are still alive ask something from the dead? ²⁰You should follow the teachings and the agreement with the Lord. The mediums and fortune-tellers do not speak the word of the Lord, so their words are worth nothing.

²¹People will wander through the land troubled and hungry. When they become hungry, they will become angry and will look up and curse their king and their God. ²²They will look around them at their land and see only trouble, darkness, and awful gloom. And they will be forced into the darkness.

A New Day Is Coming

But suddenly there will be no more gloom for the land that suffered. In the past God made the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali hang their heads in shame, but in the future those lands will be made great. They will stretch from the road along the Mediterranean Sea to the land beyond the Jordan River and north to Galilee, the land of people who are not Israelites.

²Before those people lived in darkness,
but now they have seen a great light.

They lived in a dark land,
but a light has shined on them.

³God, you have caused the nation to grow
and made the people happy.

And they have shown their happiness to you,
like the joy during harvest time,
like the joy of people
taking what they have won in war.

⁴Like the time you defeated Midian,
you have taken away their heavy load
and the heavy pole from their backs
and the rod the enemy used to punish them.

⁵Every boot that marched in battle
and every uniform stained with blood
has been thrown into the fire.

⁶A child has been born to us;
God has given a son to us.
He will be responsible for leading the people.

His name will be Wonderful Counselor, Powerful God,
Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace.

⁷Power and peace will be in his kingdom
and will continue to grow forever.

He will rule as king on David's throne
and over David's kingdom.

He will make it strong
by ruling with justice and goodness
from now on and forever.

The Lord All-Powerful will do this
because of his strong love for his people.

God Will Punish Israel

⁸The Lord sent a message against the people of Jacob;
it says that God will judge Israel.

⁹Then everyone in Israel, even the leaders in Samaria,
will know that God has sent it.

Those people are proud and brag by saying,

¹⁰“These bricks have fallen,
but we will build again with cut stones.
These small trees have been chopped down,
but we will put great cedars there.”

¹¹But the Lord has brought the enemies of Rezin
against them;

he has stirred up their enemies against them.

¹²The Arameans came from the east
and the Philistines from the west,
and they ate up Israel with their armies.

But the Lord was still angry;
his hand was still raised to punish the people.
Stepping from the throne, he removed his robe of light and wrapped himself in skin: pigmented, human skin. The light of the universe entered a dark, wet womb. He who angels worship nestled himself in the placenta of a peasant, was birthed into the cold night, and then slept on cow's hay.
—Max Lucado (*In the Grip of Grace*)

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The Son of Man

He lived among us. He donned the costliest of robes: a human body. He made a throne out of a manger and a royal court out of some cows. He took a common name—Jesus—and made it holy. He took common people and made them the same. He could have lived over us or away from us. But he didn't. He lived among us.

He became a friend of the sinner and brother of the poor. He touched their sores and felt their tears and paid for their mistakes. He entered a tomb and came out and pledged that we'd do the same. And to us all, and to all the frightened Freds of the world, he shared the same message. "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me... I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am" ([John 14:1, 3](#)).

And how do we respond?

Some pretend he doesn't exist. They occupy themselves with a study of the piano and ask no

questions about the Maestro.

Others hear him, but don't believe him. It's not easy to believe that God would go so far to take us home.

But then, a few decide to give it a try. They venture out of their corners and peek up through the opening. Each day they look toward the sky. They, like Simeon, "wait for" and "look forward to" the day Christ comes ([2 Peter 3:11](#)). They know there is more to life than the belly of a piano, and they want to be ready when Christ comes. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

¹³But the people did not return to the one who had struck them;

they did not follow the Lord All-Powerful.

¹⁴So the Lord cut off Israel's head and tail,
taking away both the branch and stalk in one day.

¹⁵The older leaders and important men were the head,
and the prophets who speak lies were the tail.

¹⁶Those who led the people led them in the wrong direction,

and those who followed them were destroyed.

¹⁷So the Lord is not happy with the young people,
nor will he show mercy to the orphans and widows.

All the people are separated from God and are very evil;

they all speak lies.

But the Lord is still angry;

his hand is still raised to strike down the people.

¹⁸Evil is like a small fire.

First, it burns weeds and thorns.

Next, it burns the larger bushes in the forest,
and they all go up in a column of smoke.

¹⁹The Lord All-Powerful is angry,
so the land will be burned.

The people are like fuel for the fire;
no one will try to save his brother or sister.

²⁰People will grab something on the right,
but they will still be hungry.

They will eat something on the left,
but they will not be filled.

Then they will each turn and eat their own children.

²¹The people of Manasseh will fight against the people
of Ephraim,

and Ephraim will fight against Manasseh.

Then both of them will turn against Judah.

But the Lord is still angry;

his hand is still raised to strike down the people.

How terrible it will be for those who make unfair laws,
and those who write laws that make life hard for
people.

²They are not fair to the poor,
and they rob my people of their rights.
They allow people to steal from widows
and to take from orphans what really belongs to them.

³How will you explain the things you have done?
What will you do when your destruction comes from
far away?

Where will you run for help?
Where will you hide your riches then?

⁴You will have to bow down among the captives
or fall down among the dead bodies.
But the Lord is still angry;
his hand is still raised to strike down the people.

God Will Punish Assyria

⁵God says, “How terrible it will be for the king of
Assyria.

I use him like a rod to show my anger;
in anger I use Assyria like a club.

⁶I send it to fight against a nation that is separated
from God.

I am angry with those people,
so I command Assyria to fight against them,
to take their wealth from them,
to trample them down like dirt in the streets.

⁷But Assyria's king doesn't understand that I am using him;

he doesn't know he is a tool for me.

He only wants to destroy other people
and to defeat many nations.

⁸The king of Assyria says to himself,

'All of my commanders are like kings.

⁹The city Calno is like the city Carchemish.

The city Hamath is like the city Arpad.

The city Samaria is like the city Damascus.

¹⁰I defeated those kingdoms that worship idols,
and those idols were more than the idols of Jerusalem
and Samaria.

¹¹As I defeated Samaria and her idols,

I will also defeat Jerusalem and her idols.'"

¹²When the Lord finishes doing what he planned to Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will punish Assyria. The king of Assyria is very proud, and his pride has made him do these evil things, so God will punish him. ¹³The king of Assyria says this:

"By my own power I have done these things;

by my wisdom I have defeated many nations.

I have taken their wealth,

and, like a mighty one, I have taken their people.

¹⁴I have taken the riches of all these people,

like a person reaching into a bird's nest.

I have taken these nations,

like a person taking eggs.

Not one raised a hand

or opened its mouth to stop me."

¹⁵An ax is not better than the person who swings it.
A saw is not better than the one who uses it.
A stick cannot control the person who picks it up.
A club cannot pick up the person!

¹⁶So the Lord God All-Powerful
will send a terrible disease upon Assyria's soldiers.
The strength of Assyria will be burned up
like a fire burning until everything is gone.

¹⁷God, the Light of Israel, will be like a fire;
the Holy One will be like a flame.
He will be like a fire
that suddenly burns the weeds and thorns.

¹⁸The fire burns away the great trees and rich
farmlands,
destroying everything.
It will be like a sick person who wastes away.
¹⁹The trees left standing will be so few
that even a child could count them.

²⁰At that time some people will be left alive in Israel
from the family of Jacob.
They will not continue to depend
on the person who defeated them.
They will learn truly to depend on the Lord,
the Holy One of Israel.

²¹Those who are left alive in Jacob's family
will again follow the powerful God.

²²Israel, your people are many,
like the grains of sand by the sea.

But only a few of them will be left alive to return to the
Lord.

God has announced that he will destroy the land completely and fairly.

²³The Lord God All-Powerful will certainly destroy this land,
as he has announced.

²⁴This is what the Lord God All-Powerful says:

“My people living in Jerusalem,
don’t be afraid of the Assyrians,
who beat you with a rod
and raise a stick against you, as Egypt did.

²⁵After a short time my anger against you will stop,
and then I will turn my anger to destroying them.”

²⁶Then the Lord All-Powerful will beat the Assyrians
with a whip

as he defeated Midian at the rock of Oreb.
He will raise his stick over the waters
as he did in Egypt.

²⁷Then the troubles that Assyria puts on you
will be removed,
and the load they make you carry
will be taken away.

Assyria Invades Israel

²⁸The army of Assyria will enter near Aiath.
Its soldiers will walk through Migron.
They will store their food in Micmash.

²⁹The army will go over the pass.
The soldiers will sleep at Geba.
The people of Ramah will be afraid,
and the people at Gibeah of Saul will run away.

³⁰Cry out, Bath Gallim!
Laishah, listen!
Poor Anathoth!

³¹The people of Madmenah are running away;
the people of Gebim are hiding.

³²This day the army will stop at Nob.
They will shake their fist at Mount Zion,
at the hill of Jerusalem.

³³Watch! The Lord God All-Powerful
with his great power will chop them down like a great
tree.

Those who are great will be cut down;
those who are important will fall to the ground.

³⁴He will cut them down
as a forest is cut down with an ax.
And the great trees of Lebanon
will fall by the power of the Mighty One.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 11:1–12:6

Situation

Isaiah prophesied about Jesus, who would establish a kingdom of peace and prosperity.

Observation

Jesus Christ ushered in a kingdom where God reigns in righteousness and justice. We will realize it fully when he comes again.

Inspiration

The government in God's kingdom is *unique*. It is not a democracy where the people govern, but a Christocracy where Christ is the supreme Authority. In a government of unredeemed men, democracy is the only fair and equitable system. But no democracy can ever be better than the people who make it up. When men are selfishly motivated, the government will be inequitable. When men are dishonest, the government will be the same. When everyone wants his own way, someone is going to get hurt.

But in God's kingdom, Christ is King. He is compassionate, fair, merciful, and just. When He is sovereign in men's hearts, anguish turns to peace, hatred is transformed into love, and misunderstanding into understanding.

Not only this, but God's kingdom is *lasting*. The history of man has been a continuous series of half successes and total failures. Prosperity exists for a time, only to be followed by war and depression.

Twenty-six civilizations have come and gone, and man still battles with the same problems, over and over again.

But the kingdom of God will abide forever. The fluctuations of time, the swinging of the pendulum from war to peace, from starvation to plenty, from chaos to order, will end forever. The Bible says, “And of his kingdom there shall be no end” ([Luke 1:33](#)). (From *Unto the Hills* by Billy Graham)

Application

Is your behavior appropriate for a citizen of God’s kingdom? Make adjustments so that you are fair in your business, loving to your family, considerate to your friends, and honest in everything you do.

Exploration

God’s Kingdom—[Matthew 6:33](#); [Luke 12:32–34](#); [1 Corinthians 15:23–28](#); [Hebrews 12:28](#); [James 2:5](#).

The King of Peace Is Coming

A new branch will grow
from a stump of a tree;
so a new king will come
from the family of [Jesse](#).

²The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon that king.

The Spirit will give him wisdom and understanding,
guidance and power.

The Spirit will teach him to know and respect the Lord.

³This king will be glad to obey the Lord.
He will not judge by the way things look
or decide by what he hears.

⁴But he will judge the poor honestly;
he will be fair in his decisions for the poor people of
the land.

At his command evil people will be punished,
and by his words the wicked will be put to death.

⁵Goodness and fairness will give him strength,
like a belt around his waist.

⁶Then wolves will live in peace with lambs,
and leopards will lie down to rest with goats.
Calves, lions, and young bulls will eat together,
and a little child will lead them.

⁷Cows and bears will eat together in peace.
Their young will lie down to rest together.

Lions will eat hay as oxen do.

⁸A baby will be able to play near a cobra's hole,
and a child will be able to put his hand into the nest of
a poisonous snake.

⁹They will not hurt or destroy each other
on all my holy mountain,
because the earth will be full of the knowledge of the
Lord,
as the sea is full of water.

¹⁰At that time the new king from the family of Jesse will
stand as a banner for all peoples. The nations will come
together around him, and the place where he lives will be filled
with glory. ¹¹At that time the Lord will again reach out and take
his people who are left alive in Assyria, North Egypt, South
Egypt, Cush, Elam, Babylonia, Hamath, and all the islands of
the sea.

¹²God will raise a banner as a sign for all nations,
and he will gather the people of Israel who were forced
from their country.

He will gather the scattered people of Judah
from all parts of the earth.

¹³At that time Israel will not be jealous anymore,
and Judah will have no more enemies.

Israel will not be jealous of Judah,
and Judah will not hate Israel.

¹⁴But Israel and Judah will attack the Philistines on the
west.

Together they will take the riches from the people of
the east.

They will conquer Edom and Moab,
and the people of Ammon will be under their control.

¹⁵The Lord will dry up
the Red Sea of Egypt.

He will wave his arm over the Euphrates River
and dry it up with a scorching wind.

He will divide it into seven small rivers
so that people can walk across them with their sandals

on.

¹⁶So God's people who are left alive
will have a way to leave Assyria,
just like the time the Israelites
came out of Egypt.

A Song of Praise to God

At that time you will say:

“I praise you, Lord!

You were angry with me,
but you are not angry with me now!
You have comforted me.

²God is the one who saves me;
I will trust him and not be afraid.

The Lord, the Lord gives me strength and makes me
sing.

He has saved me.”

³You will receive your salvation with joy
as you would draw water from a well.

⁴At that time you will say,
“Praise the Lord and worship him.
Tell everyone what he has done
and how great he is.

⁵Sing praise to the Lord, because he has done great
things.

Let all the world know what he has done.

⁶Shout and sing for joy, you people of Jerusalem,
because the Holy One of Israel does great things
before your eyes.”

Life Lessons

Isaiah 13:1–21:17

Situation

Isaiah reminded Israel not to make alliances with pagan nations. If the people sought God, his strength would be adequate to protect them. God promised to punish each neighboring country for its arrogance, rebellion, and immorality.

Observation

God expects his people as a group to stand up for truth.

Inspiration

It was May Day, 1990. The place, Moscow's Red Square.

"Is it straight, Father?" one Orthodox priest asked another, shifting the heavy, eight-foot crucifix on his shoulder.

"Yes," said the other. "It is straight."

Together the two priests, along with a group of parishioners holding ropes that steadied the beams of the huge cross, walked the parade route. Before them had passed the official might of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics: the usual May Day procession of tanks, missiles, troops, and salutes to the Communist party elite.

Behind the tanks surged a giant crowd of protesters, shouting up at Mikhail Gorbachev. "Bread! ... Freedom! ... Truth!"

As the throng passed directly in front of the

Soviet leader standing in his place of honor, the priests hoisted their heavy burden toward the sky. The cross emerged from the crowd. As it did, the figure of Jesus Christ obscured the giant poster faces of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Lenin that provided the backdrop for Gorbachev's reviewing stand.

"Mikhail Sergeyevich!" one of the priests shouted, his deep voice cleaving the clamor of the protesters and piercing straight toward the angry Soviet leader. "Mikhail Sergeyevich! Christ is risen!"

In a matter of months after that final May Day celebration, the Soviet Union was officially dissolved. Christ is risen indeed and is building His church, "... and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (From *The Body* by Charles Colson)

Application

Do you know how your representatives in Congress have voted on moral issues? Do their votes align with God's desires? Write your representatives in Congress. Ask their position on specific issues. Write them with your support or concerns. Next election, know the position of all the candidates.

Exploration

Nations—[Exodus 19:5](#); [Deuteronomy 18:9–13](#); [Isaiah 14:1–2](#).

God's Message to Babylon

God showed Isaiah son of Amoz this message about Babylon:

²Raise a flag on the bare mountain.

Call out to the men.

Raise your hand to signal them
to enter through the gates for important people.

³I myself have commanded those people
whom I have separated as mine.

I have called those warriors to carry out my anger.
They rejoice and are glad to do my will.

⁴Listen to the loud noise in the mountains,
the sound of many people.

Listen to the noise among the kingdoms,
the sound of nations gathering together.

The Lord All-Powerful is calling
his army together for battle.

⁵This army is coming from a faraway land,
from the edge of the horizon.

In anger the Lord is using this army like a weapon
to destroy the whole country.

⁶Cry, because the Lord's day of judging is near;
the Almighty is sending destruction.

⁷People will be weak with fear,
and their courage will melt away.

⁸Everyone will be afraid.
Pain and hurt will grab them;
they will hurt like a woman giving birth to a baby.
They will look at each other in fear,
with their faces red like fire.

God's Judgment Against Babylon

⁹Look, the Lord's day of judging is coming—
a terrible day, a day of God's anger.

He will destroy the land
and the sinners who live in it.

¹⁰The stars will not show their light;
the skies will be dark.

The sun will grow dark as it rises,
and the moon will not give its light.

¹¹The Lord says, "I will punish the world for its evil
and wicked people for their sins.

I will cause proud people to lose their pride,
and I will destroy the pride of those who are cruel to
others.

¹²People will be harder to find than pure gold;
there will be fewer people than there is fine gold in
Ophir.

¹³I will make the sky shake,
and the earth will be moved from its place

by the anger of the Lord All-Powerful
at the time of his burning anger.

¹⁴“Then the people from Babylon will run away like
hunted deer

or like sheep who have no shepherd.
Everyone will turn back to his own people;
each will run back to his own land.

¹⁵Everyone who is captured will be killed;
everyone who is caught will be killed with a sword.

¹⁶Their little children will be beaten to death in front of
them.

Their houses will be robbed
and their wives raped.

¹⁷“Look, I will cause the armies of Media to attack
Babylon.

They do not care about silver
or delight in gold.

¹⁸Their soldiers will shoot the young men with arrows;
they will show no mercy on children,
nor will they feel sorry for little ones.

¹⁹Babylon is the most beautiful of all kingdoms,
and the Babylonians are very proud of it.
But God will destroy it
like Sodom and Gomorrah.

²⁰No one will ever live there
or settle there again.
No Arab will put a tent there;
no shepherd will bring sheep there.

²¹Only desert animals will live there,

and their houses will be full of wild dogs.
Owls will live there,
and wild goats will leap about in the houses.
²²Wolves will howl within the strong walls,
and wild dogs will bark in the beautiful buildings.
The end of Babylon is near;
its time is almost over.”

Israel Will Return Home

The Lord will show mercy to the people of Jacob, and he will again choose the people of Israel. He will settle them in their own land. Then non-Israelite people will join the Israelites and will become a part of the family of Jacob. ²Nations will take the Israelites back to their land. Then those men and women from the other nations will become slaves to Israel in the Lord's land. In the past the Israelites were their slaves, but now the Israelites will defeat those nations and rule over them.

The King of Babylon Will Fall

³The Lord will take away the Israelites' hard work and will comfort them. They will no longer have to work hard as slaves. ⁴On that day Israel will sing this song about the king of Babylon:

The cruel king who ruled us is finished;
his angry rule is finished!

⁵The Lord has broken the scepter of evil rulers
and taken away their power.

⁶The king of Babylon struck people in anger
again and again.

He ruled nations in anger
and continued to hurt them.

⁷But now, the whole world rests and is quiet.
Now the people begin to sing.

⁸Even the pine trees are happy,

and the cedar trees of Lebanon rejoice.
They say, "The king has fallen,
so no one will ever cut us down again."

⁹The place of the dead is excited
to meet you when you come.
It wakes the spirits of the dead,
the leaders of the world.
It makes kings of all nations
stand up from their thrones to greet you.

¹⁰All these leaders will make fun of you
and will say,
"Now you are weak, as we are.

Now you are just like us."

¹¹Your pride has been sent down to the place of the
dead.

The music from your harps goes with it.
Flies are spread out like your bed beneath you,
and worms cover your body like a blanket.

¹²King of Babylon, morning star, you have fallen from
heaven,

even though you were as bright as the rising sun!

In the past all the nations on earth bowed down before
you,

but now you have been cut down.

¹³You told yourself,

"I will go up to heaven.

I will put my throne

above God's stars.

I will sit on the mountain of the gods,

on the slopes of the sacred mountain.

¹⁴I will go up above the tops of the clouds.

I will be like God Most High.”

¹⁵But you were brought down to the grave,
to the deep places where the dead are.

¹⁶Those who see you stare at you.

They think about what has happened to you
and say, “Is this the same man who caused great fear
on earth,

who shook the kingdoms,

¹⁷who turned the world into a desert,

who destroyed its cities,

who captured people in war

and would not let them go home?”

¹⁸Every king of the earth has been buried with honor,
each in his own grave.

¹⁹But you are thrown out of your grave,
like an unwanted branch.

You are covered by bodies

that died in battle,

by bodies to be buried in a rocky pit.

You are like a dead body other soldiers walk on.

²⁰You will not be buried with those bodies,

because you ruined your own country

and killed your own people.

The children of evil people

will never be mentioned again.

²¹Prepare to kill his children,

because their father is guilty.
They will never again take control of the earth;
they will never again fill the world with their cities.

²²The Lord All-Powerful says this:
“I will fight against those people;
I will destroy Babylon and its people,
its children and their descendants,” says the Lord.
²³“I will make Babylon fit only for owls
and for swamps.
I will sweep Babylon as with a broom of destruction,”
says the Lord All-Powerful.

God Will Punish Assyria

²⁴The Lord All-Powerful has made this promise:
“These things will happen exactly as I planned them;
they will happen exactly as I set them up.
²⁵I will destroy the king of Assyria in my country;
I will trample him on my mountains.
He placed a heavy load on my people,
but that weight will be removed.
²⁶“This is what I plan to do for all the earth.
And this is the hand that I have raised over all
nations.”
²⁷When the Lord All-Powerful makes a plan,
no one can stop it.
When the Lord raises his hand to punish people,

no one can stop it.

God's Message to Philistia

²⁸This message was given in the year that King Ahaz died:

²⁹Country of Philistia, don't be happy
that the king who struck you is now dead.

He is like a snake that will give birth to another
dangerous snake.

The new king will be like a quick, dangerous snake to
bite you.

³⁰Even the poorest of my people will be able to eat
safely,

and people in need will be able to lie down in safety.

But I will kill your family with hunger,
and all your people who are left will die.

³¹People near the city gates, cry out!

Philistines, be frightened,

because a cloud of dust comes from the north.

It is an army, full of men ready to fight.

³²What shall we tell the messengers from Philistia?

Say that the Lord has made Jerusalem strong

and that his poor people will go there for safety.

God's Message to Moab

This is a message about Moab:

In one night armies took the wealth from Ar in Moab,
and it was destroyed.

In one night armies took the wealth from Kir in Moab,
and it was destroyed.

²The people of Dibon go to the places of worship to
cry.

The people of Moab cry for the cities of Nebo and
Medeba.

Every head and beard has been shaved to show how
sad Moab is.

³In the streets they wear rough cloth to show their
sadness.

On the [roofs](#) and in the public squares,
they are crying loudly.

⁴People in the cities Heshbon and Elealeh cry out loud.
You can hear their voices far away in the city Jahaz.
Even the soldiers are frightened;
they are shaking with fear.

⁵My heart cries with sorrow for Moab.

Its people run away to Zoar for safety;
they run to Eglath Shelishiyah.

People are going up the mountain road to Luhith,
crying as they go.

People are going on the road to Horonaim,

crying over their destruction.

⁶But the water of Nimrim has dried up.

The grass has dried up,
and all the plants are dead;
nothing green is left.

⁷So the people gather up what they have saved
and carry it across the Ravine of the Poplars.

⁸Crying is heard everywhere in Moab.

Their crying is heard as far away as the city Eglaim;
it is heard as far away as Beer Elim.

⁹The water of the city Dibon is full of blood,
and I, the Lord, will bring even more troubles to Dibon.
A few people living in Moab have escaped the enemy,
but I will send lions to kill them.

Send the king of the land
the payment he demands.
Send a lamb from Sela through the desert
to the mountain of Jerusalem.

²The women of Moab
try to cross the river Arnon
like little birds
that have fallen from their nest.

³They say: "Help us.
Tell us what to do.
Protect us from our enemies
as shade protects us from the noon sun.
Hide us, because we are running for safety!
Don't give us to our enemies.

⁴Let those of us who were forced out of Moab live in
your land.

Hide us from our enemies."
The robbing of Moab will stop.
The enemy will be defeated;
those who hurt others will disappear from the land.

⁵Then a new loyal king will come;
this faithful king will be from the family of David.
He will judge fairly
and do what is right.

⁶We have heard that the people of Moab are proud
and very conceited.

They are very proud and angry,
but their bragging means nothing.

⁷So the people of Moab will cry;

they will all be sad.

They will moan and groan

for the raisin cakes they had in Kir Hareseth.

⁸But the fields of Heshbon and the vines of Sibmah
cannot grow grapes;

foreign rulers have destroyed the grapevines.

The grapevines once spread as far as the city of Jazer
and into the desert;

they had spread as far as the sea.

⁹I cry with the people of Jazer

for the grapevines of Sibmah.

I will cry with the people of Heshbon and Elealeh.

There will be no shouts of joy,

because there will be no harvest or ripe fruit.

¹⁰There will be no joy and happiness in the orchards
and no songs or shouts of joy in the vineyards.

No one makes wine in the winepresses,

because I have put an end to shouts of joy.

¹¹My heart cries for Moab like a harp playing a funeral
song;

I am very sad for Kir Hareseth.

¹²The people of Moab will go to their places of worship
and will try to pray.

But when they go to their temple to pray,

they will not be able.

¹³Earlier the Lord said these things about Moab. ¹⁴Now the Lord says, "In three years all those people and what they take pride in will be hated. (This is three years as a hired helper would count time.) There will be a few people left, but they will be weak."

God's Message to Aram

This is a message about Damascus:

“The city of Damascus will be destroyed;
only ruins will remain.

²People will leave the cities of Aroer.
Flocks will wander freely in those empty towns,
and there will be no one to bother them.

³The strong, walled cities of Israel will be destroyed.
The government in Damascus will end.
Those left alive of Aram will be
like the glory of Israel,” says the Lord All-Powerful.

⁴“At that time Israel's wealth will all be gone.
Israel will be like someone who has lost much weight
from sickness.

⁵That time will be like the grain harvest in the Valley of
Rephaim.

The workers cut the wheat.
Then they cut the heads of grain from the plants
and collect the grain.

⁶That time will also be like the olive harvest,
when a few olives are left.
Two or three olives are left in the top branches.
Four or five olives are left on full branches,” says the
Lord, the God of Israel.

⁷At that time people will look to God, their Maker;

their eyes will see the Holy One of Israel.

⁸They will not trust the altars they have made,
nor will they trust what their hands have made,
not even the Asherah idols and altars.

⁹In that day all their strong cities will be empty. They will be like the cities the Hivites and the Amorites left when the Israelites came to take the land. Everything will be ruined.

¹⁰You have forgotten the God who saves you;
you have not remembered that God is your place of safety.

You plant the finest grapevines
and grapevines from faraway places.

¹¹You plant your grapevines one day and try to make them grow,
and the next day you make them blossom.
But at harvest time everything will be dead;
a sickness will kill all the plants.

¹²Listen to the many people!
Their crying is like the noise from the sea.
Listen to the nations!
Their crying is like the crashing of great waves.

¹³The people roar like the waves,
but when God speaks harshly to them, they will run away.

They will be like chaff on the hills being blown by the wind,

or like tumbleweeds blown away by a storm.

¹⁴At night the people will be very frightened.

Before morning, no one will be left.
So our enemies will come to our land,
but they will become nothing.

God's Message to Cush

How terrible it will be for the land beyond the rivers of Cush.

It is filled with the sound of wings.

²That land sends messengers across the sea;
they go on the water in boats made of reeds.

Go, quick messengers,
to a people who are tall and smooth-skinned,
who are feared everywhere.

They are a powerful nation that defeats other nations.
Their land is divided by rivers.

³All you people of the world, look!
Everyone who lives in the world, look!
You will see a banner raised on a mountain.
You will hear a trumpet sound.

⁴The Lord said to me,
“I will quietly watch from where I live,
like heat in the sunshine,
like the dew in the heat of harvest time.”

⁵The time will come, after the flowers have bloomed
and before the harvest,

when new grapes will be budding and growing.
The enemy will cut the plants with knives;
he will cut down the vines and take them away.

⁶They will be left for the birds of the mountains
and for the wild animals.

Birds will feed on them all summer,
and wild animals will eat them that winter.”

⁷At that time a gift will be brought to the Lord All-Powerful

from the people who are tall and smooth-skinned,
who are feared everywhere.

They are a powerful nation that defeats other nations.
Their land is divided by rivers.

These gifts will be brought to the place of the Lord All-Powerful,
to Mount Zion.

God's Message to Egypt

This is a message about Egypt:

Look, the Lord is coming on a fast cloud
to enter Egypt.

The idols of Egypt will tremble before him,
and Egypt's courage will melt away.

²The Lord says, "I will cause the Egyptians to fight
against themselves.

People will fight with their relatives;
neighbors will fight neighbors;
cities will fight cities;
kingdoms will fight kingdoms.

³The Egyptians will be afraid,
and I will ruin their plans.

They will ask advice from their idols and spirits of the
dead,
from their mediums and fortune-tellers."

⁴The Lord God All-Powerful says,
"I will hand Egypt over to a hard master,
and a powerful king will rule over them."

⁵The sea will become dry,
and the water will disappear from the Nile River.

⁶The canals will stink;
the streams of Egypt will decrease and dry up.
All the water plants will rot;

⁷all the plants along the banks of the Nile will die.
Even the planted fields by the Nile
will dry up, blow away, and disappear.

⁸The fishermen, all those who catch fish from the Nile,
will groan and cry;
those who fish in the Nile will be sad.

⁹All the people who make cloth from flax will be sad,
and those who weave linen will lose hope.

¹⁰Those who weave cloth will be broken.
All those who work for money will be sad.

¹¹The officers of the city of Zoan are fools;
the wise men who advise the king of Egypt give wrong
advice.

How can you say to him, 'I am wise'?

How can you say, 'I am from the old family of the
kings'?

¹²Egypt, where are your wise men?

Let them show you
what the Lord All-Powerful has planned for Egypt.

¹³The officers of Zoan have been fooled;
the leaders of Memphis have believed false things.
So the leaders of Egypt
lead that nation the wrong way.

¹⁴The Lord has made the leaders confused.
They have led Egypt to wander in the wrong ways,
like drunk people stumbling in their own vomit.

¹⁵There is nothing Egypt can do;
no one there can help.

¹⁶In that day the Egyptians will be like women. They will be

afraid of the Lord All-Powerful, because he will raise his hand to strike them down.¹⁷ The land of Judah will bring fear to Egypt. Anyone there who hears the name Judah will be afraid, because the Lord All-Powerful has planned terrible things for them.¹⁸ At that time five cities in Egypt will speak Hebrew, the language of Canaan, and they will promise to be loyal to the Lord All-Powerful. One of these cities will be named the City of Destruction.¹⁹ At that time there will be an altar for the Lord in the middle of Egypt and a monument to the Lord at the border of Egypt.²⁰ This will be a sign and a witness to the Lord All-Powerful in the land of Egypt. When the people cry to the Lord for help, he will send someone to save and defend them. He will rescue them from those who hurt them.

²¹So the Lord will show himself to the Egyptians, and then they will know he is the Lord. They will worship God and offer many sacrifices. They will make promises to the Lord and will keep them.²² The Lord will punish the Egyptians, but then he will heal them. They will come back to the Lord, and he will listen to their prayers and heal them.

²³At that time there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will go to Egypt, and the Egyptians will go to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship God together.²⁴ At that time Israel, Assyria, and Egypt will join together, which will be a blessing for the earth.²⁵ The Lord All-Powerful will bless them, saying, "Egypt, you are my people. Assyria, I made you. Israel, I own you. You are all blessed!"

Assyria Will Defeat Egypt and Cush

Sargon king of Assyria sent a military commander to Ashdod to attack that city. So the commander attacked and captured it.

²Then the Lord spoke through Isaiah son of Amoz, saying, “Take the rough cloth off your body, and take your sandals off your feet.” So Isaiah obeyed and walked around naked and barefoot.

³Then the Lord said, “Isaiah my servant has walked around naked and barefoot for three years as a sign against Egypt and Cush. ⁴The king of Assyria will carry away prisoners from Egypt and Cush. Old people and young people will be led away naked and barefoot, with their buttocks bare. So the Egyptians will be shamed. ⁵People who looked to Cush for help will be afraid, and those who were amazed by Egypt’s glory will be shamed. ⁶People who live near the sea will say, ‘Look at those countries. We trusted them to help us. We ran to them so they would save us from the king of Assyria. So how will we be able to escape?’”

God's Message to Babylon

This is a message about the [Desert by the Sea](#):

Disaster is coming from the desert
like wind blowing in the south.

It is coming from a terrible country.

²I have seen a terrible vision.

I see traitors turning against you
and people taking your wealth.

Elam, attack the people!

Media, surround the city and attack it!

I will bring an end to the pain the city causes.

³I saw those terrible things, and now I am in pain;
my pains are like the pains of giving birth.

What I hear makes me very afraid;
what I see causes me to shake with fear.

⁴I am worried,
and I am shaking with fear.

My pleasant evening
has become a night of fear.

⁵They set the table;
they spread the rugs;
they eat and drink.
Leaders, stand up.
Prepare the shields for battle!

⁶The Lord said to me,

“Go, place a lookout for the city
and have him report what he sees.

⁷If he sees chariots and teams of horses,
donkeys, or camels,
he should pay very close attention.”

⁸Then the lookout called out,
“My master, each day I stand in the watchtower
watching;

every night I have been on guard.

⁹Look, I see a man coming in a chariot
with a team of horses.”

The man gives back the answer,

“Babylon has fallen. It has fallen!

All the statues of her gods
lie broken on the ground.”

¹⁰My people are crushed like grain on the threshing
floor.

My people, I tell you what I have heard
from the Lord All-Powerful,
from the God of Israel.

God's Message to Edom

¹¹This is a message about [Dumah](#):

Someone calls to me from Edom,

“Watchman, how much of the night is left?

Watchman, how much longer will it be night?”

¹²The watchman answers,

“Morning is coming, but then night will come again.

If you have something to ask,
then come back and ask.”

God’s Message to Arabia

¹³This is a message about Arabia:

A group of traders from Dedan
spent the night near some trees in Arabia.

¹⁴They gave water to thirsty travelers;
the people of Tema gave food
to those who were escaping.

¹⁵They were running from swords,
from swords ready to kill,
from bows ready to shoot,
from a hard battle.

¹⁶This is what the Lord said to me: “In one year all the glory of the country of Kedar will be gone. (This is a year as a hired helper counts time.) ¹⁷At that time only a few of the archers, the soldiers of Kedar, will be left alive.” The Lord, the God of Israel, has spoken.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 22:1–23:18

Situation

Isaiah foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and Tyre. Both cities would be destroyed for ignoring God and trusting in their own ingenuity.

Observation

When faced with a dilemma, ask God for his help and guidance rather than depending on your own resources.

Inspiration

It is the same now as of old. Christ in His visible presence has left us, but the Ark of His Covenant remains, His sacramental presence. “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Remember that word, “always.” Regardless of circumstances, He is still there. Another word in your New Testament says, “I will not leave you destitute, I will come to you.” ...

Who cares? To whom can you go? Where are decisions of right and wrong made? How can I fight on if there is no prevailing power of righteousness to check the erosion of sin?

How are we to go against our enemies? Shall we try it in our own strength?

... You can't do it by yourself! You can't overcome Satan in your own strength. *Divine help is always available.*

Live the life, and call on God. That's the

combination that spells victory.

... If we go against our spiritual foes, we must go in the strength of God, having first put away from our hearts the evil we have done, through sincere repentance. *Faith and a conscience void of offense toward God and man make a winning combination.*

Are you in trouble? Has temptation backed you into a corner? Is your marriage partner unsaved? Has the one who promised to love you, honor you, and protect you, deserted you?

... Seek refuge and strength in God! ... You are not alone. Another shares your battle. He will support you and bring you through to victory....

None of us can make it through without God's help. *I need an abiding sense of God's presence.* I need a "cloud" by day and a "pillar of fire" by night. In the gloomiest hour, when the lights of this world have gone out, I need to know that He is there watching over me....

Sinner, what is your hope? *Who will open a path for you at death?* What friend will part the waters and let you through? ... You'll need to know that Jesus never fails. I ask you to turn toward Him now. (From *Revivaltime Pulpit* compiled by C. M. Ward)

Application

Pride can keep us from asking God for help. Are you too self-confident? Too self-assured? God asks you to give up your self-dependence and give him your heart.

Exploration

God's Help—[Genesis 18:14](#); [Exodus 4:14](#);

[Leviticus 20:22–23](#); [Deuteronomy 7:21–24](#); [Psalms 9:13–14](#); [115:9–11](#); [Matthew 9:23–26](#); [Luke 18:35–43](#).

God's Message to Jerusalem

This is a message about the [Valley of Vision](#):

What is wrong with you people?

Why are you on your [roofs](#)?

²This city was a very busy city,
full of noise and wild parties.
Now your people have been killed,
but not with swords,
nor did they die in battle.

³All your leaders ran away together,
but they have been captured without using a bow.
All you who were captured
tried to run away before the enemy came.

⁴So I say, "Don't look at me.

Let me cry loudly.

Don't hurry to comfort me
about the destruction of Jerusalem."

⁵The Lord God All-Powerful has chosen a special day
of riots and confusion.

People will trample each other in the Valley of Vision.
The city walls will be knocked down,
and the people will cry out to the mountain.

⁶The soldiers from Elam will gather their arrows
and their chariots and men on horses.

Kir will prepare their shields.

⁷Your nicest valleys will be filled with chariots.

Horsemen will be ordered to guard the gates of the city.

⁸The walls protecting Judah will fall.

At that time the people of Jerusalem depended on the weapons kept at the Palace of the Forest.

⁹You saw that the walls of Jerusalem had many cracks that needed repairing.

You stored up water in the lower pool.

¹⁰You counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you tore down houses to repair the walls with their stones.

¹¹You made a pool between the two walls to save water from the old pool, but you did not trust the God who made these things; you did not respect the One who planned them long ago.

¹²The Lord God All-Powerful told the people to cry and be sad, to shave their heads and wear rough cloth.

¹³But look, the people are happy and are having wild parties.

They kill the cattle and the sheep; they eat the food and drink the wine.

They say, "Let us eat and drink, because tomorrow we will die."

¹⁴The Lord All-Powerful said to me: "You people will die before this guilt is forgiven." The Lord God All-Powerful said

this.

God's Message to Shebna

¹⁵This is what the Lord God All-Powerful says:

“Go to this servant Shebna,
the manager of the palace.

¹⁶Say to him, ‘What are you doing here?

Who said you could cut out a tomb for your self here?

Why are you preparing your tomb in a high place?

Why are you carving out a tomb from the rock?

¹⁷Look, mighty one! The Lord will throw you away.

He will take firm hold of you

¹⁸and roll you tightly into a ball
and throw you into another country.

There you will die,

and there your fine chariots will remain.

You are a disgrace to your master's house.

¹⁹I will force you out of your important job,

and you will be thrown down from your important place.’

²⁰“At that time I will call for my servant Eliakim son of Hilkiyah. ²¹I will take your robe and put it on him and give him your belt. I will hand over to him the important job you have, and he will be like a father to the people of Jerusalem and the family of Judah. ²²I will put the key to the house of David around his neck. If he opens a door, no one will be able to close it; if he closes a door, no one will be able to open it. ²³He will be like an honored chair in his father's house. I will make

him strong like a peg that is hammered into a strong board.
²⁴All the honored and important things of his family will depend on him; all the adults and little children will depend on him. They will be like bowls and jars hanging on him.

²⁵“At that time,” says the Lord All-Powerful, “the peg hammered into the strong board will weaken. It will break and fall, and everything hanging on it will be destroyed.” The Lord says this.

God's Message to Lebanon

This is a message about Tyre:

You trading ships, cry!
The houses and harbor of Tyre are destroyed.
This news came to the ships
from the land of Cyprus.

²Be silent, you who live on the island of Tyre;
you merchants of Sidon, be silent.
Sailors have made you rich.

³They traveled the sea to bring grain from Egypt;
the sailors of Tyre brought grain from the Nile Valley
and sold it to other nations.

⁴Sidon, be ashamed.
Strong city of the sea, be ashamed, because the sea
says:

“I have not felt the pain of giving birth;
I have not reared young men or women.”

⁵Egypt will hear the news about Tyre,
and it will make Egypt hurt with sorrow.

⁶You ships should return to Tarshish.
You people living near the sea should be sad.

⁷Look at your once happy city!
Look at your old, old city!
People from that city have traveled
far away to live.

⁸Who planned Tyre's destruction?

Tyre made others rich.

Its merchants were treated like princes,
and its traders were greatly respected.

⁹It was the Lord All-Powerful who planned this.

He decided to make these proud people unimportant;
he decided to disgrace those who were greatly
respected.

¹⁰Go through your land, people of Tarshish,
like the Nile goes through Egypt.

There is no harbor for you now!

¹¹The Lord has stretched his hand over the sea
and made its kingdoms tremble.

He commands that Canaan's
strong, walled cities be destroyed.

¹²He said, "Sidon, you will not rejoice any longer,
because you are destroyed.

Even if you cross the sea to Cyprus,
you will not find a place to rest."

¹³Look at the land of the Babylonians;
it is not a country now.

Assyria has made it a place for wild animals.

Assyria built towers to attack it;
the soldiers took all the treasures from its cities,
and they turned it into ruins.

¹⁴So be sad, you trading ships,
because your strong city is destroyed.

¹⁵At that time people will forget about Tyre for seventy
years, which is the length of a king's life. After seventy years,
Tyre will be like the prostitute in this song:

¹⁶“Oh woman, you are forgotten.
Take your harp and walk through the city.
Play your harp well. Sing your song often.
Then people will remember you.”

¹⁷After seventy years the Lord will deal with Tyre, and it will again have trade. It will be like a prostitute for all the nations of the earth. ¹⁸The profits will be saved for the Lord. Tyre will not keep the money she earns but will give them to the people who serve the Lord, so they will have plenty of food and nice clothes.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 24:1–27:13

Situation

God would step in and judge sin. Life would not be business as usual. God, the deliverer and comforter of Zion, would punish oppressors and preserve his people.

Observation

Sin corrupts the world. But God will judge the world and destroy death. God's people will enjoy eternity with him.

Inspiration

You were created in the image and likeness of God. You were made for God's fellowship and your heart can never be satisfied without His communion. Just as iron is attracted to a magnet, the soul in its state of hunger is drawn to God. Though you, like thousands of others, may feel in the state of sin that the world is more alluring and more to your liking, some day—perhaps even now as you read these words—you will acknowledge that there is something deep down inside you which cannot be satisfied by the alloy of earth. Then with David, the Psalmist who had sampled the delicacies of sin and had found them unsatisfying, you will say, “Oh God, you are my God; early will I seek you: my soul thirsteth for you, my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land, where there is no water.” (From *Day by Day with Billy Graham* by Joan W. Brown)

Application

How has moral sin entered your community? Find ways to stand for what is right: rent movies from stores that do not carry adult movies. Shop at the convenience store that does not carry pornography. Call your mayor and share that you do not want any more adult book shops. Make your godly preference known through your wallet and your voice.

Exploration

Sin—[Genesis 3:6–7](#); [9:20–27](#); [Joshua 7:24–25](#); [Judges 4:1](#); [1 Chronicles 9:1](#).

The Lord Will Punish the World

Look! The Lord will destroy the earth and leave it empty;

he will ruin the surface of the land and scatter its people.

²At that time the same thing will happen to everyone:
to common people and priests,
to slaves and masters,
to women slaves and their women masters,
to buyers and sellers,
to those who borrow and those who lend,
to bankers and those who owe the bank.

³The earth will be completely empty.
The wealth will all be taken,
because the Lord has commanded it.

⁴The earth will dry up and die;
the world will grow weak and die;
the great leaders in this land will become weak.

⁵The people of the earth have ruined it,
because they do not follow God's teachings
or obey God's laws
or keep their agreement with God that was to last forever.

⁶So a curse will destroy the earth.
The people of the world are guilty,
so they will be burned up;

only a few will be left.

⁷The new wine will be bad, and the grapevines will die.
People who were happy will be sad.

⁸The happy music of the tambourines will end.
The happy sounds of wild parties will stop.
The joyful music from the harps will end.

⁹People will no longer sing while they drink their wine.
The beer will taste bitter to those who drink it.

¹⁰The ruined city will be empty,
and people will hide behind closed doors.

¹¹People in the streets will ask for wine,
but joy will have turned to sadness;
all the happiness will have left.

¹²The city will be left in ruins,
and its gates will be smashed to pieces.

¹³This is what will happen all over the earth
and to all the nations.
The earth will be like an olive tree after the harvest
or like the few grapes left on a vine after harvest.

¹⁴The people shout for joy.
From the west they praise the greatness of the Lord.

¹⁵People in the east, praise the Lord.
People in the islands of the sea,
praise the name of the Lord, the God of Israel.

¹⁶We hear songs from every part of the earth
praising God, the Righteous One.
But I said, "I am dying! I am dying!
How terrible it will be for me!
Traitors turn against people;

with their dishonesty, they turn against people.”

¹⁷There are terrors, holes, and traps
for the people of the earth.

¹⁸Anyone who tries to escape from the sound of terror
will fall into a hole.

Anyone who climbs out of the hole
will be caught in a trap.

The clouds in the sky will pour out rain,
and the foundations of the earth will shake.

¹⁹The earth will be broken up;
the earth will split open;
the earth will shake violently.

²⁰The earth will stumble around like someone who is
drunk;

it will shake like a hut in a storm.
Its sin is like a heavy weight on its back;
it will fall and never rise again.

²¹At that time the Lord will punish
the powers in the sky above
and the rulers on earth below.

²²They will be gathered together
like prisoners thrown into a dungeon;
they will be shut up in prison.
After much time they will be punished.

²³The moon will be embarrassed,
and the sun will be ashamed,
because the Lord All-Powerful will rule as king
on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.
Jerusalem’s leaders will see his greatness.

A Song of Praise to God

Lord, you are my God.
I honor you and praise you,
because you have done amazing things.
You have always done what you said you would do;
you have done what you planned long ago.
²You have made the city a pile of rocks
and have destroyed her walls.
The city our enemies built with strong walls is gone;
it will never be built again.
³People from powerful nations will honor you;
cruel people from strong cities will fear you.
⁴You protect the poor;
you protect the helpless when they are in danger.
You are like a shelter from storms,
like shade that protects them from the heat.
The cruel people attack
like a rainstorm beating against the wall,
⁵like the heat in the desert.
But you, God, stop their violent attack.
As a cloud cools a hot day,
you silence the songs of those who have no mercy.

God's Banquet for His Servants

⁶The Lord All-Powerful will prepare a feast
on this mountain for all people.
It will be a feast with all the best food and wine,

the finest meat and wine.

⁷On this mountain God will destroy
the veil that covers all nations,
the veil that stretches over all peoples;
⁸he will destroy death forever.

The Lord God will wipe away every tear from every face.

He will take away the shame of his people from the earth.

The Lord has spoken.

⁹At that time people will say,
“Our God is doing this!
We have waited for him, and he has come to save us.
This is the Lord. We waited for him,
so we will rejoice and be happy when he saves us.”

¹⁰The Lord will protect Jerusalem,
but he will crush our enemy Moab
like straw that is trampled down in the manure.

¹¹They will spread their arms in it
like a person who is swimming.
But God will bring down their pride,
and all the clever things they have made will mean
nothing.

¹²Moab’s high walls protect them,
but God will destroy these walls.
He will throw them down to the ground,
even to the dust.

If pride goes before the fall, then shame is what keeps you
from getting up after one. —Max Lucado (*He Chose the*

Nails)

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The One Who Takes Away Our Shame

I invite you to think carefully about the supreme test Jesus faced in the race. [Hebrews 12:2](#) offers this intriguing statement: “[Jesus] accepted the shame as if it were nothing.”

Shame is a feeling of disgrace, embarrassment, humiliation. Forgive me for stirring the memory, but don't you have a shameful moment in your history? Can you imagine the horror you would feel if everyone knew about it? What if a videotape of that event were played before your family and friends? How would you feel?

That is exactly what Jesus felt. Why? you ask. He never did anything worthy of shame. No, but we did. And since on the cross God made him become sin ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)), Jesus was covered with shame. He was shamed before his family. Stripped naked before his own mother and loved ones. Shamed before his fellow men. Forced to carry a cross until the weight caused him to stumble. Shamed before his church. The pastors and elders of his day mocked him, calling him names. Shamed before the city of Jerusalem. Condemned to die a criminal's death. Parents likely pointed to him from a distance and told their children, “That's what they do to evil men.”

But the shame before men didn't compare with the shame Jesus felt before his father. Our individual

shame seems too much to bear. Can you imagine bearing the collective shame of all humanity? One wave of shame after another was dumped on Jesus. Though he never cheated, he was convicted as a cheat. Though he never stole, heaven regarded him as a thief. Though he never lied, he was considered a liar. Though he never lusted, he bore the shame of an adulterer. Though he always believed, he endured the disgrace of an infidel. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

A Song of Praise to God

At that time people will sing this song in Judah:

We have a strong city.
God protects us with its strong walls and defenses.

²Open the gates,
and the good people will enter,
those who follow God.

³You, Lord, give true peace
to those who depend on you,
because they trust you.

⁴So, trust the Lord always,
because he is our Rock forever.

⁵He will destroy the proud city,
and he will punish the people living there.
He will bring that high city down to the ground
and throw it down into the dust.

⁶Then those who were hurt by the city will walk on its
ruins;
those who were made poor by the city will trample it
under their feet.

⁷The path of life is level for those who are right with
God;
Lord, you make the way of life smooth for those
people.

⁸But, Lord, we are waiting
for your way of justice.

Our souls want to remember
you and your name.

⁹My soul wants to be with you at night,
and my spirit wants to be with you at the dawn of
every day.

When your way of justice comes to the land,
people of the world will learn the right way of living.

¹⁰Evil people will not learn to do good
even if you show them kindness.

They will continue doing evil, even if they live in a
good world;

they never see the Lord's greatness.

¹¹Lord, you are ready to punish those people,
but they do not see that.

Show them your strong love for your people.

Then those who are evil will be ashamed.

Burn them in the fire

you have prepared for your enemies.

¹²Lord, all our success is because of what you have
done,

so give us peace.

¹³Lord, our God, other masters besides you have ruled
us,

but we honor only you.

¹⁴Those masters are now dead;
their ghosts will not rise from death.

You punished and destroyed them
and erased any memory of them.

¹⁵Lord, you multiplied the number of your people;
you multiplied them and brought honor to yourself.

You made the borders of the land wide.

¹⁶Lord, people remember you when they are in trouble;
they say quiet prayers to you when you punish them.

¹⁷Lord, when we are with you,
we are like a woman giving birth to a baby;
she cries and has pain from the birth.

¹⁸In the same way, we had pain.
We gave birth, but only to wind.
We don't bring salvation to the land
or make new people for the world.

¹⁹Your people have died, but they will live again;
their bodies will rise from death.
You who lie in the ground,
wake up and be happy!
The dew covering you is like the dew of a new day;
the ground will give birth to the dead.

Judgment: Reward or Punishment

²⁰My people, go into your rooms
and shut your doors behind you.
Hide in your rooms for a short time
until God's anger is finished.

²¹The Lord will leave his place
to punish the people of the world for their sins.
The earth will show the blood of the people who have
been killed;
it will not cover the dead any longer.

At that time the Lord will punish Leviathan, the gliding snake.

He will punish Leviathan, the coiled snake,
with his great and hard and powerful sword.
He will kill the monster in the sea.

²At that time
people will sing about the pleasant vineyard.

³“I, the Lord, will care for that vineyard;
I will water it at the right time.

No one will hurt it,
because I will guard it day and night.

⁴I am not angry.
If anyone builds a wall of thornbushes in war,
I will march to it and burn it.

⁵But if anyone comes to me for safety
and wants to make peace with me,
he should come and make peace with me.”

⁶In the days to come, the people of Jacob will be like a
plant with good roots;

Israel will grow like a plant beginning to bloom.
Then the world will be filled with their children.

The Lord Will Send Israel Away

⁷The Lord has not hurt his people as he hurt their
enemies;

his people have not been killed like those who tried to
kill them.

⁸He will settle his argument with Israel by sending it far away.

Like a hot desert wind, he will drive it away.

⁹This is how Israel's guilt will be forgiven;

this is how its sins will be taken away:

Israel will crush the rocks of the altar to dust,

and no statues or altars will be left standing for the Asherah idols.

¹⁰At that time the strong, walled city will be empty like a desert.

Calves will eat grass there.

They will lie down there

and eat leaves from the branches.

¹¹The limbs will become dry and break off,
so women will use them for firewood.

The people refuse to understand,

so God will not comfort them;

their Maker will not be kind to them.

¹²At that time the Lord will begin gathering his people one by one from the Euphrates River to the brook of Egypt. He will separate them from others as grain is separated from chaff.

¹³Many of my people are now lost in Assyria. Some have run away to Egypt. But at that time a great trumpet will be blown, and all those people will come and worship the Lord on that holy mountain in Jerusalem.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 28:1–31:9

Situation

God warned Judah by using Israel as an example. God offered peace and protection if Israel repented and turned to him, but the people jeered and scoffed at God's Word. They preferred to trust Assyria and Egypt.

Observation

God's righteousness is the standard by which everyone is measured. Yet, while God requires righteousness, he also helps and shows his people the right way to go.

Inspiration

Get the point? God is righteous. His decrees are righteous ([Romans 1:32](#)). His judgment is righteous ([Romans 2:5](#)). His requirements are righteous ([Romans 8:4](#)). His acts are righteous ([Daniel 9:16](#)). Daniel declared, "Our God is right in everything he does" ([Daniel 9:14](#)).

God is never wrong. He has never rendered a wrong decision, experienced the wrong attitude, taken the wrong path, said the wrong thing, or acted the wrong way. He is never too late or too early, too loud or too soft, too fast or too slow. He has always been and always will be right. He is righteous.

When it comes to righteousness, God runs the table without so much as a bank shot. And when it comes to righteousness, we don't know which end of

the cue stick to hold. Hence, our plight.

Will God, who is righteous, spend eternity with those who are not? Would Harvard admit a third-grade dropout? If it did, the act might be benevolent, but it wouldn't be right. If God accepted the unrighteous, the invitation would be even nicer, but would he be right? Would he be right to overlook our sins? Lower his standards? No. He wouldn't be right. And if God is anything, he is right.

He told Isaiah that righteousness would be his plumb line, the standard by which his house is measured ([Isaiah 28:17](#)). (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

Application

Though we are unrighteous by nature, we can have a righteous standing because of Christ's death on our behalf. Study the Scriptures to determine what it means to be righteous in his sight.

Exploration

Righteousness—[Romans 3:19–26](#); [2 Corinthians 5:21](#); [6:4–7](#); [Philippians 3:8–9](#).

Warnings to Israel

How terrible it will be for Samaria, the pride of Israel's drunken people!

That beautiful crown of flowers is just a dying plant set on a hill above a rich valley where drunkards live.

²Look, the Lord has someone who is strong and powerful.

Like a storm of hail and strong wind,
like a sudden flood of water pouring over the country,
he will throw Samaria down to the ground.

³That city, the pride of Israel's drunken people,
will be trampled underfoot.

⁴That beautiful crown of flowers is just a dying plant set on a hill above a rich valley.

That city will be like the first fig of summer.
Anyone who sees it
quickly picks it and eats it.

⁵At that time the Lord All-Powerful
will be like a beautiful crown,
like a wonderful crown of flowers
for his people who are left alive.

⁶Then he will give wisdom to the judges who must decide cases

and strength to those who battle at the city gate.

⁷But now those leaders are drunk with wine;

they stumble from drinking too much beer.

The priests and prophets are drunk with beer
and are filled with wine.

They stumble from too much beer.

The prophets are drunk when they see their visions;
the judges stumble when they make their decisions.

⁸Every table is covered with vomit,
so there is not a clean place anywhere.

⁹The Lord is trying to teach the people a lesson;
he is trying to make them understand his teachings.
But the people are like babies too old for breast milk,
like those who no longer nurse at their mother's breast.

¹⁰So they make fun of the Lord's prophet and say:

"A command here, a command there.

A rule here, a rule there.

A little lesson here, a little lesson there."

¹¹So the Lord will use strange words and foreign
languages

to speak to these people.

¹²God said to them,

"Here is a place of rest;

let the tired people come and rest.

This is the place of peace."

But the people would not listen.

¹³So the words of the Lord will be,

"A command here, a command there.

A rule here, a rule there.

A little lesson here, a little lesson there."

They will fall back and be defeated;

they will be trapped and captured.

¹⁴So listen to the Lord's message, you who brag,
you leaders in Jerusalem.

¹⁵You say, "We have made an agreement with death;
we have a contract with death.
When terrible punishment passes by,
it won't hurt us.
Our lies will keep us safe,
and our tricks will hide us."

¹⁶Because of these things, this is what the Lord God says:

"I will put a stone in the ground in Jerusalem,
a tested stone.

Everything will be built on this important and precious
rock.

Anyone who trusts in it will never be disappointed.

¹⁷I will use justice as a measuring line
and goodness as the standard.

The lies you hide behind will be destroyed as if by hail.
They will be washed away as if in a flood.

¹⁸Your agreement with death will be erased;
your contract with death will not help you.

When terrible punishment comes,
you will be crushed by it.

¹⁹Whenever punishment comes, it will take you away.

It will come morning after morning;
it will defeat you by day and by night.

Those who understand this punishment will be
terrified."

²⁰You will be like the person who tried to sleep
on a bed that was too short

and with a blanket that was too narrow
to wrap around himself.

²¹The Lord will fight as he did at Mount Perazim.
He will be angry as he was in the Valley of Gibeon.
He will do his work, his strange work.
He will finish his job, his strange job.

²²Now, you must not make fun of these things,
or the ropes around you will become tighter.
The Lord God All-Powerful has told me
how the whole earth will be destroyed.

The Lord Punishes Fairly

²³Listen closely to what I tell you;
listen carefully to what I say.

²⁴A farmer does not plow his field all the time;
he does not go on working the soil.

²⁵He makes the ground flat and smooth.
Then he plants the dill and scatters the cumin.
He plants the wheat in rows,
the barley in its special place,
and other wheat as a border around the field.

²⁶His God teaches him
and shows him the right way.

²⁷A farmer doesn't use heavy boards to crush dill;
he doesn't use a wagon wheel to crush cumin.
He uses a small stick to break open the dill,
and with a stick he opens the cumin.

²⁸The grain is ground to make bread.

People do not ruin it by crushing it forever.

The farmer separates the wheat from the chaff with his cart,

but he does not let his horses grind it.

²⁹This lesson also comes from the Lord All-Powerful, who gives wonderful advice, who is very wise.

Warnings to Jerusalem

How terrible it will be for you, Jerusalem,
the city where David camped.
Your festivals have continued
year after year.

²I will attack Jerusalem,
and that city will be filled with sadness and crying.
It will be like an altar to me.

³I will put armies all around you, Jerusalem;
I will surround you with towers
and with devices to attack you.

⁴You will be pulled down and will speak from the
ground;

I will hear your voice rising from the ground.
It will sound like the voice of a ghost;
your words will come like a whisper from the dirt.

⁵Your many enemies will become like fine dust;
the many cruel people will be like chaff that is blown
away.

Everything will happen very quickly.

⁶The Lord All-Powerful will come
with thunder, earthquakes, and great noises,
with storms, strong winds, and a fire that destroys.

⁷Then all the nations that fight against Jerusalem
will be like a dream;
all the nations that attack her
will be like a vision in the night.

⁸They will be like a hungry man who dreams he is

eating,

but when he awakens, he is still hungry.

They will be like a thirsty man who dreams he is drinking,

but when he awakens, he is still weak and thirsty.

It will be the same way with all the nations
who fight against Mount Zion.

⁹Be surprised and amazed.

Blind yourselves so that you cannot see.

Become drunk, but not from wine.

Trip and fall, but not from beer.

¹⁰The Lord has made you go into a deep sleep.

He has closed your eyes. (The prophets are your eyes.)

He has covered your heads. (The seers are your heads.)

¹¹This vision is like the words of a book that is closed and sealed. You may give the book to someone who can read and tell that person to read it. But he will say, "I can't read the book, because it is sealed." ¹²Or you may give the book to someone who cannot read and tell him to read it. But he will say, "I don't know how to read."

¹³The Lord says:

"These people say they love me;
they show honor to me with words,

but their hearts are far from me.

The honor they show me
is nothing but human rules.

¹⁴So I will continue to amaze these people
by doing more and more miracles.
Their wise men will lose their wisdom;
their wise men will not be able to understand.”

Warnings About Other Nations

¹⁵How terrible it will be for those who try
to hide things from the Lord
and who do their work in darkness.
They think no one will see them or know what they do.
¹⁶You are confused.
You think the clay is equal to the potter.
You think that an object can tell the one who made it,
“You didn’t make me.”
This is like a pot telling its maker,
“You don’t know anything.”

A Better Time Is Coming

¹⁷In a very short time, Lebanon will become rich
farmland,
and the rich farmland will seem like a forest.
¹⁸At that time the deaf will hear the words in a book.
Instead of having darkness and gloom, the blind will
see.
¹⁹The Lord will make the poor people happy;

they will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

²⁰Then the people without mercy will come to an end;
those who do not respect God will disappear.

Those who enjoy doing evil will be gone:

²¹those who lie about others in court,

those who trap people in court,

those who lie and take justice from innocent people in court.

²²This is what the Lord who set Abraham free says to the family of Jacob:

“Now the people of Jacob will not be ashamed
or disgraced any longer.

²³When they see all their children,
the children I made with my hands,
they will say my name is holy.

They will agree that the Holy One of Jacob is holy,
and they will respect the God of Israel.

²⁴People who do wrong will now understand.

Those who complain will accept being taught.”

Warnings to the Stubborn Nation

The Lord said,

“How terrible it will be for these stubborn children.
They make plans, but they don’t ask me to help them.
They make agreements with other nations, without
asking my Spirit.

They are adding more and more sins to themselves.

²They go down to Egypt for help
without asking me about it first.

They hope they will be saved by the king of Egypt;
they want Egypt to protect them.

³But hiding in Egypt will bring you only shame;
Egypt’s protection will only disappoint you.

⁴Your officers have gone to Zoan,
and your messengers have gone to Hanes,

⁵but they will be put to shame,
because Egypt is useless to them.

It will give no help and will be of no use;
it will cause them only shame and embarrassment.”

God’s Message to Judah

⁶This is a message about the animals in southern Judah:
Southern Judah is a dangerous place
full of lions and lionesses,
poisonous snakes and darting snakes.

The messengers travel through there with their wealth
on the backs of donkeys
and their treasure on the backs of camels.
They carry them to a nation that cannot help them,
⁷to Egypt whose help is useless.
So I call that country Rahab the Do-Nothing.

⁸Now write this on a sign for the people,
write this on a scroll,
so that for the days to come
this will be a witness forever.

⁹These people are like children who lie and refuse to
obey;
they refuse to listen to the Lord's teachings.

¹⁰They tell the seers,
"Don't see any more visions!"
They say to the prophets,
"Don't tell us the truth!
Say things that will make us feel good;
see only good things for us.

¹¹Stop blocking our path.
Get out of our way.
Stop telling us
about God, the Holy One of Israel."

¹²So this is what the Holy One of Israel says:

"You people have refused to accept this message
and have depended on cruelty and lies to help you.

¹³You are guilty of these things.
So you will be like a high wall with cracks in it

that falls suddenly and breaks into small pieces.

¹⁴You will be like a clay jar that breaks,
smashed into many pieces.

Those pieces will be too small
to take coals from the fire
or to get water from a well.”

¹⁵This is what the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, says:

“If you come back to me and trust me, you will be saved.

If you will be calm and trust me, you will be strong.”
But you don’t want to do that.

¹⁶You say, “No, we need horses to run away on.”
So you will run away on horses.

You say, “We will ride away on fast horses.”
So those who chase you will be fast.

¹⁷One enemy will make threats,
and a thousand of your men will run away.

Five enemies will make threats,
and all of you will run from them.

You will be left alone like a flagpole on a hilltop,
like a banner on a hill.

¹⁸The Lord wants to show his mercy to you.
He wants to rise and comfort you.

The Lord is a fair God,
and everyone who waits for his help will be happy.

The Lord Will Help His People

¹⁹You people who live on Mount Zion in Jerusalem will not cry anymore. The Lord will hear your crying, and he will comfort you. When he hears you, he will help you. ²⁰The Lord has given you sorrow and hurt like the bread and water you ate every day. He is your teacher; he will not continue to hide from you, but you will see your teacher with your own eyes. ²¹If you go the wrong way—to the right or to the left—you will hear a voice behind you saying, “This is the right way. You should go this way.” ²²You have statues covered with silver and gold, but you will ruin them for further use. You will throw them away like filthy rags and say, “Go away!”

²³At that time the Lord will send rain for the seeds you plant in the ground, and the ground will grow food for you. The harvest will be rich and great, and you will have plenty of food in the fields for your animals. ²⁴Your oxen and donkeys that work the soil will have all the food they need. You will have to use shovels and pitchforks to spread all their food. ²⁵Every mountain and hill will have streams filled with water. These things will happen after many people are killed and the towers are pulled down. ²⁶At that time the light from the moon will be bright like the sun, and the light from the sun will be seven times brighter than now, like the light of seven days. These things will happen when the Lord bandages his broken people and heals the hurts he gave them.

²⁷Look! The Lord comes from far away.
His anger is like a fire with thick clouds of smoke.
His mouth is filled with anger,
and his tongue is like a burning fire.

²⁸His breath is like a rushing river,

which rises to the throat.

He will judge the nations as if he is sifting them through the strainer of destruction.

He will place in their mouths a bit that will lead them the wrong way.

²⁹You will sing happy songs

as on the nights you begin a festival.

You will be happy like people listening to flutes

as they come to the mountain of the Lord,
to the Rock of Israel.

³⁰The Lord will cause all people to hear his great voice

and to see his powerful arm come down with anger,

like a great fire that burns everything,

like a great storm with much rain and hail.

³¹Assyria will be afraid when it hears the voice of the Lord,

because he will strike Assyria with a rod.

³²When the Lord punishes Assyria with a rod,

he will beat them to the music of tambourines and harps;

he will fight against them with his mighty weapons.

³³[Topheth](#) has been made ready for a long time;

it is ready for the king.

It was made deep and wide

with much wood and fire.

And the Lord's breath will come

like a stream of burning sulfur and set it on fire.

Warnings About Relying on Egypt

How terrible it will be for those people who go down to Egypt for help.

They think horses will save them.

They think their many chariots
and strong horsemen will save them.

But they don't trust God, the Holy One of Israel,
or ask the Lord for help.

²But he is wise and can bring them disaster.

He does not change his warnings.

He will rise up and fight against the evil people
and against those who try to help evil people.

³The Egyptians are only people and are not God.

Their horses are only animals and are not spirit.

The Lord will stretch out his arm,
and the one who helps will stumble,
and the people who wanted help will fall.

All of them will be destroyed together.

⁴The Lord says this to me:

“When a lion or a lion's cub kills an animal to eat,
it stands over the dead animal and roars.

A band of shepherds

may be assembled against it,

but the lion will not be afraid of their yelling
or upset by their noise.

So the Lord All-Powerful will come down
to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill.

⁵The Lord All-Powerful will defend Jerusalem
like birds flying over their nests.

He will defend and save it;
he will 'pass over' and save Jerusalem."

⁶You children of Israel, come back to the God you fought against.⁷The time is coming when each of you will stop worshiping idols of gold and silver, which you sinned by making.

⁸"Assyria will be defeated by a sword, but not the sword of a person;

Assyria will be destroyed, but not by a person's sword.

Assyria will run away from the sword of God,
but its young men will be caught and made slaves.

⁹They will panic, and their protection will be destroyed.
Their commanders will be terrified when they see
God's battle flag,"
says the Lord,
whose fire is in Jerusalem
and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 32:1–35:10

Situation

Isaiah spoke of God's coming judgment on both individuals and nations surrounding Judah. People's motives were clear to God, and he rewarded those who lived by his commandments and were honest. He punished sinners.

Observation

Although slow to anger, God punishes sin. Only the faithful will know God's bounty and security.

Inspiration

Almost every headline, every television news report, and every radio bulletin these days proclaims one essential truth: The modern world is in chaos and no one has a realistic solution....

The whole world is crying out for some word of hope, but all we hear is the babble of wishful thinkers and charlatans. Psychologists, educators, social scientists, physicians, and media wizards of every stripe offer pronouncements and preachments, but even the best ideas generally collapse under closer scrutiny. So far, our modern secular society has produced no positive answers; yet we continue to reach out in hope.

Actually, there is still good reason to hope; there is still time. For with society's failure comes the chance to repent and seek renewal. If we recognize the failures of living without God and turn from our

foolishness and disobedience, we may yet be able to receive God's mercy and forgiveness.

Today's headlines are God's warning to a sinful world. The television news flashes are a shadow of His loving hand at work, pushing for the world's redemption. The radio bulletins are a reminder that in spite of our compulsive determination to ruin the earth and destroy God's program of salvation, He has not given up on us completely. Until that day when God's final judgment affixes each of us into place for eternity, there is a chance to begin again. Jesus said, "You must be born again" ([John 3:7](#)). That is the last best hope for this world. Ultimately it is our only hope.

(From *Storm Warning* by Billy Graham)

Application

Have you ever surrendered your life to God? Have you ever asked him to forgive your sins? Pray and ask him to be your Lord and Savior. Tell him you are sorry for your sins. Tell your pastor that you accept Christ as your Savior.

Exploration

Judgment—[Deuteronomy 7:2](#); [Matthew 3:10](#); [13:30](#).

A Good Kingdom Is Coming

A king will rule in a way that brings justice,
and leaders will make fair decisions.

²Then each ruler will be like a shelter from the wind,
like a safe place in a storm,
like streams of water in a dry land,
like a cool shadow from a large rock in a hot land.

³People will look to the king for help,
and they will truly listen to what he says.

⁴People who are now worried will be able to
understand.

Those who cannot speak clearly now will then be able
to speak clearly and quickly.

⁵Fools will not be called great,
and people will not respect the wicked.

⁶A fool says foolish things,
and in his mind he plans evil.
A fool does things that are wicked,
and he says wrong things about the Lord.
A fool does not feed the hungry
or let thirsty people drink water.

⁷The wicked person uses evil like a tool.
He plans ways to take everything from the poor.
He destroys the poor with lies,
even when the poor person is in the right.

⁸But a good leader plans to do good,
and those good things make him a good leader.

Hard Times Are Coming

⁹You women who are calm now,
stand up and listen to me.
You women who feel safe now,
hear what I say.

¹⁰You women feel safe now,
but after one year you will be afraid.
There will be no grape harvest
and no summer fruit to gather.

¹¹Women, you are calm now, but you should shake
with fear.

Women, you feel safe now, but you should tremble.
Take off your nice clothes
and put rough cloth around your waist to show your
sadness.

¹²Beat your breasts in grief, because the fields that
were pleasant are now empty.

Cry, because the vines that once had fruit now have
no more grapes.

¹³Cry for the land of my people,
in which only thorns and weeds now grow.
Cry for the city that once was happy
and for all the houses that once were filled with joy.

¹⁴The palace will be empty;
people will leave the noisy city.

Strong cities and towers will be empty.
Wild donkeys will love to live there, and sheep will go there to eat.

Things Will Get Better

¹⁵This will continue until God pours his Spirit from above upon us.

Then the desert will be like a fertile field
and the fertile field like a forest.

¹⁶Justice will be found even in the desert,
and fairness will be found in the fertile fields.

¹⁷That fairness will bring peace,
and it will bring calm and safety forever.

¹⁸My people will live in peaceful places
and in safe homes
and in calm places of rest.

¹⁹Hail will destroy the forest,
and the city will be completely destroyed.

²⁰But you will be happy as you plant seeds near every stream
and as you let your cattle and donkeys wander freely.

Warnings to Assyria and Promises to God's People

How terrible it will be for you who destroy others
but have not been destroyed yet.

How terrible it will be for you, traitor,
whom no one has turned against yet.

When you stop destroying,
others will destroy you.

When you stop turning against others,
they will turn against you.

²Lord, be kind to us.

We have waited for your help.

Give us strength every morning.

Save us when we are in trouble.

³Your powerful voice makes people run away in fear;
your greatness causes the nations to run away.

⁴Like locusts, your enemies will take away the things
you stole in war.

Like locusts rushing about, they will take your wealth.

⁵The Lord is very great, and he lives in a high place.

He fills Jerusalem with fairness and justice.

⁶He will be your safety.

He is full of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge.

Respect for the Lord is the greatest treasure.

⁷See, brave men are crying out in the streets;
those who tried to bring peace are crying loudly.

⁸There is no one on the roads,
no one walking in the paths.

People have broken the agreements they made.
They refuse to believe the proof from witnesses.
No one respects other people.

⁹The land is sick and dying;
Lebanon is ashamed and dying.
The Plain of Sharon is dry like the desert,
and the trees of Bashan and Carmel are dying.

¹⁰The Lord says, “Now, I will stand up
and show my greatness.
Now, I will become important to the people.

¹¹You people do useless things
that are like hay and straw.
A destructive wind will burn you like fire.

¹²People will be burned until their bones become like
lime;
they will burn quickly like dry thornbushes.”

¹³You people in faraway lands, hear what I have done.
You people who are near me, learn about my power.

¹⁴The sinners in Jerusalem are afraid;
those who are separated from God shake with fear.
They say, “Can any of us live through this fire that
destroys?

Who can live near this fire that burns on and on?”

¹⁵A person who does what is right
and speaks what is right,
who refuses to take money unfairly,
who refuses to take money to hurt others,
who does not listen to plans of murder,
who refuses to think about evil—

¹⁶this is the kind of person who will be safe.
He will be protected as he would be in a high, walled city.
He will always have bread,
and he will not run out of water.
¹⁷Your eyes will see the king in his beauty.
You will see the land that stretches far away.
¹⁸You will think about the terror of the past:
“Where is that officer?
Where is the one who collected the taxes?
Where is the officer in charge of our defense towers?”
¹⁹No longer will you see those proud people from other countries,
whose strange language you couldn’t understand.

God Will Protect Jerusalem

²⁰Look at Jerusalem, the city of our festivals.
Look at Jerusalem, that beautiful place of rest.
It is like a tent that will never be moved;
the pegs that hold her in place will never be pulled up,
and her ropes will never be broken.
²¹There the Lord will be our Mighty One.
That land is a place with streams and wide rivers,
but there will be no enemy boats on those rivers;
no powerful ship will sail on them.
²²This is because the Lord is our judge.
The Lord makes our laws.
The Lord is our king.

He will save us.

²³You sailors from other lands, hear:

The ropes on your boats hang loose.

The mast is not held firm.

The sails are not spread open.

Then your great wealth will be divided.

There will be so much wealth that even the crippled people will carry off a share.

²⁴No one living in Jerusalem will say, "I am sick."

The people who live there will have their sins forgiven.

God Will Punish His Enemies

All you nations, come near and listen.

Pay attention, you peoples!

The earth and all the people in it should listen,
the world and everything in it.

²The Lord is angry with all the nations;
he is angry with their armies.

He will destroy them and kill them all.

³Their bodies will be thrown outside.

The stink will rise from the bodies,
and the blood will flow down the mountains.

⁴The sun, moon, and stars will dissolve,
and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll.

The stars will fall

like dead leaves from a vine

or dried-up figs from a fig tree.

⁵The Lord's sword in the sky is covered with blood.

It will cut through Edom

and destroy those people as an offering to the Lord.

⁶The Lord's sword will be covered with blood;

it will be covered with fat,

with the blood from lambs and goats,

with the fat from the kidneys of sheep.

This is because the Lord decided there will be a
sacrifice in Bozrah

and much killing in Edom.

⁷The oxen will be killed,

and the cattle and the strong bulls.

The land will be filled with their blood,

and the dirt will be covered with their fat.

⁸The Lord has chosen a time for punishment.

He has chosen a year when people must pay for the wrongs they did to Jerusalem.

⁹Edom's rivers will be like hot tar.

Its dirt will be like burning sulfur.

Its land will be like burning tar.

¹⁰The fires will burn night and day;
the smoke will rise from Edom forever.

Year after year that land will be empty;
no one will ever travel through that land again.

¹¹Birds and small animals will own that land,
and owls and ravens will live there.

God will make it an empty wasteland;
it will have nothing left in it.

¹²The important people will have no one left to rule
them;

the leaders will all be gone.

¹³Thorns will take over the strong towers,
and wild bushes will grow in the walled cities.

It will be a home for wild dogs
and a place for owls to live.

¹⁴Desert animals will live with the hyenas,
and wild goats will call to their friends.

Night animals will live there
and find a place of rest.

¹⁵Owls will nest there and lay eggs.

When they hatch open, the owls will gather their
young under their wings.

Hawks will gather

with their own kind.

¹⁶Look at the Lord's scroll and read what is written there:

None of these will be missing;
none will be without its mate.
God has given the command,
so his Spirit will gather them together.

¹⁷God has divided the land among them,
and he has given them each their portion.
So they will own that land forever
and will live there year after year.

God Will Comfort His People

The desert and dry land will become happy;
the desert will be glad and will produce flowers.

Like a flower,² it will have many blooms.

It will show its happiness, as if it were shouting with joy.

It will be beautiful like the forest of Lebanon,
as beautiful as the hill of Carmel and the Plain of Sharon.

Everyone will see the glory of the Lord
and the splendor of our God.

³Make the weak hands strong
and the weak knees steady.

⁴Say to people who are frightened,
“Be strong. Don’t be afraid.

Look, your God will come,
and he will punish your enemies.
He will make them pay for the wrongs they did,
but he will save you.”

⁵Then the blind people will see again,
and the deaf will hear.

⁶Crippled people will jump like deer,
and those who can’t talk now will shout with joy.
Water will flow in the desert,
and streams will flow in the dry land.

⁷The burning desert will have pools of water,
and the dry ground will have springs.
Where wild dogs once lived,

grass and water plants will grow.

⁸A road will be there;
this highway will be called “The Road to Being Holy.”
Evil people will not be allowed to walk on that road;
only good people will walk on it.
No fools will go on it.

⁹No lions will be there,
nor will dangerous animals be on that road.
They will not be found there.
That road will be for the people God saves;
¹⁰the people the Lord has freed will return there.
They will enter Jerusalem with joy,
and their happiness will last forever.
Their gladness and joy will fill them completely,
and sorrow and sadness will go far away.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 36:1–39:8

Situation

King Hezekiah reigned in Israel during a time when the people had forgotten about God. Unlike his predecessors, Hezekiah tried to restore the worship of God. During these reforms, the expanding Assyrian empire threatened his kingdom.

Observation

Hezekiah was miraculously healed by God. But chapter [39](#) records his pride and Isaiah's announcement of judgment.

Inspiration

What is it that drives us on so relentlessly? Are you ready? Take a deep breath and allow yourself to tolerate the one-word answer: PRIDE. We work and push and strive so we can prove we are worthy ... we are the best ... we deserve top honors. And the hidden message: I can gain righteousness all on my own, by my own effort, ingenuity, and energy. And because I can, I must! And why is this heretical? Because ultimately this philosophy says: (1) I really don't need divine righteousness (after all, God helps those who help themselves, right?), and (2) I will find lasting joy in my own achievements. This will bring me ultimate satisfaction.

Both are dead-end roads found on Fantasy Island. (From *Wisdom for the Way* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

What accomplishments, awards, or recognitions bring you the most satisfaction? Since pride can often be hard to detect, ask a good friend, spouse, or family member to evaluate you. Take time to ask God to replace that pride with a spirit of humility.

Exploration

Pride—[Proverbs 8:13; 16:18; Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 13:4; Philippians 2:3; James 4:6.](#)

The Assyrians Invade Judah

During Hezekiah's fourteenth year as king, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the strong, walled cities of Judah and captured them.²The king of Assyria sent out his field commander with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. When the commander came near the waterway from the upper pool on the road where people do their laundry, he stopped.³Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah went out to meet him. Eliakim son of Hilkiah was the palace manager, Shebna was the royal secretary, and Joah son of Asaph was the recorder.

⁴The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah this:

"The great king, the king of Assyria, says: What can you trust in now? ⁵You say you have battle plans and power for war, but your words mean nothing. Whom are you trusting for help so that you turn against me? ⁶Look, you are depending on Egypt to help you, but Egypt is like a splintered walking stick. If you lean on it for help, it will stab your hand and hurt you. The king of Egypt will hurt all those who depend on him. ⁷You might say, "We are depending on the Lord our God," but Hezekiah destroyed the Lord's altars and the places of worship. Hezekiah told Judah and Jerusalem, "You must worship only at this one altar."

⁸"Now make an agreement with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses if you can find enough men to ride them. ⁹You cannot defeat one of my

master's least important officers, so why do you depend on Egypt to give you chariots and horsemen? ¹⁰I have not come to attack and destroy this country without an order from the Lord. The Lord himself told me to come to this country and destroy it.”

¹¹Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to the field commander, “Please speak to us in the Aramaic language. We understand it. Don’t speak to us in Hebrew, because the people on the city wall can hear you.”

¹²But the commander said, “My master did not send me to tell these things only to you and your king. He sent me to speak also to those people sitting on the wall who will have to eat their own dung and drink their own urine like you.”

¹³Then the commander stood and shouted loudly in the Hebrew language, “Listen to what the great king, the king of Assyria says, ¹⁴The king says you should not let Hezekiah fool you, because he can’t save you. ¹⁵Don’t let Hezekiah talk you into trusting the Lord by saying, ‘The Lord will surely save us. This city won’t be handed over to the king of Assyria.’

¹⁶“Don’t listen to Hezekiah. The king of Assyria says, ‘Make peace with me, and come out of the city to me. Then everyone will be free to eat the fruit from his own grapevine and fig tree and to drink water from his own well. ¹⁷After that I will come and take you to a land like your own—a land with grain and new wine, bread and vineyards.’

¹⁸“Don’t let Hezekiah fool you, saying, ‘The Lord will save us.’ Has a god of any other nation saved his people from the power of the king of Assyria? ¹⁹Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? They did not save Samaria from my power. ²⁰Not one of all the gods of these

countries has saved his people from me. Neither can the Lord save Jerusalem from my power.”

²¹The people were silent. They didn’t answer the commander at all, because King Hezekiah had ordered, “Don’t answer him.”

²²Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah tore their clothes to show how upset they were. (Eliakim son of Hilkiah was the palace manager, Shebna was the royal secretary, and Joah son of Asaph was the recorder.) The three men went to Hezekiah and told him what the field commander had said.

Hezekiah Asks God to Help

When King Hezekiah heard the message, he tore his clothes and put on rough cloth to show how sad he was. Then he went into the Temple of the Lord. ²Hezekiah sent Eliakim, the palace manager, and Shebna, the royal secretary, and the older priests to Isaiah. They were all wearing rough cloth when they came to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. ³They told Isaiah, “This is what Hezekiah says: Today is a day of sorrow and punishment and disgrace, as when a child should be born, but the mother is not strong enough to give birth to it. ⁴The king of Assyria sent his field commander to make fun of the living God. Maybe the Lord your God will hear what the commander said and will punish him for it. So pray for the few of us who are left alive.”

⁵When Hezekiah’s officers came to Isaiah, ⁶he said to them, “Tell your master this: The Lord says, ‘Don’t be afraid of what you have heard. Don’t be frightened by the words the servants of the king of Assyria have spoken against me. ⁷Listen! I am going to put a spirit in the king of Assyria. He will hear a report that will make him return to his own country, and I will cause him to die by the sword there.’”

⁸The field commander heard that the king of Assyria had left Lachish. When he went back, he found the king fighting against the city of Libnah.

⁹The king received a report that Tirhakah, the Cushite king of Egypt, was coming to attack him. When the king of Assyria heard this, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, ¹⁰“Tell Hezekiah king of Judah: Don’t be fooled by the god you trust. Don’t believe him when he says Jerusalem will not be handed

over to the king of Assyria. ¹¹You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done. They have completely defeated every country, so do not think you will be saved. ¹²Did the gods of those people save them? My ancestors destroyed them, defeating the cities of Gozan, Haran, and Rezep, and the people of Eden living in Tel Assar. ¹³Where are the kings of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the kings of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?”

Hezekiah Prays to the Lord

¹⁴When Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it, he went up to the Temple of the Lord. He spread the letter out before the Lord ¹⁵and prayed to the Lord: ¹⁶“Lord All-Powerful, you are the God of Israel, whose throne is between the gold creatures with wings, only you are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth. ¹⁷Hear, Lord, and listen. Open your eyes, Lord, and see. Listen to all the words Sennacherib has said to insult the living God.

¹⁸“It is true, Lord, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed all these countries and their lands. ¹⁹They have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire, but they were only wood and rock statues that people made. So the kings have destroyed them. ²⁰Now, Lord our God, save us from the king’s power so that all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you, Lord, are the only God.”

The Lord Answers Hezekiah

²¹Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah that

said, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘You prayed to me about Sennacherib king of Assyria.’²² So this is what the Lord has said against Sennacherib:

The people of Jerusalem
hate you and make fun of you;
the people of Jerusalem
laugh at you as you run away.

²³You have insulted me and spoken against me;
you have raised your voice against me.
You have a proud look on your face,
which is against me, the Holy One of Israel!

²⁴You have sent your messengers to insult the Lord.
You have said, “With my many chariots
I have gone to the tops of the mountains,
to the highest mountains of Lebanon.
I have cut down its tallest cedars
and its best pine trees.

I have gone to its greatest heights
and its best forests.

²⁵I have dug wells in foreign countries
and drunk water there.
By the soles of my feet,
I have dried up all the rivers of Egypt.”

²⁶“King of Assyria, surely you have heard.
Long ago I, the Lord, planned these things.
Long ago I designed them,
and now I have made them happen.
I allowed you to turn those strong, walled cities
into piles of rocks.

²⁷The people in those cities were weak;

they were frightened and put to shame.
They were like grass in the field,
like tender, young grass,
like grass on the housetop
that is burned by the wind before it can grow.

²⁸“I know when you rest,
when you come and go,
and how you rage against me.
²⁹Because you rage against me,
and because I have heard your proud words,
I will put my hook in your nose
and my bit in your mouth.
Then I will force you to leave my country
the same way you came.’

³⁰“Then the Lord said, ‘Hezekiah, I will give you this sign:

This year you will eat the grain that grows wild,
and the second year you will eat what grows wild from
that.

But in the third year, plant grain and harvest it.
Plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

³¹Some of the people in the family of Judah
will escape.

Like plants that take root,
they will grow strong and have many children.

³²A few people will come out of Jerusalem alive;
a few from Mount Zion will live.

The strong love of the Lord All-Powerful
will make this happen.’

³³“So this is what the Lord says about the king of Assyria:

‘He will not enter this city
or even shoot an arrow here.
He will not fight against it with shields
or build a ramp to attack the city walls.

³⁴‘He will return to his country the same way he came,
and he will not enter this city,’
says the Lord.

³⁵‘I will defend and save this city
for my sake and for David, my servant.’”

³⁶Then the angel of the Lord went out and killed one hundred eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up early the next morning, they saw all the dead bodies. ³⁷So Sennacherib king of Assyria left and went back to Nineveh and stayed there.

³⁸One day as Sennacherib was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with a sword. Then they escaped to the land of Ararat. So Sennacherib’s son Esarhaddon became king of Assyria.

Hezekiah's Illness

At that time Hezekiah became very sick; he was almost dead. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to see him and told him, "This is what the Lord says: Make arrangements, because you are not going to live, but die."

²Hezekiah turned toward the wall and prayed to the Lord, ³"Lord, please remember that I have always obeyed you. I have given myself completely to you and have done what you said was right." Then Hezekiah cried loudly.

⁴Then the Lord spoke his word to Isaiah: ⁵"Go to Hezekiah and tell him: 'This is what the Lord, the God of your ancestor David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. So I will add fifteen years to your life. ⁶I will save you and this city from the king of Assyria; I will defend this city.

⁷"The Lord will do what he says. This is the sign from the Lord to show you: ⁸The sun has made a shadow go down the stairway of Ahaz, but I will make it go back ten steps.'" So the shadow made by the sun went back up the ten steps it had gone down.

⁹After Hezekiah king of Judah got well, he wrote this song:

¹⁰I said, "I am in the middle of my life.

Do I have to go through the gates of death?

Will I have the rest of my life taken away from me?"

¹¹I said, "I will not see the Lord

in the land of the living again.

I will not again see the people

who live on the earth.

¹²Like a shepherd's tent,
my home has been pulled down and taken from me.
I am finished
like the cloth a weaver rolls up and cuts from the [loom](#).
In one day you brought me to this end.

¹³All night I cried loudly.
Like a lion, he crushed all my bones.
In one day you brought me to this end.

¹⁴I cried like a bird
and moaned like a dove.
My eyes became tired as I looked to the heavens.
Lord, I have troubles. Please help me.”

¹⁵What can I say?
The Lord told me what would happen and then made it
happen.

I have had these troubles in my soul,
so now I will be humble all my life.

¹⁶Lord, because of you, people live.
Because of you, my spirit also lives;
you made me well and let me live.

¹⁷It was for my own good
that I had such troubles.
Because you love me very much,
you did not let me die
but threw my sins
far away.

¹⁸People in the place of the dead cannot praise you;
those who have died cannot sing praises to you;
those who die don't trust you
to help them.

¹⁹The people who are alive are the ones who praise you.

They praise you as I praise you today.

A father should tell his children
that you provide help.

²⁰The Lord saved me,
so we will play songs on stringed instruments
in the Temple of the Lord
all the days of our lives.

²¹Then Isaiah said, “Make a paste from figs and put it on Hezekiah’s boil. Then he will get well.” ²²Hezekiah then asked Isaiah, “What will be the sign? What will show that I will go up to the Temple of the Lord?”

Messengers from Babylon

At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan was king of Babylon. He sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, because he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick and was now well. ²Hezekiah was pleased and showed the messengers what was in his storehouses: the silver, gold, spices, expensive perfumes, his swords and shields, and all his wealth. He showed them everything in his palace and in his kingdom.

³Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked him, “What did these men say? Where did they come from?”

Hezekiah said, “They came from a faraway country—from Babylon.”

⁴So Isaiah asked him, “What did they see in your palace?”

Hezekiah said, “They saw everything in my palace. I showed them all my wealth.”

⁵Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah: “Listen to the words of the Lord All-Powerful: ⁶‘In the future everything in your palace and everything your ancestors have stored up until this day will be taken away to Babylon. Nothing will be left,’ says the Lord. ⁷Some of your own children, those who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become servants in the palace of the king of Babylon.”

⁸Hezekiah told Isaiah, “These words from the Lord are good.” He said this because he thought, “There will be peace and security in my lifetime.”

Life Lessons

Isaiah 40:1–41:29

Situation

God promised to remain faithful to his people. The Jews felt that God had ignored them, but God would rescue them from captivity.

Observation

Because he is perfect, all-powerful, and knows everything, God transcends nature. Mysteriously, though, he still concerns himself with our lives.

Inspiration

God is always first, and God will surely be last.

To say this is not to draw God downward into the stream of time and involve Him in the flux and flow of the world. He stands above His own creation and outside of time; but for the convenience of His creatures, who are children of time, He makes free use of time-words when referring to Himself. So He says that He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last.

Man in the plan of God has been granted considerable say; but never is he permitted to utter the first word nor the last. That is the prerogative of the Deity, and one which He will never surrender to His creatures.

Man has no say about the time or place of his birth; God determines that without consulting the man himself. One day the little man finds himself in consciousness and accepts the fact that he is. There

his volitional life begins. Before that he had nothing to say about anything. After that he struts and boasts and utters his defiant proclamations of individual freedom, and encouraged by the sound of his own voice he may declare his independence of God and call himself an “atheist” or an “agnostic.” Have your fun, little man; you are only chattering in the interim between first and last; you had no voice at the first and you will have none at the last. God reserves the right to take up at the last where He began at the first, and you are in the hands of God whether you will or not.

This knowledge should humble us and encourage us, too. It should humble us when we remember how frail we are, how utterly dependent on God; and it should encourage us to know that when everything else has passed we may still have God no less surely than before.

(From *The Root of Righteousness* by A. W. Tozer)

Application

Is anything in your life guaranteed? Is your career unshakable, your family immortal, your money eternal? Do not base your comfort and enjoyment on what could be gone tomorrow. Only God and his Word will last for ever—let these be the basis of everything in your life.

Exploration

Waiting—[Isaiah 52:10](#); [2 Corinthians 4:1](#); [Hebrews 12:1–3](#).

Israel's Punishment Will End

Your God says,

“Comfort, comfort my people.

²Speak kindly to the people of Jerusalem
and tell them

that their time of service is finished,
that they have paid for their sins,
that the Lord has punished Jerusalem
twice for every sin they did.”

³This is the voice of one who calls out:

“Prepare in the desert
the way for the Lord.

Make a straight road in the dry lands
for our God.

⁴Every valley should be raised up,
and every mountain and hill should be made flat.
The rough ground should be made level,
and the rugged ground should be made smooth.

⁵Then the glory of the Lord will be shown,
and all people together will see it.
The Lord himself said these things.”

⁶A voice says, “Cry out!”

Then I said, “What shall I cry out?”

“Say all people are like the grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.

⁷The grass dies and the flowers fall
when the breath of the Lord blows on them.
Surely the people are like grass.

⁸The grass dies and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God will live forever.”

⁹Jerusalem, you have good news to tell.
Go up on a high mountain.

Jerusalem, you have good news to tell.
Shout out loud the good news.
Shout it out and don’t be afraid.

Say to the towns of Judah,
“Here is your God.”

¹⁰Look, the Lord God is coming with power
to rule all the people.

Look, he will bring reward for his people;
he will have their payment with him.

¹¹He takes care of his people like a shepherd.
He gathers them like lambs in his arms
and carries them close to him.

He gently leads the mothers of the lambs.

God Is Supreme

¹²Who has measured the oceans in the palm of his
hand?

Who has used his hand to measure the sky?

Who has used a bowl to measure all the dust of the earth

and scales to weigh the mountains and hills?

¹³Who has known the mind of the Lord
or been able to give him advice?

¹⁴Whom did he ask for help?

Who taught him the right way?

Who taught him knowledge

and showed him the way to understanding?

¹⁵The nations are like one small drop in a bucket;
they are no more than the dust on his measuring
scales.

To him the islands are no more than fine dust on his
scales.

¹⁶All the trees in Lebanon are not enough for the altar
fires,

and all the animals in Lebanon are not enough for
burnt offerings.

¹⁷Compared to the Lord all the nations are worth
nothing;

to him they are less than nothing.

¹⁸Can you compare God to anything?

Can you compare him to an image of anything?

¹⁹An idol is formed by a craftsman,
and a goldsmith covers it with gold
and makes silver chains for it.

²⁰A poor person cannot buy those expensive statues,
so he finds a tree that will not rot.

Then he finds a skilled craftsman

to make it into an idol that will not fall over.

²¹Surely you know. Surely you have heard.
Surely from the beginning someone told you.
Surely you understand how the earth was created.

²²God sits on his throne above the circle of the earth,
and compared to him, people are like grasshoppers.
He stretches out the skies like a piece of cloth
and spreads them out like a tent to sit under.

²³He makes rulers unimportant
and the judges of this world worth nothing.

²⁴They are like plants that are placed in the ground,
like seeds that are planted.
As soon as they begin to grow strong,
he blows on them and they die,
and the wind blows them away like chaff.

²⁵God, the Holy One, says, “Can you compare me to
anyone?

Is anyone equal to me?”

²⁶Look up to the skies.

Who created all these stars?

He leads out the army of heaven one by one
and calls all the stars by name.

Because he is strong and powerful,
not one of them is missing.

²⁷People of Jacob, why do you complain?

People of Israel, why do you say,

“The Lord does not see what happens to me;
he does not care if I am treated fairly”?

²⁸Surely you know.

Surely you have heard.

The Lord is the God who lives forever,
who created all the world.

He does not become tired or need to rest.

No one can understand how great his wisdom is.

²⁹He gives strength to those who are tired
and more power to those who are weak.

³⁰Even children become tired and need to rest,
and young people trip and fall.

³¹But the people who trust the Lord will become strong
again.

They will rise up as an eagle in the sky;
they will run and not need rest;
they will walk and not become tired.

The Lord Will Help Israel

The Lord says, "Faraway countries, listen to me.
Let the nations become strong.
Come to me and speak;
we will meet together to decide who is right.

²"Who caused the one to come from the east?
Who gives him victories everywhere he goes?
The one who brought him gives nations over to him
and defeats kings.
He uses his sword, and kings become like dust.
He uses his bow, and they are blown away like chaff.
³He chases them and is never hurt,
going places he has never been before.
⁴Who caused this to happen?
Who has controlled history since the beginning?
I, the Lord, am the one. I was here at the beginning,
and I will be here when all things are finished."

⁵All you faraway places, look and be afraid;
all you places far away on the earth, shake with fear.
Come close and listen to me.

⁶The workers help each other
and say to each other, "Be strong!"

⁷The craftsman encourages the goldsmith,
and the workman who smooths the metal with a
hammer encourages the one who shapes the metal.
He says, "This metal work is good."
He nails the statue to a base so it can't fall over.

Only the Lord Can Save Us

⁸The Lord says, “People of Israel, you are my servants.
People of Jacob, I chose you.

You are from the family of my friend Abraham.

⁹I took you from places far away on the earth
and called you from a faraway country.

I said, ‘You are my servants.’

I have chosen you and have not turned against you.

¹⁰So don’t worry, because I am with you.

Don’t be afraid, because I am your God.

I will make you strong and will help you;

I will support you with my right hand that saves you.

¹¹“All those people who are angry with you
will be ashamed and disgraced.

Those who are against you
will disappear and be lost.

¹²You will look for your enemies,
but you will not find them.

Those who fought against you
will vanish completely.

¹³I am the Lord your God,
who holds your right hand,
and I tell you, ‘Don’t be afraid.
I will help you.’

¹⁴You few people of Israel who are left,
do not be afraid even though you are weak as a worm.
I myself will help you,” says the Lord.

“The one who saves you is the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁵Look, I have made you like a new threshing board
with many sharp teeth.

So you will walk on mountains and crush them;
you will make the hills like chaff.

¹⁶You will throw them into the air, and the wind will
carry them away;

a windstorm will scatter them.

Then you will be happy in the Lord;
you will be proud of the Holy One of Israel.

^{17c}The poor and needy people look for water,
but they can't find any.

Their tongues are dry with thirst.

But I, the Lord, will answer their prayers;

I, the God of Israel, will not leave them to die.

¹⁸I will make rivers flow on the dry hills
and springs flow through the valleys.

I will change the desert into a lake of water
and the dry land into fountains of water.

¹⁹I will make trees grow in the desert—
cedars, acacia, myrtle, and olive trees.

I will put pine, fir, and cypress trees
growing together in the desert.

²⁰People will see these things and understand;
they will think carefully about these things and learn
that the Lord's power did this,
that the Holy One of Israel made these things.”

The Lord Challenges False Gods

²¹The Lord says, “Present your case.”
The King of Jacob says, “Tell me your arguments.

²²Bring in your idols to tell us
what is going to happen.
Have them tell us what happened in the beginning.
Then we will think about these things,
and we will know how they will turn out.
Or tell us what will happen in the future.

²³Tell us what is coming next
so we will believe that you are gods.
Do something, whether it is good or bad,
and make us afraid.

²⁴You gods are less than nothing;
you can’t do anything.
Those who worship you should be hated.

²⁵“I have brought [someone to come out of the north](#)
I have called by name a man from the east, and he
knows me.

He walks on kings as if they were mud,
just as a potter walks on the clay.

²⁶Who told us about this before it happened?
Who told us ahead of time so we could say, ‘He was
right’?

None of you told us anything;
none of you told us before it happened;
no one heard you tell about it.

²⁷I, the Lord, was the first one to tell Jerusalem that the
people were coming home.

I sent a messenger to Jerusalem with the good news.

²⁸I look at the idols, but there is not one that can

answer.

None of them can give advice;
none of them can answer my questions.

²⁹Look, all these idols are false.

They cannot do anything;
they are worth nothing.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 42:1–43:28

Situation

Isaiah looked ahead to the time when Jesus would bring justice to the world. Isaiah pointed out that although the Israelites were unfaithful to God, God would still deliver them from captivity ([43:8–28](#)).

Observation

God never gives up on us. He always pursues us when we wander from him.

Inspiration

John the Baptist saw a dove and believed. James Whittaker saw a sea gull and believed. Who's to say the one who sent the first didn't send the second?

James Whittaker was a member of the handpicked crew that flew the B-17 Flying Fortress captained by Eddie Rickenbacker. Anybody who remembers October of 1942 remembers the day Rickenbacker and his crew were reported lost at sea.

Somewhere over the Pacific, out of radio range, the plane ran out of fuel and crashed into the ocean. The nine men spent the next month floating in three rafts. They battled the heat, the storms, and the water. Sharks, some ten feet long, would ram their nine-foot boats. After only eight days their rations were eaten or destroyed by saltwater. It would take a miracle to survive.

One morning after their daily devotions, Rickenbacker leaned his head back against the raft

and pulled his hat over his eyes. A bird landed on his head. He peered out from under his hat. Every eye was on him. He instinctively knew it was a sea gull.

Rickenbacker caught it, and the crew ate it. The bird's intestines were used for bait to catch fish ... and the crew survived to tell the story. A story about a stranded crew with no hope or help in sight. A story about prayers offered and prayers answered. A story about a visitor from an unknown land traveling a great distance to give his life as a sacrifice.

A story of salvation.

A story much like our own. Weren't we, like the crew, stranded? Weren't we, like the crew, praying? And weren't we, like the crew, rescued by a visitor we've never seen through a sacrifice we'll never forget?

You may have heard the Rickenbacker story before. You may have even heard it from me. You may have read it in one of my books. Coreen Schwenk did. She was engaged to the only crew member who did not survive, young Sgt. Alex Kacymarcyck. As a result of a 1985 reunion of the crew, Mrs. Schwenk learned that the widow of James Whittaker lived only eighty miles from her house. The two women met and shared their stories.

After reading this story in my book *In the Eye of the Storm*, Mrs. Schwenk felt compelled to write to me. The real miracle, she informed me, was not a bird on the head of Eddie Rickenbacker but a change in the heart of James Whittaker. The greatest event of that day was not the rescue of a crew but the rescue

of a soul.

James Whittaker was an unbeliever. The plane crash didn't change his unbelief. The days facing death didn't cause him to reconsider his destiny. In fact, Mrs. Whittaker said her husband grew irritated with John Bartak, a crew member who continually read his Bible privately and aloud.

But his protests didn't stop Bartak from reading. Nor did Whittaker's resistance stop the Word from penetrating his soul. Unknown to Whittaker, the soil of his heart was being plowed. For it was one morning after a Bible reading that the sea gull landed on Captain Rickenbacker's head.

And at that moment Jim became a believer.

I chuckled when I read the letter. Not at the letter; I believe every word of it. Nor at James Whittaker. I have every reason to believe his conversion was real. But I had to chuckle at ... please excuse me ... I had to chuckle at God.

Isn't that just like him? Who would go to such extremes to save a soul? Such an effort to get a guy's attention. The rest of the world is occupied with Germany and Hitler. Every headline is reporting the actions of Roosevelt and Churchill. The globe is locked in a battle for freedom ... and the Father is in the Pacific sending a missionary pigeon to save a soul. Oh, the lengths to which God will go to get our attention and win our affection. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

Thank God for the lengths he went to bring you to

himself. Reflect on the extreme measures Jesus took to purchase your salvation. Remember, that as you go through each day, Jesus continues to work in your life to bring you back to himself each time you stray.

Exploration

God's Love—[Deuteronomy 7:8](#); [Jeremiah 31:3](#); [John 3:16](#); [Romans 5:8](#); [Ephesians 2:4–5](#); [2 Peter 3:9](#); [1 John 3:1](#).

The Lord's Special Servant

“Here is my servant, the one I support.
He is the one I chose, and I am pleased with him.
I have put my Spirit upon him,
and he will bring justice to all nations.

²He will not cry out or yell
or speak loudly in the streets.

³He will not break a crushed blade of grass
or put out even a weak flame.
He will truly bring justice;

⁴he will not lose hope or give up
until he brings justice to the world.
And people far away will trust his teachings.”

⁵God, the Lord, said these things.
He created the skies and stretched them out.
He spread out the earth and everything on it.
He gives life to all people on earth,
to everyone who walks on the earth.

⁶The Lord says, “I, the Lord, called you to do right,
and I will hold your hand
and protect you.

You will be the sign of my agreement with the people,
a light to shine for all people.

⁷You will help the blind to see.
You will free those who are in prison,

and you will lead those who live in darkness out of their prison.

⁸“I am the Lord. That is my name.
I will not give my glory to another;
I will not let idols take the praise that should be mine.
⁹The things I said would happen have happened,
and now I tell you about new things.
Before those things happen,
I tell you about them.”

A Song of Praise to the Lord

¹⁰Sing a new song to the Lord;
sing his praise everywhere on the earth.
Praise him, you people who sail on the seas and you
animals who live in them.

Praise him, you people living in faraway places.

¹¹The deserts and their cities should praise him.
The settlements of Kedar should praise him.
The people living in Sela should sing for joy;
they should shout from the mountaintops.

¹²They should give glory to the Lord.
People in faraway lands should praise him.

¹³The Lord will march out like a strong soldier;
he will be excited like a man ready to fight a war.
He will shout out the battle cry
and defeat his enemies.

¹⁴The Lord says. “For a long time I have said nothing:

The Lord says, For a long time I have said nothing,
I have been quiet and held myself back.

But now I will cry out
and strain like a woman giving birth to a child.

¹⁵I will destroy the hills and mountains
and dry up all their plants.

I will make the rivers become dry land
and dry up the pools of water.

¹⁶Then I will lead the blind along a way they never
knew;

I will guide them along paths they have not known.

I will make the darkness become light for them,
and the rough ground smooth.

These are the things I will do;

I will not leave my people.

¹⁷But those who trust in idols,
who say to their statues,
'You are our gods'
will be rejected in disgrace.

Israel Refused to Listen to the Lord

¹⁸“You who are deaf, hear me.

You who are blind, look and see.

¹⁹No one is more blind than my servant Israel
or more deaf than the messenger I send.

No one is more blind than the person I own
or more blind than the servant of the Lord.

²⁰Israel, you have seen much, but you have not
obeyed.

You hear, but you refuse to listen.”

²¹The Lord made his teachings wonderful,
because he is good.

²²These people have been defeated and robbed.
They are trapped in pits
or locked up in prison.
Like robbers, enemies have taken them away,
and there is no one to save them.
Enemies carried them off,
and no one said, “Bring them back.”

²³Will any of you listen to this?
Will you listen carefully in the future?

²⁴Who let the people of Jacob be carried off?
Who let robbers take Israel away?
The Lord allowed this to happen,
because we sinned against him.
We did not live the way he wanted us to live
and did not obey his teaching.

²⁵So he became very angry with us
and brought terrible wars against us.
It was as if the people of Israel had fire all around them,
but they didn’t know what was happening.
It was as if they were burning,
but they didn’t pay any attention.

God Is Always with His People

Now this is what the Lord says.
He created you, people of Jacob;
he formed you, people of Israel.
He says, "Don't be afraid, because I have saved you.
I have called you by name, and you are mine.
²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.
When you cross rivers, you will not drown.
When you walk through fire, you will not be burned,
nor will the flames hurt you.
³This is because I, the Lord, am your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
I gave Egypt to pay for you,
and I gave Cush and Seba to make you mine.
⁴Because you are precious to me,
because I give you honor and love you,
I will give other people in your place;
I will give other nations to save your life.
⁵Don't be afraid, because I am with you.
I will bring your children from the east
and gather you from the west.
⁶I will tell the north: Give my people to me.
I will tell the south: Don't keep my people in prison.
Bring my sons from far away
and my daughters from faraway places.
⁷Bring to me all the people who are mine,
whom I made for my glory,
whom I formed and made."

Judah Is God's Witness

⁸Bring out the people who have eyes but don't see
and those who have ears but don't hear.

⁹All the nations gather together,
and all the people come together.

Which of their gods said this would happen?

Which of their gods can tell what happened in the
beginning?

Let them bring their witnesses to prove they were
right.

Then others will say, "It is true."

¹⁰The Lord says, "You are my witnesses
and the servant I chose.

I chose you so you would know and believe me,
so you would understand that I am the true God.

There was no God before me,
and there will be no God after me.

¹¹I myself am the Lord;

I am the only Savior.

¹²I myself have spoken to you, saved you, and told
you these things.

It was not some foreign god among you.

You are my witnesses, and I am God,"
says the Lord.

¹³"I have always been God.

No one can save people from my power;
when I do something, no one can change it."

¹⁴This is what the Lord, who saves you,

the Holy One of Israel, says:
“I will send armies to Babylon for you,
and I will knock down all its locked gates.
The Babylonians will shout their cries of sorrow.
¹⁵I am the Lord, your Holy One,
the Creator of Israel, your King.”

God Will Save His People Again

¹⁶This is what the Lord says.
He is the one who made a road through the sea
and a path through rough waters.
¹⁷He is the one who defeated the chariots and horses
and the mighty armies.
They fell together and will never rise again.
They were destroyed as a flame is put out.
¹⁸The Lord says, “Forget what happened before,
and do not think about the past.
¹⁹Look at the new thing I am going to do.
It is already happening. Don’t you see it?
I will make a road in the desert
and rivers in the dry land.
²⁰Even the wild animals will be thankful to me—
the wild dogs and owls.
They will honor me when I put water in the desert
and rivers in the dry land
to give water to my people, the ones I chose.
²¹The people I made
will sing songs to praise me.

²²“People of Jacob, you have not called to me;
people of Israel, you have become tired of me.

²³You have not brought me your sacrifices of sheep
nor honored me with your sacrifices.

I did not weigh you down with sacrifices to offer
or make you tired with incense to burn.

²⁴So you did not buy incense for me;
you did not freely bring me fat from your sacrifices.

Instead you have weighed me down with your many
sins;
you have made me tired of your many wrongs.

²⁵“I, I am the One who forgives all your sins, for my
sake;

I will not remember your sins.

²⁶But you should remind me.

Let’s meet and decide what is right.

Tell what you have done and show you are right.

²⁷Your first father sinned,
and your leaders have turned against me.

²⁸So I will make your holy rulers unholy.
I will bring destruction on the people of Jacob,
and I will let Israel be insulted.”

Life Lessons

[Isaiah 44:1–46:13](#)

Situation

God reaffirmed Israel as his chosen people. He warned them that practicing idolatry was foolish.

Observation

God reminded the Israelites that worshiping an inanimate object, such as a piece of firewood, as a god was not only futile but stupid.

Inspiration

You can make an idol out of anything or anyone in life. A church building can become an idol to us, when all the while it is simply a place to meet and worship our Lord—nothing more. Your child can become your idol ... in subtle ways you can so adore that little one that your whole life revolves around the child. Your mate or date can be given first place in your life and literally idolized. Your work can easily become your God ... as can some pursuit in life. A house, a lawn, an antique car, a letter sport, an education, a trip abroad, and even that goal of “retirement.”...

Your Lord and Savior wants to occupy first place. [Matthew 6:33](#) says that when He *has* it, everything else will be added to you. How long has it been since you’ve enlisted your Lord’s help in a private, personal temple-cleansing session? It’s so easy to get attached to idols—good things, inappropriately adored. But when you have Jesus in the center of the

room, everything else only junks up the decor. (From *Come Before Winter* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Who created you? Who can you ultimately depend on? Where can you find supreme truth? Where can you find happiness? Did you answer anything but God for these questions? If so, you may be in danger of falling into idolatry. Pull yourself out of that trap and let God be the one you rely on.

Exploration

Idolatry—[Exodus 20:3](#); [1 Samuel 15:23](#); [1 Corinthians 6:9](#).

God, I have a question: Why do you love your children? I don't want to sound irreverent, but only heaven knows how much pain we've brought you. —Max Lucado (*A Gentle Thunder*)

The Lord Is the Only God

The Lord says, “People of Jacob, you are my servants. Listen to me!

People of Israel, I chose you.”

²This is what the Lord says, who made you,
who formed you in your mother's body,
who will help you:

“People of Jacob, my servants, don't be afraid.
Israel, I chose you.

³I will pour out water for the thirsty land
and make streams flow on dry land.
I will pour out my Spirit into your children
and my blessing on your descendants.

⁴Your children will grow like a tree in the grass,
like poplar trees growing beside streams of water.

⁵One person will say, ‘I belong to the Lord,’
and another will use the name Jacob.
Another will sign his name ‘I am the Lord's,’
and another will use the name Israel.”

⁶The Lord, the king of Israel,
is the Lord All-Powerful, who saves Israel.

This is what he says: "I am the beginning and the end.
I am the only God.

⁷Who is a god like me?

That god should come and prove it.

Let him tell and explain all that has happened since I
set up my ancient people.

He should also tell what will happen in the future.

⁸Don't be afraid! Don't worry!

I have always told you what will happen.

You are my witnesses.

There is no other God but me.

I know of no other Rock; I am the only One."

Idols Are Useless

⁹Some people make idols, but they are worth nothing.

People treasure them, but they are useless.

Those people are witnesses for the statues, but those
people cannot see.

They know nothing, so they will be ashamed.

¹⁰Who made these gods?

Who made these useless idols?

¹¹The workmen who made them will be ashamed,
because they are only human.

If they all would come together,
they would all be ashamed and afraid.

¹²One workman uses tools to heat iron,
and he works over hot coals.

With his hammer he beats the metal and makes a statue,
using his powerful arms.
But when he becomes hungry, he loses his power.
If he does not drink water, he becomes tired.

¹³Another workman uses a line and a compass
to draw on the wood.
Then he uses his chisels to cut a statue
and his calipers to measure the statue.
In this way, the workman makes the wood look exactly
like a person,
and this statue of a person sits in the house.

¹⁴He cuts down cedars
or cypress or oak trees.
Those trees grew by their own power in the forest.
Or he plants a pine tree, and the rain makes it grow.

¹⁵Then he burns the tree.
He uses some of the wood for a fire to keep himself
warm.

He also starts a fire to bake his bread.
But he uses part of the wood to make a god, and then
he worships it!

He makes the idol and bows down to it!
¹⁶The man burns half of the wood in the fire.

He uses the fire to cook his meat,
and he eats the meat until he is full.

He also burns the wood to keep himself warm. He says,
“Good! Now I am warm. I can see because of the fire’s
light.”

¹⁷But he makes a statue from the wood that is left and

calls it his god.

He bows down to it and worships it.

He prays to it and says,

“You are my god. Save me!”

¹⁸Those people don’t know what they are doing. They don’t understand!

It is as if their eyes are covered so they can’t see.

Their minds don’t understand.

¹⁹They have not thought about these things;
they don’t understand.

They have never thought to themselves,

“I burned half of the wood in the fire

and used the hot coals to bake my bread.

I cooked and ate my meat.

And I used the wood that was left to make this hateful thing.

I am worshiping a block of wood!”

²⁰He doesn’t know what he is doing;

his confused mind leads him the wrong way.

He cannot save himself

or say, “This statue I am holding is a false god.”

The Lord Is the True God

²¹“People of Jacob, remember these things!

People of Israel, remember you are my servants.

I made you, and you are my servants.

So Israel, I will not forget you.

²²I have swept away your sins like a big cloud;

I have removed your sins like a cloud that disappears into the air.

Come back to me because I saved you.”

²³Skies, sing for joy because the Lord did great things!

Earth, shout for joy, even in your deepest parts!

Sing, you mountains, with thanks to God.

Sing, too, you trees in the forest!

The Lord saved the people of Jacob!

He showed his glory when he saved Israel.

²⁴This is what the Lord says, who saved you,

who formed you in your mother’s body:

“I, the Lord, made everything,

stretching out the skies by myself

and spreading out the earth all alone.

²⁵I show that the lying prophets’ signs are false;

I make fools of those who do magic.

I confuse even wise men;

they think they know much, but I make them look foolish.

²⁶I make the messages of my servants come true;

I make the advice of my messengers come true.

I say to Jerusalem,

‘People will live in you again!’

I say to the towns of Judah,

‘You will be built again!’

I say to Jerusalem’s ruins,

‘I will repair you.’

²⁷I tell the deep waters, ‘Become dry!

I will make your streams become dry!’

²⁸I say of [Cyrus](#), ‘He is my shepherd

and will do all that I want him to do.

He will say to Jerusalem, “You will be built again!”

He will tell the Temple, “Your foundations will be rebuilt.” ””

God Chooses Cyrus to Free Israel

This is what the Lord says to Cyrus, his appointed king:

¹“I hold your right hand
and will help you defeat nations
and take away other kings’ power.

I will open doors for you
so city gates will not stop you.

²I will go before you
and make the mountains flat.

I will break down the bronze gates of the cities
and cut through their iron bars.

³I will give you the wealth that is stored away
and the hidden riches
so you will know I am the Lord,
the God of Israel, who calls you by name.

⁴I do these things for my servants, the people of Jacob,
and for my chosen people, the Israelites.

Cyrus, I call you by name,
and I give you a title of honor even though you don’t
know me.

⁵I am the Lord. There is no other God;
I am the only God.

I will make you strong,
even though you don’t know me,

⁶so that everyone will know
there is no other God.

From the east to the west they will know
I alone am the Lord.

⁷I made the light and the darkness.
I bring peace, and I cause troubles.
I, the Lord, do all these things.

⁸“Sky above, make victory fall like rain;
clouds, pour down victory.
Let the earth receive it,
and let salvation grow,
and let victory grow with it.
I, the Lord, have created it.

⁹“How terrible it will be for those who argue with the
God who made them.

They are like a piece of broken pottery among many
pieces.

The clay does not ask the potter,
‘What are you doing?’
The thing that is made doesn’t say to its maker,
‘You have no hands.’

¹⁰How terrible it will be for the child who says to his
father,

‘Why are you giving me life?’

How terrible it will be for the child who says to his
mother,

‘Why are you giving birth to me?’”

¹¹This is what the Lord,
the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker, says:
“You ask me about what will happen.
You question me about my children.
You give me orders about what I have made.

¹²I made the earth
and all the people living on it.
With my own hands I stretched out the skies,
and I commanded all the armies in the sky.
¹³I will bring Cyrus to do good things,
and I will make his work easy.
He will rebuild my city
and set my people free
without any payment or reward.
The Lord All-Powerful says this.”

¹⁴The Lord says,
“The goods made in Egypt and Cush
and the tall people of Seba
will come to you
and will become yours.
The Sabeans will walk behind you,
coming along in chains.
They will bow down before you
and pray to you, saying,
‘God is with you,
and there is no other God.’”

¹⁵God and Savior of Israel,
you are a God that people cannot see.

¹⁶All the people who make idols will be put to great
shame;
they will go off together in disgrace.
¹⁷But Israel will be saved by the Lord,
and that salvation will continue forever.
Never again will Israel be put to shame.

¹⁸The Lord created the heavens.
He is the God who formed the earth and made it.
He did not want it to be empty,
but he wanted life on the earth.
This is what the Lord says:
“I am the Lord. There is no other God.

¹⁹I did not speak in secret
or hide my words in some dark place.
I did not tell the family of Jacob
to look for me in empty places.
I am the Lord, and I speak the truth;
I say what is right.

²⁰“You people who have escaped from other nations,
gather together and come before me;
come near together.

People who carry idols of wood don't know what they
are doing.

They pray to a god who cannot save them.

²¹Tell these people to come to me.
Let them talk about these things together.
Who told you long ago that this would happen?
Who told about it long ago?
I, the Lord, said these things.
There is no other God besides me.
I am the only good God. I am the Savior.
There is no other God.

²²“All people everywhere,
follow me and be saved.
I am God. There is no other God.

²³I will make a promise by my own power,
and my promise is true;
what I say will not be changed.

I promise that everyone will bow before me
and will promise to follow me.

²⁴People will say about me, 'Goodness and power
come only from the Lord.'"

Everyone who has been angry with him
will come to him and be ashamed.

²⁵But with the Lord's help, the people of Israel
will be found to be good,
and they will praise him.

False Gods Are Useless

Bel and Nebo bow down.

Their idols are carried by animals.

The statues are only heavy loads that must be carried;
they only make people tired.

²These gods will all bow down.

They cannot save themselves
but will all be carried away like prisoners.

³“Family of Jacob, listen to me!

All you people from Israel who are still alive, listen!

I have carried you since you were born;

I have taken care of you from your birth.

⁴Even when you are old, I will be the same.

Even when your hair has turned gray, I will take care of
you.

I made you and will take care of you.

I will carry you and save you.

⁵“Can you compare me to anyone?

No one is equal to me or like me.

⁶Some people are rich with gold
and weigh their silver on the scales.

They hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god.

Then they bow down and worship it.

⁷They put it on their shoulders and carry it.

They set it in its place, and there it stands;

it cannot move from its place.

People may yell at it, but it cannot answer.

It cannot save them from their troubles.

⁸“Remember this, and do not forget it!

Think about these things, you who turn against God.

⁹Remember what happened long ago.

Remember that I am God, and there is no other God.

I am God, and there is no one like me.

¹⁰From the beginning I told you what would happen in the end.

A long time ago I told you things that have not yet happened.

When I plan something, it happens.

What I want to do, I will do.

¹¹I am calling a man from the east to carry out my plan;
he will come like a hawk from a country far away.

I will make what I have said come true;

I will do what I have planned.

¹²Listen to me, you stubborn people,
who are far from what is right.

¹³I will soon do the things that are right.

I will bring salvation soon.

I will save Jerusalem

and bring glory to Israel.”

Life Lessons

Isaiah 47:1–48:22

Situation

Isaiah celebrated the overthrow of Babylon with a song of victory. God continued to rebuke Israel for its stubbornness.

Observation

Israel had a history of unyielding stubbornness in its relationship with God. This led to idolatry and unnecessary suffering.

Inspiration

When we are yielded to God and His will, we are filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit controls and dominates us. Now we are to *act* on that truth and *walk* or live with full assurance that God has already filled us, and we are under His control...

Personally, I find it helpful to begin each day silently committing that day into God's hands. I thank Him that I belong to Him, and I thank Him that He knows what the day holds for me. I ask Him to take my life that day and use it for His glory. I ask Him to cleanse me from anything which would hinder His work in my life. And then I step out in faith, knowing that His Holy Spirit is filling me continually as I trust in Him and obey His Word. Sometimes during the day I may not be aware of His presence; sometimes I am. But at the end of the day, I can look back and thank Him, because I see His hand at work. He promised to be with me that day—and He has been! (From *The*

Holy Spirit by Billy Graham)

Application

Does your family name give you confidence? Can you rely on your upstanding church? Does your house make you feel secure? All securities in this life will fail. Trust completely in God. Let him be your unfailing security.

Exploration

Repentance—[Psalm 32:5](#); [Ezekiel 18:23](#); [1 John 1:9](#). [Isaiah 49:1–52:12](#)

God Will Destroy Babylon

The Lord says, “City of Babylon, go down and sit in the dirt.

People of Babylon, sit on the ground.

You are no longer the ruler.

You will no longer be called

tender or beautiful.

²You must use large stones to grind grain into flour.

Remove your veil and your nice skirts.

Uncover your legs and cross the rivers.

³People will see your nakedness;

they will see your shame.

I will punish you;

I will punish every one of you.”

⁴Our Savior is named the Lord All-Powerful;

he is the Holy One of Israel.

⁵“Babylon, sit in darkness and say nothing.

You will no longer be called the queen of kingdoms.

⁶I was angry with my people,

so I rejected those who belonged to me.

I gave them to you,

but you showed them no mercy.

You even made the old people

But you did not think about these things
or consider what would happen.

You think you are safe.
You tell yourself,
'I am the only important person.
I will never be a widow
or lose my children.'

You will lose your children and your husband.
These things will truly happen to you,
in spite of all your magic,
in spite of your powerful tricks.

You say to yourself,
'I am God, and no one is equal to me.'

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¹²Keep on using your tricks
and doing all your magic
that you have used since you were young.
Maybe they will help you;
maybe you will be able to scare someone.

¹³You are tired of the advice you have received.
So let those who study the sky—
those who tell the future by looking at the stars and
the new moons—
let them save you from what is about to happen to
you.

¹⁴But they are like straw;
fire will quickly burn them up.
They cannot save themselves
from the power of the fire.
They are not like coals that give warmth
nor like a fire that you may sit beside.

¹⁵You have worked with these people,
and they have been with you since you were young,
but they will not be able to help you.
Everyone will go his own way,
and there will be no one left to save you.”

God Controls the Future

The Lord says, “Family of Jacob, listen to me.
You are called Israel,
and you come from the family of Judah.
You swear by the Lord’s name
and praise the God of Israel,
but you are not honest or sincere.

²You call yourselves people of the holy city,
and you depend on the God of Israel,
who is named the Lord All-Powerful.

³Long ago I told you what would happen.
I said these things and made them known;
suddenly I acted, and these things happened.

⁴I knew you were stubborn;
your neck was like an iron muscle,
and your head was like bronze.

⁵So a long time ago I told you about these things;
I told you about them before they happened
so you couldn’t say, ‘My idols did this,
and my wooden and metal statues made these things
happen.’

⁶“You heard and saw everything that happened,
so you should tell this news to others.
Now I will tell you about new things,
hidden things that you don’t know yet.

⁷These things are happening now, not long ago;
you have not heard about them before today.
So you cannot say, ‘We already knew about that.’

⁸But you have not heard me; you have not understood.

Even long ago you did not listen to me.

I knew you would surely turn against me;
you have fought against me since you were born.

⁹But for my own sake I will be patient.

People will praise me for not becoming angry
and destroying you.

¹⁰I have made you pure, but not by fire, as silver is made pure.

I have purified you by giving you troubles.

¹¹I do this for myself, for my own sake.

I will not let people speak evil against me,
and I will not let some god take my glory.

Israel Will Be Free

¹²“People of Jacob, listen to me.

People of Israel, I have called you to be my people.

I am God;

I am the beginning and the end.

¹³I made the earth with my own hands.

With my right hand I spread out the skies.

When I call them,

they come together before me.”

¹⁴All of you, come together and listen.

None of the gods said these things would happen.

The Lord has chosen someone

to attack the Babylonians;
he will carry out his wishes against Babylon.

¹⁵“I have spoken; I have called [him](#).
I have brought him, and I will make him successful.

¹⁶Come to me and listen to this.
From the beginning I have spoken openly.
From the time it began, I was there.”

Now, the Lord God
has sent me with his Spirit.

¹⁷This is what the Lord, who saves you,
the Holy One of Israel, says:

“I am the Lord your God,
who teaches you to do what is good,
who leads you in the way you should go.

¹⁸If you had obeyed me,
you would have had peace like a full-flowing river.
Good things would have flowed to you like the waves
of the sea.

¹⁹You would have had many children,
as many as the grains of sand.
They would never have died out
nor been destroyed.”

²⁰My people, leave Babylon!
Run from the Babylonians!
Tell this news with shouts of joy to the people;
spread it everywhere on earth.

Say, “The Lord has saved his servants, the people of
Jacob.”

²¹They did not become thirsty when he led them through the deserts.

He made water flow from a rock for them.

He split the rock,
and water flowed out.

²²“There is no peace for evil people,” says the Lord.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 49:1–52:12

Situation

Isaiah introduced the purpose of the Servant-Messiah. Isaiah reminded the Israelites of God's previous rescue of them and of the Messiah's future saving work.

Observation

God has a long history when it comes to being faithful. He has kept his people safe for thousands of years.

Inspiration

We have already seen that the Bible teaches that God was a God of love. He wanted to do something for man. He wanted to save man. He wanted to free man from the curse of sin. How could He do it? God was a just God. He was righteous, and holy. He had warned man from the beginning that if he obeyed the Devil and disobeyed God, he would die physically and spiritually....

All through the Old Testament, God gave man the promise of salvation if by faith he would believe in the coming Redeemer. Therefore God began to teach His people that man could only be saved by substitution. Someone else would have to pay the bill for man's redemption....

Thanks be to God—that is exactly what happened! Looking down over the battlements of heaven He saw this planet swinging in space—

doomed, damned, crushed, and bound for hell. He saw you and me struggling beneath our load of sin and bound in the chains and ropes of sin. He made His decision in the council halls of God. The angelic hosts bowed in humility and awe as heaven's Prince of Princes and Lord of Lords, who could speak worlds into space, got into His jeweled chariot, went through pearly gates, across the steep of the skies, and on a black Judean night, while the stars sang together and the escorting angels chanted praises, stepped out of the chariot, threw off His robes, and became man!

(From *Peace with God* by Billy Graham)

Application

Meditate on the things God has saved you from: hell, drugs, despair, alcohol, sinful habits, hopelessness, restlessness, and selfishness. Thank God for this most wonderful gift of redemption.

Exploration

Redemption—[Psalm 31:5](#); [130:7](#); [Luke 1:68](#); [Romans 3:24](#); [Ephesians 4:30](#); [Titus 2:14](#); [1 Peter 1:18–19](#).

God Calls His Special Servant

All of you people in faraway places, listen to me.
Listen, all you nations far away.
Before I was born, the Lord called me to serve him.
The Lord named me while I was still in my mother's
body.

²He made my tongue like a sharp sword.
He hid me in the shadow of his hand.
He made me like a sharp arrow.
He hid me in the holder for his arrows.

³He told me, "Israel, you are my servant.
I will show my glory through you."

⁴But I said, "I have worked hard for nothing;
I have used all my power, but I did nothing useful.
But the Lord will decide what my work is worth;
God will decide my reward."

⁵The Lord made me in the body of my mother
to be his servant,
to lead the people of Jacob back to him
so that Israel might be gathered to him.
The Lord will honor me,
and I will get my strength from my God.

⁶Now he told me,
"You are an important servant to me
to bring back the tribes of Jacob,
to bring back the people of Israel who are left alive.

But, more importantly, I will make you a light for all nations

to show people all over the world the way to be saved.”

⁷The Lord who saves you
is the Holy One of Israel.

He speaks to the one who is hated by the people,
to the servant of rulers.

This is what he says: “Kings will see you and stand to honor you;

great leaders will bow down before you,
because the Lord can be trusted.

He is the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

The Day of Salvation

⁸This is what the Lord says:

“At the right time I will hear your prayers.

On the day of salvation I will help you.

I will protect you,

and you will be the sign of my agreement with the people.

You will bring back the people to the land
and give the land that is now ruined back to its owners.

⁹You will tell the prisoners, ‘Come out of your prison.’

You will tell those in darkness, ‘Come into the light.’

The people will eat beside the roads,

and they will find food even on bare hills.

¹⁰They will not be hungry or thirsty.

Neither the hot sun nor the desert wind will hurt them.

The God who comforts them will lead them

and guide them by springs of water.

¹¹I will make my mountains into roads,

and the roads will be raised up.

¹²Look, people are coming to me from far away,

from the north and from the west,

from Aswan in southern Egypt.”

¹³Heavens and earth, be happy.

Mountains, shout with joy,

because the Lord comforts his people

and will have pity on those who suffer.

Jerusalem and Her Children

¹⁴But Jerusalem said, “The Lord has left me;

the Lord has forgotten me.”

¹⁵The Lord answers, “Can a woman forget the baby she nurses?

Can she feel no kindness for the child to which she gave birth?

Even if she could forget her children,

I will not forget you.

¹⁶See, I have written your name on my hand.

Jerusalem, I always think about your walls.

¹⁷Your children will soon return to you,
and the people who defeated you and destroyed you
will leave.

¹⁸Look up and look around you.
All your children are gathering to return to you.”
The Lord says, “As surely as I live,
your children will be like jewels
that a bride wears proudly.

¹⁹“You were destroyed and defeated,
and your land was made useless.
But now you will have more people than the land can
hold,

and those people who destroyed you will be far away.

²⁰Children were born to you while you were sad,
but they will say to you,
‘This place is too small for us.
Give us a bigger place to live.’

²¹Then you will say to yourself,
‘Who gave me all these children?
I was sad and lonely,
defeated and separated from my people.
So who reared these children?
I was left all alone.
Where did all these children come from?’”

²²This is what the Lord God says:

“See, I will lift my hand to signal the nations;
I will raise my banner for all the people to see.

Then they will bring your sons back to you in their
arms,

and they will carry your daughters on their shoulders.
²³Kings will teach your children,
and daughters of kings will take care of them.
They will bow down before you
and kiss the dirt at your feet.
Then you will know I am the Lord.
Anyone who trusts in me will not be disappointed.”

²⁴Can the wealth a soldier wins in war be taken away
from him?

Can a prisoner be freed from a powerful soldier?

²⁵This is what the Lord says:

“The prisoners will be taken from the strong soldiers.

What the soldiers have taken will be saved.

I will fight your enemies,

and I will save your children.

²⁶I will force those who trouble you to eat their own
flesh.

Their own blood will be the wine that makes them
drunk.

Then everyone will know

I, the Lord, am the One who saves you;

I am the Powerful One of Jacob who saves you.”

Israel Was Punished for Its Sin

This is what the Lord says:

“People of Israel, you say I divorced your mother.

Then where is the paper that proves it?

Or do you think I sold you

to pay a debt?

Because of the evil things you did, I sold you.

Because of the times she turned against me, your mother was sent away.

²I came home and found no one there;

I called, but no one answered.

Do you think I am not able to save you?

Do I not have the power to save you?

Look, I need only to shout and the sea becomes dry.

I change rivers into a desert,

and their fish rot because there is no water;

they die of thirst.

³I can make the skies dark;

I can make them black like clothes of sadness.”

God's Servant Obeys

⁴The Lord God gave me the ability to teach

so that I know what to say to make the weak strong.

Every morning he wakes me.

He teaches me to listen like a student.

⁵The Lord God helps me learn,
and I have not turned against him
nor stopped following him.

⁶I offered my back to those who beat me.
I offered my cheeks to those who pulled my beard.
I won't hide my face from them
when they make fun of me and spit at me.

⁷The Lord God helps me,
so I will not be ashamed.
I will be determined,
and I know I will not be disgraced.

⁸He shows that I am innocent, and he is close to me.
So who can accuse me?
If there is someone, let us go to court together.
If someone wants to prove I have done wrong,
he should come and tell me.

⁹Look! It is the Lord God who helps me.
So who can prove me guilty?
Look! All those who try will become useless like old
clothes;
moths will eat them.

¹⁰Who among you fears the Lord
and obeys his servant?
That person may walk in the dark
and have no light.
Then let him trust in the Lord
and depend on his God.

¹¹But instead, some of you want to light your own fires
and make your own light.
So, go, walk in the light of your fires,

and trust your own light to guide you.
But this is what you will receive from me:
You will lie down in a place of pain.

Jerusalem Will Be Saved

The Lord says, "Listen to me,
those of you who try to live right and follow the Lord.
Look at the rock from which you were cut;
look at the stone quarry from which you were dug.

²Look at Abraham, your ancestor,
and Sarah, who gave birth to your ancestors.
Abraham had no children when I called him,
but I blessed him and gave him many descendants.

³So the Lord will comfort Jerusalem;
he will show mercy to those who live in her ruins.
He will change her deserts into a garden like Eden;
he will make her empty lands like the garden of the
Lord.

People there will be very happy;
they will give thanks and sing songs.

⁴"My people, listen to me;
my nation, pay attention to me.
I will give the people my teachings,
and my decisions will be like a light to all people.

⁵I will soon show that I do what is right.
I will soon save you.
I will use my power and judge all nations.
All the faraway places are waiting for me;
they wait for my power to help them.

⁶Look up to the heavens.
Look around you at the earth below.
The skies will disappear like clouds of smoke.

The earth will become useless like old clothes,
and its people will die like flies.
But my salvation will continue forever,
and my goodness will never end.

⁷“You people who know what is right should listen to me;
you people who follow my teachings should hear what I say.

Don’t be afraid of the evil things people say,
and don’t be upset by their insults.

⁸Moths will eat those people as if they were clothes,
and worms will eat them as if they were wool.
But my goodness will continue forever,
and my salvation will continue from now on.”

⁹Wake up, wake up, and use your strength,
powerful Lord.

Wake up as you did in the old times,
as you did a long time ago.

With your own power, you cut Rahab into pieces
and killed that sea monster.

¹⁰You dried up the sea
and the waters of the deep ocean.

You made the deepest parts of the sea into a road
for your people to cross over and be saved.

¹¹The people the Lord has freed will return
and enter Jerusalem with joy.

Their happiness will last forever.

They will have joy and gladness,
and all sadness and sorrow will be gone far away.

¹²The Lord says, "I am the one who comforts you.
So why should you be afraid of people, who die?
Why should you fear people who die like the grass?"
¹³Have you forgotten the Lord who made you,
who stretched out the skies
and made the earth?
Why are you always afraid
of those angry people who trouble you
and who want to destroy?
But where are those angry people now?
¹⁴People in prison will soon be set free;
they will not die in prison,
and they will have enough food.
¹⁵I am the Lord your God,
who stirs the sea and makes the waves roar.
My name is the Lord All-Powerful.
¹⁶I will give you the words I want you to say.
I will cover you with my hands and protect you.
I made the heavens and the earth,
and I say to Jerusalem, 'You are my people.'"

God Punished Israel

¹⁷Awake! Awake!
Get up, Jerusalem.
The Lord was very angry with you;
your punishment was like wine in a cup.
The Lord made you drink that wine;
you drank the whole cup until you stumbled.

¹⁸Jerusalem had many people,
but there was not one to lead her.
Of all the people who grew up there,
no one was there to guide her.

¹⁹Troubles came to you two by two,
but no one will feel sorry for you.
There was ruin and disaster, great hunger and fighting.
No one can comfort you.

²⁰Your people have become weak.
They fall down and lie on every street corner,
like animals caught in a net.
They have felt the full anger of the Lord
and have heard God's angry shout.

²¹So listen to me, poor Jerusalem,
you who are drunk but not from wine.

²²Your God will defend his people.
This is what the Lord your God says:
"The punishment I gave you is like a cup of wine.
You drank it and could not walk straight.

But I am taking that cup of my anger away from you,
and you will never be punished by my anger again.

²³I will now give that cup of punishment to those who
gave you pain,
who told you,
'Bow down so we can walk over you.'
They made your back like dirt for them to walk on;
you were like a street for them to travel on."

Jerusalem Will Be Saved

Wake up, wake up, Jerusalem! Become strong!

Be beautiful again,
holy city of Jerusalem.

The people who do not worship God and who are not
pure

will not enter you again.

²Jerusalem, you once were a prisoner.

Now shake off the dust and stand up.

Jerusalem, you once were a prisoner.

Now free yourself from the chains around your neck.

³This is what the Lord says:

“You were not sold for a price,
so you will be saved without cost.”

⁴This is what the Lord God says:

“First my people went down to Egypt to live.
Later Assyria made them slaves.

⁵“Now see what has happened,” says the Lord.

“Another nation has taken away my people for
nothing.

This nation who rules them makes fun of me,” says the
Lord.

“All day long they speak against me.

⁶This has happened so my people will know who I am,
and so, on that future day, they will know
that I am the one speaking to them.

It will really be me.”

⁷How beautiful is the person
who comes over the mountains to bring good news,
who announces peace
and brings good news,
who announces salvation
and says to Jerusalem,
“Your God is King.”

⁸Listen! Your guards are shouting.
They are all shouting for joy!
They all will see with their own eyes
when the Lord returns to Jerusalem.

⁹Jerusalem, your buildings are destroyed now,
but shout and rejoice together,
because the Lord has comforted his people.
He has saved Jerusalem.

¹⁰The Lord will show his holy power
to all the nations.
Then everyone on earth
will see the salvation of our God.

¹¹You people, leave, leave; get out of Babylon!
Touch nothing that is unclean.
You men who carry the Lord’s things used in worship,
leave there and make yourselves pure.

¹²You will not be forced to leave Babylon quickly;
you will not be forced to run away,
because the Lord will go before you,
and the God of Israel will guard you from behind.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 52:13–53:12

Situation

Isaiah prophesied about the coming of the Messiah, the Suffering Servant—Jesus Christ. He referred to the Servant's lowly existence, agonizing death, and honorable purpose.

Observation

We needed Christ to die for our sins and provide forgiveness because we're not going to find it any other way.

Inspiration

We humans want to do things our way. Forget the easy way. Forget the common way. Forget the best way. Forget God's way. We want to do things our way.

And, according to the Bible, that's precisely our problem. "We all have wandered away like sheep; each of us has gone his own way" ([Isaiah 53:6](#)).

You wouldn't think sheep would be obstinate. Of all God's animals, the sheep is the least able to take care of himself.

Sheep are dumb! Have you ever met a sheep trainer? Ever seen sheep tricks? Know anyone who has taught his sheep to roll over? Ever witnessed a circus sideshow featuring "Mazadon and his jumping sheep"? No. Sheep are just too dumb.

And defenseless. They have no fangs or claws. They can't bite you or outrun you. That's why you

never see sheep as team mascots. We've heard of the St. Louis Rams and the Chicago Bulls and the Seattle Seahawks, but the New York Lambs? Who wants to be a lamb? You couldn't even stir up a decent yell for the cheerleaders.

We are the sheep.

We don't make a peep.

Victory is yours to keep.

But count us if you want to sleep ...

Still uncomfortable with being considered a sheep? Will you humor me and take a simple quiz? See if you succeed in self-reliance. Raise your hand if any of the following describe you.

You can control your moods. You're never grumpy or sullen. You can't relate to Jekyll and Hyde. You're always upbeat and upright. Does that describe you? No? Well, let's try another.

You are at peace with everyone. Every relationship as sweet as fudge. Even your old flames speak highly of you. Love all and are loved by all. Is that you? If not, how about this description?

You have no fears. Call you the Teflon toughie. Wall Street plummets—no problem. Heart condition discovered—yawn. World War III starts—what's for dinner? Does this describe you?

You need no forgiveness. Never made a mistake. As square as a game of checkers. As clean as grandma's kitchen. Never cheated, never lied, never lied about cheating. Is that you? No?

Let's evaluate this. You can't control your moods. A few of your relationships are shaky. You have fears

and faults. Hmmm. Do you really want to hang on to your chest of self-reliance? Sounds to me as if you could use a shepherd. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you think you can make it through life by yourself—even as a Christian? It may be time to check your self-sufficiency at the door. Confess your natural desire to do things your way and ask God to give you a spirit of dependence upon him.

Exploration

Trusting in God—[Psalm 20:7](#); [Proverbs 3:5](#); [16:20](#); [Romans 4:5](#); [10:11](#); [1 Peter 2:6](#).

When we come to Christ, God not only forgives us, he also adopts us. Through a dramatic series of events, we go from condemned orphans with no hope to adopted children with no fear. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

The Lord's Suffering Servant

¹³The Lord says, “See, my servant will act wisely.
People will greatly honor and respect him.

¹⁴Many people were shocked when they saw him.
His appearance was so changed he did not look like a man;
his form was changed so much they could barely tell
he was human.

¹⁵But now he will surprise many nations.
Kings will be amazed and shut their mouths.
They will see things they had not been told about him,
and they will understand things they had not heard.”

Who would have believed what we heard?

Who saw the Lord's power in this?

²He grew up like a small plant before the Lord,
like a root growing in a dry land.

He had no special beauty or form to make us notice
him;

there was nothing in his appearance to make us desire
him.

³He was hated and rejected by people.

He had much pain and suffering.

People would not even look at him.

He was hated, and we didn't even notice him.

⁴But he took our suffering on him
and felt our pain for us.

We saw his suffering

and thought God was punishing him.

⁵But he was wounded for the wrong we did;
he was crushed for the evil we did.

The punishment, which made us well, was given to
him,

and we are healed because of his wounds.

⁶We all have wandered away like sheep;
each of us has gone his own way.

But the Lord has put on him the punishment
for all the evil we have done.

⁷He was beaten down and punished,
but he didn't say a word.

He was like a lamb being led to be killed.

He was quiet, as a sheep is quiet while its wool is
being cut;

he never opened his mouth.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The Bread of Life

Can you see why Jesus called himself the Bread of Life?

I can think of one other similarity. Consider how bread is made. Think about the process. Wheat grows in the field, then it is cut down, winnowed, and ground into flour. It passes through the fire of the oven and is then distributed around the world. Only by this process does bread become bread. Each step is essential. Eliminate the plant, and you have no wheat. Eliminate the winnowing, and you have no flour. Eliminate the fire, and you have no product. Eliminate the distribution, and you have no satisfaction. Each step is essential.

Now, consider Jesus. He grew up as a “small plant before the Lord” ([Isaiah 53:2](#)). One of millions of boys on the planet. One of thousands in Israel. One of dozens in Nazareth. Indistinguishable from the person down the street or the child in the next chair. Had you seen him as a youngster, you wouldn’t have thought he was the Son of God. You might have thought him polite or courteous or diligent, but God on earth? Not a chance. He was just a boy. One of hundreds. Like a staff of wheat in the wheat field.

But like wheat, he was cut down. Like chaff he was pounded and beaten. “He was wounded for the wrong we did; he was crushed for the evil we did”

([Isaiah 53:5](#)). And like bread he passed through the fire. On the cross he passed through the fire of God's anger, not because of his sin, but because of ours. "The Lord has put on him the punishment for all the evil we have done" ([Isaiah 53:6](#)).

Jesus experienced each part of the process of making bread: the growing, the pounding, the firing. And just as each is necessary for bread, each was also necessary for Christ to become the bread of life. "The Christ must suffer these things before he enters his glory" ([Luke 24:26](#)). (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

New Life in Christ

He was crushed for the evil we did. The punishment, which made us well, was given to him.

—[Isaiah 53:5](#)

Peace with God Through Christ

“Since we have been made right with God by our faith, we have peace with God” ([Romans 5:1](#)).

Peace with God. What a happy consequence of faith! Not just peace between countries, peace between neighbors, or peace at home; salvation brings peace with God.

Once a monk and his apprentice traveled from the abbey to a nearby village. The two parted at the city gates, agreeing to meet the next morning after completing their tasks. According to plan, they met and began the long walk back to the abbey. The monk noticed that the younger man was unusually quiet. He asked him if anything was wrong. “What business is it of yours?” came the terse response.

Now the monk was sure his brother was troubled, but he said nothing. The distance between the two began to increase. The apprentice walked slowly, as if to separate himself from his teacher. When the abbey came in sight, the monk stopped at the gate and waited on the student. “Tell me, my son. What troubles your soul?”

The boy started to react again, but when he saw

the warmth in his master's eyes, his heart began to melt. "I have sinned greatly," he sobbed. "Last night I slept with a woman and abandoned my vows. I am not worthy to enter the abbey at your side."

The teacher put his arm around the student and said, "We will enter the abbey together. And we will enter the cathedral together. And together we will confess your sin. No one but God will know which of the two of us fell."

Doesn't that describe what God has done for us? When we kept our sin silent, we withdrew from him. We saw him as an enemy. We took steps to avoid his presence. But our confession of faults alters our perception. God is no longer a foe but a friend. We are at peace with him. He did more than the monk did, much more. More than share in our sin, Jesus was "crushed for the evil we did. The punishment, which made us well, was given to him" ([Isaiah 53:5](#)). "He accepted the shame" ([Hebrews 12:2](#)). He leads us into the presence of God. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Question: What sin do you need to bring into God's presence today and confess?

For more on ["New Life in Christ."](#)

⁸Men took him away roughly and unfairly.
He died without children to continue his family.
He was put to death;
he was punished for the sins of my people.

⁹He was buried with wicked men,
and he died with the rich.
He had done nothing wrong,
and he had never lied.

¹⁰But it was the Lord who decided
to crush him and make him suffer.
The Lord made his life a penalty offering,
but he will still see his descendants and live a long life.
He will complete the things the Lord wants him to do.

¹¹“After his soul suffers many things,
he will see life and be satisfied.

My good servant will make many people right with
God;
he will carry away their sins.

¹²For this reason I will make him a great man among
people,
and he will share in all things with those who are
strong.

He willingly gave his life
and was treated like a criminal.
But he carried away the sins of many people
and asked forgiveness for those who sinned.”

Life Lessons

[Isaiah 54:1–55:13](#)

Situation

Isaiah comforted the Israelites by telling them of God's power.

Observation

God is compassionate on those who come to him, but we cannot even begin to understand his ways and thoughts.

Inspiration

We ask for grace, only to find forgiveness already offered. (How did you know I would sin?)

We ask for food, only to find provision already made. (How did you know I would be hungry?)

We ask for guidance, only to find answers in God's ancient story. (How did you know what I would ask?)

God dwells in a different realm. "The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength" ([1 Corinthians 1:25](#)). He occupies another dimension. "My thoughts are not like your thoughts. Your ways are not like my ways. Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts" ([Isaiah 55:8–9](#)).

Make special note of the word "like." God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are they even *like* ours. We aren't even in the same neighborhood.

We're thinking, *Preserve the body*; he's thinking, *Save the soul*. We dream of a pay raise. He dreams of raising the dead. We avoid pain and seek peace. God uses pain to bring peace. "I'm going to live before I die," we resolve. "Die, so you can live," he instructs. We love what rusts. He loves what endures. We rejoice at our successes. He rejoices at our confessions. We show our children the Nike star with the million-dollar smile and say, "Be like Mike." God points to the crucified carpenter with bloody lips and a torn side and says, "Be like Christ."

Our thoughts are not like God's thoughts. Our ways are not like his ways. He has a different agenda. He dwells in a different dimension. He lives on another plane. And that plane is named in the first phrase of the Lord's prayer, "*Our Father in heaven*."

(From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Application

Make a list of several questions you have about God and about your life. Acknowledge that you can't even begin to comprehend his actions. Thank him that he is in absolute control over the universe.

Exploration

God's Superiority—[Psalm 36:5–6](#); [57:10](#); [103:11](#); [Romans 11:33–36](#).

People Will Return to Jerusalem

The Lord says, “Sing, Jerusalem.
You are like a woman who never gave birth to children.
Start singing and shout for joy.
You never felt the pain of giving birth,
but you will have more children
than the woman who has a husband.

²Make your tent bigger;
stretch it out and make it wider.

Do not hold back.

Make the ropes longer
and its stakes stronger,

³because you will spread out to the right and to the left.

Your children will take over other nations,
and they will again live in cities that once were
destroyed.

⁴“Don’t be afraid, because you will not be ashamed.
Don’t be embarrassed, because you will not be
disgraced.

You will forget the shame you felt earlier;
you will not remember the shame you felt when you
lost your husband.

⁵The God who made you is like your husband.
His name is the Lord All-Powerful.

The Holy One of Israel is the one who saves you.

He is called the God of all the earth.

⁶You were like a woman whose husband left her,
and you were very sad.

You were like a wife who married young
and then her husband left her.

But the Lord called you to be his,”
says your God.

⁷God says, “I left you for a short time,
but with great kindness I will bring you back again.

⁸I became very angry
and hid from you for a time,
but I will show you mercy with kindness forever,”
says the Lord who saves you.

⁹The Lord says, “This day is like the time of Noah to
me.

I promised then that I would never flood the world
again.

In the same way, I promise I will not be angry with you
or punish you again.

¹⁰The mountains may disappear,
and the hills may come to an end,
but my love will never disappear;
my promise of peace will not come to an end,”
says the Lord who shows mercy to you.

¹¹“You poor city. Storms have hurt you,
and you have not been comforted.
But I will rebuild you with turquoise stones,
and I will build your foundations with sapphires.

¹²I will use rubies to build your walls

and shining jewels for the gates
and precious jewels for all your outer walls.

¹³All your children will be taught by the Lord,
and they will have much peace.

¹⁴I will build you using fairness.
You will be safe from those who would hurt you,
so you will have nothing to fear.
Nothing will come to make you afraid.

¹⁵I will not send anyone to attack you,
and you will defeat those who do attack you.

¹⁶“See, I made the blacksmith.
He fans the fire to make it hotter,
and he makes the kind of tool he wants.
In the same way I have made the destroyer to destroy.

¹⁷So no weapon that is used against you will defeat
you.

You will show that those who speak against you are
wrong.

These are the good things my servants receive.
Their victory comes from me,” says the Lord.

God Gives What Is Good

The Lord says, “All you who are thirsty,
come and drink.

Those of you who do not have money,
come, buy and eat!

Come buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.

²Why spend your money on something that is not real
food?

Why work for something that doesn't really satisfy
you?

Listen closely to me, and you will eat what is good;
your soul will enjoy the rich food that satisfies.

³Come to me and listen;
listen to me so you may live.

I will make an agreement with you that will last forever.

I will give you the blessings I promised to David.

... I can't tell you how many times I've expected to hit the
bottom only to find myself suspended in midair, secured
by a pair of nail-pierced hands. —Max Lucado (*A Gentle
Thunder*)

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The Invitation

You are tired.

You are weary.

Weary of being slapped by the waves of broken
dreams.

Weary of being stepped on and run over in the endless marathon to the top.

Weary of trusting in someone only to have that trust returned in an envelope with no return address.

Weary of staring into the future and seeing only futility.

What steals our childhood zeal? ...

It is this weariness that makes the words of the carpenter so compelling. Listen to them. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."

Come to me. ... The invitation is to come to him. Why him?

He offers the invitation as a penniless rabbi in an oppressed nation. He has no connections with the authorities in Rome. He hasn't written a best-seller or earned a diploma.

Yet, he dares to look into the leathery faces of farmers and tired faces of housewives and offer rest. He looks into the disillusioned eyes of a bartender and makes this paradoxical promise: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

The people came. They came out of the cul-de-sacs and office complexes of their existence and he gave them, not religion, not doctrine, not systems, but rest.

As a result, they called him Lord.

As a result, they called him Savior.

Not so much because of what he said, but because of what he did.

What he did on the cross during six hours, one Friday. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)
For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

⁴I made David a witness of my power for all nations,
a ruler and commander of many nations.

⁵You will call for nations that you don't yet know.
And these nations that do not know you will run to
you
because of the Lord your God,
because of the Holy One of Israel who honors you."

⁶So you should look for the Lord before it is too late;
you should call to him while he is near.

⁷The wicked should stop doing wrong,
and they should stop their evil thoughts.

They should return to the Lord so he may have mercy
on them.

They should come to our God, because he will freely
forgive them.

⁸The Lord says, "My thoughts are not like your
thoughts.

Your ways are not like my ways.

⁹Just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

¹⁰Rain and snow fall from the sky
and don't return without watering the ground.
They cause the plants to sprout and grow,
making seeds for the farmer
and bread for the people.

¹¹The same thing is true of the words I speak.

They will not return to me empty.

They make the things happen that I want to happen,
and they succeed in doing what I send them to do.

¹²“So you will go out with joy
and be led out in peace.

The mountains and hills will burst into song before
you,

and all the trees in the fields will clap their hands.

¹³Large cypress trees will grow where thornbushes
were.

Myrtle trees will grow where weeds were.

These things will be a reminder of the Lord’s promise,
and this reminder will never be destroyed.”

Life Lessons

Isaiah 56:1–57:21

Situation

Isaiah reported God's message to Israel. He exhorted the people to observe God's laws concerning the Sabbath.

Observation

God gives peace and satisfaction to those who love him, but he punishes the wicked for their sins.

Inspiration

Read what Jesus did during the last Sabbath of his life. . . . Looks like Jesus was quiet that day.

"Wait a minute. That's it?" That's it.

"You mean with one week left to live, Jesus observed the Sabbath?" As far as we can tell.

"You mean with all those apostles to train and people to teach, he took a day to rest and worship?" Apparently so.

"You're telling me that Jesus thought worship was more important than work?" That's exactly what I'm telling you.

For such is the purpose of the Sabbath. And such was the practice of Jesus. "On the Sabbath day he went to the synagogue, *as he always did*, and stood up to read." Should we do any less?

If Jesus found time in the midst of a racing agenda to stop the rush and sit in the silence, do you think we could, too?

Ahh, I know what you're thinking. I can see it in

your face. There you are. Looking at me from my monitor with dubious eyes and furrowed brows. “But, Max, Sunday is the only day I have to get caught up at the office.” Or, “Good idea, Max, but have you heard our preacher? He provides the rest all right—I fall asleep! But the worship?” Or, “That’s easy for you to say, Max. You’re a preacher. If you were a housewife like me and had four kids like mine....” It’s not easy to slow down.

It’s almost as if activity is a sign of maturity. After all, isn’t there a beatitude which reads, “Blessed are the busy”? No, there isn’t. But there is a verse which summarizes many lives: “Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it” [[Psalm 39:6](#)].

Does that sound like your life? Are you so seldom in one place that your friends regard you as a phantom? Are you so constantly on the move that your family is beginning to question your existence? Do you take pride in your frenzy at the expense of your faith?

Are [these] words yours? “I don’t remember how to stop.” If so, you are headed for a crash.

Slow down. If God commanded it, you need it. If Jesus modeled it, you need it. God still provides the manna. Trust him. Take a day to say no to work and yes to worship. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you need to slow down? Why not leave

Sunday agenda-free? Do something you find relaxing. Take the day off. Take a nap. Read a book. Spend it doing ... nothing.

Exploration

Peace/Comfort—[Psalm 29:11](#); [Isaiah 26:3–4](#); [32:17](#); [Habakkuk 3:17–19](#); [John 14:27](#); [Romans 2:10](#); [5:1](#).

All Nations Will Obey the Lord

This is what the Lord says:

“Give justice to all people,
and do what is right,
because my salvation will come to you soon.
Soon everyone will know that I do what is right.

²The person who obeys the law about the Sabbath
will be blessed,
and the person who does no evil
will be blessed.”

³Foreigners who have joined the Lord should not say,
“The Lord will not accept me with his people.”

The eunuch should not say,
“Because I cannot have children, the Lord will not
accept me.”

⁴This is what the Lord says:

“The eunuchs should obey the law about the Sabbath
and do what I want
and keep my agreement.

⁵If they do, I will make their names remembered
within my Temple and its walls.
It will be better for them than children.
I will give them a name that will last forever,
that will never be forgotten.

⁶Foreigners will join the Lord

to worship him and love him,
to serve him,
to obey the law about the Sabbath,
and to keep my agreement.

⁷I will bring these people to my holy mountain
and give them joy in my house of prayer.
The offerings and sacrifices
they place on my altar will please me,
because my Temple will be called
a house for prayer for people from all nations.”

⁸The Lord God says—

he who gathers the Israelites that were forced to leave
their country:

“I will bring together other people
to join those who are already gathered.”

Israel's Leaders Are Evil

⁹All you animals of the field,
all you animals of the forest, come to eat.

¹⁰The leaders who are to guard the people are blind;
they don't know what they are doing.
All of them are like quiet dogs
that don't know how to bark.

They lie down and dream
and love to sleep.

¹¹They are like hungry dogs
that are never satisfied.
They are like shepherds

who don't know what they are doing.
They all have gone their own way;
all they want to do is satisfy themselves.
¹²They say, "Come, let's drink some wine;
let's drink all the beer we want.
And tomorrow we will do this again,
or, maybe we will have an even better time."

Israel Does Not Follow God

Those who are right with God may die,
but no one pays attention.

Good people are taken away,
but no one understands.

Those who do right are being taken away from evil
²and are given peace.

Those who live as God wants
find rest in death.

³“Come here, you magicians!

Come here, you sons of prostitutes and those who
take part in adultery!

⁴Of whom are you making fun?

Whom are you insulting?

At whom do you stick out your tongue?

You turn against God,
and you are liars.

⁵You have sexual relations under every green tree
to worship your gods.

You kill children in the ravines
and sacrifice them in the rocky places.

⁶You take the smooth rocks from the ravines
as your portion.

You pour drink offerings on them to worship them,
and you give grain offerings to them.

Do you think this makes me want to show you mercy?

⁷You make your bed on every hill and mountain,
and there you offer sacrifices.

⁸You have hidden your idols

behind your doors and doorposts.
You have left me, and you have uncovered yourself.
You have pulled back the covers and climbed into bed.
You have made an agreement with those whose beds
you love,
and you have looked at their nakedness.

⁹You use your oils and perfumes
to look nice for Molech.

You have sent your messengers to faraway lands;
you even tried to send them to the place of the dead.

¹⁰You were tired from doing these things,
but you never gave up.
You found new strength,
so you did not quit.

¹¹“Whom were you so afraid of
that you lied to me?

You have not remembered me
or even thought about me.

I have been quiet for a long time.
Is that why you are not afraid of me?

¹²I will tell about your ‘goodness’ and what you do,
and those things will do you no good.

¹³When you cry out for help,
let the gods you have gathered help you.

The wind will blow them all away;
just a puff of wind will take them away.

But the person who depends on me will receive the
land
and own my holy mountain.”

The Lord Will Save His People

¹⁴Someone will say, “Build a road! Build a road!
Prepare the way!

Make the way clear for my people.”

¹⁵And this is the reason: God lives forever and is holy.
He is high and lifted up.

He says, “I live in a high and holy place,
but I also live with people who are sad and humble.
I give new life to those who are humble
and to those whose hearts are broken.

¹⁶I will not accuse forever,
nor will I always be angry,
because then human life would grow weak.
Human beings, whom I created, would die.

¹⁷I was angry because they were dishonest in order to
make money.

I punished them and turned away from them in anger,
but they continued to do evil.

¹⁸I have seen what they have done, but I will heal them.
I will guide them and comfort them and those who felt
sad for them.

They will all praise me.

¹⁹I will give peace, real peace, to those far and near,
and I will heal them,” says the Lord.

²⁰But evil people are like the angry sea,
which cannot rest,
whose waves toss up waste and mud.

²¹“There is no peace for evil people,” says my God.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 58:1–59:21

Situation

God ordered Isaiah to remind the people of their rebellion. Even their efforts to be religious had selfish motivations.

Observation

Seek God with pure motives. Do good works because you love God, not because others expect them.

Inspiration

Holy living demands constant examination of our actions and motives. But in doing so we must guard against the tendency to focus totally on self, which is easy to do—especially as the culture’s egocentric values invade the church. In fact, this self-indulgent character of our times is a major reason the topic of true holiness is so neglected today by Christian teachers, leaders, writers, and speakers. We have, perhaps unconsciously, substituted a secularized self-centered message in its place. For when we speak of “victory” in the Christian life, we all-too-often mean personal victory—how God will conquer sin FOR US (at least those sins we would like to be rid of—those extra ten pounds, that annoying habit, maybe a quick temper). This reflects not only egocentricity but an incorrect view of sin.

... The Christian life begins with obedience, depends on obedience, and results in obedience. We

can't escape it. The orders from our commander-in-chief are plain: "Whoever has my commandments and obeys them, he is the one who loves me."

Loving God—really loving Him—means living out His commands no matter what the cost. (From *Loving God* by Charles Colson)

Application

The next time you sing at church, during the second stanza ask yourself, "Why am I doing this? Why am I here? Why am I singing? Why did I bring my Bible?" Examine your motives!

Exploration

Obey from Your Heart—[Isaiah 1:11–20](#); [Hosea 6:6](#); [Joel 2:12–13](#); [Amos 5:23–24](#); [Matthew 15:6–9](#).

If a society deletes God from the human equation, what sandbags will they stack against the swelling tide of barbarism and hedonism? —Max Lucado (*In the Grip of Grace*)

How to Honor God

The Lord says, “Shout out loud. Don’t hold back.
Shout out loud like a trumpet.

Tell my people what they have done against their God;
tell the family of Jacob about their sins.

²They still come every day looking for me
and want to learn my ways.

They act just like a nation that does what is right,
that obeys the commands of its God.

They ask me to judge them fairly.

They want God to be near them.

³They say, “To honor you we had special days when
we gave up eating,
but you didn’t see.

We humbled ourselves to honor you,
but you didn’t notice.”

But the Lord says, “You do what pleases yourselves
on these special days,
and you are unfair to your workers.

⁴On these special days when you do not eat, you
argue and fight
and hit each other with your fists.

You cannot do these things as you do now
and believe your prayers are heard in heaven.

⁵This kind of special day is not what I want.

This is not the way I want people to be sorry for what
they have done.

I don't want people just to bow their heads like a plant
and wear rough cloth and lie in ashes to show their
sadness.

This is what you do on your special days when you do
not eat,

but do you think this is what the Lord wants?

⁶"I will tell you the kind of special day I want:

Free the people you have put in prison unfairly
and undo their chains.

Free those to whom you are unfair
and stop their hard labor.

⁷Share your food with the hungry
and bring poor, homeless people into your own homes.

When you see someone who has no clothes, give him
yours,

and don't refuse to help your own relatives.

⁸Then your light will shine like the dawn,
and your wounds will quickly heal.

Your God will walk before you,
and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind.

⁹Then you will call out, and the Lord will answer.

You will cry out, and he will say, 'Here I am.'

"If you stop making trouble for others,
if you stop using cruel words and pointing your finger
at others,

¹⁰if you feed those who are hungry
and take care of the needs of those who are troubled,
then your light will shine in the darkness,
and you will be bright like sunshine at noon.

¹¹The Lord will always lead you.
He will satisfy your needs in dry lands
and give strength to your bones.
You will be like a garden that has much water,
like a spring that never runs dry.

¹²Your people will rebuild the old cities that are now in
ruins;
you will rebuild their foundations.
You will be known for repairing the broken places
and for rebuilding the roads and houses.

¹³“You must obey God’s law about the Sabbath
and not do what pleases yourselves on that holy day.
You should call the Sabbath a joyful day
and honor it as the Lord’s holy day.
You should honor it by not doing whatever you please
nor saying whatever you please on that day.

¹⁴Then you will find joy in the Lord,
and I will carry you to the high places above the earth.
I will let you eat the crops of the land your ancestor
Jacob had.”

The Lord has said these things.

The Evil That People Do

Surely the Lord's power is enough to save you.
He can hear you when you ask him for help.

²It is your evil that has separated
you from your God.

Your sins cause him to turn away from you,
so he does not hear you.

³With your hands you have killed others,
and with your fingers you have done wrong.
With your lips you have lied,
and with your tongue you say evil things.

⁴People take each other to court unfairly,
and no one tells the truth in arguing his case.
They accuse each other falsely and tell lies.
They cause trouble and create more evil.

⁵They hatch evil like eggs from poisonous snakes.
If you eat one of those eggs, you will die,
and if you break one open, a poisonous snake comes
out.

People tell lies as they would spin a spider's web.

⁶The webs they make cannot be used for clothes;
you can't cover yourself with those webs.

The things they do are evil,
and they use their hands to hurt others.

⁷They eagerly run to do evil,
and they are always ready to kill innocent people.
They think evil thoughts.
Everywhere they go they cause ruin and destruction.

⁸They don't know how to live in peace,

and there is no fairness in their lives.
They are dishonest.
Anyone who lives as they live will never have peace.

Israel's Sin Brings Trouble

⁹Fairness has gone far away;
goodness is nowhere to be found.
We wait for the light, but there is only darkness now.
We hope for a bright light, but all we have is darkness.
¹⁰We are like the blind feeling our way along a wall.
We feel our way as if we had no eyes.
In the brightness of day we trip as if it were night.
We are like dead men among the strong.
¹¹All of us growl like the bears.
We call out sadly like the doves.
We look for justice, but there isn't any.
We want to be saved, but salvation is far away.

¹²We have done many wrong things against our God;
our sins show we are wrong.
We know we have turned against God;
we know the evil things we have done:
¹³sinning and rejecting the Lord,
turning away from our God,
planning to hurt others and to disobey God,
planning and speaking lies.
¹⁴So we have driven away justice,
and we have kept away from what is right.

Truth is not spoken in the streets;
what is honest is not allowed to enter the city.

¹⁵Truth cannot be found anywhere,
and people who refuse to do evil are attacked.
The Lord looked and could not find any justice,
and he was displeased.

¹⁶He could not find anyone to help the people,
and he was surprised that there was no one to help.
So he used his own power to save the people;
his own goodness gave him strength.

¹⁷He covered himself with goodness like armor.
He put the helmet of salvation on his head.
He put on the clothes of punishment
and wrapped himself in the coat of his strong love.

¹⁸The Lord will pay back his enemies for what they
have done.

He will show his anger to those who were against him;
he will punish the people in faraway places as they
deserve.

¹⁹Then people from the west will fear the Lord,
and people from the east will fear his glory.
The Lord will come quickly like a fast-flowing river,
driven by the breath of the Lord.

²⁰“Then a Savior will come to Jerusalem
and to the people of Jacob who have turned from sin,”
says the Lord.

²¹The Lord says, “This is my agreement with these people:
My Spirit and my words that I give you will never leave you or
your children or your grandchildren, now and forever.”

Life Lessons

Isaiah 60:1–61:11

Situation

Isaiah continued to prophesy. He reported the deliverance that the Messiah would bring to Israel.

Observation

Because of God's great love for his people, he would send a Savior to comfort, heal, and set his people free. He would clothe his people with goodness and salvation ([61:10](#)).

Inspiration

We eat our share of forbidden fruit. We say what we shouldn't say. Go where we shouldn't go. Pluck fruit from trees we shouldn't touch.

And when we do, the door opens, and the shame tumbles in. And we hide. We sew fig leaves. Flimsy excuses. See-through justifications. We cover ourselves in good works and good deeds, but one gust of the wind of truth, and we are naked again—stark naked in our own failure.

So what does God do? Exactly what he did for our parents in the garden. He sheds innocent blood. He offers the life of his Son. And from the scene of the sacrifice the Father takes a robe—not the skin of an animal—but the robe of righteousness. And does he throw it in our direction and tell us to shape up? No, he dresses us himself. He dresses us *with* himself. “You were all baptized into Christ, and so you were all clothed with Christ” ([Galatians 3:26–27](#)).

The robing is his work, not ours. Did you note the inactivity of Adam and Eve? They did nothing. Absolutely nothing. They didn't request the sacrifice; they didn't think of the sacrifice; they didn't even dress themselves. They were passive in the process. So are we. "You have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God. It was not the result of your own efforts, so you cannot brag about it. God has made us what we are" ([Ephesians 2:8-10](#)).

We hide. He seeks. We bring sin. He brings a sacrifice. We try fig leaves. He brings the robe of righteousness. And we are left to sing the song of the prophet: "He has covered me with clothes of salvation and wrapped me with a coat of goodness, like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding, like a bride dressed in jewels" ([Isaiah 61:10](#)).

God has clothed us. He protects us with a cloak of love. Can you look back over your life and see instances of God's protection? I can too.

(From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

Application

Salvation is a free gift from God. Only he can clothe us with righteousness. Whom can you talk to this week who needs to hear of God's salvation?

Exploration

God's Free Gift—[John 4:10](#); [Acts 2:38](#); [Romans 6:23](#).

Jerusalem Will Be Great

“Jerusalem, get up and shine, because your light has come,

and the glory of the Lord shines on you.

²Darkness now covers the earth;
deep darkness covers her people.

But the Lord shines on you,
and people see his glory around you.

³Nations will come to your light;
kings will come to the brightness of your sunrise.

⁴“Look around you.

People are gathering and coming to you.
Your sons are coming from far away,
and your daughters are coming with them.

⁵When you see them, you will shine with happiness;
you will be excited and full of joy,
because the wealth of the nations across the seas will
be given to you;
the riches of the nations will come to you.

⁶Herds of camels will cover your land,
young camels from Midian and Ephah.
People will come from Sheba
bringing gold and incense,
and they will sing praises to the Lord.

⁷All the sheep from Kedar will be given to you;

the sheep from Nebaioth will be brought to you.
They will be pleasing sacrifices on my altar,
and I will make my beautiful Temple more beautiful.

⁸“The people are returning to you like clouds,
like doves flying to their nests.

⁹People in faraway lands are waiting for me.
The great trading ships will come first,
bringing your children from faraway lands,
and with them silver and gold.
This will honor the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel,
who does wonderful things for you.

¹⁰“Jerusalem, foreigners will rebuild your walls,
and their kings will serve you.
When I was angry, I hurt you,
but now I want to be kind to you and comfort you.

¹¹Your gates will always be open;
they will not be closed day or night
so the nations can bring their wealth to you,
and their kings will be led to you.

¹²The nation or kingdom that doesn't serve you will be
destroyed;
it will be completely ruined.

¹³“The great trees of Lebanon will be given to you:
its pine, fir, and cypress trees together.
You will use them to make my Temple beautiful,
and I will give much honor to this place where I rest my
feet.

¹⁴The people who have hurt you will bow down to you;

those who hated you will bow down at your feet.
They will call you The City of the Lord,
Jerusalem, city of the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁵“You have been hated and left empty
with no one passing through.

But I will make you great from now on;
you will be a place of happiness forever and ever.

¹⁶You will be given what you need from the nations,
like a child drinking milk from its mother.

Then you will know that it is I, the Lord, who saves you.

You will know that the Powerful One of Jacob protects you.

¹⁷I will bring you gold in place of bronze,
silver in place of iron,
bronze in place of wood,
iron in place of rocks.

I will change your punishment into peace,
and you will be ruled by what is right.

¹⁸There will be no more violence in your country;
it will not be ruined or destroyed.

You will name your walls Salvation
and your gates Praise.

¹⁹The sun will no longer be your light during the day
nor will the brightness from the moon be your light,
because the Lord will be your light forever,
and your God will be your glory.

²⁰Your sun will never set again,

and your moon will never be dark,
because the Lord will be your light forever,
and your time of sadness will end.

²¹All of your people will do what is right.
They will receive the earth forever.
They are the plant I have planted,
the work of my own hands
to show my greatness.

²²The smallest family will grow to a thousand.

The least important of you will become a powerful
nation.

I am the Lord,
and when it is time, I will make these things happen
quickly.”

The Lord's Message of Freedom

The Lord God has put his Spirit in me,
because the Lord has appointed me to tell the good
news to the poor.

He has sent me to comfort those whose hearts are
broken,

to tell the captives they are free,
and to tell the prisoners they are released.

²He has sent me to announce the time when the Lord
will show his kindness

and the time when our God will punish evil people.

He has sent me to comfort all those who are sad

³and to help the sorrowing people of Jerusalem.

I will give them a crown to replace their ashes,
and the oil of gladness to replace their sorrow,
and clothes of praise to replace their spirit of sadness.

Then they will be called Trees of Goodness,
trees planted by the Lord to show his greatness.

⁴They will rebuild the old ruins
and restore the places destroyed long ago.

They will repair the ruined cities
that were destroyed for so long.

⁵My people, foreigners will come to tend your sheep.
People from other countries will tend your fields and
vineyards.

⁶You will be called priests of the Lord;
you will be named the servants of our God.
You will have riches from all the nations on earth,

and you will take pride in them.

⁷Instead of being ashamed, my people will receive twice as much wealth.

Instead of being disgraced, they will be happy because of what they receive.

They will receive a double share of the land,
so their happiness will continue forever.

⁸“I, the Lord, love justice.

I hate stealing and everything that is wrong.

I will be fair and give my people what they should have,

and I will make an agreement with them that will continue forever.

⁹Everyone in all nations will know the children of my people,

and their children will be known among the nations.

Anyone who sees them will know

that they are people the Lord has blessed.”

When asked to describe the width of his love, he stretched one hand to the right and the other to the left and had them nailed in that position so you would know he died loving you. —Max Lucado (*He Chose the Nails*)

¹⁰The Lord makes me very happy;

all that I am rejoices in my God.

He has covered me with clothes of salvation
and wrapped me with a coat of goodness,
like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding,
like a bride dressed in jewels.

¹¹The earth causes plants to grow,

and a garden causes the seeds planted in it to grow.

In the same way the Lord God will make goodness and praise
come from all the nations.

New Life in Christ

The Lord ... has covered me with clothes of salvation and wrapped me with a coat of goodness.

—[Isaiah 61:10](#)

Seeing Ourselves as God Sees Us

Look long enough into the eyes of our Savior and, there, too, you will see a bride. Dressed in fine linen. Clothed in pure grace. From the wreath in her hair to the clouds at her feet, she is royal; she is the princess. She is the bride. His bride. Walking toward him, she is not yet with him. But he sees her, he awaits her, he longs for her.

“Who could bear to live without her?” you hear him whisper.

And who is that bride? Who is this beauty who occupies the heart of Jesus?

It is not nature. He loves his creation and creation groans to be with him, but he never called creation his bride.

It is not his angels. His angels are ever present to worship and serve him, but he never called the heavenly beings his bride.

Then who? Who is this bride about whom Jesus speaks and for whom Jesus longs? Who is this maiden who has captured the heart of God’s son?

You are. You have captured the heart of God. “As a man rejoices over his new wife, so your God will rejoice over you” ([Isaiah 62:5](#)).

The challenge is to remember that. To meditate on it. To focus on it. To allow his love to change the way you look at you.

Do you ever feel unnoticed? New clothes and styles may help for a while. But if you want permanent change, learn to see yourself as God sees you: “He has covered me with clothes of salvation and wrapped me with a coat of goodness, like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding, like a bride dressed in jewels” ([Isaiah 61:10](#)). (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

Question: What does it mean to you that God rejoices over you?

For more on [“New Life in Christ.”](#)

Life Lessons

Isaiah 62:1–64:12

Situation

Isaiah prophesied that God would one day be proud of his people—a day to long for, prepare for, and pray for. Recollecting God’s past favors and faithfulness, Isaiah passionately pleaded for God’s compassion and mercy. He asked that Israel’s enemies be punished.

Observation

When Jesus Christ came and provided a way for salvation, God would exalt his people. God would see his children as people without sin because Jesus paid their penalty.

Inspiration

The holiness we are to exhibit is not our own, but the holiness of Christ in us. We are not holy, and we will not become holy humans. Christ in us can manifest His holiness if we will yield our flesh to Him. This is not a human operation; it is a spiritual one. Jesus installs His holiness in us by grace. Not a once-for-all-time transaction, this is a daily, moment-by-moment striving to live more by the Spirit and less by the flesh.

... A friend bought his daughter a new car, but it must sit in the garage until she reaches the legal driving age. Until her sixteenth birthday she only has partial use of the car, when accompanied by an adult. Similarly, holiness is like a gift already purchased for

us (by the blood of Christ), but we cannot have full use of it until a certain date in the future (our glorification).

Becoming holy is a process which includes God's part and our part. On one hand, our part is to stay out of God's part—to yield, to surrender, to stop seeking God on our own terms. But our part also is to obey. It is to enter His rehabilitation program.

When you put yourself under a doctor's care, he cannot help you if you don't follow his instructions. As the patient surrenders his own good ideas and obeys the doctor's instruction, he becomes well. The same is true in sanctification. If you and I want to be made holy, then we must willingly surrender ourselves to His care, and we must also actively obey His instructions.

We have no more power to make ourselves holy than a dying man has to save himself. We are weak and tired, and we cannot offer much help. However, we can submit to His rehabilitation program—sanctification. The key to our part is faith—to seek Him in obedience. (From *Walking with Christ in the Details of Life* by Patrick Morley)

Application

Are you working for God's kingdom? Are you active in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do you tell others what God has done for you? All these things are done by those who desire to see God's kingdom come. Be an active member of God's kingdom.

Exploration

Holiness—[Exodus 20:8–11](#); [Leviticus 11:44–45](#);
[Psalms 93:5](#); [Isaiah 4:2–4](#); [Hebrews 10:14](#); [1 Peter 1:14–](#)
[16](#).

New Jerusalem

Because I love Jerusalem, I will continue to speak for her;

for Jerusalem's sake I will not stop speaking
until her goodness shines like a bright light,
until her salvation burns bright like a flame.

²Jerusalem, the nations will see your goodness,
and all kings will see your glory.

Then you will have a new name,
which the Lord himself will give you.

³You will be like a beautiful crown in the Lord's hand,
like a king's crown in your God's hand.

⁴You will never again be called the People that God
Left,

nor your land the Land that God Destroyed.

You will be called the People God Loves,
and your land will be called the Bride of God,
because the Lord loves you.

And your land will belong to him as a bride belongs to
her husband.

⁵As a young man marries a woman,
so your children will marry your land.
As a man rejoices over his new wife,
so your God will rejoice over you.

⁶Jerusalem, I have put guards on the walls to watch.
They must not be silent day or night.

You people who remind the Lord of your needs in prayer

should never be quiet.

⁷You should not stop praying to him until he builds up Jerusalem

and makes it a city all people will praise.

⁸The Lord has made a promise,
and by his power he will keep his promise.
He said, "I will never again give your grain
as food to your enemies.

I will not let your enemies drink the new wine
that you have worked to make.

⁹The person who gathers food will eat it,
and he will praise the Lord.

The person who gathers the grapes will drink the wine
in the courts of my Temple."

¹⁰Go through, go through the gates!

Make the way ready for the people.

Build up, build up the road!

Move all the stones off the road.

Raise the banner as a sign for the people.

¹¹The Lord is speaking
to all the faraway lands:

"Tell the people of Jerusalem,

'Look, your Savior is coming.

He is bringing your reward to you;
he is bringing his payment with him.'"

¹²His people will be called the Holy People,
the Saved People of the Lord,

and Jerusalem will be called the City God Wants,
the City God Has Not Rejected.

The Lord Judges His People

Who is this coming from Edom,
from the city of Bozrah, dressed in red?
Who is this dressed in fine clothes
and marching forward with his great power?
He says, "I, the Lord, speak what is right.
I have the power to save you."

²Someone asks, "Why are your clothes bright red
as if you had walked on the grapes to make wine?"

³The Lord answers, "I have walked in the winepress
alone,

and no one among the nations helped me.
I was angry and walked on the nations
and crushed them because of my anger.
Blood splashed on my clothes,
and I stained all my clothing.

⁴I chose a time to punish people,
and the time has come for me to save.

⁵I looked around, but I saw no one to help me.
I was surprised that no one supported me.
So I used my own power to save my people;
my own anger supported me.

⁶While I was angry, I walked on the nations.
In my anger I punished them
and poured their blood on the ground."

The Lord's Kindness to His People

⁷I will tell about the Lord's kindness
and praise him for everything he has done.

I will praise the Lord for the many good things he has
given us

and for his goodness to the people of Israel.

He has shown great mercy to us
and has been very kind to us.

⁸He said, "These are my people;
my children will not lie to me."

So he saved them.

⁹When they suffered, he suffered also.

He sent his own angel to save them.

Because of his love and kindness, he saved them.

Since long ago he has picked them up and carried
them.

¹⁰But they turned against him
and made his Holy Spirit very sad.

So he became their enemy,
and he fought against them.

¹¹But then his people remembered what happened long
ago,

in the days of Moses and the Israelites with him.

Where is the Lord who brought the people through the
sea,

with the leaders of his people?

Where is the one

who put his Holy Spirit among them,

¹²who led Moses by the right hand
with his wonderful power,
who divided the water before them
to make his name famous forever,
¹³who led the people through the deep waters?
Like a horse walking through a desert,
the people did not stumble.
¹⁴Like cattle that go down to the valley,
the Spirit of the Lord gave the people a place to rest.
Lord, that is the way you led your people,
and by this you won for yourself wonderful fame.

A Prayer for Help

¹⁵Lord, look down from the heavens and see;
look at us from your wonderful and holy home in
heaven.
Where is your strong love and power?
Why are you keeping your love and mercy from us?
¹⁶You are our father.
Abraham doesn't know we are his children,
and Israel doesn't recognize us.
Lord, you are our father.
You are called "the one who has always saved us."
¹⁷Lord, why are you making us wander from your
ways?
Why do you make us stubborn so that we don't honor
you?
For our sake come back to us,

your servants, who belong to you.

¹⁸Your people had your Temple for a while,
but now our enemies have walked on your holy place
and crushed it.

¹⁹We have become like people you never ruled over,
like those who have never worn your name.

Tear open the skies and come down to earth
so that the mountains will tremble before you.

²Like a fire that burns twigs,
like a fire that makes water boil,
let your enemies know who you are.

Then all nations will shake with fear when they see
you.

³You have done amazing things we did not expect.

You came down, and the mountains trembled before
you.

⁴From long ago no one has ever heard of a God like
you.

No one has ever seen a God besides you,
who helps the people who trust you.

⁵You help those who enjoy doing good,
who remember how you want them to live.
But you were angry because we sinned.
For a long time we disobeyed,
so how can we be saved?

⁶All of us are dirty with sin.

All the right things we have done are like filthy pieces
of cloth.

All of us are like dead leaves,
and our sins, like the wind, have carried us away.

⁷No one worships you
or even asks you to help us.

That is because you have turned away from us
and have let our sins destroy us.

⁸But Lord, you are our father.

We are like clay, and you are the potter;

your hands made us all.

⁹Lord, don't continue to be angry with us;
don't remember our sins forever.

Please, look at us,
because we are your people.

¹⁰Your holy cities are empty like the desert.
Jerusalem is like a desert;
it is destroyed.

¹¹Our ancestors worshiped you
in our holy and wonderful Temple,
but now it has been burned with fire,
and all our precious things have been destroyed.

¹²When you see these things, will you hold yourself
back from helping us, Lord?

Will you be silent and punish us beyond what we can
stand?

Life Lessons

Isaiah 65:1–66:24

Situation

God answered the prayers of his people. Those who remained faithful would receive life, joy, and peace beyond imagination. The disobedient would receive judgment and death.

Observation

God cannot overlook sin, and he will punish it; but the faithful will know the eternal blessings of God's new kingdom.

Inspiration

While the kingdom is full of righteousness, peace, and joy, it isn't a physical, tangible thing. It isn't something we touch or see...

Furthermore, this kingdom isn't verbal, something we can actually hear with our ears, even though it is powerful...

If that isn't mysterious enough, I should add that while it is unshakable, it isn't visible either!

... How about that! We're supposed to seek something we cannot feel, or hear. And we're expected to embrace something that is intangible, inaudible, and invisible.

... *God's kingdom is a synonym for God's rule.* Those who choose to live in His kingdom (though still very much alive on Planet Earth) choose to live under His authority.

Maybe a super-simple outline of the Bible will

help us understand the definition of God's kingdom even better. But first let me warn you—it's so basic you'll probably sneer!

I. God creates the heavens and earth and all things in them, including mankind. That's [Genesis 1](#) and [2](#).

II. Mankind, alone, rebels against God's authority. That's covered in [Genesis 3](#).

III. God moves through history to reestablish His authority over all creation. That's [Genesis 4](#) through [Revelation 22](#).

... If you are wondering where you and I fit into this outline, take a look at category three. For centuries God has been at work reestablishing His rulership....

All this leads me to some helpful news, some bad news, and some good news! The kingdom is the invisible realm where God rules as supreme authority. That's *helpful news*. The bad news is that we, by nature, don't want Him to rule over us; we much prefer to please ourselves. We'd much rather serve mammon (the word means "money") than the Master... . More bad news is this: Most people do serve mammon. Just look around. Who's in charge, God or mammon? What's happening? The mediocre majority have bought into a mammon lifestyle.

Now, the good news. We don't have to live that way. God has given us an avenue of escape. It's called a birth from above... . Not until we experience a spiritual rebirth will we submit to God's rule.

So when I write of God's kingdom, I'm referring to

His right-authority over our lives. Only then can we experience true excellence. (From *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Become a citizen in God's kingdom today by trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Reserve your place in his new creation. You can have permanent hope and eternal life! There is no better way to live than by following him.

Exploration

God's Kingdom—[Matthew 5:3–12](#); [6:10](#); [Luke 4:43](#); [9:2](#); [John 3:3](#); [Acts 1:3](#).

All People Will Learn About God

The Lord says, “I made myself known to people who were not looking for me.

I was found by those who were not asking me for help.

I said, ‘Here I am. Here I am,’

to a nation that was not praying to me.

²All day long I stood ready to accept

people who turned against me,

but the way they continue to live is not good;

they do anything they want to do.

³Right in front of me

they continue to do things that make me angry.

They offer sacrifices to their gods in their gardens,

and they burn incense on altars of brick.

⁴They sit among the graves

and spend their nights waiting to get messages from the dead.

They eat the meat of pigs,

and their pots are full of soup made from meat that is wrong to eat.

⁵But they tell others, ‘Stay away, and don’t come near me.

I am too holy for you.’

These people are like smoke in my nose.

Like a fire that burns all the time, they continue to make me angry.

⁶“Look, it is written here before me.

I will not be quiet; instead, I will repay you in full.

I will punish you for what you have done.

⁷I will punish you for your sins and your ancestors’ sins,”

says the Lord.

“They burned incense to gods on the mountains
and shamed me on those hills.

So I will punish them as they should be punished
for what they did.”

⁸This is what the Lord says:

“When there is juice left in the grapes,

people do not destroy them,

because they know there is good left in them.

So I will do the same thing to my servants—

I will not completely destroy them.

⁹I will leave some of the children of Jacob,
and some of the people of Judah will receive my
mountain.

I will choose the people who will live there;

my servants will live there.

¹⁰Then the Plain of Sharon will be a field for flocks,
and the Valley of Achor will be a place for herds to
rest.

They will be for the people who want to follow me.

¹¹“But as for you who left the Lord,

who forgot about my holy mountain,

who worship the god Luck,

who hold religious feasts for the god Fate,

¹²I decide your fate, and I will punish you with my sword.

You will all be killed,
because I called you, but you refused to answer.
I spoke to you, but you wouldn't listen.
You did the things I said were evil
and chose to do things that displease me.”

¹³So this is what the Lord God says:

“My servants will eat,
but you evil people will be hungry.
My servants will drink,
but you evil people will be thirsty.
My servants will be happy,
but you evil people will be shamed.

¹⁴My servants will shout for joy
because of the goodness of their hearts,
but you evil people will cry,
because you will be sad.

You will cry loudly, because your spirits will be broken.

¹⁵Your names will be like curses to my servants,
and the Lord God will put you to death.
But he will call his servants by another name.

¹⁶People in the land who ask for blessings
will ask for them from the faithful God.
And people in the land who make a promise
will promise in the name of the faithful God,
because the troubles of the past will be forgotten.
I will make those troubles go away.

A New Time Is Coming

¹⁷“Look, I will make new heavens and a new earth,
and people will not remember the past
or think about those things.

¹⁸My people will be happy forever
because of the things I will make.
I will make a Jerusalem that is full of joy,
and I will make her people a delight.

¹⁹Then I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and be delighted with my people.
There will never again be heard in that city
the sounds of crying and sadness.

²⁰There will never be a baby from that city
who lives only a few days.
And there will never be an older person
who doesn't have a long life.

A person who lives a hundred years will be called
young,

and a person who dies before he is a hundred will be
thought of as a sinner.

²¹In that city those who build houses will live there.
Those who plant vineyards will get to eat their grapes.

²²No more will one person build a house and someone
else live there.

One person will not plant a garden and someone else
eat its fruit.

My people will live a long time,
as trees live long.
My chosen people will live there

and enjoy the things they make.

²³They will never again work for nothing.

They will never again give birth to children who die young.

All my people will be blessed by the Lord;
they and their children will be blessed.

²⁴I will provide for their needs before they ask,
and I will help them while they are still asking for help.

²⁵Wolves and lambs will eat together in peace.

Lions will eat hay like oxen,
and a snake on the ground will not hurt anyone.
They will not hurt or destroy each other
on all my holy mountain,”
says the Lord.

The Lord Will Judge All Nations

This is what the Lord says:

“Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
So do you think you can build a house for me?
Do I need a place to rest?

²My hand made all things.
All things are here because I made them,”
says the Lord.

“These are the people I am pleased with:
those who are not proud or stubborn
and who fear my word.

³But those people who kill bulls as a sacrifice to me
are like those who kill people.

Those who kill sheep as a sacrifice
are like those who break the necks of [dogs](#).

Those who give me grain offerings
are like those who offer me the blood of [pigs](#).

Those who burn incense
are like those who worship idols.

These people choose their own ways, not mine,
and they love the terrible things they do.

⁴So I will choose their punishments,
and I will punish them with what they fear most.

This is because I called to them, but they did not
listen.

I spoke to them, but they did not hear me.

They did things I said were evil;
they chose to do things I did not like.”

⁵You people who obey the words of the Lord,
listen to what he says:
“Your brothers hated you
and turned against you because you followed me.
Your brothers said, ‘Let the Lord be honored
so we may see you rejoice,’
but they will be punished.

⁶Listen to the loud noise coming from the city;
hear the noise from the Temple.
It is the Lord punishing his enemies,
giving them the punishment they should have.

⁷“A woman does not give birth before she feels the
pain;

she does not give birth to a son before the pain starts.

⁸No one has ever heard of that happening;
no one has ever seen that happen.

In the same way no one ever saw a country begin in
one day;

no one has ever heard of a new nation beginning in
one moment.

But Jerusalem will give birth to her children
just as soon as she feels the birth pains.

⁹In the same way I will not cause pain
without allowing something new to be born,” says the
Lord.

“If I cause you the pain,
I will not stop you from giving birth to your new

nation,” says your God.

¹⁰“Jerusalem, rejoice.

All you people who love Jerusalem, be happy.

Those of you who felt sad for Jerusalem

should now feel happy with her.

¹¹You will take comfort from her and be satisfied,
as a child is nursed by its mother.

You will receive her good things
and enjoy her wealth.”

¹²This is what the Lord says:

“I will give her peace that will flow to her like a river.

The wealth of the nations will come to her like a river
overflowing its banks.

Like babies you will be nursed and held in my arms
and bounced on my knees.

¹³I will comfort you
as a mother comforts her child.
You will be comforted in Jerusalem.”

¹⁴When you see these things, you will be happy,
and you will grow like the grass.

The Lord’s servants will see his power,
but his enemies will see his anger.

¹⁵Look, the Lord is coming with fire
and his armies with clouds of dust.
He will punish those people with his anger;
he will punish them with flames of fire.

¹⁶The Lord will judge the people with fire,
and he will destroy many people with his sword;

he will kill many people.

¹⁷“These people make themselves holy and pure to go to worship their gods in their gardens. Following each other into their special gardens, they eat the meat of pigs and rats and other hateful things. But they will all be destroyed together,” says the Lord.

¹⁸“I know they have evil thoughts and do evil things, so I am coming to punish them. I will gather all nations and all people, and they will come together and see my glory.

¹⁹“I will put a mark on some of the people, and I will send some of these saved people to the nations: to Tarshish, Libya, Lud (the land of archers), Tubal, Greece, and all the faraway lands. These people have never heard about what I have done nor seen my glory. So the saved people will tell the nations about my glory. ²⁰And they will bring all your fellow Israelites from all nations to my holy mountain in Jerusalem. Your fellow Israelites will come on horses, donkeys, and camels and in chariots and wagons. They will be like the grain offerings that the people bring in clean containers to the Temple,” says the Lord. ²¹“And I will choose even some of these people to be priests and Levites,” says the Lord.

²²“I will make new heavens and the new earth, which will last forever,” says the Lord. “In the same way, your names and your children will always be with me. ²³All people will come to worship me every Sabbath and every New Moon,” says the Lord. ²⁴“They will go out and see the dead bodies of the people who sinned against me. The worms that eat them will never die, and the fires that burn them will never stop, and everyone will hate to see those bodies.”

Israel Literally, “Ephraim.” Isaiah often uses “Ephraim” to mean all of Israel.

Shear-Jashub This name means “a part of the people will come back.”

virgin The Hebrew word means “a young woman.” Often this meant a girl who was not married and had not yet had sexual relations with anyone.

Immanuel This name means “God is with us.”

Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz This name means “there will soon be looting and stealing.”

Jesse King David’s father.

roofs In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

Desert by the Sea Probably Babylon.

Dumah Another name for Edom.

Valley of Vision This probably means a valley near Jerusalem.

roofs In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

Topheth Gehenna; the Valley of Hinnom. Here people burned the bodies of criminals and animals, along with garbage.

loom A machine for making cloth from thread.

someone ... north This probably means Cyrus, a king of Persia.

Cyrus A king of Persia who ruled from about 550–530 B.C..

him This probably refers to Cyrus king of Persia.

dogs ... pigs God did not want his people to offer dogs and pigs as sacrifices because they were unclean animals.

The Book of Jeremiah

Introduction

No church would hire Jeremiah. He wouldn't make it past the first interview. Better still, he wouldn't even make it to the interview.

He had little stomach for organized religion. One can hardly blame him. What he saw would nauseate the worst of us.

He saw raging immorality. He saw blatant idolatry. He saw unbridled hypocrisy. He saw priests who sold out to the highest bidder. He saw kings who lived out his worst nightmare.

Were his head a Niagara, it wouldn't generate enough tears for him to weep. Like Job, he cursed the day he was born, and again, you can hardly blame him. It was a rotten day in which to live.

He could see the writing on the Babylonian wall, but you'd think he was the only one who knew how to read.

In the end, the walls fell, just like he said. The Temple was raided, just like he prophesied. And the people were bound like slaves and led into Babylon.

To his credit, he never said, "I told you so."

He remained behind and walked among the ruins and did what he did most of his life. He wept.

About This Book

Author:

The prophet Jeremiah

Date Written:

630–580 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- Only God understands the hearts of people.
- God wants to reward righteousness and punish evil.
- Within his timing, God is willing to forgive and restore.
- There is a cost as well as a reward to obedience.

Key Verse:

“Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Do all that I command so that good things will happen to you” ([Jeremiah 7:23](#)).

Contents:

1. Jeremiah's Call and Judah's Prophecy [1:1–33:26](#)
2. Jeremiah's Ministry [34:1–45:5](#)
3. Fate of the Nations [46:1–51:64](#)
4. Destruction of Jerusalem [52:1–34](#)

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 1:1–19

Situation

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, was called to minister to Judah during the reigns of its last five kings: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah (627–586 B.C.). Other prophets, such as Habakkuk and Zephaniah, ministered during Jeremiah's time.

Observation

Before Jeremiah was conceived God had singled him out for his special work. The prophet had been set apart (or sanctified) for God to use in a particular way.

Inspiration

Both the original Hebrew and Greek terms that are translated “holy” in the Scriptures convey the idea of “separateness” or “separation, a setting apart.” In the Bible, when something is said to be “holy,” that something is set apart for God, like our two words “dedicated” and “consecrated.” The furniture in the tabernacle was “dedicated” furniture; the robes worn by the priests were “consecrated” robes. They were holy, in the sense of being set apart for the purpose, the work, and the glory of God. “Holiness” carries the concept to its maximum expression, indicating a total separation from all that is sinful, impure, and imperfect. Moral wholeness is encompassed within the word “holiness,” meaning that God is absolutely

separate from any and all contamination ...

But because the human race is contaminated by sin (thanks to Adam and Eve's fall in the Garden), we, during our earthly lives, cannot ever know complete holiness. At salvation, we are made holy before God by our position in Christ, but we can never know a complete sinless experience during our earthly existence. (From *The Mystery of God's Will* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Though you can't live a completely sinless life, are there parts of your lifestyle that do not conform to God's standards of holiness and separation? Ask God to show you his desire for your life. Confess and turn from any thoughts or behaviors that would keep you from living a life set apart for God.

Exploration

Holiness—[Ephesians 1:4](#); [Colossians 1:22–23](#); [3:2](#); [1 Peter 1:15–16](#).

Before presenting the grace of God, we must understand the wrath of God. —Max Lucado (*In the Grip of Grace*)

These are the words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah. He belonged to the family of priests who lived in the town of Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. ²The Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah during the thirteenth year that Josiah son of Amon was king of Judah. ³The Lord also spoke to Jeremiah while Jehoiakim son of Josiah was king of Judah and during the eleven years that Zedekiah son of Josiah was king of Judah. In the fifth month of his last year, the people of Jerusalem were taken away as captives.

The Lord Calls Jeremiah

⁴The Lord spoke his word to me, saying:

⁵“Before I made you in your mother’s womb, I chose you.

Before you were born, I set you apart for a special work.

I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

⁶Then I said, “But Lord God, I don’t know how to speak. I am only a boy.”

⁷But the Lord said to me, “Don’t say, ‘I am only a boy.’ You must go everywhere I send you, and you must say everything I tell you to say. ⁸Don’t be afraid of anyone, because I am with you to protect you,” says the Lord.

⁹Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth. He said to me, “See, I am putting my words in your mouth. ¹⁰Today I have put you in charge of nations and kingdoms. You will pull up and tear down, destroy and overthrow, build up and plant.”

Jeremiah Sees Two Visions

¹¹The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: “Jeremiah, what do you see?”

I answered, “I see a stick of almond wood.”

¹²The Lord said to me, “You have seen correctly, because I am watching to make sure my words come true.”

¹³The Lord spoke his word to me again: “What do you see?”

I answered, “I see a pot of boiling water, tipping over from the north.”

¹⁴The Lord said to me, “Disaster will come from the north and strike all the people who live in this country. ¹⁵In a short time I will call all of the people in the northern kingdoms,” said the Lord.

“Those kings will come and set up their thrones
near the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem.

They will attack all the city walls around Jerusalem
and all the cities in Judah.

¹⁶And I will announce my judgments against my
people

because of their evil in turning away from me.

They offered sacrifices to other gods

and worshiped idols they had made with their own

hands.

¹⁷“Jeremiah, get ready. Stand up and tell them everything I command you to say. Don’t be afraid of the people, or I will give you good reason to be afraid of them. ¹⁸Today I am going to make you a strong city, an iron pillar, a bronze wall. You will be able to stand against everyone in the land: Judah’s kings, officers, priests, and the people of the land. ¹⁹They will fight against you, but they will not defeat you, because I am with you to protect you!” says the Lord.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 2:1–6:30

Situation

Many sinful kings led the people astray in both Judah and the Northern Kingdom. Eventually, the Assyrians captured the Northern Kingdom (722 B.C.). Judah was on the verge of similar punishment from Babylon. Jeremiah began his prophecy against Judah by outlining the people's unfaithfulness to God and urging them to repent or face strong punishment.

Observation

Any severe and prolonged pattern of sin, practiced by people who claim to be devoted to God, invites punishment from God.

Inspiration

Many people will profess faithfulness, but very few will demonstrate it. The virtue of faithfulness is often costly, and few people are willing to pay the price. But for the godly person, faithfulness is an absolutely essential quality of his character, regardless of what it might cost.

What is faithfulness? How do we practice it, and when do we exhibit it in our lives? The biblical word denotes that which is firm and can be counted upon... . The faithful person is one who is dependable, trustworthy, and loyal, who can be depended upon in all of his relationships, and who is absolutely honest and ethical in all of his affairs....

If we are careful to be honest in the little things,

we will certainly be careful to be honest in the more important things of life... . If our society needs to reemphasize the virtue of honesty, it certainly needs to place great importance on dependability....

Reliability is not just a social obligation; it is a spiritual obligation. God is even more concerned about our faithfulness than the person who is relying on us in some particular situation... . The faithful person is not only honest and dependable, but also loyal....

Whether it be in honesty or dependability or loyalty, faithfulness is frequently a costly virtue. Only the Holy Spirit can enable us to pay that price. (From *The Practice of Godliness* by Jerry Bridges)

Application

Do you gossip about others? Do you criticize others? Do you lustfully think about someone? Last April, did you cheat the government? Do you work hard on your job, or do you waste time? If you repeat sin again and again, you will experience God's discipline! Consider your life and ask the Holy Spirit to help you get rid of sin.

Exploration

Backsliding—[Psalm 78:56–58](#); [Jeremiah 17:5](#); [Ezekiel 18:24–26](#); [Matthew 5:13](#); [Galatians 5:7–9](#); [Hebrews 5:11–6:12](#).

Israel Turns from God

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Go and speak to the people of Jerusalem, saying: This is what the Lord says:

‘I remember how faithful you were to me when you were a young nation.

You loved me like a young bride.
You followed me through the desert,
a land that had never been planted.

³The people of Israel were holy to the Lord,
like the first fruits from his harvest.
Those who tried to hurt Israel were judged guilty.
Disasters struck them,” says the Lord.

⁴Hear the word of the Lord, family of Jacob,
all you family groups of Israel.

⁵This is what the Lord says:

“I was fair to your ancestors,
so why did they turn away from me?
Your ancestors worshiped useless idols
and became useless themselves.

⁶Your ancestors didn’t say,
‘Where is the Lord who brought us out of Egypt?
He led us through the desert,

through a dry and rocky land,
through a dark and dangerous land.
He led us where no one travels or lives.’

⁷I brought you into a fertile land
so you could eat its fruit and produce.
But you came and made my land unclean;
you made it a hateful place.

⁸The priests didn’t ask,
‘Where is the Lord?’
The people who know the teachings didn’t know me.
The leaders turned against me.
The prophets prophesied in the name of Baal
and worshiped useless idols.

⁹“So now I will again tell what I have against you,”
says the Lord.

“And I will tell what I have against your grandchildren.

¹⁰Go across the sea to the island of Cyprus and see.
Send someone to the land of Kedar to look closely.
See if there has ever been anything like this.

¹¹Has a nation ever exchanged its gods?
(Of course, its gods are not really gods at all.)
But my people have exchanged their glorious God
for idols worth nothing.

¹²Skies, be shocked at the things that have happened
and shake with great fear!” says the Lord.

¹³“My people have done two evils:
They have turned away from me,
the spring of living water.
And they have dug their own wells,
which are broken wells that cannot hold water.

¹⁴Have the people of Israel become slaves?
Have they become like someone who was born a slave?

Why were they taken captive?

¹⁵Enemies have roared like lions at Israel;
they have growled at Israel.

They have destroyed the land of Israel.

The cities of Israel lie in ruins,
and all the people have left.

¹⁶The men from the cities of Memphis and Tahpanhes
have disgraced you by shaving the top of your head.

¹⁷Haven't you brought this on yourselves
by turning away from the Lord your God
when he was leading you in the right way?

¹⁸It did not help to go to Egypt
and drink from the Shihor River.

It did not help to go to Assyria
and drink from the Euphrates River.

¹⁹Your evil will bring punishment to you,
and the wrong you have done will teach you a lesson.

Think about it and understand
that it is a terrible evil to turn away from the Lord your God.

It is wrong not to fear me,"
says the Lord God All-Powerful.

^{20c}Long ago you refused to obey me as an ox breaks
its yoke.

You broke the ropes I used to hold you
and said, 'I will not serve you!'

In fact, on every high hill

and under every green tree
you lay down as a prostitute.

²¹But I planted you as a special vine,
as a very good seed.

How then did you turn
into a wild vine that grows bad fruit?

²²Although you wash yourself with cleanser
and use much soap,

I can still see the stain of your guilt,” says the Lord
God.

²³“How can you say to me, ‘I am not guilty.

I have not worshiped the Baal idols’?

Look at the things you did in the valley.

Think about what you have done.

You are like a she-camel in mating season
that runs from place to place.

²⁴You are like a wild donkey that lives in the desert
and sniffs the wind at mating time.

At that time who can hold her back?

Any male who chases her will easily catch her;
at mating time, it is easy to find her.

²⁵Don’t run until your feet are bare
or until your throat is dry.

But you say, ‘It’s no use!

I love those other gods,
and I must chase them!’

²⁶“A thief is ashamed when someone catches him
stealing.

In the same way, the family of Israel is ashamed—
they, their kings, their officers,

their priests, and their prophets.

²⁷They say to things of wood, ‘You are my father,’
and to idols of stone, ‘You gave birth to me.’

Those people won’t look at me;

they have turned their backs to me.

But when they get into trouble, they say,

‘Come and save us!’

²⁸Where are the idols you made for yourselves?

Let them come and save you

when you are in trouble!

People of Judah, you have as many idols

as you have towns!

²⁹“Why do you complain to me?

All of you have turned against me,” says the Lord.

³⁰“I punished your people, but it did not help.

They didn’t come back when they were punished.

With your swords you killed your prophets

like a hungry lion.

³¹“People of Judah, pay attention to the word of the Lord:

Have I been like a desert to the people of Israel

or like a dark and dangerous land?

Why do my people say, ‘We are free to wander.

We won’t come to you anymore’?

³²A young woman does not forget her jewelry,

and a bride does not forget the decorations for her

dress.

But my people have forgotten me

for more days than can be counted.

³³You really know how to chase after love.
Even the worst women can learn evil ways from you.

³⁴Even on your clothes you have the blood
of poor and innocent people,
but they weren't thieves you caught breaking in.
You do all these things,

³⁵but you say, 'I am innocent.
God is not angry with me.'
But I will judge you guilty of lying,
because you say, 'I have not sinned.'

³⁶It is so easy for you to change your mind.
Even Egypt will let you down,
as Assyria let you down.

³⁷You will eventually leave that place
with your hands on your head, like captives.
You trusted those countries,
but you will not be helped by them,
because the Lord has rejected them.

Judah Is Unfaithful

“If a man divorces his wife
and she leaves him and marries another man,
should her first husband come back to her again?
If he went back to her, wouldn’t the land become
completely unclean?

But you have acted like a prostitute with many lovers,
and now you want to come back to me?” says the
Lord.

²“Look up to the bare hilltops, Judah.

Is there any place where you have not been a
prostitute?

You have sat by the road waiting for lovers,
like an Arab in the desert.

You made the land unclean,
because you did evil and were like a prostitute.

³So the rain has not come,
and there have not been any spring rains.
But your face still looks like the face of a prostitute.
You refuse even to be ashamed of what you did.

⁴Now you are calling to me,
‘My father, you have been my friend since I was
young.

⁵Will you always be angry at me?
Will your anger last forever?’
Judah, you said this,
but you did as much evil as you could!”

Judah and Israel Are like Sisters

⁶When King Josiah was ruling Judah, the Lord said to me, “Did you see what unfaithful Israel did? She was like a prostitute with her idols on every hill and under every green tree. ⁷I said to myself, ‘Israel will come back to me after she does this evil,’ but she didn’t come back. And Israel’s wicked sister Judah saw what she did. ⁸Judah saw that I divorced unfaithful Israel because of her adultery, but that didn’t make Israel’s wicked sister Judah afraid. She also went out and acted like a prostitute! ⁹And she didn’t care that she was acting like a prostitute. So she made her country unclean and was guilty of adultery, because she worshiped idols made of stone and wood. ¹⁰Israel’s wicked sister didn’t even come back to me with her whole heart, but only pretended,” says the Lord.

¹¹The Lord said to me, “Unfaithful Israel had a better excuse than wicked Judah. ¹²Go and speak this message toward the north:

‘Come back, unfaithful people of Israel,’ says the Lord.

‘I will stop being angry at you,
because I am full of mercy,’ says the Lord.

‘I will not be angry with you forever.

¹³All you have to do is admit your sin—
that you turned against the Lord your God
and worshiped gods under every green tree
and didn’t obey me,’” says the Lord.

¹⁴“Come back to me, you unfaithful children,” says the Lord, “because I am your master. I will take one person from every city and two from every family group, and I will bring

you to Jerusalem. ¹⁵Then I will give you new rulers who will be faithful to me, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. ¹⁶In those days there will be many of you in the land,” says the Lord. “At that time people will no longer say, ‘I remember the Ark of the Agreement.’ They won’t think about it anymore or remember it or miss it or make another one. ¹⁷At that time people will call Jerusalem The Throne of the Lord, and all nations will come together in Jerusalem to show respect to the Lord. They will not follow their stubborn, evil hearts anymore. ¹⁸In those days the family of Judah will join the family of Israel. They will come together from a land in the north to the land I gave their ancestors.

¹⁹“I, the Lord, said,

‘How happy I would be to treat you as my own children

and give you a pleasant land,

a land more beautiful than that of any other nation.’

I thought you would call me ‘My Father’

and not turn away from me.

²⁰But like a woman who is unfaithful to her husband,
family of Israel, you have been unfaithful to me,” says
the Lord.

²¹You can hear crying on the bare hilltops.

It is the people of Israel crying and praying for mercy.

They have become very evil

and have forgotten the Lord their God.

²²“Come back to me, you unfaithful children,
and I will forgive you for being unfaithful.”

“Yes, we will come to you,

because you are the Lord our God.

²³It was foolish to worship idols on the hills
and on the mountains.

Surely the salvation of Israel
comes from the Lord our God.

²⁴Since our youth, shameful gods have eaten up in
sacrifice

everything our ancestors worked for—
their flocks and herds,
their sons and daughters.

²⁵Let us lie down in our shame,
and let our disgrace cover us like a blanket.
We have sinned against the Lord our God,
both we and our ancestors.

From our youth until now,
we have not obeyed the Lord our God.”

“If you will return, Israel,
then return to me,” says the Lord.
“If you will throw away your idols that I hate,
then don’t wander away from me.
²If you say when you make a promise,
‘As surely as the Lord lives,’
and you can say it in a truthful, honest, and right way,
then the nations will be blessed by him,
and they will praise him for what he has done.”

³This is what the Lord says to the people of Judah and to Jerusalem:

“Plow your unplowed fields,
and don’t plant seeds among thorns.
⁴Give yourselves to the service of the Lord,
and decide to obey him,
people of Judah and people of Jerusalem.
If you don’t, my anger will spread among you like a
fire,
and no one will be able to put it out,
because of the evil you have done.

Trouble from the North

⁵“Announce this message in Judah and say it in Jerusalem:
‘Blow the trumpet throughout the country!’
Shout out loud and say,

‘Come together!
Let’s all escape to the strong, walled cities!’
‘Raise the signal flag toward Jerusalem!
Run for your lives, and don’t wait,
because I am bringing disaster from the north
There will be terrible destruction.’

⁷A lion has come out of his den;
a destroyer of nations has begun to march.
He has left his home
to destroy your land.
Your towns will be destroyed
with no one left to live in them.
⁸So put on rough cloth,
show how sad you are, and cry loudly.
The terrible anger of the Lord
has not turned away from us.

⁹“When this happens,” says the Lord,
“the king and officers will lose their courage.
The priests will be terribly afraid,
and the prophets will be shocked!”

¹⁰Then I said, “Lord God, you have tricked the people of Judah and Jerusalem. You said, ‘You will have peace,’ but now the sword is pointing at our throats!”

¹¹At that time this message will be given to Judah and Jerusalem: “A hot wind blows from the bare hilltops of the desert toward the Lord’s people. It is not a gentle wind to separate grain from chaff. ¹²I feel a stronger wind than that. Now even I will announce judgments against the people of

Judah.”

¹³Look! The enemy rises up like a cloud,
and his chariots come like a tornado.
His horses are faster than eagles.
How terrible it will be for us! We are ruined!

¹⁴People of Jerusalem, clean the evil from your hearts
so that you can be saved.

Don’t continue making evil plans.

¹⁵A voice from Dan makes an announcement
and brings bad news from the mountains of Ephraim.

¹⁶“Report this to the nations.

Spread this news in Jerusalem:

“Invaders are coming from a faraway country,
shouting words of war against the cities of Judah.

¹⁷The enemy has surrounded Jerusalem as men guard a
field,

because Judah turned against me,”” says the Lord.

¹⁸“The way you have lived and acted
has brought this trouble to you.

This is your punishment.

How terrible it is!

The pain stabs your heart!”

Jeremiah’s Cry

¹⁹Oh, how I hurt! How I hurt!

I am bent over in pain.

Oh, the torture in my heart!

My heart is pounding inside me.
I cannot keep quiet,
because I have heard the sound of the trumpet.
I have heard the shouts of war.

²⁰Disaster follows disaster;
the whole country has been destroyed.
My tents are destroyed in only a moment.
My curtains are torn down quickly.
²¹How long must I look at the war flag?
How long must I listen to the war trumpet?

²²The Lord says, "My people are foolish.
They do not know me.
They are stupid children;
they don't understand.
They are skillful at doing evil,
but they don't know how to do good."

Disaster Is Coming

²³I looked at the earth,
and it was empty and had no shape.
I looked at the sky,
and its light was gone.
²⁴I looked at the mountains,
and they were shaking.
All the hills were trembling.
²⁵I looked, and there were no people.
Every bird in the sky had flown away.

²⁶I looked, and the good, rich land had become a desert.

All its towns had been destroyed
by the Lord and his great anger.

²⁷This is what the Lord says:

“All the land will be ruined,
but I will not completely destroy it.

²⁸So the people in the land will cry loudly,
and the sky will grow dark,
because I have spoken and will not change my mind.
I have made a decision, and I will not change it.”

²⁹At the sound of the horsemen and the archers,
all the people in the towns run away.
They hide in the thick bushes
and climb up into the rocks.
All of the cities of Judah are empty;
no one lives in them.

³⁰Judah, you destroyed nation, what are you doing?
Why do you put on your finest dress
and decorate yourself with gold jewelry?
Why do you put color around your eyes?
You make yourself beautiful, but it is all useless.
Your lovers hate you;
they want to kill you.

³¹I hear a cry like a woman having a baby,
distress like a woman having her first child.
It is the sound of Jerusalem gasping for breath.

She lifts her hands in prayer and says,
“Oh! I am about to faint
before my murderers!”

No One Is Right

The Lord says, “Walk up and down the streets of Jerusalem.

Look around and discover these things.

Search the public squares of the city.

If you can find one person who does honest things,
who searches for the truth,

I will forgive this city.

²Although the people say, ‘As surely as the Lord lives!’

they don’t really mean it.”

³Lord, don’t you look for truth in people?

You struck the people of Judah,
but they didn’t feel any pain.

You crushed them,

but they refused to learn what is right.

They became more stubborn than a rock;
they refused to turn back to God.

⁴But I thought,

“These are only the poor, foolish people.

They have not learned the way of the Lord
and what their God wants them to do.

⁵So I will go to the leaders of Judah
and talk to them.

Surely they understand the way of the Lord
and know what God wants them to do.”

But even the leaders had all joined together to break
away from the Lord;

they had broken their ties with him.

⁶So a lion from the forest will attack them.

A wolf from the desert will kill them.

A leopard is waiting for them near their towns.

It will tear to pieces anyone who comes out of the city,
because the people of Judah have sinned greatly.

They have wandered away from the Lord many times.

⁷The Lord said, “Tell me why I should forgive you.

Your children have left me

and have made promises to idols that are not gods at
all.

I gave your children everything they needed,
but they still were like an unfaithful wife to me.

They spent much time in houses of prostitutes.

⁸They are like well-fed horses filled with sexual desire;
each one wants another man’s wife.

⁹Shouldn’t I punish the people of Judah for doing
these things?” says the Lord.

“Shouldn’t I give a nation such as this the punishment
it deserves?

¹⁰“Go along and cut down Judah’s vineyards,
but do not completely destroy them.

Cut off all her people as if they were branches,
because they do not belong to the Lord.

¹¹The families of Israel and Judah
have been completely unfaithful to me,” says the Lord.

¹²Those people have lied about the Lord
and said, “He will not do anything to us!

Nothing bad will happen to us!
We will never see war or hunger!
¹³The prophets are like an empty wind;
the word of God is not in them.
Let the bad things they say happen to them.”

¹⁴So this is what the Lord God All-Powerful says:

“The people said I would not punish them.
So, the words I give you will be like fire,
and these people will be like wood that it burns up.
¹⁵Listen, family of Israel,” says the Lord,
“I will soon bring a nation from far away to attack you.
It is an old nation that has lasted a long time.
The people there speak a language you do not know;
you cannot understand what they say.
¹⁶Their arrows bring death.
All their people are strong warriors.
¹⁷They will eat your crops and your food.
They will eat your sons and daughters.
They will eat your flocks and herds.
They will eat your grapes and figs.
They will destroy with their swords
the strong, walled cities you trust.

¹⁸“Yet even then,” says the Lord, “I will not destroy you completely. ¹⁹When the people of Judah ask, ‘Why has the Lord our God done all these terrible things to us?’ then give them this answer: ‘You have left the Lord and served foreign idols in your own land. So now you will serve foreigners in a land that does not belong to you.’”

²⁰“Announce this message to the family of Jacob,
and tell it to the nation of Judah:

²¹Hear this message, you foolish people who have no
sense.

They have eyes, but they don't really see.

They have ears, but they don't really listen.

²²Surely you are afraid of me,” says the Lord.

“You should shake with fear in my presence.

I am the one who made the beaches to be a border for
the sea,

a border the water can never go past.

The waves may pound the beach, but they can't win
over it.

They may roar, but they cannot go beyond it.

²³But the people of Judah are stubborn and have
turned against me.

They have turned aside and gone away from me.

²⁴They do not say to themselves,

‘We should fear the Lord our God,

who gives us autumn and spring rains in their seasons,
who makes sure we have the harvest at the right time.’

²⁵But your evil has kept away both rain and harvest.

Your sins have kept you from enjoying good things.

²⁶There are wicked men among my people.

Like those who make nets for catching birds,
they set their traps to catch people.

²⁷Like cages full of birds,
their houses are full of lies.

They have become rich and powerful.

²⁸They have grown big and fat.

There is no end to the evil things they do.
They won't plead the case of the orphan
or help the poor be judged fairly.

²⁹“Shouldn't I punish the people of Judah for doing these things?” says the Lord.

“Shouldn't I give a nation such as this the punishment it deserves?

³⁰“A terrible and shocking thing
has happened in the land of Judah:

³¹The prophets speak lies,
and the priests take power into their own hands,
and my people love it this way.
But what will you do when the end comes?

Jerusalem Is Surrounded

“Run for your lives, people of Benjamin!

Run away from Jerusalem!

Blow the war trumpet in the town of Tekoa!

Raise the warning flag over the town of Beth
Hakkerem!

Disaster is coming from the north;
terrible destruction is coming to you.

²Jerusalem, I will destroy you,
you who are fragile and gentle.

³Shepherds with their flocks will come against
Jerusalem.

They will set up their tents all around her,
each shepherd taking care of his own section.”

⁴They say, “Get ready to fight against Jerusalem!
Get up! We will attack at noon!

But it is already getting late;
the evening shadows are growing long.

⁵So get up! We will attack at night.

We will destroy the strong towers of Jerusalem!”

⁶This is what the Lord All-Powerful says:

“Cut down the trees around Jerusalem,
and build an attack ramp to the top of its walls.

This city must be punished.

Inside it is nothing but slavery.

⁷Jerusalem pours out her evil
as a well pours out its water.

The sounds of violence and destruction are heard
within her.

I can see the sickness and hurts of Jerusalem.

⁸Listen to this warning, Jerusalem,
or I will turn my back on you
and make your land an empty desert
where no one can live.”

⁹This is what the Lord All-Powerful says:

“Gather the few people of Israel who are left alive,
as you would gather the last grapes on a grapevine.
Check each vine again,
like someone who gathers grapes.”

¹⁰To whom can I speak? Whom can I warn?
Who will listen to me?

The people of Israel have closed ears,
so they cannot hear my warnings.
They don't like the word of the Lord;
they don't want to listen to it!

¹¹But I am full of the anger of the Lord,
and I am tired of holding it in.

“Pour out my anger on the children who play in the
street

and on the young men gathered together.

A husband and his wife will both be caught in his
anger,
as will the very old.

¹²Their houses will be turned over to others,
along with their fields and wives,
because I will raise my hand
and punish the people of Judah,” says the Lord.

¹³“Everyone, from the least important to the greatest,
is greedy for money.

Even the prophets and priests
all tell lies.

¹⁴They tried to heal my people’s serious injuries
as if they were small wounds.

They said, ‘It’s all right, it’s all right.’

But really, it is not all right.

¹⁵They should be ashamed of the terrible way they act,
but they are not ashamed at all.

They don’t even know how to blush about their sins.

So they will fall, along with everyone else.

They will be thrown to the ground when I punish
them,” says the Lord.

¹⁶This is what the Lord says:

“Stand where the roads cross and look.

Ask where the old way is,

where the good way is, and walk on it.

If you do, you will find rest for yourselves.

But they have said, ‘We will not walk on the good
way.’

¹⁷I set watchmen over you

and told you, ‘Listen for the sound of the war
trumpet!’

But they said, ‘We will not listen.’

¹⁸So listen, all you nations,

and pay attention, you witnesses.

Watch what I will do to the people of Judah.

¹⁹Hear this, people of the earth:

I am going to bring disaster to the people of Judah
because of the evil they plan.

They have not listened to my messages
and have rejected my teachings.

²⁰Why do you bring me offerings of incense from the
land of Sheba?

Why do you bring me sweet-smelling cane from a
faraway land?

Your burnt offerings will not be accepted;
your sacrifices do not please me.”

²¹So this is what the Lord says:

“I will put problems in front of Judah.
Fathers and sons will stumble over them together.
Neighbors and friends will die.”

²²This is what the Lord says:

“Look, an army is coming
from the land of the north;
a great nation is coming
from the far sides of the earth.

²³The soldiers carry bows and spears.

They are cruel and show no mercy.

They sound like the roaring ocean
when they ride their horses.

That army is coming lined up for battle,
ready to attack you, Jerusalem.”

²⁴We have heard the news about that army
and are helpless from fear.

We are gripped by our pain,
like a woman having a baby.

²⁵Don't go out into the fields
or walk down the roads,
because the enemy has swords.
There is terror on every side.

²⁶My people, put on rough cloth
and roll in the ashes to show how sad you are.
Cry loudly for those who are dead,
as if your only son were dead,
because the destroyer
will soon come against us.

²⁷“Jeremiah, I have made you like a worker who tests
metal,
and my people are like the ore.
You must observe their ways
and test them.

²⁸All my people have turned against me and are
stubborn.

They go around telling lies about others.
They are like bronze and iron
that became covered with rust.
They all act dishonestly.

²⁹The fire is fanned to make it hotter,
but the lead does not melt.
The pure metal does not come out;
the evil is not removed from my people.

³⁰My people will be called rejected silver,
because the Lord has rejected them.”

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 7:1–10:25

Situation

Jeremiah prophesied from the Temple gates and challenged the people. He told them that even if it meant destroying the Temple, God would bring discipline on Jerusalem. The nation had forgotten God after the death of good King Josiah.

Observation

True religion must have substance, integrity, and purity. God will uncover and rebuke sin, especially when people minimize it or let it go unacknowledged.

Inspiration

Habits are the thought and emotional patterns engraved on our minds. These internal habit patterns play just as forceful a role as external influences on our actions—in fact, perhaps more so...

As unbelievers, we formerly gave ourselves to developing habits of unholiness—what Paul called “ever-increasing wickedness” ([Romans 6:19](#)). Every time we sinned—every time we lusted, coveted, hated, cheated, or lied—we were developing habits of ever-increasing wickedness. These repeated acts of unrighteousness became habits that made us, in fact, slaves to sin...

Though we are to deal with these habits of unholiness, we must not try to do it in our own strength. Breaking sinful habits must be done in cooperation with the Holy Spirit and in dependence

upon Him. The determination that “I’ll not do that anymore,” based upon sheer human resolve, has never once broken the shackles of sin. But there are practical principles which we can follow to train ourselves in godliness.

The first principle is that habits are developed and reinforced by *frequent repetition*. ... This is the principle underlying the fact that the more we sin the more we are inclined to sin. But the converse is also true. The more we say no to sin, the more we are inclined to say no.

Therefore, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, we must systematically work at acquiring the habit of saying no to the sins that so easily entangle us. We all know what these sins are; the sins to which we are particularly vulnerable. We begin by concentrating on saying no to these. Then God will lead us to work on other sins which we may not even be aware of at this time. The more we succeed in saying no to our sinful desires, the easier it becomes to say no.

In the same manner we can develop positive habits of holiness. We can develop the habit of thinking thoughts that are pure, true, and good. We can develop the habits of prayer and meditating on the Scriptures. But these habits will only be developed through frequent repetition.

(From *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges)

Application

Are you a person of integrity? How do you work without supervision? Do you work harder if your boss is around? Do you cut corners you know your

supervisor will never notice? Work for your employer as you would for Jesus Christ. Work hard, with or without supervision.

Exploration

Idolatry Punished—[Exodus 22:20](#); [Deuteronomy 4:25–28](#); [8:19–20](#); [1 Kings 9:6–7](#); [Psalm 97:7](#); [Ezekiel 7:20–22](#); [Romans 1:22–25](#); [Revelation 14:9–10](#).

Jeremiah's Temple Message

This is the word that the Lord spoke to Jeremiah: ²“Stand at the gate of the Temple and preach this message there:

“Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of the nation of Judah! All you who come through these gates to worship the Lord, listen to this message! ³This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: Change your lives and do what is right! Then I will let you live in this place. ⁴Don't trust the lies of people who say, “This is the Temple of the Lord. This is the Temple of the Lord. This is the Temple of the Lord!” ⁵You must change your lives and do what is right. Be fair to each other. ⁶You must not be hard on strangers, orphans, and widows. Don't kill innocent people in this place! Don't follow other gods, or they will ruin your lives. ⁷If you do these things, I will let you live in this land that I gave to your ancestors to keep forever.

⁸“But look, you are trusting lies, which is useless. ⁹Will you steal and murder and be guilty of adultery? Will you falsely accuse other people? Will you burn incense to the god Baal and follow other gods you have not known? ¹⁰If you do that, do you think you can come before me and stand in this place where I have chosen to be worshiped? Do you think you can say, “We are safe!” when you do all these hateful things?

¹¹This place where I have chosen to be worshiped is nothing more to you than a hideout for robbers. I have been watching

you, says the Lord.

¹²“You people of Judah, go now to the town of Shiloh, where I first made a place to be worshiped. See what I did to it because of the evil things the people of Israel had done. ¹³You people of Judah have done all these evil things too, says the Lord. I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen to me. I called you, but you did not answer. ¹⁴So I will destroy the place where I have chosen to be worshiped in Jerusalem. You trust in that place, which I gave to you and your ancestors, but I will destroy it just as I destroyed Shiloh. ¹⁵I will push you away from me just as I pushed away your relatives, the people of Israel!”

¹⁶“As for you, Jeremiah, don’t pray for these people. Don’t cry out for them or ask anything for them or beg me to help them, because I will not listen to you. ¹⁷Don’t you see what they are doing in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? ¹⁸The children gather wood, and the fathers use the wood to make a fire. The women make the dough for cakes of bread, and they offer them to the Queen Goddess. They pour out drink offerings to other gods to make me angry. ¹⁹But I am not the one the people of Judah are really hurting, says the Lord. They are only hurting themselves and bringing shame upon themselves.

²⁰“So this is what the Lord God says: I will pour out my anger on this place, on people and animals, on the trees in the field and the crops in the ground. My anger will be like a hot fire that no one can put out.

Obedience Is More than Sacrifice

²¹“This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: Offer burnt offerings along with your other sacrifices, and eat the meat yourselves! ²²When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, I did not speak to them and give them commands only about burnt offerings and sacrifices. ²³I also gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Do all that I command so that good things will happen to you. ²⁴But your ancestors did not listen or pay attention to me. They were stubborn and did whatever their evil hearts wanted. They went backward, not forward. ²⁵Since the day your ancestors left Egypt, I have sent my servants, the prophets, again and again to you. ²⁶But your ancestors did not listen or pay attention to me. They were very stubborn and did more evil than their ancestors.’

²⁷“Jeremiah, you will tell all these things to the people of Judah, but they will not listen to you. You will call to them, but they will not answer you. ²⁸So say to them, ‘This is the nation that has not obeyed the Lord its God. These people do nothing when I correct them. They do not tell the truth; it has disappeared from their lips.

The Valley of Killing

²⁹“Cut off your hair and throw it away. Go up to the bare hilltop and cry out, because the Lord has rejected these people. He has turned his back on them, and in his anger will punish them. ³⁰The people of Judah have done what I said was evil, says the Lord. They have set up their hateful idols in the place where I have chosen to be worshiped and have made it unclean. ³¹The people of Judah have built places of worship at

Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. There they burned their own sons and daughters as sacrifices, something I never commanded. It never even entered my mind. ³²So, I warn you. The days are coming, says the Lord, when people will not call this place Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom anymore. They will call it the Valley of Killing. They will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no room to bury anyone else. ³³Then the bodies of the dead will become food for the birds of the sky and for the wild animals. There will be no one left alive to chase them away. ³⁴I will end the happy sounds of the bride and bridegroom. There will be no happy sounds in the cities of Judah or in the streets of Jerusalem, because the land will become an empty desert!

“The Lord says: At that time they will remove from their tombs the bones of Judah’s kings and officers, priests and prophets, and the people of Jerusalem. ²The bones will be spread on the ground under the sun, moon, and stars that the people loved and served and went after and searched for and worshiped. No one will gather up the bones and bury them. So they will be like dung thrown on the ground. ³I will force the people of Judah to leave their homes and their land. Those of this evil family who are not dead will wish they were, says the Lord All-Powerful.’

Sin and Punishment

⁴“Say to the people of Judah: ‘This is what the Lord says:
When people fall down, don’t they get up again?
And when someone goes the wrong way, doesn’t he
turn back?
⁵Why, then, have the people of Jerusalem gone the
wrong way
and not turned back?
They believe their own lies
and refuse to turn around and come back.
⁶I have listened to them very carefully,
but they do not say what is right.
They do not feel sorry about their wicked ways,
saying, “What have I done?”
Each person goes his own way,
like a horse charging into a battle.
⁷Even the birds in the sky
know the right times to do things.
The storks, doves, swifts, and thrushes

know when it is time to migrate.
But my people don't know
what the Lord wants them to do.

⁸“You keep saying, “We are wise,
because we have the teachings of the Lord.”
But actually, those who explain the Scriptures
have written lies with their pens.

⁹These wise men refused to listen to the word of the
Lord,

so they are not really wise at all.
They will be ashamed.
They will be shocked and trapped.

¹⁰So I will give their wives to other men
and their fields to new owners.
Everyone, from the least important to the greatest,
is greedy for money.
Even the prophets and priests
all tell lies.

¹¹They tried to heal my people's serious injuries
as if they were small wounds.
They said, “It's all right, it's all right.”
But really, it is not all right.

¹²They should be ashamed of the terrible way they act,
but they are not ashamed at all.
They don't even know how to blush about their sins.
So they will fall, along with everyone else.

They will be thrown to the ground when I punish them,
says the Lord.

¹³“I will take away their crops, says the Lord.

There will be no grapes on the vine
and no figs on the fig tree.
Even the leaves will dry up and die.
I will take away what I gave them.”

¹⁴“Why are we just sitting here?
Let’s get together!
We have sinned against the Lord,
so he has given us poisoned water to drink.
Come, let’s run to the strong, walled cities.
The Lord our God has decided that we must die,
so let’s die there.

¹⁵We hoped to have peace,
but nothing good has come.
We hoped for a time when he would heal us,
but only terror has come.

¹⁶From the land of Dan,
the snorting of the enemy’s horses is heard.
The ground shakes from the neighing of their large
horses.

They have come and destroyed
the land and everything in it,
the city and all who live there.”

¹⁷“Look! I am sending poisonous snakes to attack you.
These snakes cannot be charmed,
and they will bite you,” says the Lord.

Jeremiah’s Sadness

¹⁸God, you are my comfort when I am very sad
and when I am afraid.

¹⁹Listen to the sound of my people.

They cry from a faraway land:

“Isn’t the Lord still in Jerusalem?

Isn’t Jerusalem’s king still there?”

But God says, “Why did the people make me angry by
worshiping idols,
useless foreign idols?”

²⁰And the people say, “Harvest time is over;
summer has ended,
and we have not been saved.”

²¹Because my people are crushed, I am crushed.
I cry loudly and am afraid for them.

²²Isn’t there balm in the land of Gilead?

Isn’t there a doctor there?

So why aren’t the hurts of my people healed?

I wish my head were like a spring of water
and my eyes like a fountain of tears!
Then I could cry day and night
for my people who have been killed.
²I wish I had a place in the desert—
a house where travelers spend the night—
so I could leave my people.
I could go away from them,
because they are all unfaithful to God;
they are all turning against him.

Judah's Failures

³“They use their tongues like a bow,
shooting lies from their mouths like arrows.
Lies, not truth,
have grown strong in the land.
They go from one evil thing to another.
They do not know who I am,” says the Lord.

⁴“Watch out for your friends,
and don't trust your own relatives,
because every relative is a cheater,
and every friend tells lies about you.

⁵Everyone lies to his friend,
and no one speaks the truth.
The people of Judah have taught their tongues to lie.
They have become tired from sinning.

⁶Jeremiah, you live in the middle of lies.
With their lies the people refuse to know me,” says the

Lord.

⁷So this is what the Lord All-Powerful says:

“I will test the people of Judah as a person tests metal in a fire.

I have no other choice,
because my people have sinned.

⁸Their tongues are like sharp arrows.

Their mouths speak lies.

Everyone speaks nicely to his neighbor,
but he is secretly planning to attack him.

⁹“Shouldn’t I punish the people for doing this?” says the Lord.

“Shouldn’t I give a nation like this the punishment it deserves?”

¹⁰I, Jeremiah, will cry loudly for the mountains
and sing a funeral song for the empty fields.

They are empty, and no one passes through.

The mooing of cattle cannot be heard.

The birds have flown away,
and the animals are gone.

¹¹“I, the Lord, will make the city of Jerusalem a heap of ruins,

a home for wild dogs.

I will destroy the cities of Judah
so no one can live there.”

¹²What person is wise enough to understand these things?
Is there someone who has been taught by the Lord who can explain them? Why was the land ruined? Why has it been made

like an empty desert where no one goes?

¹³The Lord answered, "It is because Judah quit following my teachings that I gave them. They have not obeyed me or done what I told them to do. ¹⁴Instead, they were stubborn and followed the Baals, as their ancestors taught them to do. ¹⁵So this is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: "I will soon make the people of Judah eat bitter food and drink poisoned water. ¹⁶I will scatter them through other nations that they and their ancestors never knew about. I will chase the people of Judah with the sword until they are all killed."

¹⁷This is what the Lord All-Powerful says:

"Now, think about these things!

Call for the women who cry at funerals to come.

Send for those women who are good at that job.

¹⁸Let them come quickly
and cry loudly for us.

Then our eyes will fill with tears,

and streams of water will flow from our eyelids.

¹⁹The sound of loud crying is heard from Jerusalem:

"We are truly ruined!

We are truly ashamed!

We must leave our land,

because our houses are in ruins."

²⁰Now, women of Judah, listen to the word of the Lord;
open your ears to hear the words of his mouth.

Teach your daughters how to cry loudly.

Teach one another a funeral song.

²¹Death has climbed in through our windows
and has entered our strong cities.

Death has taken away our children who play in the streets
and the young men who meet in the city squares.

²²Say, "This is what the Lord says:

"The dead bodies of people will lie
in the open field like dung.
They will lie like grain a farmer has cut,
but there will be no one to gather them."

²³This is what the Lord says:

"The wise must not brag about their wisdom.
The strong must not brag about their strength.
The rich must not brag about their money.
²⁴But if someone wants to brag, let him brag
that he understands and knows me.
Let him brag that I am the Lord,
and that I am kind and fair,
and that I do things that are right on earth.
This kind of bragging pleases me," says the Lord.

²⁵The Lord says, "The time is coming when I will punish all those who are circumcised only in the flesh: ²⁶the people of Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and the desert people who cut their hair short. The men in all those countries are not circumcised. And the whole family of Israel does not give itself to serving me."

The Lord and the Idols

Family of Israel, listen to what the Lord says to you.²This is what he says:

“Don’t live like the people from other nations,
and don’t be afraid of special signs in the sky,
even though the other nations are afraid of them.

³The customs of other people are worth nothing.
Their idols are just wood cut from the forest,
shaped by a worker with his chisel.

⁴They decorate their idols with silver and gold.
With hammers and nails they fasten them down
so they won’t fall over.

⁵Their idols are like scarecrows in melon fields;
they cannot talk.

Since they cannot walk,
they must be carried.

Do not be afraid of those idols,
because they can’t hurt you,
and they can’t help you either.”

⁶Lord, there is no one like you.

You are great,
and your name is great and powerful.

⁷Everyone should respect you, King of the nations;
you deserve respect.

Of all the wise people among the nations
and in all the kingdoms,

none of them is as wise as you.

⁸Those wise people are stupid and foolish.
Their teachings come from worthless wooden idols.

⁹Hammered silver is brought from Tarshish
and gold from Uphaz,
so the idols are made by craftsmen and goldsmiths.
They put blue and purple clothes on the idols.
All these things are made by skilled workers.

¹⁰But the Lord is the only true God.
He is the only living God, the King forever.
The earth shakes when he is angry,
and the nations cannot stand up to his anger.

¹¹“Tell them this message: ‘These gods did not make heaven and earth; they will be destroyed and disappear from heaven and earth.’”

¹²God made the earth by his power.
He used his wisdom to build the world
and his understanding to stretch out the skies.

¹³When he thunders, the waters in the skies roar.
He makes clouds rise in the sky all over the earth.
He sends lightning with the rain
and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

¹⁴People are so stupid and know so little.
Goldsmiths are made ashamed by their idols,
because those statues are only false gods.
They have no breath in them.

¹⁵They are worth nothing; people make fun of them.
When they are judged, they will be destroyed.

¹⁶But God, who is Jacob's Portion, is not like the idols.
He made everything,
and he chose Israel to be his special people.
The Lord All-Powerful is his name.

Destruction Is Coming

¹⁷Get everything you own and prepare to leave,
you people who are trapped by your enemies.

¹⁸This is what the Lord says:

“At this time I will throw out the people who live in
this land.

I will bring trouble to them
so that they may be captured.”

¹⁹How terrible it will be for me because of my injury.
My wound cannot be healed.

Yet I told myself,

“This is my sickness; I must suffer through it.”

²⁰My tent is ruined,

and all its ropes are broken.

My children have gone away and left me.

No one is left to put up my tent again

or to set up a shelter for me.

²¹The shepherds are stupid

and don't ask the Lord for advice.

So they do not have success,

and all their flocks are scattered and lost.

²²Listen! The news is coming.

A loud noise comes from the north
to make the towns of Judah an empty desert
and a home for wild dogs!

Jeremiah's Prayer

²³Lord, I know that a person's life doesn't really belong
to him.

No one can control his own life.

²⁴Lord, correct me, but be fair.

Don't punish me in your anger,
or you will destroy me.

²⁵Pour out your anger on other nations
that do not know you
and do not pray to you.

Those nations have destroyed Jacob's family.
They have eaten him up completely
and destroyed his homeland.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 11:1–23

Situation

God would bring disaster on Israel if they would not repent. He would refuse to hear their prayers and let foreigners invade who would kill and exile many. God granted the Israelites an opportunity to acknowledge their sin and repent.

Observation

After rebuking the people for their sin, Jeremiah overheard about a plot to kill him. The prophet complained to the Lord. He was frustrated and hurt by the hostility he continued to endure.

Inspiration

Where is God when we hurt? Where is he when sleep won't come? Where is he when we awaken in a hospital bed with pain that won't subside? He's right here! He hung on the gallows to prove once and for all, with pierced hands and bloodstained face—that he's here—that he didn't create the hurt, but he came to take it away.

When you hurt, God hurts with you. When no one listens to you, God listens to you. When you wipe away tears of loneliness or frustration or anguish, in heaven there's a pierced hand approaching a heavenly face wiping away a tear.

Sometimes storms of life come to teach us that God is in control, that we must lean on him and learn to be thankful for the richness of his blessings to us.

We should serve God even if there is darkness enveloping our life and even if we don't understand what's happening ... even when the circumstances of our life don't make sense: Because he is worthy of praise, *because* he is God. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, "Hurt")

Application

In what areas of your life do you need to trust God to do what is right? What does it mean to you to believe that he is a sovereign God, in control of every aspect of your life? Thank God that he knows everything about you and still loves you.

Exploration

God's Sovereignty—[Exodus 18:11](#); [1 Chronicles 29:11–12](#); [Job 33:12](#); [Psalms 93:1–2](#); [Jeremiah 27:5](#).

The Agreement Is Broken

These are the words that the Lord spoke to Jeremiah: ²“Listen to the words of this agreement and tell them to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem. ³Tell them this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Cursed is the person who does not obey the words of this agreement ⁴that I made with your ancestors when I brought them out of Egypt. Egypt was like a furnace for melting iron!’ I told them, ‘Obey me and do everything I command you. Then you will be my people, and I will be your God. ⁵Then I will keep the promise I made to your ancestors to give them a fertile land.’ And you are living in that country today.”

I answered, “Amen, Lord.”

⁶The Lord said to me, “Announce this message in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: ‘Listen to the words of this agreement and obey them. ⁷I warned your ancestors to obey me when I brought them out of Egypt. I have warned them again and again to this very day: “Obey me!” ⁸But your ancestors did not listen to me. They were stubborn and did what their own evil hearts wanted. So I made all the curses of this agreement come upon them. I commanded them to obey the agreement, but they did not.”

⁹Then the Lord said to me, “I know the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem have made secret plans. ¹⁰They have gone back to the same sins their ancestors did. Their ancestors

refused to listen to my message and followed and worshiped other gods instead. The families of Israel and Judah have broken the agreement I made with their ancestors.¹¹ So this is what the Lord says: ‘I will soon bring a disaster on the people of Judah which they will not be able to escape. They will cry to me for help, but I will not listen to them.¹² The people living in the towns of Judah and the city of Jerusalem will pray to their idols to whom they burn incense. But those idols will not be able to help when disaster comes.¹³ Look, people of Judah, you have as many idols as there are towns in Judah. You have built as many altars to burn incense to that shameful god Baal as there are streets in Jerusalem.’

¹⁴“As for you, Jeremiah, don’t pray for these people or cry out for them or ask anything for them. I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble.

¹⁵“What is my beloved Judah doing in my Temple when she makes many evil plans?

Do you think animal sacrifices will stop your punishment?

When you do your evil, then you are happy.”

¹⁶The Lord called you “a leafy olive tree, with beautiful fruit and shape.”

But with the roar of a strong storm
he will set that tree on fire,
and its branches will be burned up.

¹⁷The Lord All-Powerful, who planted you, has announced that disaster will come to you. This is because the families of Israel and Judah have done evil and have made him angry by burning incense to Baal.

Evil Plans Against Jeremiah

¹⁸The Lord showed me that men were making plans against me. Because he showed me what they were doing, I knew they were against me. ¹⁹Before this, I was like a gentle lamb waiting to be butchered. I did not know they had made plans against me, saying:

“Let us destroy the tree and its fruit.

Let’s kill him so people will forget him.”

²⁰But, Lord All-Powerful, you are a fair judge.

You know how to test peoples’ hearts and minds.

I have told you what I have against them.

So let me see you give them the punishment they deserve.

²¹So the Lord speaks about the men from Anathoth who plan to kill Jeremiah and say, “Don’t prophesy in the name of the Lord, or we will kill you!” ²²So this is what the Lord All-Powerful says: “I will soon punish the men from Anathoth. Their young men will die in war. Their sons and daughters will die from hunger. ²³No one from the city of Anathoth will be left alive, because I will cause a disaster to happen to them that year.”

Life Lessons

[Jeremiah 12:1–13:27](#)

Situation

Jeremiah complained to God that the people of Israel were evil and questioned God's justice regarding these people. God responded that he will punish Israel, but he also would restore them in his mercy and grace.

Observation

While it is tempting to judge others, particularly other Christians, we shouldn't look down on them. Instead, we should reach out to them with God's love and mercy.

Inspiration

Not everyone has the strength of courage and character to live a life worthy of the calling they have received. To live up to our calling is itself a gift from God. "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it" ([Ephesians 4:7](#), NIV). Some of us are impeded from living up to Christ. It may be a troubled childhood, a tough marriage, difficult children, or ... you may have seen too much evil.

If Christ has apportioned you with enough grace to live a life worthy of the calling you received, are you applying it? ... Many Christians under-apply their grace. It is such a waste.

If you are living a life worthy of the calling you received, how do you treat your weaker brother? Do you look in disgust at another who can't quite seem

to get his act together? Does your mind get stuck thinking about how weak he is? Pray for him, that God's grace to him may increase. Fall to your face and implore God to have mercy on your weaker brother or sister with tears of remorse. Thank Him with tears of gratitude that He has mercifully given you so much grace. Why should it be the other person and not you that is weak? There is no reason except the grace Christ has apportioned to you at His sole discretion. "But for the grace of God, there go I."

... Every Christian is one for whom Christ died. If Jesus thought that person was worth dying for, why do you despise him? ...

Let us, therefore, concentrate on living up to the calling we have received. Part of our calling is to bear with our weaker brothers, to not revel in the smug satisfaction that we overcome but they don't. If we overcome, it is because of the grace apportioned to us. And if we ourselves are not living a life worthy of our calling, then ask for more grace. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, but know that the strength of courage and character to do so comes from the grace apportioned to you. (From *Walking with Christ in the Details of Life* by Patrick M. Morley)

Application

On what issues do you disagree with other believers—a disagreement caused because you both want to honor God and do what is best? How can you best show love (as opposed to giving them "right answers") to help them live out their faith?

Exploration

Judging Others—[Psalm 1:1](#); [Matthew 13:40–43](#);
[John 8:7](#); [1 Corinthians 4:5](#); [1 Corinthians 5:12](#).

Jeremiah's First Complaint

Lord, when I bring my case to you,
you are always right.
But I want to ask you about the justice you give.
Why are evil people successful?
Why do dishonest people have such easy lives?
²You have put the evil people here
like plants with strong roots.
They grow and produce fruit.
With their mouths they speak well of you,
but their hearts are really far away from you.
³But you know my heart, Lord.
You see me and test my thoughts about you.
Drag the evil people away like sheep to be butchered.
Set them aside for the day of killing.
⁴How much longer will the land stay dried up
and the grass in every field be dead?
The animals and birds in the land have died,
because the people are evil.
Yes, they are even saying,
“God does not see what happens to us.”

The Lord's Answer to Jeremiah

⁵“If you get tired while racing against people,

how can you race against horses?
If you stumble in a country that is safe,
what will you do in the thick thornbushes along the
Jordan River?

⁶Even your own brothers and members of your own
family
are making plans against you.
They are crying out against you.
Don't trust them,
even when they say nice things to you!

⁷"I have left Israel;
I have left my people.
I have given the people I love
over to their enemies.

⁸My people have become to me
like a lion in the forest.
They roar at me,
so I hate them.

⁹My people have become to me
like a speckled bird attacked on all sides by hawks.
Go, gather the wild animals.
Bring them to get something to eat.

¹⁰Many shepherds have ruined my vineyards
and trampled the plants in my field.
They have turned my beautiful field
into an empty desert.

¹¹They have turned my field into a desert
that is wilted and dead.
The whole country is an empty desert,
because no one who lives there cares.

¹²Many soldiers have marched over those barren hills.
The Lord is using the armies to punish that land
from one end to the other.

No one is safe.

¹³The people have planted wheat,
but they have harvested only thorns.
They have worked hard until they were very tired,
but they have nothing for all their work.
They are ashamed of their poor harvest,
because the Lord's terrible anger has caused this."

¹⁴This is what the Lord said to me: "Here is what I will do to all my wicked neighbors who take the land I gave my people Israel. I will pull them up and throw them out of their land. And I will pull up the people of Judah from among them. ¹⁵But after I pull them up, I will feel sorry for them again. I will bring each person back to his own property and to his own land. ¹⁶I want them to learn their lessons well. In the past they taught my people to swear by Baal's name. But if they will now learn to swear by my name, saying, 'As surely as the Lord lives ...' I will allow them to rebuild among my people. ¹⁷But if a nation will not listen to my message, I will pull it up completely and destroy it," says the Lord.

Jeremiah's Linen Belt

This is what the Lord said to me: “Go and buy a linen belt and put it around your waist. Don’t let the belt get wet.”

²So I bought a linen belt, just as the Lord told me, and put it around my waist. ³Then the Lord spoke his word to me a second time: ⁴“Take the belt you bought and are wearing, and go to Perath. Hide the belt there in a crack in the rocks.” ⁵So I went to Perath and hid the belt there, just as the Lord told me.

⁶Many days later the Lord said to me, “Now go to Perath and get the belt I told you to hide there.” ⁷So I went to Perath and dug up the belt and took it from where I had hidden it. But now it was ruined; it was good for nothing.

⁸Then the Lord spoke his word to me. ⁹This is what the Lord said: “In the same way I will ruin the pride of the people of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. ¹⁰These evil people refuse to listen to my warnings. They stubbornly do only what they want to do, and they follow other gods to serve and worship them. So they will become like this linen belt—good for nothing. ¹¹As a belt is wrapped tightly around a person’s waist, I wrapped the families of Israel and Judah around me,” says the Lord. “I did that so they would be my people and bring fame, praise, and honor to me. But my people would not listen.

Warnings About Leather Wine Bags

¹²“Say to them: ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says:

All leather bags for holding wine should be filled with wine.’ People will say to you: ‘Of course, we know all wine bags should be filled with wine.’ ¹³Then you will say to them, ‘This is what the Lord says: I will make everyone in this land like a drunken person—the kings who sit on David’s throne, the priests and the prophets, and all the people who live in Jerusalem. ¹⁴I will make them smash against one another, fathers and sons alike, says the Lord. I will not feel sorry or have pity on them or show mercy that would stop me from destroying them.’”

Threat of Slavery

¹⁵Listen and pay attention.
Don’t be too proud,
because the Lord has spoken to you.
¹⁶Give glory to the Lord your God
before he brings darkness
and before you slip and fall
on the dark hills.
You hope for light,
but he will turn it into thick darkness;
he will change it into deep gloom.
¹⁷If you don’t listen to him,
I will cry secretly
because of your pride.
I will cry painfully,
and my eyes will overflow with tears,
because the Lord’s people will be captured.

¹⁸That is, to the king and the people with him.

~ I tell this to the king and the queen mother:

“Come down from your thrones,
because your beautiful crowns
have fallen from your heads.”

¹⁹The cities of southern Judah are locked up,
and no one can open them.

All Judah will be taken as captives to a foreign land;
they will be carried away completely.

²⁰Jerusalem, look up and see
the people coming from the north.

Where is the flock God gave you to care for,
the flock you bragged about?

²¹What will you say when they appoint as your heads
those you had thought were your friends?

Won't you have much pain and trouble,
like a woman giving birth to a baby?

²²You might ask yourself,

“Why has this happened to me?”

It happened because of your many sins.

Because of your sins, your skirt was torn off
and your body has been treated badly.

²³Can a person from Cush change the color of his skin?
Can a leopard change his spots?

In the same way, Jerusalem, you cannot change and do
good,

because you are accustomed to doing evil.

²⁴“I will scatter you like chaff that is blown away by the
desert wind.

²⁵This is what will happen to you;

this is your part in my plans,” says the Lord.

“Because you forgot me
and trusted in false gods,

²⁶I will pull your skirts up over your face
so everyone will see your shame.

²⁷I have seen the terrible things you have done:
your acts of adultery and your snorting,
your prostitution,
your hateful acts
on the hills and in the fields.

How terrible it will be for you, Jerusalem.

How long will you continue being unclean?”

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 14:1–17:27

Situation

Jeremiah prophesied drought, famine, and days of disaster for God's people.

Observation

Sin requires judgment. Sin can distort our judgment of good and evil. God calls us to repent and to have moral outrage for violations of his holiness.

Inspiration

Where is our sense of moral outrage? Perhaps our moral sensibilities have been dulled because of today's dazzling instant communications. We sit mesmerized in front of our TVs, unable to turn the sets off, so we turn our minds off instead.

Over time, so much trash is heaped upon us that we come to expect and accept it; the bizarre becomes commonplace. Morally exhausted, we lose our capacity to discern good from evil.

The brilliant essayist Charles Krauthammer, citing economist Thomas Sowell, sums up our predicament beautifully: "The inability to make moral distinctions is the AIDS of the intellectuals: an acquired immune deficiency syndrome ... moral blindness of this caliber requires practice. It has to be learned."

In a culture with moral AIDS, words lose all meaning; or they are manipulated to obscure meaning.... But when words lose their meaning, it is nearly impossible for the Word of God to be received.

If sin and repentance mean nothing, then God's grace is irrelevant. Our preaching falls on deaf ears.

This moral deafness leads to disaster. The Scriptures tell us it was when people accepted King Ahab's gross evils as "trivial" that fearsome judgment befell ancient Israel.

Certainly evil is to be expected in a fallen world. What is not expected is for a holy people to accept it. If Christ is Lord of all, Christians must recapture their sense of moral outrage. (From *Who Speaks for God* by Charles Colson)

Application

What views about sin have softened so that they are even acceptable among Christians? What areas of life has this affected? Male-female relationships? Social settings? Family life? Don't be drawn in by the world's standards. Be morally pure in your dating or marriage relationship. Be bold in keeping a high standard. Don't let Satan wear down your defenses.

Exploration

Endurance—[Philippians 3:12–16](#); [4:11–13](#); [Jude 17–25](#).

A Time Without Rain

These are the words that the Lord spoke to Jeremiah about the time when there was no rain:

²“The nation of Judah cries as if someone has died,
and her cities are very sad.

They are distressed over the land.

A cry goes up to God from Jerusalem.

³The important men send their servants to get water.

They go to the wells,
but they find no water.

So they return with empty jars.

They are ashamed and embarrassed
and cover their heads in shame.

⁴The ground is dry and cracked open,
because no rain falls on the land.

The farmers are upset and sad,
so they cover their heads in shame.

⁵Even the mother deer in the field
leaves her newborn fawn to die,
because there is no grass.

⁶Wild donkeys stand on the bare hills
and sniff the wind like wild dogs.
But their eyes go blind,
because there is no food.”

⁷We know that we suffer because of our sins.

Lord, do something to help us for the good of your name.

We have left you many times;
we have sinned against you.

⁸God, the Hope of Israel,
you have saved Israel in times of trouble.

Why are you like a stranger in the land,
or like a traveler who only stays one night?

⁹Why are you like someone who has been attacked by surprise,

like a warrior who is not able to save anyone?

But you are among us, Lord,
and we are called by your name
so don't leave us without help!

¹⁰This is what the Lord says about the people of Judah:

“They really love to wander from me;
they don't stop themselves from leaving me.
So now the Lord will not accept them.
He will now remember the evil they do
and will punish them for their sins.”

¹¹Then the Lord said, “Don't pray for good things to happen to the people of Judah. ¹²Even if they give up eating, I will not listen to their prayers. Even if they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings to me, I will not accept them. Instead, I will destroy the people of Judah with war, hunger, and terrible diseases.”

¹³But I said, “Oh, Lord God, the prophets keep telling the people, ‘You will not suffer from an enemy's sword or from

hunger. I, the Lord, will give you peace in this land.”

¹⁴Then the Lord said to me, “Those prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them or appoint them or speak to them. They have been prophesying false visions, idolatries, worthless magic, and their own wishful thinking. ¹⁵So this is what I say about the prophets who are prophesying in my name. I did not send them. They say, ‘No enemy will attack this country with swords. There will never be hunger in this land.’ So those prophets will die from hunger and from an enemy’s sword. ¹⁶And the people to whom the prophets speak will be thrown into the streets of Jerusalem. There they will die from hunger and from an enemy’s sword. And no one will be there to bury them, or their wives, or their sons, or their daughters. I will punish them.

¹⁷“Jeremiah, speak this message to the people of Judah:

‘Let my eyes be filled with tears
night and day, without stopping.
My people have received a terrible blow;
they have been hurt badly.

¹⁸If I go into the country,
I see people killed by swords.
If I go into the city,
I see much sickness, because the people have no food.
Both the priests and the prophets
have been taken to a foreign land.”

¹⁹Lord, have you completely rejected the nation of Judah?

Do you hate Jerusalem?
Why have you hurt us so badly
that we cannot be made well again?

We hoped for peace,
but nothing good has come.
We looked for a time of healing,
but only terror came.

²⁰Lord, we admit that we are wicked
and that our ancestors did evil things.
We have sinned against you.

²¹For your sake, do not hate us.
Do not take away the honor from your glorious throne.
Remember your agreement with us,
and do not break it.

²²Do foreign idols have the power to bring rain?
Does the sky itself have the power to send down
showers?

No, it is you, Lord our God.
You are our only hope,
because you are the one who made all these things.

Then the Lord said to me: “I would not feel sorry for the people of Judah even if Moses and Samuel prayed for them. Send them away from me! Tell them to go! ²When they ask you, ‘Where will we go?’ tell them: ‘This is what the Lord says:

Those who are meant to die
will die.

Those who are meant to die in war
will die in war.

Those who are meant to die from hunger
will die from hunger.

Those who are meant to be taken captive
will be taken captive.’

³“I will send four kinds of destroyers against them,” says the Lord. “I will send war to kill, dogs to drag the bodies away, and the birds of the air and wild animals to eat and destroy the bodies. ⁴I will make the people of Judah hated by everyone on earth because of what Manasseh did in Jerusalem. (Manasseh son of Hezekiah was king of the nation of Judah.)

⁵“Who will feel sorry for you, Jerusalem?
Who will be sad and cry for you?
Who will go out of his way to ask how you are?

⁶Jerusalem, you have left me,” says the Lord.

“You keep going farther and farther away,
so I have taken hold of you and destroyed you.
I was tired of holding back my anger.

⁷I have separated the people of Judah with my
pitchfork
and scattered them at the city gates of the land.

My people haven't changed their ways.
So I have destroyed them
and taken away their children.

⁸There are more widows than grains of sand in the sea.
I brought a destroyer at noontime
against the mothers of the young men of Judah.
I suddenly brought pain and fear
on the people of Judah.

⁹When the enemy attacked, a woman with seven sons
felt faint because they would all die.
She became weak and unable to breathe.
Her bright day became dark from sadness.
She felt shame and disgrace.
And everyone else left alive in Judah
I will hand over to the enemies, too!" says the Lord.

Jeremiah's Second Complaint

¹⁰Mother, I am sorry that you gave birth to me
since I must accuse and criticize the whole land.
I have not loaned or borrowed anything,
but everyone curses me.

¹¹The Lord said,
"I have saved you for a good reason.
I have made your enemies beg you
in times of disaster and trouble.

¹²No one can smash a piece of iron or bronze
that comes from the north.

¹³Your wealth and treasures

I will give to others free of charge,
because the people of Judah have sinned
throughout the country.

¹⁴I will make you slaves to your enemies
in a land you have never known.
My anger is like a hot fire,
and it will burn against you.”

¹⁵Lord, you understand.
Remember me and take care of me.
Punish for me those who are hurting me.
Don’t destroy me while you remain patient with them.
Think about the shame I suffer for you.

¹⁶Your words came to me, and I listened carefully to
them.

Your words made me very happy,
because I am called by your name,
Lord God All-Powerful.

¹⁷I never sat with the crowd
as they laughed and had fun.
I sat by myself, because you were there,
and you filled me with anger at the evil around me.

¹⁸I don’t understand why my pain has no end.
I don’t understand why my injury is not cured or
healed.

Will you be like a brook that goes dry?
Will you be like a spring that stops flowing?

¹⁹So this is what the Lord says:

“If you change your heart and return to me, I will take

you back.

Then you may serve me.

And if you speak things that have worth,

not useless words,

then you may speak for me.

Let the people of Judah turn to you,

but you must not change and be like them.

²⁰I will make you as strong as a wall to this people,

as strong as a wall of bronze.

They will fight against you,

but they will not defeat you,

because I am with you.

I will rescue you and save you,” says the Lord.

²¹“I will save you from these wicked people

and rescue you from these cruel people.”

The Day of Disaster

Then the Lord spoke his word to me:²“You must not get married or have sons or daughters in this place.”

³The Lord says this about the sons and daughters born in this land and their mothers and fathers:⁴“They will die of terrible diseases, and no one will cry for them or bury them. Their bodies will lie on the ground like dung. They will die in war, or they will starve to death. Their bodies will be food for the birds of the sky and for the wild animals.”

⁵So this is what the Lord says: “Jeremiah, do not go into a house where there is a funeral meal. Do not go there to cry for the dead or to show your sorrow for them, because I have taken back my blessing, my love, and my pity from these people,” says the Lord. ⁶“Important people and common people will die in the land of Judah. No one will bury them or cry for them or cut himself or shave his head to show sorrow for them. ⁷No one will bring food to comfort those who are crying for the dead. No one will offer a drink to comfort someone whose mother or father has died.

⁸“Do not go into a house where the people are having a feast to sit down to eat and drink, ⁹because this is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: I will soon stop the sounds of joy and gladness and the happy sounds of brides and bridegrooms in this place. This will happen during your lifetime.

¹⁰“When you tell the people of Judah these things, they will ask you, ‘Why has the Lord said these terrible things to us?’

What have we done wrong? What sin have we done against the Lord our God?

¹¹“Then say to them: ‘This is because your ancestors quit following me,’ says the Lord. ‘And they followed other gods and served and worshiped them. Your ancestors left me and quit obeying my teaching. ¹²But you have done even more evil than your ancestors. You are very stubborn and do only what you want to do; you have not obeyed me. ¹³So I will throw you out of this country and send you into a land that you and your ancestors never knew. There you can serve other gods day and night, because I will not help you or show you any favors.’

¹⁴“People say, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the people of Israel out of Egypt ...’ But the time is coming,” says the Lord, “when people will not say this anymore. ¹⁵They will say instead, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites from the northern land and from all the countries where he had sent them ...’ And I will bring them back to the land I gave to their ancestors.

¹⁶“I will soon send for many fishermen to come to this land,” says the Lord. “And they will catch the people of Judah. After that, I will send for many hunters to come to this land. And they will hunt the people of Judah on every mountain and hill and in the cracks of the rocks. ¹⁷I see everything they do. They cannot hide from me the things they do; their sin is not hidden from my eyes. ¹⁸I will pay back the people of Judah twice for every one of their sins, because they have made my land unclean. They have filled my country with their hateful idols.”

¹⁹Lord, you are my strength and my protection,

my safe place in times of trouble.

The nations will come to you from all over the world
and say, "Our ancestors had only false gods,
useless idols that didn't help them.

²⁰Can people make gods for themselves?

They will not really be gods!"

²¹The Lord says, "So I will teach those who make idols.

This time I will teach them

about my power and my strength.

Then they will know

that my name is the Lord.

Judah's Guilty Heart

“The sin of the people of Judah is written with an iron tool.

Their sins were cut with a hard point into the stone that is their hearts.

Their sins were cut into the corners of their altars.

²Even their children remember
their altars to idols and their Asherah idols
beside the green trees
and on the high hills.

³My mountain in the open country
and your wealth and treasures
I will give away to other people.
I will give away the places of worship in your country,
because you sinned by worshipping there.

⁴You will lose the land I gave you,
and it is your own fault.
I will let your enemies take you as their slaves
to a land you have never known.

This is because you have made my anger burn like a
hot fire,
and it will burn forever.”

Trusting in Humans or God

⁵This is what the Lord says:

“A curse is placed on those who trust other people,
who depend on humans for strength,

who have stopped trusting the Lord.

⁶They are like a bush in a desert
that grows in a land where no one lives,
a hot and dry land with bad soil.
They don't know about the good things God can give.

⁷“But the person who trusts in the Lord will be
blessed.

The Lord will show him that he can be trusted.

⁸He will be strong, like a tree planted near water
that sends its roots by a stream.
It is not afraid when the days are hot;
its leaves are always green.
It does not worry in a year when no rain comes;
it always produces fruit.

⁹“More than anything else, a person's mind is evil
and cannot be healed.

No one truly understands it.

¹⁰But I, the Lord, look into a person's heart
and test the mind.

So I can decide what each one deserves;

I can give each one the right payment for what he
does.”

¹¹Like a bird hatching an egg it did not lay,
so are the people who get rich by cheating.

When their lives are half finished, they will lose their
riches.

At the end of their lives, it will be clear they were fools.

¹²From the beginning our Temple has been honored

From the beginning, our Temple has been honored
as a glorious throne for God.

¹³Lord, hope of Israel,
those who leave you will be shamed.

People who quit following the Lord will be like a name
written in the dust,

because they have left the Lord, the spring of living
water.

Jeremiah's Third Complaint

¹⁴Lord, heal me, and I will truly be healed.
Save me, and I will truly be saved.
You are the one I praise.

¹⁵The people of Judah keep asking me,
“Where is the word from the Lord?
Let's see that message come true!”

¹⁶Lord, I didn't run away from being the shepherd you
wanted.

I didn't want the terrible day to come.
You know everything I have said;
you see all that is happening.

¹⁷Don't be a terror to me.
I run to you for safety in times of trouble.

¹⁸Make those who are hurting me be ashamed,
but don't bring shame to me.

Let them be terrified,
but keep me from terror.
Bring the day of disaster on my enemies.

Destroy them, and destroy them again.

Keeping the Sabbath Holy

¹⁹This is what the Lord said to me: “Go and stand at the People’s Gate of Jerusalem, where the kings of Judah go in and out. And then go to all the other gates of Jerusalem. ²⁰Say to them there: ‘Hear the word of the Lord, kings of Judah, all you people of Judah, and all who live in Jerusalem, who come through these gates into the city. ²¹This is what the Lord says: Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. ²²Don’t take a load out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work on that day. But keep the Sabbath as a holy day, as I commanded your ancestors. ²³But your ancestors did not listen or pay attention to me. They were very stubborn and did not listen. I punished them, but it didn’t do any good. ²⁴But you must be careful to obey me, says the Lord. You must not bring a load through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath, but you must keep the Sabbath as a holy day and not do any work on that day.

²⁵“If you obey this command, kings who sit on David’s throne will come through the gates of Jerusalem with their officers. They will come riding in chariots and on horses, along with the people of Judah and Jerusalem. And the city of Jerusalem will have people living in it forever. ²⁶People will come to Jerusalem from the villages around it, from the towns of Judah, from the land of Benjamin, from the western hills, from the mountains, and from southern Judah. They will all bring to the Temple of the Lord burnt offerings, sacrifices,

grain offerings, incense, and offerings to show thanks to God.
²⁷But you must obey me and keep the Sabbath day as a holy day. You must not carry any loads into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. If you don't obey me, I will start a fire at the gates of Jerusalem, and it will burn until it burns even the strong towers. And it will not be put out.”

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 18:1–20:18

Situation

God sent Jeremiah to a potter's shop. While there, God told him that Jerusalem would be destroyed as easily as a clay pot. The people persecuted Jeremiah for his unpopular message.

Observation

God shapes our lives like a potter shapes clay.

Inspiration

The prophet was in the pits. Literally. Like Poe's fanciful character, he was "sick, sick unto death." Swamped with disillusionment and drowning in despair, he cursed the day he was born and wondered why an abortion wasn't performed, killing him prior to his birth....

An exaggeration? Not hardly. Read the record for yourself. Jeremiah's journal holds nothing back. In chapter [20](#) the chief officer in the temple had him beaten (forty lashes), then placed in stocks. That means his feet, hands, and neck were secured in a torturous device that caused the body to be bent almost double. That happened after he was beaten! Why? Had he committed some crime? No. He had simply declared the truth. He had done what was right—and this is what he got in return. It hurt him deeply.

On top of all that, sarcastic whisperings swirled about. His once-trusted friends tagged him with a nickname—MAGOR-MISSABIB—meaning "terror on

every side.” That also hurt. He must have felt like a limp rag doll in the mouth of a snarling Doberman....

The man is in anguish. Prophet or not, he is struggling with God’s justice, His strange treatment. Deep down he is questioning His presence. “Where is He? Why has Jehovah vanished at a time when I need Him the most?” ...

What desperate feelings!

And one need not be ... doubled over in stocks and beaten with rods. No, sometimes they come in the dark, long tunnel of suffering when pain won’t go away. Or when a marriage partner who promised to stay “for better or worse” breaks that vow. Or when a long-sought-after dream goes up in smoke. Or when we kiss a loved one goodbye for the last time.

Not always ... but sometimes (usually unspoken and hidden away in the secret vaults of our minds) we question Jehovah’s justice. We ask, “Is He absent today?”...

At those times I’m tempted to say what the prophet said:

I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name ... ([20:9a](#)).

“That’s it! I’m tossing in my collar. No more sermons or devotionals for this preacher. Secular job here I come!” But right about the time I start to jump I experience what Jeremiah admitted:

... Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it ([20:9b](#)).

Directly sent from God is this surge of hope, this

cleansing fire of confidence, this renewed sense of determination swelling up within me. And the disillusionment is quietly replaced with His reassurance as He reminds me of that glorious climax to the hymn I often sing back to Him in full volume:

“All is well, all is well!”

Thank God, it is. Recently, I doubted that—like Jeremiah. But not today. Reassurance has returned. Divine perspective has provided a fresh breeze of hope in the pits. I have determined that disillusionment must go. Now ... not later. (From *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Is your minister close to being burned out? Does he ever feel like throwing in the towel? Look for ways to encourage him. After church on Sunday, tell him what you learned from the message. During the week, call, write, or stop by the church office and share what makes his ministry helpful to you.

Exploration

Trusting God in Difficult Times—[Psalm 27:5](#); [Matthew 5:4, 10](#); [Romans 8:28](#); [2 Timothy 1:11–12](#).

Any injustice in this life is offset by the honor of choosing our destiny in the next. —Max Lucado (*He Chose the Nails*)

The Potter and the Clay

This is the word the Lord spoke to Jeremiah: ²“Go down to the potter’s house, and I will give you my message there.” ³So I went down to the potter’s house and saw him working at the potter’s wheel. ⁴He was using his hands to make a pot from clay, but something went wrong with it. So he used that clay to make another pot the way he wanted it to be.

⁵Then the Lord spoke his word to me: ⁶“Family of Israel, can’t I do the same thing with you?” says the Lord. “You are in my hands like the clay in the potter’s hands. ⁷There may come a time when I will speak about a nation or a kingdom that I will pull up by its roots or that I will pull down to destroy it. ⁸But if the people of that nation stop doing the evil they have done, I will change my mind and not carry out my plans to bring disaster to them. ⁹There may come another time when I will speak about a nation that I will build up and plant. ¹⁰But if I see it doing evil by not obeying me, I will change my mind and not carry out my plans to do good for them.

¹¹“So, say this to the people of Judah and those who live in Jerusalem: ‘This is what the Lord says: I am preparing disaster for you and making plans against you. So stop doing evil. Change your ways and do what is right.’ ¹²But the people of

Judah will answer, ‘It won’t do any good to try! We will continue to do what we want. Each of us will do what his stubborn, evil heart wants!’”

¹³So this is what the Lord says:

“Ask the people in other nations this question:
‘Have you ever heard anything like this?’
The people of Israel have done a horrible thing.

¹⁴The snow on the mountains of Lebanon
never melts from the rocks.
Its cool, flowing streams
do not dry up.

¹⁵But my people have forgotten me.
They burn incense to worthless idols
and have stumbled in what they do
and in the old ways of their ancestors.
They walk along back roads
and on poor highways.

¹⁶So Judah’s country will become an empty desert.
People will not stop making fun of it.
They will shake their heads as they pass by;
they will be shocked at how the country was
destroyed.

¹⁷Like a strong east wind,
I will scatter them before their enemies.
At that awful time they will not see me coming to help
them;
they will see me leaving.”

¹⁸Then the people said, “Come, let’s make plans against Jeremiah. Surely the teaching of the law by the priest will not be lost. We will still have the advice from the wise men and the words of the prophets. So let’s ruin him by telling lies about him. We won’t pay attention to anything he says.”

¹⁹Lord, listen to me.

Listen to what my accusers are saying!

²⁰Good should not be paid back with evil,
but they have dug a pit in order to kill me.

Remember that I stood before you
and asked you to do good things for these people
and to turn your anger away from them.

²¹So now, let their children starve,
and let their enemies kill them with swords.
Let their wives lose their children and husbands.
Let the men from Judah be put to death
and the young men be killed with swords in battle.

²²Let them cry out in their houses
when you bring an enemy against them suddenly.
Let all this happen, because my enemies have dug
a pit to capture me and have hidden traps for my feet.

²³Lord, you know
about all their plans to kill me.
Don’t forgive their crimes
or erase their sins from your mind.
Make them fall from their places;
punish them while you are angry.

Judah Is like a Broken Jar

This is what the Lord said to me: “Go and buy a clay jar from a potter. ²Take some of the older leaders of the people and the priests, and go out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom, near the front of the Potsherd Gate. There speak the words I tell you. ³Say, ‘Kings of Judah and people of Jerusalem, listen to this message from the Lord. This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: I will soon bring a disaster on this place that will amaze and frighten everyone who hears about it. ⁴The people of Judah have quit following me. They have made this a place for foreign gods. They have burned sacrifices to other gods that neither they, nor their ancestors, nor the kings of Judah had ever known before. They filled this place with the blood of innocent people. ⁵They have built places on hilltops to worship Baal, where they burn their children in the fire to Baal. That is something I did not command or speak about; it never even entered my mind. ⁶Now people call this place the Valley of Ben Hinnom or Topheth, but the days are coming, says the Lord, when people will call it the Valley of Killing.

⁷“At this place I will ruin the plans of the people of Judah and Jerusalem. The enemy will chase them, and I will have them killed with swords. I will make their dead bodies food for the birds and wild animals. ⁸I will completely destroy this city. People will make fun of it and shake their heads when they pass by. They will be shocked when they see how the city was destroyed. ⁹An enemy army will surround the city and will not let anyone go out to get food. I will make the people so hungry that they will eat the bodies of their own sons and daughters,

and then they will begin to eat each other.’

¹⁰“While the people with you are watching, break that jar.
¹¹Then say this: ‘The Lord All-Powerful says: I will break this nation and this city just as someone breaks a clay jar that cannot be put back together again. The dead people will be buried here in Topheth, because there is no other place for them. ¹²This is what I will do to these people and to this place, says the Lord. I will make this city like Topheth. ¹³The houses in Jerusalem and the king’s palaces will become as unclean as this place, Topheth, because the people worshiped gods on the [roofs](#) of their houses. They worshiped the stars and burned incense to honor them and gave drink offerings to gods.’”

¹⁴When Jeremiah left Topheth where the Lord had sent him to prophesy, he went to the Lord’s Temple, stood in the courtyard, and said to all the people: ¹⁵“This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will soon bring disaster to Jerusalem and the villages around it, as I said I would. This will happen because the people are very stubborn and do not listen at all to what I say.’”

Pashhur Will Be Captured

Pashhur son of Immer was a priest and the highest officer in the Temple of the Lord. When he heard Jeremiah prophesying in the Temple courtyard, ²he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten. And he locked Jeremiah's hands and feet between large blocks of wood at the Upper Gate of Benjamin of the Lord's Temple. ³The next day when Pashhur took Jeremiah out of the blocks of wood, Jeremiah said to him, "The Lord's name for you is not Pashhur. Now his name for you is Terror on Every Side. ⁴This is what the Lord says: 'I will soon make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends. You will watch enemies killing your friends with swords. And I will give all the people of Judah to the king of Babylon, who will take them away as captives to Babylon and then will kill them with swords. ⁵I will give all the wealth of this city to its enemies—its goods, its valuables, and the treasures of the kings of Judah. The enemies will carry all those valuables off to Babylon. ⁶And Pashhur, you and everyone in your house will be taken captive. You will be forced to go to Babylon, where you will die and be buried, you and your friends to whom you have prophesied lies.'"

Jeremiah's Fifth Complaint

⁷Lord, you tricked me, and I was fooled.
You are stronger than I am, so you won.
I have become a joke;
everyone makes fun of me all day long.

⁸Every time I speak, I shout.
I am always shouting about violence and destruction.
I tell the people about the message I received from the
Lord,
but this only brings me insults.
The people make fun of me all day long.
⁹Sometimes I say to myself,
“I will forget about the Lord.
I will not speak anymore in his name.”
But then his message becomes like a burning fire
inside me,
deep within my bones.
I get tired of trying to hold it inside of me,
and finally, I cannot hold it in.
¹⁰I hear many people whispering about me:
“Terror on every side!
Tell on him! Let’s tell the rulers about him.”
My friends are all just waiting for me to make some
mistake.
They are saying,
“Maybe we can trick him
so we can defeat him
and pay him back.”

¹¹But the Lord is with me like a strong warrior,
so those who are chasing me will trip and fall;
they will not defeat me.
They will be ashamed because they have failed,
and their shame will never be forgotten.

¹²Lord All-Powerful, you test good people;

you look deeply into the heart and mind of a person.
I have told you my arguments against these people,
so let me see you give them the punishment they
deserve.

¹³Sing to the Lord!
Praise the Lord!
He saves the life of the poor
from the power of the wicked.

Jeremiah's Sixth Complaint

¹⁴Let there be a curse on the day I was born;
let there be no blessing on the day when my mother
gave birth to me.

¹⁵Let there be a curse on the man
who brought my father the news:
“You have a son!”

This made my father very glad.

¹⁶Let that man be like the towns
the Lord destroyed without pity.
Let him hear loud crying in the morning
and battle cries at noon,

¹⁷because he did not kill me before I was born.
Then my mother would have been my grave;
she would have stayed pregnant forever.

¹⁸Why did I have to come out of my mother's body?
All I have known is trouble and sorrow,
and my life will end in shame.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 21:1–23:40

Situation

God had allowed many disobedient kings to continue ruling. But now God forewarned the people of his plan for a harsh discipline if they once again refused to return to him. Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, attacked Jerusalem between 588 and 586 B.C. When he destroyed the city, he was fulfilling God's prophecy.

Observation

God makes clear what is right and wrong. When people choose to do wrong, God helps them see their sin. God's discipline arises from his love for his people.

Inspiration

Oftentimes we do not recognize the disciplining hand of God. When there are personal consequences resulting from our sin, such as an injury or a financial loss, we can usually recognize those right away. But sometimes God's discipline comes in forms that at first seem to have no relationship to what we have done. In time, however, the truth usually becomes apparent....

People who accept the discipline of God realize that His discipline is for their own protection. They do not view it as something negative. They see it as an expression of His love, for that is exactly what it is.

Imagine for a moment a child who has been told

repeatedly not to play in the street. But he goes right ahead and does it anyway. His parents, if they are wise, will discipline him. Why? Because they are the parents and he is just a child and how dare he break their rules? No. They know that if he doesn't learn to stay out of the street, he could be killed or crippled. The disciplinary action they choose may seem painful to their child, but a simple spanking is far better than being hit by a car. A lesser evil is used to guard the child from a much greater evil.

So it is when God disciplines us. He is trying to keep us from the greater harm that comes from involvement with sin. We will not fully appreciate the love God has expressed toward us through His discipline until we get to heaven. (From *Winning the War Within* by Charles Stanley)

Application

Do you love your children? Don't be afraid to discipline them! Your thankless work will help them to become respected adults. Are you still a young person at home? When you are disciplined, realize that your parents want to help you become a respected adult. Thank them for it!

Exploration

God's Discipline—[Deuteronomy 8:2–5](#); [Proverbs 10:17](#); [Jeremiah 32:33](#); [Hosea 6:1–3](#); [14:1–2](#), [4](#); [Joel 2:13](#); [Micah 7:18–19](#); [Haggai 2:17](#); [2 Corinthians 7:10](#); [Philippians 1:6](#); [Hebrews 12:5–11](#).

God Rejects King Zedekiah's Request

This is the word that the Lord spoke to Jeremiah. It came when Zedekiah king of Judah sent Pashhur son of Malkijah and the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah to Jeremiah.²They said, "Ask the Lord for us what will happen, because Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is attacking us. Maybe the Lord will do miracles for us as he did in the past so Nebuchadnezzar will stop attacking us and leave."

³But Jeremiah answered them, "Tell King Zedekiah this: ⁴'Here is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: You have weapons of war in your hands to defend yourselves against the king of Babylon and the Babylonians, who are all around the city wall. But I will make those weapons useless. Soon I will bring them into the center of this city. ⁵In my anger, my very great anger, I myself will fight against you with my great power and strength. ⁶I will kill everything living in Jerusalem—both people and animals. They will die from terrible diseases. ⁷Then, says the Lord, I'll hand over Zedekiah king of Judah, his officers, and the people in Jerusalem who do not die from the terrible diseases or battle or hunger, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. I will let those win who want to kill the people of Judah, so the people of Judah and Jerusalem will be killed in war. Nebuchadnezzar will not show any mercy or pity or feel sorry for them!'

⁸"Also tell this to the people of Jerusalem: 'This is what the

Lord says: I will let you choose to live or die.⁹ Anyone who stays in Jerusalem will die in war or from hunger or from a terrible disease. But anyone who goes out of Jerusalem and surrenders to the Babylonians who are attacking you will live. Anyone who leaves the city will save his life as if it were a prize won in war.¹⁰ I have decided to make trouble for this city and not to help it, says the Lord. I will give it to the king of Babylon, and he will burn it with fire.’

¹¹“Say to Judah’s royal family: ‘Hear the word of the Lord.

¹²Family of David, this is what the Lord says:

You must judge people fairly every morning.

Save the person who has been robbed
from the power of his attacker.

If you don’t, I will become very angry.

My anger will be like a fire that no one can put out,
because you have done evil things.

¹³“Jerusalem, I am against you,
you who live on top of the mountain
over this valley, says the Lord.

You say, “No one can attack us
or come into our strong city.”

¹⁴But I will give you the punishment you deserve, says
the Lord.

I will start a fire in your forests
that will burn up everything around you!”

Judgment Against Evil Kings

This is what the Lord says: “Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and prophesy this message there: ²‘Hear the word of the Lord, king of Judah, who rules from David’s throne. You and your officers, and your people who come through these gates, listen! ³This is what the Lord says: Do what is fair and right. Save the one who has been robbed from the power of his attacker. Don’t mistreat or hurt the foreigners, orphans, or widows. Don’t kill innocent people here. ⁴If you carefully obey these commands, kings who sit on David’s throne will come through the gates of this palace with their officers and people, riding in chariots and on horses. ⁵But if you don’t obey these commands, says the Lord, I swear by my own name that this king’s palace will become a ruin.’”

⁶This is what the Lord says about the palace where the king of Judah lives:

“You are tall like the forests of Gilead,
like the mountaintops of Lebanon.

But I will truly make you into a desert,
into towns where no one lives.

⁷I will send men to destroy the palace,
each with his weapons.

They will cut up your strong, beautiful cedar beams
and throw them into the fire.

⁸“People from many nations will pass by this city and ask each other, ‘Why has the Lord done such a terrible thing to

Jerusalem, this great city?’⁹ And the answer will be: ‘Because the people of Judah quit following the agreement with the Lord their God. They worshiped and served other gods.’”

Judgment Against Jehoahaz

¹⁰Don’t cry for the dead king or be sad about him.
But cry painfully for the king who is being taken away,
because he will never return
or see his homeland again.

¹¹This is what the Lord says about Jehoahaz son of Josiah who became king of Judah after his father died and who has left this place: “He will never return. ¹²He will die where he has been taken captive, and he will not see this land again.”

Judgment Against Jehoiakim

¹³“How terrible it will be for one who builds his palace
by doing evil,
who cheats people so he can build its upper rooms.
He makes his own people work for nothing
and does not pay them.

¹⁴He says, ‘I will build a great palace for myself
with large upper rooms.’
So he builds it with large windows
and uses cedar wood for the walls,
which he paints red.

¹⁵“Does having a lot of cedar in your house

make you a great king?

Your father was satisfied to have food and drink.
He did what was right and fair,
so everything went well for him.

¹⁶He helped those who were poor and needy,
so everything went well for him.
That is what it means to know God,”
says the Lord.

¹⁷“But you only look for and think about
what you can get dishonestly.
You are even willing to kill innocent people to get it.
You feel free to hurt people and to steal from them.”

¹⁸So this is what the Lord says to Jehoiakim son of Josiah
king of Judah:

“The people of Judah will not cry when Jehoiakim dies,
saying: ‘Oh, my brother,’ or ‘Oh, my sister.’
They will not cry for him, saying:
‘Oh, master,’ or ‘Oh, my king.’

¹⁹They will bury him like a donkey,
dragging his body away
and throwing it outside the gates of Jerusalem.

²⁰“Judah, go up to Lebanon and cry out.
Let your voice be heard in Bashan.
Cry out from Abarim,
because all your friends are destroyed!

²¹Judah, when you were successful, I warned you,
but you said, ‘I won’t listen.’
You have acted like this since you were young;

you have not obeyed me.

²²Like a storm, my punishment will blow all your shepherds away

and send your friends into captivity.

Then you will really be ashamed and disgraced
because of all the wicked things you did.

²³King, you live in your palace,
cozy in your rooms of cedar.

But when your punishment comes, how you will groan
like a woman giving birth to a baby!

Judgment upon Jehoiachin

²⁴“As surely as I live,” says the Lord, “Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, even if you were a signet ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off. ²⁵I will hand you over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to the Babylonians—those people you fear because they want to kill you. ²⁶I will throw you and your mother into another country. Neither of you was born there, but both of you will die there. ²⁷They will want to come back, but they will never be able to return.”

²⁸Jehoiachin is like a broken pot someone threw away;
he is like something no one wants.

Why will Jehoiachin and his children be thrown out
and sent into a foreign land?

²⁹Land, land, land of Judah,
hear the word of the Lord!

³⁰This is what the Lord says:

“Write this down in the record about Jehoiachin:

He is a man without children,
a man who will not be successful in his lifetime.
And none of his descendants will be successful;
none will sit on the throne of David
or rule in Judah.”

The Evil Leaders of Judah

“How terrible it will be for the leaders of Judah, who are scattering and destroying my people,” says the Lord.

²They are responsible for the people, so the Lord, the God of Israel, says to them: “You have scattered my people and forced them away and not taken care of them. So I will punish you for the evil things you have done,” says the Lord. ³“I sent my people to other countries, but I will gather those who are left alive and bring them back to their own country. Then they will have many children and grow in number. ⁴I will place new leaders over my people, who will take care of them. And my people will not be afraid or terrified again, and none of them will be lost,” says the Lord.

The Good Branch Will Come

⁵“The days are coming,” says the Lord,
“when I will raise up a good branch in David’s family.
He will be a king who will rule in a wise way;
he will do what is fair and right in the land.

⁶In his time Judah will be saved,
and Israel will live in safety.

This will be his name:

The Lord Does What Is Right.

⁷“So the days are coming,” says the Lord, “when people will not say again: ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who brought

Israel out of Egypt ... ’⁸But people will say something new:
‘As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the descendants of
Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries
where he had sent them away ... ’ Then the people of Israel will
live in their own land.”

False Prophets Will Be Punished

⁹A message to the prophets:

My heart is broken.

All my bones shake.

I’m like someone who is drunk,

like someone who has been overcome with wine.

This is because of the Lord

and his holy words.

¹⁰The land of Judah is full of people who are guilty of
adultery.

Because of this, the Lord cursed the land.

It has become a very sad place,

and the pastures have dried up.

The people are evil

and use their power in the wrong way.

¹¹“Both the prophets and the priests live as if there
were no God.

I have found them doing evil things even in my own
Temple,” says the Lord.

¹²“So they will be in danger.

They will be forced into darkness

where they will be defeated.

I will bring disaster on them
in the year I punish them,” says the Lord.

¹³“I saw the prophets of Samaria
do something wrong.
Those prophets prophesied by Baal
and led my people Israel away.

¹⁴And I have seen the prophets of Jerusalem
do terrible things.

They are guilty of adultery
and live by lies.

They encourage evil people to keep on doing evil,
so the people don’t stop sinning.

All of those people are like the city of Sodom.

The people of Jerusalem are like the city of Gomorrah
to me!”

¹⁵So this is what the Lord All-Powerful says about the
prophets:

“I will make those prophets eat bitter food
and drink poisoned water,
because the prophets of Jerusalem spread wickedness
through the whole country.”

¹⁶This is what the Lord All-Powerful says:

“Don’t pay attention to what those prophets are
saying to you.

They are trying to fool you.

They talk about visions their own minds made up,
not about visions from me.

¹⁷They say to those who hate me:
‘The Lord says: You will have peace.’

They say to all those who are stubborn and do as they please:

‘Nothing bad will happen to you.’

¹⁸But none of these prophets has stood in the meeting of angels

to see or hear the message of the Lord.

None of them has paid close attention to his message.

¹⁹Look, the punishment from the Lord
will come like a storm.

His anger will be like a hurricane.

It will come swirling down on the heads of those wicked people.

²⁰The Lord’s anger will not stop
until he finishes what he plans to do.

When that day is over,
you will understand this clearly.

²¹I did not send those prophets,
but they ran to tell their message.

I did not speak to them,
but they prophesied anyway.

²²But if they had stood in the meeting of angels,
they would have told my message to my people.

They would have turned the people from their evil ways
and from doing evil.

²³“I am a God who is near,” says the Lord.

“I am also a God who is far away.”

²⁴“No one can hide

where I cannot see him,” says the Lord.

“I fill all of heaven and earth,” says the Lord.

²⁵“I have heard the prophets who prophesy lies in my name. They say, ‘I have had a dream! I have had a dream!’ ²⁶How long will this continue in the minds of these lying prophets? They prophesy from their own wishful thinking. ²⁷They are trying to make the people of Judah forget me by telling each other these dreams. In the same way, their ancestors forgot me and worshiped Baal. ²⁸Is straw the same thing as wheat?” says the Lord. “If a prophet wants to tell about his dreams, let him! But let the person who hears my message speak it truthfully! ²⁹Isn’t my message like a fire?” says the Lord. “Isn’t it like a hammer that smashes a rock?

³⁰“So I am against the false prophets,” says the Lord. “They keep stealing words from each other and say they are from me. ³¹I am against the false prophets,” says the Lord. “They use their own words and pretend it is a message from me. ³²I am against the prophets who prophesy false dreams,” says the Lord. “They mislead my people with their lies and false teachings! I did not send them or command them to do anything for me. They can’t help the people of Judah at all,” says the Lord.

The Sad Message from the Lord

³³“Suppose the people of Judah, a prophet, or a priest asks you: ‘Jeremiah, what is the message from the Lord?’ You will answer them and say, ‘You are a heavy load to the Lord, and I will throw you down,’ says the Lord.” ³⁴A prophet or a priest or one of the people might say, ‘This is a message from the Lord.’

That person has lied, so I will punish him and his whole family.
³⁵This is what you will say to each other: ‘What did the Lord answer?’ or ‘What did the Lord say?’ ³⁶But you will never again say, ‘The message of the Lord,’ because the only message you speak is your own words. You have changed the words of our God, the living God, the Lord All-Powerful. ³⁷This is how you should speak to the prophets: ‘What answer did the Lord give you?’ or ‘What did the Lord say?’ ³⁸But don’t say, ‘The message from the Lord.’ If you use these words, this is what the Lord says: Because you called it a ‘message from the Lord,’ though I told you not to use those words, ³⁹I will pick you up and throw you away from me, along with Jerusalem, which I gave to your ancestors and to you. ⁴⁰And I will make a disgrace of you forever; your shame will never be forgotten.”

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 24:1–26:24

Situation

Unless they turned from their sins, God vowed to exile Judah into Babylon for seventy years. Although the king threatened Jeremiah, the priests gradually believed that Jeremiah spoke with God's authority.

Observation

God promised protection for his people if they turned from their sin. If not, they would suffer his fierce wrath.

Inspiration

True confession cannot happen without repentance. Many times we don't confess our sin because we're not ready to let go of it. When I was a young Christian, I remember telling the Lord that I was sorry about particular sins I had committed and then thanked Him for already forgiving them. But that was all I did.

I reached a milestone in my spiritual life when I began to say, "Lord, thank You for forgiving those sins. I know they did not please You, and I never want to do them again." That can be hard to say because sometimes we want to commit certain sins again. But we betray a lack of spiritual maturity when we want to eliminate the penalty of sin but retain the pleasure. For your confession to be genuine, you must turn from your sins. (From *Truth for Today* by John MacArthur)

Application

Be thankful for a patient and loving God who forgives you when you are willing to honor and obey him. But don't take his graciousness lightly. Express your gratefulness for his mercy.

Exploration

Repentance—[Exodus 9:27–34](#); [Jonah 3:10](#); [Luke 15:8–10](#).

The Good and Bad Figs

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon captured Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim and king of Judah, his officers, and all the craftsmen and metalworkers of Judah. He took them away from Jerusalem and brought them to Babylon. It was then that the Lord showed me two baskets of figs arranged in front of the Temple of the Lord. ²One of the baskets had very good figs in it, like figs that ripen early in the season. But the other basket had figs too rotten to eat.

³The Lord said to me, “What do you see, Jeremiah?”

I answered, “I see figs. The good figs are very good, but the rotten figs are too rotten to eat.”

⁴Then the Lord spoke his word to me: ⁵“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I sent the people of Judah out of their country to live in the country of Babylon. I think of those people as good, like these good figs. ⁶I will look after them and bring them back to the land of Judah. I will not tear them down, but I will build them up. I will not pull them up, but I will plant them so they can grow. ⁷I will make them want to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, because they will return to me with their whole hearts.

⁸“‘But the bad figs are too rotten to eat.’ So this is what the Lord says: ‘Zedekiah king of Judah, his officers, and all the people from Jerusalem who are left alive, even those who live in Egypt, will be like those rotten figs. ⁹I will make those people

hated as an evil people by all the kingdoms of the earth. People will make fun of them and tell jokes about them and point fingers at them and curse them everywhere I scatter them. ¹⁰I will send war, hunger, and disease against them. I will attack them until they have all been killed. Then they will no longer be in the land I gave to them and their ancestors.”

A Summary of Jeremiah's Preaching

This is the message that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah. It came in the fourth year that Jehoiakim son of Josiah was king of Judah and the first year Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon.²This is the message Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and Jerusalem:

³The Lord has spoken his word to me again and again for these past twenty-three years. I have been a prophet since the thirteenth year of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah. I have spoken messages from the Lord to you from that time until today, but you have not listened.

⁴The Lord has sent all his servants the prophets to you over and over again, but you have not listened or paid any attention to them. ⁵Those prophets have said, "Stop your evil ways. Stop doing what is wrong so you can stay in the land that the Lord gave to you and your ancestors to live in forever. ⁶Don't follow other gods to serve them or to worship them. Don't make me, the Lord, angry by worshiping idols that are the work of your own hands, or I will punish you."

⁷"But you people of Judah did not listen to me," says the Lord. "You made me angry by worshiping idols that were the work of your own hands, so I punished you."

⁸So this is what the Lord All-Powerful says: "Since you have not listened to my messages,⁹I will send for all the peoples of the north," says the Lord, "along with my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. I will bring them all against Judah, those who live there, and all the nations around you, too. I will completely destroy all those countries and leave

them in ruins forever. People will be shocked when they see how badly I have destroyed those countries.¹⁰ I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and happiness, the sounds of brides and bridegrooms, and the sound of people grinding meal. And I will take away the light of the lamp.¹¹ That whole area will be an empty desert, and these nations will be slaves of the king of Babylon for seventy years.

¹²“But when the seventy years have passed, I will punish the king of Babylon and his entire nation for their evil,” says the Lord. “I will make that land a desert forever.¹³ I will make happen all the terrible things I said about Babylonia—everything Jeremiah prophesied about all those foreign nations, the warnings written in this book.¹⁴ Even the Babylonians will have to serve many nations and many great kings. I will give them the punishment they deserve for all their own hands have done.”

Judgment on the Nations

¹⁵The Lord, the God of Israel, said this to me: “My anger is like the wine in a cup. Take it from my hand and make all the nations, to whom I am sending you, drink all of my anger from this cup.¹⁶ They will drink my anger and stumble about and act like madmen because of the war I am going to send among them.”

¹⁷So I took the cup from the Lord’s hand and went to those nations and made them drink from it.¹⁸ I served this wine to the people of Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, and the kings and officers of Judah, so they would become a ruin. Then people would be shocked and would insult them and speak evil of

them. And so it has been to this day. ¹⁹I also made these people drink of the Lord's anger: the king of Egypt, his servants, his officers, all his people, ²⁰and all the foreigners there; all the kings of the land of Uz; all the kings of the Philistines (the kings of the cities of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the people left at Ashdod); ²¹the people of Edom, Moab, and Ammon; ²²all the kings of Tyre and Sidon; all the kings of the coastal countries to the west; ²³the people of Dedan and Tema and Buz; all who cut their hair short; ²⁴all the kings of Arabia; and the kings of the people who live in the desert; ²⁵all the kings of Zimri, Elam, and Media; ²⁶and all the kings of the north, near and far, one after the other. I made all the kingdoms on earth drink from the cup of the Lord's anger, but the king of Babylon will drink from this cup after all the others.

²⁷“Then say to them, ‘This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: Drink this cup of my anger. Get drunk from it and vomit. Fall down and don't get up because of the war I am sending among you!’

²⁸“If they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, say to them, ‘The Lord All-Powerful says this: You must drink from this cup. ²⁹Look! I am already bringing disaster on Jerusalem, the city that is called by my name. Do you think you will not be punished? You will be punished! I am sending war on all the people of the earth, says the Lord All-Powerful.’

³⁰“You, Jeremiah, will prophesy against them with all these words. Say to them:

‘The Lord will roar from heaven
and will shout from his Holy Temple.

He will roar loudly against his land.

He will shout like people who walk on grapes to make

wine;

he will shout against all who live on the earth.

³¹The noise will spread all over the earth,
because the Lord will accuse all the nations.

He will judge and tell what is wrong with all people,
and he will kill the evil people with a sword,” says the

Lord.

³²This is what the Lord All-Powerful says:

“Disasters will soon spread
from nation to nation.
They will come like a powerful storm
from the faraway places on earth.”

³³At that time those killed by the Lord will reach from one end of the earth to the other. No one will cry for them or gather up their bodies and bury them. They will be left lying on the ground like dung.

³⁴Cry, you leaders! Cry out loud!
Roll around in the dust, leaders of the people!
It is now time for you to be killed.
You will fall and be scattered,
like pieces of a broken jar.

³⁵There will be no place for the leaders to hide;
they will not escape.

³⁶I hear the sound of the leaders shouting.
I hear the leaders of the people crying loudly,
because the Lord is destroying their land.

³⁷Those peaceful pastures will be like an empty desert,

because the Lord is very angry.

³⁸Like a lion, he has left his den.

Their land has been destroyed
because of the terrible war he brought,
because of his fierce anger.

Jeremiah's Lesson at the Temple

This message came from the Lord soon after Jehoiakim son of Josiah became king of Judah.²This is what the Lord said: "Jeremiah, stand in the courtyard of the Temple of the Lord. Give this message to all the people of the towns of Judah who are coming to worship at the Temple of the Lord. Tell them everything I tell you to say; don't leave out a word.³Maybe they will listen and stop their evil ways. If they will, I will change my mind about bringing on them the disaster that I am planning because of the evil they have done.⁴Say to them: 'This is what the Lord says: You must obey me and follow my teachings that I gave you.⁵You must listen to what my servants the prophets say to you. I have sent them to you again and again, but you did not listen. ⁶If you don't obey me, I will destroy my Temple in Jerusalem as I destroyed my Holy Tent at Shiloh. When I do, people all over the world will curse Jerusalem.'"

⁷The priests, the prophets, and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the Temple of the Lord. ⁸When Jeremiah finished speaking everything the Lord had commanded him to say, the priests, prophets, and all the people grabbed Jeremiah. They said, "You must die! ⁹How dare you prophesy in the name of the Lord that this Temple will be destroyed like the one at Shiloh! How dare you say that Jerusalem will become a desert without anyone to live in it!" And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the Temple of the Lord.

¹⁰Now when the officers of Judah heard about what was happening, they came out of the king's palace and went up to the Temple of the Lord and took their places at the entrance of the New Gate. ¹¹Then the priests and prophets said to the officers and all the other people, "Jeremiah should be killed. He prophesied against Jerusalem, and you heard him yourselves."

¹²Then Jeremiah spoke these words to all the officers of Judah and all the other people: "The Lord sent me to say everything you have heard about this Temple and this city. ¹³Now change your lives and start doing good and obey the Lord your God. Then he will change his mind and not bring on you the disaster he has told you about. ¹⁴As for me, I am in your power. Do to me what you think is good and right. ¹⁵But be sure of one thing. If you kill me, you will be guilty of killing an innocent person. You will make this city and everyone who lives in it guilty, too! The Lord truly sent me to you to give you this message."

¹⁶Then the officers and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "Jeremiah must not be killed. What he told us comes from the Lord our God."

¹⁷Then some of the older leaders of Judah stood up and said to all the people, ¹⁸"Micah, from the city of Moresheth, was a prophet during the time Hezekiah was king of Judah. Micah said to all the people of Judah, 'This is what the Lord All-Powerful says:

Jerusalem will be plowed like a field.

It will become a pile of rocks,

and the hill where the Temple stands will be covered with bushes.'

¹⁹“Hezekiah king of Judah and the people of Judah did not kill Micah. You know that Hezekiah feared the Lord and tried to please the Lord. So the Lord changed his mind and did not bring on Judah the disaster he had promised. If we hurt Jeremiah, we will bring a terrible disaster on ourselves!”

²⁰(Now there was another man who prophesied in the name of the Lord. His name was Uriah son of Shemaiah from the city of Kiriath Jearim. He preached the same things against Jerusalem and the land of Judah that Jeremiah did. ²¹When King Jehoiakim, all his army officers, and all the leaders of Judah heard Uriah preach, King Jehoiakim wanted to kill Uriah. But Uriah heard about it and was afraid. So he escaped to Egypt. ²²Then King Jehoiakim sent Elnathan son of Acbor and some other men to Egypt, ²³and they brought Uriah back from Egypt. Then they took him to King Jehoiakim, who had Uriah killed with a sword. His body was thrown into the burial place where poor people are buried.) ²⁴Ahikam son of Shaphan supported Jeremiah. So Ahikam did not hand Jeremiah over to be killed by the people.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 27:1–29:32

Situation

Jeremiah responded to the false prophets. One false prophet, Hananiah, said that the “yoke” of Babylon would be broken in two years.

Observation

After seventy years the people would seek for God and would find him ([29:10–14](#)). We, too, need to trust him for the future and seek him in all our circumstances.

Inspiration

“If only you knew ...” are God’s words to us.

No lectures. No speeches. No homilies on how far he has come to help. No finger-pointing at our past. None of that. Just an appeal. An appeal for trust. “If only you knew ...”

“If only you knew that I came to help and not condemn. If only you knew that tomorrow will be better than today. If only you knew the gift I have brought: eternal life. If only you knew I want you safely home.”

If only you knew.

What wistful words to come from the lips of God. How kind that he would let us hear them. How crucial that we pause to hear them. If only we knew to trust. Trust that God is in our corner. Trust that God wants what is best. Trust that he really means it when he says, “I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt

you. I will give you hope and a good future”
([Jeremiah 29:11](#)).

If only we could learn to trust him.

But how hard it is. We quiver like the bird on the ledge, ducking the hand that comes to help. We forget that he is the pilot and we are his passengers.

We accuse, falsely. We reject, naively.

If only we knew.

When he washed the disciples’ feet, he was washing ours; when he calmed their storms, he was calming yours; when he forgave Peter, he was forgiving all the penitent. If only we knew.

He still sends pigeons to convince the lost and music to inspire the dance.

He still makes our storms his path, our graves his proof, and our souls his passion.

He hasn’t changed. He trims branches so we can bear fruit; he calls the sheep that we might be safe; he hears the prayers of crooks so we might go home.

His thunder is still gentle.

And his gentleness still thunders.

If only you knew “the free gift of God and who it is that is asking you ...”

The gift and the Giver. If you know them, you know all you need. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

In what aspects of your life are you having trouble trusting God? Commit those areas to God and trust that he knows what is best for you. Ask him for strength for difficult times. If you’re struggling with

where you are now, ask him to help your attitude.

Exploration

Trusting In God—[Joshua 1:9](#); [Psalm 20:7](#);
[Proverbs 3:5](#); [16:20](#); [Romans 4:5](#); [10:11](#); [1 Peter 2:6](#).

Nebuchadnezzar Is Made Ruler

The Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah soon after Zedekiah son of Josiah was made king of Judah. ²This is what the Lord said to me: “Make a yoke out of straps and poles, and put it on the back of your neck. ³Then send messages to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon by their messengers who have come to Jerusalem to see Zedekiah king of Judah. ⁴Tell them to give this message to their masters: ‘The Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: “Tell your masters: ⁵I made the earth, its people, and all its animals with my great power and strength. I can give the earth to anyone I want. ⁶Now I have given all these lands to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, my servant. I will make even the wild animals obey him. ⁷All nations will serve Nebuchadnezzar and his son and grandson. Then the time will come for Babylon to be defeated, and many nations and great kings will make Babylon their servant.

⁸“But if some nations or kingdoms refuse to serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and refuse to be under his control, I will punish them with war, hunger, and terrible diseases, says the Lord. I will use Nebuchadnezzar to destroy them. ⁹So don’t listen to your false prophets, those who use magic to tell the future, those who explain dreams, the mediums, or magicians. They all tell you, ‘You will not be slaves to the king of Babylon.’ ¹⁰They are telling you lies that will cause you to be taken far from your homeland. I will force

you to leave your homes, and you will die in another land. ¹¹But the nations who put themselves under the control of the king of Babylon and serve him I will let stay in their own country, says the Lord. The people from those nations will live in their own land and farm it.” ”

¹²I gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah. I said, “Put yourself under the control of the king of Babylon and serve him, and you will live. ¹³Why should you and your people die from war, hunger, or disease, as the Lord said would happen to those who do not serve the king of Babylon? ¹⁴But the false prophets are saying, ‘You will never be slaves to the king of Babylon.’ Don’t listen to them because they are prophesying lies to you! ¹⁵‘I did not send them,’ says the Lord. ‘They are prophesying lies and saying the message is from me. So I will send you away, Judah. And you and those prophets who prophesy to you will die.’”

¹⁶Then I, Jeremiah, said to the priests and all the people, “This is what the Lord says: Those false prophets are saying, ‘The Babylonians will soon return what they took from the Temple of the Lord.’ Don’t listen to them! They are prophesying lies to you. ¹⁷Don’t listen to those prophets. But serve the king of Babylon, and you will live. There is no reason for you to cause Jerusalem to become a ruin. ¹⁸If they are prophets and have the message from the Lord, let them pray to the Lord All-Powerful. Let them ask that the items which are still in the Temple of the Lord and in the king’s palace and in Jerusalem not be taken away to Babylon.

¹⁹“This is what the Lord All-Powerful says about those items left in Jerusalem: the pillars, the large bronze bowl, which is called the Sea, the stands that can be moved, and other

things. ²⁰Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon did not take these away when he took as captives Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other important people from Judah and Jerusalem to Babylon. ²¹This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says about the items left in the Temple of the Lord and in the king's palace and in Jerusalem: ²²‘All of them will also be taken to Babylon. And they will stay there until the day I go to get them,’ says the Lord. ‘Then I will bring them back and return them to this place.’”

The False Prophet Hananiah

It was in that same year, in the fifth month of Zedekiah's fourth year as king of Judah, soon after he began to rule. The prophet Hananiah son of Azzur, from the town of Gibeon, spoke to me in the Temple of the Lord in front of the priests and all the people. He said:²“The Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: ‘I have broken the yoke the king of Babylon has put on Judah.³ Before two years are over, I will bring back everything that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took to Babylon from the Lord's Temple.⁴ I will also bring back Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other captives from Judah who went to Babylon,’ says the Lord. ‘So I will break the yoke the king of Babylon put on Judah.’”

⁵Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in front of the priests and all the people who were standing in the Temple of the Lord. ⁶He said, “Amen! Let the Lord really do that! May the Lord make the message you prophesy come true. May he bring back here everything from the Lord's Temple and all the people who were taken as captives to Babylon.

⁷“But listen to what I am going to say to you and all the people. ⁸There were prophets long before we became prophets, Hananiah. They prophesied that war, hunger, and terrible diseases would come to many countries and great kingdoms. ⁹But if a prophet prophesies that we will have peace and that message comes true, he can be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord.”

¹⁰Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke off Jeremiah's

neck and broke it. ¹¹Hananiah said in front of all the people, “This is what the Lord says: ‘In the same way I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. He put that yoke on all the nations of the world, but I will break it before two years are over.’” After Hananiah had said that, Jeremiah left the Temple.

¹²The Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah after the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke off of the prophet Jeremiah’s neck. ¹³The Lord said, “Go and tell Hananiah, ‘This is what the Lord says: You have broken a wooden yoke, but I will make a yoke of iron in its place!’” ¹⁴The Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: I will put a yoke of iron on the necks of all these nations to make them serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they will be slaves to him. I will even give Nebuchadnezzar control over the wild animals.’ ”

¹⁵Then the prophet Jeremiah said to the prophet Hananiah, “Listen, Hananiah! The Lord did not send you, and you have made the people of Judah trust in lies. ¹⁶So this is what the Lord says: ‘Soon I will remove you from the earth. You will die this year, because you taught the people to turn against the Lord.’”

¹⁷Hananiah died in the seventh month of that same year.

A Letter to the Captives in Babylon

This is the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the older leaders who were among the captives, the priests, and the prophets. He sent it to all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had taken as captives from Jerusalem to Babylon.²(This letter was sent after all these people were taken away: Jehoiachin the king and the queen mother; the officers and leaders of Judah and Jerusalem; and the craftsmen and metalworkers from Jerusalem.)³Zedekiah king of Judah sent Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. So Jeremiah gave them this letter to carry to Babylon:⁴This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says to all those people I sent away from Jerusalem as captives to Babylon:⁵“Build houses and settle in the land. Plant gardens and eat the food they grow.⁶Get married and have sons and daughters. Find wives for your sons, and let your daughters be married so they also may have sons and daughters. Have many children in Babylon; don’t become fewer in number.⁷Also do good things for the city where I sent you as captives. Pray to the Lord for the city where you are living, because if good things happen in the city, good things will happen to you also.”⁸The Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: “Don’t let the prophets among you and the people who do magic fool you. Don’t listen to their dreams.⁹They are prophesying lies to you, saying that their message is from me. But I did not send them,” says the Lord.

¹⁰This is what the Lord says: “Babylon will be powerful for seventy years. After that time I will come to you, and I will keep my promise to bring you back to Jerusalem. ¹¹I say this because I know what I am planning for you,” says the Lord. “I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future. ¹²Then you will call my name. You will come to me and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³You will search for me. And when you search for me with all your heart, you will find me! ¹⁴I will let you find me,” says the Lord. “And I will bring you back from your captivity. I forced you to leave this place, but I will gather you from all the nations, from the places I have sent you as captives,” says the Lord. “And I will bring you back to this place.”

¹⁵You might say, “The Lord has given us prophets here in Babylon.”

¹⁶But the Lord says this about the king who is sitting on David’s throne now and all the other people still in Jerusalem, your relatives who did not go as captives to Babylon with you.

¹⁷The Lord All-Powerful says: “I will soon send war, hunger, and terrible diseases against those still in Jerusalem. I will make them like bad figs that are too rotten to eat. ¹⁸I will chase them with war, hunger, and terrible diseases. I will make them hated by all the kingdoms of the earth. People will curse them and be shocked and will use them as a shameful example wherever I make them go. ¹⁹This is because they have not listened to my message,” says the Lord. “I sent my message to them again and again through my servants, the prophets, but they did not listen,” says the Lord.

²⁰You captives, whom I forced to leave Jerusalem and go to Babylon, listen to the message from the Lord. ²¹The Lord All-

Powerful, the God of Israel, says this about Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah: “These two men have been prophesying lies to you, saying that their message is from me. But soon I will hand over those two prophets to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will kill them in front of you.”²²Because of them, all the captives from Judah in Babylon will use this curse: ‘May the Lord treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon burned in the fire.’²³They have done evil things among the people of Israel. They are guilty of adultery with their neighbors’ wives. They have also spoken lies and said those lies were a message from me. I did not tell them to do that. I know what they have done; I am a witness to it,” says the Lord.

²⁴Also give a message to Shemaiah from the Nehelamite family.²⁵The Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: “Shemaiah, you sent letters in your name to all the people in Jerusalem, to the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah, and to all the priests.²⁶You said to Zephaniah, ‘The Lord has made you priest in place of Jehoiada. You are to be in charge of the Temple of the Lord. You should arrest any madman who acts like a prophet. Lock his hands and feet between wooden blocks, and put iron rings around his neck.’²⁷Now Jeremiah from Anathoth is acting like a prophet. So why haven’t you arrested him?²⁸Jeremiah has sent this message to us in Babylon: You will be there for a long time, so build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what they grow.”

²⁹Zephaniah the priest read the letter to Jeremiah the prophet.³⁰Then the Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah:³¹“Send this message to all the captives in Babylon: ‘This is what the Lord says about Shemaiah the Nehelamite: Shemaiah has

prophesied to you, but I did not send him. He has made you believe a lie. ³²So the Lord says, I will soon punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his family. He will not see the good things I will do for my people, says the Lord. None of his family will be left alive among the people, because he has taught the people to turn against me.”

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 30:1–33:26

Situation

Jeremiah did not just preach doom and gloom. He told the people to hope in God, who would restore them.

Observation

Christians must never lose all hope. Our belief in Jesus Christ gives us hope for the future.

Inspiration

For thousands of years, using his wit and charm, man had tried to be friends with God. And for thousands of years he had let God down more than he had lifted him up. He's done the very thing he promised he'd never do. It was a fiasco. Even the holiest of the heroes sometimes forgot whose side they were on. Some of the scenarios in the Bible look more like the adventures of Sinbad the sailor than stories for vacation Bible school. Remember these characters?

Aaron. Right-hand man to Moses. Witness of the plagues. Member of the "Red Sea Riverbed Expedition." Holy priest of God. But if he was so saintly, what is he doing leading the Israelites in fireside aerobics in front of the golden calf?

The sons of Jacob. The fathers of the tribes of Israel. Great-grandsons of Abraham. Yet, if they were so special, why were they gagging their younger brother and sending him to Egypt?

David. The man after God's own heart. The King's king. The giant-slayer and songwriter. He's also the guy whose glasses got steamy as a result of a bath on a roof. Unfortunately, the water wasn't his, nor was the woman he was watching.

And Samson. Swooning on Delilah's couch, drunk on the wine, perfume, and soft lights. He's thinking, *She's putting on something more comfortable*. She's thinking, *I know I put those shears in here somewhere*.

Adam adorned in fig leaves and stains of forbidden fruit. Moses throwing both a staff and a temper tantrum. King Saul looking into a crystal ball for the will of God. Noah, drunk and naked in his own tent.

These are the chosen ones of God? This is the royal lineage of the King? These are the ones who were to carry out God's mission?

It's easy to see the absurdity.

Why didn't he give up? Why didn't he let the globe spin off its axis?

Even after generations of people had spit in his face, he still loved them. After a nation of chosen ones had stripped him naked and ripped his incarnated flesh, he still died for them. And even today, after billions have chosen to prostitute themselves before the pimps of power, fame, and wealth, he still waits for them.

It is inexplicable. It doesn't have a drop of logic nor a thread of rationality.

And yet, it is that very irrationality that gives the

gospel its greatest defense. For only God could love like that.

(From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do this project with someone close to you: spend an hour on your own making a list of all God has done for you. Then share together and rejoice in his goodness and faithfulness.

Exploration

Hope—[Proverbs 13:12](#); [Isaiah 40:31](#); [Jeremiah 29:11](#); [Romans 15:13](#); [Hebrews 11:1](#).

Promises of Hope

These are the words that the Lord spoke to Jeremiah.²The Lord, the God of Israel, said: “Jeremiah, write in a book all the words I have spoken to you.³The days will come when I will bring Israel and Judah back from captivity,” says the Lord. “I will return them to the land I gave their ancestors, and they will own it!” says the Lord.

⁴The Lord spoke this message about the people of Israel and Judah: ⁵This is what the Lord said:

“We hear people crying from fear.

They are afraid; there is no peace.

⁶Ask this question, and consider it:

A man cannot have a baby.

So why do I see every strong man

holding his stomach in pain like a woman having a baby?

Why is everyone’s face turning white like a dead man’s face?

⁷This will be a terrible day!

There will never be another time like this.

This is a time of great trouble for the people of Jacob, but they will be saved from it.”

⁸The Lord All-Powerful says, “At that time

I will break the yoke from their necks
and tear off the ropes that hold them.

Foreign people will never again make my people
slaves.

⁹They will serve the Lord their God
and David their king,
whom I will send to them.

¹⁰“So people of Jacob, my servants, don’t be afraid.
Israel, don’t be frightened,” says the Lord.

“I will soon save you from that faraway place where
you are captives.

I will save your family from that land.
The people of Jacob will be safe and have peace again;
there will be no enemy to frighten them.

¹¹I am with you and will save you,”
says the Lord.

“I will completely destroy all those nations
where I scattered you,
but I will not completely destroy you.
I will punish you fairly,
but I will still punish you.”

¹²This is what the Lord said:

“You people have a wound that cannot be cured;
your injury will not heal.

¹³There is no one to argue your case
and no cure for your sores.
So you will not be healed.

¹⁴All those nations who were your friends have

forgotten you.

They don't care about you.

I have hurt you as an enemy would.

I punished you very hard,

because your guilt was so great

and your sins were so many.

¹⁵Why are you crying out about your injury?

There is no cure for your pain.

I did these things to you because of your great guilt,

because of your many sins.

¹⁶But all those nations that destroyed you will now be destroyed.

All your enemies will become captives in other lands.

Those who stole from you will have their own things stolen.

Those who took things from you in war will have their own things taken.

¹⁷I will bring back your health

and heal your injuries," says the Lord,

"because other people forced you away.

They said about you, 'No one cares about Jerusalem!'"

¹⁸This is what the Lord said:

"I will soon make the tents of Jacob's people as they used to be,

and I will have pity on Israel's houses.

The city will be rebuilt on its hill of ruins,

and the king's palace will stand in its proper place.

¹⁹People in those places will sing songs of praise.

There will be the sound of laughter.
I will give them many children
so their number will not be small.
I will bring honor to them
so no one will look down on them.

²⁰Their descendants will be as they were in the old days.

I will set them up as a strong people before me,
and I will punish the nations who have hurt them.

²¹One of their own people will lead them;
their ruler will come from among them.

He will come near to me when I invite him.

Who would dare to come to me uninvited?" says the Lord.

²²"So you will be my people,
and I will be your God."

²³Look! It is a storm from the Lord!

He is angry and has gone out to punish the people.
Punishment will come like a storm
crashing down on the evil people.

²⁴The Lord will stay angry
until he finishes punishing the people.
He will stay angry
until he finishes the punishment he planned.
When that day comes,
you will understand this.

The New Israel

The Lord says, “At that time I will be God of all Israel’s family groups, and they will be my people.”

²This is what the Lord says:

“The people who were not killed by the enemy’s sword
found help in the desert.

I came to give rest to Israel.”

³And from far away the Lord appeared to his people and said,

“I love you people
with a love that will last forever.

That is why I have continued
showing you kindness.

⁴People of Israel, I will build you up again,
and you will be rebuilt.

You will pick up your tambourines again
and dance with those who are joyful.

⁵You will plant vineyards again
on the hills around Samaria.

The farmers will plant them
and enjoy their fruit.

⁶There will be a time when watchmen in the mountains
of Ephraim shout this message:

‘Come, let’s go up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord
our God!’”

⁷This is what the Lord says:

“Be happy and sing for the people of Jacob.

Shout for Israel, the greatest of the nations.

Sing your praises and shout this:

‘Lord, save your people,

those who are left alive from the nation of Israel!’

⁸Look, I will soon bring Israel from the country in the north,

and I will gather them from the faraway places on earth.

Some of the people are blind and crippled.

Some of the women are pregnant, and some are ready to give birth.

A great many people will come back.

⁹They will be crying as they come,

but they will pray as I bring them back.

I will lead those people by streams of water

on an even road where they will not stumble.

I am Israel’s father,

and Israel is my firstborn son.

¹⁰“Nations, listen to the message from the Lord.

Tell this message in the faraway lands by the sea:

‘The one who scattered the people of Israel will bring them back,

and he will watch over his people like a shepherd.’

¹¹The Lord will pay for the people of Jacob

and will buy them back from people stronger than they were.

¹²The people of Israel will come to the high points of Jerusalem

and shout for joy.

Their faces will shine with happiness about all the good things from the Lord:

the grain, new wine, oil, young sheep, and young cows.

They will be like a garden that has plenty of water,
and they will not be troubled anymore.

¹³Then young women of Israel will be happy and dance,

the young men and old men also.

I will change their sadness into happiness;

I will give them comfort and joy instead of sadness.

¹⁴The priests will have more than enough sacrifices,
and my people will be filled with the good things I give them!" says the Lord.

¹⁵This is what the Lord says:

"A voice was heard in Ramah
of painful crying and deep sadness:
Rachel crying for her children.
She refused to be comforted,
because her children are dead!"

¹⁶But this is what the Lord says:

"Stop crying;
don't let your eyes fill with tears.
You will be rewarded for your work!" says the Lord.
"The people will return from their enemy's land.

¹⁷So there is hope for you in the future," says the Lord.

“Your children will return to their own land.

¹⁸“I have heard Israel moaning:

‘Lord, you punished me, and I have learned my lesson.

I was like a calf that had never been trained.

Take me back so that I may come back.

You truly are the Lord my God.

¹⁹Lord, after I wandered away from you,

I changed my heart and life.

After I understood,

I beat my breast with sorrow.

I was ashamed and disgraced,

because I suffered for the foolish things I did when I
was young.’

²⁰“You know that Israel is my dear son,

The child I love.

Yes, I often speak against Israel,

but I still remember him.

I love him very much,

and I want to comfort him,” says the Lord.

²¹“People of Israel, fix the road signs.

Put up signs to show you the way home.

Watch the road.

Pay attention to the road on which you travel.

People of Israel, come home,

come back to your towns.

²²You are an unfaithful daughter.

How long will you wander before you come home?

The Lord has made something new happen in the land:

A woman will go seeking a man.”

²³The Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: “I will again do good things for the people of Judah. At that time the people in the land of Judah and its towns will again use these words: ‘May the Lord bless you, home of what is good, holy mountain.’” ²⁴People in all the towns of Judah will live together in peace. Farmers and those who move around with their flocks will live together in peace. ²⁵I will give rest and strength to those who are weak and tired.”

²⁶After hearing that, I, Jeremiah, woke up and looked around. My sleep had been very pleasant.

²⁷The Lord says, “The time is coming when I will help the families of Israel and Judah and their children and animals to grow. ²⁸In the past I watched over Israel and Judah, to pull them up and tear them down, to destroy them and bring them disaster. But now I will watch over them to build them up and make them strong,” says the Lord.

²⁹“At that time people will no longer say:

‘The parents have eaten sour grapes,
and that caused the children to grind their teeth from
the sour taste.’

³⁰Instead, each person will die for his own sin; the person who eats sour grapes will grind his own teeth.

The New Agreement

³¹“Look, the time is coming,” says the Lord,
“when I will make a new agreement

with the people of Israel
and the people of Judah.

³²It will not be like the agreement

I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to bring them out of Egypt.

I was a husband to them,
but they broke that agreement,” says the Lord.

³³“This is the agreement I will make
with the people of Israel at that time,” says the Lord:

“I will put my teachings in their minds
and write them on their hearts.

I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

³⁴People will no longer have to teach their neighbors
and relatives

to know the Lord,
because all people will know me,
from the least to the most important,” says the Lord.

“I will forgive them for the wicked things they did,
and I will not remember their sins anymore.”

The Lord Will Never Leave Israel

³⁵The Lord makes the sun shine in the day
and the moon and stars to shine at night.

He stirs up the sea so that its waves crash on the
shore.

The Lord All-Powerful is his name.

This is what the Lord says:

³⁶“Only if these laws should ever fail,”

says the Lord,

“will Israel’s descendants ever stop

being a nation before me.”

³⁷This is what the Lord says:

“Only if people can measure the sky above

and learn the secrets of the earth below,

will I reject all the descendants of Israel

because of what they have done,” says the Lord.

The New Jerusalem

³⁸The Lord says, “The time is coming when Jerusalem will be rebuilt for me—everything from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. ³⁹The measuring line will stretch from the Corner Gate straight to the hill of Gareb. Then it will turn to the place named Goah. ⁴⁰The whole valley where dead bodies and ashes are thrown, and all the terraces out to the Kidron Valley on the east as far as the corner of the Horse Gate—all that area will be holy to the Lord. The city of Jerusalem will never again be torn down or destroyed.”

Jeremiah Buys a Field

This is the word the Lord spoke to Jeremiah in the tenth year Zedekiah was king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. ²At that time the army of the king of Babylon was surrounding Jerusalem. Jeremiah the prophet was under arrest in the courtyard of the guard, which was at the palace of the king of Judah.

³Zedekiah king of Judah had put Jeremiah in prison there. Zedekiah had asked, “Why have you prophesied the things you have?” (Jeremiah had said, “This is what the Lord says: ‘I will soon hand the city of Jerusalem over to the king of Babylon, and he will capture it. ⁴Zedekiah king of Judah will not escape from the Babylonian army, but he will surely be handed over to the king of Babylon. And he will speak to the king of Babylon face to face and see him with his own eyes. ⁵The king will take Zedekiah to Babylon, where he will stay until I have punished him,’ says the Lord. ‘If you fight against the Babylonians, you will not succeed.’”) ⁶While Jeremiah was in prison, he said, “The Lord spoke this word to me: ⁷Your cousin Hanamel, son of your uncle Shallum, will come to you soon. Hanamel will say to you, ‘Jeremiah, you are my nearest relative, so buy my field near the town of Anathoth. It is your right and your duty to buy that field.’

⁸“Then it happened just as the Lord had said. My cousin Hanamel came to me in the courtyard of the guard and said to me, ‘Buy for yourself my field near Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. It is your right and duty to buy it and own it.’ So I knew this was a message from the Lord.

⁹“I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, weighing out seven ounces of silver for him. ¹⁰I signed the record and sealed it and had some people witness it. I also weighed out the silver on the scales. ¹¹Then I took both copies of the record of ownership—the one that was sealed that had the demands and limits of ownership, and the one that was not sealed. ¹²And I gave them to Baruch son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah. My cousin Hanamel, the other witnesses who signed the record of ownership, and many Jews sitting in the courtyard of the guard saw me give the record of ownership to Baruch.

¹³“With all the people watching, I told Baruch, ¹⁴“This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: Take both copies of the record of ownership—the sealed copy and the copy that was not sealed—and put them in a clay jar so they will last a long time. ¹⁵This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: In the future my people will once again buy houses and fields for grain and vineyards in the land of Israel.’

¹⁶“After I gave the record of ownership to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the Lord, ¹⁷Oh, Lord God, you made the skies and the earth with your very great power. There is nothing too hard for you to do. ¹⁸You show love and kindness to thousands of people, but you also bring punishment to children for their parents’ sins. Great and powerful God, your name is the Lord All-Powerful. ¹⁹You plan and do great things. You see everything that people do, and you reward people for the way they live and for what they do. ²⁰You did miracles and wonderful things in the land of Egypt. You have continued doing them in Israel and among the other nations even until today. So you have become well known. ²¹You brought your

people, the Israelites, out of Egypt using signs and miracles and your great power and strength. You brought great terror on everyone.²²You gave them this land that you promised to their ancestors long ago, a fertile land.²³They came into this land and took it for their own, but they did not obey you or follow your teachings. They did not do everything you commanded. So you made all these terrible things happen to them.

²⁴“Look! The enemy has surrounded the city and has built roads to the top of the walls to capture it. Because of war, hunger, and terrible diseases, the city will be handed over to the Babylonians who are attacking it. You said this would happen, and now you see it is happening.²⁵But now, Lord God, you tell me, ‘Buy the field with silver and call in witnesses.’ You tell me this while the Babylonian army is ready to capture the city.”

²⁶Then the Lord spoke this word to Jeremiah: ²⁷“I am the Lord, the God of every person on the earth. Nothing is impossible for me.²⁸So this is what the Lord says: I will soon hand over the city of Jerusalem to the Babylonian army and to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who will capture it.²⁹The Babylonian army is already attacking the city of Jerusalem. They will soon enter it and start a fire to burn down the city and its houses. The people of Jerusalem offered sacrifices to Baal on the [roofs](#) of those same houses and poured out drink offerings to other idols to make me angry.³⁰From their youth, the people of Israel and Judah have done only the things I said were wrong. They have made me angry by worshiping idols made with their own hands,” says the Lord.³¹“From the day Jerusalem was built until now, this city has made me angry, so

angry that I must remove it from my sight. ³²I will destroy it, because of all the evil the people of Israel and Judah have done. The people, their kings and officers, their priests and prophets, all the people of Judah, and the people of Jerusalem have made me angry. ³³They turned their backs to me, not their faces. I tried to teach them again and again, but they wouldn't listen or learn. ³⁴They put their hateful idols in the place where I have chosen to be worshiped, so they made it unclean. ³⁵In the Valley of Ben Hinnom they built places to worship Baal so they could burn their sons and daughters as sacrifices to Molech. But I never commanded them to do such a hateful thing. It never entered my mind that they would do such a thing and cause Judah to sin.

³⁶“You are saying, ‘Because of war, hunger, and terrible diseases, the city will be handed over to the king of Babylon.’ But the Lord, the God of Israel, says about Jerusalem: ³⁷I forced the people of Israel and Judah to leave their land, because I was furious and very angry with them. But soon I will gather them from all the lands where I forced them to go, and I will bring them back to this place, where they may live in safety. ³⁸The people of Israel and Judah will be my people, and I will be their God. ³⁹I will make them truly want to be one people with one goal. They will truly want to worship me all their lives, for their own good and for the good of their children after them.

⁴⁰“I will make an agreement with them that will last forever. I will never turn away from them; I will always do good to them. I will make them want to respect me so they will never turn away from me. ⁴¹I will enjoy doing good to them. And with my whole being I will surely plant them in this land and make them grow.”

⁴²This is what the Lord says: “I have brought this great

disaster to the people of Israel and Judah. In the same way I will bring the good things that I promise to do for them.⁴³ You are saying, ‘This land is an empty desert, without people or animals. It has been handed over to the Babylonians.’ But in the future, people will again buy fields in this land.⁴⁴ They will use their money to buy fields. They will sign and seal their agreements and call in witnesses. They will again buy fields in the land of Benjamin, in the area around Jerusalem, in the towns of Judah and in the mountains, in the western hills, and in southern Judah. I will make everything as good for them as it once was,” says the Lord.

The Promise of the Lord

While Jeremiah was still locked up in the courtyard of the guards, the Lord spoke his word to him a second time: ²“These are the words of the Lord, who made the earth, shaped it, and gave it order, whose name is the Lord: ³“Judah, pray to me, and I will answer you. I will tell you important secrets you have never heard before.” ⁴This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says about the houses in Jerusalem and the royal palaces of Judah that have been torn down to be used in defense of the attack by the Babylonian army: ⁵“Some people will come to fight against the Babylonians. They will fill these houses with the bodies of people I killed in my hot anger. I have turned away from this city because of all the evil its people have done.

⁶“But then I will bring health and healing to the people there. I will heal them and let them enjoy great peace and safety. ⁷I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and make them strong countries as in the past. ⁸They sinned against me, but I will wash away that sin. They did evil and turned away from me, but I will forgive them. ⁹Then “Jerusalem” will be to me a name that brings joy! And people from all nations of the earth will praise it when they hear about the good things I am doing there. They will be surprised and shocked at all the good things and the peace I will bring to Jerusalem.”

¹⁰“You are saying, ‘Our country is an empty desert, without people or animals.’ But this is what the Lord says: It is now quiet in the streets of Jerusalem and in the towns of Judah,

without people or animals, but it will be noisy there soon!
¹¹There will be sounds of joy and gladness and the happy sounds of brides and bridegrooms. There will be the sounds of people bringing to the Temple of the Lord their offerings of thanks to the Lord. They will say,

‘Praise the Lord All-Powerful,
because the Lord is good!
His love continues forever!’

They will say this because I will again do good things for Judah, as I did in the beginning,” says the Lord.

¹²This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: “This place is empty now, without people or animals. But there will be shepherds in all the towns of Judah and pastures where they let their flocks rest. ¹³Shepherds will again count their sheep as the sheep walk in front of them. They will count them in the mountains and in the western hills, in southern Judah and the land of Benjamin, and around Jerusalem and the other towns of Judah!” says the Lord.

The Good Branch

¹⁴The Lord says, “The time is coming when I will do the good thing I promised to the people of Israel and Judah.

¹⁵In those days and at that time,
I will make a good branch sprout from David’s family.
He will do what is fair and right in the land.

¹⁶At that time Judah will be saved,
and the people of Jerusalem will live in safety.
The branch will be named:

The Lord Does What Is Right.”

¹⁷This is what the Lord says: “Someone from David’s family will always sit on the throne of the family of Israel. ¹⁸And there will always be priests from the family of Levi. They will always stand before me to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings and sacrifices to me.”

¹⁹The Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah, saying: ²⁰“This is what the Lord says: I have an agreement with day and night that they will always come at the right times. If you could change that agreement, ²¹only then could you change my agreement with David and Levi. Only then would my servant David not have a descendant ruling as king on David’s throne. And only then would the family of Levi not be priests serving me in the Temple. ²²But I will give many descendants to my servant David and to the family group of Levi who serve me in the Temple. They will be as many as the stars in the sky that no one can count. They will be as many as the grains of sand on the seashore that no one can measure.”

²³The Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah, saying: ²⁴“Jeremiah, have you heard what the people are saying? They say: ‘The Lord turned away from the two families of Israel and Judah that he chose.’ Now they don’t think of my people as a nation anymore!”

²⁵This is what the Lord says: “If I had not made my agreement with day and night, and if I had not made the laws for the sky and earth, ²⁶only then would I turn away from Jacob’s descendants. And only then would I not let the descendants of David my servant rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But I will be kind to them and cause good things to happen to them again.”

Life Lessons

[Jeremiah 34:1–35:19](#)

Situation

Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem with a huge army. King Zedekiah of Judah fought for survival.

Observation

In chapter [35](#) the author contrasted faithless Judah and the faithful Recabites. The obedience of the latter would be rewarded.

Inspiration

Did you know it's not faith plus obedience that equals salvation, but obedient faith that equals salvation? True faith is verified in your obedience to God.

Because Jesus is Lord, He demands obedience. There is no faith without obedience. Paul said to the Roman Christians, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" ([Romans 1:8](#)). And why was their faith spoken of throughout the world? [Romans 16:19](#) explains, "Your obedience has become known to all." In the beginning, it is your faith that is spread abroad, but in the end it is your obedience.

Faith that excludes obedience won't save anyone. The delusion that it will causes many people to take the broad road that leads to destruction ([Matthew 7:13–14](#)). That's like building a religious superstructure on sand ([Matthew 7:21–29](#)). Build your life in obedience to Christ. Then you'll know

that you belong to Him. (From *Truth for Today* by John MacArthur)

Application

Have you ever promised to do something for the Lord if he would grant your request? Then you're making a demand on God; he doesn't work that way. He wants us to be loyal and obedient constantly. His answer to our prayers reflects his perfect will for us.

Exploration

Obedience—[Genesis 2:16–17](#); [Exodus 8:25–29](#); [Joshua 11:15](#); [1 Samuel 15:1–3](#), [9](#); [Matthew 23:23–24](#); [Romans 6:17](#).

A Warning to Zedekiah

The Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and all the towns around it. Nebuchadnezzar had with him all his army and the armies of all the kingdoms and peoples he ruled.² This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said: “Jeremiah, go to Zedekiah king of Judah and tell him: ‘This is what the Lord says: I will soon hand the city of Jerusalem over to the king of Babylon, and he will burn it down!’³ You will not escape from the king of Babylon; you will surely be captured and handed over to him. You will see the king of Babylon with your own eyes, and he will talk to you face to face. And you will go to Babylon.⁴ But, Zedekiah king of Judah, listen to the promise of the Lord. This is what the Lord says about you: You will not be killed with a sword.⁵ You will die in a peaceful way. As people made funeral fires to honor your ancestors, the kings who ruled before you, so people will make a funeral fire to honor you. They will cry for you and sadly say, ‘Ah, master!’” I myself make this promise to you, says the Lord.”

⁶So Jeremiah the prophet gave this message to Zedekiah in Jerusalem.⁷ This was while the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and the cities of Judah that had not yet been taken—Lachish and Azekah. These were the only strong, walled cities left in the land of Judah.

Slaves Are Mistreated

⁸The Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah. This was after King Zedekiah had made an agreement with all the people in Jerusalem to free all the Hebrew slaves. ⁹Everyone was supposed to free his Hebrew slaves, both male and female. No one was to keep a fellow Jew as a slave. ¹⁰All the officers and all the people accepted this agreement; they agreed to free their male and female slaves and no longer keep them as slaves. So all the slaves were set free. ¹¹But after that, the people who had slaves changed their minds. So they took back the people they had set free and made them slaves again.

¹²Then the Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah: ¹³“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I brought your ancestors out of Egypt where they were slaves and made an agreement with them. ¹⁴I said to your ancestors: ‘At the end of every seven years, each one of you must set his Hebrew slaves free. If a fellow Hebrew has sold himself to you, you must let him go free after he has served you for six years.’ But your ancestors did not listen or pay attention to me. ¹⁵A short time ago you changed your hearts and did what I say is right. Each of you gave freedom to his fellow Hebrews who were slaves. And you even made an agreement before me in the place where I have chosen to be worshiped. ¹⁶But now you have changed your minds. You have shown you do not honor me. Each of you has taken back the male and female slaves you had set free, and you have forced them to become your slaves again.

¹⁷“So this is what the Lord says: You have not obeyed me. You have not given freedom to your fellow Hebrews, neither relatives nor friends. But now I will give freedom, says the

Lord, to war, to terrible diseases, and to hunger. I will make you hated by all the kingdoms of the earth. ¹⁸I will hand over the men who broke my agreement, who have not kept the promises they made before me. They cut a calf into two pieces before me and walked between the pieces. ¹⁹These people made the agreement before me by walking between the pieces of the calf: the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the officers of the court, the priests, and all the people of the land. ²⁰So I will hand them over to their enemies and to everyone who wants to kill them. Their bodies will become food for the birds of the air and for the wild animals of the earth. ²¹I will hand Zedekiah king of Judah and his officers over to their enemies, and to everyone who wants to kill them, and to the army of the king of Babylon, even though they have left Jerusalem. ²²I will give the order, says the Lord, to bring the Babylonian army back to Jerusalem. It will fight against Jerusalem, capture it, set it on fire, and burn it down. I will destroy the towns in Judah so that they become ruins where no one lives!”

The Recabite Family Obeys God

When Jehoiakim son of Josiah was king of Judah, the Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah, saying:² “Go to the family of Recab. Invite them to come to one of the side rooms of the Temple of the Lord, and offer them wine to drink.”

³So I went to get Jaazaniah son of [Jeremiah](#), the son of Habazziniah. And I gathered all of Jaazaniah’s brothers and sons and the whole family of the Recabites together. ⁴Then I brought them into the Temple of the Lord. We went into the room of the sons of Hanan son of Igdaiah, who was a man of God. The room was next to the one where the officers stay and above the room of Maaseiah son of Shallum, the doorkeeper in the Temple. ⁵Then I put some bowls full of wine and some cups before the men of the Recabite family. And I said to them, “Drink some wine.”

⁶But the Recabite men answered, “We never drink wine. Our ancestor Jonadab son of Recab gave us this command: ‘You and your descendants must never drink wine. ⁷Also you must never build houses, plant seeds, or plant vineyards, or do any of those things. You must live only in tents. Then you will live a long time in the land where you are wanderers.’ ⁸So we Recabites have obeyed everything Jonadab our ancestor commanded us. Neither we nor our wives, sons, or daughters ever drink wine. ⁹We never build houses in which to live, or own fields or vineyards, or plant crops. ¹⁰We have lived in tents and have obeyed everything our ancestor Jonadab commanded us. ¹¹But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon

attacked Judah, we said to each other, ‘Come, we must enter Jerusalem so we can escape the Babylonian army and the Aramean army.’ So we have stayed in Jerusalem.”

¹²Then the Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah: ¹³“This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: Jeremiah, go and tell the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem: ‘You should learn a lesson and obey my message,’ says the Lord.

¹⁴Jonadab son of Recab ordered his descendants not to drink wine, and that command has been obeyed. Until today they have obeyed their ancestor’s command; they do not drink wine. But I, the Lord, have given you messages again and again, but you did not obey me. ¹⁵I sent all my servants the prophets to you again and again, saying, “Each of you must stop doing evil. You must change and be good. Do not follow other gods to serve them. If you obey me, you will live in the land I have given to you and your ancestors.” But you have not listened to me or paid attention to my message. ¹⁶The descendants of Jonadab son of Recab obeyed the commands their ancestor gave them, but the people of Judah have not obeyed me.’

¹⁷“So the Lord God All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will soon bring every disaster I said would come to Judah and to everyone living in Jerusalem. I spoke to those people, but they refused to listen. I called out to them, but they did not answer me.’”

¹⁸Then Jeremiah said to the Recabites, “This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: ‘You have obeyed the commands of your ancestor Jonadab and have followed all of his teachings; you have done everything he commanded.’

¹⁹So this is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says:

‘There will always be a descendant of Jonadab son of Recab to serve me.’”

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 36:1–32

Situation

When he heard Jeremiah's prophecy, King Jehoiakim instructed his aide to burn Jeremiah's message. The king also issued a decree to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch the scribe, but God aided them.

Observation

Pride blinds people and can endanger a person's spiritual life.

Inspiration

Thousands of years before Jesus was called the Lamb of God, God promised forgiveness.

"Someday," God confided to Jeremiah, "these people will be my people and I will be their God."

"And someday," wrote David, "the mistakes of men will be tossed, not under a rug, or behind the sofa, but far, far away. As far as the east is from the west."

And do you know what? That someday came. On a garbage heap outside of Jerusalem.

Someday the almighty God, who has every right to make me burn forever, will look past my apathy, point to the cross and invite me to come home ... forgiven ... forever. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you know someone who has asked God for forgiveness, yet still dwells in guilt? Write that

person a note with a fitting Scripture verse and a word of encouragement that God forgives first, then he forgets.

Exploration

God Provided a Way—[Psalm 68:18](#); [Isaiah 63:9](#); [Titus 3:5](#); [1 Peter 1:23](#).

Jehoiakim Burns Jeremiah's Scroll

The Lord spoke this word to Jeremiah during the fourth year that Jehoiakim son of Josiah was king of Judah: ²“Get a scroll. Write on it all the words I have spoken to you about Israel and Judah and all the nations. Write everything from when I first spoke to you, when Josiah was king, until now. ³Maybe the family of Judah will hear what disasters I am planning to bring on them and will stop doing wicked things. Then I would forgive them for the sins and the evil things they have done.”

⁴So Jeremiah called for Baruch son of Neriah. Jeremiah spoke the messages the Lord had given him, and Baruch wrote those messages on the scroll. ⁵Then Jeremiah commanded Baruch, “I cannot go to the Temple of the Lord. I must stay here. ⁶So I want you to go to the Temple of the Lord on a day when the people are giving up eating. Read from the scroll to all the people of Judah who come into Jerusalem from their towns. Read the messages from the Lord, which are the words you wrote on the scroll as I spoke them to you. ⁷Perhaps they will ask the Lord to help them. Perhaps each one will stop doing wicked things, because the Lord has announced that he is very angry with them.” ⁸So Baruch son of Neriah did everything Jeremiah the prophet told him to do. In the Lord's Temple he read aloud the scroll that had the Lord's messages written on it.

⁹In the ninth month of the fifth year that Jehoiakim son of

Josiah was king, a special time to give up eating was announced. All the people of Jerusalem and everyone who had come into Jerusalem from the towns of Judah were supposed to give up eating to honor the Lord. ¹⁰At that time Baruch read to all the people there the scroll containing Jeremiah's words. He read the scroll in the Temple of the Lord in the room of Gemariah son of Shaphan, a royal secretary. That room was in the upper courtyard at the entrance of the New Gate of the Temple.

¹¹Micaiah son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard all the messages from the Lord that were on the scroll. ¹²Micaiah went down to the royal secretary's room in the king's palace where all of the officers were sitting: Elishama the royal secretary; Delaiah son of Shemaiah; Elnathan son of Acbor; Gemariah son of Shaphan; Zedekiah son of Hananiah; and all the other officers. ¹³Micaiah told those officers everything he had heard Baruch read to the people from the scroll.

¹⁴Then the officers sent a man named Jehudi son of Nethaniah to Baruch. (Nethaniah was the son of Shelemiah, who was the son of Cushi.) Jehudi said to Baruch, "Bring the scroll that you read to the people and come with me."

So Baruch son of Neriah took the scroll and went with Jehudi to the officers. ¹⁵Then the officers said to Baruch, "Please sit down and read the scroll to us."

So Baruch read the scroll to them. ¹⁶When the officers heard all the words, they became afraid and looked at each other. They said to Baruch, "We must certainly tell the king about these words." ¹⁷Then the officers asked Baruch, "Tell us, please, where did you get all these words you wrote on the scroll? Did you write down what Jeremiah said to you?"

¹⁸“Yes,” Baruch answered. “Jeremiah spoke them all to me, and I wrote them down with ink on this scroll.”

¹⁹Then the officers said to Baruch, “You and Jeremiah must go and hide, and don’t tell anyone where you are.”

²⁰The officers put the scroll in the room of Elishama the royal secretary. Then they went to the king in the courtyard and told him all about the scroll. ²¹So King Jehoiakim sent Jehudi to get the scroll. Jehudi brought the scroll from the room of Elishama the royal secretary and read it to the king and to all the officers who stood around the king. ²²It was the ninth month of the year, so King Jehoiakim was sitting in the winter apartment. There was a fire burning in a small firepot in front of him. ²³After Jehudi had read three or four columns, the king cut those columns off of the scroll with a penknife and threw them into the firepot. Finally, the whole scroll was burned in the fire. ²⁴King Jehoiakim and his servants heard everything that was said, but they were not frightened! They did not tear their clothes to show their sorrow. ²⁵Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah even tried to talk King Jehoiakim out of burning the scroll, but he would not listen to them. ²⁶Instead, the king ordered Jerahmeel son of the king, Seraiah son of Azriel, and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest Baruch the secretary and Jeremiah the prophet. But the Lord had hidden them.

²⁷So King Jehoiakim burned the scroll where Baruch had written all the words Jeremiah had spoken to him. Then the Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah: ²⁸“Get another scroll. Write all the words on it that were on the first scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah burned up. ²⁹Also say this to Jehoiakim king of Judah: ‘This is what the Lord says: You burned up that scroll and said, “Why, Jeremiah, did you write on it ‘the king of Babylon

will surely come and destroy this land and the people and animals in it?”³⁰ So this is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: Jehoiakim’s descendants will not sit on David’s throne. When Jehoiakim dies, his body will be thrown out on the ground. It will be left out in the heat of the day and in the cold frost of the night.³¹ I will punish Jehoiakim and his children and his servants, because they have done evil things. I will bring disasters upon them and upon all the people in Jerusalem and Judah—everything I promised but which they refused to hear.”

³² So Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch son of Neriah, his secretary. As Jeremiah spoke, Baruch wrote on the scroll the same words that were on the scroll Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to the second scroll.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 37:1–21

Situation

When Jeremiah prophesied against the king, the king imprisoned him on the false charge of treason. After a lengthy stay in prison, King Zedekiah released Jeremiah.

Observation

The world hates to hear what God says. As a result, unbelievers will sometimes accuse God's servants falsely.

Inspiration

Honestly—have you said, “Thanks, Lord, for this test”? Have you finally stopped struggling and expressed to Him how much you appreciate His loving sovereignty over your life? I submit that one of the reasons our suffering is prolonged is that we take so long saying “Thank You, Lord” with an attitude of genuine appreciation.

How unfinished and rebellious and proud and unconcerned we would be without suffering! Here are two statements on suffering I heard years ago and shall never forget:

Pain plants the flag of reality in the fortress of a rebel heart.

When God wants to do an impossible task, He takes an impossible individual—and crushes him.

May these things encourage you the next time God heats up the furnace!

(From *Come Before Winter* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

While you are free to come and go, some people are imprisoned behind bars. Most deserve to be there. But we all deserve punishment for our sins, yet Christ forgave us through his death on the cross. Show Christ's love by becoming a pen-pal to a prisoner. By your speech and action, share God's love.

Exploration

Unjust Suffering—[Philippians 1:29](#); [James 5:10](#); [1 Peter 5:10](#).

Jeremiah in Prison

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had appointed Zedekiah son of Josiah to be king of Judah. Zedekiah took the place of Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim.² But Zedekiah, his servants, and the people of Judah did not listen to the words the Lord had spoken through Jeremiah the prophet.

³Now King Zedekiah sent Jehucal son of Shelemiah and the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah with a message to Jeremiah the prophet. This was the message: “Jeremiah, please pray to the Lord our God for us.”

⁴At that time Jeremiah had not yet been put into prison. So he was free to go anywhere he wanted.⁵ The army of the king of Egypt had marched from Egypt toward Judah. Now the Babylonian army had surrounded the city of Jerusalem. When they heard about the Egyptian army marching toward them, the Babylonian army left Jerusalem.

⁶The Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah the prophet:⁷ “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Jehucal and Zephaniah, I know Zedekiah king of Judah sent you to seek my help. Tell this to King Zedekiah: ‘The army of the king of Egypt came here to help you, but they will go back to Egypt.’⁸ After that, the Babylonian army will return and attack Jerusalem and capture it and burn it down.’

⁹“This is what the Lord says: People of Jerusalem, do not fool yourselves. Don’t say, ‘The Babylonian army will surely

leave us alone.' They will not! ¹⁰Even if you defeated all of the Babylonian army that is attacking you and there were only a few injured men left in their tents, they would come from their tents and burn down Jerusalem!"

¹¹So the Babylonian army left Jerusalem to fight the army of the king of Egypt. ¹²Now Jeremiah tried to travel from Jerusalem to the land of Benjamin to get his share of the property that belonged to his family. ¹³When Jeremiah got to the Benjamin Gate of Jerusalem, the captain in charge of the guards arrested him. The captain's name was Irijah son of Shelemiah son of Hananiah. Irijah said, "You are leaving us to join the Babylonians!"

¹⁴But Jeremiah said to Irijah, "That's not true! I am not leaving to join the Babylonians." Irijah refused to listen to Jeremiah, so he arrested Jeremiah and took him to the officers of Jerusalem. ¹⁵Those rulers were very angry with Jeremiah and beat him. Then they put him in jail in the house of Jonathan the royal secretary, which had been made into a prison. ¹⁶So those people put Jeremiah into a cell in a dungeon, and Jeremiah was there for a long time.

¹⁷Then King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah and had him brought to the palace. Zedekiah asked him in private, "Is there any message from the Lord?"

Jeremiah answered, "Yes, there is. Zedekiah, you will be handed over to the king of Babylon." ¹⁸Then Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, "What crime have I done against you or your officers or the people of Jerusalem? Why have you thrown me into prison? ¹⁹Where are your prophets that prophesied this message to you: 'The king of Babylon will not attack you or this land of Judah?' ²⁰But now, my master, king of Judah,

please listen to me, and please do what I ask of you. Do not send me back to the house of Jonathan the royal secretary, or I will die there!”

²¹So King Zedekiah gave orders for Jeremiah to be put under guard in the courtyard of the guard and to be given bread each day from the street of the bakers until there was no more bread in the city. So he stayed under guard in the courtyard of the guard.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 38:1-28

Situation

Judah's leaders had persecuted Jeremiah repeatedly for faithfully proclaiming God's message. In this passage, the prophet was thrown into a well to die. A Cushite, Ebed-Melech, was willing to stand up for Jeremiah and plead for his life.

Observation

Followers of Christ should expect to be persecuted. Commitment to God will not always make life easy.

Inspiration

Today many of us think we are doing God a favor when we tell another about Christ, even though we were commanded to do so. And we think we are suffering real persecution when someone makes light of our faith.

There are places in the world where Christians can still be jailed for sharing their faith or face the death penalty for leading a lost soul to Christ, but they are few and far between. Most people don't care what others believe in, or if they believe in anything.

The Christian faith has become a cheap faith because we too often live as if it has no value. We complain when the preacher runs over a few minutes on the Sunday sermon and consider it a great inconvenience to return to services once or twice more in the same week. No wonder so much of the

world does not consider our faith relevant when we are not even willing to give of our time, much less our freedom or lives, for what we say we believe in.

Think about it. Have you ever been persecuted for sharing your faith in Christ? Has your faith cost you anything? If not, perhaps you had better re-examine your faith to see if it measures up.

(From *Unto the Hills* by Billy Graham)

Application

Are you going through a difficult time because of your faith in Christ? Do people look down upon you or exclude you because of your faith? Do you know some Christians who are undergoing persecution or having particularly tough times? Pray for these people. Pray for strength to endure for yourself and others, then band together with others in need.

Exploration

Struggles—[Mark 13:9](#); [John 15:18–21](#); [2 Timothy 3:10–12](#); [1 Peter 4:12–19](#).

Jeremiah Is Thrown into a Well

Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah heard what Jeremiah was telling all the people. He said:²“This is what the Lord says: ‘Everyone who stays in Jerusalem will die from war, or hunger, or terrible diseases. But everyone who surrenders to the Babylonian army will live; they will escape with their lives and live.’³ And this is what the Lord says: ‘This city of Jerusalem will surely be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon. He will capture this city!’”

⁴Then the officers said to the king, “Jeremiah must be put to death! He is discouraging the soldiers who are still in the city, and all the people, by what he is saying to them. He does not want good to happen to us; he wants to ruin us.”

⁵King Zedekiah said to them, “Jeremiah is in your control. I cannot do anything to stop you.”

⁶So the officers took Jeremiah and put him into the well of Malkijah, the king’s son, which was in the courtyard of the guards. The officers used ropes to lower Jeremiah into the well, which did not have any water in it, only mud. And Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

⁷But Ebed-Melech, a Cushite and a servant in the palace, heard that the officers had put Jeremiah into the well. As King Zedekiah was sitting at the Benjamin Gate,⁸Ebed-Melech left the palace and went to the king. Ebed-Melech said to him,

⁹“My master and king, these rulers have acted in an evil way. They have treated Jeremiah the prophet badly. They have thrown him into a well and left him there to die! When there is no more bread in the city, he will starve to death.”

¹⁰Then King Zedekiah commanded Ebed-Melech the Cushite, “Take thirty men from the palace and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the well before he dies.”

¹¹So Ebed-Melech took the men with him and went to a room under the storeroom in the palace. He took some old rags and worn-out clothes from that room. Then he let those rags down with some ropes to Jeremiah in the well. ¹²Ebed-Melech the Cushite said to Jeremiah, “Put these old rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to be pads for the ropes.” So Jeremiah did as Ebed-Melech said. ¹³The men pulled Jeremiah up with the ropes and lifted him out of the well. And Jeremiah stayed under guard in the courtyard of the guard.

Zedekiah Questions Jeremiah

¹⁴Then King Zedekiah sent someone to get Jeremiah the prophet and bring him to the third entrance to the Temple of the Lord. The king said to Jeremiah, “I am going to ask you something. Do not hide anything from me, but tell me everything honestly.”

¹⁵Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “If I give you an answer, you will surely kill me. And even if I give you advice, you will not listen to me.”

¹⁶But King Zedekiah made a secret promise to Jeremiah, “As surely as the Lord lives who has given us breath and life, I will not kill you. And I promise not to hand you over to the

officers who want to kill you.”

¹⁷Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “This is what the Lord God All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: ‘If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be saved. Jerusalem will not be burned down, and you and your family will live. ¹⁸But if you refuse to surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, Jerusalem will be handed over to the Babylonian army, and they will burn it down. And you yourself will not escape from them.’”

¹⁹Then King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “I’m afraid of some Jews who have already gone over to the side of the Babylonian army. If the Babylonians hand me over to them, they will treat me badly.”

²⁰But Jeremiah answered, “The Babylonians will not hand you over to the Jews. Obey the Lord by doing what I tell you. Then things will go well for you, and your life will be saved. ²¹But if you refuse to surrender to the Babylonians, the Lord has shown me what will happen. ²²All the women left in the palace of the king of Judah will be brought out and taken to the important officers of the king of Babylon. Your women will make fun of you with this song:

‘Your good friends misled you
and were stronger than you.
While your feet were stuck in the mud,
they left you.’

²³“All your wives and children will be brought out and given to the Babylonian army. You yourself will not even escape from them. You will be taken prisoner by the king of Babylon, and Jerusalem will be burned down.”

²⁴Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “Do not tell anyone that I

have been talking to you, or you will die.²⁵ If the officers find out I talked to you, they will come to you and say, ‘Tell us what you said to King Zedekiah and what he said to you. Don’t keep any secrets from us. If you don’t tell us everything, we will kill you.’²⁶ If they ask you, tell them, ‘I was begging the king not to send me back to Jonathan’s house to die.’”

²⁷All the officers did come to question Jeremiah. So he told them everything the king had ordered him to say. Then the officers said no more to Jeremiah, because no one had heard what Jeremiah and the king had discussed.

²⁸So Jeremiah stayed under guard in the courtyard of the guard until the day Jerusalem was captured.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 39:1-18

Situation

After Zedekiah had ruled Judah for eleven years, the Babylonians captured Jerusalem. The Babylonians deported the rich and powerful from the conquered land and left the poor behind.

Observation

Note the contrast in this chapter. Zedekiah had his sons killed and his eyes put out. Jeremiah, however, was rewarded by deliverance, according to God's promise to him. However, both had to face the possibility of death during the time of siege and destruction.

Inspiration

If you've attended a memorial service, you've heard the words [[Psalm 23](#)]. If you've walked through a cemetery, you've read them. They're quoted at the gravesides of paupers, carved on the headstones of kings. Those who know nothing of the Bible know this part of the Bible. Those who quote no scripture can remember this scripture, the one about the valley and the shadow and the shepherd.

Why? Why are these words so treasured? Why is this verse so beloved? I can think of a couple of reasons. By virtue of this psalm, David grants us two important reminders that can help us surrender our fear of the grave.

We all have to face it. In a life marked by doctor

appointments, dentist appointments, and school appointments, there is one appointment that none of us will miss, the appointment with death. “Everyone must die once and be judged” ([Hebrews 9:27](#)). Oh, how we’d like to change that verse. Just a word or two would suffice. “Nearly everyone must die ...” or “Everyone but me must die ...” or “Everyone who forgets to eat right and take vitamins must die ...” But those are not God’s words. In his plan everyone must die, even those who eat right and take their vitamins.

I could have gone all day without reminding you of that. We do our best to avoid the topic. One wise man, however, urges us to face it squarely: “We all must die, and everyone living should think about this” ([Ecclesiastes 7:2](#)). Solomon isn’t promoting a morbid obsession with death. He is reminding us to be honest about the inevitable.

Moses gave the same exhortation. In the only psalm attributed to his pen, he prayed, “Teach us how short our lives really are so that we may be wise” ([Psalm 90:12](#)).

The wise remember the brevity of life. Exercise may buy us a few more heartbeats. Medicine may grant us a few more breaths. But in the end, there is an end. And the best way to face life is to be honest about death. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

Application

When you consider your own mortality, what typically is your response? Take time to read the passages below about God’s promises to believers concerning death and eternity. How do these

passages change your thoughts about death and mortality?

Exploration

Victory over Death—[Psalm 23:4](#); [116:15](#); [Isaiah 25:8](#); [John 5:24](#); [Romans 6:23](#); [1 Corinthians 15:51–58](#); [Revelation 21:4](#).

The Fall of Jerusalem

This is how Jerusalem was captured: Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army and surrounded the city to attack it. This was during the tenth month of the ninth year Zedekiah was king of Judah.² This lasted until the ninth day of the fourth month in Zedekiah's eleventh year. Then the city wall was broken through.³ And all these officers of the king of Babylon came into Jerusalem and sat down at the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezzer of the district of Samgar; Nebo-Sarsekim, a chief officer; Nergal-Sharezzer, an important leader; and all the other important officers.

⁴When Zedekiah king of Judah and all his soldiers saw them, they ran away. They left Jerusalem at night and went out from the king's garden. They went through the gate that was between the two walls and then headed toward the Jordan Valley.⁵ But the Babylonian army chased them and caught up with Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. They captured him and took him to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who was at the town of Riblah in the land of Hamath. There Nebuchadnezzar passed his sentence on Zedekiah.⁶ At Riblah the king of Babylon killed Zedekiah's sons and all the important officers of Judah as Zedekiah watched.⁷ Then he put out Zedekiah's eyes. He put bronze chains on Zedekiah and took him to Babylon.

⁸The Babylonians set fire to the palace and to the houses of the people, and they broke down the walls around Jerusalem.

⁹Nebuzaradan, commander of the king's special guards, took the people left in Jerusalem, those captives who had surrendered to him earlier, and the rest of the people of Jerusalem, and he took them all away to Babylon. ¹⁰But Nebuzaradan, commander of the guard, left some of the poorest people of Judah behind. They owned nothing, but that day he gave them vineyards and fields.

¹¹Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had given these orders about Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan, commander of the guard: ¹²"Find Jeremiah and take care of him. Do not hurt him, but do for him whatever he asks you." ¹³So Nebuchadnezzar sent these men for Jeremiah: Nebuzaradan, commander of the guards; Nebushazban, a chief officer; Nergal-Sharezer, an important leader; and all the other officers of the king of Babylon. ¹⁴They had Jeremiah taken out of the courtyard of the guard. Then they turned him over to Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan, who had orders to take Jeremiah back home. So they took him home, and he stayed among the people left in Judah.

¹⁵While Jeremiah was guarded in the courtyard, the Lord spoke his word to him: ¹⁶"Jeremiah, go and tell Ebed-Melech the Cushite this message: 'This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: Very soon I will make my words about Jerusalem come true through disaster, not through good times. You will see everything come true with your own eyes.' ¹⁷But I will save you on that day, Ebed-Melech, says the Lord. You will not be handed over to the people you fear. ¹⁸I will surely save you, Ebed-Melech. You will not die from a sword, but you will escape and live. This will happen because you have trusted in me, says the Lord.'"

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 40:1–45:5

Situation

Except for [52:31–34](#), chapters [40–44](#) are chronologically the last writings in the Book of Jeremiah. They recount the fall of Jerusalem (in 586 B.C.) and its aftermath of destruction.

Observation

After the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah ministered to the remnant in Palestine and Egypt. They may have lost hope, but God looks at the big picture.

Inspiration

It's impossible to pass through life without experiencing times when you cannot see your way through a deep valley. Times when the package delivered at the back door comes delivered in the ugly wrapping of death or affliction or illness or even divorce... . John Selden, the old British jurist and scholar, put it even more bluntly, "Pleasure is nothing else but the intermission of pain."

You may find yourself enjoying the intermission. Today, you may be smiling. Your heart may be light and merry. Perhaps answers to prayer have come beautifully and deliberately. You are swept away in delight. But it's also quite possible that you are caught in the grip of affliction. You may be going through some of the hardest days of your life. You may be wondering *Why? Why me? Why this trial?*

When you persevere through a trial, God gives

you a special measure of insight. You become the recipient of the favor of God as He gives to you something that would not be learned otherwise.

(From *Wisdom for the Way* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

If you're undergoing a trial in your life, try to look at the big picture. Reflect on your current situation and ask God to help you see it from his view. Spend a day alone with God and ask him to help you understand his perspective for life.

Exploration

Guidance—[Psalm 23:3](#); [25:4-5](#); [Isaiah 58:11](#); [John 16:12-13](#).

Jeremiah Is Set Free

The Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah after Nebuzaradan, commander of the guards, had set Jeremiah free at the city of Ramah. He had found Jeremiah in Ramah bound in chains with all the captives from Jerusalem and Judah who were being taken away to Babylon.² When commander Nebuzaradan found Jeremiah, Nebuzaradan said to him, “The Lord your God announced this disaster would come to this place.³ And now the Lord has done everything he said he would do. This disaster happened because the people of Judah sinned against the Lord and did not obey him.⁴ But today I am freeing you from the chains on your wrists. If you want to, come with me to Babylon, and I will take good care of you. But if you don’t want to come, then don’t. Look, the whole country is open to you. Go wherever you wish.”⁵ Before Jeremiah turned to leave, Nebuzaradan said, “Or go back to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan. The king of Babylon has chosen him to be governor over the towns of Judah. Go and live with Gedaliah among the people, or go anywhere you want.”

Then Nebuzaradan gave Jeremiah some food and a present and let him go.⁶ So Jeremiah went to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah and stayed with him there. He lived among the people who were left behind in Judah.

The Short Rule of Gedaliah

⁷Some officers and their men from the army of Judah were still out in the open country. They heard that the king of Babylon had put Gedaliah son of Ahikam in charge of the people who were left in the land: the men, women, and children who were the poorest. They were the ones who were not taken to Babylon as captives. ⁸So these soldiers came to Gedaliah at Mizpah: Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan and Jonathan sons of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, Jaazaniah son of the Maacathite, and their men.

⁹Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, made a promise to them, saying, “Do not be afraid to serve the Babylonians. Stay in the land and serve the king of Babylon. Then everything will go well for you. ¹⁰I myself will live in Mizpah and will speak for you before the Babylonians who come to us here. Harvest the wine, the summer fruit, and the oil, and put what you harvest in your storage jars. Live in the towns you control.”

¹¹The Jews in Moab, Ammon, Edom, and other countries also heard that the king of Babylon had left a few Jews alive in the land. And they heard the king of Babylon had chosen Gedaliah as governor over them. (Gedaliah was the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan.) ¹²When the people of Judah heard this news, they came back to Judah from all the countries where they had been scattered. They came to Gedaliah at Mizpah and gathered a large harvest of wine and summer fruit.

¹³Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers of Judah still in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah. ¹⁴They said to him, “Don’t you know that Baalis king of the Ammonite people wants you dead? He has sent Ishmael son of Nethaniah

to kill you.” But Gedaliah son of Ahikam did not believe them.

¹⁵Then Johanan son of Kareah spoke to Gedaliah in private at Mizpah. He said, “Let me go and kill Ishmael son of Nethaniah. No one will know anything about it. We should not let Ishmael kill you. Then all the Jews gathered around you would be scattered to different countries again, and the few people of Judah who are left alive would be lost.”

¹⁶But Gedaliah son of Ahikam said to Johanan son of Kareah, “Do not kill Ishmael! The things you are saying about Ishmael are not true.”

In the seventh month Ishmael son of Nethaniah and ten of his men came to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah. (Nethaniah was the son of Elishama.) Now Ishmael was a member of the king's family and had been one of the officers of the king of Judah. While they were eating a meal with Gedaliah at Mizpah, ²Ishmael and his ten men got up and killed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with a sword. (Gedaliah was the man the king of Babylon had chosen as governor over Judah.) ³Ishmael also killed all the Jews and the Babylonian soldiers who were there with Gedaliah at Mizpah.

⁴The day after Gedaliah was murdered, before anyone knew about it, ⁵eighty men came to Mizpah bringing grain offerings and incense to the Temple of the Lord. Those men from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria had [shaved off their beards, torn their clothes, and cut themselves](#). ⁶Ishmael son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them, crying as he walked. When he met them, he said, "Come with me to meet Gedaliah son of Ahikam." ⁷So they went into Mizpah. Then Ishmael son of Nethaniah and his men killed seventy of them and threw the bodies into a deep well. ⁸But the ten men who were left alive said to Ishmael, "Don't kill us! We have wheat and barley and oil and honey that we have hidden in a field." So Ishmael let them live and did not kill them with the others. ⁹Now the well where he had thrown all the bodies had been made by King Asa as a part of his defenses against Baasha king of Israel. But Ishmael son of Nethaniah put dead bodies in it until it was full.

¹⁰Ishmael captured all the other people in Mizpah: the king's daughters and all the other people who were left there. They were the ones whom Nebuzaradan commander of the guard had chosen Gedaliah son of Ahikam to take care of. So

Ishmael son of Nethaniah captured those people, and he started to cross over to the country of the Ammonites.

¹¹Johanan son of Kareah and all his army officers with him heard about all the evil things Ishmael son of Nethaniah had done. ¹²So they took their men and went to fight Ishmael son of Nethaniah and caught him near the big pool of water at Gibeon. ¹³When the captives Ishmael had taken saw Johanan and the army officers, they were glad. ¹⁴So all the people Ishmael had taken captive from Mizpah turned around and ran to Johanan son of Kareah. ¹⁵But Ishmael son of Nethaniah and eight of his men escaped from Johanan and ran away to the Ammonites.

¹⁶So Johanan son of Kareah and all his army officers saved the captives that Ishmael son of Nethaniah had taken from Mizpah after he murdered Gedaliah son of Ahikam. Among those left alive were soldiers, women, children, and palace officers. And Johanan brought them back from the town of Gibeon.

The Escape to Egypt

¹⁷⁻¹⁸Johanan and the other army officers were afraid of the Babylonians. Since the king of Babylon had chosen Gedaliah son of Ahikam to be governor of Judah but Ishmael son of Nethaniah had murdered him, Johanan was afraid that the Babylonians would be angry. So they decided to run away to Egypt. On the way they stayed at Geruth Kimham, near the town of Bethlehem.

While there, Johanan son of Kareah and Jezeiah son of Hoshai went to Jeremiah the prophet. All the army officers and all the people, from the least important to the greatest, went along, too.² They said to him, “Jeremiah, please listen to what we ask. Pray to the Lord your God for all the people left alive from the family of Judah. At one time there were many of us, but you can see that there are few of us now.³ So pray that the Lord your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do.”

⁴Then Jeremiah the prophet answered, “I understand what you want me to do. I will pray to the Lord your God as you have asked. I will tell you everything he says and not hide anything from you.”

⁵Then the people said to Jeremiah, “May the Lord be a true and loyal witness against us if we don’t do everything the Lord your God sends you to tell us.⁶ It does not matter if we like the message or not. We will obey the Lord our God, to whom we are sending you. We will obey what he says so good things will happen to us.”

⁷Ten days later the Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah.⁸ Then Jeremiah called for Johanan son of Kareah, the army officers with him, and all the other people, from the least important to the greatest.⁹ Jeremiah said to them, “You sent me to ask the Lord for what you wanted. This is what the God of Israel says:¹⁰ ‘If you will stay in Judah, I will build you up and not tear you down. I will plant you and not pull you up, because I am sad about the disaster I brought on you.’¹¹ Now you fear the king of Babylon, but don’t be afraid of him. Don’t be afraid of him,’ says the Lord, ‘because I am with you. I will save you and rescue you from his power.’¹² I will be kind to you, and he will

also treat you with mercy and let you stay in your land.’

¹³“But if you say, ‘We will not stay in Judah,’ you will disobey the Lord your God. ¹⁴Or you might say, ‘No, we will go and live in Egypt. There we will not see war, or hear the trumpets of war, or be hungry.’ ¹⁵If you say that, listen to the message of the Lord, you who are left alive from Judah. This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: ‘If you make up your mind to go and live in Egypt, these things will happen: ¹⁶You are afraid of war, but it will find you in the land of Egypt. And you are worried about hunger, but it will follow you into Egypt, and you will die there. ¹⁷Everyone who goes to live in Egypt will die in war or from hunger or terrible disease. No one who goes to Egypt will live; no one will escape the terrible things I will bring to them.’

¹⁸“This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: ‘I showed my anger against the people of Jerusalem. In the same way I will show my anger against you when you go to Egypt. Other nations will speak evil of you. People will be shocked by what will happen to you. You will become a curse word, and people will insult you. And you will never see Judah again.’

¹⁹“You who are left alive in Judah, the Lord has told you, ‘Don’t go to Egypt.’ Be sure you understand this; I warn you today ²⁰that you are making a mistake that will cause your deaths. You sent me to the Lord your God, saying, ‘Pray to the Lord our God for us. Tell us everything the Lord our God says, and we will do it.’ ²¹So today I have told you, but you have not obeyed the Lord your God in all that he sent me to tell you. ²²So now be sure you understand this: You want to go to live in Egypt, but you will die there by war, hunger, or terrible

diseases.”

So Jeremiah finished telling the people the message from the Lord their God; he told them everything the Lord their God had sent him to tell them.

²Azariah son of Hoshaiiah, Johanan son of Kareah, and some other men were too proud. They said to Jeremiah, “You are lying! The Lord our God did not send you to say, ‘You must not go to Egypt to live there.’” ³Baruch son of Neriah is causing you to be against us. He wants you to hand us over to the Babylonians so they can kill us or capture us and take us to Babylon.”

⁴So Johanan, the army officers, and all the people disobeyed the Lord’s command to stay in Judah. ⁵But Johanan son of Kareah and the army officers led away those who were left alive from Judah. They were the people who had run away from the Babylonians to other countries but then had come back to live in Judah. ⁶They led away the men, women, and children, and the king’s daughters. Nebuzaradan commander of the guard had put Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan in charge of those people. Johanan also took Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch son of Neriah. ⁷These people did not listen to the Lord. So they all went to Egypt to the city of Tahpanhes.

⁸In Tahpanhes the Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah: ⁹“Take some large stones. Bury them in the clay in the brick pavement in front of the king of Egypt’s palace in Tahpanhes. Do this while the Jews are watching you. ¹⁰Then say to them, ‘This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: I will soon send for my servant, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. I will set his throne over these stones I have buried, and he will spread his covering for shade above them. ¹¹He will come here and attack Egypt. He will bring death to those who are

supposed to die. He will make prisoners of those who are to be taken captive, and he will bring war to those who are to be killed with a sword. ¹²Nebuchadnezzar will set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt and burn them. And he will take the idols away as captives. As a shepherd wraps himself in his clothes, so Nebuchadnezzar will wrap Egypt around him. Then he will safely leave Egypt. ¹³He will destroy the stone pillars in the temple of the sun god in Egypt, and he will burn down the temples of the gods of Egypt.”

Disaster in Egypt

Jeremiah received a message from the Lord for all the Jews living in Egypt—in the cities of Migdol, Tahpanhes, Memphis, and in southern Egypt. This was the message:²“The Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: You saw all the terrible things I brought on Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, which are ruins today with no one living in them.³ It is because the people who lived there did evil. They made me angry by burning incense and worshiping other gods that neither they nor you nor your ancestors ever knew.⁴ I sent all my servants, the prophets, to you again and again. By them I said to you, ‘Don’t do this terrible thing that I hate.’⁵ But they did not listen or pay attention. They did not stop doing evil things and burning incense to other gods.⁶ So I showed my great anger against them. I poured out my anger in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem so they are only ruins and piles of stones today.

⁷“Now the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: Why are you doing such great harm to yourselves? You are cutting off the men and women, children and babies from the family of Judah, leaving yourselves without anyone from the family of Judah.⁸ Why do you want to make me angry by making idols? Why do you burn incense to the gods of Egypt, where you have come to live? You will destroy yourselves. Other nations will speak evil of you and make fun of you.⁹ Have you forgotten about the evil things your ancestors did? And have you forgotten the evil the kings and queens of Judah did? Have you forgotten about the evil you and your wives did?

These things were done in the country of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. ¹⁰Even to this day the people of Judah are still too proud. They have not learned to respect me or to follow my teachings. They have not obeyed the laws I gave you and your ancestors.

¹¹“So this is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: I am determined to bring disasters on you. I will destroy the whole family of Judah. ¹²The few who were left alive from Judah were determined to go to Egypt and settle there, but they will all die in Egypt. They will be killed in war or die from hunger. From the least important to the greatest, they will be killed in war or die from hunger. Other nations will speak evil about them. People will be shocked by what has happened to them. They will become a curse word, and people will insult them. ¹³I will punish those people who have gone to live in Egypt, just as I punished Jerusalem, using swords, hunger, and terrible diseases. ¹⁴Of the people of Judah who were left alive and have gone to live in Egypt, none will escape my punishment. They want to return to Judah and live there, but none of them will live to return to Judah, except a few people who will escape.”

¹⁵A large group of the people of Judah who lived in southern Egypt were meeting together. Among them were many women of Judah who were burning incense to other gods, and their husbands knew it. All these people said to Jeremiah, ¹⁶“We will not listen to the message from the Lord that you spoke to us. ¹⁷We promised to make sacrifices to the Queen Goddess, and we will certainly do everything we promised. We will burn incense and pour out drink offerings to worship her, just as we, our ancestors, kings, and officers did

in the past. All of us did these things in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and were successful, and nothing bad happened to us.¹⁸ But since we stopped making sacrifices to the Queen Goddess and stopped pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had great problems. Our people have also been killed in war and by hunger.”

¹⁹The women said, “Our husbands knew what we were doing. We had their permission to burn incense to the Queen Goddess and to pour out drink offerings to her. Our husbands knew we were making cakes that looked like her and were pouring out drink offerings to her.”

²⁰Then Jeremiah spoke to all the people—men and women—who answered him. ²¹He said to them, “The Lord remembered that you and your ancestors, kings and officers, and the people of the land burned incense in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. He remembered and thought about it. ²²Then he could not be patient with you any longer. He hated the terrible things you did. So he made your country an empty desert, where no one lives. Other people curse that country. And so it is today. ²³All this happened because you burned incense to other gods. You sinned against the Lord. You did not obey him or follow his teachings or the laws he gave you. You did not keep your part of the agreement with him. So this disaster has happened to you. It is there for you to see.”

²⁴Then Jeremiah said to all those men and women, “People of Judah who are now in Egypt, hear the word of the Lord: ²⁵The Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: You and your wives did what you said you would do. You said, ‘We will certainly keep the promises we made. We promised to make

sacrifices to the Queen Goddess and to pour out drink offerings to her.' So, go ahead. Do the things you promised, and keep your promises.²⁶ But hear the word of the Lord. Listen, all you Jews living in Egypt. The Lord says, 'I have sworn by my great name: The people of Judah now living in Egypt will never again use my name to make promises. They will never again say in Egypt, "As surely as the Lord God lives ..."' ²⁷I am watching over them, not to take care of them, but to hurt them. The Jews who live in Egypt will die from swords or hunger until they are all destroyed. ²⁸A few will escape being killed by the sword and will come back to Judah from Egypt. Then, of the people of Judah who came to live in Egypt, those who are left alive will know if my word or their word came true. ²⁹I will give you a sign that I will punish you here in Egypt,' says the Lord. 'When you see it happen, you will know that my promises to hurt you will really happen.' ³⁰This is what the Lord says: 'Hophra king of Egypt has enemies who want to kill him. Soon I will hand him over to his enemies just as I handed Zedekiah king of Judah over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who wanted to kill him.'"

A Message to Baruch

It was the fourth year that Jehoiakim son of Josiah was king of Judah. Jeremiah the prophet told these things to Baruch son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote them on a scroll: ²“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to you, Baruch: ³You have said, ‘How terrible it is for me! The Lord has given me sorrow along with my pain. I am tired because of my suffering and cannot rest.’”

⁴The Lord said, “Say this to Baruch: ‘This is what the Lord says: I will soon tear down what I have built, and I will pull up what I have planted everywhere in Judah. ⁵Baruch, you are looking for great things for yourself. Don’t look for them, because I will bring disaster on all the people, says the Lord. You will have to go many places, but I will let you escape alive wherever you go.’”

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 46:1–49:39

Situation

Since the Book of Jeremiah is not arranged chronologically, this section of Scripture would historically follow the events of [Jeremiah 25](#). Jeremiah anticipated Nebuchadnezzar's conquest ([25:9](#)).

Observation

God not only ruled Judah, but all nations. God doesn't just rule over Christians, but over the whole world.

Inspiration

You and I are called upon, at times, to announce coming judgment. There is no way that we can be faithful to God and avoid the judgmental aspects of our ministry. We must recognize that sin must be dealt with. It is impossible to be biblical and at the same time sugar-coat the message of the Gospel. The Gospel cuts right into the heart of man and into his sinfulness. As Oswald Chambers has put it, "If there is no tragedy at the back of human life, no gap between God and man, then the Redemption of Jesus Christ is 'much ado about nothing.'"

... When you and I are called upon to minister for God, one part of our message has to be to pluck up and to break down, to overthrow and destroy, to announce the coming judgment of God against sin.

Jeremiah's message did not end there. He was also called upon to build and to plant. There was also

the message of mercy. Whenever God announces judgment, there is always also the great truth that righteousness and peace have met together. There is the merciful aspect of God. Mercy and truth have kissed each other, because those two things come together in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

... You and I are called upon, in our ministry in witnessing to others, to make clear the judgment of God against sin and the mercy of God who has provided the way out of that sin. (From *Words of Fire, Rivers of Tears* by David M. Howard)

Application

Is there someone God wants you to witness to? As he brings people into your life, take time to get to know them. Let them get to know you. As you become friends, ask God to show you the right time to share Christ with them. And let your life portray the truth of what you say.

Exploration

God's Power—[Job 38–41](#). God's Justice and Righteousness—[Romans 3:9–26](#). Christian Witness—[Romans 8:35–39](#); [Ephesians 3:20–21](#).

Messages to the Nations

The Lord spoke this word to Jeremiah the prophet about the nations:

²This message is to Egypt. It is about the army of Neco king of Egypt, which was defeated at the city of Carchemish on the Euphrates River by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. This was in the fourth year that Jehoiakim son of Josiah was king of Judah. This is the Lord's message to Egypt:

³“Prepare your shields, large and small,
and march out for battle!

⁴Harness the horses
and get on them!
Go to your places for battle
and put on your helmets!
Polish your spears.
Put on your armor!

⁵What do I see?
That army is terrified,
and the soldiers are running away.
Their warriors are defeated.
They run away quickly
without looking back.
There is terror on every side!” says the Lord.

⁶“The fast runners cannot run away;

the strong soldiers cannot escape.
They stumble and fall
in the north, by the Euphrates River.

⁷Who is this, rising up like the Nile River,
like strong, fast rivers?

⁸Egypt rises up like the Nile River,
like strong, fast rivers.

Egypt says, 'I will rise up and cover the earth.
I will destroy cities and the people in them!'

⁹Horsemen, charge into battle!

Chariot drivers, drive hard!

March on, brave soldiers—

soldiers from the countries of Cush and Put who carry
shields,

soldiers from Lydia who use bows.

¹⁰“But that day belongs to the Lord God All-Powerful.

At that time he will give those people the punishment
they deserve.

The sword will kill until it is finished,

until it satisfies its thirst for their blood.

The Lord God All-Powerful will offer a sacrifice
in the land of the north, by the Euphrates River.

¹¹“Go up to Gilead and get some balm,
people of Egypt!

You have prepared many medicines,

but they will not work;

you will not be healed.

¹²The nations have heard of your shame,
and your cries fill all the earth.

One warrior has run into another;
both of them have fallen down together!”

¹³This is the message the Lord spoke to Jeremiah the prophet about Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon’s coming to attack Egypt:

¹⁴“Announce this message in Egypt, and preach it in Migdol.

Preach it also in the cities of Memphis and Tahpanhes:
‘Get ready for war,
because the battle is all around you.’

¹⁵Egypt, why were your warriors killed?
They could not stand because the Lord pushed them down.

¹⁶They stumbled again and again
and fell over each other.
They said, ‘Get up. Let’s go back
to our own people and our homeland.
We must get away from our enemy’s sword!’

¹⁷In their homelands those soldiers called out,
‘The king of Egypt is only a lot of noise.
He missed his chance for glory!’”

¹⁸The King’s name is the Lord All-Powerful.
He says, “As surely as I live,
a powerful leader will come.
He will be like Mount Tabor among the mountains,
like Mount Carmel by the sea.

¹⁹People of Egypt, pack your things
to be taken away as captives,

because Memphis will be destroyed.
It will be a ruin, and no one will live there.

²⁰“Egypt is like a beautiful young cow,
but a horsefly is coming
from the north to attack her.

²¹The hired soldiers in Egypt’s army
are like fat calves,
because even they all turn and run away together;
they do not stand strong against the attack.
Their time of destruction is coming;
they will soon be punished.

²²Egypt is like a hissing snake that is trying to escape.
The enemy comes closer and closer.
They come against Egypt with axes
like men who cut down trees.

²³They will chop down Egypt’s army
as if it were a great forest,” says the Lord.
“There are more enemy soldiers than locusts;
there are too many to count.

²⁴The people of Egypt will be ashamed.

They will be handed over to the enemy from the
north.”

²⁵The Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: “Very soon I will punish Amon, the god of the city of Thebes. And I will punish Egypt, her kings, her gods, and the people who depend on the king. ²⁶I will hand those people over to their enemies, who want to kill them. I will give them to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and his officers. But in the future, Egypt will live in peace as it once did,” says the Lord.

A Message to Israel

²⁷“People of Jacob, my servants, don’t be afraid;
don’t be frightened, Israel.

I will surely save you from those faraway places
and your children from the lands where they are
captives.

The people of Jacob will have peace and safety again,
and no one will make them afraid.

²⁸“People of Jacob, my servants, do not be afraid,
because I am with you,” says the Lord.

“I will completely destroy the many different nations
where I scattered you.

But I will not completely destroy you.

I will punish you fairly,

but I will not let you escape your punishment.”

A Message to the Philistines

Before the king of Egypt attacked the city of Gaza, the Lord spoke his word to Jeremiah the prophet. This message is to the Philistine people.

²This is what the Lord says:

“See, the enemy is gathering in the north like rising waters.

They will become like an overflowing stream
and will cover the whole country like a flood,
even the towns and the people living in them.
Everyone living in that country
will cry for help;
the people will cry painfully.

³They will hear the sound of the running horses
and the noisy chariots
and the rumbling chariot wheels.
Parents will not help their children to safety,
because they will be too weak to help.

⁴The time has come
to destroy all the Philistines.
It is time to destroy all who are left alive
who could help the cities of Tyre and Sidon.
The Lord will soon destroy the Philistines,
those left alive from the island of Crete.

⁵The people from the city of Gaza will be [sad and shave their heads.](#)

The people from the city of Ashkelon will be made

silent.

Those left alive from the valley,
how long will you cut yourselves?

⁶“You cry, ‘Sword of the Lord,
how long will you keep fighting?
Return to your holder.
Stop and be still.’

⁷But how can his sword rest
when the Lord has given it a command?
He has ordered it
to attack Ashkelon and the seacoast.”

A Message to Moab

This message is to the country of Moab.

This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says:

“How terrible it will be for the city of Nebo,
because it will be ruined.

The town of Kiriathaim will be disgraced and captured;
the strong city will be disgraced and shattered.

²Moab will not be praised again.

Men in the town of Heshbon plan Moab’s defeat.

They say, ‘Come, let us put an end to that nation!’

Town of [Madmen](#), you will also be silenced.

The sword will chase you.

³Listen to the cries from the town of Horonaim,
cries of much confusion and destruction.

⁴Moab will be broken up.

Her little children will cry for help.

⁵Moab’s people go up the path to the town of Luhith,
crying loudly as they go.

On the road down to Horonaim,
cries of pain and suffering can be heard.

⁶Run! Run for your lives!

Go like a bush being blown through the desert.

⁷You trust in the things you do and in your wealth,
so you also will be captured.

The god Chemosh will go into captivity
and his priests and officers with him.

⁸The destroyer will come against every town;
not one town will escape.

The valley will be ruined,
and the high plain will be destroyed,
as the Lord has said.

⁹Give wings to Moab,
because she will surely leave her land.
Moab's towns will become empty,
with no one to live in them.

¹⁰A curse will be on anyone who doesn't do what the
Lord says,
and a curse will be on anyone who holds back his
sword from killing.

¹¹"The people of Moab have never known trouble.
They are like wine left to settle;
they have never been poured from one jar to another.
They have not been taken into captivity.
So they taste as they did before,
and their smell has not changed.

¹²A time is coming," says the Lord,
"When I will send people to pour you from your jars.
They will empty Moab's jars
and smash her jugs.

¹³The people of Israel trusted that god in the town of
Bethel,
and they were ashamed when there was no help.
In the same way Moab will be ashamed of their god
Chemosh.

¹⁴"You cannot say, 'We are warriors!'

... you cannot say, 'We are warriors!

We are brave men in battle!'

¹⁵The destroyer of Moab and her towns has arrived.
Her best young men will be killed!" says the King,
whose name is the Lord All-Powerful.

¹⁶"The end of Moab is near,
and she will soon be destroyed.

¹⁷All you who live around Moab,
all you who know her, cry for her.
Say, 'The ruler's power is broken;
Moab's power and glory are gone.'

¹⁸"You people living in the town of Dibon, come down
from your place of honor

and sit on the dry ground,
because the destroyer of Moab has come against you.
And he has destroyed your strong, walled cities.

¹⁹You people living in the town of Aroer,
stand next to the road and watch.
See the man running away and the woman escaping.
Ask them, 'What happened?'

²⁰Moab is filled with shame, because she is ruined.
Cry, Moab, cry out!
Announce at the Arnon River
that Moab is destroyed.

²¹People on the high plain have been punished.
Judgment has come to these towns:
Holon, Jahzah, and Mephaath;

²²Dibon, Nebo, and Beth Diblathaim;

²³Kiriathaim, Beth Gamul, and Beth Meon;

²⁴Kerioth and Bozrah.

Judgment has come to all the towns of Moab, far and near.

²⁵Moab's strength has been cut off,
and its arm broken!" says the Lord.

²⁶"The people of Moab thought they were greater than the Lord,

so punish them until they act as if they are drunk.
Moab will fall and roll around in its own vomit,
and people will even make fun of it.

²⁷Moab, you made fun of Israel.
Israel was caught in the middle of a gang of thieves.
When you spoke about Israel,
you shook your head and acted as if you were better than it.

²⁸People in Moab, leave your towns empty
and go live among the rocks.
Be like a dove that makes its nest
at the entrance of a cave.

²⁹"We have heard that the people of Moab are proud,
very proud.

They are proud, very proud,
and in their hearts they think they are important."

³⁰The Lord says,
"I know Moab's great pride, but it is useless.
Moab's bragging accomplishes nothing.

³¹So I cry sadly for Moab,
for everyone in Moab.
I moan for the people from the town of Kir Hareseth.

³²I cry with the people of the town of Jazer

for you, the grapevines of the town of Sibmah.
In the past your vines spread all the way to the sea,
as far as the sea of Jazer.

But the destroyer has taken over
your fruit and grapes.

³³Joy and happiness are gone
from the large, rich fields of Moab.

I have stopped the flow of wine from the winepresses.
No one walks on the grapes with shouts of joy.
There are shouts,
but not shouts of joy.

³⁴“Their crying can be heard from Moabite towns,
from Heshbon to Elealeh and Jahaz.

It can be heard from Zoar as far away as Horonaim and
Eglath Shelishiyah.

Even the waters of Nimrim are dried up.

³⁵I will stop Moab
from making burnt offerings at the places of worship
and from burning incense to their gods,” says the

Lord.

³⁶“My heart cries sadly for Moab like a flute playing a
funeral song.

It cries like a flute for the people from Kir Hareseth.
The money they made has all been taken away.

³⁷Every head has been shaved

and every beard cut off.

Everyone’s hands are cut,
and everyone wears rough cloth around his waist.

³⁸People are crying on every roof in Moab

and in every public square.
There is nothing but sadness,
because I have broken Moab
like a jar no one wants,” says the Lord.
³⁹“Moab is shattered! The people are crying!
Moab turns away in shame!
People all around her make fun of her.
The things that happened fill them with great fear.”

⁴⁰This is what the Lord says:
“Look! Someone is coming, like an eagle diving down
from the sky
and spreading its wings over Moab.
⁴¹The towns of Moab will be captured,
and the strong, walled cities will be defeated.
At that time Moab’s warriors will be frightened,
like a woman who is having a baby.
⁴²The nation of Moab will be destroyed,
because they thought they were greater than the Lord.
⁴³Fear, deep pits, and traps wait for you,
people of Moab,” says the Lord.
⁴⁴“People will run from fear,
but they will fall into the pits.
Anyone who climbs out of the pits
will be caught in the traps.
I will bring the year of punishment to Moab,” says the
Lord.

⁴⁵“People have run from the powerful enemy
and have gone to Heshbon for safety.
But fire started in Heshbon;

a blaze has spread from the hometown of Sihon king of Moab.

It burned up the leaders of Moab
and destroyed those proud people.

⁴⁶How terrible it is for you, Moab!

The people who worship Chemosh have been destroyed.

Your sons have been taken captive,
and your daughters have been taken away.

⁴⁷“But in days to come,

I will make good things happen again to Moab,” says the Lord.

This ends the judgment on Moab.

A Message to Ammon

This message is to the Ammonite people.

This is what the Lord says:

“Do you think that Israel has no children?

Do you think there is no one to take the land when the parents die?

If that were true, why did Molech take Gad’s land and why did Molech’s people settle in Gad’s towns?”

²The Lord says,

“The time will come when I will make Rabbah, the capital city of the Ammonites, hear the battle cry. It will become a hill covered with ruins, and the towns around it will be burned.

Those people forced Israel out of that land, but now Israel will force them out!” says the Lord.

³“People in the town of Heshbon, cry sadly because the town of Ai is destroyed!

Those who live in Rabbah, cry out!

Put on your rough cloth to show your sadness, and cry loudly.

Run here and there for safety inside the walls, because Molech will be taken captive and his priests and officers with him.

⁴You brag about your valleys and about the fruit in your valleys.

You are like an unfaithful child who believes his treasures will save him.

You think, ‘Who would attack me?’

⁵I will soon bring terror on you
from everyone around you,”
says the Lord God All-Powerful.
“You will all be forced to run away,
and no one will be able to gather you.

⁶“But the time will come
when I will make good things happen to the
Ammonites again,”
says the Lord.

A Message to Edom

⁷This message is to Edom. This is what the Lord All-Powerful
says:

“Is there no more wisdom in the town of Teman?
Can the wise men of Edom no longer give good
advice?

Have they lost their wisdom?

⁸You people living in the town of Dedan,
run away and hide in deep caves,
because I will bring disaster on the people of Esau.
It is time for me to punish them.

⁹If workers came and picked the grapes from your
vines,

they would leave a few grapes behind.
If robbers came at night,
they would steal only enough for themselves.

¹⁰But I will strip Edom bare.

I will find all their hiding places,
so they will not be able to hide from me.
The children, relatives, and neighbors will die,
and Edom will be no more.

¹¹Leave the orphans, and I will take care of them.
Your widows also can trust in me.”

¹²This is what the Lord says: “Some people did not deserve to be punished, but they had to drink from the cup of suffering anyway. People of Edom, you deserve to be punished, so you will not escape punishment. You must certainly drink from the cup of suffering.” ¹³The Lord says, “I swear by my own name that the city of Bozrah will become a pile of ruins! People will be shocked by what happened there. They will insult that city and speak evil of it. And all the towns around it will become ruins forever.”

¹⁴I have heard a message from the Lord.

A messenger has been sent among the nations,
saying,

“Gather your armies to attack it!
Get ready for battle!”

¹⁵“Soon I will make you the smallest of nations,
and you will be greatly hated by everyone.

¹⁶Edom, you frightened other nations,
but your pride has fooled you.

You live in the hollow places of the cliff
and control the high places of the hills.

Even if you build your home as high as an eagle’s
nest,

I will bring you down from there,” says the Lord.

¹⁷“Edom will be destroyed.

People who pass by will be shocked to see the destroyed cities,

and they will be amazed at all her injuries.

¹⁸Edom will be destroyed like the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah

and the towns around them,” says the Lord.

“No one will live there!

No one will stay in Edom.”

¹⁹“Like a lion coming up from the thick bushes near the Jordan River

to attack a strong pen for sheep,

I will suddenly chase Edom from its land.

Who is the one I have chosen to do this?

There is no one like me,

no one who can take me to court.

None of their leaders can stand up against me.”

²⁰So listen to what the Lord has planned to do against Edom.

Listen to what he has decided to do to the people in the town of Teman.

He will surely drag away the young ones of Edom.

Their hometowns will surely be shocked at what happens to them.

²¹At the sound of Edom’s fall, the earth will shake.

Their cry will be heard all the way to the Red Sea.

²²The Lord is like an eagle swooping down

and spreading its wings over the city of Bozrah.
At that time Edom's soldiers will become very
frightened,
like a woman having a baby.

A Message to Damascus

²³This message is to the city of Damascus:

“The towns of Hamath and Arpad are put to shame,
because they have heard bad news.

They are discouraged.

They are troubled like the tossing sea.

²⁴The city of Damascus has become weak.

The people want to run away;

they are ready to panic.

The people feel pain and suffering,
like a woman giving birth to a baby.

²⁵Damascus was a city of my joy.

Why have the people not left that famous city yet?

²⁶Surely the young men will die in the city squares,
and all her soldiers will be killed at that time,” says the
Lord All-Powerful.

²⁷“I will set fire to the walls of Damascus,
and it will completely burn the strong cities of King
Ben-Hadad.”

A Message to Kedar and Hazor

²⁸This message is to the tribe of Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated. This is what the Lord says:

“Go and attack the people of Kedar,
and destroy the people of the East.

²⁹Their tents and flocks will be taken away.
Their belongings will be carried off—
their tents, all their goods, and their camels.
Men will shout to them,
‘Terror on every side!’

³⁰“Run away quickly!

People in Hazor, find a good place to hide!” says the Lord.

“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has made plans
against you
and wants to defeat you.

³¹“Get up! Attack the nation that is comfortable,
that is sure no one will defeat it,” says the Lord.
“It does not have gates or fences to protect it.
Its people live alone.

³²The enemy will steal their camels
and their large herds of cattle as war prizes.

I will scatter the people who cut their hair short to
every part of the earth,
and I will bring disaster on them from everywhere,”
says the Lord.

³³“The city of Hazor will become a home for wild dogs;
it will be an empty desert forever.
No one will live there,

and no one will stay in it.”

A Message to Elam

³⁴Soon after Zedekiah became king of Judah, the Lord spoke this word to Jeremiah the prophet. This message is to the nation of Elam.

³⁵This is what the Lord All-Powerful says:

“I will soon break Elam’s bow,
its greatest strength.

³⁶I will bring the four winds against Elam
from the four corners of the skies.

I will scatter its people everywhere the four winds
blow;

its captives will go to every nation.

³⁷I will terrify Elam in front of their enemies,
who want to destroy them.

I will bring disaster to Elam
and show them how angry I am!” says the Lord.

“I will send a sword to chase Elam
until I have killed them all.

³⁸I will set up my throne in Elam to show that I am king,
and I will destroy its king and its officers!” says the
Lord.

³⁹“But I will make good things happen to Elam again
in the future,” says the Lord.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 50:1–51:64

Situation

Jeremiah foretold the fall of Babylon. The powerful and arrogant Babylonians would be conquered by a power from the north. Under the Messiah, Israel would rise again and would regain her preeminent status among nations.

Observation

God gave his people something to hope in. A new Israel, led by God's chosen Messiah, would arrive after Babylon was crushed.

Inspiration

Do you have the hope of the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ? Then you should live it—a pure life, a godly life, a surrendered life, a consecrated life. There's a sense in which we're sanctified when we receive Christ. There's a sense in which we grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ in progressive sanctification. But one day we shall see Jesus face to face, and total sanctification is when we're perfect, as He is perfect. We shall see Him as He is.

... I know sometimes we get a little anxious and wonder if Jesus is really going to come back... . He has appointed a day. God knows the day. It's all set. He will be back right on time—He won't be an hour late or an hour early.

... We are to be constantly thinking about His coming....

... People say, “Well, Christ is coming back—let’s quit all these activities that we’re involved in.” No! He may not come in our lifetime. Let’s do our best to help reach our fellow man for Christ. His return should be our incentive toward work.

(From *Peace with God* by Billy Graham)

Application

Trusting Jesus gives us hope. Did you trust him to work out your day’s worth of headaches, to get you to work safely, to help you get your homework done, or to get along with your spouse? When you pray, go over each detail of your day. Who will you see and talk to? What projects need to get done? Where will you drive ... ? Don’t live any part of your day without letting God know you are looking to him for stamina.

Exploration

Hope—[Leviticus 26:40–45](#); [Mark 5:35](#), [36](#); [1 Corinthians 15:54–57](#); [2 Corinthians 4:8](#).

A Message to Babylon

This is the message the Lord spoke to Babylon and the Babylonian people through Jeremiah the prophet.

²“Announce this to the nations.
Lift up a banner and tell them.
Speak the whole message and say:
‘Babylon will be captured.

The god Bel will be put to shame,
and the god Marduk will be afraid.
Babylon’s gods will be put to shame,
and her idols will be afraid!’

³A nation from the north will attack Babylon
and make it like an empty desert.
No one will live there;
both people and animals will run away.”

⁴The Lord says, “At that time
the people of Israel and Judah will come together.
They will cry and look for the Lord their God.

⁵Those people will ask how to go to Jerusalem
and will start in that direction.

They will come and join themselves to the Lord.

They will make an agreement with him that will last
forever,

an agreement that will never be forgotten.

⁶“My people have been like lost sheep.
Their leaders have led them in the wrong way
and made them wander around in the mountains and
hills.

They forgot where their resting place was.

⁷Whoever saw my people hurt them.
And those enemies said, ‘We did nothing wrong.
Those people sinned against the Lord, their true
resting place,
the God their fathers trusted.’

⁸“Run away from Babylon,
and leave the land of the Babylonians.
Be like the goats that lead the flock.

⁹I will soon bring against Babylon
many great nations from the north.
They will take their places for war against it,
and it will be captured by people from the north.
Their arrows are like trained soldiers
who do not return from war with empty hands.

¹⁰The enemy will take all the wealth from the
Babylonians.

Those enemy soldiers will get all they want,” says the
Lord.

¹¹“Babylon, you are excited and happy,
because you took my land.
You dance around like a young cow in the grain.
Your laughter is like the neighing of male horses.

¹²Your mother will be very ashamed;
the woman who gave birth to you will be disgraced.
Soon Babylon will be the least important of all the
nations.

She will be an empty, dry desert.

¹³Because of the Lord's anger,
no one will live there.

She will be completely empty.

Everyone who passes by Babylon will be shocked.

They will shake their heads when they see all her
injuries.

¹⁴“Take your positions for war against Babylon,
all you soldiers with bows.

Shoot your arrows at Babylon! Do not save any of
them,

because Babylon has sinned against the Lord.

¹⁵Soldiers around Babylon, shout the war cry!
Babylon has surrendered, her towers have fallen,
and her walls have been torn down.

The Lord is giving her people the punishment they
deserve.

You nations should give her what she deserves;
do to her what she has done to others.

¹⁶Don't let the people from Babylon plant their crops
or gather the harvest.

The soldiers treated their captives cruelly.

Now, let everyone go back home.

Let everyone run to his own country.

¹⁷“The people of Israel are like a flock of sheep that are

scattered
from being chased by lions.
The first lion to eat them up
was the king of Assyria.
The last lion to crush their bones
was Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.”

¹⁸So this is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel,
says:

“I will punish the king of Babylon and his country
as I punished the king of Assyria.

¹⁹But I will bring the people of Israel back to their own
pasture.

They will eat on Mount Carmel and in Bashan.
They will eat and be full
on the hills of Ephraim and Gilead.”

²⁰The Lord says,

“At that time people will try to find Israel’s guilt,
but there will be no guilt.

People will try to find Judah’s sins,
but no sins will be found,
because I will leave a few people alive from Israel and
Judah,
and I will forgive their sins.

²¹“Attack the land of Merathaim.

Attack the people who live in Pekod.

Chase them, kill them, and completely destroy them.
Do everything I commanded you!” says the Lord.

²²“The noise of battle can be heard all over the

country;

it is the noise of much destruction.

²³Babylon was the hammer of the whole earth,
but how broken and shattered that hammer is now.
It is truly the most ruined
of all the nations.

²⁴Babylon, I set a trap for you,
and you were caught before you knew it.
You fought against the Lord,
so you were found and taken prisoner.

²⁵The Lord has opened up his storeroom
and brought out the weapons of his anger,
because the Lord God All-Powerful has work to do
in the land of the Babylonians.

²⁶Come against Babylon from far away.
Break open her storehouses of grain.
Pile up her dead bodies like heaps of grain.
Completely destroy Babylon
and do not leave anyone alive.

²⁷Kill all the young men in Babylon;
let them be killed like animals.

How terrible it will be for them, because the time has
come for their defeat;

it is time for them to be punished.

²⁸Listen to the people running to escape the country of
Babylon!

They are telling Jerusalem

how the Lord our God is punishing Babylon as it
deserves

for destroying his Temple.

²⁹“Call for the archers
to come against Babylon.
Tell them to surround the city,
and let no one escape.
Pay her back for what she has done;
do to her what she has done to other nations.
Babylon acted with pride against the Lord,
the Holy One of Israel.

³⁰“So her young men will be killed in her streets.
All her soldiers will die on that day,” says the Lord.

³¹“Babylon, you are too proud, and I am against you,”
says the Lord God All-Powerful.

“The time has come
for you to be punished.

³²Proud Babylon will stumble and fall,
and no one will help her get up.
I will start a fire in her towns,
and it will burn up everything around her.”

³³This is what the Lord All-Powerful says:

“The people of Israel
and Judah are slaves.
The enemy took them as prisoners
and won’t let them go.

³⁴But God is strong and will buy them back.
His name is the Lord All-Powerful.
He will surely defend them with power
so he can give rest to their land.
But he will not give rest to those living in Babylon.”

³⁵The Lord says,

“Let a sword kill the people living in Babylon
and her officers and wise men!

³⁶Let a sword kill her false prophets,
and they will become fools.

Let a sword kill her warriors,
and they will be full of terror.

³⁷Let a sword kill her horses and chariots
and all the soldiers hired from other countries!
Then they will be like frightened women.

Let a sword attack her treasures,
so they will be taken away.

³⁸Let a sword attack her waters
so they will be dried up.
She is a land of idols,
and the people go crazy with fear over them.

³⁹“Desert animals and hyenas will live there,
and owls will live there,
but no people will ever live there again.
She will never be filled with people again.

⁴⁰God completely destroyed the cities of Sodom and
Gomorrah

and the towns around them,” says the Lord.
“In the same way no people will live in Babylon,
and no human being will stay there.

⁴¹“Look! An army is coming from the north.
A powerful nation and many kings
are coming together from all around the world.

⁴²Their armies have bows and spears.
The soldiers are cruel and have no mercy.
As the soldiers come riding on their horses,
the sound is loud like the roaring sea.
They stand in their places, ready for battle.
They are ready to attack you, city of Babylon.

⁴³The king of Babylon heard about those armies,
and he became helpless with fear.
Distress has gripped him.
His pain is like that of a woman giving birth to a baby.

⁴⁴“Like a lion coming up from the thick bushes near the
Jordan River
to attack a strong pen for sheep,
I will suddenly chase the people of Babylon from their
land.
Who is the one I have chosen to do this?
There is no one like me,
no one who can take me to court.
None of their leaders can stand up against me.”

⁴⁵So listen to what the Lord has planned to do against
Babylon.
Listen to what he has decided to do to the people in
the city of Babylon.
He will surely drag away the young ones of Babylon.
Their hometowns will surely be shocked at what
happens to them.

⁴⁶At the sound of Babylon's capture, the earth will
shake.
People in all nations will hear Babylon's cry of

distress.

This is what the Lord says:

“I will soon cause a destroying wind to blow
against Babylon and the Babylonian people.

²I will send foreign people to destroy Babylon
like a wind that blows chaff away.

They will destroy the land.

Armies will surround the city
when the day of disaster comes upon her.

³Don’t let the Babylonian soldiers prepare their bows
to shoot.

Don’t even let them put on their armor.

Don’t feel sorry for the young men of Babylon,
but completely destroy her army.

⁴They will be killed in the land of the Babylonians
and will die in her streets.

⁵The Lord God All-Powerful
did not leave Israel and Judah,
even though they were completely guilty
in the presence of the Holy One of Israel.

⁶“Run away from Babylon
and save your lives!

Don’t stay and be killed because of Babylon’s sins.
It is time for the Lord to punish Babylon;
he will give Babylon the punishment she deserves.

⁷Babylon was like a gold cup in the Lord’s hand
that made the whole earth drunk.

The nations drank Babylon’s wine,
so they went crazy.

⁸Babylon has suddenly fallen and been broken.
Cry for her!

Get balm for her pain,
and maybe she can be healed.

⁹“Foreigners in Babylon say, ‘We tried to heal
Babylon,
but she cannot be healed.
So let us leave her and each go to his own country.
Babylon’s punishment is as high as the sky;
it reaches to the clouds.’

¹⁰“The people of Judah say, ‘The Lord has shown us
to be right.
Come, let us tell in Jerusalem
what the Lord our God has done.’

¹¹“Sharpen the arrows!
Pick up your shields!
The Lord has stirred up the kings of the Medes,
because he wants to destroy Babylon.
The Lord will punish them as they deserve
for destroying his Temple.

¹²Lift up a banner against the walls of Babylon!
Bring more guards.
Put the watchmen in their places,
and get ready for a secret attack!
The Lord will certainly do what he has planned
and what he said he would do against the people of
Babylon.

¹³People of Babylon, you live near much water
and are rich with many treasures,
but your end as a nation has come.

It is time to stop you from robbing other nations.

¹⁴The Lord All-Powerful has promised in his own name:
‘Babylon, I will surely fill you with so many enemy
soldiers they will be like a swarm of locusts.
They will stand over you and shout their victory.’

¹⁵“The Lord made the earth by his power.
He used his wisdom to build the world
and his understanding to stretch out the skies.

¹⁶When he thunders, the waters in the skies roar.
He makes clouds rise in the sky all over the earth.
He sends lightning with the rain
and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

¹⁷“People are so stupid and know so little.
Goldsmiths are made ashamed by their idols,
because those statues are only false gods.
They have no breath in them.

¹⁸They are worth nothing; people make fun of them.
When they are judged, they will be destroyed.

¹⁹But God, who is Jacob’s Portion, is not like the idols.
He made everything,
and he chose Israel to be his special people.
The Lord All-Powerful is his name.

²⁰“You are my war club,
my battle weapon.
I use you to smash nations.
I use you to destroy kingdoms.

²¹I use you to smash horses and riders.
I use you to smash chariots and drivers.

²²I use you to smash men and women.
I use you to smash old people and young people.
I use you to smash young men and young women.
²³I use you to smash shepherds and flocks.
I use you to smash farmers and oxen.
I use you to smash governors and officers.

²⁴“But I will pay back Babylon and all the Babylonians for all the evil things they did to Jerusalem in your sight,” says the Lord.

²⁵The Lord says,
“Babylon, you are a destroying mountain,
and I am against you.
You have destroyed the whole land.
I will put my hand out against you.
I will roll you off the cliffs,
and I will make you a burned-out mountain.

²⁶People will not find any rocks in Babylon big enough for cornerstones.

People will not take any rocks from Babylon to use for the foundation of a building,

because your city will be just a pile of ruins forever,” says the Lord.

²⁷“Lift up a banner in the land!
Blow the trumpet among the nations!
Get the nations ready for battle against Babylon.
Call these kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz to fight against her.

Choose a commander to lead the army against

Babylon.

Send so many horses that they are like a swarm of locusts.

²⁸Get the nations ready for battle against Babylon—
the kings of the Medes,
their governors and all their officers,
and all the countries they rule.

²⁹The land shakes and moves in pain,
because the Lord will do what he has planned to
Babylon.

He will make Babylon an empty desert,
where no one will live.

³⁰Babylon's warriors have stopped fighting.
They stay in their protected cities.
Their strength is gone,
and they have become like frightened women.
Babylon's houses are burning.
The bars of her gates are broken.

³¹One messenger follows another;
messenger follows messenger.
They announce to the king of Babylon
that his whole city has been captured.
³²The river crossings have been captured,
and the swamplands are burning.
All of Babylon's soldiers are terribly afraid.”

³³This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel,
says:

“The city of Babylon is like a threshing floor,
where people crush the grain at harvest time.

The time to harvest Babylon is coming soon.”

³⁴“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has defeated and destroyed us.

In the past he took our people away,

and we became like an empty jar.

He was like a giant snake that swallowed us.

He filled his stomach with our best things.

Then he spit us out.

³⁵Babylon did terrible things to hurt us.

Now let those things happen to Babylon,”

say the people of Jerusalem.

“The people of Babylon killed our people.

Now let them be punished for what they did,” says Jerusalem.

³⁶So this is what the Lord says:

“I will soon defend you, Judah,

and make sure that Babylon is punished.

I will dry up Babylon’s sea

and make her springs become dry.

³⁷Babylon will become a pile of ruins,

a home for wild dogs.

People will be shocked by what happened there.

No one will live there anymore.

³⁸Babylon’s people roar like young lions;

they growl like baby lions.

³⁹While they are stirred up,

I will give a feast for them

and make them drunk.

They will shout and laugh.
And they will sleep forever and never wake up!” says
the Lord.

⁴⁰“I will take the people of Babylon to be killed.
They will be like lambs,
like sheep and goats waiting to be killed.

⁴¹“How Babylon has been defeated!
The pride of the whole earth has been taken captive.
People from other nations are shocked at what
happened to Babylon,
and the things they see make them afraid.

⁴²The sea has risen over Babylon;
its roaring waves cover her.

⁴³Babylon’s towns are ruined and empty.
It has become a dry, desert land,
a land where no one lives.
People do not even travel through Babylon.

⁴⁴I will punish the god Bel in Babylon.
I will make him spit out what he has swallowed.
Nations will no longer come to Babylon;
even the wall around the city will fall.

⁴⁵“Come out of Babylon, my people!
Run for your lives!
Run from the Lord’s great anger.

⁴⁶Don’t lose courage;
rumors will spread through the land, but don’t be
afraid.

One rumor comes this year, and another comes the
next year.

There will be rumors of terrible fighting in the country,
of rulers fighting against rulers.

⁴⁷The time will surely come
when I will punish the idols of Babylon,
and the whole land will be disgraced.
There will be many dead people lying all around.

⁴⁸Then heaven and earth and all that is in them
will shout for joy about Babylon.

They will shout because the army comes from the
north
to destroy Babylon,” says the Lord.

⁴⁹“Babylon must fall, because she killed people from
Israel.

She killed people from everywhere on earth.

⁵⁰You who have escaped being killed with swords,
leave Babylon! Don’t wait!
Remember the Lord in the faraway land
and think about Jerusalem.”

⁵¹“We people of Judah are disgraced,
because we have been insulted.
We have been shamed,
because strangers have gone into
the holy places of the Lord’s Temple!”

⁵²So the Lord says, “The time is coming soon
when I will punish the idols of Babylon.
Wounded people will cry with pain
all over that land.

⁵³Even if Babylon grows until she touches the sky,

and even if she makes her highest cities strong,
I will send people to destroy her,” says the Lord.

⁵⁴“Sounds of people crying are heard in Babylon.
Sounds of people destroying things
are heard in the land of the Babylonians.

⁵⁵The Lord is destroying Babylon
and making the loud sounds of the city become silent.
Enemies come roaring in like ocean waves.
The roar of their voices is heard all around.

⁵⁶The army has come to destroy Babylon.
Her soldiers have been captured,
and their bows are broken,
because the Lord is a God who punishes people for the
evil they do.

He gives them the full punishment they deserve.

⁵⁷I will make Babylon’s rulers and wise men drunk,
and her governors, officers, and soldiers, too.
Then they will sleep forever and never wake up,” says
the King,
whose name is the Lord All-Powerful.

⁵⁸This is what the Lord All-Powerful says:

“Babylon’s thick wall will be completely pulled down
and her high gates burned.
The people will work hard, but it won’t help;
their work will only become fuel for the flames!”

A Message to Babylon

⁵⁹This is the message that Jeremiah the prophet gave to the officer Seraiah son of Neriah, who was the son of Mahseiah. Seraiah went to Babylon with Zedekiah king of Judah in the fourth year Zedekiah was king of Judah. His duty was to arrange the king's food and housing on the trip. ⁶⁰Jeremiah had written on a scroll all the terrible things that would happen to Babylon, all these words about Babylon. ⁶¹Jeremiah said to Seraiah, "As soon as you come to Babylon, be sure to read this message so all the people can hear you. ⁶²Then say, 'Lord, you have said that you will destroy this place so that no people or animals will live in it. It will be an empty ruin forever.' ⁶³After you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates River. ⁶⁴Then say, 'In the same way Babylon will sink and will not rise again because of the terrible things I will make happen here. Her people will fall.'"

The words of Jeremiah end here.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 52:1–34

Situation

Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians after a two-year siege. The Babylonians blinded King Zedekiah, looted the Temple, and destroyed the city. Many Israelites were exiled to Babylon. God completely fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy.

Observation

True to his word, God punished unrepentant Israel through conquest by Babylon.

Inspiration

There is a window in your heart through which you can see God. Once upon a time that window was clear. Your view of God was crisp. You could see God as vividly as you could see a gentle valley or hillside. The glass was clean, the pane unbroken.

You knew God. You knew how he worked. You knew what he wanted you to do. No surprises. Nothing unexpected. You knew that God had a will, and you continually discovered what it was.

Then, suddenly, the window cracked. A pebble broke the window. A pebble of pain.

Perhaps the stone struck when you were a child and a parent left home—forever. Maybe the rock hit in adolescence when your heart was broken. Maybe you made it into adulthood before the window was cracked. But then the pebble came....

Whatever the pebble's form, the result was the

same—a shattered window. The pebble missed into the pane and shattered it. The crash echoed down the halls of your heart. Cracks shot out from the point of impact, creating a spider web of fragmented pieces.

And suddenly God was not so easy to see. The view that had been so crisp had changed. You turned to see God, and his figure was distorted. It was hard to see him through the pain. It was hard to see him through the fragments of hurt.

You were puzzled. God wouldn't allow something like this to happen, would he? Tragedy and travesty weren't on the agenda of the One you had seen, were they? Had you been fooled? Had you been blind?

The moment the pebble struck, the glass became a reference point for you. From then on, there was life before the pain and life after the pain. Before your pain, the view was clear; God seemed so near. After your pain, well, he was harder to see. He seemed a bit distant ... harder to perceive. Your pain distorted the view—not eclipsed it, but distorted it...

When you can't see him, trust him. The figure you see is not a ghost. The voice you hear is not the wind.

Jesus is closer than you've ever dreamed. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

Is someone in your family anxious? In a panic? Help that person to face the chaos, to work through the pain with God's help, to face the problems peacefully.

Exploration

Punishment—[Genesis 3:14–19](#); [9:11–15](#); [Exodus 32:34](#); [Psalm 38:2–4](#); [Isaiah 13:11](#); [Jeremiah 52](#).

The Fall of Jerusalem

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he was king in Jerusalem for eleven years. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of [Jeremiah](#), and she was from Libnah. ²Zedekiah did what the Lord said was wrong, just as Jehoiakim had done. ³All this happened in Jerusalem and Judah because the Lord was angry with them. Finally, he threw them out of his presence.

Zedekiah turned against the king of Babylon. ⁴Then Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. They made a camp around the city and built devices all around the city walls to attack it. This happened on Zedekiah's ninth year, tenth month, and tenth day as king. ⁵And the city was under attack until Zedekiah's eleventh year as king.

⁶By the ninth day of the fourth month, the hunger was terrible in the city; there was no food for the people to eat. ⁷Then the city wall was broken through, and the whole army of Judah ran away at night. They left the city through the gate between the two walls by the king's garden. Even though the Babylonians were surrounding the city, Zedekiah and his men headed toward the Jordan Valley.

⁸But the Babylonian army chased King Zedekiah and caught him in the plains of Jericho. All of his army was scattered from him. ⁹So the Babylonians captured Zedekiah and

took him to the king of Babylon at the town of Riblah in the land of Hamath. There he passed sentence on Zedekiah.¹⁰ At Riblah the king of Babylon killed Zedekiah's sons as he watched. The king also killed all the officers of Judah.¹¹ Then he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and put bronze chains on him, and took him to Babylon. And the king kept Zedekiah in prison there until the day he died.

¹²Nebuzaradan, commander of the king's special guards and servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem on the tenth day of the fifth month. This was in Nebuchadnezzar's nineteenth year as king of Babylon.¹³ Nebuzaradan set fire to the Temple of the Lord, the palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every important building was burned.¹⁴ The whole Babylonian army, led by the commander of the king's special guards, broke down all the walls around Jerusalem.¹⁵ Nebuzaradan, the commander of the king's special guards, took captive some of the poorest people, those who were left in Jerusalem, those who had surrendered to the king of Babylon, and the skilled craftsmen who were left in Jerusalem.¹⁶ But Nebuzaradan left behind some of the poorest people of the land to take care of the vineyards and fields.

¹⁷The Babylonians broke into pieces the bronze pillars, the bronze stands, and the large bronze bowl, called the Sea, which were in the Temple of the Lord. Then they carried all the bronze pieces to Babylon.¹⁸ They also took the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, bowls, dishes, and all the bronze objects used to serve in the Temple.¹⁹ The commander of the king's special guards took away bowls, pans for carrying hot coals, large bowls, pots, lampstands, pans, and bowls used for drink offerings. He took everything that was made of pure gold or

silver.

²⁰There was so much bronze that it could not be weighed: two pillars, the large bronze bowl called the Sea with the twelve bronze bulls under it, and the movable stands, which King Solomon had made for the Temple of the Lord.

²¹Each of the pillars was about twenty-seven feet high, eighteen feet around, and hollow inside. The wall of each pillar was three inches thick. ²²The bronze capital on top of the one pillar was about seven and one-half feet high. It was decorated with a net design and bronze pomegranates all around it. The other pillar also had pomegranates and was like the first pillar. ²³There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides of the pillars. There was a total of a hundred pomegranates above the net design.

²⁴The commander of the king's special guards took as prisoners Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the priest next in rank, and the three doorkeepers. ²⁵He also took from the city the officer in charge of the soldiers, seven people who advised the king, the royal secretary who selected people for the army, and sixty other men from Judah who were in the city when it fell. ²⁶Nebuzaradan, the commander, took these people and brought them to the king of Babylon at the town of Riblah. ²⁷There at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, the king had them killed.

So the people of Judah were led away from their country as captives. ²⁸This is the number of the people Nebuchadnezzar took away as captives: in the seventh year, 3,023 Jews; ²⁹in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year, 832 people from Jerusalem; ³⁰in Nebuchadnezzar's twenty-third year, Nebuzaradan, commander of the king's special guards, took 745 Jews as

captives.

In all 4,600 people were taken captive.

Jehoiachin Is Set Free

³¹Jehoiachin king of Judah was in prison in Babylon for thirty-seven years. The year Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon he let Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison. He set Jehoiachin free on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month. ³²Evil-Merodach spoke kindly to Jehoiachin and gave him a seat of honor above the seats of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. ³³So Jehoiachin put away his prison clothes, and for the rest of his life, he ate at the king's table. ³⁴Every day the king of Babylon gave Jehoiachin an allowance. This lasted as long as he lived, until the day Jehoiachin died.

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They ... pieces. This showed that the men were willing to be killed, like this animal, if they did not keep their agreement.

Jeremiah Not the prophet Jeremiah, but a different man with the same name.

shaved ... themselves The men did this to show they were sad about the Temple in Jerusalem being destroyed.

sad and ... yourselves The people did these things to show their sadness.

Madmen This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “be silenced.”

Every head ... waist. The people did these things to show their sadness for those who had died.

roof In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

Jeremiah This is not the prophet Jeremiah but a different man with the same name.

THE BOOK OF EMENDATIONS

Introduction

You're looking for Jeremiah? Come, look out the window. That's him. That's him walking through the rubble. Shoulders stooped, step slow.

He's a tired man. I knew him when he was young.

But that was long ago.

That was before the walls fell.

That was before the enemy came.

Look at him sort through the stones. He does this all day. He'll spot a dish that once sat on a table or a sandal once worn by a child. Each item he clutches, not to keep but to mourn. He'll hold the plate to his chest and fall on his knees and wail. Sobbing erupts like cloudbursts. He'll stay there and weep until he has mourned the memory of the object, and then he'll place it back on the pile and move on.

Soon he sees another item, and the weeping starts all over again.

Some people think he's crazy. Some people think he's lost what little sense he had.

I don't. I don't think him insane. After all, didn't he tell us this would happen? No, he's not crazy. He's just sad.

I told him the other day, I said, "Jeremiah, write these things down. These feelings that you have. This sorrow that you feel—write it down."

He looked at me from under those bushy eyebrows and said, "Maybe you're right ... maybe you're right. I just don't want the people to forget."

I told him to write it down. I hope he will.

About This Book

Author:

The prophet Jeremiah

Date Written:

625–586 B.C. after the fall of Jerusalem

Key Themes:

-
- There are consequences for every person's actions as there were for Jerusalem's.
- No matter how difficult the circumstances, God's mercies still stand.
- The effects of sin are dreadful.

Key Verses:

“The Lord's love never ends; his mercies never stop. They are new every morning; Lord, your loyalty is great” ([Lamentations 3:22–23](#)).

Contents:

1. Destruction of Jerusalem [1:1–22](#)
2. God's Anger and the People's Sins [2:1–22](#)
3. Jeremiah's Grief and Confession [3:1–66](#)
4. Siege of Jerusalem [4:1–22](#)
5. Prayer for Restoration [5:1–22](#)

Life Lessons

Lamentations 1:1–22

Situation

Lamentations was read publicly each year to remind the Jews that their sin had caused the destruction of Jerusalem. The book recorded both the faithfulness of God and the repentance of the people.

Observation

Sin brings punishment. But sorrow, confession, and repentance bring healing and wholeness.

Inspiration

A vast number and variety of human emotional experiences come under the general label, “sorrow.” Marie, a friend of mine and a member of my congregation, shared these intimate feelings with me upon the death of her husband: “No two sorrows are the same. I lost my son as a teenager; I lost my daughter in her twenties. Now my husband has passed away. Each grief has been painful, but each grief has been different.”

Over and over I’ve seen sorrow, and over and over again I have witnessed this one fact: *God does comfort good people when bad things happen to them.* It is possible to be happy even in a world where sorrow casts its long, gray shadow.

Trouble never leaves us where it finds us; sorrow will change our tomorrow. But God inspires us to become better people, not bitter ones. He shows us the negative can be turned into a positive, a minus

into a plus, and that's what the cross is all about.

How can we find relief from grief? How can we turn our mourning into a morning? (1) Realize what you can do for yourself! (2) Realize what God can do for you! (From *The Be (Happy) Attitudes* by Robert Schuller)

Application

What sorrows have you known? Have you experienced the death of a loved one, a ruined life, or regrettable mistakes? If your heart is grieving, turn to God for comfort and assurance. He hears your cries, tears, and disappointments.

Exploration

Comfort from God—[Psalm 23:1–4](#); [94:19](#); [119:50, 52](#); [Isaiah 66:13](#); [2 Corinthians 1:3–5](#); [Philippians 2:1](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:16–17](#).

If you are overdrawn at a bank, a fine must be paid. If you are overdrawn with God, a penalty must be paid as well. The fine at the bank is a hassle. But the penalty from God is hell. —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

Jerusalem Cries over Her Loss

Jerusalem once was full of people,
but now the city is empty.
Jerusalem once was a great city among the nations,
but now [she](#) is like a widow.
She was like a queen of all the other cities,
but now she is a slave.

²She cries loudly at night,
and tears are on her cheeks.
There is no one to comfort her;
all who loved her are gone.
All her friends have turned against her
and are now her enemies.

³Judah has gone into captivity
where she suffers and works hard.
She lives among other nations,
but she has found no rest.
Those who chased her caught her
when she was in trouble.

⁴The roads to Jerusalem are sad,

because no one comes for the feasts.
No one passes through her gates.
Her priests groan,
her young women are suffering,
and Jerusalem suffers terribly.

⁵Her foes are now her masters.
Her enemies enjoy the wealth they have taken.
The Lord is punishing her
for her many sins.
Her children have gone away
as captives of the enemy.

⁶The beauty of Jerusalem
has gone away.
Her rulers are like deer
that cannot find food.
They are weak
and run from the hunters.

⁷Jerusalem is suffering and homeless.
She remembers all the good things
from the past.
But her people were defeated by the enemy,
and there was no one to help her.
When her enemies saw her,
they laughed to see her ruined.

⁸Jerusalem sinned terribly,
so she has become unclean.
Those who honored her now hate her,

because they have seen her nakedness.
She groans
and turns away.

⁹She made herself dirty by her sins
and did not think about what would happen to her.
Her defeat was surprising,
and no one could comfort her.
She says, “Lord, see how I suffer,
because the enemy has won.”

¹⁰The enemy reached out and took
all her precious things.
She even saw foreigners
enter her Temple.
The Lord had commanded foreigners
never to enter the meeting place of his people.

¹¹All of Jerusalem’s people groan,
looking for bread.
They are trading their precious things for food
so they can stay alive.
The city says, “Look, Lord, and see.
I am hated.”

¹²Jerusalem says, “You who pass by on the road don’t
seem to care.
Come, look at me and see:
Is there any pain like mine?
Is there any pain like that he has caused me?
The Lord has punished me

on the day of his great anger.

¹³“He sent fire from above
that went down into my bones.
He stretched out a net for my feet
and turned me back.
He made me so sad and lonely
that I am weak all day.

¹⁴“He has noticed my sins;
they are tied together by his hands;
they hang around my neck.
He has turned my strength into weakness.
The Lord has handed me over
to those who are stronger than I.

¹⁵“The Lord has rejected
all my mighty men inside my walls.
He brought an army against me
to destroy my young men.
As if in a winepress, the Lord has crushed
the capital city of Judah.

¹⁶“I cry about these things;
my eyes overflow with tears.
There is no one near to comfort me,
no one who can give me strength again.
My children are left sad and lonely,
because the enemy has won.”

¹⁷Jerusalem reaches out her hands,
but there is no one to comfort her.

The Lord commanded the people of Jacob
to be surrounded by their enemies.
Jerusalem is now unclean
like those around her.

¹⁸Jerusalem says, “The Lord is right,
but I refused to obey him.
Listen, all you people,
and look at my pain.
My young women and men
have gone into captivity.

¹⁹“I called out to my friends,
but they turned against me.
My priests and my older leaders
have died in the city
while looking for food
to stay alive.

²⁰“Look at me, Lord. I am upset
and greatly troubled.
My heart is troubled,
because I have been so stubborn.
Out in the streets, the sword kills;
inside the houses, death destroys.

²¹“People have heard my groaning,
and there is no one to comfort me.
All my enemies have heard of my trouble,
and they are happy you have done this to me.
Now bring that day you have announced

so that my enemies will be like me.

²²“Look at all their evil.

Do to them what you have done to me
because of all my sins.

I groan over and over again,
and I am afraid.”

Life Lessons

Lamentations 2:1–22

Situation

Jeremiah's second lament spoke of affliction and deliverance. Solomon's Temple symbolized God's presence in Israel. Its destruction represented God's rejection of his people because of their stubborn sinfulness.

Observation

God cares more about how we worship him than where we worship him.

Inspiration

If we ponder who God really is before we carelessly utter any remark before or about Him, surely we will render a more considered, respectful utterance. This is no different from the respect we would show the distinguished stranger if we knew his true identity. When once we see Him as He really is, the trite or casual remark no longer seems appropriate.

In fact, when we know the God who is, our first reaction is to hide from the awfulness of His presence. We want to see the face of God, until the presence of His glory draws near. Then, we want Him to hide us in the cleft of a rock. His presence is like peals of thunder and fierce winds of a violent storm, and we reconsider the foolishness of our whim to see Him. He is a holy God. Not only holy—but holy, holy, holy. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come” ([Revelation 4:8](#)).

... Let us reconsider who God is—His power, His wealth, His wisdom, His glory, His honor, His Praise. Let us take our cue from the living creatures, elders, and the angels. Let us not approach the God who is holy, holy, holy with caprice or unthinking casualness.

Let us come into His presence with praise and thanksgiving, but also in sober recognition that we are in the presence of the Holy. “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence” ([Hebrews 4:16](#)), but with the bearing and respect we would show to the One whose identity we have learned: the God who is, who created all things, in whom we have our being.

When you come apart to meet with God, consider these statements as you begin your time in His presence. Pause and meditate upon them:

-
- Father, I come to meet with You... . Meet with me.
- Lord Jesus, I come to meet with You... . Meet with me.
- Holy Spirit I come to meet with You... . Meet with me.

Enter into the presence of God who is with the respect and honor and praise He is due. (From *Walking with Christ in the Details of Life* by Patrick Morley)

Application

Worship God in prayer and song. Find a song that

lifts your heart to God; sing it throughout the day.
Thank God often for his help and love for you.

Exploration

Worship—[Nehemiah 9:2–3](#); [Psalm 122:1](#); [Isaiah 29:13–14](#); [Jeremiah 7:2–3](#); [John 4:21–24](#); [1 Corinthians 11:2–16](#).

The Lord Destroyed Jerusalem

Look how the Lord in his anger
has brought Jerusalem to shame.
He has thrown down the greatness of Israel
from the sky to the earth;
he did not remember the Temple, his footstool,
on the day of his anger.

²The Lord swallowed up without mercy
all the houses of the people of Jacob;
in his anger he pulled down
the strong places of Judah.
He threw her kingdom and its rulers
down to the ground in dishonor.

³In his anger he has removed
all the strength of Israel;
he took away his power from Israel
when the enemy came.
He burned against the people of Jacob like a flaming
fire
that burns up everything around it.

⁴Like an enemy, he prepared to shoot his bow,
and his hand was against us.
Like an enemy, he killed
all the good-looking people;

he poured out his anger like fire
on the tents of Jerusalem.

⁵The Lord was like an enemy;
he swallowed up Israel.
He swallowed up all her palaces
and destroyed all her strongholds.
He has caused more moaning and groaning
for Judah.

⁶He cut down his Temple like a garden;
he destroyed the meeting place.
The Lord has made Jerusalem forget
the set feasts and Sabbath days.
He has rejected the king and the priest
in his great anger.

⁷The Lord has rejected his altar
and abandoned his Temple.
He has handed over to the enemy
the walls of Jerusalem's palaces.
Their uproar in the Lord's Temple
was like that of a feast day.

⁸The Lord planned to destroy
the wall around Jerusalem.
He measured the wall
and did not stop himself from destroying it.
He made the walls and defenses sad;
together they have fallen.

⁹Jerusalem's gates have fallen to the ground;

he destroyed and smashed the bars of the gates.
Her king and her princes are among the nations.
The teaching of the Lord has stopped,
and the prophets do not have
visions from the Lord.

¹⁰The older leaders of Jerusalem
sit on the ground in silence.
They throw dust on their heads
and put on rough cloth to show their sadness.
The young women of Jerusalem
bow their heads to the ground in sorrow.

¹¹My eyes have no more tears,
and I am sick to my stomach.
I feel empty inside,
because my people have been destroyed.
Children and babies are fainting
in the streets of the city.

¹²They ask their mothers,
“Where is the grain and wine?”
They faint like wounded soldiers
in the streets of the city
and die in their mothers’ arms.

¹³What can I say about you, Jerusalem?
What can I compare you to?
What can I say you are like?
How can I comfort you, Jerusalem?
Your ruin is as deep as the sea.

No one can heal you.

¹⁴Your prophets saw visions,
but they were false and worth nothing.
They did not point out your sins
to keep you from being captured.
They preached what was false
and led you wrongly.

¹⁵All who pass by on the road
clap their hands at you;
they make fun of Jerusalem
and shake their heads.
They ask, "Is this the city that people called
the most beautiful city,
the happiest place on earth?"

¹⁶All your enemies open their mouths
to speak against you.
They make fun and grind their teeth in anger.
They say, "We have swallowed you up.
This is the day we were waiting for!
We have finally seen it happen."

¹⁷The Lord has done what he planned;
he has kept his word
that he commanded long ago.
He has destroyed without mercy,
and he has let your enemies laugh at you.
He has strengthened your enemies.

¹⁸The people cry out to the Lord.

Wall of Jerusalem,
let your tears flow
like a river day and night.
Do not stop
or let your eyes rest.

¹⁹Get up, cry out in the night,
even as the night begins.
Pour out your heart like water
in prayer to the Lord.
Lift up your hands in prayer to him
for the life of your children
who are fainting with hunger
on every street corner.

²⁰Jerusalem says: "Look, Lord, and see
to whom you have done this.
Women eat their own babies,
the children they have cared for.
Priests and prophets are killed
in the Temple of the Lord.

²¹"People young and old
lie outside on the ground.
My young women and young men
have been killed by the sword.
You killed them on the day of your anger;
you killed them without mercy.

²²"You invited terrors to come against me on every
side,

as if you were inviting them to a feast.
No one escaped or remained alive
on the day of the Lord's anger.
My enemy has killed
those I cared for and brought up.”

Life Lessons

Lamentations 3:1–66

Situation

Jeremiah's sorrow and consolation represented the nation's agony. Surrounded by sin and sorrow, Jeremiah saw hope in God's steadfast love and mercy.

Observation

God renews our lives day by day.

Inspiration

The fog of the broken heart.

It's a dark fog that slyly imprisons the soul and refuses easy escape. It's a silent mist that eclipses the sun and beckons the darkness. It's a heavy cloud that honors no hour and respects no person. Depression, discouragement, disappointment, doubt ... all are companions of this dreaded presence.

The fog of the broken heart disorients our life. It makes it hard to see the road. Dim your lights. Wipe off the windshield. Slow down. Do what you wish, nothing helps. When this fog encircles us, our vision is blocked and tomorrow is a forever away. When this billowy blackness envelops us, the most earnest words of help and hope are but vacant phrases.

If you have ever been betrayed by a friend, you know what I mean. If you have ever been dumped by a spouse or abandoned by a parent, you have seen this fog. If you have ever placed a spade of dirt on a loved one's casket or kept vigil at a dear one's bedside, you, too, recognize this cloud.

If you have been in this fog, or are in it now, you can be sure of one thing—you are not alone. Even the saltiest of sea captains have lost their bearings because of the appearance of this unwanted cloud....

Think back over the last two or three months. How many broken hearts did you encounter? How many wounded spirits did you witness? How many stories of tragedy did you read about? ...

The list goes on and on, doesn't it? Foggy tragedies. How they blind our vision and destroy our dreams. Forget any great hopes of reaching the world. Forget any plans of changing society. Forget any aspirations of moving mountains. Forget all that. Just help me make it through the night!

The suffering of the broken heart....

Seeing God ... does wonders for our own suffering. God was never more human than at this hour. God was never nearer to us than when he hurt. The Incarnation was never so fulfilled as in the garden.

As a result, time spent in the fog of pain could be God's greatest gift. It could be the hour that we finally see our Maker... Maybe in our suffering we can see God like never before.

The next time you are called to suffer, pay attention. It may be the closest you'll ever get to God. Watch closely. It could very well be that the hand that extends itself to lead you out of the fog is a pierced one. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

Application

Send a note to someone who is overwhelmed by his or her lot in life. Assure that friend of your prayers. Include a Scripture verse that tells of God's love.

Exploration

God's Love—[Proverbs 13:24](#); [Luke 12:7](#); [Romans 8:35–39](#); [Ephesians 3:17–19](#); [1 John 4:9–10](#).

The Meaning of Suffering

I am a man who has seen the suffering
that comes from the rod of the Lord's anger.

²He led me
into darkness, not light.

³He turned his hand against me
again and again, all day long.

⁴He wore out my flesh and skin
and broke my bones.

⁵He surrounded me with sadness
and attacked me with grief.

⁶He made me sit in the dark,
like those who have been dead a long time.

⁷He shut me in so I could not get out;
he put heavy chains on me.

⁸I cry out and beg for help,
but he ignores my prayer.

⁹He blocked my way with a stone wall
and led me in the wrong direction.

¹⁰He is like a bear ready to attack me,
like a lion in hiding.

¹¹He led me the wrong way and let me stray
and left me without help.

¹²He prepared to shoot his bow
and made me the target for his arrows.

¹³He shot me in the kidneys
with the arrows from his bag.

¹⁴I was a joke to all my people,
who make fun of me with songs all day long.

¹⁵The Lord filled me with misery;
he made me drunk with suffering.

¹⁶He broke my teeth with gravel
and trampled me into the dirt.

¹⁷I have no more peace.
I have forgotten what happiness is.

¹⁸I said, "My strength is gone,
and I have no hope in the Lord."

¹⁹Lord, remember my suffering and my misery,
my sorrow and trouble.

²⁰Please remember me
and think about me.

²¹But I have hope
when I think of this:

²²The Lord's love never ends;
his mercies never stop.

²³They are new every morning;
Lord, your loyalty is great.

²⁴I say to myself, "The Lord is mine,
so I hope in him."

²⁵The Lord is good to those who hope in him,

to those who seek him.

²⁶It is good to wait quietly
for the Lord to save.

²⁷It is good for someone to work hard
while he is young.

²⁸He should sit alone and be quiet;
the Lord has given him hard work to do.

²⁹He should bow down to the ground;
maybe there is still hope.

³⁰He should let anyone slap his cheek;
he should be filled with shame.

³¹The Lord will not reject
his people forever.

³²Although he brings sorrow,
he also has mercy and great love.

³³He does not like to punish people
or make them sad.

³⁴He sees if any prisoner of the earth
is crushed under his feet;

³⁵he sees if someone is treated unfairly
before the Most High God;

³⁶the Lord sees
if someone is cheated in his case in court.

³⁷Nobody can speak and have it happen
unless the Lord commands it.

³⁸Both bad and good things
come by the command of the Most High God.

³⁹No one should complain
when he is punished for his sins.

⁴⁰Let us examine and see what we have done
and then return to the Lord.

⁴¹Let us lift up our hands and pray from our hearts
to God in heaven:

⁴²“We have sinned and turned against you,
and you have not forgiven us.

⁴³“You wrapped yourself in anger and chased us;
you killed us without mercy.

⁴⁴You wrapped yourself in a cloud,
and no prayer could get through.

⁴⁵You made us like scum and trash
among the other nations.

⁴⁶“All of our enemies
open their mouths and speak against us.

⁴⁷We have been frightened and fearful,
ruined and destroyed.”

⁴⁸Streams of tears flow from my eyes,
because my people are destroyed.

⁴⁹My tears flow continually,
without stopping,

⁵⁰until the Lord looks down
and sees from heaven.

⁵¹I am sad when I see
what has happened to all the women of my city.

⁵²“The Lord has heard my cry; he has answered my prayer.”

52 I know who are my enemies for no reason
hunted me like a bird.

53 They tried to kill me in a pit;
they threw stones at me.

54 Water came up over my head,
and I said, "I am going to die."

55 I called out to you, Lord,
from the bottom of the pit.

56 You heard me calling, "Do not close your ears
and ignore my gasps and shouts."

57 You came near when I called to you;
you said, "Don't be afraid."

58 Lord, you have taken my case
and given me back my life.

59 Lord, you have seen how I have been wronged.
Now judge my case for me.

60 You have seen how my enemies took revenge on me
and made evil plans against me.

61 Lord, you have heard their insults
and all their evil plans against me.

62 The words and thoughts of my enemies
are against me all the time.

63 Look! In everything they do
they make fun of me with songs.

64 Pay them back, Lord,
for what they have done.

65 Make them stubborn,
and put your curse on them.

⁶⁶Chase them in anger, Lord,
and destroy them from under your heavens.

Life Lessons

Lamentations 4:1–5:22

Situation

Jeremiah described the people's fate. He also told what they had done to deserve such punishment. The sins of the prophets, priests, and people had brought about the city's destruction.

Observation

God does not leave his people in destruction and judgment. God will restore.

Inspiration

I came into this world physically alive but spiritually dead, I learned to live my life independent of God. Essentially, that is what constitutes the flesh. I had neither the presence of God in my life nor the knowledge of God's ways, so I learned to cope and defend myself as I was being conformed to this world. This learned independence is what makes the flesh hostile toward God. That is why the flesh and the Spirit are in opposition to one another.

Being children of God, the presence of the Holy Spirit restrains us so we will not do the things that we please. If there were no moral restraints and no boundaries to govern our behavior, we would drive ourselves into moral decadence. Imagine the air traffic controller saying to the pilot, "You have my permission to land any time and any place you want."

...

God wants us free, but freedom is not license. I

believe we are free by the grace of God to live a responsible life. In the early part of the twentieth century, a rigid fundamentalism had left our churches frozen in legalism. In the '50s it began to thaw, and the Jesus People movement of the '60s and '70s melted it into license for many. The pendulum had swung from the justice of God to the mercy of God... There's always a price to pay for license. True freedom doesn't lie in the exercise of choices, but in the consequences of the choices made. You may reserve the right to tell a lie, but you'll be in bondage to it because you'll have to remember the nature of the lie and to whom you told it. You may choose to rob a bank, but you will always be looking over your shoulder, fearing you may be caught. That's bondage. (From *Walking with Christ in the Details of Life* by Patrick Morley)

Application

What tempts you to neglect or ignore God? Take a walk in a quiet place. Fellowship with God. Spend time in his presence every day.

Exploration

Carnal Life—[Judges 3:5–7](#); [Psalms 49](#); [119:9](#); [Romans 13:12–14](#); [1 Corinthians 6:9–11](#); [1 John 2:15–16](#); [Revelation 9:20–21](#).

The Attack on Jerusalem

See how the gold has lost its shine,
how the pure gold has dulled!
The stones of the Temple are scattered
at every street corner.

²The precious people of Jerusalem
were more valuable than gold,
but now they are thought of as clay jars
made by the hands of a potter.

³Even wild dogs give their milk
to feed their young,
but my people are cruel
like ostriches in the desert.

⁴The babies are so thirsty
their tongues stick to the roofs of their mouths.
Children beg for bread,
but no one gives them any.

⁵Those who once ate fine foods
are now starving in the streets.
People who grew up wearing nice clothes
now pick through trash piles.

⁶My people have been punished

more than Sodom was.
Sodom was destroyed suddenly,
and no hands reached out to help her.

⁷Our princes were purer than snow,
and whiter than milk.
Their bodies were redder than rubies;
they looked like sapphires.

⁸But now they are blacker than coal,
and no one recognizes them in the streets.
Their skin hangs on their bones;
it is as dry as wood.

⁹Those who were killed in the war were better off
than those killed by hunger.
They starve in pain and die,
because there is no food from the field.

¹⁰With their own hands kind women
cook their own children.
They became food
when my people were destroyed.

¹¹The Lord turned loose all of his anger;
he poured out his strong anger.
He set fire to Jerusalem,
burning it down to the foundations.

¹²Kings of the earth and people of the world
could not believe
that enemies and foes

could enter the gates of Jerusalem.

¹³It happened because her prophets sinned
and her priests did evil.
They killed in the city
those who did what was right.

¹⁴They wandered in the streets
as if they were blind.
They were dirty with blood,
so no one would touch their clothes.

¹⁵“Go away! You are unclean,” people shouted at them.
“Get away! Get away! Don’t touch us!”
So they ran away and wandered.
Even the other nations said, “Don’t stay here.”

¹⁶The Lord himself scattered them
and did not look after them anymore.
No one respects the priests
or honors the older leaders.

¹⁷Also, our eyes grew tired,
looking for help that never came.
We kept watch from our towers
for a nation to save us.

¹⁸Our enemies hunted us,
so we could not even walk in the streets.
Our end is near. Our time is up.
Our end has come.

¹⁹Those who chased us
were faster than eagles in the sky.
They ran us into the mountains
and ambushed us in the desert.

²⁰The Lord's appointed king, who was our very breath,
was caught in their traps.
We had said about him, "We will be protected by him
among the nations."

²¹Be happy and glad, people of Edom,
you who live in the land of Uz.
The cup of God's anger will come to you;
then you will get drunk and go naked.

²²Your punishment is complete, Jerusalem.
He will not send you into captivity again.
But the Lord will punish the sins of Edom;
he will uncover your evil.

A Prayer to the Lord

Remember, Lord, what happened to us.

Look and see our disgrace.

²Our land has been turned over to strangers;
our houses have been given to foreigners.

³We are like orphans with no father;
our mothers are like widows.

⁴We have to buy the water we drink;
we must pay for the firewood.

⁵Those who chase after us want to catch us by the neck.

We are tired and find no rest.

⁶We made an agreement with Egypt
and with Assyria to get enough food.

⁷Our ancestors sinned against you, but they are gone;
now we suffer because of their sins.

⁸Slaves have become our rulers,
and no one can save us from them.

⁹We risk our lives to get our food;
we face death in the desert.

¹⁰Our skin is hot like an oven;
we burn with starvation.

¹¹The enemy abused the women of Jerusalem
and the girls in the cities of Judah.

¹²Princes were hung by the hands;
they did not respect our older leaders.

¹³The young men ground grain at the mill,
and boys stumbled under loads of wood.

¹⁴The older leaders no longer sit at the city gates;

the young men no longer sing.

¹⁵We have no more joy in our hearts;
our dancing has turned to sadness.

¹⁶The crown has fallen from our head.
How terrible it is because we sinned.

¹⁷Because of this we are afraid,
and now our eyes are dim.

¹⁸Mount Zion is empty,
and wild dogs wander around it.

¹⁹But you rule forever, Lord.
You will be King from now on.

²⁰Why have you forgotten us for so long?
Have you left us forever?

²¹Bring us back to you, Lord, and we will return.
Make our days as they were before,

²²or have you completely rejected us?
Are you so angry with us?

she In this poem the city of Jerusalem is described as a woman.

The Book of Ezekiel

Introduction

Out of the ruins of Jerusalem came a gutsy preacher named Ezekiel. He was among the Jews taken to Babylon after the fall of his country. He left behind his city. He left behind his Temple. He left behind his home.

But he didn't leave his faith.

He announced it to everyone who would listen. For twenty-two years he paced the streets proclaiming both sides of the faith.

The bad side? Turn or burn. Forgive me for being so direct, but Ezekiel was.

The good side? Turn and learn. God has a great plan for his people. A great city. Justice will reign and worship will be restored. Unlike Jerusalem, God's city is eternal. Who will be in God's city? Ezekiel answers that with the final words of the book—*The Lord Is There*.

Out of the ruins came Ezekiel. Out of the ruins came the promise. Out of the ruins came the new hope.

Is your life in ruins? Look ahead to God's city: *The Lord Is There*.

About This Book

Author:

Ezekiel

Date Written:

c. 571 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- The righteousness of nations becomes compromised by prosperity, pride, and inactivity.
- Prayer is a necessity in a nation's restoration.
- The righteous must be the watchmen of their people.
- There is a heavenly kingdom beyond our imaginations.

Key Verses:

“I will make myself known among my people Israel, and I will not let myself be dishonored anymore. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel” ([Ezekiel 39:7–8](#)).

Contents:

1. Ezekiel's Call to Prophecy [1:1–3:27](#)
2. God's Judgment on Judah [4:1–24:27](#)
3. God's Judgment on the Gentiles [25:1–32:32](#)
4. Restoration of Israel [33:1–48:35](#)

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 1:1-3:27

Situation

Ezekiel, a priest who had favor in God's eyes, suffered because of the sin of the whole nation. In exile, he preached to fellow Jewish captives.

Observation

God ordains our position so that we can show God's love to those around us.

Inspiration

What we *want* is relief. We want our problem or heartache to just go away. And yet the biblical message of rest is that your relief may come from the power you gain when you accept your suffering. Your relief may come from the strength you develop from serving in spite of it.

Remember, Jesus said, "Take My yoke (suffering) upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall *find* rest for your souls."

If you are bewildered, badgered, broken, or battered as you try to make your way along the freeways of life, take a rest. You'll find a quiet calm awaiting you when you accept what you cannot change, and serve the very people who contribute to your pain. (From *Little House on the Freeway* by Tim Kimmel)

Application

Is your life discouraging? Is the difficulty unavoidable? God has placed you where you can

help others. Encourage others who have the same illness you have. Share Christ with those who have also experienced the loss of a loved one. Get to know others who are recovering from a problem you have faced and share with them what has helped you.

Exploration

Preaching Without a Response—[Isaiah 6:9–12](#);
[Jeremiah 1:17–19](#).

Ezekiel's Vision of Living Creatures

It was the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month of our captivity. I was by the Kebar River among the people who had been carried away as captives. The sky opened, and I saw visions of God.

²It was the fifth day of the month of the fifth year that King Jehoiachin had been a prisoner. ³The Lord spoke his word to Ezekiel son of Buzi in the land of the Babylonians by the Kebar River. There he felt the power of the Lord.

⁴When I looked, I saw a stormy wind coming from the north. There was a great cloud with a bright light around it and fire flashing out of it. Something that looked like glowing metal was in the center of the fire. ⁵Inside the cloud was what looked like four living creatures, who were shaped like humans, ⁶but each of them had four faces and four wings. ⁷Their legs were straight. Their feet were like a calf's hoofs and sparkled like polished bronze. ⁸The living creatures had human hands under their wings on their four sides. All four of them had faces and wings, ⁹and their wings touched each other. The living creatures did not turn when they moved, but each went straight ahead.

¹⁰Their faces looked like this: Each living creature had a human face and the face of a lion on the right side and the face of an ox on the left side. And each one also had the face of an eagle. ¹¹That was what their faces looked like. Their wings were

spread out above. Each had two wings that touched one of the other living creatures and two wings that covered its body.

¹²Each went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, the living creatures would also go, without turning. ¹³The living creatures looked like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire went back and forth among the living creatures. It was bright, and lightning flashed from it. ¹⁴The living creatures ran back and forth like bolts of lightning.

¹⁵Now as I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground by each of the living creatures with its four faces.

¹⁶The wheels and the way they were made were like this: They looked like sparkling chrysolite. All four of them looked the same, like one wheel crossways inside another wheel. ¹⁷When they moved, they went in any one of the four directions, without turning as they went. ¹⁸The rims of the wheels were high and frightening and were full of eyes all around.

¹⁹When the living creatures moved, the wheels moved beside them. When the living creatures were lifted up from the ground, the wheels also were lifted up. ²⁰Wherever the spirit would go, the living creatures would go. And the wheels were lifted up beside them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. ²¹When the living creatures moved, the wheels moved. When the living creatures stopped, the wheels stopped. And when the living creatures were lifted from the ground, the wheels were lifted beside them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

²²Now, over the heads of the living creatures was something like a dome that sparkled like ice and was frightening. ²³And under the dome the wings of the living creatures were stretched out straight toward one another. Each

living creature also had two wings covering its body. ²⁴I heard the sound of their wings, like the roaring sound of the sea, as they moved. It was like the voice of God Almighty, a roaring sound like a noisy army. When the living creatures stopped, they lowered their wings.

²⁵A voice came from above the dome over the heads of the living creatures. When the living creatures stopped, they lowered their wings. ²⁶Now above the dome there was something that looked like a throne. It looked like a sapphire gem. And on the throne was a shape like a human. ²⁷Then I noticed that from the waist up the shape looked like glowing metal with fire inside. From the waist down it looked like fire, and a bright light was all around. ²⁸The surrounding glow looked like the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day. It seemed to look like the glory of the Lord. So when I saw it, I bowed facedown on the ground and heard a voice speaking.

The Lord Speaks to Ezekiel

He said to me, “Human, stand up on your feet so I may speak with you.” ²While he spoke to me, the Spirit entered me and put me on my feet. Then I heard the Lord speaking to me.

³He said, “Human, I am sending you to the people of Israel. That nation has turned against me and broken away from me. They and their ancestors have sinned against me until this very day. ⁴I am sending you to people who are stubborn and who do not obey. You will say to them, ‘This is what the Lord God says.’ ⁵They may listen, or they may not, since they are a people who have turned against me. But they will know that a prophet has been among them. ⁶You, human, don’t be afraid of the people or their words. Even though they may be like thorny branches and stickers all around you, and though you may feel like you live with poisonous insects, don’t be afraid. Don’t be afraid of their words or their looks, because they are a people who turn against me. ⁷But speak my words to them. They may listen, or they may not, because they turn against me. ⁸But you, human, listen to what I say to you. Don’t turn against me as those people do. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.”

⁹Then I looked and saw a hand stretched out to me, and a scroll was in it. ¹⁰He opened the scroll in front of me. Funeral songs, sad writings, and words about troubles were written on the front and back.

Then the Lord said to me, “Human, eat what you find; eat this scroll. Then go and speak to the people of Israel.” ²So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.

³He said to me, “Human, eat this scroll which I am giving you, and fill your stomach with it.” Then I ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth.

⁴Then he said to me, “Human, go to the people of Israel, and speak my words to them. ⁵You are not being sent to people whose speech you can’t understand, whose language is difficult. You are being sent to Israel. ⁶You are not being sent to many nations whose speech you can’t understand, whose language is difficult, whose words you cannot understand. If I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you. ⁷But the people of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, because they are not willing to listen to me. Yes, all the people of Israel are stubborn and will not obey. ⁸See, I now make you as stubborn and as hard as they are. ⁹I am making you as hard as a diamond, harder than stone. Don’t be afraid of them or be frightened by them, though they are a people who turn against me.”

¹⁰Also, he said to me, “Human, believe all the words I will speak to you, and listen carefully to them. ¹¹Then go to the captives, your own people, and say to them, ‘The Lord God says this.’ Tell them this whether they listen or not.”

¹²Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard a loud rumbling sound behind me, saying, “Praise the glory of the Lord in heaven.” ¹³I heard the wings of the living creatures touching each other and the sound of the wheels by them. It was a loud rumbling sound. ¹⁴So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away. I was unhappy and angry, and I felt the great power of the Lord.

¹⁵I came to the captives from Judah, who lived by the Kebar River at Tel Abib. I sat there seven days where these people lived, feeling shocked.

Israel's Warning

¹⁶After seven days the Lord spoke his word to me again. He said, ¹⁷“Human, I now make you a watchman for Israel. Any time you hear a word from my mouth, warn them for me. ¹⁸When I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ you must warn them so they may live. If you don’t speak out to warn the wicked to stop their evil ways, they will die in their sin. But I will hold you responsible for their death. ¹⁹If you warn the wicked and they do not turn from their wickedness or their evil ways, they will die because of their sin. But you will have saved your life.

²⁰“Again, those who do right may turn away from doing good and do evil. If I make something bad happen to them, they will die. Because you have not warned them, they will die because of their sin, and the good they did will not be remembered. But I will hold you responsible for their deaths. ²¹But if you have warned those good people not to sin, and they do not sin, they will surely live, because they believed the warning. And you will have saved your life.”

²²Then I felt the power of the Lord there. He said to me, “Get up and go out to the plain. There I will speak to you.” ²³So I got up and went out to the plain. I saw the glory of the Lord standing there, like the glory I saw by the Kebar River, and I bowed facedown on the ground.

²⁴Then the Spirit entered me and made me stand on my feet.

He spoke to me and said, “Go, shut yourself up in your house.
²⁵As for you, human, the people will tie you up with ropes so that you will not be able to go out among them. ²⁶Also, I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so you will be silent. You will not be able to argue with the people, even though they turn against me. ²⁷But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth, and you will say to them, ‘The Lord God says this.’ Those who will listen, let them listen. Those who refuse, let them refuse, because they are a people who turn against me.

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 4:1–7:27

Situation

Before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., God told Ezekiel about the impending judgment.

Observation

Israel's idolatry needed to be judged. God will not tolerate anything that displaces him in our lives.

Inspiration

What is idolatry? Idolatry is anything that comes between us and God. Joshua told his people that their nation would be destroyed if they persisted in idolatry, and their souls would suffer eternal death. He said, "You must make your decision today. You must decide whether you want to serve the idols of this life, or the living God." "Choose you this day," said Joshua, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" [[Joshua 24:15](#)]. What about you? Are you taking your stand with Joshua? No matter what the cost? I am asking you to choose this day whom you will serve. Our families cannot choose Christ for us. Our friends cannot do it. God is a great God, but even God can't make the decision for us. He can help, but only we can decide. We have to make our own choice. (From *Day by Day with Billy Graham* by Joan W. Brown)

Application

We don't see many people worshiping idols today. However, we do see career, cars, money, and

pleasure crowding God out of people's lives. No one is immune from such temptation. Be aware of selfish desires for material wealth or social status. Have only one concern: a right relationship with God.

Exploration

Idolatry/Sin—[Exodus 20:1–6](#); [Joshua 24:23](#); [Job 31:24–28](#); [Jeremiah 1:16](#); [Luke 16:10–13](#); [Revelation 21:8](#).

The Map of Jerusalem

“Now, human, get yourself a brick, put it in front of you, and draw a map of Jerusalem on it. ²Then surround it with an army. Build battle works against the city and a dirt road to the top of the city walls. Set up camps around it, and put heavy logs in place to break down the walls. ³Then get yourself an iron plate and set it up like an iron wall between you and the city. Turn your face toward the city as if to attack it and then attack. This is a sign to Israel.

⁴“Then lie down on your left side, and take the guilt of Israel on yourself. Their guilt will be on you for the number of days you lie on your left side. ⁵I have given you the same number of days as the years of the people’s sin. So you will have the guilt of Israel’s sin on you for three hundred ninety days.

⁶“After you have finished these three hundred ninety days, lie down a second time, on your right side. You will then have the guilt of Judah on you. I will give it to you for forty days, a day for each year of their sin. ⁷Then you will look toward Jerusalem, which is being attacked. With your arm bare, you will prophesy against Jerusalem. ⁸I will put ropes on you so you cannot turn from one side to the other until you have finished the days of your attack on Jerusalem.

⁹“Take wheat, barley, beans, small peas, and millet seeds, and put them in one bowl, and make them into bread for

yourself. You will eat it the three hundred ninety days you lie on your side. ¹⁰You will eat eight ounces of food every day at set times. ¹¹You will drink about two-thirds of a quart of water every day at set times. ¹²Eat your food as you would eat a barley cake, baking it over human dung where the people can see.” ¹³Then the Lord said, “In the same way Israel will eat unclean food among the nations where I force them to go.”

¹⁴But I said, “No, Lord God! I have never been made unclean. From the time I was young until now I’ve never eaten anything that died by itself or was torn by animals. Unclean meat has never entered my mouth.”

¹⁵“Very well,” he said. “Then I will give you cow’s dung instead of human dung to use for your fire to bake your bread.”

¹⁶He also said to me, “Human, I am going to cut off the supply of bread to Jerusalem. They will eat the bread that is measured out to them, and they will worry as they eat. They will drink water that is measured out to them, and they will be in shock as they drink it. ¹⁷This is because bread and water will be hard to find. The people will be shocked at the sight of each other, and they will become weak because of their sin.

Ezekiel Cuts His Hair

“Now, human, take a sharp sword, and use it like a barber’s razor to shave your head and beard. Then take scales and weigh and divide the hair. ²Burn one-third with fire in the middle of the city when the days of the attack on Jerusalem are over. Then take one-third and cut it up with the knife all around the city. And scatter one-third to the wind. This is how I will chase them with a sword. ³Also take a few of these hairs and tie them in the folds of your clothes. ⁴Take a few more and throw them into the fire and burn them up. From there a fire will spread to all the people of Israel.

⁵“This is what the Lord God says: This is Jerusalem. I have put her at the center of the nations with countries all around her. ⁶But she has refused to obey my laws and has been more evil than the nations. She has refused to obey my rules, even more than nations around her. The people of Jerusalem have rejected my laws and have not lived by my rules.

⁷“So this is what the Lord God says: You have caused more trouble than the nations around you. You have not followed my rules or obeyed my laws. You have not even obeyed the laws of the nations around you.

⁸“So this is what the Lord God says: I myself am against you, and I will punish you as the nations watch. ⁹I will do things among you that I have not done before and that I will never do anything like again, because you do the things I hate. ¹⁰So parents among you will eat their children, and children will eat their parents. I will punish you and will scatter to the winds

all who are left alive. ¹¹So the Lord God says: You have made my Temple unclean with all your evil idols and the hateful things you do. Because of this, as surely as I live, I will cut you off. I will have no pity, and I will show no mercy. ¹²A third of you will die by disease or be destroyed by hunger inside your walls. A third will fall dead by the sword outside your walls. And a third I will scatter in every direction as I chase them with a sword. ¹³Then my anger will come to an end. I will use it up against them, and then I will be satisfied. Then they will know that I, the Lord, have spoken. After I have carried out my anger against them, they will know how strongly I felt.

¹⁴“I will make you a ruin and a shame among the nations around you, to be seen by all who pass by. ¹⁵Then the nations around you will shame you and make fun of you. You will be a warning and a terror to them. This will happen when I punish you in my great anger. I, the Lord, have spoken. ¹⁶I will send a time of hunger to destroy you, and then I will make your hunger get even worse, and I will cut off your supply of food. ¹⁷I will send a time of hunger and wild animals against you, and they will kill your children. Disease and death will sweep through your people, and I will bring the sword against you to kill you. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

Prophecies Against the Mountains

Again the Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, look toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them. ³Say, ‘Mountains of Israel, listen to the word of the Lord God. The Lord God says this to the mountains, the hills, the ravines, and the valleys: I will bring a sword against you, and I will destroy your places of idol worship. ⁴Your altars will be destroyed and your incense altars broken down. Your people will be killed in front of your idols. ⁵I will lay the dead bodies of the Israelites in front of their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars. ⁶In all the places you live, cities will become empty. The places of idol worship will be ruined; your altars will become lonely ruins. Your idols will be broken and brought to an end. Your incense altars will be cut down, and the things you made will be wiped out. ⁷Your people will be killed and fall among you. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

⁸“But I will leave some people alive; some will not be killed by the nations when you are scattered among the foreign lands. ⁹Then those who have escaped will remember me, as they live among the nations where they have been taken as captives. They will remember how I was hurt because they were unfaithful to me and turned away from me and desired to worship their idols. They will hate themselves because of the evil things they did that I hate. ¹⁰Then they will know that I am the Lord. I did not bring this terrible thing on them for no reason.

¹¹“This is what the Lord God says: Clap your hands, stamp

your feet, and groan because of all the hateful, evil things the people of Israel have done. They will die by war, hunger, and disease. ¹²The person who is far away will die by disease. The one who is nearby will die in war. The person who is still alive and has escaped these will die from hunger. So I will carry out my anger on them. ¹³Their people will lie dead among their idols around the altars, on every high hill, on all the mountain tops, and under every green tree and leafy oak—all the places where they offered sweet-smelling incense to their idols. Then you will know that I am the Lord. ¹⁴I will use my power against them to make the land empty and wasted from the desert to Diblah, wherever they live. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

Ezekiel Tells of the End

Again the Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, the Lord God says this to the land of Israel: An end! The end has come on the four corners of the land. ³Now the end has come for you, and I will send my anger against you. I will judge you for the way you have lived, and I will make you pay for all your actions that I hate. ⁴I will have no pity on you; I will not hold back punishment from you. Instead, I will make you pay for the way you have lived and for your actions that I hate. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

⁵“This is what the Lord God says: Disaster on top of disaster is coming. ⁶The end has come! The end has come! It has stirred itself up against you! Look! It has come! ⁷Disaster has come for you who live in the land! The time has come; the day of confusion is near. There will be no happy shouting on the mountains. ⁸Soon I will pour out my anger against you; I will carry out my anger against you. I will judge you for the way you have lived and will make you pay for everything you have done that I hate. ⁹I will show no pity, and I will not hold back punishment. I will pay you back for the way you have lived and the things you have done that I hate. Then you will know that I am the Lord who punishes.

¹⁰“Look, the day is here. It has come. Disaster has come, violence has grown, and there is more pride than ever. ¹¹Violence has grown into a weapon for punishing wickedness. None of the people will be left—none of that crowd, none of their wealth, and nothing of value. ¹²The time has come; the

day has arrived. Don't let the buyer be happy or the seller be sad, because my burning anger is against the whole crowd.

¹³Sellers will not return to the land they have sold as long as they live, because the vision against all that crowd will not be changed. Because of their sins, they will not save their lives.

¹⁴They have blown the trumpet, and everything is ready. But no one is going to the battle, because my anger is against all that crowd.

¹⁵“The sword is outside, and disease and hunger are inside. Whoever is in the field will die by the sword. Hunger and disease will destroy those in the city. ¹⁶Those who are left alive and who escape will be on the mountains, moaning like doves of the valleys about their own sin. ¹⁷All hands will hang weakly with fear, and all knees will become weak as water. ¹⁸They will put on rough cloth to show how sad they are. They will tremble all over with fear. Their faces will show their shame, and all their heads will be shaved. ¹⁹The people will throw their silver into the streets, and their gold will be like trash. Their silver and gold will not save them from the Lord's anger. It will not satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs, because it caused them to fall into sin. ²⁰They were proud of their beautiful jewelry and used it to make their idols and their evil statues, which I hate. So I will turn their wealth into trash. ²¹I will give it to foreigners as loot from war and to the most evil people in the world as treasure, and they will dishonor it. ²²I will also turn away from the people of Israel, and they will dishonor my treasured place. Then robbers will enter and dishonor it.

²³“Make chains for captives, because the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence. ²⁴So I will bring the worst of the nations to take over the people's houses. I will

also end the pride of the strong, and their holy places will be dishonored.²⁵ When the people are suffering greatly, they will look for peace, but there will be none.²⁶ Disaster will come on top of disaster, and rumor will be added to rumor. Then they will try to get a vision from a prophet; the teachings of God from the priest and the advice from the older leaders will be lost.²⁷ The king will cry greatly, the prince will give up hope, and the hands of the people who own land will shake with fear. I will punish them for the way they have lived. The way they have judged others is the way I will judge them. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 8:1–11:25

Situation

God spoke through his servant Ezekiel. He showed the Israelites the reason for their exile.

Observation

God hates idolatry. He hates anything that gets in the way of a relationship with him. And self-centeredness, at its root, is idolatry.

Inspiration

The self-centered see everything through self. Their motto? “It’s all about me!” The flight schedule. The traffic. The dress styles. The worship styles. The weather, the work, whether or not one works—everything is filtered through the mini-me in the eye.

Selfishness.

Such a condition can be fatal.

Listen to the words of James. “Where jealousy and selfishness are, there will be confusion and every kind of evil” ([James 3:16](#)).

Need proof?

Let’s examine one newspaper. Today’s edition. How many examples of selfishness will we find in the first few pages?

1. A teenage girl died in a car wreck. Her boyfriend was challenged to a race on a city street. He took the dare and wrapped the car

- around a telephone pole.
2. The largest petroleum company in the world has filed for bankruptcy. Executives allegedly knew the ship had leaks but told no one until they had time to make huge profits.
 3. A prominent citizen is put in jail for child pornography.

Selfishness is to society what the Exxon *Valdez* was to scallops and sea otters—deadly. Is it any wonder that Paul writes: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” ([Philippians 2:3–4](#), NASB).

At first glance the standard in the passage seems impossible to meet. Nothing? We shouldn’t do *anything* for ourselves? No new dress or suit. What about going to school or saving money—couldn’t all of these things be considered selfish?

They could, unless we are careful to understand what Paul is saying. The word the apostle uses for *selfishness* shares a root form with the words *strife* and *contentious*. It suggests a self-preoccupation that hurts others. A divisive arrogance. In fact, first-century writers used the word to describe a politician who procured office by illegal manipulation or a harlot who seduced the client, demeaning both herself and him. *Selfishness is an obsession with self that excludes others, hurting everyone.*

Looking after your personal interests is proper life management. Doing so to the exclusion of the rest of the world is selfishness.

(From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

Application

Idols come in attractive packages today. You can identify them when they keep you from worship, consume your tithe, or become what you are most proud of. What can you do? Take time to evaluate what may be idols in your life. Pray that God will help you remove them from your life.

Exploration

Idolatry—[Leviticus 26:1](#); [Isaiah 42:8](#); [1 John 5:21](#).

Ezekiel's Vision of Jerusalem

It was the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month of our captivity. I was sitting in my house with the older leaders of Judah in front of me. There I felt the power of the Lord God. ²I looked and saw something that looked like a human. From the waist down it looked like fire, and from the waist up it looked like bright glowing metal. ³It stretched out the shape of a hand and caught me by the hair on my head. The Spirit lifted me up between the earth and the sky. He took me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance to the north gate of the inner courtyard of the Temple. In the courtyard was the idol that caused God to be jealous. ⁴I saw the glory of the God of Israel there, as I had seen on the plain.

⁵Then he said to me, "Human, now look toward the north." So I looked up toward the north, and in the entrance north of the gate of the altar was the idol that caused God to be jealous.

⁶He said to me, "Human, do you see what they are doing? Do you see how many hateful things the people of Israel are doing here that drive me far away from my Temple? But you will see things more hateful than these."

⁷Then he brought me to the entry of the courtyard. When I looked, I saw a hole in the wall. ⁸He said to me, "Human, dig through the wall." So I dug through the wall and saw an entrance.

⁹Then he said to me, "Go in and see the hateful, evil things

they are doing here.”¹⁰ So I entered and looked, and I saw every kind of crawling thing and hateful beast and all the idols of the people of Israel, carved on the wall all around.¹¹ Standing in front of these carvings and idols were seventy of the older leaders of Israel and Jaazaniah son of Shaphan. Each man had his pan for burning incense in his hand, and a sweet-smelling cloud of incense was rising.

¹² Then he said to me, “Human, have you seen what the older leaders of Israel are doing in the dark? Have you seen each man in the room of his own idol? They say, ‘The Lord doesn’t see us. The Lord has left the land.’”¹³ He also said to me, “You will see even more hateful things that they are doing.”

¹⁴ Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the Temple of the Lord, where I saw women sitting and crying for [Tammuz](#).¹⁵ He said to me, “Do you see, human? You will see things even more hateful than these.”

¹⁶ Then he brought me into the inner courtyard of the Temple. There I saw about twenty-five men at the entrance to the Temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar. With their backs turned to the Temple of the Lord, they faced east and were worshiping the sun in the east.

¹⁷ He said to me, “Do you see, human? Is it unimportant that the people of Judah are doing the hateful things they have done here? They have filled the land with violence and made me continually angry. Look, they are insulting me every way they can.”¹⁸ So I will act in anger. I will have no pity, nor will I show mercy. Even if they shout in my ears, I won’t listen to them.”

Vision of the Angels

Then he shouted with a loud voice in my ears, “You who are chosen to punish this city, come near with your weapon in your hand.”² Then six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his powerful weapon in his hand. Among them was a man dressed in linen with a writing case at his side. The men went in and stood by the bronze altar.

³ Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the creatures with wings, where it had been, to the place in the Temple where the door opened. He called to the man dressed in linen who had the writing case at his side. ⁴ He said to the man, “Go through Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of the people who groan and cry about all the hateful things being done among them.”

⁵ As I listened, he said to the other men, “Go through the city behind the man dressed in linen and kill. Don’t pity anyone, and don’t show mercy. ⁶ Kill and destroy old men, young men and women, little children, and older women, but don’t touch any who have the mark on them. Start at my Temple.” So they started with the older leaders who were in front of the Temple.

⁷ Then he said to the men, “Make the Temple unclean, and fill the courtyards with those who have been killed. Go out!” So the men went out and killed the people in the city. ⁸ While the men were killing the people, I was left alone. I bowed facedown on the ground and I cried out, “Oh, Lord God! Will you destroy everyone left alive in Israel when you turn loose your anger on Jerusalem?”

⁹Then he said to me, “The sin of the people of Israel and Judah is very great. The land is filled with people who murder, and the city is full of people who are not fair. The people say, ‘The Lord has left the land, and the Lord does not see.’ ¹⁰But I will have no pity, nor will I show mercy. I will bring their evil back on their heads.”

¹¹Then the man dressed in linen with the writing case at his side reported, “I have done just as you commanded me.”

The Coals of Fire

Then I looked and saw in the dome above the heads of the living creatures something like a sapphire gem which looked like a throne.²The Lord said to the man dressed in linen, “Go in between the wheels under the living creatures, fill your hands with coals of fire from between the living creatures, and scatter the coals over the city.”

As I watched, the man with linen clothes went in.³Now the living creatures were standing on the south side of the Temple when the man went in. And a cloud filled the inner courtyard.⁴Then the glory of the Lord went up from the living creatures and stood over the door of the Temple. The Temple was filled with the cloud, and the courtyard was full of the brightness from the glory of the Lord.⁵The sound of the wings of the living creatures was heard all the way to the outer courtyard. It was like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.

⁶When the Lord commanded the man dressed in linen, “Take fire from between the wheels, from between the living creatures,” the man went in and stood by a wheel.⁷One living creature put out his hand to the fire that was among them, took some of the fire, and put it in the hands of the man dressed in linen. Then the man took the fire and went out.

The Wheels and the Creatures

⁸Something that looked like a human hand could be seen under the wings of the living creatures.⁹I saw the four wheels by the

living creatures, one wheel by each living creature. The wheels looked like shining chrysolite.¹⁰ All four wheels looked alike: Each looked like a wheel crossways inside another wheel.¹¹ When the wheels moved, they went in any of the directions that the four living creatures faced. The wheels did not turn about, and the living creatures did not turn their bodies as they went.¹² All their bodies, their backs, their hands, their wings, and the wheels were full of eyes all over. Each of the four living creatures had a wheel.¹³ I heard the wheels being called “whirling wheels.”¹⁴ Each living creature had four faces. The first face was the face of a creature with wings. The second face was a human face, the third was the face of a lion, and the fourth was the face of an eagle.

¹⁵ Then the living creatures flew up. They were the same living creatures I had seen by the Kebar River.¹⁶ When the living creatures moved, the wheels moved beside them. When the living creatures lifted their wings to fly up from the ground, the wheels did not leave their place beside them.¹⁷ When the living creatures stopped, the wheels stopped. When the creatures went up, the wheels went up also, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

¹⁸ Then the glory of the Lord left the door of the Temple and stood over the living creatures.¹⁹ As I watched, the living creatures spread their wings and flew up from the ground, with the wheels beside them. They stood where the east gate of the Temple of the Lord opened, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them.

²⁰ These were the living creatures I had seen under the God of Israel by the Kebar River. I knew they were called cherubim.

²¹ Each one had four faces and four wings, and under their

wings were things that looked like human hands.²² Their faces looked the same as the ones I had seen by the Kebar River. They each went straight ahead.

Prophecies Against Evil Leaders

The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the front gate of the Temple of the Lord, which faces east. I saw twenty-five men where the gate opens, among them Jaazaniah son of Azzur and Pelatiah son of Benaiah, who were leaders of the people.² Then the Lord said to me, “Human, these are the men who plan evil and give wicked advice in this city of Jerusalem.³ They say, ‘It is almost time for us to build houses. This city is like a cooking pot, and we are like the best meat.’⁴ So prophesy against them, prophesy, human.”

⁵Then the Spirit of the Lord entered me and told me to say: “This is what the Lord says: You have said these things, people of Israel, and I know what you are thinking.⁶ You have killed many people in this city, filling its streets with their bodies.

⁷“So this is what the Lord God says: Those people you have killed and left in the middle of the city are like the best meat, and this city is like the cooking pot. But I will force you out of the city.⁸ You have feared the sword, but I will bring a sword against you, says the Lord God.⁹ I will force you out of the city and hand you over to strangers and punish you.¹⁰ You will die by the sword. I will punish you at the border of Israel so you will know that I am the Lord.¹¹ This city will not be your cooking pot, and you will not be the best meat in the middle of it. I will punish you at the border of Israel.¹² Then you will know that I am the Lord. You did not live by my rules or obey my laws. Instead, you did the same things as the nations

around you.”

¹³As I prophesied, Pelatiah son of Benaiah died. Then I bowed facedown on the ground and shouted with a loud voice, “Oh no, Lord God! Will you completely destroy the Israelites who are left alive?”

Promise to Those Remaining

¹⁴The Lord spoke his word to me, saying, ¹⁵“Human, the people still in Jerusalem have spoken about your own relatives and all the people of Israel who are captives with you, saying, ‘They are far from the Lord. This land has been given to us as our property.’

¹⁶“So say, ‘This is what the Lord God says: I sent the people far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries. But for a little while I have become a Temple to them in the countries where they have gone.’

¹⁷“So say: ‘This is what the Lord God says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you together from the countries where you have been scattered. Then I will give you back the land of Israel.’

¹⁸“When they come to this land, they will remove all the evil idols and all the hateful images. ¹⁹I will give them a desire to respect me completely, and I will put inside them a new way of thinking. I will take out the stubborn heart of stone from their bodies, and I will give them an obedient heart of flesh. ²⁰Then they will live by my rules and obey my laws and keep them. They will be my people, and I will be their God. ²¹But those who want to serve their evil statues and hateful idols, I will pay back for their evil ways, says the Lord God.”

Ezekiel's Vision Ends

²²Then the living creatures lifted their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. ²³The glory of the Lord went up from inside Jerusalem and stopped on the mountain on the east side of the city. ²⁴The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the captives who had been taken from Judah to Babylonia. This happened in a vision given by the Spirit of God, and then the vision I had seen ended. ²⁵And I told the captives from Judah all the things the Lord had shown me.

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 12:1-28

Situation

Although Jerusalem was about to be destroyed, the Jews remained blind to their own disobedience and rebellion.

Observation

The Israelites refused to obey God. They would not believe that God's warnings of destruction applied to them, and they resented Ezekiel's message of judgment against them.

Inspiration

Resentment is allowing your hurts to turn into hates. When those hates simmer in your heart, they create bitterness, and you are the one who suffers. Forget those hurts!

When you have a relationship in need of repair, the first key to improvement is to examine your own heart. Look at your own heart—remember who you are and who God called you to be. Did the Father call you to be angry? to be bitter? Or did he call you to be loving and forgiving?

An itinerant preacher from Nazareth can do something for the hurt that is in your heart. Maybe you're trying to rebuild an estranged relationship... . Maybe you've been trying to find God for longer than you can remember. There was something about this Nazarene preacher that made people cluster around him like he was God's gift to humanity. He is

your gift as well. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, “Resentment”)

Application

Isn't it amazing how blind we are to the truth of God's Word? God requires repentance from our sins and obedience to his will. Anger and resentment loom. Yet, like the Israelites, we are prone to think that judgment or discipline won't happen to us. Ask God to give you a clean slate in service and obedience to him.

Exploration

Obedience to God—[1 Samuel 15:22](#); [Psalms 1](#); [John 14:15](#); [Romans 3:21–26](#); [2 Corinthians 5:18–21](#); [Hebrews 12:4–29](#).

Ezekiel Moves Out

Again the Lord spoke his word to me, saying:²“Human, you are living among a people who refuse to obey. They have eyes to see, but they do not see, and they have ears to hear, but they do not hear, because they are a people who refuse to obey.

³“So, human, pack your things as if you will be taken away captive, and walk away like a captive in the daytime with the people watching. Move from your place to another with the people watching. Maybe they will understand, even though they are a people who refuse to obey.⁴During the day when the people are watching, bring out the things you would pack as captive. At evening, with the people watching, leave your place like those who are taken away as captives from their country.⁵Dig a hole through the wall while they watch, and bring your things out through it.⁶Lift them onto your shoulders with the people watching, and carry them out in the dark. Cover your face so you cannot see the ground, because I have made you a sign to the people of Israel.”

⁷I did these things as I was commanded. In the daytime I brought what I had packed as if I were being taken away captive. Then in the evening I dug through the wall with my hands. I brought my things out in the dark and carried them on my shoulders as the people watched.

⁸Then in the morning the Lord spoke his word to me,

saying: ⁹“Human, didn’t Israel, who refuses to obey, ask you, ‘What are you doing?’

¹⁰“Say to them, ‘This is what the Lord God says: This message is about the king in Jerusalem and all the people of Israel who live there.’ ¹¹Say, ‘I am a sign to you.’

“The same things I have done will be done to the people in Jerusalem. They will be taken away from their country as captives. ¹²The king among them will put his things on his shoulder in the dark and will leave. The people will dig a hole through the wall to bring him out. He will cover his face so he cannot see the ground. ¹³But I will spread my net over him, and he will be caught in my trap. Then I will bring him to Babylon in the land of the Babylonians. He will not see that land, but he will die there. ¹⁴All who are around the king—his helpers and all his army—I will scatter in every direction, and I will chase them with a sword.

¹⁵“They will know that I am the Lord when I scatter them among the nations and spread them among the countries. ¹⁶But I will save a few of them from the sword and from hunger and disease. Then they can tell about their hateful actions among the nations where they go. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

The Lesson of Ezekiel’s Shaking

¹⁷The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ¹⁸“Human, tremble as you eat your food, and shake with fear as you drink your water.

¹⁹Then say to the people of the land: ‘This is what the Lord God says about the people who live in Jerusalem in the land of Israel: They will eat their food with fear and drink their water in

shock, because their land will be stripped bare because of the violence of the people who live in it. ²⁰The cities where people live will become ruins, and the land will become empty. Then you will know that I am the Lord.”

The Visions Will Come True

²¹The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²²“Human, what is this saying you have in the land of Israel: ‘The days go by and every vision comes to nothing’? ²³So say to them, ‘This is what the Lord God says: I will make them stop saying this, and nobody in Israel will use this saying anymore.’ But tell them, ‘The time is near when every vision will come true. ²⁴There will be no more false visions or pleasing prophecies inside the nation of Israel, ²⁵but I, the Lord, will speak. What I say will be done, and it will not be delayed. You refuse to obey, but in your time I will say the word and do it, says the Lord God.”

²⁶The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²⁷“Human, the people of Israel are saying, ‘The vision that Ezekiel sees is for a time many years from now. He is prophesying about times far away.’

²⁸“So say to them: ‘The Lord God says this: None of my words will be delayed anymore. What I have said will be done, says the Lord God.”

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 13:1–14:23

Situation

Ezekiel continued to prophesy about the destruction of Israel. He warned the people not to listen to false prophets or to worship idols.

Observation

Israel abandoned God's covenant.

Inspiration

Everything begins with God the Father. The initiative of grace is his alone. It is he who in sheer love desired both to show himself to mankind (which is “revelation”) and to bring mankind to himself (which is “redemption”).

In both he acted through Jesus Christ. It is through Christ that he has revealed himself to us, and it is through Christ that he has redeemed us for himself.

It is inconceivable, therefore, that there could ever be either a higher revelation than God has given through the person of Jesus Christ his son, or a fuller redemption than he has achieved through the work of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Both are perfect and complete. (From *Understanding Christ* by John Stott)

Application

Do you demonstrate your right relationship with God even in small areas—like driving? Do you observe the speed limit? Does your driving change when you see a police car? Be diligent to obey God

even in small areas.

Exploration

Judgment—[Matthew 11:20–24](#); [Acts 17: 30–31](#); [2 Peter 2](#).

Ezekiel Speaks Against False Prophets

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, prophesy against the prophets of Israel. Say to those who make up their own prophecies: ‘Listen to the word of the Lord. ³This is what the Lord God says: How terrible it will be for the foolish prophets who follow their own ideas and have not seen a vision from me! ⁴People of Israel, your prophets have been like wild dogs hunting to kill and eat among ruins. ⁵Israel is like a house in ruins, but you have not gone up into the broken places or repaired the wall. So how can Israel hold back the enemy in the battle on the Lord’s day of judging? ⁶Your prophets see false visions and prophesy lies. They say, “This is the message of the Lord,” when the Lord has not sent them. But they still hope their words will come true. ⁷You said, “This is the message of the Lord,” but that is a false vision. Your prophecies are lies, because I have not spoken.

⁸“So this is what the Lord God says: Because you prophets spoke things that are false and saw visions that do not come true, I am against you, says the Lord God. ⁹I will punish the prophets who see false visions and prophesy lies. They will have no place among my people. Their names will not be written on the list of the people of Israel, and they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord God.

¹⁰“It is because they lead my people the wrong way by

saying, “Peace!” when there is no peace. When the people build a weak wall, the prophets cover it with whitewash to make it look strong.¹¹ So tell those who cover a weak wall with whitewash that it will fall down. Rain will pour down, hailstones will fall, and a stormy wind will break the wall down.¹² When the wall has fallen, people will ask you, “Where is the whitewash you used on the wall?”

¹³“So this is what the Lord God says: I will break the wall with a stormy wind. In my anger rain will pour down, and hailstones will destroy the wall.¹⁴ I will tear down the wall on which you put whitewash. I will level it to the ground so that people will see the wall’s foundation. And when the wall falls, you will be destroyed under it. Then you will know that I am the Lord.¹⁵ So I will carry out my anger on the wall and against those who covered it with whitewash. Then I will tell you, “The wall is gone, and those who covered it with whitewash are gone.¹⁶ The prophets of Israel who prophesy to Jerusalem and who see visions of peace for the city, when there is no peace, will be gone, says the Lord God.” ’

False Women Prophets

¹⁷“Now, human, look toward the women among your people who make up their own prophecies. Prophecy against them.¹⁸ Say, ‘This is what the Lord God says: How terrible it will be for women who sew magic charms on their wrists and make veils of every length to trap people! You ruin the lives of my people but try to save your own lives.¹⁹ For handfuls of barley and pieces of bread, you have dishonored me among my people. By lying to my people, who listen to lies, you have

killed people who should not die, and you have kept alive those who should not live.

²⁰“So this is what the Lord God says: I am against your magic charms, by which you trap people as if they were birds. I will tear those charms off your arms, and I will free those people you have trapped like birds. ²¹I will also tear off your veils and save my people from your hands. They will no longer be trapped by your power. Then you will know that I am the Lord. ²²By your lies you have caused those who did right to be sad, when I did not make them sad. And you have encouraged the wicked not to stop being wicked, which would have saved their lives. ²³So you will not see false visions or prophesy anymore, and I will save my people from your power so you will know that I am the Lord.”

Stop Worshiping Idols

Some of the older leaders of Israel came to me and sat down in front of me.² Then the Lord spoke his word to me, saying:
³“Human, these men want to worship idols. They put up evil things that cause people to sin. Should I allow them to ask me for help? ⁴So speak to them and tell them, ‘This is what the Lord God says: When any of the people of Israel want to worship idols and put up evil things that cause people to sin and then come to the prophet, I, the Lord, will answer them myself for worshiping idols. ⁵Then I will win back my people Israel, who have left me because of all their idols.’

⁶“So say to the people of Israel, ‘This is what the Lord God says: Change your hearts and lives, and stop worshiping idols. Stop doing all the things I hate. ⁷Any of the Israelites or foreigners in Israel can separate themselves from me by wanting to worship idols or by putting up the things that cause people to sin. Then if they come to the prophet to ask me questions, I, the Lord, will answer them myself. ⁸I will reject them. I will make them a sign and an example, and I will separate them from my people. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

⁹“But if the prophet is tricked into giving a prophecy, it is because I, the Lord, have tricked that prophet to speak. Then I will use my power against him and destroy him from among my people Israel. ¹⁰The prophet will be as guilty as the one who asks him for help; both will be responsible for their guilt. ¹¹Then the nation of Israel will not leave me anymore or make themselves unclean anymore with all their sins. They will be my

people, and I will be their God, says the Lord God.”

Jerusalem Will Not Be Spared

¹²The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ¹³“Human, if the people of a country sin against me by not being loyal, I will use my power against them. I will cut off their supply of food and send a time of hunger, destroying both people and animals.

¹⁴Even if three great men like Noah, Daniel, and Job were in that country, their goodness could save only themselves, says the Lord God.

¹⁵“Or I might send wild animals into that land, leaving the land empty and without children. Then no one would pass through it because of the animals. ¹⁶As surely as I live, says the Lord God, even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in the land, they could not save their own sons or daughters. They could save only themselves, but that country would become empty.

¹⁷“Or I might bring a war against that country. I might say, ‘Let a war be fought in that land,’ in this way destroying its people and its animals. ¹⁸As surely as I live, says the Lord God, even if those three men were in the land, they could not save their sons or daughters. They could save only themselves.

¹⁹“Or I might cause a disease to spread in that country. I might pour out my anger against it, destroying and killing people and animals. ²⁰As surely as I live, says the Lord God, even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in the land, they could not save their son or daughter. They could save only themselves because they did what was right.

²¹“This is what the Lord God says: My plans for Jerusalem are much worse! I will send my four terrible punishments

against it—war, hunger, wild animals, and disease—to destroy its people and animals. ²²But some people will escape; some sons and daughters will be led out. They will come out to you, and you will see what happens to people who live as they did. Then you will be comforted after the disasters I have brought against Jerusalem, after all the things I have brought against it. ²³You will be comforted when you see what happens to them for living as they did, because you will know there was a good reason for what I did to Jerusalem, says the Lord God.”

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 15:1–20:44

Situation

God intended to destroy Jerusalem for its idolatry and rebellion. He compared the idol-worshipping city to a useless vine. God told Ezekiel that he would burn the city into a charred stalk.

Observation

Lack of faith leads to disaster.

Inspiration

During the reign of Oliver Cromwell, the British government began to run low on silver for coins. Lord Cromwell sent his men on an investigation of the local cathedral to see if they could find any precious metal there. After investigating, they reported: The only silver we could find is in the statues of the saints standing in the corners.

To which the radical soldier and statesman of England replied: Good! We'll melt down the saints and put them into circulation!

Not bad theology for a proper, strait-laced, Lord Protector of the Isles, huh? In a few words the direct order states the essence ... the kernel ... the practical goal of authentic Christianity. Not rows of silver saints, highly polished, frequently dusted, crammed into the corners of elegant cathedrals. Not plaster people cloaked in thin layers of untarnished silver and topped with a metallic halo. But real persons. Melted saints circulating through the mainstream of

humanity. Bringing worth and value down where life transpires in the raw....

It's easy to kid ourselves. So easy. The Christian must guard against self-deception. We can begin to consider ourselves martyrs because we are in church twice on Sunday—really sacrificing by investing a few hours on the “day of rest.” Listen, my friend, being among the saints is no sacrifice ... it's a brief, choice privilege. The cost factor occurs on Monday or Tuesday ... and during the rest of the week. That's when we're “melted down and put into circulation.” That's when they go for the jugular. And it is remarkable how that monotonous work-week test discolours many a silver saint. “Sunday religion” may seem sufficient, but it isn't....

Doing battle in the steaming jungle calls for shock troops in super shape. No rhinestone cowboys can cut it among the swamps and insects of the gross world system. Sunday-go-to-meetin' silver saints in shining armor are simply out of circulation if that's the limit to their faith. Waging wilderness warfare calls for sweat ... energy ... keen strategy ... determination ... a good supply of ammunition ... willingness to fight ... refusal to surrender, even with the elephants tromping on your airhose.

And that is why we must be melted! It's all part of being “in circulation.” Those who successfully wage war with silent heroism under relentless secular pressure—ah, they are the saints who know what it means to be melted.

(From *Encourage Me* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

If you were melted down to your essence, what impurities would you find? Think of one area of weakness and work this week to become faithful where once you were faithless. Trust God to supply your needs.

Exploration

Following Christ—[Mark 8:34–38](#); [John 8:12](#); [10:27](#); [Romans 15:5](#).

Story of the Vine

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, is the wood of the vine better than the wood of any tree in the forest? ³Can wood be taken from the vine to make anything? Can you use it to make a peg on which to hang something? ⁴If the vine is thrown into the fire for fuel, and the fire burns up both ends and starts to burn the middle, is it useful for anything? ⁵When the vine was whole, it couldn't be made into anything. When the fire has burned it completely, it certainly cannot be made into anything.”

⁶So this is what the Lord God says: “Out of all the trees in the forest, I have given the wood of the vine as fuel for fire. In the same way I have given up the people who live in Jerusalem ⁷and will turn against them. Although they came through one fire, fire will still destroy them. When I turn against them, you will know that I am the Lord. ⁸So I will make the land empty, because the people have not been loyal, says the Lord God.”

The Lord's Kindness to Jerusalem

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying:²“Human, tell Jerusalem about her hateful actions.³Say, ‘This is what the Lord God says to Jerusalem: Your beginnings and your ancestors were in the land of the Canaanites. Your father was an Amorite, and your mother was a Hittite.⁴On the day you were born, your [cord](#) was not cut. You were not washed with water to clean you. You were not rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths.⁵No one felt sorry enough for you to do any of these things for you. No, you were thrown out into the open field, because you were hated on the day you were born.

⁶“When I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, I said to you, “Live!”⁷I made you grow like a plant in the field. You grew up and became tall and became like a beautiful jewel. Your breasts formed, and your hair grew, but you were naked and without clothes.

⁸“Later when I passed by you and looked at you, I saw that you were old enough for love. So I spread my robe over you and covered your nakedness. I also made a promise to you and entered into an agreement with you so that you became mine, says the Lord God.

⁹“Then I bathed you with water, washed all the blood off of you, and put oil on you.¹⁰I put beautiful clothes made with needlework on you and put sandals of fine leather on your feet. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk.¹¹I put jewelry on you: bracelets on your arms, a necklace around your neck,¹²a ring in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a

beautiful crown on your head. ¹³So you wore gold and silver. Your clothes were made of fine linen, silk, and beautiful needlework. You ate fine flour, honey, and olive oil. You were very beautiful and became a queen. ¹⁴Then you became famous among the nations, because you were so beautiful. Your beauty was perfect, because of the glory I gave you, says the Lord God.

Jerusalem Becomes a Prostitute

¹⁵“But you trusted in your beauty. You became a prostitute, because you were so famous. You had sexual relations with anyone who passed by. ¹⁶You took some of your clothes and made your places of worship colorful. There you carried on your prostitution. These things should not happen; they should never occur. ¹⁷You also took your beautiful jewelry, made from my gold and silver I had given you, and you made for yourselves male idols so you could be a prostitute with them. ¹⁸Then you took your clothes with beautiful needlework and covered the idols. You gave my oil and incense as an offering to them. ¹⁹Also, you took the bread I gave you, the fine flour, oil, and honey I gave you to eat, and you offered them before the gods as a pleasing smell. This is what happened, says the Lord God.

²⁰“But your sexual sins were not enough for you. You also took your sons and daughters who were my children, and you sacrificed them to the idols as food. ²¹You killed my children and offered them up in fire to the idols. ²²While you did all your hateful acts and sexual sins, you did not remember when you were young, when you were naked and had no clothes and

were left in your blood.

²³“How terrible! How terrible it will be for you, says the Lord God. After you did all these evil things, ²⁴you built yourself a place to worship gods. You made for yourself a place of worship in every city square. ²⁵You built a place of worship at the beginning of every street. You made your beauty hateful, offering your body for sex to anyone who passed by, so your sexual sins became worse and worse. ²⁶You also had sexual relations with the Egyptians, who were your neighbors and partners in sexual sin. Your sexual sins became even worse, and they caused me to be angry. ²⁷So then, I used my power against you and took away some of your land. I let you be defeated by those who hate you, the Philistine women, who were ashamed of your evil ways. ²⁸Also, you had sexual relations with the Assyrians, because you could not be satisfied. Even though you had sexual relations with them, you still were not satisfied. ²⁹You did many more sexual sins in Babylonia, the land of traders, but even this did not satisfy you.

³⁰“Truly your will is weak, says the Lord God. You do all the things a stubborn prostitute does. ³¹You built your place to worship gods at the beginning of every street, and you made places of worship in every city square. But you were not like a prostitute when you refused to accept payment.

³²“You are a wife who is guilty of adultery. You desire strangers instead of your husband. ³³Men pay prostitutes, but you pay all your lovers to come to you. And they come from all around for sexual relations. ³⁴So you are different from other prostitutes. No man asks you to be a prostitute, and you pay money instead of having money paid to you. Yes, you are

different.

The Prostitute Is Judged

³⁵“So, prostitute, hear the word of the Lord. ³⁶This is what the Lord God says: You showed your nakedness to other countries. You uncovered your body in your sexual sins with them as your lovers and with all your hateful idols. You killed your children and offered their blood to your idols. ³⁷So I will gather all your lovers with whom you found pleasure. Yes, I will gather all those you loved and those you hated. I will gather them against you from all around, and I will strip you naked in front of them so they can see your nakedness. ³⁸I will punish you as women guilty of adultery or as murderers are punished. I will put you to death because I am angry and jealous. ³⁹I will also hand you over to your lovers. They will tear down your places of worship and destroy other places where you worship gods. They will tear off your clothes and take away your jewelry, leaving you naked and bare. ⁴⁰They will bring a crowd against you to throw stones at you and to cut you into pieces with their swords. ⁴¹They will burn down your houses and will punish you in front of many women. I will put an end to your sexual sins, and you will no longer pay your lovers. ⁴²Then I will rest from my anger against you, and I will stop being jealous. I will be quiet and not angry anymore.

⁴³“Because you didn’t remember when you were young, but have made me angry in all these ways, I will repay you for what you have done, says the Lord God. Didn’t you add sexual sins to all your other acts which I hate?

⁴⁴“Everyone who uses wise sayings will say this about

you: "The daughter is like her mother."⁴⁵ You are like your mother, who hated her husband and children. You are also like your sisters, who hated their husbands and children. Your mother was a Hittite, and your father was an Amorite.⁴⁶ Your older sister is Samaria, who lived north of you with her daughters; your younger sister is Sodom, who lived south of you with her daughters.⁴⁷ You not only followed their ways and did the hateful things they did, but you were soon worse than they were in all your ways.⁴⁸ As surely as I live, says the Lord God, this is true. Your sister Sodom and her daughters never did what you and your daughters have done.

⁴⁹“This was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were proud and had plenty of food and lived in great comfort, but she did not help the poor and needy.⁵⁰ So Sodom and her daughters were proud and did things I hate in front of me. So I got rid of them when I saw what they did.⁵¹ Also, Samaria did not do half the sins you do; you have done more hateful things than they did. So you make your sisters look good because of all the hateful things you have done.⁵² You will suffer disgrace, because you have provided an excuse for your sisters. They are better than you are. Your sins were even more terrible than theirs. Feel ashamed and suffer disgrace, because you made your sisters look good.

⁵³“But I will give back to Sodom and her daughters the good things they once had. I will give back to Samaria and her daughters the good things they once had. And with them I will also give back the good things you once had⁵⁴ so you may suffer disgrace and feel ashamed for all the things you have done. You even gave comfort to your sisters in their sins.⁵⁵ Your sisters, Sodom with her daughters and Samaria with her

daughters, will return to what they were before. You and your daughters will also return to what you were before.⁵⁶ You humiliated your sister Sodom when you were proud,⁵⁷ before your evil was uncovered. And now the Edomite women and their neighbors humiliate you. Even the Philistine women humiliate you. Those around you hate you.⁵⁸ This is your punishment for your terrible sins and for actions that I hate, says the Lord.

God Keeps His Promises

⁵⁹“This is what the Lord God says: I will do to you what you have done. You hated and broke the agreement you promised to keep.⁶⁰ But I will remember my agreement I made with you when you were young, and I will make an agreement that will continue forever with you.⁶¹ Then you will remember what you have done and feel ashamed when you receive your sisters—both your older and your younger sisters. I will give them to you like daughters, but not because they share in my agreement with you.⁶² I will set up my agreement with you, and you will know that I am the Lord.⁶³ You will remember what you did and feel ashamed. You will not open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you for all the things you have done, says the Lord God.”

The Eagle and the Vine

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, give a riddle and tell a story to the people of Israel. ³Say, ‘This is what the Lord God says: A giant eagle with big wings and long feathers of many different colors came to Lebanon and took hold of the top of a cedar tree. ⁴He pulled off the top branch and brought it to a land of traders, where he planted it in a city of traders.

⁵“The eagle took some seed from the land and planted it in a good field near plenty of water. He planted it to grow like a willow tree. ⁶It sprouted and became a low vine that spread over the ground. The branches turned toward the eagle, but the roots were under the eagle. So the seed became a vine, and its branches grew, sending out leaves.

⁷“But there was another giant eagle with big wings and many feathers. The vine then bent its roots toward this eagle. It sent out its branches from the area where it was planted toward the eagle so he could water it. ⁸It had been planted in a good field by plenty of water so it could grow branches and give fruit. It could have become a fine vine.’

⁹“Say to them, ‘This is what the Lord God says: The vine will not continue to grow. The first eagle will pull up the vine’s roots and strip off its fruit. Then the vine and all its new leaves will dry up and die. It will not take a strong arm or many people to pull the vine up by its roots. ¹⁰Even if it is planted again, it will not continue to grow. It will completely dry up and die when the east wind hits it in the area where it grew.’”

Zedekiah Against Nebuchadnezzar

¹¹Then the Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ¹²“Say now to the people who refuse to obey: ‘Do you know what these things mean?’ Say: ‘The king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and took the king and important men of Jerusalem and brought them to Babylon. ¹³Then he took a member of the family of the king of Judah and made an agreement with him, forcing him to take an oath. The king also took away the leaders of Judah ¹⁴to make the kingdom weak so it would not be strong again. Then the kingdom of Judah could continue only by keeping its agreement with the king of Babylon. ¹⁵But the king of Judah turned against the king of Babylon by sending his messengers to Egypt and asking them for horses and many soldiers. Will the king of Judah succeed? Will the one who does such things escape? He cannot break the agreement and escape.

¹⁶“As surely as I live, says the Lord God, he will die in Babylon, in the land of the king who made him king of Judah. The king of Judah hated his promise to the king of Babylon and broke his agreement with him. ¹⁷The king of Egypt with his mighty army and many people will not help the king of Judah in the war. The Babylonians will build devices to attack the cities and to kill many people. ¹⁸The king of Judah showed that he hated the promise by breaking the agreement. He promised to support Babylon, but he did all these things. So he will not escape.

¹⁹“So this is what the Lord God says: As surely as I live, this is true: I will pay back the king of Judah for hating my promise and breaking my agreement. ²⁰I will spread my net over him, and he will be caught in my trap. Then I will bring him to

Babylon, where I will punish him for the unfaithful acts he did against me. ²¹All the best of his soldiers who escape will die by the sword, and those who live will be scattered to every wind. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken.

²²“This is what the Lord God says: I myself will also take a young branch from the top of a cedar tree, and I will plant it. I will cut off a small twig from the top of the tree’s young branches, and I will plant it on a very high mountain. ²³I will plant it on the high mountain of Israel. Then it will grow branches and give fruit and become a great cedar tree. Birds of every kind will build nests in it and live in the shelter of the tree’s branches. ²⁴Then all the trees in the countryside will know that I am the Lord. I bring down the high tree and make the low tree tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree grow. I am the Lord. I have spoken, and I will do it.”

God Is Fair

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“What do you mean by using this saying about the land of Israel:

‘The parents have eaten sour grapes,
and that caused the children to grind their teeth from
the sour taste’?”

³“As surely as I live, says the Lord God, this is true: You will not use this saying in Israel anymore. ⁴Every living thing belongs to me. The life of the parent is mine, and the life of the child is mine. The person who sins is the one who will die.

⁵“Suppose a person is good and does what is fair and right. ⁶He does not eat at the mountain places of worship. He does not look to the idols of Israel for help. He does not have sexual relations with his neighbor’s wife or with a woman during her time of monthly bleeding. ⁷He does not mistreat anyone but returns what was given as a promise for a loan. He does not rob other people. He gives bread to the hungry and clothes to those who have none. ⁸He does not lend money to get too much interest or profit. He keeps his hand from doing wrong. He judges fairly between one person and another. ⁹He lives by my rules and obeys my laws faithfully. Whoever does these things is good and will surely live, says the Lord God.

¹⁰“But suppose this person has a wild son who murders people and who does any of these other things. ¹¹(But the father himself has not done any of these things.) This son eats at the mountain places of worship. He has sexual relations with

his neighbor's wife. ¹²He mistreats the poor and needy. He steals and refuses to return what was promised for a loan. He looks to idols for help. He does things which I hate. ¹³He lends money for too much interest and profit. Will this son live? No, he will not live! He has done all these hateful things, so he will surely be put to death. He will be responsible for his own death.

¹⁴“Now suppose this son has a son who has seen all his father's sins, but after seeing them does not do those things. ¹⁵He does not eat at the mountain places of worship. He does not look to the idols of Israel for help. He does not have sexual relations with his neighbor's wife. ¹⁶He does not mistreat anyone or keep something promised for a loan or steal. He gives bread to the hungry and clothes to those who have none. ¹⁷He keeps his hand from doing wrong. He does not take too much interest or profit when he lends money. He obeys my laws and lives by my rules. He will not die for his father's sin; he will surely live. ¹⁸But his father took other people's money unfairly and robbed his brother and did what was wrong among his people. So he will die for his own sin.

¹⁹“But you ask, ‘Why is the son not punished for the father's sin?’ The son has done what is fair and right. He obeys all my rules, so he will surely live. ²⁰The person who sins is the one who will die. A child will not be punished for a parent's sin, and a parent will not be punished for a child's sin. Those who do right will enjoy the results of their own goodness; evil people will suffer the results of their own evil.

²¹“But suppose the wicked stop doing all the sins they have done and obey all my rules and do what is fair and right. Then they will surely live; they will not die. ²²Their sins will be

forgotten. Because they have done what is right, they will live. ²³I do not really want the wicked to die, says the Lord God. I want them to stop their bad ways and live.

²⁴“But suppose good people stop doing good and do wrong and do the same hateful things the wicked do. Will they live? All their good acts will be forgotten, because they became unfaithful. They have sinned, so they will die because of their sins.

²⁵“But you say, ‘What the Lord does isn’t fair.’ Listen, people of Israel. I am fair. It is what you do that is not fair! ²⁶When good people stop doing good and do wrong, they will die because of it. They will die, because they did wrong. ²⁷When the wicked stop being wicked and do what is fair and right, they will save their lives. ²⁸Because they thought about it and stopped doing all the sins they had done, they will surely live; they will not die. ²⁹But the people of Israel still say, ‘What the Lord does isn’t fair.’ People of Israel, I am fair. It is what you do that is not fair.

³⁰“So I will judge you, people of Israel; I will judge each of you by what you do, says the Lord God. Change your hearts and stop all your sinning so sin will not bring your ruin. ³¹Get rid of all the sins you have done, and get for yourselves a new heart and a new way of thinking. Why do you want to die, people of Israel? ³²I do not want anyone to die, says the Lord God, so change your hearts and lives so you may live.

A Sad Song for Israel

“Sing a funeral song for the leaders of Israel. ²Say:

‘Your mother was like a female lion.
She lay down among the young lions.
She had many cubs.

³When she brought up one of her cubs,
he became a strong lion.
He learned to tear the animals he hunted,
and he ate people.

⁴The nations heard about him.
He was trapped in their pit,
and they brought him with hooks
to the land of Egypt.

⁵“The mother lion waited and saw
that there was no hope for her cub.
So she took another one of her cubs
and made him a strong lion.

⁶This cub roamed among the lions.
He was now a strong lion.
He learned to tear the animals he hunted,
and he ate people.

⁷He tore down their strong places
and destroyed their cities.
The land and everything in it

were terrified by the sound of his roar.

⁸Then the nations came against him
from areas all around,
and they spread their net over him.
He was trapped in their pit.

⁹Then they put him into a cage with chains
and brought him to the king of Babylon.
They put him into prison
so his roar could not be heard again
on the mountains of Israel.

¹⁰“Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard,
planted beside the water.
The vine had many branches and gave much fruit,
because there was plenty of water.

¹¹The vine had strong branches,
good enough for a king’s scepter.
The vine became tall
among the thick branches.
And it was seen, because it was tall
with many branches.

¹²But it was pulled up by its roots in anger
and thrown down to the ground.
The east wind dried it up.
Its fruit was torn off.
Its strong branches were broken off
and burned up.

¹³Now the vine is planted in the desert,

in a dry and thirsty land.

¹⁴Fire spread from the vine's main branch,
destroying its fruit.

There is not a strong branch left on it
that could become a scepter for a king.'

This is a funeral song; it is to be used as a funeral song.”

Israel Has Refused God

It was the seventh year of our captivity, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month. Some of the older leaders of Israel came to ask about the Lord and sat down in front of me.

²The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ³“Human, speak to the older leaders of Israel and say to them: ‘This is what the Lord God says: Did you come to ask me questions? As surely as I live, I will not let you ask me questions.’”

⁴“Will you judge them? Will you judge them, human? Let them know the hateful things their ancestors did. ⁵Say to them: ‘This is what the Lord God says: When I chose Israel, I made a promise to the descendants of Jacob. I made myself known to them in Egypt, and I promised them, “I am the Lord your God.”’ ⁶At that time I promised them I would bring them out of Egypt into a land I had found for them, a fertile land, the best land in the world. ⁷I said to them, “Each one of you must throw away the hateful idols you have seen and liked. Don’t make yourselves unclean with the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.”

⁸“But they turned against me and refused to listen to me. They did not throw away the hateful idols which they saw and liked; they did not give up the idols of Egypt. Then I decided to pour out my anger against them while they were still in Egypt. ⁹But I acted for the sake of my name so it would not be dishonored in full view of the nations where the Israelites lived. I made myself known to the Israelites with a promise to bring them out of Egypt while the nations were watching. ¹⁰So I took

them out of Egypt and brought them into the desert. ¹¹I gave them my rules and told them about my laws, by which people will live if they obey them. ¹²I also gave them my Sabbaths to be a sign between us so they would know that I am the Lord who made them holy.

¹³“But in the desert Israel turned against me. They did not follow my rules, and they rejected my laws, by which people will live if they obey them. They dishonored my Sabbaths. Then I decided to pour out my anger against them and destroy them in the desert. ¹⁴But I acted for the sake of my name so it would not be dishonored in full view of the nations who watched as I had brought the Israelites out of Egypt. ¹⁵And in the desert I swore to the Israelites that I would not bring them into the land I had given them. It is a fertile land, the best land in the world. ¹⁶This was because they rejected my laws and did not follow my rules. They dishonored my Sabbaths and wanted to worship their idols. ¹⁷But I had pity on them. I did not destroy them or put an end to them in the desert. ¹⁸I said to their children in the desert, “Don’t live by the rules of your parents, or obey their laws. Don’t make yourselves unclean with their idols. ¹⁹I am the Lord your God. Live by my rules, obey my laws, and follow them. ²⁰Keep my Sabbaths holy, and they will be a sign between me and you. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.”

²¹“But the children turned against me. They did not live by my rules, nor were they careful to obey my laws, by which people will live if they obey them. They dishonored my Sabbaths. So I decided to pour out my anger against them in the desert. ²²But I held back my anger. I acted for the sake of my name so it would not be dishonored in full view of the

nations who watched as I brought the Israelites out.²³ And in the desert I swore to the Israelites that I would scatter them among the nations and spread them among the countries,²⁴ because they had not obeyed my laws. They had rejected my rules and dishonored my Sabbaths and worshiped the idols of their parents.²⁵ I also allowed them to follow rules that were not good and laws by which they could not live.²⁶ I let the Israelites make themselves unclean by the gifts they brought to their gods when they sacrificed their first children in the fire. I wanted to terrify them so they would know that I am the Lord.’

²⁷“So, human, speak to the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘This is what the Lord God says: Your ancestors spoke against me by being unfaithful to me in another way.²⁸ When I had brought them into the land I promised to give them, they saw every high hill and every leafy tree. There they offered their sacrifices to gods. They brought offerings that made me angry and burned their incense and poured out their drink offerings.²⁹ Then I said to them: What is this high place where you go to worship?’” (It is still called High Place today.)³⁰ “So say to the people of Israel: ‘This is what the Lord God says: Are you going to make yourselves unclean as your ancestors did? Are you going to be unfaithful and desire their hateful idols?³¹ When you offer your children as gifts and sacrifice them in the fire, you are making yourselves unclean with all your idols even today. So, people of Israel, should I let you ask me questions? As surely as I live, says the Lord God, I will not accept questions from you.

³²“What you want will not come true. You say, ‘We want to be like the other nations, like the people in other lands. We want to worship idols made of wood and stone.’”³³ As surely as

I live, says the Lord God, I will use my great power and strength and anger to rule over you. ³⁴I will bring you out from the foreign nations. With my great power and strength and anger I will gather you from the lands where you are scattered. ³⁵I will bring you among the nations as I brought your ancestors into the desert with Moses. There I will judge you face to face. ³⁶I will judge you the same way I judged your ancestors in the desert of the land of Egypt, says the Lord God. ³⁷I will count you like sheep and will bring you into line with my agreement. ³⁸I will get rid of those who refuse to obey me and who turn against me. I will bring them out of the land where they are now living, but they will never enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

³⁹“This is what the Lord God says: People of Israel, go serve your idols for now. But later you will listen to me; you will not continue to dishonor my holy name with your gifts and gods. ⁴⁰On my holy mountain, the high mountain of Israel, all Israel will serve me in the land, says the Lord God. There I will accept you. There I will expect your offerings, the first harvest of your offerings, and all your holy gifts. ⁴¹I will accept you like the pleasing smell of sacrifices when I bring you out from the foreign nations and gather you from the lands where you are scattered. Then through you I will show how holy I am so the nations will see. ⁴²When I bring you into the land of Israel, the land I promised your ancestors, you will know that I am the Lord. ⁴³There you will remember everything you did that made you unclean, and then you will hate yourselves for all the evil things you have done. ⁴⁴I will deal with you for the sake of my name, not because of your evil ways or unclean actions. Then you will know I am the Lord, people of Israel, says the Lord

God.”

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 20:45–24:27

Situation

God told Ezekiel of Jerusalem’s impending judgment. He compared Jerusalem to a woman who has prostituted herself for pleasure and money. As punishment, Jerusalem would suffer greatly from foreign invaders. Despite the punishment brought upon Jerusalem, some righteous Israelites would survive and honor God.

Observation

God planned severe judgment for the Israelites because of their godless and immoral lifestyles. This was their last chance to repent.

Inspiration

People with marital problems have told me they have found it more difficult to forget than to forgive. With the best will in the world, they have tried to forgive and forget, but it has not always been possible. “Time is a great healer,” as they say, and gradually the wounds heal in most cases. And it takes a considerable amount of concentration on the past for a person with a failing memory to remember all the things he is supposed to forget. They just tend to drip away in the end, or become so confused with other things that there is more fantasy than reality left.

Now, think of something else. God doesn’t have a

failing memory. He doesn't overlook sin and He is eternal, so that what we call the past is the present to Him, and what hasn't happened yet is in the now with Him. If this is confusing, it is also sobering, because it means the considerable mind of God is fully aware of all that has gone by in our lives. And all that has gone past includes an awful lot of sin—"a multitude of sins."

This is serious beyond description because people are responsible beings who must stand before God and give an answer for their sins. No evasion, no postponement, no tricky defense lawyer. Just man and God and a multitude of sins. But one thing we need to remember: God can "put away sin," "hide it in the depths of the sea," "remove it as far as the east is from the west," and "remember it no more." All because Christ's sacrifice for sin is applicable to all who come to Him in repentance and faith. (From *Getting into God* by Stuart Briscoe)

Application

If secret sins mar your relationship with God, deal with them immediately. Confess your sin, get it out of your life, seek help, and ask God to free your spirit from guilt.

Exploration

Judgment—[Deuteronomy 7:2](#); [1 Samuel 2:25](#); [Isaiah 1:2-4](#); [Matthew 3:10](#); [Romans 2:12-15](#).

Babylon, the Lord's Sword

⁴⁵Now the Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ⁴⁶“Human, look toward the south. Prophecy against the south and against the forest of the southern area. ⁴⁷Say to that forest: ‘Hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord God says: I am ready to start a fire in you that will destroy all your green trees and all your dry trees. The flames that burn will not be put out. Every face from south to north will feel their heat. ⁴⁸Then all the people will see that I, the Lord, have started the fire. It will not be put out.’”

⁴⁹Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! The people are saying about me, ‘He is only telling stories.’”

Then the Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, look toward Jerusalem and speak against the holy place. Prophecy against the land of Israel. ³Say to Israel: ‘This is what the Lord says: I am against you. I will pull my sword out of its holder, and I will cut off from you both the wicked and those who do right. ⁴Because I am going to cut off the wicked and those who do right, my sword will come out from its holder and attack all people from south to north. ⁵Then all people will know that I, the Lord, have pulled my sword out from its holder. My sword will not go back in again.’

⁶“So, human, groan with breaking heart and great sadness. Groan in front of the people. ⁷When they ask you, ‘Why are you groaning?’ you will say, ‘Because of what I have heard is going to happen. When it happens, every heart will melt with fear, and all hands will become weak. Everyone will be afraid; all knees will become weak as water. Look, it is coming, and it will happen, says the Lord God.’”

⁸The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ⁹“Human, prophesy and say, ‘This is what the Lord says:

A sword, a sword,
made sharp and polished.

¹⁰It is made sharp for the killing.
It is polished to flash like lightning.

“You are not happy about this horrible punishment by the sword. But my son Judah, you did not change when you were only beaten with a rod.

¹¹The sword should be polished.

It is meant to be held in the hand.
It is made sharp and polished,
ready for the hand of a killer.

¹²Shout and yell, human,
because the sword is meant for my people,
for all the rulers of Israel.
They will be killed by the sword,
along with my people.
So beat your chest in sadness.

¹³“The test will come. And Judah, who is hated by the
armies of Babylon, will not last, says the Lord God.’

¹⁴“So, human, prophesy
and clap your hands.
Let the sword strike
two or three times.
It is a sword meant for killing,
a sword meant for much killing.

This sword surrounds the people to be killed.

¹⁵Their hearts will melt with fear,
and many people will die.
I have placed the killing sword
at all their city gates.
Oh! The sword is made to flash like lightning.
It is held, ready for killing.

¹⁶Sword, cut on the right side;
then cut on the left side.

Cut anywhere your blade is turned.

¹⁷I will also clap my hands
and use up my anger.
I, the Lord, have spoken.”

Jerusalem to Be Destroyed

¹⁸The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ¹⁹“Human, mark two roads that the king of Babylon and his sword can follow. Both of these roads will start from the same country. And make signs where the road divides and one way goes toward the city. ²⁰Mark one sign to show the road he can take with his sword to Rabbah in the land of the Ammonites. Mark the other sign to show the road to Judah and Jerusalem, which is protected with strong walls. ²¹The king of Babylon has come to where the road divides, and he is using magic. He throws lots with arrows and asks questions of his family idols. He looks at the liver of a sacrificed animal to learn where he should go. ²²The lot in his right hand tells him to go to Jerusalem. It tells him to use logs to break down the city gates, to shout the battle cry and give the order to kill, and to build a dirt road to the top of the walls and devices to attack the walls. ²³The people of Jerusalem have made agreements with other nations to help them fight Babylon. So they will think this prediction is wrong, but it is really proof of their sin, and they will be captured.

²⁴“So this is what the Lord God says: ‘You have shown how sinful you are by turning against the Lord. Your sins are

seen in all the things you do. Because of this proof against you, you will be taken captive by the enemy.

²⁵“You unclean and evil leader of Israel, you will be killed! The time of your final punishment has come. ²⁶This is what the Lord God says: Take off the royal turban, and remove the crown. Things will change. Those who are important now will be made unimportant, and those who are unimportant now will be made important. ²⁷A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! This place will not be rebuilt until the one comes who has a right to be king. Then I will give him that right.’

The Punishment of Ammon

²⁸“And you, human, prophesy and say: ‘This is what the Lord God says about the people of Ammon and their insults:

A sword, a sword
is pulled out of its holder.
It is polished to kill and destroy,
to flash like lightning!

²⁹Prophets see false visions about you
and prophesy lies about you.
The sword will be put on the necks
of these unclean and evil people.
Their day of judging has come;
the time of final punishment has come.

³⁰Put the sword back in its holder.
I will judge you
in the place where you were created,

in the land where you were born.

³¹I will pour out my anger against you
and blast you with the fire of my anger.
I will hand you over to cruel men,
experts in destruction.

³²You will be like fuel for the fire;
you will die in the land.
You will not be remembered,
because I, the Lord, have spoken.”

The Sins of Jerusalem

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“And you, human, will you judge? Will you judge the city of murderers? Then tell her about all her hateful acts. ³You are to say: ‘This is what the Lord God says: You are a city that kills those who come to live there. You make yourself unclean by making idols. ⁴You have become guilty of murder and have become unclean by your idols which you have made. So you have brought your time of punishment near; you have come to the end of your years. That is why I have made you a shame to the nations and why all lands laugh at you. ⁵Those near and those far away laugh at you with your bad name, you city full of confusion.

⁶“Jerusalem, see how each ruler of Israel in you has been trying to kill people. ⁷The people in you hate their fathers and mothers. They mistreat the foreigners in you and wrong the orphans and widows in you. ⁸You hate my holy things and dishonor my Sabbaths. ⁹The men in you tell lies to cause the death of others. The people in you eat food offered to idols at the mountain places of worship, and they take part in sexual sins. ¹⁰The men in you have sexual relations with their fathers’ wives and with women who are unclean, during their time of monthly bleeding. ¹¹One man in you does a hateful act with his neighbor’s wife, while another has shamefully made his daughter-in-law unclean sexually. And another forces his half sister to have sexual relations with him. ¹²The people in you take money to kill others. You take unfair interest and profits and make profits by mistreating your neighbor. And you have

forgotten me, says the Lord God.

¹³“So, Jerusalem, I will shake my fist at you for stealing money and for murdering people. ¹⁴Will you still be brave and strong when I punish you? I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will act. ¹⁵I will scatter you among the nations and spread you through the countries. That is how I will get rid of your uncleanness. ¹⁶But you, yourself, will be dishonored in the sight of the nations. Then you will know that I am the Lord.”

Israel Is Worthless

¹⁷The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ¹⁸“Human, the people of Israel have become useless like scum to me. They are like the copper, tin, iron, and lead left in the furnace when silver is purified. ¹⁹So this is what the Lord God says: ‘Because you have become useless like scum, I am going to put you together inside Jerusalem. ²⁰People put silver, copper, iron, lead, and tin together inside a furnace to melt them down in a blazing fire. In the same way I will gather you in my hot anger and put you together in Jerusalem and melt you down. ²¹I will put you together and make you feel the heat of my anger. You will be melted down inside Jerusalem. ²²As silver is melted in a furnace, you will be melted inside the city. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have poured out my anger on you.’”

Sins of the People

²³The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²⁴“Human, say to the land, ‘You are a land that has not had rain or showers when

God is angry.’²⁵ Like a roaring lion that tears the animal it has caught, Israel’s rulers make evil plans. They have destroyed lives and have taken treasure and valuable things. They have caused many women to become widows.²⁶ Israel’s priests do cruel things to my teachings and do not honor my holy things. They make no difference between holy and unholy things, and they teach there is no difference between clean and unclean things. They do not remember my Sabbaths, so I am dishonored by them.²⁷ Like wolves tearing a dead animal, Jerusalem’s leaders have killed people for profit.²⁸ And the prophets try to cover this up by false visions and by lying messages. They say, ‘This is what the Lord God says’ when the Lord has not spoken.²⁹ The people cheat others and steal. They hurt people who are poor and needy. They cheat foreigners and do not treat them fairly.

³⁰“I looked for someone to build up the walls and to stand before me where the walls are broken to defend these people so I would not have to destroy them. But I could not find anyone.³¹ So I let them see my anger. I destroyed them with an anger that was like fire because of all the things they have done, says the Lord God.”

Samaria and Jerusalem

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, a woman had two daughters. ³While they were young, they went to Egypt and became prostitutes. They let men touch and hold their breasts. ⁴The older girl was named Oholah, and her sister was named Oholibah. They became my wives and had sons and daughters. [Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem.](#)

⁵“While still my wife, Samaria had sexual relations with other men. She had great sexual desire for her lovers, men from Assyria. The Assyrians were warriors and ⁶wore blue uniforms. They were all handsome young captains and lieutenants riding on horseback. ⁷Samaria became a prostitute for all the important men in Assyria and made herself unclean with all the idols of everyone she desired. ⁸She continued the prostitution she began in Egypt. When she was young, she had slept with men, and they touched her breasts and had sexual relations with her.

⁹“So I handed her over to her lovers, the Assyrians, that she wanted so badly. ¹⁰They stripped her naked and took away her sons and daughters. Then they killed her with a sword. Women everywhere began talking about how she had been punished.

¹¹“Her sister Jerusalem saw what happened, but she became worse than her sister in her sexual desire and prostitution. ¹²She also desired the Assyrians, who were all soldiers in beautiful uniforms—handsome young captains and lieutenants riding horses. ¹³I saw that both girls were alike; both were prostitutes.

¹⁴“But Jerusalem went even further. She saw carvings of Babylonian men on a wall. They wore red ¹⁵and had belts around their waists and turbans on their heads. They all looked like chariot officers born in Babylonia. ¹⁶When she saw them, she wanted to have sexual relations with them and sent messengers to them in Babylonia. ¹⁷So these Babylonian men came and had sexual relations with her and made her unclean. After that, she became sick of them. ¹⁸But she continued her prostitution so openly that everyone knew about it. And I finally became sick of her, as I had her sister. ¹⁹But she remembered how she was a young prostitute in Egypt, so she took part in even more prostitution. ²⁰She wanted men who behaved like animals in their sexual desire. ²¹In the same way you desired to do the sinful things you had done in Egypt. There men touched and held your young breasts.

God's Judgment on Jerusalem

²²“So, Jerusalem, this is what the Lord God says: You are tired of your lovers. So now I will make them angry with you and have them attack you from all sides. ²³Men from Babylon and all Babylonia and men from Pekod, Shoa, and Koa will attack you. All the Assyrians will attack you: handsome young captains and lieutenants, all of them important men and all riding horses. ²⁴Those men will attack with great armies and with their weapons, chariots, and wagons. They will surround you with large and small shields and with helmets. And I will give them the right to punish you, and they will give you their own kind of punishment. ²⁵Then you will see how strong my anger can be when they punish you in their anger. They will

cut off your noses and ears. They will take away your sons and daughters, and those who are left will be burned.²⁶ They will take off your clothes and steal your jewelry.²⁷ I will put a stop to the sinful life you began when you were in Egypt so that you will not desire it or remember Egypt anymore.

²⁸“This is what the Lord God says: You became tired of your lovers, but I am going to hand you over to those men you now hate.²⁹ They will treat you with hate and take away everything you worked for, leaving you empty and naked. Everyone will know about the sinful things you did. Your sexual sins³⁰ have brought this on you. You have had sexual relations with the nations and made yourselves unclean by worshiping their idols.³¹ You did the same things your sister did, so you will get the same punishment, like a bitter cup to drink.

³²“This is what the Lord God says:

You will drink the same cup your sister did,
and that cup is deep and wide.
Everyone will make fun of you,
because the cup is full.

³³It will make you miserable and drunk.
It is the cup of fear and ruin.
It is the cup of your sister Samaria.

³⁴You will drink everything in it,
and then you will smash it
and tear at your breasts.

I have spoken, says the Lord God.

³⁵“So this is what the Lord God says: You have forgotten me and turned your back on me. So you will be punished for your sexual sins.”

Judgment on Samaria and Jerusalem

³⁶The Lord said to me: “Human, will you judge Samaria and Jerusalem, showing them their hateful acts? ³⁷They are guilty of adultery and murder. They have taken part in adultery with their idols. They even offered our children as sacrifices in the fire to be food for these idols. ³⁸They have also done this to me: They made my Temple unclean at the same time they dishonored my Sabbaths. ³⁹They sacrificed their children to their idols. Then they entered my Temple at that very time to dishonor it. That is what they did inside my Temple!

⁴⁰“They even sent for men from far away, who came after a messenger was sent to them. The two sisters bathed themselves for them, painted their eyes, and put on jewelry. ⁴¹They sat on a fine bed with a table set before it, on which they put my incense and my oil.

⁴²“There was the noise of a reckless crowd in the city. Common people gathered, and drunkards were brought from the desert. They put bracelets on the wrists of the two sisters and beautiful crowns on their heads. ⁴³Then I said about the one who was worn out by her acts of adultery, ‘Let them continue their sexual sins with her. She is nothing but a prostitute.’ ⁴⁴They kept going to her as they would go to a prostitute. So they continued to go to Samaria and Jerusalem, these shameful women. ⁴⁵But men who do right will punish them as they punish women who take part in adultery and who

murder people, because they are guilty of adultery and murder.

⁴⁶“This is what the Lord God says: Bring together a mob against Samaria and Jerusalem, and hand them over to be frightened and robbed. ⁴⁷Let the mob kill them by throwing stones at them, and let them cut them down with their swords. Let them kill their sons and daughters and burn their houses down.

⁴⁸“So I will put an end to sexual sins in the land. Then all women will be warned, and they will not do the sexual sins you have done. ⁴⁹You will be punished for your sexual sins and the sin of worshiping idols. Then you will know that I am the Lord God.”

The Pot and the Meat

The Lord spoke his word to me in the ninth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month. He said: ²“Human, write down today’s date, this very date. The king of Babylon has surrounded Jerusalem this very day. ³And tell a story to the people who refuse to obey me. Say to them: ‘This is what the Lord God says:

Put on the pot; put it on
and pour water in it.

⁴Put in the pieces of meat,
the best pieces—the legs and the shoulders.
Fill it with the best bones.

⁵Take the best of the flock,
and pile wood under the pot.
Boil the pieces of meat
until even the bones are cooked.

⁶“This is what the Lord God says:
How terrible it will be for the city of murderers!
How terrible it will be for the rusty pot
whose rust will not come off!
Take the meat out of it, piece by piece.
Don’t choose any special piece.

⁷“The blood from her killings is still in the city.
She poured the blood on the bare rock.

She did not pour it on the ground
where dust would cover it.

⁸To stir up my anger and revenge,
I put the blood she spilled on the bare rock
so it will not be covered.

⁹“So this is what the Lord God says:
How terrible it will be for the city of murderers!
I myself will pile the wood high for burning.

¹⁰Pile up the wood
and light the fire.
Finish cooking the meat.
Mix in the spices,
and let the bones burn.

¹¹Then set the empty pot on the coals
so it may become hot and its copper sides glow.
The dirty scum stuck inside it may then melt
and its rust burn away.

¹²But efforts to clean the pot have failed.
Its heavy rust cannot be removed,
even in the fire.

¹³“By your sinful action you have become unclean. I
wanted to cleanse you, but you are still unclean. You will never
be cleansed from your sin until my anger against you is carried
out.

¹⁴“I, the Lord, have spoken. The time has come for me to
act. I will not hold back punishment or feel pity or change my

mind. I will judge you by your ways and actions, says the Lord God.””

The Death of Ezekiel's Wife

¹⁵Then the Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ¹⁶“Human, I am going to take your wife from you, the woman you look at with love. She will die suddenly, but you must not be sad or cry loudly for her or shed any tears. ¹⁷Groan silently; do not cry loudly for the dead. Tie on your turban, and put your sandals on your feet. Do not cover your face, and do not eat the food people eat when they are sad about a death.”

¹⁸So I spoke to the people in the morning, and my wife died in the evening. The next morning I did as I had been commanded.

¹⁹Then the people asked me, “Tell us, what do the things you are doing mean for us?”

²⁰Then I said to them, “The Lord spoke his word to me. He said, ²¹‘Say to the people of Israel, This is what the Lord God says: I am going to dishonor my Temple. You think it gives you strength. You are proud of it, and you look at it with love and tenderness. But your sons and daughters that you left behind in Jerusalem will fall dead by the sword. ²²When that happens, you are to act as I have: you are not to cover your face, and you are not to eat the food people eat when they are sad about a death. ²³Your turbans must stay on your heads, and your sandals on your feet. You must not cry loudly, but you must rot away in your sins and groan to each other. ²⁴So Ezekiel is to be an example for you. You must do all the same things he did. When all this happens, you will know that I am the Lord God.’

²⁵“And as for you, human, this is how it will be. I will take away the Temple that gives them strength and joy, that makes them proud. They look at it with love, and it makes them happy. And I will take away their sons and daughters also. ²⁶At that time a person who escapes will come to you with information for you to hear. ²⁷At that very time your mouth will be opened. You will speak and be silent no more. So you will be a sign for them, and they will know that I am the Lord.”

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 25:1–32:32

Situation

The prophets knew that God reigned over all the world. When these seven nations failed to acknowledge God as their king, they were punished.

Observation

We are never beyond the reach of God's judgment. God condemns pride and arrogance wherever it appears.

Inspiration

There are two kinds of pride. One is the opposite of humility; it is very bad. The other is the opposite of shame; it is very good.

The kind of pride that is the opposite of humility leaves God and other circumstances out of our successes. It claims that whatever we have achieved, we have achieved by our own virtue.

The essence of this kind of pride is self-centeredness and selfishness and it is condemned by Scripture. This does not mean, however, that the Bible is opposed to the self. The self is one of God's good creations; selfishness is worshiping the creation rather than the creator.

Bad pride is the kind of selfishness that always wants to be center stage, that takes all the credit, that leaves God out, that gives no thanks to other people, that goes it alone. It is the opposite of what God desires for us....

By contrast, the kind of pride that is the opposite of shame has to do with a job well done, with excellence, with striving for the best, with rising above mediocrity. In a Christian, this kind of pride attempts to give of its best to the Master.

People who misunderstand the difference between the two kinds of pride may have a misimpression of the Christian faith. Christianity is not opposed to excellence. It is not opposed to putting forth your best effort, excelling, and achieving. No, it is only opposed to a person's thinking he can excel without God's help.

Selfish pride is the opposite of thankfulness and gratitude. It shows no gratitude to God for a healthy body, a healthy mind, good parents, a good national heritage, a good diet, and a thousand other blessings over which the person has no control. A person filled with selfish pride thinks he has created himself through his own efforts...

The other kind of pride, the kind that is opposite to shame, doesn't crawl out between the mattress and springs and say, "I'm a worm; step on me." It doesn't finish playing a solo and say, "It was nothing." It is not unable to accept a compliment.

The pride that is opposite to shame can say thank you and give credit where credit is due. It can thank God for his gifts and, at the same time, acknowledge good work when it is done. The person who can accept a compliment is not arrogant. He knows where his dexterous fingers come from, who gave him his mind and his sense of rhythm...

When Michelangelo walked away from the Sistine Chapel, he knew he had done a beautiful work, and he was proud of it. Yet when a person looks at the ceiling of that chapel, he is always drawn toward God. He is inspired to worship God, not Michelangelo. The art is great, but because it is aimed at glorifying the heavenly Father, the observer is moved to worship. (From “Two Kinds of Pride” by Jay Kesler in *Practical Christianity*)

Application

Have you been successful? Do people praise your achievements? Give credit to God in thankful prayer for each gift he has given you.

Exploration

Pride—[Mark 9:34](#); [Luke 18:11–14](#); [1 Peter 5:5–6](#).

Prophecy Against Ammon

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, look toward the people of Ammon and prophesy against them. ³Say to them, ‘Hear the word of the Lord God. This is what the Lord God says: You were glad when my Temple was dishonored, when the land of Israel was ruined, and when the people of Judah were taken away as captives. ⁴So I am going to give you to the people of the East to be theirs. They will set up their camps among you and make their homes among you. They will eat your fruit and drink your milk. ⁵I will make the city of Rabbah a pasture for camels and the land of Ammon a resting place for sheep. Then you will know that I am the Lord. ⁶This is what the Lord God says: You have clapped your hands and stamped your feet; you have laughed about all the insults you made against the land of Israel. ⁷So I will use my power against you. I will give you to the nations as if you were treasures taken in war. I will wipe you out of the lands so you will no longer be a nation, and I will destroy you. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’

Prophecy Against Moab and Edom

⁸“This is what the Lord God says: ‘Moab and Edom say, “The people of Judah are like all the other nations.”’ ⁹So I am going to

take away the cities that protect Moab's borders, the best cities in that land: Beth Jeshimoth, Baal Meon, and Kiriathaim. ¹⁰Then I will give Moab, along with the Ammonites, to the people of the East as their possession. Then, along with the Ammonites, Moab will not be a nation anymore. ¹¹So I will punish the people of Moab, and they will know that I am the Lord.'

Prophecy Against Edom

¹²"This is what the Lord God says: 'Edom took revenge on the people of Judah, and the Edomites became guilty because of it. ¹³So this is what the Lord God says: I will use my power against Edom, killing every human and animal in it. And I will destroy Edom all the way from Teman to Dedan as they die in battle. ¹⁴I will use my people Israel to take revenge on Edom. So the Israelites will do to Edom what my hot anger demands. Then the Edomites will know what my revenge feels like, says the Lord God.'

Prophecy Against Philistia

¹⁵"This is what the Lord God says: 'The Philistines have taken revenge with hateful hearts. Because of their strong hatred, they have tried to destroy Judah. ¹⁶So this is what the Lord God says: I will use my power against the Philistines. I will kill the Kerethites, and I will destroy those people still alive on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. ¹⁷I will punish them in my anger and do great acts of revenge to them. They will know that I am the Lord when I take revenge on them.'"

Prophecy Against Tyre

It was the eleventh year of our captivity, on the first day of the month. The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, the city of Tyre has spoken against Jerusalem: ‘The city that traded with the nations is destroyed. Now we can be the trading center. Since the city of Jerusalem is ruined, we can make money.’ ³So this is what the Lord God says: I am against you, Tyre. I will bring many nations against you, like the sea beating its waves on your island shores. ⁴They will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her towers. I will also scrape away her ruins and make her a bare rock. ⁵Tyre will be an island where fishermen dry their nets. I have spoken, says the Lord God. The nations will steal treasures from Tyre. ⁶Also, her villages on the shore across from the island will be destroyed by war. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

Nebuchadnezzar to Attack Tyre

⁷“This is what the Lord God says: I will bring a king from the north against Tyre. He is Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the greatest king, with his horses, chariots, horsemen, and a great army. ⁸He will fight a battle and destroy your villages on the shore across from the island. He will set up devices to attack you. He will build a road of earth to the top of the walls. He will raise his shields against you. ⁹He will bring logs to pound through your city walls, and he will break down your towers with his iron bars. ¹⁰His horses will be so many that they will

cover you with their dust. Your walls will shake at the noise of horsemen, wagons, and chariots. The king of Babylon will enter your city gates as men enter a city where the walls are broken through. ¹¹The hoofs of his horses will run over your streets. He will kill your army with the sword, and your strong pillars will fall down to the ground. ¹²Also, his men will take away your riches and will steal the things you sell. They will break down your walls and destroy your nice houses. They will throw your stones, wood, and trash into the sea. ¹³So I will stop your songs; the music of your harps will not be heard anymore. ¹⁴I will make you a bare rock, and you will be a place for drying fishing nets. You will not be built again, because I, the Lord, have spoken, says the Lord God.

¹⁵“This is what the Lord God says to Tyre: The people who live along the seacoast will shake with fear when they hear about your defeat. Those of you who are injured and dying will groan. ¹⁶Then all the leaders of the seacoast will get down from their thrones, take off their beautiful needlework clothes, and show how afraid they are. They will sit on the ground and tremble all the time. When they see you, they will be shocked. ¹⁷They will begin singing a funeral song about you and will say to you:

‘Tyre, you famous city, you have been destroyed!
You have lost your sea power!
You and your people
had great power on the seas.
You made everyone around you
afraid of you.

¹⁸Now the people who live by the coast tremble,

now that you have fallen.
The islands of the sea
are afraid because you have been defeated.’

¹⁹“This is what the Lord God says: I will make you an empty city, like cities that have no people living in them. I will bring the deep ocean waters over you, and the Mediterranean Sea will cover you. ²⁰At that time I will send you down to the place of the dead to join those who died long ago. I will make you live with the dead below the earth in places that are like old ruins. You will not come back from there or have any place in the world of the living again. ²¹Other people will be afraid of what happened to you, and it will be the end of you. People will look for you, but they will never find you again, says the Lord God.”

A Funeral Song for Tyre

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, sing a funeral song for the city of Tyre. ³Speak to Tyre, which has ports for the Mediterranean Sea and is a place for trade for the people of many lands along the seacoast. ‘This is what the Lord God says:

Tyre, you have said,
“I am like a beautiful ship.”

⁴You were at home on the high seas.
Your builders made your beauty perfect.

⁵They made all your boards
of fir trees from Mount Hermon.
They took a cedar tree from Lebanon
to make a ship’s mast for you.

⁶They made your oars
from oak trees from Bashan.
They made your deck
from cypress trees from the coast of Cyprus
and set ivory into it.

⁷Your sail of linen with designs sewed on it came from
Egypt
and became like a flag for you.
Your cloth shades over the deck were blue and purple
and came from the island of Cyprus.

⁸Men from Sidon and Arvad used oars to row you.
Tyre, your skilled men were the sailors on your deck.

⁹Workers of Byblos were with you,
putting caulk in your ship's seams.
All the ships of the sea and their sailors
came alongside to trade with you.

¹⁰“Men of Persia, Lydia, and Put
were warriors in your navy
and hung their shields and helmets on your sides.
They made you look beautiful.

¹¹Men of Arvad and Cilicia
guarded your city walls all around.
Men of Gammad
were in your watchtowers
and hung their shields around your walls.
They made your beauty perfect.

¹²“People of Tarshish became traders for you because of
your great wealth. They traded your goods for silver, iron, tin,
and lead.

¹³“People of Greece, Tubal, and Meshech became
merchants for you. They traded your goods for slaves and
items of bronze.

¹⁴“People of Beth Togarmah traded your goods for work
horses, war horses, and mules.

¹⁵“People of Rhodes became merchants for you, selling
your goods on many coastlands. They brought back ivory
tusks and valuable black wood as your payment.

¹⁶“People of Aram became traders for you, because you

had so many good things to sell. They traded your goods for turquoise, purple cloth, cloth with designs sewed on, fine linen, coral, and rubies.

¹⁷“People of Judah and Israel became merchants for you. They traded your goods for wheat from Minnith, and for honey, olive oil, and balm.

^{18–19}“People of Damascus became traders for you because you have many good things and great wealth. They traded your goods for wine from Helbon, wool from Zahar, and barrels of wine from Izal. They received wrought iron, cassia, and sugar cane in payment for your good things.

²⁰“People of Dedan became merchants for you, trading saddle blankets for riding.

²¹“People of Arabia and all the rulers of Kedar became traders for you. They received lambs, male sheep, and goats in payment for you.

²²“The merchants of Sheba and Raamah became merchants for you. They traded your goods for all the best spices, valuable gems, and gold.

²³“People of Haran, Canneh, Eden, and the traders of Sheba, Asshur, and Kilmad became merchants for you. ²⁴They were paid with the best clothes, blue cloth, cloth with designs sewed on, carpets of many colors, and tightly wound ropes.

²⁵“Trading ships
carried the things you sold.
You were like a ship full of heavy cargo
in the middle of the sea.

²⁶The men who rowed you
brought you out into the high seas,

but the east wind broke you to pieces
in the middle of the sea.

²⁷Your wealth, your trade, your goods,
your seamen, your sailors, your workers,
your traders, your warriors,
and everyone else on board
sank into the sea
on the day your ship was wrecked.

²⁸The people on the shore shake with fear
when your sailors cry out.

²⁹All the men who row
leave their ships;
the seamen and the sailors of other ships
stand on the shore.

³⁰They cry loudly about you;
they cry very much.
They throw dust on their heads
and roll in ashes to show they are sad.

³¹They shave their heads for you,
and they put on rough cloth to show they are upset.
They cry and sob for you;
they cry loudly.

³²And in their loud crying
they sing a funeral song for you:
“No one was ever destroyed like Tyre,
surrounded by the sea.”

³³When the goods you traded went out over the seas,
you met the needs of many nations.
With your great wealth and goods,
you made kings of the earth rich.

³⁴But now you are broken by the sea
and have sunk to the bottom.
Your goods and all the people on board
have gone down with you.

³⁵All those who live along the shore
are shocked by what happened to you.
Their kings are terribly afraid,
and their faces show their fear.

³⁶The traders among the nations hiss at you.
You have come to a terrible end,
and you are gone forever.”

Prophecy Against the King of Tyre

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying:²“Human, say to the ruler of Tyre: ‘This is what the Lord God says:

Because you are proud,
you say, “I am a god.
I sit on the throne of a god
in the middle of the seas.”
You think you are as wise as a god,
but you are a human, not a god.

³You think you are wiser than Daniel.
You think you can find out all secrets.

⁴Through your wisdom and understanding
you have made yourself rich.
You have gained gold and silver
and have saved it in your storerooms.

⁵Through your great skill in trading,
you have made your riches grow.
You are too proud
because of your riches.

⁶“So this is what the Lord God says:

You think you are wise
like a god,

⁷but I will bring foreign people against you

but I will bring foreign people against you,
the cruelest nation.

They will pull out their swords
and destroy all that your wisdom has built,
and they will dishonor your greatness.

⁸They will kill you;
you will die a terrible death
like those who are killed at sea.

⁹While they are killing you,
you will not be able to say anymore, “I am a god.”
You will be only a human, not a god,
when your murderers kill you.

¹⁰You will die like an unclean person;
foreigners will kill you.

I have spoken, says the Lord God.””

¹¹The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ¹²“Human, sing a funeral song for the king of Tyre. Say to him: ‘This is what the Lord God says:

You were an example of what was perfect,
full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

¹³You had a wonderful life,
as if you were in Eden, the garden of God.
Every valuable gem was on you:
ruby, topaz, and emerald,
yellow quartz, onyx, and jasper,
sapphire, turquoise, and chrysolite.

Your jewelry was made of gold.
It was prepared on the day you were created.

¹⁴I appointed a living creature to guard you.
I put you on the holy mountain of God.
You walked among the gems that shined like fire.

¹⁵Your life was right and good
from the day you were created,
until evil was found in you.

¹⁶Because you traded with countries far away,
you learned to be cruel, and you sinned.
So I threw you down in disgrace from the mountain of
God.
And the living creature who guarded you
forced you out from among the gems that shined like
fire.

¹⁷You became too proud
because of your beauty.
You ruined your wisdom
because of your greatness.
I threw you down to the ground.
Your example taught a lesson to other kings.

¹⁸You dishonored your places of worship
through your many sins and dishonest trade.
So I set on fire the place where you lived,
and the fire burned you up.
I turned you into ashes on the ground
for all those watching to see.

¹⁹All the nations who knew you
are shocked about you.
Your punishment was so terrible,
and you are gone forever.”

Prophecy Against Sidon

²⁰The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²¹“Human, look toward the city of Sidon and prophesy against her. ²²Say: ‘This is what the Lord God says:

I am against you, Sidon,
and I will show my glory among you.
People will know that I am the Lord
when I have punished Sidon;
I will show my holiness by defeating her.

²³I will send diseases to Sidon,
and blood will flow in her streets.
Those who are wounded in Sidon will fall dead,
attacked from all sides.
Then they will know that I am the Lord.

God Will Help Israel

²⁴“No more will neighboring nations be like thorny branches or sharp stickers to hurt Israel. Then they will know that I am the Lord God.

²⁵“This is what the Lord God says: I will gather the people

of Israel from the nations where they are scattered. I will show my holiness when the nations see what I do for my people. Then they will live in their own land—the land I gave to my servant Jacob.²⁶ They will live safely in the land and will build houses and plant vineyards. They will live in safety after I have punished all the nations around who hate them. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God.”

Prophecy Against Egypt

It was the tenth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month. The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, look toward the king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and all Egypt. ³Say: ‘This is what the Lord God says:

I am against you, king of Egypt.
You are like a great crocodile that lies in the Nile River.
You say, “The Nile is mine;
I made it for myself.”

⁴But I will put hooks in your jaws,
and I will make the fish of the Nile stick to your sides.
I will pull you up out of your rivers,
with all the fish sticking to your sides.

⁵I will leave you in the desert,
you and all the fish from your rivers.
You will fall onto the ground;
you will not be picked up or buried.
I have given you to the wild animals
and to the birds of the sky for food.

⁶Then all the people who live in Egypt will know that I am the Lord.

“Israel tried to lean on you for help, but you were like a crutch made out of a weak stalk of grass. ⁷When their hands

grabbed you, you splintered and tore open their shoulders. When they leaned on you, you broke and made all their backs twist.

⁸“So this is what the Lord God says: I will cause an enemy to attack you and kill your people and animals. ⁹Egypt will become an empty desert. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

“Because you said, “The Nile River is mine, and I have made it,” ¹⁰I am against you and your rivers. I will destroy the land of Egypt and make it an empty desert from Migdol in the north to Aswan in the south, all the way to the border of Cush.

¹¹No person or animal will walk through it, and no one will live in Egypt for forty years. ¹²I will make the land of Egypt the most deserted country of all. Her cities will be the most deserted of all ruined cities for forty years. I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, spreading them among the countries.

¹³“This is what the Lord God says: After forty years I will gather Egypt from the nations where they have been scattered.

¹⁴I will bring back the Egyptian captives and make them return to southern Egypt, to the land they came from. They will become a weak kingdom there. ¹⁵It will be the weakest kingdom, and it will never again rule other nations. I will make it so weak it will never again rule over the nations. ¹⁶The Israelites will never again depend on Egypt. Instead, Egypt’s punishment will remind the Israelites of their sin in turning to Egypt for help. Then they will know that I am the Lord God.”

Egypt Is Given to Babylon

¹⁷It was the twenty-seventh year of our captivity, in the first

month, on the first day of the month. The Lord spoke his word to me, saying:¹⁸“Human, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army fight hard against Tyre. Every soldier’s head was rubbed bare, and every shoulder was rubbed raw. But Nebuchadnezzar and his army gained nothing from fighting Tyre. ¹⁹So this is what the Lord God says: I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. He will take away Egypt’s people and its wealth and its treasures as pay for his army. ²⁰I am giving Nebuchadnezzar the land of Egypt as a reward for working hard for me, says the Lord God.

²¹“At that time I will make Israel grow strong again, and I will let you, Ezekiel, speak to them. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

Egypt Will Be Punished

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, prophesy and say, ‘This is what the Lord God says:

Cry and say,
“The terrible day is coming.”

³The day is near;
the Lord’s day of judging is near.
It is a cloudy day
and a time when the nations will be judged.

⁴An enemy will attack Egypt,
and Cush will tremble with fear.
When the killing begins in Egypt,
her wealth will be taken away,
and her foundations will be torn down.

⁵Cush, Put, Lydia, Arabia, Libya, and some of my people
who had made an agreement with Egypt will fall dead in war.

⁶“This is what the Lord says:

Those who fight on Egypt’s side will fall.
The power she is proud of will be lost.
The people in Egypt will fall dead in war
from Migdol in the north to Aswan in the south,
says the Lord God.

⁷They will be the most deserted lands.

Egypt's cities will be the worst of cities that lie in ruins.

⁸Then they will know that I am the Lord
when I set fire to Egypt
and when all those nations on her side are crushed.

⁹“At that time I will send messengers in ships to frighten Cush, which now feels safe. The people of Cush will tremble with fear when Egypt is punished. And that time is sure to come.

¹⁰“This is what the Lord God says:

I will destroy great numbers of people in Egypt
through the power of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.

¹¹Nebuchadnezzar and his army,
the cruelest army of any nation,
will be brought in to destroy the land.
They will pull out their swords against Egypt
and will fill the land with those they kill.

¹²I will make the streams of the Nile River become dry land,
and then I will sell the land to evil people.
I will destroy the land and everything in it
through the power of foreigners.
I, the Lord, have spoken.

Egypt's Idols Are Destroyed

¹³“This is what the Lord God says:

I will destroy the idols
and take away the statues of gods from the city of
Memphis.

There will no longer be a leader in Egypt,
and I will spread fear through the land of Egypt.

¹⁴I will make southern Egypt empty
and start a fire in Zoan
and punish Thebes.

¹⁵And I will pour out my anger against Pelusium,
the strong place of Egypt.
I will destroy great numbers of people in Thebes.

¹⁶I will set fire to Egypt.
Pelusium will be in great pain.
The walls of Thebes will be broken open,
and Memphis will have troubles every day.

¹⁷The young men of Heliopolis and Bubastis
will fall dead in war,
and the people will be taken away as captives.

¹⁸In Tahpanhes the day will be dark
when I break Egypt's power.
Then she will no longer be proud of her power.
A cloud will cover Egypt,
and her villages will be captured and taken away.

¹⁹So I will punish Egypt,

and they will know I am the Lord.”

Egypt Becomes Weak

²⁰It was in the eleventh year of our captivity, in the first month, on the seventh day of the month. The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²¹“Human, I have broken the powerful arm of the king of Egypt. It has not been tied up, so it will not get well. It has not been wrapped with a bandage, so it will not be strong enough to hold a sword in war. ²²So this is what the Lord God says: I am against the king of Egypt. I will break his arms, both the strong arm and the broken arm, and I will make the sword fall from his hand. ²³I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, spreading them among the countries. ²⁴I will make the arms of the king of Babylon strong and put my sword in his hand. But I will break the arms of the king of Egypt. Then when he faces the king of Babylon, he will cry out in pain like a dying person. ²⁵So I will make the arms of the king of Babylon strong, but the arms of the king of Egypt will fall. Then people will know that I am the Lord when I put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he uses it in war against Egypt. ²⁶Then I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, spreading them among the countries. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

A Cedar Tree

It was in the eleventh year of our captivity, in the third month, on the first day of the month. The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, say to the king of Egypt and his people:

‘No one is like you in your greatness.

³Assyria was once like a cedar tree in Lebanon with beautiful branches that shaded the forest. It was very tall; its top was among the clouds.

⁴Much water made the tree grow; the deep springs made it tall. Rivers flowed around the bottom of the tree and sent their streams to all other trees in the countryside.

⁵So the tree was taller than all the other trees in the countryside. Its limbs became long and big because of so much water.

⁶All the birds of the sky made their nests in the tree’s limbs. And all the wild animals gave birth under its branches. All great nations

lived in the tree's shade.

⁷So the tree was great and beautiful,
with its long branches,
because its roots reached down to much water.

⁸The cedar trees in the garden of God
were not as great as it was.
The pine trees
did not have such great limbs.
The plane trees
did not have such branches.
No tree in the garden of God
was as beautiful as this tree.

⁹I made it beautiful
with many branches,
and all the trees of Eden in the garden of God
wanted to be like it.

¹⁰“So this is what the Lord God says: The tree grew tall. Its top reached the clouds, and it became proud of its height. ¹¹So I handed it over to a mighty ruler of the nations for him to punish it. Because it was evil, I got rid of it. ¹²The cruelest foreign nation cut it down and left it. The tree's branches fell on the mountains and in all the valleys, and its broken limbs were in all the ravines of the land. All the nations of the earth left the shade of that tree. ¹³The birds of the sky live on the fallen tree. The wild animals live among the tree's fallen branches. ¹⁴So the trees that grow by the water will not be proud to be tall; they will not put their tops among the clouds.

None of the trees that are watered well will grow that tall, because they all are meant to die and go under the ground. They will be with people who have died and have gone down to the place of the dead.

¹⁵“This is what the Lord God says: On the day when the tree went down to the place of the dead, I made the deep springs cry loudly. I covered them and held back their rivers, and the great waters stopped flowing. I dressed Lebanon in black to show her sadness about the great tree, and all the trees in the countryside were sad about it. ¹⁶I made the nations shake with fear at the sound of the tree falling when I brought it down to the place of the dead. It went to join those who have gone down to the grave. Then all the trees of Eden and the best trees of Lebanon, all the well-watered trees, were comforted in the place of the dead below the earth. ¹⁷These trees had also gone down with the great tree to the place of the dead. They joined those who were killed in war and those among the nations who had lived under the great tree’s shade.

¹⁸“So no tree in Eden is equal to you, Egypt, in greatness and honor, but you will go down to join the trees of Eden in the place below the earth. You will lie among unclean people, with those who were killed in war.

“This is about the king of Egypt and all his people, says the Lord God.”

A Funeral Song

It was in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the twelfth month, on the first day of the month. The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, sing a funeral song about the king of Egypt. Say to him:

‘You are like a young lion among the nations.
You are like a crocodile in the seas.
You splash around in your streams
and stir up the water with your feet,
making the rivers muddy.

³“This is what the Lord God says:

I will spread my net over you,
and I will use a large group of people
to pull you up in my net.

⁴Then I will throw you on the land
dropping you onto the ground.
I will let the birds of the sky rest on you
and all the animals of the earth eat you until they are
full.

⁵I will scatter your flesh on the mountains
and fill the valleys with what is left of you.

⁶I will drench the land with your flowing blood
as far as the mountains,

and the ravines will be full of your flesh.

⁷When I make you disappear,
I will cover the sky and make the stars dark.
I will cover the sun with a cloud,
and the moon will not shine.

⁸I will make all the shining lights in the sky
become dark over you;

I will bring darkness over your land,
says the Lord God.

⁹I will cause many people to be afraid
when I bring you as a captive into other nations,
to lands you have not known.

¹⁰I will cause many people to be shocked about you.
Their kings will tremble with fear because of you
when I swing my sword in front of them.
They will shake every moment
on the day you fall;
each king will be afraid for his own life.

¹¹“So this is what the Lord God says:
The sword of the king of Babylon
will attack you.

¹²I will cause your people to fall
by the swords of mighty soldiers,
the most terrible in the world.
They will destroy the pride of Egypt

and all its people.

¹³I will also destroy all Egypt's cattle
which live alongside much water.
The foot of a human will not stir the water,
and the hoofs of cattle will not muddy it anymore.

¹⁴So I will let the Egyptians' water become clear.
I will cause their rivers to run as smoothly as olive oil,
says the Lord God.

¹⁵When I make the land of Egypt empty
and take everything that is in the land,
when I destroy all those who live in Egypt,
then they will know that I am the Lord.'

¹⁶“This is the funeral song people will sing for Egypt. The
women of the nations will sing it; they will sing a funeral song
for Egypt and all its people, says the Lord God.”

Egypt to Be Destroyed

¹⁷It was in the twelfth year of our captivity, on the fifteenth day
of the month. The Lord spoke his word to me, saying:
¹⁸“Human, cry for the people of Egypt. Bring down Egypt,
together with the women of the powerful nations; bring them
down to the place of the dead below the earth to join those
who go to the place of the dead. ¹⁹Say to them: ‘Are you more
beautiful than others? Go lie down in death with those who are
unclean.’ ²⁰The Egyptians will fall among those killed in war.
The sword is ready; the enemy will drag Egypt and all her

people away. ²¹From the place of the dead the leaders of the mighty ones will speak about the king of Egypt and the nations which help him: 'The unclean, those killed in war, have come down here and lie dead.'

²²Assyria and all its army lie dead there. The graves of their soldiers are all around. All were killed in war, ²³and their graves were put in the deepest parts of the place of the dead. Assyria's army lies around its grave. When they lived on earth, they frightened people, but now all of them have been killed in war.

²⁴The nation of Elam is there with all its army around its grave. All of them were killed in war. They had frightened people on earth and were unclean, so they went down to the lowest parts of the place of the dead. They must carry their shame with those who have gone down to the place of the dead. ²⁵A bed has been made for Elam with all those killed in war. The graves of her soldiers are all around her. All Elam's people are unclean, killed in war. They frightened people when they lived on earth, but now they must carry their shame with those who have gone down to the place of the dead. Their graves are with the rest who were killed.

²⁶Meshech and Tubal are there with the graves of all their soldiers around them. All of them are unclean and have been killed in war. They also frightened people when they lived on earth. ²⁷But they are not buried with the other soldiers who were killed in battle long ago, those who went with their weapons of war to the place of the dead. These soldiers had their swords laid under their heads and their shields on their bodies. These mighty soldiers used to frighten people when they lived on earth.

²⁸“You, king of Egypt, will be broken and lie among those who are unclean, who were killed in war.

²⁹“Edom is there also, with its kings and all its leaders. They were mighty, but now they lie in death with those killed in war, with those who are unclean, with those who have gone down to the place of the dead.

³⁰“All the rulers of the north and all the Sidonians are there. Their strength frightened people, but they have gone down in shame with those who were killed. They are unclean, lying with those killed in war. They carry their shame with those who have gone down to the place of the dead.

³¹“The king of Egypt and his army will see these who have been killed in war. Then he will be comforted for all his soldiers killed in war, says the Lord God. ³²I made people afraid of the king of Egypt while he lived on earth. But he and all his people will lie among those who are unclean, who were killed in war, says the Lord God.”

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 33:1–36:38

Situation

Ezekiel acted as a watchman and preached about hope, comfort, and restoration. The people felt bad about their sins but refused to quit sinning. They treated Ezekiel's message as entertainment.

Observation

God promises to forgive and restore if we turn to him in repentance.

Inspiration

Without any question, forgiveness is the key relational issue in the Bible. It is essential to our relationship with God, with others, and even with ourselves. Forgiveness is central to emotional and spiritual growth.

Scripture teaches us that grace and salvation are unconditional. This is absolutely true in the sense that there is no way we can earn God's grace or love; there's nothing we can do in order to achieve it; there are no conditions of merit we must meet in order to receive it. Our salvation is given to us freely as the gift of God's love. But when we read Scripture carefully, we discover that before God forgives us, he expects us to forgive others. It seems as if God has made us psychologically so that we are not able to receive his forgiveness unless we first forgive.

In [Luke 6:37](#), Jesus states this principle: "Forgive, and you will be forgiven." Again and again he

stresses this. In what we call the Lord's Prayer, he said, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" ([Matthew 6:12](#)). A couple of verses later, he explains, "If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (vv. [14-15](#)).

... Again and again we get this message that Jesus expects us to be as willing to forgive others as he is to forgive us. This ... points to a basic biblical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual principle—if we want to receive forgiveness without giving forgiveness, we're asking God to violate his own moral nature. We're asking him to violate principles he has built into us.

If you find it hard to believe that forgiveness is a need God has built into us, look at the opposite of forgiveness—resentment. When we resent someone, we destroy our relationship with that person, of course. We also destroy our own physical health. Any doctor [will] tell you about diseases and physical disorders that are closely tied to resentment. It literally eats holes in us, and that's a living metaphor of what it does to our relationships.

God's laws are a given of existence. They are built into our muscles, brains, personalities, and social interactions. His highest law, love, is what brought the world into being, and love is nourished by forgiveness. The opposite of love is hate, and hate is kept alive through resentment.

So if we're looking for emotional, spiritual, and

physical well-being, forgiveness is central. (From “Forgiveness: The Cure for Resentment” by David Seamands in *Practical Christianity*)

Application

The tough part of forgiveness is actually doing it. Merely thinking about forgiving someone accomplishes nothing. Forgiveness requires action. Ask God to help you forgive someone. Show you have forgiven that person by your actions. God will bless you.

Exploration

Forgiveness—[Leviticus 26:13](#); [1 Chronicles 21:8](#); [Matthew 6:14–15](#); [John 20:23](#); [Romans 12:17–21](#).

Ezekiel Is Watchman for Israel

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying:²“Human, speak to your people and say to them: ‘Suppose I bring a war against a land. The people of the land may choose one of their men and make him their watchman.’³When he sees the enemy coming to attack the land, he will blow the trumpet and warn the people.⁴If they hear the sound of the trumpet but do nothing, the enemy will come and kill them. They will be responsible for their own deaths.⁵They heard the sound of the trumpet but didn’t do anything. So they are to blame for their own deaths. If they had done something, they would have saved their own lives.⁶But if the watchman sees the enemy coming to attack and does not blow the trumpet, the people will not be warned. Then if the enemy comes and kills any of them, they have died because of their own sin. But I will punish the watchman for their deaths.’

⁷“You, human, are the one I have made a watchman for Israel. If you hear a word from my mouth, you must warn them for me.⁸Suppose I say to the wicked: ‘Wicked people, you will surely die,’ but you don’t speak to warn the wicked to stop doing evil. Then they will die because they were sinners, but I will punish you for their deaths.⁹But if you warn the wicked to stop doing evil and they do not stop, they will die because they were sinners. But you have saved your life.

¹⁰“So you, human, say to Israel: ‘You have said: Surely our

law-breaking and sins are hurting us. They will kill us. What can we do so we will live?' ¹¹Say to them: 'The Lord God says: As surely as I live, I do not want any who are wicked to die. I want them to stop doing evil and live. Stop! Stop your wicked ways! You don't want to die, do you, people of Israel?'

¹²“Human, say to your people: ‘The goodness of those who do right will not save them when they sin. The evil of wicked people will not cause them to be punished if they stop doing it. If good people sin, they will not be able to live by the good they did earlier.’ ¹³If I tell good people, ‘You will surely live,’ they might think they have done enough good and then do evil. Then none of the good things they did will be remembered. They will die because of the evil they have done.

¹⁴Or, if I say to the wicked people, ‘You will surely die,’ they may stop sinning and do what is right and honest. ¹⁵For example, they may return what somebody gave them as a promise to repay a loan, or pay back what they stole. If they live by the rules that give life and do not sin, then they will surely live, and they will not die. ¹⁶They will not be punished for any of their sins. They now do what is right and fair, so they will surely live.

¹⁷“Your people say: ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ But it is their own ways that are not fair. ¹⁸When the good people stop doing good and do evil, they will die for their evil. ¹⁹But when the wicked stop doing evil and do what is right and fair, they will live. ²⁰You still say: ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ Israel, I will judge all of you by your own ways.”

The Fall of Jerusalem Explained

²¹It was in the twelfth year of our captivity, on the fifth day of the tenth month. A person who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "Jerusalem has been captured." ²²Now I had felt the power of the Lord on me the evening before. He had made me able to talk again before this person came to me. I could speak; I was not without speech anymore.

²³Then the Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²⁴"Human, people who live in the ruins in the land of Israel are saying: 'Abraham was only one person, yet he was given the land as his own. Surely the land has been given to us, who are many, as our very own.' ²⁵So say to them: 'This is what the Lord God says: You eat meat with the blood still in it, you ask your idols for help, and you murder people. Should you then have the land as your very own? ²⁶You depend on your sword and do terrible things which I hate. Each of you has sexual relations with his neighbor's wife. So should you have the land?'

²⁷"Say to them: 'This is what the Lord God says: As surely as I live, those who are among the city ruins in Israel will be killed in war. I will cause those who live in the country to be eaten by wild animals. People hiding in the strongholds and caves will die of disease. ²⁸I will make the land an empty desert. The people's pride in the land's power will end. The mountains of Israel will become empty so that no one will pass through them. ²⁹They will know that I am the Lord when I make the land an empty desert because of the things they have done that I hate.'

³⁰"But as for you, human, your people are talking about you by the walls and in the doorways of houses. They say to each other: 'Come now, and hear the message from the Lord.' ³¹So they come to you in crowds as if they were really ready to

listen. They sit in front of you as if they were my people and hear your words, but they will not obey them. With their mouths they tell me they love me, but their hearts desire their selfish profits.³²To your people you are nothing more than a singer who sings love songs and has a beautiful voice and plays a musical instrument well. They hear your words, but they will not obey them.

³³“When this comes true, and it surely will happen, then the people will know that a prophet has been among them.”

The Leaders Are like Shepherds

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, prophesy against the leaders of Israel, who are like shepherds. Prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Lord God says: How terrible it will be for the shepherds of Israel who feed only themselves! Why don’t the shepherds feed the flock? ³You eat the milk curds, and you clothe yourselves with the wool. You kill the fat sheep, but you do not feed the flock. ⁴You have not made the weak strong. You have not healed the sick or put bandages on those that were hurt. You have not brought back those who strayed away or searched for the lost. But you have ruled the sheep with cruel force. ⁵The sheep were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for every wild animal. ⁶My flock wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered all over the face of the earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

⁷“So, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord God says: ⁸As surely as I live, my flock has been caught and eaten by all the wild animals, because the flock has no shepherd. The shepherds did not search for my flock. No, they fed themselves instead of my flock. ⁹So, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord. ¹⁰This is what the Lord God says: I am against the shepherds. I will blame them for what has happened to my sheep and will not let them tend the flock anymore. Then the shepherds will stop feeding themselves, and I will take my flock from their mouths so they will no longer be their food.

¹¹“This is what the Lord God says: I, myself, will search for my sheep and take care of them. ¹²As a shepherd takes care of his scattered flock when it is found, I will take care of my sheep. I will save them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. ¹³I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries. I will bring them to their own land and pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines, and in all the places where people live in the land. ¹⁴I will feed them in a good pasture, and they will eat grass on the high mountains of Israel. They will lie down on good ground where they eat grass, and they will eat in rich grassland on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I will feed my flock and lead them to rest, says the Lord God. ¹⁶I will search for the lost, bring back those that strayed away, put bandages on those that were hurt, and make the weak strong. But I will destroy those sheep that are fat and strong. I will tend the sheep with fairness.

¹⁷“This is what the Lord God says: As for you, my flock, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the male sheep and the male goats. ¹⁸Is it not enough for you to eat grass in the good land? Must you crush the rest of the grass with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you make the rest of the water muddy with your feet? ¹⁹Must my flock eat what you crush, and must they drink what you make muddy with your feet?

²⁰“So this is what the Lord God says to them: I, myself, will judge between the fat sheep and the thin sheep. ²¹You push with your side and with your shoulder, and you knock down all the weak sheep with your horns until you have forced them away. ²²So I will save my flock; they will not be hurt anymore. I

will judge between one sheep and another. ²³Then I will put over them one shepherd, my servant David. He will feed them and tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴Then I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David will be a ruler among them. I, the Lord, have spoken.

²⁵“I will make an agreement of peace with my sheep and will remove harmful animals from the land. Then the sheep will live safely in the desert and sleep in the woods. ²⁶I will bless them and let them live around my hill. I will cause the rains to come when it is time; there will be showers to bless them. ²⁷Also the trees in the countryside will give their fruit, and the land will give its harvest. And the sheep will be safe on their land. Then they will know that I am the Lord when I break the bars of their captivity and save them from the power of those who made them slaves. ²⁸They will not be led captive by the nations again. The wild animals will not eat them, but they will live safely, and no one will make them afraid. ²⁹I will give them a place famous for its good crops, so they will no longer suffer from hunger in the land. They will not suffer the insults of other nations anymore. ³⁰Then they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them. The nation of Israel will know that they are my people, says the Lord God. ³¹You, my human sheep, are the sheep I care for, and I am your God, says the Lord God.”

Prophecy Against Edom

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying: ²“Human, look toward Edom and prophesy against it. ³Say to it: ‘This is what the Lord God says: I am against you, Edom. I will stretch out my hand against you and make you an empty desert. ⁴I will destroy your cities, and you will become empty. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

⁵“You have always been an enemy of Israel. You let them be defeated in war when they were in trouble at the time of their final punishment. ⁶So the Lord God says, as surely as I live, I will let you be murdered. Murder will chase you. Since you did not hate murdering people, murder will chase you. ⁷I will make Edom an empty ruin and destroy everyone who goes in or comes out of it. ⁸I will fill its mountains with those who are killed. Those killed in war will fall on your hills, in your valleys, and in all your ravines. ⁹I will make you a ruin forever; no one will live in your cities. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

¹⁰“You said, “These two nations, Israel and Judah, and these two lands will be ours. We will take them for our own.” But the Lord was there. ¹¹So this is what the Lord God says: As surely as I live, I will treat you just as you treated them. You were angry and jealous because you hated them. So I will punish you and show the Israelites who I am. ¹²Then you will know that I, the Lord, have heard all your insults against the mountains of Israel. You said, “They have been ruined. They have been given to us to eat.” ¹³You have not stopped your proud talk against me. I have heard you. ¹⁴This is what the Lord

God says: All the earth will be happy when I make you an empty ruin.¹⁵ You were happy when the land of Israel was ruined, but I will do the same thing to you. Mount Seir and all Edom, you will become an empty ruin. Then you will know that I am the Lord.”

Israel to Come Home

“Human, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say: ‘Mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord. ²This is what the Lord God says: The enemy has said about you, “Now the old places to worship gods have become ours.”’ ³So prophesy and say: ‘This is what the Lord God says: They have made you an empty ruin and have crushed you from all around. So you became a possession of the other nations. People have talked and whispered against you. ⁴So, mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God. The Lord God speaks to the mountains, hills, ravines, and valleys, to the empty ruins and abandoned cities that have been robbed and laughed at by the other nations. ⁵This is what the Lord God says: I speak in hot anger against the other nations. I speak against the people of Edom, who took my land for themselves with joy and with hate in their hearts. They forced out the people and took their pastureland.’ ⁶So prophesy about the land of Israel and say to the mountains, hills, ravines, and valleys: ‘This is what the Lord God says: I speak in my jealous anger, because you have suffered the insults of the nations. ⁷So this is what the Lord God says: I promise that the nations around you will also have to suffer insults.

⁸“But you, mountains of Israel, will grow branches and fruit for my people, who will soon come home. ⁹I am concerned about you; I am on your side. You will be plowed, and seed will be planted in you. ¹⁰I will increase the number of people who live on you, all the people of Israel. The cities will have people

living in them, and the ruins will be rebuilt. ¹¹I will increase the number of people and animals living on you. They will grow and have many young. You will have people living on you as you did before, and I will make you better off than at the beginning. Then you will know that I am the Lord. ¹²I will cause my people Israel to walk on you and own you, and you will belong to them. You will never again take their children away from them.

¹³“This is what the Lord God says: People say about you, “You eat people and take children from your nation.” ¹⁴But you will not eat people anymore or take away the children, says the Lord God. ¹⁵I will not make you listen to insults from the nations anymore; you will not suffer shame from them anymore. You will not cause your nation to fall anymore, says the Lord God.”

The Lord Acts for Himself

¹⁶The Lord spoke his word to me again, saying: ¹⁷“Human, when the nation of Israel was living in their own land, they made it unclean by their ways and the things they did. Their ways were like a woman’s uncleanness in her time of monthly bleeding. ¹⁸So I poured out my anger against them, because they murdered in the land and because they made the land unclean with their idols. ¹⁹I scattered them among the nations, and they were spread through the countries. I punished them for how they lived and what they did. ²⁰They dishonored my holy name in the nations where they went. The nations said about them ‘These are the people of the Lord, but they had to leave the land which he gave them.’ ²¹But I had concern for my

holy name, which the nation of Israel had dishonored among the nations where they went.

²²“So say to the people of Israel, ‘This is what the Lord God says: Israel, I am going to act, but not for your sake. I will do something to help my holy name, which you have dishonored among the nations where you went. ²³I will prove the holiness of my great name, which has been dishonored among the nations. You have dishonored it among these nations, but the nations will know that I am the Lord when I prove myself holy before their eyes, says the Lord God.

²⁴“I will take you from the nations and gather you out of all the lands and bring you back into your own land. ²⁵Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and your idols. ²⁶Also, I will teach you to respect me completely, and I will put a new way of thinking inside you. I will take out the stubborn hearts of stone from your bodies, and I will give you obedient hearts of flesh. ²⁷I will put my Spirit inside you and help you live by my rules and carefully obey my laws. ²⁸You will live in the land I gave to your ancestors, and you will be my people, and I will be your God. ²⁹So I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will command the grain to come and grow; I will not allow a time of hunger to hurt you. ³⁰I will increase the harvest of the field so you will never again suffer shame among the nations because of hunger. ³¹Then you will remember your evil ways and actions that were not good, and you will hate yourselves because of your sins and your terrible acts that I hate. ³²I want you to know that I am not going to do this for your sake, says the Lord God. Be ashamed and embarrassed about your ways, Israel.

³³“This is what the Lord God says: This is what will happen on the day I cleanse you from all your sins: I will cause the cities to have people living in them again, and the destroyed places will be rebuilt. ³⁴The empty land will be plowed so it will no longer be a ruin for everyone who passes by to see. ³⁵They will say, “This land was ruined, but now it has become like the garden of Eden. The cities were destroyed, empty, and ruined, but now they are protected and have people living in them.” ³⁶Then those nations still around you will know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt what was destroyed and have planted what was empty. I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will do it.’

³⁷“This is what the Lord God says: I will let myself be asked by the people of Israel to do this for them again: I will make their people grow in number like a flock. ³⁸They will be as many as the flocks brought to Jerusalem during her holy feasts. Her ruined cities will be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 37:1–39:29

Situation

Ezekiel preached a message of hope to the exiles in Babylon. Yet, they were as unresponsive as dead bones.

Observation

God miraculously restores and reunites his people. He shows ultimate triumph over the evils of world powers. His might always prevails in world affairs.

Inspiration

Instead of seeing [God's sovereignty] as doing away with our free will, we should rejoice. God is in total control. No move of nation against nation is done apart from His choosing. God looks at our past lives from a completely different perspective. God was accomplishing His will even through our own failures and sin. Are people free to choose for or against God? They are not free in the sense that they are unbiased toward God. Everyone is born with a bias against God. It certainly is not a fifty-fifty choice; that is, one does not grow up with as good a chance to choose for God as against Him. A person will choose against Him every time unless God moves first. Within His sovereignty there is clear indication of man's freedom throughout the Scriptures, but man's freedom has boundaries whereas God's sovereignty does not.

It is foolish to think that a man could turn aside the purposes of God. If you were standing on the top of a cliff with the water rushing in from the ocean, could you imagine yourself jumping down and pushing back the waves into the ocean? Of course not. Could you stand in a storm and as the bolt of lightning came through the sky, grab it and change its course? Of course not. Still more foolish is the thought that you could push back or change the determination of the Almighty.

Not only is God's will sovereign, but His power is, as well. That power may be called the creative energy of His nature. The sovereign power of God and God's other attributes work together. God's great power works within the realm of His holiness. My son once asked me why the Lord did not go ahead and save the devil—we would all be better off! That sounds good when you consider God's sovereign power, but does not fit with God's holiness. It might fit with God's mercy but not with His justice. God, being totally just, will have all things made right and fair when we see Him face to face. My failure, sin and confusion do not change His chosen ends. What would it profit a man to spend any time trying to buck God's will? Could he win? Never! (From *The God You Can Know* by Dan DeHaan)

Application

Are you unified with your family? Take each of your children out for a special one-on-one time during the next month. If you are a young person, take your Dad or Mom out to breakfast—you pay!

Exploration

Rebirth—[Jeremiah 24:7](#); [31:31–34](#); [Ezekiel 11:19–20](#); [John 3:3–8](#), [16–21](#); [1 Peter 1:23](#).

The Vision of Dry Bones

I felt the power of the Lord on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and put me down in the middle of a valley. It was full of bones. ²He led me around among the bones, and I saw that there were many bones in the valley and that they were very dry. ³Then he asked me, “Human, can these bones live?”

I answered, “Lord God, only you know.”

⁴He said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵This is what the Lord God says to the bones: I will cause breath to enter you so you will come to life. ⁶I will put muscles on you and flesh on you and cover you with skin. Then I will put breath in you so you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’”

⁷So I prophesied as I was commanded. While I prophesied, there was a noise and a rattling. The bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸I looked and saw muscles come on the bones, and flesh grew, and skin covered the bones. But there was no breath in them.

⁹Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the [wind](#). Prophesy, human, and say to the wind, ‘This is what the Lord God says: Wind, come from the four winds, and breathe on these people who were killed so they can come back to life.’” ¹⁰So I prophesied as the Lord commanded me. And the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, a very

large army.

¹¹Then he said to me, “Human, these bones are like all the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope has gone. We are destroyed.’ ¹²So, prophesy and say to them, ‘This is what the Lord God says: My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves. Then I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³My people, you will know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and cause you to come up from them. ¹⁴And I will put my Spirit inside you, and you will come to life. Then I will put you in your own land. And you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it, says the Lord.’”

Judah and Israel Back Together

¹⁵The Lord spoke his word to me, saying, ¹⁶“Human, take a stick and write on it, ‘For Judah and all the Israelites with him.’ Then take another stick and write on it, ‘The stick of Ephraim, for Joseph and all the Israelites with him.’ ¹⁷Then join them together into one stick so they will be one in your hand.

¹⁸“When your people say to you, ‘Explain to us what you mean by this,’ ¹⁹say to them, ‘This is what the Lord God says: I will take the stick for Joseph and the tribes of Israel with him, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and I will put it with the stick of Judah. I will make them into one stick, and they will be one in my hand.’ ²⁰Hold the sticks on which you wrote these names in your hand so the people can see them. ²¹Say to the people, ‘This is what the Lord God says: I am going to take the people of Israel from among the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them into their own land.

²²I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. One king will rule all of them. They will never again be two nations; they will not be divided into two kingdoms anymore. ²³They will not continue to make themselves unclean by their idols, their statues of gods which I hate, or by their sins. I will save them from all the ways they sin and turn against me, and I will make them clean. Then they will be my people, and I will be their God.

²⁴“My servant David will be their king, and they will all have one shepherd. They will live by my rules and obey my laws. ²⁵They will live on the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land in which your ancestors lived. They will all live on the land forever: they, their children, and their grandchildren. David my servant will be their king forever. ²⁶I will make an agreement of peace with them, an agreement that continues forever. I will put them in their land and make them grow in number. Then I will put my Temple among them forever. ²⁷The place where I live will be with them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ²⁸When my Temple is among them forever, the nations will know that I, the Lord, make Israel holy.”

Prophecy Against Gog

The Lord spoke his word to me, saying,²“Human, look toward Gog of the land of Magog, the chief ruler of the nations of Meshech and Tubal. Prophecy against him³and say, ‘The Lord God says this: I am against you, Gog, chief ruler of Meshech and Tubal. ⁴I will turn you around and put hooks in your jaws. And I will bring you out with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all of whom will be dressed in beautiful uniforms. They will be a large army with large and small shields and all having swords. ⁵Persia, Cush, and Put will be with them, all of them having shields and helmets. ⁶There will also be Gomer with all its troops and the nation of Togarmah from the far north with all its troops—many nations with you.

⁷“Be prepared. Be prepared, you and all the armies that have come together to make you their commander. ⁸After a long time you will be called for service. After those years you will come into a land that has been rebuilt from war. The people in the land will have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which were empty for a long time. These people were brought out from the nations, and they will all be living in safety. ⁹You will come like a storm. You, all your troops, and the many nations with you will be like a cloud covering the land.

¹⁰“This is what the Lord God says: At that time ideas will come into your mind, and you will think up an evil plan. ¹¹You will say, “I will march against a land of towns without walls. I will attack those who are at rest and live in safety. All of them

live without city walls or gate bars or gates. ¹²I will capture treasures and take loot. I will turn my power against the rebuilt ruins that now have people living in them. I will attack these people who have been gathered from the nations, who have become rich with farm animals and property, who live at the center of the world.” ¹³Sheba, Dedan, and the traders of Tarshish, with all its villages, will say to you, “Did you come to capture treasure? Did you bring your troops together to take loot? Did you bring them to carry away silver and gold and to take away farm animals and property?” ’

¹⁴“So prophesy, human, and say to Gog, ‘This is what the Lord God says: Now that my people Israel are living in safety, you will know about it. ¹⁵You will come with many people from your place in the far north. You will have a large group with you, a mighty army, all riding on horses. ¹⁶You will attack my people Israel like a cloud that covers the land. This will happen in the days to come when I bring you against my land. Gog, then the nations will know me when they see me prove how holy I am in what I do through you.

¹⁷“This is what the Lord God says: You are the one about whom I spoke in past days. I spoke through my servants, the prophets of Israel, who prophesied for many years that I would bring you against them. ¹⁸This is what will happen: On the day Gog attacks the land of Israel, I will become very angry, says the Lord God. ¹⁹With jealousy and great anger I tell you that at that time there will surely be a great earthquake in Israel. ²⁰The fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the wild animals, everything that crawls on the ground, and all the people on the earth will shake with fear before me. Also the mountains will be thrown down, the cliffs will fall, and every wall will fall to the

ground.²¹ Then I will call for a war against Gog on all my mountains, says the Lord God. Everyone's sword will attack the soldier next to him.²² I will punish Gog with disease and death. I will send a heavy rain with hailstones and burning sulfur on Gog, his army, and the many nations with him.²³ Then I will show how great I am. I will show my holiness, and I will make myself known to the many nations that watch. Then they will know that I am the Lord.'

The Death of Gog and His Army

“Human, prophesy against Gog and say, ‘This is what the Lord God says: I am against you, Gog, chief ruler of Meshech and Tubal. ²I will turn you around and lead you. I will bring you from the far north and send you to attack the mountains of Israel. ³I will knock your bow out of your left hand and throw down your arrows from your right hand. ⁴You, all your troops, and the nations with you will fall dead on the mountains of Israel. I will let you be food for every bird that eats meat and for every wild animal. ⁵You will lie fallen on the ground, because I have spoken, says the Lord God. ⁶I will send fire on Magog and those who live in safety on the coastlands. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

⁷“I will make myself known among my people Israel, and I will not let myself be dishonored anymore. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel. ⁸It is coming! It will happen, says the Lord God. The time I talked about is coming.

⁹“Then those who live in the cities of Israel will come out and make fires with the enemy’s weapons. They will burn them, both large and small shields, bows and arrows, war clubs, and spears. They will use the weapons to burn in their fires for seven years. ¹⁰They will not need to take wood from the field or chop firewood from the forests, because they will make fires with the weapons. In this way they will take the treasures of those who took their treasures; they will take the loot of those who took their loot, says the Lord God.

¹¹“At that time I will give Gog a burial place in Israel, in the Valley of the Travelers, east of the Dead Sea. It will block the road for travelers. Gog and all his army will be buried there, so people will call it The Valley of Gog’s Army.

¹²“The people of Israel will be burying them for seven months to make the land clean again. ¹³All the people in the land will bury them, and they will be honored on the day of my victory, says the Lord God.

¹⁴“The people of Israel will choose men to work through the land to make it clean. Along with others, they will bury Gog’s soldiers still lying dead on the ground. After the seven months are finished, they will still search. ¹⁵As they go through the land, anyone who sees a human bone is to put a marker by it. The sign will stay there until the gravediggers bury the bone in The Valley of Gog’s Army. ¹⁶A city will be there named Hamonah. So they will make the land clean again.’

¹⁷“Human, this is what the Lord God says: Speak to every kind of bird and wild animal: ‘Come together, come! Come together from all around to my sacrifice, a great sacrifice which I will prepare for you on the mountains of Israel. Eat flesh and drink blood! ¹⁸You are to eat the flesh of the mighty and drink the blood of the rulers of the earth as if they were fat animals from Bashan: male sheep, lambs, goats, and bulls. ¹⁹You are to eat and drink from my sacrifice which I have prepared for you, eating fat until you are full and drinking blood until you are drunk. ²⁰At my table you are to eat until you are full of horses and riders, mighty men and all kinds of soldiers,’ says the Lord God.

²¹“I will show my glory among the nations. All the nations will see my power when I punish them. ²²From that time onward

the people of Israel will know that I am the Lord their God.
²³The nations will know Israel was taken away captive because they turned against me. So I turned away from them and handed them over to their enemies until all of them died in war.
²⁴Because of their uncleanness and their sins, I punished them and turned away from them.

²⁵“So this is what the Lord God says: Now I will bring the people of Jacob back from captivity, and I will have mercy on the whole nation of Israel. I will not let them dishonor me. ²⁶The people will forget their shame and how they rejected me when they live again in safety on their own land with no one to make them afraid. ²⁷I will bring the people back from other lands and gather them from the lands of their enemies. So I will use my people to show many nations that I am holy. ²⁸Then my people will know that I am the Lord their God, because I sent them into captivity among the nations, but then I brought them back to their own land, leaving no one behind. ²⁹I will not turn away from them anymore, because I will put my Spirit into the people of Israel, says the Lord God.”

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 40:1–42:20

Situation

God gave Ezekiel, a priest, the measurements of Solomon's Temple. The Temple had been destroyed at the beginning of the captivity.

Observation

God reveals his perfect kingdom. The details of his vision gave the Jews hope for a restored worship and show us the importance of true God-centered worship.

Inspiration

The Holy of Holies, you'll remember, was a part of the Temple no one could enter. Jewish worshipers could enter the outer court, but only the priests could enter the Holy Place. And no one, except the high priest on one day a year, entered the Holy of Holies. No one. Why? Because the shekinah glory—the glory of God—was present there.

If you were told you were free to enter the Oval Office of the White House, you would likely shake your head and chuckle, "You're one brick short of a load, buddy." Multiply your disbelief by a thousand, and you'll have an idea how a Jew would feel if someone told him he could enter the Holy of Holies. "Yeah, right. You're one bagel short of a dozen."

No one but the high priest entered the Holy of Holies. No one. To do so meant death. Two of Aaron's sons died when they entered the Holy of

Holies in order to offer sacrifices to the Lord ([Leviticus 16:1-2](#)). In no uncertain terms, the curtain declared: “This far and no farther!”

What did fifteen hundred years of a curtain-draped Holy of Holies communicate? Simple. God is holy ... separate from us and unapproachable. Even Moses was told, “You cannot see my face, because no one can see me and live” ([Exodus 33:20](#)). God is holy, and we are sinners, and there is a distance between us.

Isn’t this our problem? We know God is good. We know we are not, and we feel far from God. The ancient words of Job are ours, “I wish there were someone to make peace between us, someone to decide our case” ([Job 9:33](#)).

Oh, but there is! Jesus hasn’t left us with an unapproachable God. Yes, God is holy. Yes, we are sinful. But, yes, yes, yes, Jesus is our mediator. “There is one God and one way human beings can reach God. That way is through Jesus Christ, who is himself human” ([1 Timothy 2:5](#)). Is not a mediator one who “goes between”? Wasn’t Jesus the curtain between us and God? And wasn’t his flesh torn?

What appeared to be the cruelty of man was actually the sovereignty of God. Matthew tells us: “But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice and died. *Then* the curtain in the Temple was torn into two pieces, from the top to the bottom” (27:50–51).

It’s as if the hands of heaven had been gripping the veil, waiting for this moment. Keep in mind the size of the curtain—sixty feet tall and thirty feet wide.

One instant it was whole; the next it was ripped in two from top to bottom. No delay. No hesitation.

What did the torn curtain mean? For the Jews it meant no more barrier between them and the Holy of Holies. No more priests to go between them and God. No more animal sacrifices to atone for their sins.

And for us? What did the torn curtain signify for us?

We are welcome to enter into God's presence—any day, any time. God has removed the barrier that separates us from him. The barrier of sin? Down. He has removed the curtain.

But we have a tendency to put the barrier back up. Though there is no curtain in a temple, there is a curtain in the heart. Like the ticks on the clock are the mistakes of the heart. And sometimes, no, oftentimes, we allow those mistakes to keep us from God. Our guilty conscience becomes a curtain that separates us from God.

As a result we hide from our Master ...

Somewhere, sometime, somehow you got tangled up in garbage, and you've been avoiding God. You've allowed a veil of guilt to come between you and your Father. You wonder if you could ever feel close to God again. The message of the torn flesh is you can. God welcomes you. God is not avoiding you. God is not resisting you. The curtain is down, the door is open, and God invites you in.

Don't trust your conscience. Trust the cross. The blood has been spilt and the veil has been split. You are welcome in God's presence.

(From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Application

Is there anything keeping you from entering God's presence in worship? Make a list of any distractions you encounter. Confess any sins that distract you from your fellowship with him.

Exploration

Temple—[1 Chronicles 22:19; 29:6–13](#); [2 Chronicles 7:1–6](#); [Ezra 3:10–13](#); [Luke 1:8–10](#); [Hebrews 4:15–16](#).

The New Temple

It was the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month. It was in the fourteenth year after Jerusalem was captured. On that same day I felt the power of the Lord, and he brought me to Jerusalem.

²In the visions of God he brought me to the land of Israel and put me down on a very high mountain. On the south of the mountain there were some buildings that looked like a city. ³He took me closer to the buildings, and I saw a man who looked as if he were made of bronze, standing in the gateway. He had a cord made of linen and a stick in his hand, both for measuring.

⁴The man said to me, "Human, look with your eyes and hear with your ears. Pay attention to all that I will show you, because that's why you have been brought here. Tell the people of Israel all that you see."

The East Gateway

⁵I saw a wall that surrounded the Temple area. The measuring stick in the man's hand was ten and one-half feet long. So the man measured the wall, which was ten and one-half feet thick and ten and one-half feet high.

⁶Then the man went to the east gateway. He went up its steps and measured the opening of the gateway. It was ten and

one-half feet deep.⁷The rooms for the guards were ten and one-half feet long and ten and one-half feet wide. The walls that came out between the guards' rooms were about nine feet thick. The opening of the gateway next to the porch that faced the Temple was ten and one-half feet deep.

⁸Then the man measured the porch of the gateway. ⁹It was about fourteen feet deep, and its side walls were three and one-half feet thick. The porch of the gateway faced the Temple.

¹⁰On each side of the east gateway were three rooms, which measured the same on each side. The walls between each room were the same thickness. ¹¹The man measured the width of the entrance to the gateway, which was seventeen and one-half feet wide. The width of the gate was about twenty-three feet. ¹²And there was a low wall about twenty-one inches high in front of each room. The rooms were ten and one-half feet on each side. ¹³The man measured the gateway from the roof of one room to the roof of the opposite room. It was about forty-four feet from one door to the opposite door. ¹⁴The man also measured the porch, which was about thirty-five feet wide. The courtyard was around the porch. ¹⁵From the front of the outer side of the gateway to the front of the porch of the inner side of the gateway was eighty-seven and one-half feet. ¹⁶The rooms and porch had small windows on both sides. The windows were narrower on the side facing the gateway. Carvings of palm trees were on each side wall of the rooms.

The Outer Courtyard

¹⁷Then the man brought me into the outer courtyard where I saw rooms and a pavement of stones all around the court.

Thirty rooms were along the edge of the paved walkway. ¹⁸The pavement ran alongside the gates and was as deep as the gates were wide. This was the lower pavement. ¹⁹Then the man measured from the outer wall to the inner wall. The outer court between these two walls was one hundred seventy-five feet on the east and on the north.

The North Gateway

²⁰The man measured the length and width of the north gateway leading to the outer courtyard. ²¹Its three rooms on each side, its inner walls, and its porch measured the same as the first gateway. It was eighty-seven and one-half feet long and forty-four feet wide. ²²Its windows, porch, and carvings of palm trees measured the same as the east gateway. Seven steps went up to the gateway, and the gateway's porch was at the inner end. ²³The inner courtyard had a gateway across from the northern gateway like the one on the east. The man measured it and found it was one hundred seventy-five feet from inner gateway to outer gateway.

The South Gateway

²⁴Then the man led me south where I saw a gateway facing south. He measured its inner walls and its porch, and they measured the same as the other gateways. ²⁵The gateway and its porch had windows all around like the other gateways. It was eighty-seven and one-half feet long and forty-four feet wide. ²⁶Seven steps went up to this gateway. Its porch was at the inner end, and it had carvings of palm trees on its inner

walls.²⁷The inner courtyard had a gateway on its south side. The man measured from gate to gate on the south side, which was one hundred seventy-five feet.

The Inner Courtyard

²⁸Then the man brought me through the south gateway into the inner courtyard. The inner south gateway measured the same as the gateways in the outer wall.²⁹The inner south gateway's rooms, inner walls, and porch measured the same as the gateways in the outer wall. There were windows all around the gateway and its porch. The gateway was eighty-seven and one-half feet long and forty-four feet wide.³⁰Each porch of each inner gateway was about forty-four feet long and about nine feet wide.³¹The inner south gateway's porch faced the outer courtyard. Carvings of palm trees were on its side walls, and its stairway had eight steps.

³²The man brought me into the inner courtyard on the east side. He measured the inner east gateway, and it was the same as the other gateways.³³The inner east gateway's rooms, inside walls, and porch measured the same as the other gateways. Windows were all around the gateway and its porch. The inner east gateway was eighty-seven and one-half feet long and forty-four feet wide.³⁴Its porch faced the outer courtyard. Carvings of palm trees were on its inner walls on each side, and its stairway had eight steps.

³⁵Then the man brought me to the inner north gateway. He measured it, and it was the same as the other gateways.³⁶Its rooms, inner walls, and porch measured the same as the other gateways. There were windows all around the gateway, which

was eighty-seven and one-half feet long and forty-four feet wide.³⁷ Its porch faced the outer courtyard. Carvings of palm trees were on its inner walls on each side, and its stairway had eight steps.

Rooms for Preparing Sacrifices

³⁸There was a room with a door that opened onto the porch of the inner north gateway. In this room the priests washed animals for the burnt offerings.³⁹ There were two tables on each side of the porch, on which animals for burnt offerings, sin offerings, and penalty offerings were killed.⁴⁰ Outside, by each side wall of the porch, at the entrance to the north gateway, were two more tables.⁴¹ So there were four tables inside the gateway, and four tables outside. In all there were eight tables on which the priests killed animals for sacrifices.⁴² There were four tables made of cut stone for the burnt offering. These tables were about three feet long, three feet wide, and about two feet high. On these tables the priests put their tools which they used to kill animals for burnt offerings and the other sacrifices.⁴³ Double shelves three inches wide were put up on all the walls. The flesh for the offering was put on the tables.

The Priests' Rooms

⁴⁴There were two rooms in the inner courtyard. One was beside the north gateway and faced south. The other room was beside the south gateway and faced north.⁴⁵ The man said to me, "The room which faces south is for the priests who serve in the Temple area,⁴⁶ while the room that faces north is for the priests

who serve at the altar. This second group of priests are descendants of Zadok, the only descendants of Levi who can come near the Lord to serve him.”

⁴⁷The man measured the inner courtyard. It was a square—one hundred seventy-five feet long and one hundred seventy-five feet wide. The altar was in front of the Temple.

The Temple Porch

⁴⁸The man brought me to the porch of the Temple and measured each side wall of the porch. Each was about nine feet thick. The doorway was twenty-four and one-half feet wide. The side walls of the doorway were each about five feet wide.

⁴⁹The porch was thirty-five feet long and twenty-one feet wide, with ten steps leading up to it. Pillars were by the side walls, one on each side of the entrance.

The Holy Place of the Temple

The man brought me to the Holy Place and measured its side walls, which were each ten and one-half feet thick.² The entrance was seventeen and one-half feet wide. The walls alongside the entrance were each about nine feet wide. The man measured the Holy Place, which was seventy feet long and thirty-five feet wide.

³Then the man went inside and measured the side walls of the next doorway. Each was three and one-half feet thick. The doorway was ten and one-half feet wide, and the walls next to it were each more than twelve feet thick. ⁴Then the man measured the room at the end of the Holy Place. It was thirty-five feet long and thirty-five feet wide. The man said to me, "This is the Most Holy Place."

⁵Then the man measured the wall of the Temple, which was ten and one-half feet thick. There were side rooms seven feet wide all around the Temple. ⁶The side rooms were on three different stories, each above the other, with thirty rooms on each story. All around the Temple walls there were ledges for the side rooms. The upper rooms rested on the ledges but were not attached to the Temple walls. ⁷The side rooms around the Temple were wider on each higher story, so rooms were wider on the top story. A stairway went up from the lowest story to the highest through the middle story.

⁸I also saw that the Temple had a raised base all around. Its edge was the foundation for the side rooms, and it was ten and one-half feet thick. ⁹The outer wall of the side rooms was about nine feet thick. There was an open area between the side rooms

of the Temple ¹⁰and some other rooms. It was thirty-five feet wide and went all around the Temple. ¹¹The side rooms had doors which led to the open area around the outside of the Temple. One door faced north, and the other faced south. The open area was about nine feet wide all around.

¹²The building facing the private area at the west side was one hundred twenty-two and one-half feet wide. The wall around the building was about nine feet thick and one hundred fifty-seven and one-half feet long.

¹³Then the man measured the Temple. It was one hundred seventy-five feet long. The private area, including the building and its walls, was in all one hundred seventy-five feet long.

¹⁴Also the front of the Temple and the private area on its east side were one hundred seventy-five feet wide.

¹⁵The man measured the length of the building facing the private area on the west side, and it was one hundred seventy-five feet from one wall to the other.

The Holy Place, the Most Holy Place, and the outer porch ¹⁶had wood panels on the walls. By the doorway, the Temple had wood panels on the walls. The wood covered all the walls from the floor up to the windows, ¹⁷up to the part of the wall above the entrance.

All the walls inside the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place, and on the outside, in the porch, ¹⁸had carvings of creatures with wings and palm trees. A palm tree was between each carved creature, and every creature had two faces. ¹⁹One was a human face looking toward the palm tree on one side. The other was a lion's face looking toward the palm tree on the other side. They were carved all around the Temple walls.

²⁰From the floor to above the entrance, palm trees and creatures

with wings were carved. The walls of the Holy Place ²¹had square doorposts. In front of the Most Holy Place was something that looked like ²²an altar of wood. It was more than five feet high and three feet wide. Its corners, base, and sides were wood. The man said to me, "This is the table that is in the presence of the Lord." ²³Both the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place had double doors. ²⁴Each of the doors had two pieces that would swing open. ²⁵Carved on the doors of the Holy Place were palm trees and creatures with wings, like those carved on the walls. And there was a wood roof over the front Temple porch. ²⁶There were windows and palm trees on both side walls of the porch. The side rooms of the Temple were also covered by a roof over the stairway.

The Priests' Rooms

Then the man led me north out into the outer courtyard and to the rooms across from the private area and the building.² These rooms on the north side were one hundred seventy-five feet long and eighty-seven and one-half feet wide.³ There was thirty-five feet of the inner courtyard between them and the Temple. On the other side, they faced the stone pavement of the outer courtyard. The rooms were built in three stories like steps and had balconies.⁴ There was a path on the north side of the rooms, which was seventeen and one-half feet wide and one hundred seventy-five feet long. Doors led into the rooms from this path.⁵ The top rooms were narrower, because the balconies took more space from them. The rooms on the first and second stories of the building were wider.⁶ The rooms were on three stories. They did not have pillars like the pillars of the courtyards. So the top rooms were farther back than those on the first and second stories.⁷ There was a wall outside parallel to the rooms and to the outer courtyard. It ran in front of the rooms for eighty-seven and one-half feet.⁸ The row of rooms along the outer courtyard was eighty-seven and one-half feet long, and the rooms that faced the Temple were about one hundred seventy-five feet long.⁹ The lower rooms had an entrance on the east side so a person could enter them from the outer courtyard,¹⁰ at the start of the wall beside the courtyard.

There were rooms on the south side, which were across from the private area and the building.¹¹ These rooms had a path in front of them. They were like the rooms on the north

with the same length and width and the same doors.¹² The doors of the south rooms were like the doors of the north rooms. There was an entrance at the open end of a path beside the wall, so a person could enter at the east end.

¹³The man said to me, "The north and south rooms across from the private area are holy rooms. There the priests who go near the Lord will eat the most holy offerings. There they will put the most holy offerings: the grain offerings, sin offerings, and the penalty offerings, because the place is holy.¹⁴ The priests who enter the Holy Place must leave their serving clothes there before they go into the outer courtyard, because these clothes are holy. After they put on other clothes, they may go to the part of the Temple area which is for the people."

Outside the Temple Area

¹⁵When the man finished measuring inside the Temple area, he brought me out through the east gateway. He measured the area all around.¹⁶ The man measured the east side with the measuring stick; it was eight hundred seventy-five feet by the measuring stick.¹⁷ He measured the north side; it was eight hundred seventy-five feet by the measuring stick.¹⁸ He measured the south side; it was eight hundred seventy-five feet by the measuring stick.¹⁹ He went around to the west side; it measured eight hundred seventy-five feet by the measuring stick.²⁰ So he measured the Temple area on all four sides. The Temple area had a wall all around it that was eight hundred seventy-five feet long and eight hundred seventy-five feet wide. It separated what was holy from that which was not holy.

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 43:1–48:35

Situation

God's glory had been present in Solomon's Temple ([2 Chronicles 2–7](#)), but it departed before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.

Observation

God requires his people to be holy (v. [12](#)). Therefore, as believers, we should be completely devoted to him and separated from sin.

Inspiration

It is possible to establish convictions regarding a life of holiness, and even make a definite commitment to that end, yet fail to achieve the goal... . This is what we must do if we pursue holiness: We must correct, mold, and train our moral character.

Discipline toward holiness begins with the Word of God... . Discipline toward holiness begins then with the Scriptures—with a disciplined plan for regular intake of the Scriptures and a disciplined plan for applying them to our daily lives... . Every Christian who makes progress in holiness is a person who has disciplined his life so that he spends regular time in the Bible. There simply is no other way.

Satan will always battle us at this point... . A disciplined intake of the Word of God not only involves a planned time; it also involves a planned method... . But if we are to pursue holiness with discipline, we must do more than hear, read, study, or

memorize Scripture. We must meditate on it... simply thinking about it and its application to life—is a practice we develop through discipline... The most important part of this process is the specific application of the Scripture to specific life Situations... You can readily see that this structured training in holiness is a lifelong process. So a necessary ingredient of discipline is perseverance... If we would succeed in our pursuit of holiness we must persevere in spite of failure.

(From *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges)

Application

Are you completely dedicated to God? Is there an area of life you have not committed to him? What sin still stays with you? Lust, gossip, selfishness, an unrepentant or unforgiving heart? Talk to your minister about how you can overcome these sins.

Exploration

Glory of God—[Exodus 15:11](#); [40:34–35](#); [Deuteronomy 5:24](#); [Psalms 8:1](#); [Luke 2:9, 14](#); [Hebrews 1:3](#); [Revelation 21:23](#).

The Lord Among His People

Then the man led me to the outer east gateway, ²and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. It sounded like the roar of rushing water, and its brightness made the earth shine. ³The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when the Lord came to destroy the city and also like the vision I had seen by the Kebar River. I bowed facedown on the ground. ⁴The glory of the Lord came into the Temple area through the east gateway.

⁵Then the Spirit picked me up and brought me into the inner courtyard. There I saw the Lord's glory filling the Temple. ⁶As the man stood at my side, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the Temple. ⁷The voice from the Temple said to me, "Human, this is my throne and the place where my feet rest. I will live here among the Israelites forever. The people of Israel will not make my holy name unclean again. Neither the people nor their kings will make it unclean with their sexual sins or with the dead bodies of their kings. ⁸The kings made my name unclean by putting their doorway next to my doorway, and their doorpost next to my doorpost so only a wall separated me from them. When they did their acts that I hate, they made my holy name unclean, and so I destroyed them in my anger. ⁹Now let them stop their sexual sins and take the dead bodies of their kings far away from me. Then I will live among them forever.

¹⁰“Human, tell the people of Israel about the Temple so they

will be ashamed of their sins. Let them think about the plan of the Temple. ¹¹If they are ashamed of all they have done, let them know the design of the Temple and how it is built. Show them its exits and entrances, all its designs, and also all its rules and teachings. Write the rules as they watch so they will obey all the teachings and rules about the Temple. ¹²This is the teaching about the Temple: All the area around the top of the mountain is most holy. This is the teaching about the Temple.

The Altar

¹³“These are the measurements of the altar, using the measuring stick. The altar’s gutter is twenty-one inches high and twenty-one inches wide, and its rim is about nine inches around its edge. And the altar is this tall: ¹⁴From the ground up to the lower ledge, it measures three and one-half feet. It is twenty-one inches wide. It measures seven feet from the smaller ledge to the larger ledge and is twenty-one inches wide. ¹⁵The place where the sacrifice is burned on the altar is seven feet high, with its four corners shaped like horns and reaching up above it. ¹⁶It is square, twenty-one feet long and twenty-one feet wide. ¹⁷The upper ledge is also square, twenty-four and one-half feet long and twenty-four and one-half feet wide. The rim around the altar is ten and one-half inches wide, and its gutter is twenty-one inches wide all around. Its steps are on the east side.”

¹⁸Then the man said to me, “Human, this is what the Lord God says: These are the rules for the altar. When it is built, use these rules to offer burnt offerings and to sprinkle blood on it.

¹⁹You must give a young bull as a sin offering to the priests,

the Levites who are from the family of Zadok and who come near me to serve me, says the Lord God.²⁰ Take some of the bull's blood and put it on the four corners of the altar, on the four corners of the ledge, and all around the rim. This is how you will make the altar pure and ready for God's service.²¹ Then take the bull for the sin offering and burn it in the proper place in the Temple area, outside the Temple building.

²²“On the second day offer a male goat that has nothing wrong with it for a sin offering. The priests will make the altar pure and ready for God's service as they did with the young bull.²³ When you finish making the altar pure and ready, offer a young bull and a male sheep from the flock, which have nothing wrong with them.²⁴ You must offer them in the presence of the Lord, and the priests are to throw salt on them and offer them as a burnt offering to the Lord.

²⁵“You must prepare a goat every day for seven days as a sin offering. Also, the priests must prepare a young bull and male sheep from the flock, which have nothing wrong with them.²⁶ For seven days the priests are to make the altar pure and ready for God's service. Then they will give the altar to God.²⁷ After these seven days, on the eighth day, the priests must offer your burnt offerings and your fellowship offerings on the altar. Then I will accept you, says the Lord God.”

The Outer East Gate

Then the man brought me back to the outer east gateway of the Temple area, but the gate was shut. ²The Lord said to me, "This gate will stay shut; it will not be opened. No one may enter through it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered through it. So it must stay shut. ³Only the ruler himself may sit in the gateway to eat a meal in the presence of the Lord. He must enter through the porch of the gateway and go out the same way."

⁴Then the man brought me through the outer north gate to the front of the Temple. As I looked, I saw the glory of the Lord filling the Temple of the Lord, and I bowed facedown on the ground.

⁵The Lord said to me, "Human, pay attention. Use your eyes to see, and your ears to hear. See and hear everything I tell you about all the rules and teachings of the Temple of the Lord. Pay attention to the entrance to the Temple and to all the exits from the Temple area. ⁶Then speak to those who refuse to obey. Say to the people of Israel, 'This is what the Lord God says: Stop doing all your acts that I hate, Israel! ⁷You brought foreigners into my Holy Place who were not circumcised in the flesh and had not given themselves to serving me. You dishonored my Temple when you offered me food, fat, and blood. You broke my agreement by all the things you did that I hate. ⁸You did not take care of my holy things yourselves but put foreigners in charge of my Temple. ⁹This is what the Lord God says: Foreigners who are not circumcised in flesh and who do not give themselves to serving me may not enter my

Temple. Not even a foreigner living among the people of Israel may enter.

¹⁰“But the Levites who stopped obeying me when Israel left me and who followed their idols must be punished for their sin. ¹¹These Levites are to be servants in my Holy Place. They may guard the gates of the Temple and serve in the Temple area. They may kill the animals for the burnt offering and the sacrifices for the people. They may stand before the people to serve them. ¹²But these Levites helped the people worship their idols and caused the people of Israel to fall, so I make this promise: They will be punished for their sin, says the Lord God. ¹³They will not come near me to serve as priests, nor will they come near any of my holy things or the most holy offerings. But they will be made ashamed of the things they did that I hate. ¹⁴I will put them in charge of taking care of the Temple area, all the work that must be done in it.

¹⁵“But the priests who are Levites and descendants of Zadok took care of my Holy Place when Israel left me, so they may come near to serve me. They may stand in my presence to offer me the fat and blood of the animals they sacrifice, says the Lord God. ¹⁶They are the only ones who may enter my Holy Place. Only they may come near my table to serve me and take care of the things I gave them to do.

¹⁷“When they enter the gates of the inner courtyard, they must wear linen robes. They must not wear wool to serve at the gates of the inner courtyard or in the Temple. ¹⁸They will wear linen turbans on their heads and linen underclothes. They will not wear anything that makes them perspire. ¹⁹When they go out into the outer courtyard to the people, they must take off their serving clothes before they go. They must leave these

clothes in the holy rooms and put on other clothes. Then they will not let their holy clothes hurt the people.

²⁰“They must not shave their heads or let their hair grow long but must keep the hair of their heads trimmed. ²¹None of the priests may drink wine when they enter the inner courtyard. ²²The priests must not marry widows or divorced women. They may marry only virgins from the people of Israel or widows of priests. ²³They must teach my people the difference between what is holy and what is not holy. They must help my people know what is unclean and what is clean.

²⁴“In court they will act as judges. When they judge, they will follow my teachings. They must obey my laws and my rules at all my special feasts and keep my Sabbaths holy.

²⁵“They must not go near a dead person, making themselves unclean. But they are allowed to make themselves unclean if the dead person is their father, mother, son, daughter, brother, or a sister who has not married. ²⁶After a priest has been made clean again, he must wait seven days. ²⁷Then he may go into the inner courtyard to serve in the Temple, but he must offer a sin offering for himself, says the Lord God.

²⁸“These are the rules about the priests and their property: They will have me instead of property. You will not give them any land to own in Israel; I am what they will own. ²⁹They will eat the grain offerings, sin offerings, and penalty offerings. Everything Israel gives to me will be theirs. ³⁰The best fruits of all the first harvests and all the special gifts offered to me will belong to the priests. You will also give to the priests the first part of your grain that you grind and so bring a blessing on your family. ³¹The priests must not eat any bird or animal that

died a natural death or one that has been torn by wild animals.

The Land Is Divided

“When you divide the land for the Israelite tribes by throwing lots, you must give a part of the land to belong to the Lord. It will be about seven miles long and about six miles wide; all of this land will be holy. ²From this land, an area eight hundred seventy-five feet square will be for the Temple. There will be an open space around the Temple that is eighty-seven and one-half feet wide. ³In the holy area you will measure a part about seven miles long and three miles wide, and in it will be the Most Holy Place. ⁴This holy part of the land will be for the priests who serve in the Temple, who come near to the Lord to serve him. It will be a place for the priests' houses and for the Temple. ⁵Another area about seven miles long and more than three miles wide will be for the Levites, who serve in the Temple area. It will belong to them so they will have cities in which to live.

⁶“You must give the city an area that is about one and one-half miles wide and about seven miles long, along the side of the holy area. It will belong to all the people of Israel.

⁷“The ruler will have land on both sides of the holy area and the city. On the west of the holy area, his land will reach to the Mediterranean Sea. On the east of the holy area, his land will reach to the eastern border. It will be as long as the land given to each tribe. ⁸Only this land will be the ruler's property in Israel. So my rulers will not be cruel to my people anymore, but they will let each tribe in the nation of Israel have its share of the land.

⁹“This is what the Lord God says: You have gone far

enough, you rulers of Israel! Stop being cruel and hurting people, and do what is right and fair. Stop forcing my people out of their homes, says the Lord God. ¹⁰You must have honest scales, an honest dry measurement and an honest liquid measurement. ¹¹The dry measure and the liquid measure will be the same: The liquid measure will always be a tenth of a homer, and the ephah will always be a tenth of a homer. The measurement they follow will be the homer. ¹²The shekel will be worth twenty gerahs, and a mina will be worth sixty shekels.

Offerings and Holy Days

¹³“This is the gift you should offer: a sixth of an ephah from every homer of wheat, and a sixth of an ephah from every homer of barley. ¹⁴The amount of oil you are to offer is a tenth of a bath from each cor. (Ten baths make a homer and also make a cor.) ¹⁵You should give one sheep from each flock of two hundred from the watering places of Israel. All these are to be offered for the grain offerings, burnt offerings, and fellowship offerings to remove sins so you will belong to God, says the Lord God. ¹⁶All people in the land will give this special offering to the ruler of Israel. ¹⁷It will be the ruler’s responsibility to supply the burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings. These offerings will be given at the feasts, at the New Moons, on the Sabbaths, and at all the other feasts of Israel. The ruler will supply the sin offerings, grain offerings, and fellowship offerings to pay for the sins of Israel.

¹⁸“This is what the Lord God says: On the first day of the first month take a young bull that has nothing wrong with it. Use it to make the Temple pure and ready for God’s service.

¹⁹The priest will take some of the blood from this sin offering and put it on the doorposts of the Temple, on the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and on the posts of the gate to the inner courtyard. ²⁰You will do the same thing on the seventh day of the month for anyone who has sinned by accident or without knowing it. This is how you make the Temple pure and ready for God's service.

Passover Feast Offerings

²¹“On the fourteenth day of the first month you will celebrate the Feast of Passover. It will be a feast of seven days when you eat bread made without yeast. ²²On that day the ruler must offer a bull for himself and for all the people of the land as a sin offering. ²³During the seven days of the feast he must offer seven bulls and seven male sheep that have nothing wrong with them. They will be burnt offerings to the Lord, which the ruler will offer every day of the seven days of the feast. He must also offer a male goat every day as a sin offering. ²⁴The ruler must give as a grain offering one-half bushel for each bull and one-half bushel for each sheep. He must give a gallon of olive oil for each half bushel.

²⁵“Beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you celebrate the Feast of Shelters, the ruler will supply the same things for seven days: the sin offerings, burnt offerings, grain offerings, and the olive oil.

Rules for Worship

“This is what the Lord God says: The east gate of the inner courtyard will stay shut on the six working days, but it will be opened on the Sabbath day and on the day of the New Moon.²The ruler will enter from outside through the porch of the gateway and stand by the gatepost, while the priests offer the ruler’s burnt offering and fellowship offering. The ruler will worship at the entrance of the gateway, and then he will go out. But the gate will not be shut until evening.³The people of the land will worship at the entrance of that gateway in the presence of the Lord on the Sabbaths and New Moons.⁴This is the burnt offering the ruler will offer to the Lord on the Sabbath day: six male lambs that have nothing wrong with them and a male sheep that has nothing wrong with it.⁵He must give a half-bushel grain offering with the male sheep, but he may give as much grain offering with the lambs as he pleases. He must also give a gallon of olive oil for each half bushel of grain.⁶On the day of the New Moon he must offer a young bull that has nothing wrong with it. He must also offer six lambs and a male sheep that have nothing wrong with them.⁷The ruler must give a half-bushel grain offering with the bull and one-half bushel with the male sheep. With the lambs, he may give as much grain as he pleases. But he must give a gallon of olive oil for each half bushel of grain.⁸When the ruler enters, he must go in through the porch of the gateway, and he must go out the same way.

⁹“When the people of the land come into the Lord’s presence at the special feasts, those who enter through the

north gate to worship must go out through the south gate. Those who enter through the south gate must go out through the north gate. They must not return the same way they entered; everyone must go out the opposite way. ¹⁰The ruler will go in with the people when they go in and go out with them when they go out.

¹¹“At the feasts and regular times of worship one-half bushel of grain must be offered with a young bull, and one-half bushel of grain must be offered with a male sheep. But with an offering of lambs, the ruler may give as much grain as he pleases. He should give a gallon of olive oil for each half bushel of grain. ¹²The ruler may give an offering as a special gift to the Lord; it may be a burnt offering or fellowship offering. When he gives it to the Lord, the inner east gate is to be opened for him. He must offer his burnt offering or his fellowship offering as he does on the Sabbath day. Then he will go out, and the gate will be shut after he has left.

¹³“Every day you will give a year-old lamb that has nothing wrong with it for a burnt offering to the Lord. Do it every morning. ¹⁴Also, you must offer a grain offering with the lamb every morning. For this you will give three and one-third quarts of grain and one and one-third quarts of olive oil, to make the fine flour moist, as a grain offering to the Lord. This is a rule that must be kept from now on. ¹⁵So you must always give the lamb, together with the grain offering and the olive oil, every morning as a burnt offering.

Rules for the Ruler

¹⁶“This is what the Lord God says: If the ruler gives a gift from

his land to any of his sons, that land will belong to the son and then to the son's children. It is their property passed down from their family. ¹⁷But if the ruler gives a gift from his land to any of his servants, that land will belong to the servant only until the year of freedom. Then the land will go back to the ruler. Only the ruler's sons may keep a gift of land from the ruler. ¹⁸The ruler must not take any of the people's land, forcing them out of their land. He must give his sons some of his own land so my people will not be scattered out of their own land.”

The Special Kitchens

¹⁹The man led me through the entrance at the side of the gateway to the priests' holy rooms that face north. There I saw a place at the west end. ²⁰The man said to me, “This is where the priests will boil the meat of the penalty offering and sin offering and bake the grain offering. Then they will not need to bring these holy offerings into the outer courtyard, because that would hurt the people.”

²¹Then the man brought me out into the outer courtyard and led me to its four corners. In each corner of the courtyard was a smaller courtyard. ²²Small courtyards were in the four corners of the courtyard. Each small courtyard was the same size, seventy feet long and fifty-two and one-half feet wide. ²³A stone wall was around each of the four small courtyards, and places for cooking were built in each of the stone walls. ²⁴The man said to me, “These are the kitchens where those who work in the Temple will boil the sacrifices offered by the people.”

The River from the Temple

The man led me back to the door of the Temple, and I saw water coming out from under the doorway and flowing east. (The Temple faced east.) The water flowed down from the south side wall of the Temple and then south of the altar. ²The man brought me out through the outer north gate and led me around outside to the outer east gate. I found the water coming out on the south side of the gate.

³The man went toward the east with a line in his hand and measured about one-third of a mile. Then he led me through water that came up to my ankles. ⁴The man measured about one-third of a mile again and led me through water that came up to my knees. Then he measured about one-third of a mile again and led me through water up to my waist. ⁵The man measured about one-third of a mile again, but it was now a river that I could not cross. The water had risen too high; it was deep enough for swimming; it was a river that no one could cross. ⁶The man asked me, "Human, do you see this?"

Then the man led me back to the bank of the river. ⁷As I went back, I saw many trees on both sides of the river. ⁸The man said to me, "This water will flow toward the eastern areas and go down into the Jordan Valley. When it enters the Dead Sea, it will become fresh. ⁹Everywhere the river goes, there will be many fish. Wherever this water goes the Dead Sea will become fresh, and so where the river goes there will be many living things. ¹⁰Fishermen will stand by the Dead Sea. From En Gedi all the way to En Eglaim there will be places to spread

fishing nets. There will be many kinds of fish in the Dead Sea, as many as in the Mediterranean Sea. ¹¹But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. ¹²All kinds of fruit trees will grow on both banks of the river, and their leaves will not dry and die. The trees will have fruit every month, because the water for them comes from the Temple. The fruit from the trees will be used for food, and their leaves for medicine.”

Borders of the Land

¹³This is what the Lord God says: “These are the borders of the land to be divided among the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph will have two parts of land. ¹⁴You will divide the land equally. I promised to give it to your ancestors, so this land will belong to you as family property.

¹⁵“This will be the border line of the land: “On the north side it will start at the Mediterranean Sea. It will go through Hethlon, toward Lebo Hamath and on to the towns of Zedad, ¹⁶Berothah, and Sibraim on the border between Damascus and Hamath. Then it will go on to the town of Hazer Hatticon on the border of the country of Hauran. ¹⁷So the border line will go from the Mediterranean Sea east to the town of Hazar Enan, where the land belonging to Damascus and Hamath lies on the north side. This will be the north side of the land.

¹⁸“On the east side the border runs south from a point between Hauran and Damascus. It will go along the Jordan between Gilead and the land of Israel and will continue to the town of Tamar on the Dead Sea. This will be the east side of the land.

¹⁹“On the south side the border line will go east from Tamar all the way to the waters of Meribah Kadesh. Then it will run along the brook of Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea. This will be the south side of the land.

²⁰“On the west side the Mediterranean Sea will be the border line up to a place across from Lebo Hamath. This will be the west side of your land.

²¹“You will divide this land among the tribes of Israel. ²²You will divide it as family property for yourselves and for the foreigners who live and have children among you. You are to treat these foreigners the same as people born in Israel; they are to share the land with the tribes of Israel. ²³In whatever tribe the foreigner lives, you will give him some land,” says the Lord God.

Dividing the Land

“These are the areas of the tribes named here: Dan will have one share at the northern border. It will go from the sea through Hethlon to Lebo Hamath, all the way to Hazar Enan, where Damascus lies to the north. It will stop there next to Hamath. This will be Dan’s northern border from the east side to the Mediterranean Sea on the west side.

²“South of Dan’s border, Asher will have one share. It will go from the east side to the west side.

³“South of Asher’s border, Naphtali will have one share. It will go from the east side to the west side.

⁴“South of Naphtali’s border, Manasseh will have one share. It will go from the east side to the west side.

⁵“South of Manasseh’s border, Ephraim will have one share. It will go from the east side to the west side.

⁶“South of Ephraim’s border, Reuben will have one share. It will go from the east side to the west side.

⁷“South of Reuben’s border, Judah will have one share. It will go from the east side to the west side.

⁸“South of Judah’s border will be the holy area which you are to give. It will be about seven miles wide and as long and wide as one of the tribes’ shares. It will run from the east side to the west side. The Temple will be in the middle of this area.

⁹“The share which you will give the Lord will be about seven miles long and three miles wide. ¹⁰The holy area will be divided among these people. The priests will have land about seven miles long on the north and south sides, and three miles

wide on the west and east sides. The Temple of the Lord will be in the middle of it. ¹¹This land is for the priests who are given the holy duty of serving the Lord. They are the descendants of Zadok who did my work and did not leave me when Israel and the Levites left me. ¹²They will have as their share a very holy part of the holy portion of the land. It will be next to the land of the Levites.

¹³“Alongside the land for the priests, the Levites will have a share about seven miles long and three miles wide; its full length will be about seven miles and its full width about three miles. ¹⁴The Levites are not to sell or trade any of this land. They are not to let anyone else own any of this best part of the land, because it belongs to the Lord.

City Property

¹⁵“The rest of the area will be about one and one-half miles wide and seven miles long. It will not be holy but will belong to the city and be used for homes and pastures. The city will be in the middle of it. ¹⁶These are the city’s measurements: the north side will be about one mile, the south side about one mile, the east side about one mile, and the west side about one mile. ¹⁷The city’s land for pastures will be about four hundred thirty-seven feet on the north, four hundred thirty-seven feet on the south, four hundred thirty-seven feet on the east, and four hundred thirty-seven feet on the west. ¹⁸Along the long side of the holy area there will be left three miles on the east and three miles on the west. It will be used to grow food for the city workers. ¹⁹The city workers from all the tribes of Israel will farm this land. ²⁰This whole area will be square, seven miles by

seven miles. You shall give to the Lord the holy share along with the city property.

²¹“Land that is left over on both sides of the holy area and city property will belong to the ruler. That land will extend east of the holy area to the eastern border and west of it to the Mediterranean Sea. Both of these areas run the length of the lands of the tribes, and they belong to the ruler. The holy area with the Holy Place of the Temple will be in the middle. ²²The Levites’ land and the city property will be in the middle of the lands belonging to the ruler. Those lands will be between Judah’s border and Benjamin’s border.

The Other Tribes’ Land

²³“Here is what the rest of the tribes will receive: Benjamin will have one share. It will go from the east side to the Mediterranean Sea on the west side.

²⁴“South of Benjamin’s land, Simeon will have one share. It will go from the east side to the west side.

²⁵“South of Simeon’s land, Issachar will have one share. It will go from the east side to the west side.

²⁶“South of Issachar’s land, Zebulun will have one share. It will go from the east side to the west side.

²⁷“South of Zebulun’s land, Gad will have one share. It will go from the east side to the west side.

²⁸“The southern border of Gad’s land will go east from Tamar on the Dead Sea to the waters of Meribah Kadesh. Then it will run along the brook of Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea.

²⁹“This is the land you will divide among the tribes of Israel to be their shares,” says the Lord God.

The Gates of the City

³⁰“These will be the outside borders of the city: The north side will measure more than one mile. ³¹There will be three gates facing north: Reuben’s Gate, Judah’s Gate, and Levi’s Gate, named for the tribes of Israel.

³²“The east side will measure more than one mile. There will be three gates facing east: Joseph’s Gate, Benjamin’s Gate, and Dan’s Gate.

³³“The south side will measure more than one mile. There will be three gates facing south: Simeon’s Gate, Issachar’s Gate, and Zebulun’s Gate.

³⁴“The west side will measure more than one mile. There will be three gates facing west: Gad’s Gate, Asher’s Gate, and Naphtali’s Gate.

³⁵“The city will measure about six miles around. From then on the name of the city will be The Lord Is There.”

Tammuz Tammuz was a god in Babylon. Every year people thought this god died when the plants died. After they cried for him, they believed he came back to life, and the plants lived again.

cord The umbilical cord that gives the unborn baby food and air from its mother.

Oholah ... Jerusalem Throughout this chapter Samaria is used in place of Oholah, and Jerusalem is used in place of Oholibah.

caulk Something like tar put between the boards of a ship to make it waterproof.

wind This Hebrew word could also mean “breath” or “spirit.”

homer The Hebrew word means “donkey-load.” It measured about five dry bushels or one hundred seventy-five liquid quarts. So an ephah was about one-half bushel, and a bath was about eighteen quarts.

shekel In Ezekiel’s time a shekel weighed about two-fifths of an ounce.

[The Book of Daniel](#)

Introduction

If you are a Jew in Babylon, you've got reason to be depressed. Jeremiah was right all along. All those times you thought he was one taco short of a platter, he was telling the truth!

Jerusalem is in ashes. The Temple is in ruins. And you and the rest of your people are in captivity.

Your captors mock you, "Sing us a song about Jerusalem!" ([Psalm 137:3](#)). But you don't sing. You hang your harps on the poplar trees and sit on the banks of the river, watching the water and your days pass by.

Who can sing songs about the Lord in a foreign country?

Daniel can.

Though he was only a teenager when taken captive, he remembers well the songs of his youth. Somewhere in his early years he came to believe that God was sovereign. Nothing happens without his permission. Nothing happens outside of his plan.

But even Daniel could not have imagined the plans God had for him. Prime minister of the court. Interpreter of dreams. Prophet. Teacher. Ruler. A lifelong voice for God among pagan people.

But though the central character of the book is Daniel, the hero is God. "There is a God in heaven ..." Daniel told the king ([2:28](#)), and it was that God in heaven who sustained Daniel and the people while in captivity.

That God, by the way, still reigns.

And anytime God's people have hung up their harps, listen carefully.

God always has a Daniel who remembers how to sing.

About This Book

Author:

Daniel

Date Written:

c. 530 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- God leads in our lives even in difficult circumstances.
- Sometimes faithfulness is rewarded by miracles.
- God will be faithful to his people in the future as he has in the past.

Key Verse:

“Daniel’s God is the living God; he lives forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and his rule will never end” ([Daniel 6:26](#)).

Contents:

1. Daniel’s Life Story [1:1–6:28](#)
2. Daniel’s Prophecy [7:1–12:13](#)

Life Lessons

Daniel 1:1–21

Situation

Daniel and his Israelite friends were exiled to Babylon. Servants of the king prepared them to serve in the royal court.

Observation

It is possible to be obedient to God even when surrounded by people who are disobedient to his Word.

Inspiration

Whereas Ezekiel spent his days preaching (and acting out) sermons to the Jewish exiles, Daniel was recruited for a job in the king's palace.

In fact, Daniel's life in the palace more closely resembles that of the ancient character Joseph, who also rose to a position of prominence in a foreign government. As this chapter underscores, Daniel achieved success without bending his own principles of integrity. Somehow he managed to thrive in an environment marked by ambition and intrigue, while still holding to his high-minded Jewish ideals....

Taken together, the Biblical prophets offer not one, but many models of how a person can serve both God and the state. On the one extreme stand men like Amos and Elijah, who, as outsiders, railed against the evils of society. Others, such as Jeremiah and Nathan, gave occasional counsel to kings, but kept a safe distance. Isaiah and Samuel, however,

became official advisors of kings. And in this book the prophet Daniel shows that a person can keep pure even while working within a tyrannical regime.

For at least sixty-six years, Daniel served pagan kings with great diligence and resourcefulness. Yet he never once compromised his faith, even when threatened with death. The Bible offers no better model of how to live among people who do not share or respect your beliefs. (From *Discovering God* by Philip Yancey)

Application

Are you ever in a Situation when you are too embarrassed to do what is right? Plan how you will handle those Situations to bring honor to God. Ask him for strength to respond correctly. Be bold!

Exploration

Unwavering Witness—[Daniel 3:28](#); [Matthew 5:16](#); [Philippians 1:27–30](#).

Daniel Taken to Babylon

During the third year that Jehoiakim was king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and surrounded it with his army.²The Lord allowed Nebuchadnezzar to capture Jehoiakim king of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar also took some of the things from the Temple of God, which he carried to Babylonia and put in the temple of his gods.

³Then King Nebuchadnezzar ordered Ashpenaz, his chief officer, to bring some of the Israelite men into his palace. He wanted them to be from important families, including the family of the king of Judah.⁴King Nebuchadnezzar wanted only young Israelite men who had nothing wrong with them. They were to be handsome and well educated, capable of learning and understanding, and able to serve in his palace. Ashpenaz was to teach them the language and writings of the Babylonians.⁵The king gave the young men a certain amount of food and wine every day, just like the food he ate. The young men were to be trained for three years, and then they would become servants of the king of Babylon.⁶Among those young men were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah from the people of Judah.

⁷Ashpenaz, the chief officer, gave them Babylonian names. Daniel's new name was Belteshazzar, Hananiah's was Shadrach, Mishaël's was Meshach, and Azariah's was

Abednego.

⁸Daniel decided not to eat the king's food or drink his wine because that would make him unclean. So he asked Ashpenaz for permission not to make himself unclean in this way.

⁹God made Ashpenaz, the chief officer, want to be kind and merciful to Daniel, ¹⁰but Ashpenaz said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my master, the king. He ordered me to give you this food and drink. If you begin to look worse than other young men your age, the king will see this. Then he will cut off my head because of you."

¹¹Ashpenaz had ordered a guard to watch Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ¹²Daniel said to the guard, "Please give us this test for ten days: Don't give us anything but vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³After ten days compare how we look with how the other young men look who eat the king's food. See for yourself and then decide how you want to treat us, your servants."

¹⁴So the guard agreed to test them for ten days. ¹⁵After ten days they looked healthier and better fed than all the young men who ate the king's food. ¹⁶So the guard took away the king's special food and wine, feeding them vegetables instead.

¹⁷God gave these four young men wisdom and the ability to learn many things that people had written and studied. Daniel could also understand visions and dreams.

¹⁸At the end of the time set for them by the king, Ashpenaz brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹The king talked to them and found that none of the young men were as good as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So those four young men became the king's servants. ²⁰Every time the king asked them about something important, they showed much

wisdom and understanding. They were ten times better than all the fortune-tellers and magicians in his kingdom! ²¹So Daniel continued to be the king's servant until the first year Cyrus was king.

Life Lessons

[Daniel 2:1–49](#)

Situation

Because the astrologers were unable to interpret his dream, King Nebuchadnezzar ordered all of the wise men to be killed.

Observation

Even though astrologers and psychics don't have all the answers, God does.

Inspiration

It is one thing to thank God privately for a specific answer to prayer, but what would Daniel say in the presence of the king? Would he be a different man in the presence of Nebuchadnezzar than in his own room and among his friends? He had an opportunity to acquire tremendous prestige and advance his professional life. He was a man of gifts and abilities who now had the opportunity of receiving praise from the ruler of the then-known world.

Yet as he stood in the presence of the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel's first statement was much like what he prayed alone. He kept the king waiting to hear the dream and the interpretation until he had given praise to God. "There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets," he told the king ([Daniel 2:28](#)).

Throughout the Jews' captivity in Babylon, the phrase *the God of heaven* apparently was the main designation used for the living God, and it contrasted Him with all other gods. He is not a god who is stuck

in a temple or a god of one nation. He cannot be limited. He is the God of all the heavens, the God of the universe, the Creator.

We must remember that Daniel's using this term was an affront to Nebuchadnezzar because Daniel was saying in effect, "You have overcome Jerusalem, but the God of heaven, the God that the Jews worship, is a greater God than your god, O Nebuchadnezzar." It took great courage to make this speech.

And having so much opportunity for personal aggrandizement, Daniel discounted his own cleverness ... , "The understanding did not come because I am wise and clever, but because the God of Heaven, who is a living God, revealed it to me." One of the big dangers and temptations in Christianity today is to be infiltrated with the cult of cleverness, but Daniel carefully removed the praise from himself and placed it upon God.

We now see clearly the answer to our earlier question. Daniel's first action, not only when he was alone but also when he was in the presence of the king and the surrounding culture, was to praise God. (From *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer* by Francis Schaeffer)

Application

Have you ever visited a psychic or fortune-teller? Do you even glance at your horoscope, just for fun? Put the newspaper down. Trust God to lead your future and fulfill his promises to you. He alone knows what the future holds.

Exploration

Giving Credit to God—[Joshua 6:16](#); [1 Samuel 1:27](#);
[Luke 19:37](#); [John 9:24–33](#); [11:40–41](#); [Acts 14:8–15](#).

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

During Nebuchadnezzar's second year as king, he had dreams that bothered him and kept him awake at night.² So the king called for his fortune-tellers, magicians, wizards, and wise men, because he wanted them to tell him what he had dreamed. They came in and stood in front of the king.

³Then the king said to them, "I had a dream that bothers me, and I want to know what it means."

⁴The wise men answered the king in the Aramaic language, "O king, live forever! Please tell us, your servants, your dream. Then we will tell you what it means."

⁵King Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "I meant what I said. You must tell me the dream and what it means. If you don't, I will have you torn apart, and I will turn your houses into piles of stones.⁶ But if you tell me my dream and its meaning, I will reward you with gifts and great honor. So tell me the dream and what it means."

⁷Again the wise men said to the king, "Tell us, your servants, the dream, and we will tell you what it means."

⁸King Nebuchadnezzar answered, "I know you are trying to get more time, because you know that I meant what I said.⁹ If you don't tell me my dream, you will be punished. You have all agreed to tell me lies and wicked things, hoping things will change. Now, tell me the dream so that I will know you can tell me what it really means!"

¹⁰The wise men answered the king, saying, “No one on earth can do what the king asks! No great and powerful king has ever asked the fortune-tellers, magicians, or wise men to do this; ¹¹the king is asking something that is too hard. Only the gods could tell the king this, but the gods do not live among people.”

¹²When the king heard their answer, he became very angry. He ordered that all the wise men of Babylon be killed. ¹³So King Nebuchadnezzar’s order to kill the wise men was announced, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to kill them.

¹⁴Arioch, the commander of the king’s guards, was going to kill the wise men of Babylon. But Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and skill, ¹⁵saying, “Why did the king order such a terrible punishment?” Then Arioch explained everything to Daniel. ¹⁶So Daniel went to King Nebuchadnezzar and asked for an appointment so that he could tell the king what his dream meant.

¹⁷Then Daniel went to his house and explained the whole story to his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ¹⁸Daniel asked his friends to pray that the God of heaven would show them mercy and help them understand this secret so he and his friends would not be killed with the other wise men of Babylon.

¹⁹During the night God explained the secret to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven. ²⁰Daniel said:

“Praise God forever and ever,
because he has wisdom and power.

²¹He changes the times and seasons of the year.

He takes away the power of kings
and gives their power to new kings.
He gives wisdom to those who are wise
and knowledge to those who understand.

²²He makes known secrets that are deep and hidden;
he knows what is hidden in darkness,
and light is all around him.

²³I thank you and praise you, God of my ancestors,
because you have given me wisdom and power.
You told me what we asked of you;
you told us about the king's dream."

The Meaning of the Dream

²⁴Then Daniel went to Arioch, the man King Nebuchadnezzar had chosen to kill the wise men of Babylon. Daniel said to him, "Don't put the wise men of Babylon to death. Take me to the king, and I will tell him what his dream means."

²⁵Very quickly Arioch took Daniel to the king and said, "I have found a man among the captives from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means."

²⁶The king asked Daniel, who was also called Belteshazzar, "Are you able to tell me what I dreamed and what it means?"

²⁷Daniel answered, "No wise man, magician, or fortune-teller can explain to the king the secret he has asked about. ²⁸But there is a God in heaven who explains secret things, and he has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen at a later time. This is your dream, the vision you saw while lying on your

bed:²⁹O king, as you were lying there, you thought about things to come. God, who can tell people about secret things, showed you what is going to happen.³⁰God also told this secret to me, not because I have greater wisdom than any other living person, but so that you may know what it means. In that way you will understand what went through your mind.

³¹“O king, in your dream you saw a huge, shiny, and frightening statue in front of you.³²The head of the statue was made of pure gold. Its chest and arms were made of silver. Its stomach and the upper part of its legs were made of bronze.³³The lower part of the legs were made of iron, while its feet were made partly of iron and partly of baked clay.³⁴While you were looking at the statue, you saw a rock cut free, but no human being touched the rock. It hit the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them.³⁵Then the iron, clay, bronze, silver, and gold broke to pieces at the same time. They became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summertime; the wind blew them away, and there was nothing left. Then the rock that hit the statue became a very large mountain that filled the whole earth.

³⁶“That was your dream. Now we will tell the king what it means.³⁷O king, you are the greatest king. God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory.³⁸Wherever people, wild animals, and birds live, God made you ruler over them. King Nebuchadnezzar, you are the head of gold on that statue.

³⁹“Another kingdom will come after you, but it will not be as great as yours. Next a third kingdom, the bronze part, will rule over the earth.⁴⁰Then there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron. In the same way that iron crushes and smashes things to

pieces, the fourth kingdom will smash and crush all the other kingdoms.

⁴¹“You saw that the statue’s feet and toes were partly baked clay and partly iron. That means the fourth kingdom will be a divided kingdom. It will have some of the strength of iron in it, just as you saw iron was mixed with clay. ⁴²The toes of the statue were partly iron and partly clay. So the fourth kingdom will be partly strong like iron and partly breakable like clay. ⁴³You saw the iron mixed with clay, but iron and clay do not hold together. In the same way the people of the fourth kingdom will be a mixture, but they will not be united as one people.

⁴⁴“During the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up another kingdom that will never be destroyed or given to another group of people. This kingdom will crush all the other kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will continue forever.

⁴⁵“King Nebuchadnezzar, you saw a rock cut from a mountain, but no human being touched it. The rock broke the iron, bronze, clay, silver, and gold to pieces. In this way the great God showed you what will happen. The dream is true, and you can trust this explanation.”

⁴⁶Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell facedown on the ground in front of Daniel. The king honored him and commanded that an offering and incense be presented to him. ⁴⁷Then the king said to Daniel, “Truly I know your God is the greatest of all gods, the Lord of all the kings. He tells people about things they cannot know. I know this is true, because you were able to tell these secret things to me.”

⁴⁸Then the king gave Daniel many gifts plus an important

position in his kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar made him ruler over the whole area of Babylon and put him in charge of all the wise men of Babylon. ⁴⁹Daniel asked the king to make Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego leaders over the area of Babylon, so the king did as Daniel asked. Daniel himself became one of the people who stayed at the royal court.

Life Lessons

[Daniel 3:1–30](#)

Situation

Although at one time he praised God, Nebuchadnezzar had an image of gold erected in the area of Babylon.

Observation

Pride and arrogance led Nebuchadnezzar to command all the officials to worship the image or face death. Undoubtedly it was a way for the king to promote submission to his authority.

Inspiration

Ever wonder why churches are powerful in one generation but empty the next? Perhaps the answer is found in [Proverbs 15:25](#): “The Lord will tear down the proud person’s house.”

God hates arrogance. He hates arrogance because we haven’t done anything to be arrogant about. Do art critics give awards to the canvas? Is there a Pulitzer for ink? Can you imagine a scalpel growing smug after a successful heart transplant? Of course not. They are only tools, so they get no credit for the accomplishments.

And the message of the Twenty-third Psalm is that we have nothing to be proud about either. We have rest, salvation, blessings, and a home in heaven—and we did nothing to earn any of it. Who did? Who did the work? The answer threads through the psalm like a silk thread through pearls.

“He makes me ...”

“He leads me ...”

“He restores my soul ...”

“You are with me ...”

“Your rod and Your staff ... comfort me ...”

“You prepare a table ...”

“You anoint my head ...”

We may be the canvas, the paper, or the scalpel, but we are not the ones who deserve the applause. And just to make sure we get the point, right smack-dab in the middle of the poem, David declares who does. The shepherd leads his sheep, not for our names' sake, but “for His name's sake.”

Why does God have anything to do with us? For his name's sake. No other name on the marquee. No other name up in lights. No other name on the front page. This is all done for God's glory.

(From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

Application

In what areas of your life is there a temptation to become proud or arrogant? Is it a special ability or talent? Is it your possessions—the house you live in or the car you drive? Or is it your educational background or your accomplishments? Make a list of those items and then confess to God your pride. Ask that God will help you remove that spirit of arrogance.

Exploration

Arrogance—[Proverbs 8:13](#); [Isaiah 13:11](#); [Jeremiah 48:29](#); [Romans 1:30](#).

The Gold Idol and Blazing Furnace

King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue ninety feet high and nine feet wide and set it up on the plain of Dura in the area of Babylon.²Then he called for the leaders: the governors, assistant governors, captains of the soldiers, people who advised the king, keepers of the treasury, judges, rulers, and all other officers in his kingdom. He wanted them to come to the special service for the statue he had set up.³So they all came for the special service and stood in front of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.⁴Then the man who made announcements for the king said in a loud voice, “People, nations, and those of every language, this is what you are commanded to do:⁵When you hear the sound of the horns, flutes, lyres, [zithers](#), harps, pipes, and all the other musical instruments, you must bow down and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.⁶Anyone who doesn’t bow down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

⁷Now people, nations, and those who spoke every language were there. When they heard the sound of the horns, flutes, lyres, zithers, pipes, and all the other musical instruments, they bowed down and worshiped the gold statue King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

⁸Then some Babylonians came up to the king and began speaking against the men of Judah.⁹They said to King

Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! ¹⁰O king, you gave a command that everyone who heard the horns, lyres, zithers, harps, pipes, and all the other musical instruments would have to bow down and worship the gold statue. ¹¹Anyone who wouldn’t do this was to be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹²O king, there are some men of Judah whom you made officers in the area of Babylon that did not pay attention to your order. Their names are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They do not serve your gods and do not worship the gold statue you have set up.”

¹³Nebuchadnezzar became very angry and called for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. When they were brought to the king, ¹⁴Nebuchadnezzar said, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you do not serve my gods nor worship the gold statue I have set up? ¹⁵In a moment you will again hear the sound of the horns, flutes, lyres, zithers, harps, pipes, and all the other musical instruments. If you bow down and worship the statue I made, that will be good. But if you do not worship it, you will immediately be thrown into the blazing furnace. What god will be able to save you from my power then?”

¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, saying, “Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves to you. ¹⁷If you throw us into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from the furnace. He will save us from your power, O king. ¹⁸But even if God does not save us, we want you, O king, to know this: We will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.”

¹⁹Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and he changed his mind. He

ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual.
²⁰Then he commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.

²¹So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were tied up and thrown into the blazing furnace while still wearing their robes, trousers, turbans, and other clothes. ²²The king's command was very strict, and the furnace was made so hot that the flames killed the strong soldiers who threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace. ²³Firmly tied, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell into the blazing furnace.

²⁴Then King Nebuchadnezzar was so surprised that he jumped to his feet. He asked the men who advised him, "Didn't we tie up only three men and throw them into the fire?"

They answered, "Yes, O king."

²⁵The king said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire. They are not tied up, and they are not burned. The fourth man looks like a son of the gods."

²⁶Then Nebuchadnezzar went to the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, come out! Servants of the Most High God, come here!"

So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. ²⁷When they came out, the governors, assistant governors, captains of the soldiers, and royal advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies. Their hair was not burned, their robes were not burned, and they didn't even smell like smoke!

²⁸Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Their God has sent his angel and

saved his servants from the fire! These three men trusted their God and refused to obey my command. They were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god other than their own.²⁹ So I now give this command: Anyone from any nation or language who says anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will be torn apart and have his house turned into a pile of stones. No other god can save his people like this.”³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the area of Babylon.

Life Lessons

[Daniel 4:1–37](#)

Situation

When King Nebuchadnezzar had a strange dream, he asked Daniel to interpret it.

Observation

God has an eternal kingdom. He brings earthly kings under his control.

Inspiration

It is quite evident that Daniel loved this reprobate. God had revealed to him the future of his friend, Nebuchadnezzar, through this tragic, terrible dream. As he wrestled with the meaning of the dream, he didn't want to tell the king what he had learned. He was undoubtedly very troubled when he said, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!" ([Daniel 4:19](#)).

Daniel gives us a superb pattern of how to teach the judgment of God to people. It needs to be done with a broken heart, with a true concern, pointing out the consequences with mercy. I have a lot of friends in the ministry who can't wait to get to the passages on judgment, because they come on with great vengeance. One thing is missing—the tears.

Years ago in London there was a large gathering of notables for a concert. One of the invited guests was a famous preacher, Caesar Milan. A young lady charmed the audience that night with her singing. After the concert Milan went up to her and

graciously, but very boldly, said to her, “I thought as I listened to you tonight how tremendously the cause of Christ would be benefited if your talents were dedicated to His cause. You know, young lady, you are a sinner in the sight of God, but I am glad to tell you that the blood of Jesus can cleanse you from all sin.”

The lady became so angry at the preacher that she stomped her feet and walked away. As she was leaving he said, “I mean no offense. I will pray that God’s Spirit will convict you.”

Now that’s not exactly my style of witnessing, but here’s the rest of the story. The young lady went home, but she couldn’t sleep. The face of the preacher appeared before her, and his words rang through her mind. About two o’clock in the morning she got out of bed, took a pencil and piece of paper, and with tears rolling down her face, Charlotte Elliot wrote:

Just as I am without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

That song has been sung by choirs throughout the world as an invitation to accept Jesus Christ... A few words by a man who preached the judgment of God with a broken heart resulted in tens of thousands of new Christians declaring their faith. I wonder what would happen if that would be our *modus operandi* in the ministry today. (From *The Handwriting on the Wall* by David Jeremiah)

Application

Choose one or two people you have read about in the newspaper the past week and pray for God's Holy Spirit to convict them of sin and reveal Christ to them.

Exploration

Concern for Others—[Luke 19:41](#); [Galatians 6:1](#); [Hebrews 3:12–13](#); [12:14–16](#); [James 5:19–20](#).

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of a Tree

King Nebuchadnezzar sent this letter to the people, nations, and those who speak every language in all the world:

I wish you peace and great wealth!

²The Most High God has done miracles and wonderful things for me that I am happy to tell you about.

³His wonderful acts are great,
and his miracles are mighty.
His kingdom goes on forever,
and his rule continues from now on.

⁴I, Nebuchadnezzar, was happy and successful at my palace, ⁵but I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying on my bed, I saw pictures and visions in my mind that alarmed me. ⁶So I ordered all the wise men of Babylon to come to me and tell me what my dream meant. ⁷The fortune-tellers, magicians, and wise men came, and I told them about the dream. But they could not tell me what it meant.

⁸Finally, Daniel came to me. (I called him Belteshazzar to honor my god, because the spirit of the holy gods is in him.) I told my dream to him. ⁹I said, "Belteshazzar, you are the most important of all the fortune-tellers. I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, so there is no secret that is too hard for you to understand. This was what I dreamed; tell me what it

means. ¹⁰These are the visions I saw while I was lying in my bed: I looked, and there in front of me was a tree standing in the middle of the earth. And it was very tall. ¹¹The tree grew large and strong. The top of the tree touched the sky and could be seen from anywhere on earth. ¹²The leaves of the tree were beautiful. It had plenty of good fruit on it, enough food for everyone. The wild animals found shelter under the tree, and the birds lived in its branches. Every animal ate from it.

¹³“As I was looking at those things in the vision while lying on my bed, I saw an observer, a holy angel coming down from heaven. ¹⁴He spoke very loudly and said, ‘Cut down the tree and cut off its branches. Strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals under the tree run away, and let the birds in its branches fly away. ¹⁵But leave the stump and its roots in the ground with a band of iron and bronze around it; let it stay in the field with the grass around it.

“Let the man become wet with dew, and let him live among the animals and plants of the earth. ¹⁶Let him not think like a human any longer, but let him have the mind of an animal for seven years.

¹⁷“The observers gave this command; the holy ones declared the sentence. This is so all people may know that the Most High God rules over every kingdom on earth. God gives those kingdoms to anyone he wants, and he chooses people to rule them who are not proud.’

¹⁸“That is what I, King Nebuchadnezzar, dreamed. Now [Belteshazzar](#), tell me what the dream means. None of the wise men in my kingdom can explain it to me, but you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you.”

Daniel Explains the Dream

¹⁹Then Daniel, who was called Belteshazzar, was very quiet for a while, because his understanding of the dream frightened him. So the king said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning make you afraid.”

Then Belteshazzar answered, “My master, I wish the dream were about your enemies, and I wish its meaning were for those who are against you! ²⁰You saw a tree in your dream that grew large and strong. Its top touched the sky, and it could be seen from all over the earth. ²¹Its leaves were beautiful, and it had plenty of fruit for everyone to eat. It was a home for the wild animals, and its branches were nesting places for the birds. ²²O king, you are that tree! You have become great and powerful, like the tall tree that touched the sky. Your power reaches to the far parts of the earth.

²³“O king, you saw an observer, a holy angel, coming down from heaven who said, ‘Cut down the tree and destroy it. But leave the stump and its roots in the ground with a band of iron and bronze around it; leave it in the field with the grass. Let him become wet with dew and live like a wild animal for seven years.’”

²⁴“This is the meaning of the dream, O king. The Most High God has commanded these things to happen to my master the king: ²⁵You will be forced away from people to live among the wild animals. People will feed you grass like an ox, and dew from the sky will make you wet. Seven years will pass, and then you will learn this lesson: The Most High God is ruler over every kingdom on earth, and he gives those kingdoms to anyone he chooses.

²⁶“Since the stump of the tree and its roots were left in the ground, your kingdom will be given back to you when you learn that one in heaven rules your kingdom. ²⁷So, O king, please accept my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Stop doing wicked things and be kind to the poor. Then you might continue to be successful.”

The King's Dream Comes True

²⁸All these things happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹Twelve months later as he was walking on the [roof](#) of his palace in Babylon, ³⁰he said, “I have built this great Babylon as my royal home. I built it by my power to show my glory and my majesty.”

³¹The words were still in his mouth when a voice from heaven said, “King Nebuchadnezzar, these things will happen to you: Your royal power has been taken away from you. ³²You will be forced away from people. You will live with the wild animals and will be fed grass like an ox. Seven years will pass before you learn this lesson: The Most High God rules over every kingdom on earth and gives those kingdoms to anyone he chooses.”

³³Immediately the words came true. Nebuchadnezzar was forced to go away from people, and he began eating grass like an ox. He became wet from dew. His hair grew long like the feathers of an eagle, and his nails grew like the claws of a bird.

³⁴At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up toward heaven, and I could think normally again! Then I gave praise to the Most High God; I gave honor and glory to him who lives forever.

God's rule is forever,
and his kingdom continues for all time.

³⁵People on earth
are not truly important.
God does what he wants
with the powers of heaven
and the people on earth.
No one can stop his powerful hand
or question what he does.

³⁶At that time I could think normally again, and God gave back my great honor and power and returned the glory to my kingdom. The people who advised me and the royal family came to me for help again. I became king again and was even greater and more powerful than before. ³⁷Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, give praise and honor and glory to the King of heaven. Everything he does is right and fair, and he is able to make proud people humble.

Life Lessons

Daniel 5:1–31

Situation

At the height of his power, Belshazzar, king of Assyria, was judged by God for his corrupt and worldly lifestyle, which included desecrating the Temple goblets in a wild party. A mysterious hand wrote a cryptic message on the wall of the Assyrian palace. Only Daniel could translate the message. The message told of the imminent fall of the Assyrian Empire.

Observation

Materialism is not the answer to a fulfilled life. Trust only in God.

Inspiration

Not far from where I live are some of the most luxurious beach communities in all the world. The finest in homes, furnishings, clothing, automobiles, restaurants, artworks, yachts, and craftsmanship can be found in the Newport Beach-Balboa Island-Laguna Beach region. If you ever want to witness materialism on parade, just visit that elegant stretch of real estate.

While driving on the Balboa Peninsula to meet a man for lunch one day, I found myself momentarily behind a bright red Porsche, a beautiful little German-made sports car, meticulously cared for by the owner, who was whipping in and out of traffic. Obviously, he was familiar with the road. As I pulled up behind him to wait for a traffic light, I noticed several

appointments on him and his car that revealed he was very much at home in the chic scene. As I smiled at his clever license plate, personalized, of course, I caught a glimpse of the lettered frame that bordered it—which told me volumes about the man’s lifestyle, had I had any doubt up to that point. It contained eight words: *He who dies with the most toys wins!* That, friends and neighbors, is “materialism to the max,” as some teenagers would say. Before we can ever expect to build a life that is meaningful and fulfilling, we must see the futility of materialism. . . .

The idea, then, is to live a pure and godly life, walking in righteousness and letting the power of the Spirit flow through us. Because God’s grace frees us from the guilt of sin, we can be plugged into His liberating power. We are free! Now that is the way to walk. And I’ll tell you, it is a marvelous way to live. Talk about having a blast!

(From *Living on the Ragged Edge* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Give God the respect and honor he is due. Look for his help in difficult times, rather than relying on worldly goods and answers whose value is only temporary. Today, pray for help with a problem that material resources cannot solve.

Exploration

Materialism—[Proverbs 11:28](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:10](#); [Matthew 6:24](#); [Revelation 18:9–10](#).

The Writing on the Wall

King Belshazzar gave a big banquet for a thousand royal guests and drank wine with them. ²As Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver cups that his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. This was so the king, his royal guests, his wives, and his slave women could drink from those cups. ³So they brought the gold cups that had been taken from the Temple of God in Jerusalem. And the king and his royal guests, his wives, and his slave women drank from them. ⁴As they were drinking, they praised their gods, which were made from gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

⁵Suddenly the fingers of a person's hand appeared and began writing on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote.

⁶King Belshazzar was very frightened. His face turned white, his knees knocked together, and he could not stand up because his legs were too weak. ⁷The king called for the magicians, wise men, and wizards of Babylon and said to them, "Anyone who can read this writing and explain it will receive purple clothes fit for a king and a gold chain around his neck. And I will make that person the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

⁸Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. ⁹King Belshazzar

became even more afraid, and his face became even whiter. His royal guests were confused.

¹⁰Then the king's mother, who had heard the voices of the king and his royal guests, came into the banquet room. She said, "O king, live forever! Don't be afraid or let your face be white with fear! ¹¹There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father, this man showed understanding, knowledge, and wisdom like the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, put this man in charge of all the wise men, fortune-tellers, magicians, and wizards. ¹²The man I am talking about is named Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. He was very smart and had knowledge and understanding. He could explain dreams and secrets and could answer very hard problems. Call for Daniel. He will tell you what the writing on the wall means."

¹³So they brought Daniel to the king, and the king asked, "Is your name Daniel? Are you one of the captives my father the king brought from Judah? ¹⁴I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that you are very smart and have knowledge and extraordinary understanding. ¹⁵The wise men and magicians were brought to me to read this writing and to explain what it means, but they could not explain it. ¹⁶I have heard that you are able to explain what things mean and can find the answers to hard problems. Read this writing on the wall and explain it to me. If you can, I will give you purple clothes fit for a king and a gold chain to wear around your neck. And you will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

¹⁷Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself, or you may give those rewards to someone else.

But I will read the writing on the wall for you and will explain to you what it means.

¹⁸“O king, the Most High God made your father Nebuchadnezzar a great, important, and powerful king.

¹⁹Because God made him important, all the people, nations, and those who spoke every language were very frightened of Nebuchadnezzar. If he wanted someone to die, he killed that person. If he wanted someone to live, he let that person live. Those he wanted to promote, he promoted. Those he wanted to be less important, he made less important.

²⁰“But Nebuchadnezzar became too proud and stubborn, so he was taken off his royal throne. His glory was taken away.

²¹He was forced away from people, and his mind became like the mind of an animal. He lived with the wild donkeys and was fed grass like an ox and became wet with dew. These things happened to him until he learned his lesson: The Most High God rules over every kingdom on earth, and he sets anyone he chooses over those kingdoms.

²²“Belshazzar, you already knew these things, because you are a descendant of Nebuchadnezzar. Still you have not been sorry for what you have done. ²³Instead, you have set yourself against the Lord of heaven. You ordered the drinking cups from the Temple of the Lord to be brought to you. Then you and your royal guests, your wives, and your slave women drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone that are not really gods; they cannot see or hear or understand anything. You did not honor God, who has power over your life and everything you do. ²⁴So God sent the hand that wrote on the wall.

²⁵“These are the words that were written on the wall:

‘Mene, mene, tekel, and parsin.’

²⁶“This is what the words mean: Mene: God has counted the days until your kingdom will end. ²⁷Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found not good enough. ²⁸Parsin: Your kingdom is being divided and will be given to the Medes and the Persians.”

²⁹Then Belshazzar gave an order for Daniel to be dressed in purple clothes and to have a gold chain put around his neck. And it was announced that Daniel was the third highest ruler in the kingdom. ³⁰That very same night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonian people, was killed. ³¹So Darius the Mede became the new king when he was sixty-two years old.

Life Lessons

Daniel 6:1–28

Situation

Daniel's enemies coveted his job and sought to destroy him. They developed a clever scheme to force the king to kill Daniel, but God rescued him.

Observation

God protects those who remain faithful to him. Daniel was not ashamed of his faith and did his best to serve God and the king faithfully.

Inspiration

I recently read a story of a woman who for years was married to a harsh husband. Each day he would leave her a list of chores to complete before he returned at the end of the day. "Clean the yard. Stack the firewood. Wash the windows...."

If she didn't complete the tasks, she would be greeted with his explosive anger. But even if she did complete the list, he was never satisfied; he would always find inadequacies in her work.

After several years, the husband passed away. Some time later she remarried, this time to a man who lavished her with tenderness and adoration.

One day, while going through a box of old papers, the wife discovered one of her first husband's lists. And as she read the sheet, a realization caused a tear of joy to splash on the paper.

"I'm still doing all these things, and no one has to tell me. I do it because I love him."

That is the unique characteristic of the new kingdom. Its subjects don't work in order to go to heaven; they work because they are going to heaven. Arrogance and fear are replaced with gratitude and joy. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

Because you love God, give honor to those in positions of leadership. Avoid telling cutting jokes about the president. Don't gossip about your boss. Give policemen proper respect. In this way, others may see your love for God.

Exploration

Faith—[Psalm 27:1](#); [118:5–9](#); [Habakkuk 2:4](#); [Mark 9:23](#).

Daniel and the Lions

Darius thought it would be a good idea to choose one hundred twenty governors who would rule his kingdom.²He chose three men as supervisors over those governors, and Daniel was one of the supervisors. The supervisors were to ensure that the governors did not try to cheat the king.³Daniel showed that he could do the work better than the other supervisors and governors, so the king planned to put Daniel in charge of the whole kingdom.⁴Because of this, the other supervisors and governors tried to find reasons to accuse Daniel about his work in the government. But they could not find anything wrong with him or any reason to accuse him, because he was trustworthy and not lazy or dishonest.⁵Finally these men said, “We will never find any reason to accuse Daniel unless it is about the law of his God.”

⁶So the supervisors and governors went as a group to the king and said: “King Darius, live forever!⁷The supervisors, assistant governors, governors, the people who advise you, and the captains of the soldiers have all agreed that you should make a new law for everyone to obey: For the next thirty days no one should pray to any god or human except to you, O king. Anyone who doesn’t obey will be thrown into the lions’ den.⁸Now, O king, make the law and sign your name to it so that it cannot be changed, because then it will be a law of the Medes and Persians and cannot be canceled.”⁹So King

Darius signed the law.

¹⁰Even though Daniel knew that the new law had been written, he went to pray in an upstairs room in his house, which had windows that opened toward Jerusalem. Three times each day Daniel would kneel down to pray and thank God, just as he always had done.

¹¹Then those men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. ¹²So they went to the king and talked to him about the law he had made. They said, “Didn’t you sign a law that says no one may pray to any god or human except you, O king? Doesn’t it say that anyone who disobeys during the next thirty days will be thrown into the lions’ den?”

The king answered, “Yes, that is the law, and the laws of the Medes and Persians cannot be canceled.”

¹³Then they said to the king, “Daniel, one of the captives from Judah, is not paying attention to you, O king, or to the law you signed. Daniel still prays to his God three times every day.” ¹⁴The king became very upset when he heard this. He wanted to save Daniel, and he worked hard until sunset trying to think of a way to save him.

¹⁵Then those men went as a group to the king. They said, “Remember, O king, the law of the Medes and Persians says that no law or command given by the king can be changed.”

¹⁶So King Darius gave the order, and Daniel was brought in and thrown into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May the God you serve all the time save you!” ¹⁷A big stone was brought and placed over the opening of the lions’ den. Then the king used his signet ring and the rings of his royal officers to put special seals on the rock. This ensured that no one

would move the rock and bring Daniel out. ¹⁸Then King Darius went back to his palace. He did not eat that night, he did not have any entertainment brought to him, and he could not sleep.

¹⁹The next morning King Darius got up at dawn and hurried to the lions' den. ²⁰As he came near the den, he was worried. He called out to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God! Has your God that you always worship been able to save you from the lions?"

²¹Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! ²²My God sent his angel to close the lions' mouths. They have not hurt me, because my God knows I am innocent. I never did anything wrong to you, O king."

²³King Darius was very happy and told his servants to lift Daniel out of the lions' den. So they lifted him out and did not find any injury on him, because Daniel had trusted in his God.

²⁴Then the king commanded that the men who had accused Daniel be brought to the lions' den. They, their wives, and their children were thrown into the den. The lions grabbed them before they hit the floor of the den and crushed their bones.

²⁵Then King Darius wrote a letter to all people and all nations, to those who spoke every language in the world:

I wish you great peace and wealth.

²⁶I am making a new law for people in every part of my kingdom. All of you must fear and respect the God of Daniel.

Daniel's God is the living God;

he lives forever.

His kingdom will never be destroyed,

and his rule will never end.

²⁷God rescues and saves people
and does mighty miracles
in heaven and on earth.
He is the one who saved Daniel
from the power of the lions.

²⁸So Daniel was successful during the time Darius was king
and when Cyrus the Persian was king.

Life Lessons

Daniel 7:1–28

Situation

Through a vision, God told Daniel about the coming of the Messiah and the final judgment. Daniel didn't understand everything he saw, because some of the events would take place five hundred years later.

Observation

God always fulfills his prophecies. Christians can have confidence in him no matter how bleak the world may seem.

Inspiration

Thousands of people today are excited about Bible prophecy. The revelation of what the Bible says about events past, present, and future, has become more prominent in the themes of books, sermons, and conferences. The Second Coming of Christ is becoming a closer and closer reality for those of us who study the Bible and the world scene.

The entire plan for the future has its key in the resurrection. Unless Christ was raised from the dead, there can be no kingdom and no returning King. When the disciples stood at the place Jesus left this earth, which is called the place of ascension, they were given assurance by angels that the Christ of resurrection would be the Christ of returning glory....

The resurrection is an event which prepares us and confirms for us that future event when He will

return again.

Yes, Jesus Christ is alive.

Obviously Christ's physical resurrection is an essential part of God's plan to save us. Have you given yourself to this living Christ? ...

If you trust the resurrected Christ as your Lord and Savior, He will be with you when you die, and will give you life with Him forever. Because of the resurrection, you can be "Born Again." (From *How to Be Born Again* by Billy Graham)

Application

Who tries to predict the future for you? What forecasts do you rely on? If your biggest fears and problems could be solved, would the future really make you happier? Pray that God would fill your heart with assurance of his love and care.

Exploration

Prophecy—[Deuteronomy 18:21–22](#); [1 Corinthians 14:1](#); [Revelation 1:3](#).

Daniel's Dream About Four Animals

In Belshazzar's first year as king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream. He saw visions as he was lying on his bed, and he wrote down what he had dreamed.

²“Daniel said: “I saw my vision at night. In the vision the wind was blowing from all four directions, which made the sea very rough. ³I saw four huge animals come up from the sea, and each animal was different from the others.

⁴“The first animal looked like a lion, but had wings like an eagle. I watched this animal until its wings were torn off. It was lifted from the ground so that it stood up on two feet like a human, and it was given the mind of a human.

⁵“Then I saw a second animal before me that looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, ‘Get up and eat all the meat you want!’

⁶“After that, I looked, and there before me was another animal. This animal looked like a leopard with four wings on its back that looked like a bird's wings. This animal had four heads and was given power to rule.

⁷“After that, in my vision at night I saw in front of me a fourth animal that was cruel, terrible, and very strong. It had large iron teeth. It crushed and ate what it killed, and then it walked on whatever was left. This fourth animal was different from any animal I had seen before, and it had ten horns.

⁸“While I was thinking about the horns, another horn grew up among them. It was a little horn with eyes like a human’s eyes. It also had a mouth, and the mouth was bragging. The little horn pulled out three of the other horns.

⁹“As I looked,

thrones were put in their places,
and God, who has been alive forever, sat on his throne.
His clothes were white like snow,
and the hair on his head was white like wool.
His throne was made from fire,
and the wheels of his throne were blazing with fire.

¹⁰A river of fire was flowing
from in front of him.
Many thousands of angels were serving him,
and millions of angels stood before him.
Court was ready to begin,
and the books were opened.

¹¹“I kept on looking because the little horn was bragging. I kept watching until finally the fourth animal was killed. Its body was destroyed, and it was thrown into the burning fire. ¹²(The power and rule of the other animals had been taken from them, but they were permitted to live for a certain period of time.)

¹³“In my vision at night I saw in front of me someone who looked like a human being coming on the clouds in the sky. He came near God, who has been alive forever, and he was led to God. ¹⁴He was given authority, glory, and the strength of a king. People of every tribe, nation, and language will serve him. His rule will last forever, and his kingdom will never be

destroyed.

The Meaning of the Dream

¹⁵“I, Daniel, was worried. The visions that went through my mind frightened me. ¹⁶I came near one of those standing there and asked what all this meant.

“So he told me and explained to me what these things meant: ¹⁷“The four great animals are four kingdoms that will come from the earth. ¹⁸But the holy people who belong to the Most High God will receive the power to rule and will have the power to rule forever, from now on.’

¹⁹“Then I wanted to know what the fourth animal meant, because it was different from all the others. It was very terrible and had iron teeth and bronze claws. It was the animal that crushed and ate what it killed and then walked on whatever was left. ²⁰I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the little horn that grew there. It had pulled out three of the other ten horns and looked greater than the others. It had eyes and a mouth that kept bragging. ²¹As I watched, the little horn began making war against God’s holy people and was defeating them ²²until God, who has been alive forever, came. He judged in favor of the holy people who belong to the Most High God; then the time came for them to receive the power to rule.

²³“And he explained this to me: ‘The fourth animal is a fourth kingdom that will come on the earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will destroy people all over the world. It will walk on and crush the whole earth.’ ²⁴The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this fourth kingdom.

After those ten kings are gone, another king will come. He will be different from the kings who ruled before him, and he will defeat three of the other kings. ²⁵This king will speak against the Most High God, and he will hurt and kill God's holy people. He will try to change times and laws that have already been set. The holy people that belong to God will be in that king's power for three and one-half years.

²⁶“But the court will decide what should happen. The power of the king will be taken away, and his kingdom will be completely destroyed. ²⁷Then the holy people who belong to the Most High God will have the power to rule. They will rule over all the kingdoms under heaven with power and greatness, and their power to rule will last forever. People from all the other kingdoms will respect and serve them.’

²⁸“That was the end of the dream. I, Daniel, was very afraid. My face became white from fear, but I kept everything to myself.”

Life Lessons

[Daniel 8:1–27](#)

Situation

Daniel's dreams symbolized the future rise and fall of Greece. By overthrowing human power, God would triumph and establish his kingdom.

Observation

The chapters in this book have given rise to various interpretations. Some Old Testament prophecies would have their fulfillment in the near future, others in the far future. But one thing is certain: The nations and the future are under God's ultimate control.

Inspiration

Jesus has said the same to us. Just prior to his crucifixion, he told his disciples that he would be leaving them. "Where I am going you cannot follow now, but you will follow later" ([John 13:36](#)).

Such a statement was bound to stir some questions. Peter spoke for the others and asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now?" (v. [37](#)).

See if Jesus' reply doesn't reflect the tenderness of a parent to a child: "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house; I would not tell you this if it were not true. I am going there to prepare a place for you... I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am going" ([John 14:1–3](#)).

Reduce the paragraph to a sentence and it might read: “You do the trusting and I’ll do the taking.” A healthy reminder when it comes to anticipating the return of Christ. For many, the verb “trust” is not easily associated with his coming.

Our pre-K minds are ill-equipped to handle the thoughts of eternity. When it comes to a world with no boundaries of space and time, we don’t have the hooks for those hats. Consequently, our Lord takes the posture of a parent, “You do the trusting and I’ll do the taking.” This is precisely his message in these warm words of [John 14](#). Let’s ponder them for a bit.

All of his words can be reduced to two: *Trust me*. “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me” (v. [1](#)).

Don’t be troubled by the return of Christ. Don’t be anxious about things you cannot comprehend. Issues like the millennium and the Antichrist are intended to challenge and stretch us, but not overwhelm and certainly not divide us. For the Christian, the return of Christ is not a riddle to be solved or a code to be broken, but rather a day to be anticipated.

Jesus wants us to trust him. He doesn’t want us to be troubled, so he reassures us with these truths. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

Application

Many people like to predict future events and the timing of them. However, even though we are given some information in the Scriptures, we aren’t expected to know all the exact dates. We are expected, though,

to study the Scriptures to the best of our ability and live every day as if the Lord were coming back that day.

Exploration

Prophecy—[Genesis 41:8; 42:8–9; Daniel 2:1–11; 2 Timothy 4:6–8; Revelation 22:10–14](#).

Daniel's Vision

During the third year of King Belshazzar's rule, I, Daniel, saw another vision, which was like the first one.²In this vision I saw myself in the capital city of Susa, in the area of Elam. I was standing by the Ulai Canal³when I looked up and saw a male sheep standing beside the canal. It had two long horns, but one horn was longer and newer than the other.⁴I watched the sheep charge to the west, the north, and the south. No animal could stand before him, and none could save another animal from his power. He did whatever he wanted and became very powerful.

⁵While I was watching this, I saw a male goat come from the west. This goat had one large horn between his eyes that was easy to see. He crossed over the whole earth so fast that his feet hardly touched the ground.

⁶In his anger the goat charged the sheep with the two horns that I had seen standing by the canal.⁷I watched the angry goat attack the sheep and break the sheep's two horns. The sheep was not strong enough to stop it. The goat knocked the sheep to the ground and then walked all over him. No one was able to save the sheep from the goat,⁸so the male goat became very great. But when he was strong, his big horn broke off and four horns grew in place of the one big horn. Those four horns pointed in four different directions and were easy to see.

⁹Then a little horn grew from one of those four horns, and it

became very big. It grew to the south, the east, and toward the beautiful land of Judah. ¹⁰That little horn grew until it reached to the sky. It even threw some of the army of heaven to the ground and walked on them! ¹¹That little horn set itself up as equal to God, the Commander of heaven's armies. It stopped the daily sacrifices that were offered to him, and the Temple, the place where people worshiped him, was pulled down. ¹²Because there was a turning away from God, the people stopped the daily sacrifices. Truth was thrown down to the ground, and the horn was successful in everything it did.

¹³Then I heard a holy angel speaking. Another holy angel asked the first one, "How long will the things in this vision last—the daily sacrifices, the turning away from God that brings destruction, the Temple being pulled down, and the army of heaven being walked on?"

¹⁴The angel said to me, "This will happen for twenty-three hundred evenings and mornings. Then the holy place will be repaired."

¹⁵I, Daniel, saw this vision and tried to understand what it meant. In it I saw someone who looked like a man standing near me. ¹⁶And I heard a man's voice calling from the Ulai Canal: "Gabriel, explain the vision to this man."

¹⁷Gabriel came to where I was standing. When he came close to me, I was very afraid and bowed facedown on the ground. But Gabriel said to me, "Human being, understand that this vision is about the time of the end."

¹⁸While Gabriel was speaking, I fell into a deep sleep with my face on the ground. Then he touched me and lifted me to my feet. ¹⁹He said, "Now, I will explain to you what will happen in the time of God's anger. Your vision was about the set time

of the end.

²⁰“You saw a male sheep with two horns, which are the kings of Media and Persia. ²¹The male goat is the king of Greece, and the big horn between its eyes is the first king. ²²The four horns that grew in the place of the broken horn are four kingdoms. Those four kingdoms will come from the nation of the first king, but they will not be as strong as the first king.

²³“When the end comes near for those kingdoms, a bold and cruel king who tells lies will come. This will happen when many people have turned against God. ²⁴This king will be very powerful, but his power will not come from himself. He will cause terrible destruction and will be successful in everything he does. He will destroy powerful people and even God’s holy people. ²⁵This king will succeed by using lies and force. He will think that he is very important. He will destroy many people without warning; he will try to fight even the Prince of princes! But that cruel king will be destroyed, and not by human power.

²⁶“The vision that has been shown to you about these evenings and mornings is true. But seal up the vision, because those things won’t happen for a long time.”

²⁷I, Daniel, became very weak and was sick for several days after that vision. Then I got up and went back to work for the king, but I was very upset about the vision. I didn’t understand what it meant.

Life Lessons

Daniel 9:1–27

Situation

While Daniel was in exile, he read [Jeremiah 25:11–12](#) and [Jeremiah 29:10](#). He realized that Israel's seventy-year punishment was almost over. Daniel knew his people had been unfaithful, but he asked God to forgive them. Daniel received another vision about the end times and the fate of Israel.

Observation

God answers our prayers and reveals his plan for us when we ask for guidance.

Inspiration

How can we worship in prayer? By first reflecting upon who God is and thanking Him for the things He has revealed about Himself. To worship in prayer is to allow our spirits to feast upon what God has revealed concerning His acts in the distant and recent past, and what He has told us about Himself. Slowly, as we review these things in a spirit of thanksgiving and recognition, we can sense our spirits beginning to expand, to take in the broader reality of God's presence and being. Slowly our consciousness is able to accept the fact that the universe about us is not closed or limited, but is in fact as expansive as the Creator meant for it to be. As we enter into worship we remind ourselves of how great He is.

In the light of God's majesty, we are called to an honesty about ourselves: what we are by contrast.

This is the second aspect of prayer: confession. Spiritual discipline calls for a regular acknowledgment of our true nature and the specific acts and attitudes of the recent past that have not been pleasurable to God as He has sought our fellowship and our obedience.

“God be merciful to me a sinner” is an abbreviated version of the prayer of confession. We need the daily humbling experience of being broken before God as we face up to our imperfection, our propensity to seek evil ways.

(From *Ordering Your Private World* by Gordon MacDonald)

Application

Fasting reminds us that we are dependent on God. When you need guidance, fast and pray. Whether you fast for part of a day or an entire day, spend the time in prayer and meditation of God’s Word.

Exploration

Prayer—[Genesis 25:21](#); [2 Chronicles 7:12](#); [Ezra 8:23](#); [Daniel 6:10](#); [Mark 9:29](#); [Philippians 4:6–7](#).

Daniel's Prayer

These things happened during the first year Darius son of Xerxes was king over Babylon. He was a descendant of the Medes. ²During Darius' first year as king, I, Daniel, was reading the Scriptures. I saw that the Lord told Jeremiah that Jerusalem would be empty ruins for seventy years.

³Then I turned to the Lord God and prayed and asked him for help. I did not eat any food. To show my sadness, I put on rough cloth and sat in ashes. ⁴I prayed to the Lord my God and told him about all of our sins. I said, "Lord, you are a great God who causes fear and wonder. You keep your agreement of love with all who love you and obey your commands.

⁵"But we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and turned against you, your commands, and your laws. ⁶We did not listen to your servants, the prophets, who spoke for you to our kings, our leaders, our ancestors, and all the people of the land.

⁷"Lord, you are good and right, but we are full of shame today—the people of Judah and Jerusalem, all the people of Israel, those near and far whom you scattered among many nations because they were not loyal to you. ⁸Lord, we are all ashamed. Our kings and leaders and our fathers are ashamed, because we have sinned against you.

⁹"But, Lord our God, you show us mercy and forgive us even though we have turned against you. ¹⁰We have not

obeyed the Lord our God or the teachings he gave us through his servants, the prophets. ¹¹All the people of Israel have disobeyed your teachings and have turned away, refusing to obey you. So you brought on us the curses and promises of punishment written in the Teachings of Moses, the servant of God, because we sinned against you.

¹²“You said these things would happen to us and our leaders, and you made them happen; you brought on us a great disaster. Nothing has ever been done on earth like what was done to Jerusalem. ¹³All this disaster came to us just as it is written in the Teachings of Moses. But we have not pleaded with the Lord our God. We have not stopped sinning. We have not paid attention to your truth. ¹⁴The Lord was ready to bring the disaster on us, and he did it because the Lord our God is right in everything he does. But we still did not obey him.

¹⁵“Lord our God, you used your power and brought us out of Egypt. Because of that, your name is known even today. But we have sinned and have done wrong. ¹⁶Lord, you do what is right, but please do not be angry with Jerusalem, your city on your holy hill. Because of our sins and the evil things done by our ancestors, people all around insult and make fun of Jerusalem and your people.

¹⁷“Now, our God, hear the prayers of your servant. Listen to my prayer for help, and for your sake do good things for your holy place that is in ruins. ¹⁸My God, pay attention and hear me. Open your eyes and see all the terrible things that have happened to us. See how our lives have been ruined and what has happened to the city that is called by your name. We do not ask these things because we are good; instead, we ask because of your mercy. ¹⁹Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear

us and do something! For your sake, don't wait, because your city and your people are called by your name."

Gabriel's Explanation

²⁰While I was saying these things in my prayer to the Lord, my God, confessing my sins and the sins of the people of Israel and praying for God's holy hill, ²¹Gabriel came to me. (I had seen him in my last vision.) He came flying quickly to me about the time of the evening sacrifice, while I was still praying. ²²He taught me and said to me, "Daniel, I have come to give you wisdom and to help you understand. ²³When you first started praying, an answer was given, and I came to tell you, because God loves you very much. So think about the message and understand the vision.

²⁴"God has ordered four hundred ninety years for your people and your holy city for these reasons: to stop people from turning against God; to put an end to sin; to take away evil; to bring in goodness that continues forever; to bring about the vision and prophecy; and to appoint a most holy place.

²⁵"Learn and understand these things. A command will come to rebuild Jerusalem. The time from this command until the appointed leader comes will be forty-nine years and four hundred thirty-four years. Jerusalem will be rebuilt with streets and a trench filled with water around it, but it will be built in times of trouble. ²⁶After the four hundred thirty-four years the appointed leader will be killed; he will have nothing. The people of the leader who is to come will destroy the city and the holy place. The end of the city will come like a flood, and

war will continue until the end. God has ordered that place to be completely destroyed.²⁷ That leader will make firm an agreement with many people for seven years. He will stop the offerings and sacrifices after three and one-half years. A destroyer will do terrible things until the ordered end comes to the destroyed city.”

Life Lessons

[Daniel 10:1–12:13](#)

Situation

Daniel lived in a time of persecution, but he found comfort in knowing that God transcended the political limits and destiny of Israel.

Observation

Daniel realized that there are events that take place beyond human understanding. Daniel was comforted to know that God will not forget those who follow him.

Inspiration

In their high expectations of politics, many Christians also misjudge the source of true societal reform. In reality, it is impossible to effect genuine political reform without reforming individual, and eventually, national character.

While it has a moral responsibility to restrain evil, government can never change the hearts and minds of its citizens. Attitudes are forged by spiritual forces, not by legislation. “All history, once you strip the rind off the kernel, is really spiritual,” said historian Arnold Toynbee. Values change when spiritual movements stir the hearts of people and when fresh winds of reason stir their minds. (From *Against the Night* by Charles Colson)

Application

Use your godly values to influence society for good. Become involved in local, state, or national

government. Many mayors are eager to appoint local citizens to city boards. Call today and find out how to become more involved.

Exploration

God's Power and Love—[Psalm 36](#); [Lamentations 3:1–24](#); [John 13:1](#); [1 John 3:1–3](#).

Daniel's Vision of a Man

During Cyrus' third year as king of Persia, Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, received a vision about a great war. It was a true message that Daniel understood.

²At that time I, Daniel, had been very sad for three weeks. ³I did not eat any fancy food or meat, or drink any wine, or use any perfumed oil for three weeks.

⁴On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, I was standing beside the great Tigris River. ⁵While standing there, I looked up and saw a man dressed in linen clothes with a belt of fine gold wrapped around his waist. ⁶His body was like shiny yellow quartz. His face was bright like lightning, and his eyes were like fire. His arms and legs were shiny like polished bronze, and his voice sounded like the roar of a crowd.

⁷I, Daniel, was the only person who saw the vision. The men with me did not see it, because they were so frightened that they ran away and hid. ⁸So I was left alone, watching this great vision. I lost my strength, my face turned white like a dead person, and I was helpless. ⁹Then I heard the man in the vision speaking. As I listened, I fell into a deep sleep with my face on the ground.

¹⁰Then a hand touched me and set me on my hands and knees. I was so afraid that I was shaking. ¹¹The man in the vision said to me, "Daniel, God loves you very much. Think carefully about the words I will speak to you, and stand up,

because I have been sent to you.” When he said this, I stood up, but I was still shaking.

¹²Then the man said to me, “Daniel, do not be afraid. Some time ago you decided to get understanding and to humble yourself before your God. Since that time God has listened to you, and I have come because of your prayers. ¹³But the prince of Persia has been fighting against me for twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the most important angels, came to help me, because I had been left there with the king of Persia. ¹⁴Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people, because the vision is about a time in the future.”

¹⁵While he was speaking to me, I bowed facedown and could not speak. ¹⁶Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, so I opened my mouth and started to speak. I said to the one standing in front of me, “Master, I am upset and afraid because of what I saw in the vision. I feel helpless. ¹⁷Master, how can I, your servant, talk with you? My strength is gone, and it is hard for me to breathe.”

¹⁸The one who looked like a man touched me again and gave me strength. ¹⁹He said, “Daniel, don’t be afraid. God loves you very much. Peace be with you. Be strong now; be courageous.”

When he spoke to me, I became stronger and said, “Master, speak, since you have given me strength.”

²⁰Then he said, “Daniel, do you know why I have come to you? Soon I must go back to fight against the prince of Persia. When I go, the prince of Greece will come, ²¹but I must first tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. No one stands with me against these enemies except Michael, the angel ruling over your people.

In the first year that Darius the Mede was king, I stood up to support Michael in his fight against the prince of Persia.

Kingdoms of the South and North

²“Now then, Daniel, I tell you the truth: Three more kings will rule in Persia, and then a fourth king will come. He will be much richer than all the kings of Persia before him and will use his riches to get power. He will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece. ³Then a mighty king will come, who will rule with great power and will do anything he wants. ⁴After that king has come, his kingdom will be broken up and divided out toward the four parts of the world. His kingdom will not go to his descendants, and it will not have the power that he had, because his kingdom will be pulled up and given to other people.

⁵“The king of the South will become strong, but one of his commanders will become even stronger. He will begin to rule his own kingdom with great power. ⁶Then after a few years, a new friendship will develop. The daughter of the king of the South will marry the king of the North in order to bring peace. But she will not keep her power, and his family will not last. She, her husband, her child, and those who brought her to that country will be killed.

⁷“But a person from her family will become king of the South and will attack the armies of the king of the North. He will go into that king’s strong, walled city and will fight and win. ⁸He will take their gods, their metal idols, and their valuable things made of silver and gold back to Egypt. Then he will not bother the king of the North for a few years. ⁹Next, the

king of the North will attack the king of the South, but he will be beaten back to his own country.

¹⁰“The sons of the king of the North will prepare for war. They will get a large army together that will move through the land very quickly, like a powerful flood. Later, that army will come back and fight all the way to the strong, walled city of the king of the South. ¹¹Then the king of the South will become very angry and will march out to fight against the king of the North. The king of the North will have a large army, but he will lose the battle, ¹²and the soldiers will be carried away. The king of the South will then be very proud and will kill thousands of soldiers from the northern army, but he will not continue to be successful. ¹³The king of the North will gather another army, larger than the first one. After several years he will attack with a large army and many weapons.

¹⁴“In those times many people will be against the king of the South. Some of your own people who love to fight will turn against the king of the South, thinking it is time for God’s promises to come true. But they will fail. ¹⁵Then the king of the North will come. He will build ramps to the tops of the city walls and will capture a strong, walled city. The southern army will not have the power to fight back; even their best soldiers will not be strong enough to stop the northern army. ¹⁶So the king of the North will do whatever he wants; no one will be able to stand against him. He will gain power and control in the beautiful land of Israel and will have the power to destroy it. ¹⁷The king of the North will decide to use all his power to fight against the king of the South, but he will make a peace agreement with the king of the South. The king of the North will give one of his daughters as a wife to the king of the South

so that he can defeat him. But those plans will not succeed or help him.¹⁸ Then the king of the North will turn his attention to cities along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and will capture them. But a commander will put an end to the pride of the king of the North, turning his pride back on him.¹⁹ After that happens the king of the North will go back to the strong, walled cities of his own country, but he will lose his power. That will be the end of him.

²⁰“The next king of the North will send out a tax collector so he will have plenty of money. In a few years that ruler will be killed, although he will not die in anger or in a battle.

²¹“That ruler will be followed by a very cruel and hated man, who will not have the honor of being from a king’s family. He will attack the kingdom when the people feel safe, and he will take power by lying to the people.²² He will sweep away in defeat large and powerful armies and even a prince who made an agreement.²³ Many nations will make agreements with that cruel and hated ruler, but he will lie to them. He will gain much power, but only a few people will support him.²⁴ The richest areas will feel safe, but that cruel and hated ruler will attack them. He will succeed where his ancestors did not. He will rob the countries he defeats and will give those things to his followers. He will plan to defeat and destroy strong cities, but he will be successful for only a short time.

²⁵“That very cruel and hated ruler will have a large army that he will use to stir up his strength and courage. He will attack the king of the South. The king of the South will gather a large and very powerful army and prepare for war. But the people who are against him will make secret plans, and the king of the South will be defeated.²⁶ People who were supposed to

be his good friends will try to destroy him. His army will be swept away in defeat; many of his soldiers will be killed in battle.²⁷ Those two kings will want to hurt each other. They will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but it will not do either one any good, because God has set a time for their end to come.²⁸ The king of the North will go back to his own country with much wealth. Then he will decide to go against the holy agreement. He will take action and then return to his own country.

²⁹“At the right time the king of the North will attack the king of the South again, but this time he will not be successful as he was before.³⁰ Ships from the west will come and fight against the king of the North, so he will be afraid. Then he will return and show his anger against the holy agreement. He will be good to those who have stopped obeying the holy agreement.

³¹“The king of the North will send his army to make the Temple in Jerusalem unclean. They will stop the people from offering the daily sacrifice, and then they will set up the destroying terror.³² The king of the North will tell lies and cause those who have not obeyed God to be ruined. But those who know God and obey him will be strong and fight back.

³³“Those who are wise will help the others understand what is happening. But they will be killed with swords, or burned, or taken captive, or robbed of their homes and possessions. These things will continue for many days.³⁴ When the wise ones are suffering, they will get a little help, but many who join the wise ones will not help them in their time of need.³⁵ Some of the wise ones will be killed. But the hard times must come so they can be made stronger and purer and without faults until the time of the end comes. Then, at the right time, the end will

come.

The King Who Praises Himself

³⁶“The king of the North will do whatever he wants. He will brag about himself and praise himself and think he is even better than a god. He will say things against the God of gods that no one has ever heard. And he will be successful until all the bad things have happened. Then what God has planned to happen will happen. ³⁷The king of the North will not care about the gods his ancestors worshiped or the god that women worship. He won’t care about any god. Instead, he will make himself more important than any god. ³⁸The king of the North will worship power and strength, which his ancestors did not worship. He will honor the god of power with gold and silver, expensive jewels and gifts. ³⁹That king will attack strong, walled cities with the help of a foreign god. He will give much honor to the people who join him, making them rulers in charge of many other people. And he will make them pay him for the land they rule.

⁴⁰“At the time of the end, the king of the South will fight a battle against the king of the North. The king of the North will attack with chariots, soldiers on horses, and many large ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through their lands like a flood. ⁴¹The king of the North will attack the beautiful land of Judah. He will defeat many countries, but Edom, Moab, and the leaders of Ammon will be saved from him. ⁴²The king of the North will show his power in many countries; Egypt will not escape. ⁴³The king will get treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt. The Libyan and Nubian people will

obey him. ⁴⁴But the king of the North will hear news from the east and the north that will make him afraid and angry. He will go to destroy completely many nations. ⁴⁵He will set up his royal tents between the sea and the beautiful mountain where the holy Temple is built. But, finally, his end will come, and no one will help him.

The Time of the End

“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will stand up. There will be a time of much trouble, the worst time since nations have been on earth, but your people will be saved. Everyone whose name is written in God’s book will be saved.² Many people who have already died will live again. Some of them will wake up to have life forever, but some will wake up to find shame and disgrace forever.³ The wise people will shine like the brightness of the sky. Those who teach others to live right will shine like stars forever and ever.

⁴“But you, Daniel, close up the book and seal it. These things will happen at the time of the end. Many people will go here and there to find true knowledge.”

⁵Then I, Daniel, looked, and saw two other men. One was standing on my side of the river, and the other was standing on the far side.⁶ The man who was dressed in linen was standing over the water in the river. One of the two men spoke to him and asked, “How long will it be before these amazing things come true?”

⁷The man dressed in linen, who stood over the water, raised his hands toward heaven. And I heard him swear by the name of God who lives forever, “It will be for three and one-half years. The power of the holy people will finally be broken, and then all these things will come true.”

⁸I heard the answer, but I did not really understand, so I asked, “Master, what will happen after all these things come true?”

⁹He answered, “Go your way, Daniel. The message is

closed up and sealed until the time of the end. ¹⁰Many people will be made clean, pure, and spotless, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. Those wicked people will not understand these things, but the wise will understand them.

¹¹“The daily sacrifice will be stopped. Then, after 1,290 days from that time, the destroying terror will be set up. ¹²Those who wait for the end of the 1,335 days will be happy.

¹³“As for you, Daniel, go your way until the end. You will get your rest, and at the end you will rise to receive your reward.”

zithers Musical instruments with thirty to forty strings.

Belteshazzar Another name for Daniel.

roof In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

The Book of Hosea

Introduction

“It’s only puppy love,” adults used to say, commenting on your early love life. You wanted to shout back, “No! This is the real thing!” And it was real for you, the puppy. But soon you forgot that love and moved on to another.

A few years later in high school, you found another and were head-over-heels-in-love and going steady. You pledged devotion to each other—emotions and sexual attraction pulled you two together. And when the breakup occurred, you thought you would die ... but you didn’t. In fact, you survived to experience several other relationships, some pretty serious. Through each experience you learned a bit more about love—true love.

Today you chuckle at youthful infatuation and have to bite your tongue to avoid saying something about puppy love. Over the years, you have learned that real love—true love—is more than emotions, sex, fun, dating, and feeling good. Real love—lasting love—involves giving, serving, listening, and being there. At the foundation lies commitment: the solid decision to stick with that person through everything—no matter what.

The Book of Hosea is a love story involving a very unlikely couple: Hosea, the prophet of God, and Gomer, a prostitute. Hosea marries Gomer, even though he knows that she will be unfaithful to him. And when she is ... well, I’ll let you read for yourself.

This profound book, however, holds a deeper love story—God’s love for his people, mirrored by this very human couple. As you read, look for traces of yourself in Gomer and her

actions. And watch God, through Hosea, display true love.

About This Book

Author:

The prophet Hosea

Date Written:

c. 715 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- Just as there are consequences for a person who refuses to be faithful, there are consequences for a nation that refuses to be faithful.
- God will judge his people according to their actions.
- God will also redeem his people, though not without consequences.

Key Verse:

“My people have made up their minds to turn away from me. The prophets call them to turn to me, but none of them honors me at all” ([Hosea 11:7](#)).

Contents:

1. Hosea and His Unfaithful Wife [1:1–3:5](#)
2. The Lord and His Unfaithful Nation [4:1–8:14](#)
3. Israel’s Judgment [9:1–10:15](#)
4. Israel’s Restoration [11:1–14:9](#)

Life Lessons

Hosea 1:1–3:5

Situation

Hosea illustrates God's enduring desire for his people. The first three chapters, Hosea's personal life story, symbolize God's relationship with Israel.

Observation

When we turn away from God, he does not wait for us to come back to him. He pursues us and desires that we be reunited with him.

Inspiration

In his book, *Sky Pilot*, Ralph Conner tells of a young man who wandered from a good home in Scotland to one of the ranches in the wild west. One day, as the pilot was making his rounds and going from shack to shack, he heard someone singing [Psalm 23](#). He made his way to the shack from whence the sound was coming, and there found the young man dying. He had been brought up in a good Christian home, but now he lay dying an early death through the sins he had committed.

The pilot spoke tenderly to the lad, and then he was asked to read a letter which had come to the boy from his mother that very day. He read it, and the letter closed something like this: "And oh! Davie laddie, if ever your heart should turn homeward, remember the door stands widely open, and there is nothing but joy that you will bring to us all."

That is the distinctive message of the parable of

the prodigal son. There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. (Told by F.W. Boreham in *The Prodigal*. From *Prodigals and Those Who Love Them* by Ruth Bell Graham)

Application

Have you ever wandered from God the way Gomer did from Hosea? How did God initiate reconciliation with you? Did he convict you or use friends to encourage you? Thank God for his faithfulness to bring you back into fellowship with him.

Exploration

Endurance—[Matthew 10:22](#); [Mark 13:13](#); [2 Timothy 4:5–8](#); [Hebrews 3:6](#); [Revelation 14:12](#).

The Lord spoke his word to Hosea son of Beeri during the time that Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah and Jeroboamson of Jehoash was king of Israel.

Hosea's Wife and Children

²When the Lord began speaking through Hosea, the Lord said to him, “Go, and marry an unfaithful woman and have unfaithful children, because the people in this country have been completely unfaithful to the Lord.” ³So Hosea married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Hosea's son.

⁴The Lord said to Hosea, “Name him Jezreel, because soon I will punish the family of Jehu for the people they killed at Jezreel. In the future I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel ⁵and break the power of Israel's army in the Valley of Jezreel.”

⁶Gomer became pregnant again and gave birth to a daughter. The Lord said to Hosea, “Name her [Lo-Ruhamah](#), because I will not pity Israel anymore, nor will I forgive them. ⁷But I will show pity to the people of Judah. I will save them, but not by using bows or swords, horses or horsemen, or weapons of war. I, the Lord their God, will save them.”

⁸After Gomer had stopped nursing [Lo-Ruhamah](#), she became pregnant again and gave birth to another son. ⁹The Lord said, “Name him [Lo-Ammi](#), because you are not my people, and I am not your God.

God's Promise to Israel

¹⁰“But the number of the Israelites will become like the grains of sand of the sea, which no one can measure or count. They were called, ‘You are not my people,’ but later they will be called ‘children of the living God.’ ¹¹The people of Judah and Israel will join together again and will choose one leader for themselves. They will come up from the land, because the day of [Jezreel](#) will be truly great.

“You are to call your brothers, ‘my people,’ and your sisters, ‘you have been shown pity.’

God Speaks About Israel

²“Plead with your [mother](#).

Accuse her, because she is no longer my wife,
and I am no longer her husband.

Tell her to stop acting like a prostitute,
to stop behaving like an unfaithful wife.

³If she refuses, I will strip her naked
and leave her bare like the day she was born.
I will make her dry like a desert,
like a land without water,
and I will kill her with thirst.

⁴I will not take pity on her children,
because they are the children of a prostitute.

⁵Their mother has acted like a prostitute;
the one who became pregnant with them has acted
disgracefully.

She said, ‘I will chase after my [lovers](#),
who give me my food and water,
wool and flax, wine and olive oil.’

⁶So I will block her road with thornbushes;
I will build a wall around her
so she cannot find her way.

⁷She will run after her lovers,
but she won't catch them.
She will look for them,
but she won't find them.
Then she will say, 'I will go back to my first [husband](#),
because life was better then for me than it is now.'

⁸But she does not know that I was the one
who gave her grain, new wine, and oil.
I gave her much silver and gold,
but she used it for Baal.

⁹“So I will come back and take away my grain at
harvest time
and my new wine when it is ready.
I will take back my wool and linen
that covered her nakedness.

¹⁰So I will show her nakedness to her lovers,
and no one will save her from me.

¹¹I will put an end to all her celebrations:
her yearly festivals, her New Moon festivals, and her
Sabbaths.
I will stop all of her special feasts.

¹²I will destroy her vines and fig trees,
which she said were her pay from her lovers.
I will turn them into a forest,
and wild animals will eat them.

¹³I will punish her for all the times
she burned incense to the Baals.

She put on her rings and jewelry
and went chasing after her lovers,
but she forgot me!”

says the Lord.

¹⁴“So I am going to attract her;
I will lead her into the desert
and speak tenderly to her.

¹⁵There I will give her back her vineyards,
and I will make the Valley of Trouble a door of hope.
There she will respond as when she was young,
as when she came out of Egypt.”

¹⁶The Lord says, “In the future she will call me ‘my
husband;’

no longer will she call me ‘my baal.’

¹⁷I will never let her say the names of Baal again;
people won’t use their names anymore.

¹⁸At that time I will make an agreement for them
with the wild animals, the birds, and the crawling
things.

I will smash from the land
the bow and the sword and the weapons of war,
so my people will live in safety.

¹⁹And I will make you my promised bride forever.
I will be good and fair;
I will show you my love and mercy.

²⁰I will be true to you as my promised bride,

and you will know the Lord.

²¹“At that time I will speak to you,” says the Lord.

“I will speak to the skies,
and they will give rain to the earth.

²²The earth will produce grain, new wine, and oil;
much will grow because my people are called [Jezreel](#).

²³I will plant my people in the land,
and I will show pity to the one I had called ‘not shown
pity.’

I will say, ‘You are my people’
to those I had called ‘not my people.’
And they will say to me, ‘You are our God.’”

Hosea Buys a Wife

The Lord said to me again, “Go, show your love to a woman loved by someone else, who has been unfaithful to you. In the same way the Lord loves the people of Israel, even though they worship other gods and love to eat the [raisin cakes](#).”

²So I bought her for six ounces of silver and ten bushels of barley. ³Then I told her, “You must wait for me for many days. You must not be a prostitute, and you must not have sexual relations with any other man. I will act the same way toward you.”

⁴In the same way Israel will live many days without a king or leader, without sacrifices or holy stone pillars, and without the holy vest or an idol. ⁵After this, the people of Israel will return to the Lord their God and follow him and the king from David’s family. In the last days they will turn in fear to the Lord, and he will bless them.

Life Lessons

Hosea 4:1–5:15

Situation

Israel disobeyed. The national leaders had failed to teach God's Law to the people. Many of God's chosen people sold their bodies in prostitution, which in turn led to national destruction.

Observation

People who have genuine faith and love for God will try to obey God.

Inspiration

To be a Christian is, in a sense, to be a man without a country. If you truly are obedient to Christ—if you take the Scriptures to heart and attempt to live them—you will inevitably come into conflict with the world. You belong to no one but Christ, while those in the world give themselves to people, possessions, institutions, and idols other than to Christ. To be a Christian is to stand apart and yet to remain within—to dare to be different. You look at everything through the prism of Scripture, and things look different when viewed biblically.

Success in the world means power, influence, money, prestige. But in the Christian world, it means pleasing God. This quest for obedience may lead you to do things that are wholly contrary to what the world wants and rewards...

Obedying his commandments means reading and understanding Scripture, then determining that you

are going to live exactly as Scripture teaches. I don't believe anybody can do that, because it is almost impossible not to be caught up every day in the ways of the world. But you can make an effort to live biblically. That is how the process of sanctification works—learning how to obey God, how to listen for his commands in your life. It is reading the Scripture and allowing it to soak into you. It is understanding the requirements of God's commandments and then gradually, day by day, in large ways and small, allowing that understanding to control the actions of your life....

If I had to pick the one thing ... that has caused the most failure in obeying God, it would be that we figure God's time is our Bible study, our prayer time, the meeting with our prayer group, and Sunday morning church service. That's just not true. God's time is every moment of our lives. Bible study and church simply prepare us for the rest of the moments of our lives.... We don't put him on and take him off like a suit of clothes.... If we would "wear" him all day long, we would discover obedience becoming a reflex reaction. (From "The Quest for Obedience" by Charles Colson in *Practical Christianity*)

Application

Does obedience to God come easier—or harder—at certain times of the week? In certain places? Among certain people? In order to obey God faithfully, you may need to make changes in your heart and in your life. Make a change and declare a new start today.

Exploration

Obedience—[Genesis 2:16–17](#); [Exodus 8:25–29](#);
[Joshua 1:6–8](#); [1 Samuel 15:22](#); [Matthew 23:23–24](#);
[Luke 17:7–10](#).

The Lord's Word Against Israel

People of Israel, listen to the Lord's message.
The Lord has this
against you who live in the land:
"The people are not true, not loyal to God,
nor do those who live in the land even know him.

²Cursing, lying, killing, stealing and adultery are everywhere.

One murder follows another.

³Because of this the land dries up,
and all its people are dying.
Even the wild animals and the birds of the air
and the fish of the sea are dying.

God's Case Against the Priests

^{4c}No one should accuse
or blame another person.
Don't blame the people, you priests,
when they quarrel with you.

⁵You will be ruined in the day,
and your prophets will be ruined with you in the night.
I will also destroy your [mother](#).

⁶My people will be destroyed,
because they have no knowledge.
You have refused to learn,
so I will refuse to let you be priests to me.
You have forgotten the teachings of your God,
so I will forget your children.

⁷The more priests there are,
the more they sin against me.
I will take away their honor
and give them shame.

⁸Since the priests live off the sin offerings of the people,
they want the people to sin more and more.

⁹The priests are as wrong as the people,
and I will punish them both for what they have done.
I will repay them for the wrong they have done.

¹⁰“They will eat
but not have enough;
they will have sexual relations with the prostitutes,
but they will not have children,
because they have left the Lord
to give themselves to ¹¹prostitution,
to old and new wine,
which take away their ability to understand.

God's Case Against the People

¹²“My people ask wooden idols for advice;
they ask those sticks of wood to advise them!
Like prostitutes, they have chased after other gods
and have left their own God.

¹³They make sacrifices on the tops of the mountains.
They burn offerings on the hills,
under oaks, poplars, and other trees,
because their shade is nice.
So your daughters become prostitutes,
and your daughters-in-law are guilty of adultery.

¹⁴“But I will not punish your daughters
for becoming prostitutes,
nor your daughters-in-law
for their sins of adultery.
I will not punish them,
because the men have sexual relations with prostitutes
and offer sacrifices with the temple prostitutes.
A foolish people will be ruined.

¹⁵“Israel, you act like a prostitute,
but do not be guilty toward the Lord.
Don’t go to [Gilgal](#)
or go up to [Beth Aven](#).
Don’t make promises,
saying, ‘As surely as the Lord lives ...’

¹⁶The people of Israel are stubborn
like a stubborn young cow.
Now the Lord will feed them
like lambs in the open country.

¹⁷The Israelites have chosen to worship idols

THE ISRAELITES HAVE CHOSEN TO WORSHIP IDOLS,
SO LEAVE THEM ALONE.

¹⁸When they finish their drinking,
they completely give themselves to being prostitutes;
they love these disgraceful ways.

¹⁹They will be swept away as if by a whirlwind,
and their sacrifices will bring them only shame.

God's Word Against the Leaders

“Listen, you priests.
Pay attention, people of Israel.
Listen, royal family,
because you will all be judged.
You have been like a trap at Mizpah
and like a net spread out at Mount Tabor.

²You have done many evil things,
so I will punish you all.

³I know all about the people of Israel;
what they have done is not hidden from me.
Now that Israel acts like a prostitute,
it has made itself unclean.

⁴“They will not give up their deeds
and return to their God.
They are determined to be unfaithful to me;
they do not know the Lord.

⁵Israel's pride testifies against them.
The people of Israel will stumble because of their sin,
and the people of Judah will stumble with them.

⁶They will come to worship the Lord,
bringing their flocks and herds,
but they will not be able to find him,
because he has left them.

⁷They have not been true to the Lord;

they are children who do not belong to him.
So their false worship
will destroy them and their land.

^{8c}Blow the horn in Gibeah
and the trumpet in Ramah.
Give the warning at Beth Aven,
and be first into battle, people of Benjamin.

⁹Israel will be ruined
on the day of punishment.
To the tribes of Israel
I tell the truth.

¹⁰The leaders of Judah are like those
who steal other people's land.
I will pour my punishment over them
like a flood of water.

¹¹Israel is crushed by the punishment,
because it decided to follow idols.

¹²I am like a moth to Israel,
like a rot to the people of Judah.

^{13c}When Israel saw its illness
and Judah saw its wounds,
Israel went to Assyria for help
and sent to the great king of Assyria.
But he cannot heal you
or cure your wounds.

¹⁴I will be like a lion to Israel,

like a young lion to Judah.
I will attack them
and tear them to pieces.
I will drag them off,
and no one will be able to save them.

¹⁵Then I will go back to my place
until they suffer for their guilt and turn back to me.
In their trouble they will look for me.”

Life Lessons

Hosea 6:1–10:15

Situation

God called Hosea to be a living parable to Israel. God loved his people despite their unfaithfulness.

Observation

God wants us to be faithful to him. It hurts him to see us wander away.

Inspiration

Don't build your house on a career. Don't build your house on a thrill. Don't build your house on a talent. Don't build your house on one solitary earthly relationship. Don't pursue things that don't last. Build your house on the only thing that can last: faith.

Do you have faith? If you have faith, then you have what it takes to tackle your problems before they tackle you. If you have that confident hope, then you will know how to handle whatever life brings you.

One thing no one can take away from you is your faith. This world can and may take everything you have. But no one can take away your faith. Grab that faith; clutch tightly that anchor of the soul.

Make your faith an independent dogged faith, firmly planted in God's sacrificed Son on the hill of Calvary. It can never be taken away from you. (From *The Inspirational Bible*, "Faith")

Application

Write down one Situation in which your faith is being tested. Pray about this Situation and ask God to strengthen your faith in this specific area. Thank God for how he is going to help your faith grow through this circumstance.

Exploration

Faithfulness—[Psalm 31:23](#); [Habakkuk 2:4](#); [1 Corinthians 16:13](#); [Galatians 5:22](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:3](#); [2 Timothy 2:2](#); [Revelation 2:10](#).

The People Are Not Faithful

“Come, let’s go back to the Lord.
He has hurt us, but he will heal us.

He has wounded us, but he will bandage our wounds.

²In two days he will put new life in us;
on the third day he will raise us up
so that we may live in his presence ³and know him.
Let’s try to learn about the Lord;
he will come to us as surely as the dawn comes.
He will come to us like rain,
like the spring rain that waters the ground.”

⁴The Lord says, “Israel, what should I do with you?
Judah, what should I do with you?
Your faithfulness is like a morning mist,
like the dew that goes away early in the day.

⁵I have warned you by my prophets
that I will kill you and destroy you.

My justice comes out like bright light.

⁶I want faithful love
more than I want animal sacrifices.
I want people to know me
more than I want burnt offerings.

⁷But they have broken the agreement as Adam did;
they have been unfaithful to me.

⁸Gilead is a city of people who do evil;
their footprints are bloody.

⁹The priests are like robbers waiting to attack people;
they murder people on the road to [Shechem](#)
and do wicked things.

¹⁰I have seen horrible things in Israel.
Look at Israel's prostitution;
Israel has become unclean.

¹¹“Judah, I have set a harvest time for you
when I will make the lives of my people good again.

When I heal Israel,
Israel's sin will go away,
and so will Samaria's evil.
“They cheat a lot!
Thieves break into houses,
and robbers are in the streets.

²It never enters their minds
that I remember all their evil deeds.
The bad things they do are all around them;
they are right in front of me.

Israel's Evil Kings

³“They make the king happy with their wickedness;
their rulers are glad with their lies.

⁴But all of them are traitors.
They are like an oven heated by a baker.
While he mixes the dough,
he does not need to stir up the fire.

⁵The kings get so drunk they get sick every day.
The rulers become crazy with wine;
they make agreements with those who do not know the
true God.

⁶They burn like an oven;
their hearts burn inside them.
All night long their anger is low,
but when morning comes, it becomes a roaring fire.

⁷All these people are as hot as an oven;
they burn up their rulers.
All their kings fall,
and no one calls on me.

Israel and the Other Nations

⁸“Israel mixes with other nations;
he is like a pancake cooked only on one side.

⁹Foreign nations have eaten up his strength,
but he doesn’t know it.
Israel is weak and feeble, like an old man,
but he doesn’t know it.

¹⁰Israel’s pride will cause their defeat;
they will not turn back to the Lord their God
or look to him for help in all this.

¹¹Israel has become like a pigeon—
easy to fool and stupid.
First they call to Egypt for help.
Then they run to Assyria.

¹²When they go, I will catch them in a net,
I will bring them down like birds from the sky;
I will punish them countless times for their evil.

¹³How terrible for them because they left me!
They will be destroyed, because they turned against
me.

I want to save them,
but they have spoken lies against me.

¹⁴They do not call to me from their hearts.
They just lie on their beds and cry.
They come together to ask for grain and new wine,
but they really turn away from me.

¹⁵Though I trained them and gave them strength,
they have made evil plans against me.

¹⁶They did not turn to the Most High God.
They are like a loose bow that can't shoot.
Because their leaders brag about their strength,
they will be killed with swords,
and the people in Egypt
will laugh at them.

Israel Has Trusted Wrong Things

“Put the trumpet to your lips and give the warning!
The enemy swoops down on the Lord’s people like an eagle.

The Israelites have broken my agreement
and have turned against my teachings.

²They cry out to me,
‘Our God, we in Israel know you!’

³But Israel has rejected what is good,
so the enemy will chase them.

⁴They chose their own kings
without asking my permission.
They chose their own leaders,
people I did not know.
They made their silver and gold into idols,
and for all this they will be destroyed.

⁵I hate the calf-shaped idol of Israel!
I am very angry with the people.
How long will they remain unclean?

⁶The idol is something a craftsman made;
it is not God.
Israel’s calf-shaped idol
will surely be smashed to pieces.

⁷“Israel’s foolish plans are like planting the wind,
but they will harvest a storm.

Like a stalk with no head of grain,
it produces nothing.
Even if it produced something,
other nations would eat it.

⁸Israel is eaten up;
the people are mixed among the other nations
and have become useless to me.

⁹Israel is like a wild donkey all by itself.
They have run to Assyria;
They have hired other nations to protect them.

¹⁰Although Israel is mixed among the nations,
I will gather them together.
They will become weaker and weaker
as they suffer under the great king of Assyria.

¹¹“Although Israel built more altars to remove sin,
they have become altars for sinning.

¹²I have written many teachings for them,
but they think the teachings are strange and foreign.

¹³The Israelites offer sacrifices to me as gifts
and eat the meat,
but the Lord is not pleased with them.
He remembers the evil they have done,
and he will punish them for their sins.
They will be slaves again as they were in Egypt.

¹⁴Israel has forgotten their Maker and has built
palaces;

Judah has built many strong, walled cities.
But I will send fire on their cities
and destroy their strong buildings.”

Israel's Punishment

Israel, do not rejoice;
don't shout for joy as the other nations do.
You have been like a prostitute against your God.
You love the pay of prostitutes on every threshing
floor.

²But the threshing floor and the winepress will not feed
the people,
and there won't be enough new wine.

³The people will not stay in the Lord's land.
Israel will return to being captives as they were in
Egypt,
and in Assyria they will eat food that they are not
allowed to eat.

⁴The Israelites will not give offerings of wine to the
Lord;
they will not give him sacrifices.
Their sacrifices will be like food that is eaten at a
funeral;
it is unclean, and everyone who eats it becomes
unclean.
Their food will only satisfy their hunger;
they cannot sacrifice it in the Temple.

⁵What will you do then on the day of feasts
and on the day of the Lord's festival?

⁶Even if the people are not destroyed

Even if the people are not destroyed,
Egypt will capture them;
[Memphis](#) will bury them.
Weeds will grow over their silver treasures,
and thorns will drive them out of their tents.

⁷The time of punishment has come,
the time to pay for sins.
Let Israel know this:
You think the prophet is a fool,
and you say the spiritual person is crazy.
You have sinned very much,
and your hatred is great.

⁸Is Israel a watchman?
Are God's people prophets?
Everywhere Israel goes, traps are set for him.
He is an enemy in God's house.

⁹The people of Israel have gone deep into sin
as the people of [Gibeah](#) did.
The Lord will remember the evil things they have done,
and he will punish their sins.

^{10c}When I found Israel,
it was like finding grapes in the desert.
Your ancestors were like
finding the first figs on the fig tree.
But when they came to Baal Peor,
they began worshipping an idol,
and they became as hateful as the thing they
worshipped.

“Israel’s glory will fly away like a bird;
there will be no more pregnancy, no more births, no
more getting pregnant.

¹²But even if the Israelites bring up children,
I will take them all away.
How terrible it will be for them
when I go away from them!

¹³I have seen Israel, like Tyre,
given a pleasant place.
But the people of Israel will soon bring out
their children to be killed.”

¹⁴Lord, give them what they should have.
What will you give them?
Make their women unable to have children;
give them dried-up breasts that cannot feed their
babies.

¹⁵“The Israelites were very wicked in Gilgal,
so I have hated them there.
Because of the sinful things they have done,
I will force them to leave my land.
I will no longer love them;
their leaders have turned against me.

¹⁶Israel is beaten down;
its root is dying, and it has no fruit.
If they have more children,
I will kill the children they love.”

¹⁷God will reject them,
because they have not obeyed him;

they will wander among the nations.

Israel Will Pay for Sin

Israel is like a large vine
that produced plenty of fruit.
As the people became richer,
they built more altars for idols.
As their land became better,
they put up better stone pillars to honor gods.

²Their heart was false,
and now they must pay for their guilt.
The Lord will break down their altars;
he will destroy their holy stone pillars.
³Then they will say, "We have no king,
because we didn't honor the Lord.
As for the king,
he couldn't do anything for us."

⁴They make many false promises
and agreements which they don't keep.
So people sue each other in court;
they are like poisonous weeds growing in a plowed
field.

⁵The people from Israel are worried about
the calf-shaped idol at Beth Aven.
The people will cry about it,
and the priests will cry about it.
They used to shout for joy about its glory,

⁶but it will be carried off to Assyria

as a gift to the great king.
Israel will be disgraced,
and the people will be ashamed for not obeying.

⁷Israel will be destroyed;
its king will be like a chip of wood floating on the
water.

⁸The places of false worship will be destroyed,
the places where Israel sins.
Thorns and weeds will grow up
and cover their altars.
Then they will say to the mountains, "Cover us!"
and to the hills, "Fall on us!"

⁹"Israel, you have sinned since the time of [Gibeah](#),
and the people there have continued sinning.
But war will surely overwhelm them in Gibeah,
because of the evil they have done there.

¹⁰When I am ready,
I will come to punish them.
Nations will come together against them,
and they will be punished for their double sins.

¹¹Israel is like a well-trained young cow
that likes to thresh grain.
I will put a yoke on her neck
and make her work hard in the field.
Israel will plow,
and Judah will break up the ground.

¹²I said, 'Plant goodness,

harvest the fruit of loyalty,
plow the new ground of knowledge.
Look for the Lord until he comes
and pours goodness on you like water.’

¹³But you have plowed evil
and harvested trouble;
you have eaten the fruit of your lies.
Because you have trusted in your own power
and your many soldiers,

¹⁴your people will hear the noise of battle,
and all your strong, walled cities will be destroyed.
It will be like the time King Shalman
destroyed Beth Arbel in battle,
when mothers and their children were bashed to death.

¹⁵The same will happen to you, people of Bethel,
because you did so much evil.
When the sun comes up,
the king of Israel will die.

Life Lessons

Hosea 11:1–14:9

Situation

Although Israel abandoned God, God still loved the nation. Through anger and punishment, God desired to show favor to Israel.

Observation

Although at times we tend to be ungrateful, faithless, and loveless toward God, he remains devoted to us.

Inspiration

Farmers in ancient Israel used to train an inexperienced ox by yoking it to an experienced one with a wooden harness. The straps around the older animal were tightly drawn. He carried the load. But the yoke around the younger animal was loose. He walked alongside the more mature ox, but his burden was light. [Read [Matthew 11:30](#).] In this verse Jesus is saying, “I walk alongside you. We are yoked together. But I pull the weight and carry the burden.”

I wonder, how many burdens is Jesus carrying for us that we know nothing about? We’re aware of some. He carries our sin. He carries our shame. He carries our eternal debt. But are there others? Has he lifted fears before we felt them? Has he carried our confusion so we wouldn’t have to? Those times when we have been surprised by our own sense of peace? Could it be that Jesus has lifted our anxiety onto his shoulders and placed a yoke of kindness on

ours?

And how often do we thank him for his kindness? Not often enough. But does our ingratitude restrict his kindness? No. “Because he is kind even to people who are ungrateful and full of sin” ([Luke 6:35](#)).

In the original language, the word for “kindness” carries an added idea the English word does not. Chiefly it refers to an act of grace. But it also refers to a deed or person who is “useful, serviceable, adapted to its purpose.” “Kindness” was even employed to describe food that was tasty as well as healthy. Sounds odd to our ears. “Hey, honey, what a great meal. The salad is especially *kind* tonight.”

But the usage makes sense. Isn’t kindness good *and* good for you? Pleasant *and* practical? Kindness not only says good morning, kindness makes the coffee. Again, doesn’t Jesus fit this description? He not only attended the wedding, he rescued it. He not only healed the woman, he honored her. He did more than call Zacchaeus by name; he entered his house.

Hasn’t he acted similarly with you? Hasn’t he helped you out of a few jams? Hasn’t he come into your house? And has there ever been a time when he was too busy to listen to your story? The Bible says, “Whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the Lord” [[Psalm 107:43](#), NKJV]. Hasn’t God been kind—pleasantly useful—to you? And since God has been so kind to you (you know what I am about to say), can’t you be kind to others?

Paul’s question is for all of us: “Do you think

lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” [[Romans 2:4](#), NASB]. Repentance from what? Certainly from ungodliness, rebellion, and sin. But can’t we equally state that God’s kindness leads to repentance from unkindness? (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

Application

Take time right now to thank God for his incredible mercy even when you are ungrateful. Prayerfully list the ways God has shown mercy and kindness to you recently. Think of at least two ways you can extend God’s kindness to others.

Exploration

God’s Mercy—[2 Samuel 24:14](#); [Nehemiah 9:31](#); [Psalm 25:6](#); [57:1](#); [Isaiah 63:9](#); [Ephesians 2:4–7](#); [Hebrews 4:16](#); [1 Peter 1:3](#).

God's Love for Israel

“When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and I called my son out of Egypt.

²But when I called the people of Israel,
they went away from me.
They offered sacrifices to the Baals
and burned incense to the idols.

³It was I who taught Israel to walk,
and I took them by the arms,
but they did not understand
that I had healed them.

⁴I led them with cords of human kindness,
with ropes of love.
I lifted the yoke from their neck
and bent down and fed them.

⁵“The Israelites will become captives again, as they
were in Egypt,
and Assyria will become their king,
because they refuse to turn back to God.

⁶War will sweep through their cities
and will destroy them
and kill them because of their wicked plans.

⁷My people have made up their minds
to turn away from me.

The prophets call them to turn to me,
but none of them honors me at all.

⁸“Israel, how can I give you up?
How can I give you away, Israel?
I don’t want to make you like [Admah](#)
or treat you like [Zeboiim](#).
My heart beats for you,
and my love for you stirs up my pity.

⁹I won’t punish you in my anger,
and I won’t destroy Israel again.
I am God and not a human;
I am the Holy One, and I am among you.
I will not come against you in anger.

¹⁰They will go after the Lord,
and he will roar like a lion.
When he roars,
his children will hurry to him from the west.

¹¹They will come swiftly
like birds from Egypt
and like doves from Assyria.
I will settle them again in their homes,”
says the Lord.

The Lord Is Against Israel

¹²Israel has surrounded me with lies;
the people have made evil plans.
And Judah turns against God,
the faithful Holy One.

What Israel does is as useless as chasing the wind;
he chases the east wind all day.
They tell more and more lies
and do more and more violence.
They make agreements with Assyria,
and they send a gift of olive oil to Egypt.

²The Lord also has some things against Judah.
He will punish Israel for what they have done;
he will give them what they deserve.

³Their ancestor Jacob held on to his brother's heel
while the two of them were being born.
When he grew to be a man,
he wrestled with God.

⁴When Jacob wrestled with the angel and won,
he cried and asked for his blessing.
Later, God met with him at Bethel
and spoke with him there.

⁵It was the Lord God All-Powerful;
the Lord is his great name.

⁶You must return to your God;
love him, do what is just,
and always trust in him as your God.

⁷The merchants use dishonest scales;
they like to cheat people.

⁸Israel said, "I am rich! I am someone with power!"
All their money will do them no good

because of the sins they have done.

⁹“But I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of Egypt.
I will make you live in tents again
as you used to do on worship days.

¹⁰I spoke to the prophets
and gave them many visions;
through them, I taught my lessons to you.”

¹¹The people of Gilead are evil,
worth nothing.
Though people sacrifice bulls at Gilgal,
their altars will become like piles of stone
in a plowed field.

¹²Your ancestor Jacob fled to Northwest Mesopotamia
where he worked to get a wife;
he tended sheep to pay for her.

¹³Later the Lord used a prophet
to bring Jacob’s descendants out of Egypt;
he used a prophet
to take care of the Israelites.

¹⁴But the Israelites made the Lord angry when they
killed other people,
and they deserve to die for their crimes.
The Lord will make them pay
for the disgraceful things they have done.

The Final Word Against Israel

People used to fear the tribe of Ephraim;
they were important people in Israel.
But they sinned by worshiping Baal,
so they must die.

²But they still keep on sinning more and more.
They make idols of their silver,
idols that are cleverly made,
the work of a craftsman.
Yet the people of Israel say to each other,
“Kiss those calf idols and sacrifice to them.”

³So those people will be like the morning mist;
they will disappear like the morning dew.
They will be like chaff blown from the threshing floor,
like smoke going out a window.

⁴“I, the Lord, have been your God
since you were in the land of Egypt.
You should have known no other God except me.
I am the only one who saves.

⁵I cared for them in the desert
where it was hot and dry.

⁶I gave them food, and they became full and satisfied.
But then they became too proud and forgot me.

⁷That is why I will be like a lion to them,
like a leopard waiting by the road.

⁸I will attack like a bear robbed of her cubs,
ripping their bodies open.

I will devour them like a lion
and tear them apart like a wild animal.

⁹“Israel, I will destroy you.
Who will be your helper then?

¹⁰What good is your king?
Can he save you in any of your towns?
What good are your leaders?
You said, ‘Give us a king and leaders.’

¹¹So I gave you a king, but only in anger,
and I took him away in my great anger.

¹²The sins of Israel are on record,
stored away, waiting for punishment.

¹³The pain of birth will come for him,
but he is like a foolish baby
who won’t come out of its mother’s womb.

¹⁴Will I save them from the place of the dead?
Will I rescue them from death?
Where is your sickness, death?
Where is your pain, place of death?
I will show them no mercy.

¹⁵Israel is doing well among the nations,
but the Lord will send a wind from the east,
coming from the desert,
that will dry up his springs and wells of water.

He will destroy from their treasure houses everything of value.

¹⁶The nation of Israel will be ruined,
because it fought against God.
The people of Israel will die in war;
their children will be torn to pieces,
and their pregnant women will be ripped open.”

Israel Returns to God

Israel, return to the Lord your God,
because your sins have made you fall.

²Come back to the Lord
and say these words to him:
“Take away all our sin
and kindly receive us,
and we will keep the promises we made to you.

³Assyria cannot save us,
nor will we trust in our horses.
We will not say again, ‘Our gods,’
to the things our hands have made.
You show mercy to orphans.”

⁴The Lord says,
“I will forgive them for leaving me
and will love them freely,
because I am not angry with them anymore.

⁵I will be like the dew to Israel,
and they will blossom like a lily.
Like the cedar trees in Lebanon,
their roots will be firm.

⁶They will be like spreading branches,
like the beautiful olive trees
and the sweet-smelling cedars in Lebanon.

⁷The people of Israel will again live under my

protection.

They will grow like the grain,
they will bloom like a vine,
and they will be as famous as the wine of Lebanon.

⁸Israel, have nothing to do with idols.

I, the Lord, am the one who answers your prayers and
watches over you.

I am like a green pine tree;
your blessings come from me.”

⁹A wise person will know these things,
and an understanding person will take them to heart.
The Lord’s ways are right.

Good people live by following them,
but those who turn against God die because of them.

Lo-Ruhamah This name in Hebrew means “not pitied.”

Lo-Ammi This name in Hebrew means “not my people.”

Jezreel This name in Hebrew means “God plants.”

mother Refers to the nation of Israel here.

lovers Refers to the nations surrounding Israel, who led Israel to worship false gods.

husband Refers to God here.

baal Another Hebrew word for husband, but it was the same word as the false god Baal.

Jezreel This name in Hebrew means “God plants.”

raisin cakes This food was eaten in the feasts that honored false gods.

mother Refers to the nation of Israel here.

Gilgal ... Beth Aven Cities in Israel where people worshiped false gods.

Shechem A city of safety where people could go for protection.

Memphis A city in Egypt famous for its tombs.

Gibeah The sins of the people of Gibeah caused a civil war.
See **Judges 19–21**.

Gibeah The sins of the people of Gibeah caused a civil war.
See **Judges 19–21**.

Admah...Zeboiim Two other cities destroyed when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

[The Book of Joel](#)

Introduction

“Hey!”

“Listen up!” “I’m talking to you!”

What gets your attention? For some, a touch on the arm. For others, a shout from the street. But some people seem oblivious to everything and everyone.

Distractions, daydreams, worries, and concerns can consume us. They make it difficult to hear or think about anything else. Sometimes we need a wake-up call, something to grab our attention and put us on the right track.

The people of Judah needed such a call.

They were coasting.

Prosperous and complacent, they had become self-centered. Taking God for granted, they had turned to idols. So, through Joel, God sends a wake-up call, a divine attention-getter, to shake them out of their lethargy and sin. Joel predicts a devastating plague of locusts that will destroy the land unless the people repent and turn back to God.

God does what it takes to get our attention. Does he have yours?

About This Book

Author:

The prophet Joel

Date Written:

850–750 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- God will use difficulties if necessary (in this case locusts) to bring his people closer to him.
- Until the final judgment there is always hope for God's mercy through the Holy Spirit.
- The coming of the Messiah will change the status of the world as we know it.
- There is a better world in store.

Key Verse:

“After this, I will pour out my Spirit on all kinds of people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions” ([Joel 2:28](#)).

Contents:

1. The Locust Plague [1:1–20](#)
2. Judgment and Blessing on God's People [2:1–27](#)
3. The Final Reckoning [2:28–3:21](#)

Life Lessons

Joel 1:1–3:21

Situation

The prophet Joel cautioned Israel about God's impending judgment for its spiritual complacency and religious neglect. When the people prospered, they abandoned God or minimized the importance of him in their life.

Observation

God always gives us a chance to repent before he inflicts discipline. Like a loving parent, God's purpose is not to punish but to correct and nurture.

Inspiration

I'd seen that silly light burning on the car panel for days. And for days I'd ignored it. Too busy. "I'll take the car to the mechanic tomorrow." But tomorrow never became today. The light continued to burn, vainly waving red flags before my blind eyes. Something was wrong, but I had too many things to do.

"Next time I'll pay attention," I mumbled to myself. The flashlight I was waving must have looked like a dancing firefly to the oncoming traffic. The Situation was not pretty: a cold winter night, stranded on a lonely highway in rural Brazil with my daughter and pregnant wife.

My breath became smoke as I stood on the shoulder flagging cars. I promised myself I would never ignore a warning again.

Warnings. Red lights in life that signal us of impending danger. They exist in all parts of life. Sirens scream as a marriage starts to sour; alarms blare when a faith weakens; flares go up to alert us of morals being compromised.

They manifest themselves in a variety of ways: guilt, depression, rationalizations. A friend might confront. A Scripture might sting. A burden might prove too heavy. Regardless of how they may arrive, warnings come with the same purpose: To alert. To wake up.

Unfortunately, they are not always heeded. All of us have learned to cover our ears and shield our eyes at the right moment. It's amazing how adept we can be at keeping them out. Warnings can be as blunt as a sledgehammer and we still turn our heads and whistle them away. We have just enough of the rascal in us to believe we are the proverbial exception to the rule.

Are you close to the falls? Are your senses numb? Are your eyes trained to turn and roll when they should pause and observe?

Then maybe you need to repair your warning detector.

Divine warnings. All inspired by God and tested by time. They're yours to do with as you wish. They are red lights on your dashboard. Heed them and safety is yours to enjoy. Ignore them and I'll be looking for you on the side of the road.

(From God Came Near by Max Lucado)

Application

What warning signs should alert you to trouble?
What attitude or action have you failed to confront?
Is it hard to persevere? Yes! But it is so important.

Exploration

Warnings—[Deuteronomy 27:15–26](#); [Ezekiel 3:18–19](#); [1 Timothy 4:1–6](#).

Locusts Destroy the Crops

The Lord spoke his word to Joel son of Pethuel:

²Older leaders, listen to this message.
Listen to me, all you who live in the land.
Nothing like this has ever happened during your
lifetime
or during your ancestors' lifetimes.

³Tell your children about these things,
let your children tell their children,
and let your grandchildren tell their children.

⁴What the cutting locusts have left,
the swarming locusts have eaten:
what the swarming locusts have left,
the hopping locusts have eaten,
and what the hopping locusts have left,
the destroying locusts have eaten.

⁵Drunks, wake up and cry!
All you people who drink wine, cry!
Cry because your wine
has been taken away from your mouths.

⁶A powerful nation has come into my land
with too many soldiers to count.

It has teeth like a lion,
jaws like a female lion.

⁷It has made my grapevine a waste
and made my fig tree a stump.
It has stripped all the bark off my trees
and left the branches white.

⁸Cry as a young woman cries
when the man she was going to marry has died.

⁹There will be no more grain or drink offerings
to offer in the Temple of the Lord.
Because of this, the priests,
the servants of the Lord, are sad.

¹⁰The fields are ruined;
the ground is dried up.
The grain is destroyed,
the new wine is dried up,
and the olive oil runs out.

¹¹Be sad, farmers.
Cry loudly, you who grow grapes.
Cry for the wheat and the barley.
Cry because the harvest of the field is lost.

¹²The vines have become dry,
and the fig trees are dried up.
The pomegranate trees, the date palm trees, the apple
trees—
all the trees in the field have died.

And the happiness of the people has died, too.

¹³Priests, put on your rough cloth and cry to show your sadness.

Servants of the altar, cry out loud.

Servants of my God,

keep your rough cloth on all night to show your sadness.

Cry because there will be no more grain or drink offerings

to offer in the Temple of your God.

¹⁴Call for a day when no one eats food!

Tell everyone to stop work!

Bring the older leaders

and everyone who lives in the land

to the Temple of the Lord your God,

and cry out to the Lord.

¹⁵What a terrible day it will be!

The Lord's day of judging is near,

when punishment will come

like a destroying attack from the Almighty.

¹⁶Our food is taken away

while we watch.

Joy and happiness are gone

from the Temple of our God.

¹⁷Though we planted fig seeds,

they lie dry and dead in the dirt.

The barns are empty and falling down.

The storerooms for grain have been broken down,
because the grain has dried up.

¹⁸The animals are groaning!
The herds of cattle wander around confused,
because they have no grass to eat;
even the flocks of sheep suffer.

¹⁹Lord, I am calling to you for help,
because fire has burned up the open pastures,
and flames have burned all the trees in the field.

²⁰Wild animals also need your help.
The streams of water have dried up,
and fire has burned up the open pastures.

The Coming Day of Judgment

Blow the trumpet in Jerusalem;
shout a warning on my holy mountain.
Let all the people who live in the land shake with fear,
because the Lord's day of judging is coming;
it is near.

²It will be a dark, gloomy day,
cloudy and black.
Like the light at sunrise,
a great and powerful army will spread over the
mountains.

There has never been anything like it before,
and there will never be anything like it again.
³In front of them a fire destroys;
in back of them a flame burns.
The land in front of them is like the garden of Eden;
the land behind them is like an empty desert.
Nothing will escape from them.

⁴They look like horses,
and they run like war horses.

⁵It is like the noise of chariots
rumbling over the tops of the mountains,
like the noise of a roaring fire
burning dry stalks.
They are like a powerful army lined up for battle.

⁶When they see them, nations shake with fear,

and everyone's face becomes pale.

⁷They charge like soldiers;
they climb over the wall like warriors.
They all march straight ahead
and do not move off their path.

⁸They do not run into each other,
because each walks in line.
They break through all efforts to stop them
and keep coming.

⁹They run into the city.
They run at the wall
and climb into the houses,
entering through windows like thieves.

¹⁰Before them, earth and sky shake.
The sun and the moon become dark,
and the stars stop shining.

¹¹The Lord shouts out orders
to his army.
His army is very large!
Those who obey him are very strong!
The Lord's day of judging
is an overwhelming and terrible day.

No one can stand up against it!

Change Your Hearts

¹²The Lord says, "Even now, come back to me with all

your heart.

Go without food, and cry and be sad.”

¹³Tearing your clothes is not enough to show you are sad;

let your heart be broken.

Come back to the Lord your God,
because he is kind and shows mercy.

He doesn't become angry quickly,
and he has great love.

He can change his mind about doing harm.

¹⁴Who knows? Maybe he will turn back to you
and leave behind a blessing for you.

Grain and drink offerings belong to the Lord your God.

¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Jerusalem;
call for a day when no one eats food.
Tell everyone to stop work.

¹⁶Bring the people together
and make the meeting holy for the Lord.

Bring together the older leaders,
as well as the children,

and even babies that still feed at their mothers'
breasts.

The bridegroom should come from his room,
the bride from her bedroom.

¹⁷The priests, the Lord's servants, should cry
between the altar and the entrance to the Temple.
They should say, "Lord, have mercy on your people.
Don't let them be put to shame;

don't let other nations make fun of them.
Don't let people in other nations ask,
'Where is their God?'"

The Lord Restores the Land

¹⁸Then the Lord became concerned about his land
and felt sorry for his people.

¹⁹He said to them:
"I will send you grain, new wine, and olive oil,
so that you will have plenty.
No more will I shame you
among the nations.

²⁰I will force the army from the north to leave your land
and go into a dry, empty land.
Their soldiers in front will be forced into the Dead Sea,
and those in the rear into the Mediterranean Sea.
Their bodies will rot and stink.
The Lord has surely done a wonderful thing!"

²¹Land, don't be afraid;
be happy and full of joy,
because the Lord has done a wonderful thing.

²²Wild animals, don't be afraid,
because the open pastures have grown grass.
The trees have given fruit;
the fig trees and the grapevines have grown much
fruit.

²³So be happy, people of Jerusalem;
be joyful in the Lord your God.
Because he does what is right,
he has brought you rain;
he has sent the fall rain
and the spring rain for you, as before.

²⁴And the threshing floors will be full of grain;
the barrels will overflow with new wine and olive oil.

The Lord Speaks

²⁵“Though I sent my great army against you—
those [swarming locusts and hopping locusts,](#)
[the destroying locusts and the cutting locusts](#) that ate
your crops—

I will pay you back
for those years of trouble.

²⁶Then you will have plenty to eat
and be full.
You will praise the name of the Lord your God,
who has done miracles for you.
My people will never again be shamed.

²⁷Then you will know that I am among the people of
Israel,
that I am the Lord your God,
and there is no other God.
My people will never be shamed again.

²⁸“After this,
I will pour out my Spirit on all kinds of people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
and your young men will see visions.

²⁹At that time I will pour out my Spirit
also on male slaves and female slaves.

³⁰I will show miracles
in the sky and on the earth:
blood, fire, and thick smoke.

³¹The sun will become dark,
the moon red as blood,
before the overwhelming and terrible day of the Lord
comes.

³²Then anyone who calls on the Lord
will be saved,
because on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
there will be people who will be saved,
just as the Lord has said.
Those left alive after the day of punishment
are the people whom the Lord called.

Punishment for Judah's Enemies

“In those days and at that time,
when I will make things better for Judah and Jerusalem,

²I will gather all the nations together
and bring them down into the Valley Where the Lord
Judges.

There I will judge them,
because those nations scattered my own people Israel
and forced them to live in other nations.
They divided up my land

³and threw lots for my people.
They traded boys for prostitutes,
and they sold girls to buy wine to drink.

⁴“Tyre and Sidon and all of you regions of Philistia! What did you have against me? Were you punishing me for something I did, or were you doing something to hurt me? I will very quickly do to you what you have done to me. ⁵You took my silver and gold, and you put my precious treasures in your temples. ⁶You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks so that you could send them far from their land.

⁷“You sent my people to that faraway place, but I will get them and bring them back, and I will do to you what you have done to them. ⁸I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans far away.” The Lord said this.

God Judges the Nations

⁹Announce this among the nations:

Prepare for war!

Wake up the soldiers!

Let all the men of war come near and attack.

¹⁰Make swords from your plows,
and make spears from your hooks for trimming trees.

Let even the weak person say,

“I am a soldier.”

¹¹All of you nations, hurry,
and come together in that place.

Lord, send your soldiers
to gather the nations.

¹²“Wake up, nations,
and come to attack in the Valley Where the Lord
Judges.

There I will sit to judge
all the nations on every side.

¹³Swing the cutting tool,
because the harvest is ripe.

Come, walk on them as you would walk on grapes to
get their juice,

because the winepress is full
and the barrels are spilling over,
because these people are so evil!”

¹⁴There are huge numbers of people
in the [Valley of Decision](#),

because the Lord's day of judging is near
in the Valley of Decision.

¹⁵The sun and the moon will become dark,
and the stars will stop shining.

¹⁶The Lord will roar like a lion from Jerusalem;
his loud voice will thunder from that city,
and the sky and the earth will shake.

But the Lord will be a safe place for his people,
a strong place of safety for the people of Israel.

¹⁷“Then you will know that I, the Lord your God,
live on my holy Mount Zion.
Jerusalem will be a holy place,
and strangers will never even go through it again.

A New Life Promised for Judah

¹⁸“On that day wine will drip from the mountains,
milk will flow from the hills,
and water will run through all the ravines of Judah.
A fountain will flow from the Temple of the Lord
and give water to the valley of acacia trees.

¹⁹But Egypt will become empty,
and Edom an empty desert,
because they were cruel to the people of Judah.
They killed innocent people in that land.

²⁰But there will always be people living in Judah,

and people will live in Jerusalem from now on.

²¹Egypt and Edom killed my people,
so I will definitely punish them.”

The Lord lives in Jerusalem!

cutting...locusts These are different names for an insect like a large grasshopper. The locust can quickly destroy trees, plants, and crops, and in this destruction Joel sees a warning. God will cause this type of destruction when he punishes his people.

swarming ... locusts These are different names for an insect like a large grasshopper. The locust can quickly destroy trees, plants, and crops, and in this destruction, Joel sees a warning. God will cause this type of destruction when he punishes his people.

Valley of Decision This is like the name “Valley Where the Lord Judges” in 3:2 and 3:12.

The Book of Amos

Introduction

Ever met a “justa”? “Just a salesman.” “Just a secretary.” “Just a farmer.” or “Just a custodian.” “Just a” implies that one’s calling or occupation is fairly insignificant, not very important in the grand scheme of things. We would feel much better if we could say with pride: world-class athlete, high-powered politician, best-selling author, brain surgeon, dynamic evangelist, CEO, television star, or rocket scientist. Self-esteem would soar, people would take notice, and God could use us to change the world. Being a “justa” feels small and ordinary.

By most standards, Amos would be considered a “justa.” After all, he wasn’t a prophet or priest or the son of either. He was just a shepherd, a small businessman in Judah. Who would listen to him?

But instead of making excuses, Amos obeyed and became God’s powerful voice for change.

God has no “justas.”

God has often used “justas”—shepherds, carpenters, fishermen ... Whatever your station in life, God can use you. Check out Amos’s example and God’s message and be willing to be used by your Lord.

Amos wasn’t much. He was a “justa” ... just a servant of God. But that was enough.

About This Book

Author:

The prophet Amos

Date Written:

c. 750 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- People can only walk with God in peace when they follow his laws.
- Sin will be punished.
- God will try to draw his people back to him before he judges them.

Key Verse:

“The days are coming when I will cause a time of hunger in the land. The people will not be hungry for bread or thirsty for water, but they will be hungry for words from the Lord” ([Amos 8:11](#)).

Contents:

1. Amos's Call and Eight Judgments [1:1–2:16](#)
2. Judgment Against Israel [3:1–6:14](#)
3. Amos's Five Visions [7:1–9:10](#)
4. Final Blessings [9:11–15](#)

Life Lessons

Amos 1:1–2:16

Situation

God called Amos, a shepherd from Judah, to prophesy against the Northern Kingdom (Israel). Amos' prophecy preceded the Assyrian captivity.

Observation

God holds people accountable for their actions. He judged the Israelites for their evil works, and he will also examine our works.

Inspiration

The wrath of God is His righteous indignation and fury against sin and unrepentant sinners. Although we would rather think of His love, mercy, and grace, God's wrath is as much a divine perfection as any of His other attributes: "It is not the ignoble outburst that human anger so often is, a sign of pride and weakness, but it is holiness reacting to evil in a way that is morally right and glorious."

God's wrath is revealed in Hades and in the lake of fire, which is the same as hell.

No man or woman has to go to hell. God provided deliverance at enormous cost, but individuals must receive God's salvation by faith.

If a person refuses mercy, there is no alternative but wrath. If one doesn't want to go to heaven on God's terms, there is no other place but hell.

The contemplation of the wrath of God should give us compassion for the lost and desire to see

them fleeing to the arms of Jesus. We should pray, give, and go out in active evangelism to our relatives, neighbors, and friends.

(From *Alone in Majesty* by William MacDonald)

Application

How do you react when you consider God's wrath? Does it cause you to have compassion for those who right now are outside God's love and forgiveness? Think of one or two people you can pray for and with whom you can share Jesus' saving grace.

Exploration

God's Judgment—[Exodus 34:7](#); [1 Samuel 2:3](#); [Job 34:10](#); [Psalms 9:7](#); [Romans 2:5–6](#); [Hebrews 10:30–31](#).

“As drastic as it may appear, God will actually allow a person to experience hell on earth, in hopes of awakening his faith. A holy love makes the tough choice to release the child to the consequences of his rebellion.” —Max Lucado (*The Great House of God*)

These are the words of Amos, one of the shepherds from the town of Tekoa. He saw this vision about Israel two years before the earthquake. It was at the time Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.

²Amos said,

“The Lord will roar from Jerusalem;
he will send his voice from Jerusalem.
The pastures of the shepherds will become dry,
and even the top of Mount Carmel will dry up.”

Israel's Neighbors Are Punished

The People of Aram

³This is what the Lord says:

“For the many crimes of Damascus,
I will punish them.
They drove over the people of Gilead
with threshing boards that had iron teeth.

⁴So I will send fire upon the house of Hazael
that will destroy the strong towers of Ben-Hadad.

⁵I will break down the bar of the gate to Damascus
and destroy the king who is in the Valley of Aven,
as well as the leader of Beth Eden.

The people of Aram will be taken captive to the
country of Kir,” says the Lord.

The People of Philistia

⁶This is what the Lord says:

“For the many crimes of Gaza,
I will punish them.
They sold all the people of one area
as slaves to Edom.

⁷So I will send a fire on the walls of Gaza
that will destroy the city’s strong buildings.

⁸I will destroy the king of the city of Ashdod,
as well as the leader of Ashkelon.

Then I will turn against the people of the city of Ekron,
and the last of the Philistines will die,” says the Lord
God.

The People of Phoenicia

⁹This is what the Lord says:

“For the many crimes of Tyre,
I will punish them.
They sold all the people of one area
as slaves to Edom,
and they forgot the agreement among relatives they
had made with Israel.

¹⁰So I will send fire on the walls of Tyre
that will destroy the city’s strong buildings.”

The People of Edom

¹¹This is what the Lord says:

“For the many crimes of Edom,
I will punish them.
They hunted down their relatives, the Israelites, with
the sword,
showing them no mercy.
They were angry all the time
and kept on being very angry.

¹²So I will send fire on the city of [Teman](#)
[that will even destroy the strong buildings of Bozrah.](#)”

The People of Ammon

¹³This is what the Lord says:

“For the many crimes of Ammon,

I will punish them.
They ripped open the pregnant women in Gilead
so they could take over that land
and make their own country larger.

¹⁴So I will send fire on the city wall of Rabbah
that will destroy its strong buildings.
It will come during a day of battle,
during a stormy day with strong winds.

¹⁵Then their king and leaders will be taken captive;
they will all be taken away together,” says the Lord.

The People of Moab

This is what the Lord says:

“For the many crimes of Moab,
I will punish them.
They burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime.

²So I will send fire on Moab
that will destroy the strong buildings of the city of
Kerioth.

The people of Moab will die in a great noise,
in the middle of the sounds of war and trumpets.

³So I will bring an end to the king of Moab,
and I will kill all its leaders with him,” says the Lord.

The People of Judah

⁴This is what the Lord says:

“For the many crimes of Judah,
I will punish them.
They rejected the teachings of the Lord
and did not keep his commands;
they followed the same gods
as their ancestors had followed.

⁵So I will send fire on Judah,

and it will destroy the strong buildings of Jerusalem.”

Israel Is Punished

⁶This is what the Lord says:

“For the many crimes of Israel,
I will punish them.
For silver, they sell people who have done nothing
wrong;
they sell the poor to buy a pair of sandals.

⁷They walk on poor people as if they were dirt,
and they refuse to be fair to those who are suffering.
Fathers and sons have sexual relations with the same
woman,
and so they ruin my holy name.

⁸As they worship at their altars,
they lie down on clothes taken from the poor.
They fine people,
and with that money they buy wine to drink in the
house of their god.

⁹“But it was I who destroyed the Amorites before
them,
who were tall like cedar trees and as strong as oaks—
I destroyed them completely.

¹⁰It was I who brought you from the land of Egypt
and led you for forty years through the desert

so I could give you the land of the Amorites.

¹¹I made some of your children to be prophets
and some of your young people to be Nazirites.
People of Israel, isn't this true?" says the Lord.

¹²"But you made the Nazirites drink wine
and told the prophets not to prophesy.

¹³Now I will make you get stuck,
as a wagon loaded with grain gets stuck.

¹⁴No one will escape, not even the fastest runner.
Strong people will not be strong enough;
warriors will not be able to save themselves.

¹⁵Soldiers with bows and arrows will not stand and
fight,
and even fast runners will not get away;
soldiers on horses will not escape alive.

¹⁶At that time even the bravest warriors
will run away without their armor," says the Lord.

Life Lessons

Amos 3:1–6:14

Situation

Through Amos, God warned Israel of the judgment that would come upon the nation for its disobedience.

Observation

Despite continued discipline, Israel continued to turn away from God.

Inspiration

When my family lived in Rio de Janeiro, I owned a ham radio. I kept it in the utility room on top of the freezer. When we traveled, I always unplugged the radio and disconnected the antenna.

Once, when we were leaving for a week-long trip, I remembered I hadn't unplugged the radio. I ran back in the house, pulled the plug, and dashed out again.

But I pulled the wrong plug. I unplugged the freezer. . . . For seven days, then, a freezer full of food sat in a sweltering apartment with the power off.

When we came home, . . . guess who got fingered as the one who had unplugged the freezer—and who therefore would be responsible for cleaning it? You got it. So I got to work.

What is the best way to clean out a rotten interior? I knew exactly what to do. I got a rag and a bucket of soapy water and began cleaning the outside of the appliance. I was sure the odor would disappear with a good shine, so I polished and buffed

and wiped. When I was through, the freezer could have passed a Marine boot-camp inspection. It was sparkling.

But when I opened the door, that freezer was revolting.

(Are you wondering, “Now what kind of fool would do that?” Read on and you’ll see.)

No problem, I thought. I knew what to do. This freezer needs some friends. I’d stink, too, if I had the social life of a machine in a utility room. So, I threw a party. I invited all the appliances from the neighborhood kitchens. It was hard work, but we filled our apartment with refrigerators, stoves, microwaves, and washing machines. It was a great party. A couple of toasters recognized each other from the appliance store. Everyone played pin the plug on the socket and had a few laughs about limited warranties. The blenders were the hit, though; they really mixed well.

I was sure the social interaction would cure the inside of my freezer, but I was wrong. I opened it up, and the stink was even worse!

Now what?

I had an idea. If a polish job wouldn’t do it and social life didn’t help, I’d give the freezer some status!

I bought a Mercedes sticker and stuck it on the door. I painted a paisley tie down the front. I put a “Save the Whales” bumper sticker on the rear and installed a cellular phone on the side. That freezer was classy. It was stylish. It was ... cool. I splashed it with cologne and gave it a credit card for clout....

Then I opened the door, expecting to see a clean inside, but what I saw was putrid—a stinky and repulsive interior.

I could think of only one other option. My freezer needed some high-voltage pleasure! I immediately bought it some copies of *Playfridge* magazines—the publication that displays freezers with their doors open. I rented some films about foxy appliances.... I even tried to get my freezer a date with the Westinghouse next door, but she gave him the cold shoulder.

After a few days of supercharged, after-hours entertainment, I opened the door. And I nearly got sick.

I know what you're thinking. The only thing worse than Max's humor is his common sense. Who would concentrate on the outside when the problem is on the inside?

Do you really want to know?

A homemaker battles with depression. What is the solution suggested by some well-meaning friend? Buy a new dress.

A husband is involved in an affair that brings him as much guilt as it does adventure. The solution? Change peer groups. Hang out with people who don't make you feel guilty!

A young professional is plagued with loneliness. His obsession with success has left him with no friends. His boss gives him an idea: Change your style. Get a new haircut. Flash some cash.

Case after case of treating the outside while

ignoring the inside—polishing the case while ignoring the interior. And what is the result?

The homemaker gets a new dress, and the depression disappears ... for a day, maybe. Then the shadow returns.

The husband finds a bunch of buddies who sanction his adultery. The result? Peace ... until the crowd is gone. Then the guilt is back.

The young professional gets a new look and the people notice ... until the styles change. Then he has to scurry out and buy more stuff so he won't appear outdated.

The exterior polished; the interior corroding. The outside altered; the inside faltering. One thing is clear: Cosmetic changes are only skin deep.

... You change your life by changing your heart.
(From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

No one enjoys being disciplined. Yet, it is often through the discomfort of chastisement that we return to the right path. Make your life easier: repent of your sin before God must bring discipline. If you are being disciplined, correct the wrong quickly.

Exploration

Discipline—[Job 5:17](#); [Psalm 39:11](#); [94:12](#); [Proverbs 3:11–12](#); [Jeremiah 30:11](#); [Hebrews 12:7–10](#).

Warning to Israel

Listen to this word that the Lord has spoken against you,
people of Israel, against the whole family he brought out of
Egypt.

²“I have chosen only you
out of all the families of the earth,
so I will punish you
for all your sins.”

³Two people will not walk together
unless they have agreed to do so.

⁴A lion in the forest does not roar
unless it has caught an animal;
it does not growl in its den
when it has caught nothing.

⁵A bird will not fall into a trap
where there is no bait;
the trap will not spring shut
if there is nothing to catch.

⁶When a trumpet blows a warning in a city,
the people tremble.
When trouble comes to a city,
the Lord has caused it.

⁷Before the Lord God does anything,
he tells his plans to his servants the prophets.

⁸The lion has roared!
Who wouldn't be afraid?
The Lord God has spoken.
Who will not prophesy?

⁹Announce this to the strong buildings of Ashdod
and to the strong buildings of Egypt:
“Come to the mountains of Samaria,
where you will see great confusion
and people hurting others.”

¹⁰“The people don't know how to do what is right,”
says the Lord.

“Their strong buildings are filled with treasures they
took by force from others.”

¹¹So this is what the Lord God says:

“An enemy will take over the land
and pull down your strongholds;
he will take the treasures out of your strong
buildings.”

¹²This is what the Lord says:

“A shepherd might save from a lion's mouth
only two leg bones or a scrap of an ear of his sheep.
In the same way only a few Israelites in Samaria will be
saved—
people who now sit on their beds

and on their couches.”

¹³“Listen and be witnesses against the family of Jacob,” says the Lord God, the God All-Powerful.

¹⁴“When I punish Israel for their sins,
I will also destroy the altars at Bethel.
The corners of the altar will be cut off,
and they will fall to the ground.

¹⁵I will tear down the winter house,
together with the summer house.
The houses decorated with ivory will be destroyed,
and the great houses will come to an end,” says the
Lord.

Israel Will Not Return

Listen to this message, you cows of [Bashan](#) on the Mountain of Samaria.

You take things from the poor
and crush people who are in need.
Then you command your husbands,
“Bring us something to drink!”

²The Lord God has promised this:
“Just as surely as I am a holy God,
the time will come
when you will be taken away by hooks,
and what is left of you with fishhooks.

³You will go straight out of the city
through holes in the walls,
and you will be thrown on the garbage dump,” says
the Lord.

⁴“Come to the city of Bethel and sin;
come to Gilgal and sin even more.
Offer your sacrifices every morning,
and bring one-tenth of your crops every three days.

⁵Offer bread made with yeast as a sacrifice to show
your thanks,
and brag about the special offerings you bring,
because this is what you love to do, Israelites,” says
the Lord God.

⁶“I did not give you any food in your cities,
and there was not enough to eat in any of your towns,

but you did not come back to me,” says the Lord.

⁷“I held back the rain from you
three months before harvest time.
Then I let it rain on one city
but not on another.
Rain fell on one field,
but another field got none and dried up.

⁸People weak from thirst went from town to town for
water,
but they could not get enough to drink.
Still you did not come back to me,” says the Lord.

⁹“I made your crops die from disease and mildew.
When your gardens and your vineyards got larger,
locusts ate your fig and olive trees.
But still you did not come back to me,” says the Lord.

¹⁰“I sent disasters against you,
as I did to Egypt.
I killed your young men with swords,
and your horses were taken from you.
I made you smell the stink from all the dead bodies,
but still you did not come back to me,” says the Lord.

¹¹“I destroyed some of you
as I destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.
You were like a burning stick pulled from a fire,
but still you did not come back to me,” says the Lord.

¹²“So this is what I will do to you, Israel;

because I will do this to you,
get ready to meet your God, Israel.”

¹³He is the one who makes the mountains
and creates the wind
and makes his thoughts known to people.
He changes the dawn into darkness
and walks over the mountains of the earth.
His name is the Lord God All-Powerful.

Israel Needs to Repent

Listen to this funeral song that I sing about you,
people of Israel.

²“The young girl Israel has fallen,
and she will not rise up again.
She was left alone in her own land,
and there is no one to help her up.”

³This is what the Lord God says:

“If a thousand soldiers leave a city,
only a hundred will return;
if a hundred soldiers leave a city,
only ten will return.”

⁴This is what the Lord says to the nation of Israel:

“Come to me and live.

⁵But do not look in Bethel
or go to Gilgal,
and do not go down to Beersheba.
The people of Gilgal will be taken away as captives,
and Bethel will become nothing.”

⁶Come to the Lord and live,
or he will move like fire against the descendants of
Joseph.
The fire will burn Bethel,
and there will be no one to put it out.

⁷You turn justice upside down,
and you throw on the ground what is right.

⁸God is the one who made the star groups Pleiades and
Orion;

he changes darkness into the morning light,
and the day into dark night.

He calls for the waters of the sea
to pour out on the earth.

The Lord is his name.

⁹He destroys the protected city;
he ruins the strong, walled city.

¹⁰You hate those who speak in court against evil,
and you can't stand those who tell the truth.

¹¹You walk on poor people,
forcing them to give you grain.
You have built fancy houses of cut stone,
but you will not live in them.
You have planted beautiful vineyards,
but you will not drink the wine from them.

¹²I know your many crimes,
your terrible sins.
You hurt people who do right,
you take money to do wrong,
and you keep the poor from getting justice in court.

¹³In such times the wise person will keep quiet,
because it is a bad time.

¹⁴Try to do good, not evil,

so that you will live,
and the Lord God All-Powerful will be with you
just as you say he is.

¹⁵Hate evil and love good;
be fair in the courts.
Maybe the Lord God All-Powerful will be kind
to the people of Joseph who are left alive.

¹⁶This is what the Lord, the Lord God All-Powerful, says:

“People will be crying in all the streets;
they will be saying, ‘Oh, no!’ in the public places.
They will call the farmers to come and weep
and will pay people to cry out loud for them.

¹⁷People will be crying in all the vineyards,
because I will pass among you to punish you,” says
the Lord.

The Lord’s Day of Judging

¹⁸How terrible it will be for you who want
the Lord’s day of judging to come.
Why do you want that day to come?
It will bring darkness for you, not light.

¹⁹It will be like someone who runs from a lion
and meets a bear,
or like someone who goes into his house
and puts his hand on the wall,

and then is bitten by a snake.

²⁰So the Lord's day of judging will bring darkness, not light;

it will be very dark, not light at all.

²¹The Lord says, "I completely hate your feasts;
I cannot stand your religious meetings.

²²If you offer me burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I won't accept them.

You bring your best fellowship offerings of fattened cattle,
but I will ignore them.

²³Take the noise of your songs away from me!
I won't listen to the music of your harps.

²⁴But let justice flow like a river,
and let goodness flow like a stream that never stops.

²⁵"People of Israel, you did not bring me sacrifices and offerings
while you traveled in the desert for forty years.

²⁶You have carried with you
your king, the god Sakkuth,
and Kaiwan your idol,
and the star gods you have made.

²⁷So I will send you away as captives beyond Damascus,"
says the Lord, whose name is the God All-Powerful.

Israel Will Be Destroyed

How terrible it will be for those who have an easy life
in Jerusalem,

for those who feel safe living on Mount Samaria.

You think you are the important people of the best
nation in the world;

the Israelites come to you for help.

²Go look at the city of Calneh,
and from there go to the great city Hamath;
then go down to Gath of the Philistines.

You are no better than these kingdoms.

Your land is no larger than theirs.

³You put off the day of punishment,
but you bring near the day when you can do evil to
others.

⁴You lie on beds decorated with ivory
and stretch out on your couches.

You eat tender lambs
and fattened calves.

⁵You make up songs on your harps,
and, like David, you compose songs on musical
instruments.

⁶You drink wine by the bowlful
and use the best perfumed lotions.
But you are not sad over the ruin of Israel,

⁷so you will be some of the first ones taken as slaves.
Your feasting and lying around will come to an end.

⁸The Lord God made this promise; the Lord God All-Powerful says:

“I hate the pride of the Israelites,
and I hate their strong buildings,
so I will let the enemy take the city
and everything in it.”

⁹At that time there might be only ten people left alive in just one house, but they will also die. ¹⁰When the relatives come to get the bodies to take them outside, one of them will call to the other and ask, “Are there any other dead bodies with you?”

That person will answer, “No.”

Then the one who asked will say, “Hush! We must not say the name of the Lord.”

¹¹The Lord has given the command;
the large house will be broken into pieces,
and the small house into bits.

¹²Horses do not run on rocks,
and people do not plow rocks with oxen.
But you have changed fairness into poison;
you have changed what is right into a bitter taste.

¹³You are happy that the town of [Lo Debar](#) was captured,
and you say, “We have taken [Karnaim](#) by our own strength.”

¹⁴The Lord God All-Powerful says,
“Israel, I will bring a nation against you
that will make your people suffer from Lebo Hamath in
the north
to the valley south of the Dead Sea.”

Life Lessons

Amos 7:1–9:15

Situation

Amos saw God's coming judgments on Israel through two visions. After each vision, he prayed that God would be merciful.

Observation

God sent his prophet Amos to warn the people of Israel to repent of their sins. God gives us these examples to teach us that he hates sin.

Inspiration

The task of the prophet is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a vision of an alternative to the dominant system. The prophet must generate hope for something that lies beyond the present order. We need a vision of an alternative future that will energize us and motivate us to act, a vision of possibilities that will make our blood run hot and give us the courage to revolt against the way things are.

A prophet's vision can replace people's numbness with energy. The possibility of a glorious "might be" can enable us to live in ways that appear dangerous to the custodians of the status quo. With vision, the dead bones can come alive. The psychically dead can be resurrected. The spiritual sleepers can be awakened. Out of sorrow for the death of the old can come a new dynamism to us; through the message of the prophet we can come to believe in a new heaven and a new earth. The apathy

that works in people in dying societies can be dispelled. There can be passion. There can be a “new song” ([Isaiah 42:10](#)), and the fatigue that is so evident among those in the present order can be overcome. . . .

All of this energy comes from the message of the prophet. The people of the dying society can be “born again.” The prophet’s hope can generate the dynamism for change. (From *Wake Up America* by Tony Campolo)

Application

Use Sundays as a chance to get to know God better. Go to church faithfully. Worship and listen attentively. Spend Sunday building relationships with others in your church or spending time with your family.

Exploration

Bold Witnesses—[Matthew 5:13–16](#); [Mark 4:21–25](#); [John 3:21](#); [Acts 1:8](#); [Galatians 6:9](#).

The Vision of Locusts

This is what the Lord God showed me: He was forming a swarm of locusts, after the king had taken his share of the first crop and the second crop had just begun growing.²When the locusts ate all the crops in the country, I said, “Lord God, forgive us. How could Israel live through this? It is too small already!”

³So the Lord changed his mind about this. “It will not happen,” said the Lord.

The Vision of Fire

⁴This is what the Lord God showed me: The Lord God was calling for fire to come down like rain. It burned up the deep water and was going to burn up the land.⁵Then I cried out, “Lord God, stop! How could Israel live through this? It is too small already.”

⁶So the Lord changed his mind about this too. “It will not happen,” said the Lord God.

The Vision of the Plumb Line

⁷This is what he showed me: The Lord stood by a straight wall, with a plumb line in his hand.⁸The Lord said to me, “Amos,

what do you see?”

I said, “A plumb line.”

Then the Lord said, “See, I will put a plumb line among my people Israel to show how crooked they are. I will not look the other way any longer.

⁹“The places where Isaac’s descendants worship will be destroyed,

Israel’s holy places will be turned into ruins,

and I will attack King Jeroboam’s family with the sword.”

Amaziah Speaks Against Amos

¹⁰Amaziah, a priest at Bethel, sent this message to Jeroboam king of Israel: “Amos is making evil plans against you with the people of Israel. He has been speaking so much that this land can’t hold all his words. ¹¹This is what Amos has said:

‘Jeroboam will die by the sword,
and the people of Israel will be taken as captives
out of their own country.’”

¹²Then Amaziah said to Amos, “Seer, go back right now to Judah. Do your prophesying and earn your living there, ¹³but don’t prophesy anymore here at Bethel. This is the king’s holy place, and it is the nation’s temple.”

¹⁴Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I do not make my living as a prophet, nor am I a member of a group of prophets. I make my living as a shepherd, and I take care of sycamore trees.

¹⁵But the Lord took me away from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ ¹⁶So listen to the Lord’s word. You tell me,

‘Don’t prophesy against Israel,
and stop prophesying against the descendants of
Isaac.’

¹⁷“Because you have said this, the Lord says:

‘Your wife will become a prostitute in the city,
and your sons and daughters will be killed with
swords.

Other people will measure your land and divide it
among themselves,

and you will die in a foreign country.

The people of Israel will definitely be taken
from their own land as captives.’”

The Vision of Ripe Fruit

This is what the Lord God showed me: a basket of summer fruit.

²He said to me, “Amos, what do you see?”

I said, “A basket of summer fruit.”

Then the Lord said to me, “An [end](#) has come for my people Israel, because I will not overlook their sins anymore.

³“On that day the palace songs will become funeral songs,” says the Lord God. “There will be dead bodies thrown everywhere! Silence!”

⁴Listen to me, you who walk on helpless people,
you who are trying to destroy the poor people of this
country, saying,

⁵“When will the New Moon festival be over
so we can sell grain?
When will the Sabbath be over
so we can bring out wheat to sell?
We can charge them more
and give them less,
and we can change the scales to cheat the people.

⁶We will buy poor people for silver,
and needy people for the price of a pair of sandals.
We will even sell the wheat that was swept up from the
floor.”

⁷The Lord has sworn by his name, the Pride of Jacob, “I will

never forget everything that these people did.

⁸The whole land will shake because of it,
and everyone who lives in the land will cry for those
who died.

The whole land will rise like the Nile;
it will be shaken, and then it will fall
like the Nile River in Egypt.”

⁹The Lord God says:

“At that time I will cause the sun to go down at noon
and make the earth dark on a bright day.

¹⁰I will change your festivals into days of crying for the
dead,
and all your songs will become songs of sadness.
I will make all of you wear rough cloth to show your
sadness;

I will make you shave your heads as well.

I will make it like a time of crying for the death of an
only son,
and its end like the end of an awful day.”

¹¹The Lord God says: “The days are coming
when I will cause a time of hunger in the land.

The people will not be hungry for bread or thirsty for
water,
but they will be hungry for words from the Lord.

¹²They will wander from the Mediterranean Sea to the
Dead Sea,
from the north to the east.

They will search for the word of the Lord,
but they won't find it.

¹³At that time the beautiful young women and the
young men
will become weak from thirst.

¹⁴They make promises by the idol in Samaria
and say, 'As surely as the god of [Dan](#) lives ...'
and, 'As surely as the god of [Beersheba](#) lives, we
promise ...'
So they will fall
and never get up again."

Israel Will Be Destroyed

I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and he said:

“Smash the top of the pillars
so that even the bottom of the doors will shake.
Make the pillars fall on the people’s heads;
anyone left alive I will kill with a sword.
Not one person will get away;
no one will escape.

²If they dig down as deep as the place of the dead,
I will pull them up from there.
If they climb up into heaven,
I will bring them down from there.

³If they hide at the top of Mount Carmel,
I will find them and take them away.
If they try to hide from me at the bottom of the sea,
I will command a snake to bite them.

⁴If they are captured and taken away by their enemies,
I will command the sword to kill them.
I will keep watch over them,
but I will keep watch to give them trouble, not to do
them good.”

⁵The Lord God All-Powerful touches the land,
and the land shakes.
Then everyone who lives in the land cries for the dead.
The whole land rises like the Nile River

and falls like the river of Egypt.

⁶The Lord builds his upper rooms above the skies;
he sets their foundations on the earth.
He calls for the waters of the sea
and pours them out on the land.

The Lord is his name.

⁷The Lord says,

“Israel, you are no different to me than the people of
Cush.

I brought Israel out of the land of Egypt,
and the Philistines from Crete,
and the Arameans from Kir.

⁸I, the Lord God, am watching the sinful kingdom
Israel.

I will destroy it
from off the earth,
but I will not completely destroy
Jacob’s descendants,” says the Lord.

⁹“I am giving the command
to scatter the nation of Israel among all nations.
It will be like someone shaking grain through a strainer,
but not even a tiny stone falls through.

¹⁰All the sinners among my people
will die by the sword—
those who say,
‘Nothing bad will happen to us.’

The Lord Promises to Restore Israel

¹¹“The kingdom of David is like a fallen tent,
but in that day I will set it up again
and mend its broken places.
I will rebuild its ruins
as it was before.

¹²Then Israel will take over what is left of Edom
and the other nations that belong to me,”
says the Lord,
who will make it happen.

¹³The Lord says, “The time is coming when there will
be all kinds of food.

People will still be harvesting crops
when it's time to plow again.
People will still be taking the juice from grapes
when it's time to plant again.
Wine will drip from the mountains
and pour from the hills.

¹⁴I will bring my people Israel back from captivity;
they will build the ruined cities again,
and they will live in them.

They will plant vineyards and drink the wine from
them;
they will plant gardens and eat their fruit.

¹⁵I will plant my people on their land,
and they will not be pulled out again
from the land which I have given them,”

says the Lord your God.

Teman ... Bozrah Since Teman was in northern Edom and Bozrah was in southern Edom, this means the whole country will be destroyed.

Bashan Amos compares the rich, lazy women of Samaria to well-fed cows from Bashan, a place known for its rich animal pastures.

Lo Debar ... Karnaim These were two not especially significant cities that the Israelites had captured in war.

end The Hebrew word for “end” sounds like the Hebrew word for “summer fruit.”

Dan ... Beersheba Dan was the city farthest north in Israel, and Beersheba was the city farthest south.

The Book of Obadiah

Introduction

I know how to make you mad. I don't want to. I don't intend to. But if I desired to, I would know how to do it.

I would insult your family.

I wouldn't insult you. I would insult your family. I'd mock your mother. I'd make fun of your father. I'd criticize your kids. Again, I'm not going to. But if I did, I know what would happen.

You'd get angry. If there is any shred of loyalty in your heart, you'd tell me to mind my own business.

Even if I were right.

Even if my accusations were accurate. No matter. You'd tell me to quit sticking my nose in your business. When it comes to the family, we look out for our own. God does the same.

God's children, the Jews, weren't the best of children. They were stubborn, rebellious, and forgetful. Over the years God dished out the discipline and correction. But through all the stresses and strains, God's love for his children was stubborn.

Edom, a powerful nation, enjoyed picking on Israel. Here in Obadiah, we see God rising to the defense of his children. He says, in effect, *Mess with them and you mess with me.*

It's a small book with a huge message. God cares for his children.

About This Book

Author:

Obadiah

Date Written:

c. 850 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- God will stand up for his people against their enemies.
- There will be judgment for those who take a stand against God's work and people.
- God's word is true and will come about.

Key Verse:

“The people of Esau will be like dry stalks. The people of Jacob will set them on fire and burn them up. There will be no one left of the people of Esau.’ This will happen because the Lord has said it” ([Obadiah 18](#)).

Contents:

1. God's Judgment [1-9](#)
2. Edom's Sin [10-14](#)
3. Israel's Victory [15-21](#)

Life Lessons

Obadiah 1–21

Situation

A bloody feud between Edom and Israel continued from the days of Esau and Jacob ([Genesis 25:19–34](#)). Obadiah denounced Edom's cruelty and pride, and then prophesied about its destruction. He also prophesied that Israel would be restored as a nation with extended territory.

Observation

God always protects and takes care of his children. With God on their side, his children are never underdogs.

Inspiration

I have never met a Christian who had lost his salvation. However, I have met plenty who had lost their assurance. Our *security* rests in the hands of an unconditionally loving heavenly Father. One who gave His best to insure our fellowship with Him forever. Our *assurance* rests in understanding and acceptance of these glorious truths.

For some people, the problem is erroneous teaching; for others, the problem is guilt. But whatever the reason, the result is the same, a lack of assurance. And when assurance goes, the basic building blocks of the relationship go also.

More is at stake than assurance. The very gospel itself comes under attack when the eternal security of the believer is questioned. Placing the responsibility

for maintaining salvation on the believer is adding works to grace. Salvation would no longer be a gift. It would become trade—our faithfulness for His faithfulness.

This is a far cry from the good news Jesus preached and Paul heralded. Their gospel was salvation by faith—and only by faith.

The salvation spoken of by Jesus and Paul takes place at one moment in time yet seals the believer for all time. This faith moves the Judge not only to forgive and pardon the sinner, but to adopt him into His own family as well.

... Why the mercy? Why the kindness? The only answer is love—love of such magnitude that all human illustrations fall short, love that is unconditional at its core with no hidden agendas and no fine print. God's love is such that He accepts us just the way we are but refuses to leave us there...

God has gone to great lengths to make our relationship with Him possible. Doing so cost Him His Son. But the sacrifice of His Son did far more than merely provide us with the possibility of such a relationship; it guaranteed the permanency of that relationship as well.

Your salvation is secure. My prayer is that you would experience the assurance of this precious and costly gift.

(From *Eternal Security* by Charles Stanley)

Application

Have you ever felt that you were out of favor with God? Did you try to ask Jesus into your heart again,

and again? Jesus comes the first time! He stays! Be confident that he will never leave you for you are his child.

Exploration

Security—[Psalm 17:8–9](#); [18:2–3](#); [27:1](#); [Proverbs 18:10](#); [1 Peter 1:3–4](#).

The Lord Will Punish the Edomites

¹This is the vision of Obadiah.

This is what the Lord God says about [Edom](#):

We have heard a message from the Lord.

A messenger has been sent among the nations,
saying,

“Attack! Let’s go attack Edom!”

The Lord Speaks to the Edomites

²“Soon I will make you the smallest of nations.
You will be greatly hated by everyone.

³Your pride has fooled you,
you who live in the hollow places of the cliff.
Your home is up high,
you who say to yourself,
‘No one can bring me down to the ground.’

⁴Even if you fly high like the eagle
and make your nest among the stars,
I will bring you down from there,” says the Lord.

⁵“You will really be ruined!
If thieves came to you,
if robbers came by night,

they would steal only enough for themselves.
If workers came and picked the grapes from your vines,
they would leave a few behind.

⁶But you, Edom, will really lose everything!
People will find all your hidden treasures!

⁷All the people who are your friends
will force you out of the land.
The people who are at peace with you
will trick you and defeat you.
Those who eat your bread with you now
are planning a trap for you,
and you will not notice it.”

⁸The Lord says, “On that day
I will surely destroy the wise people from Edom,
and those with understanding from the mountains of
Edom.

⁹Then, city of Teman, your best warriors will be afraid,
and everyone from the mountains of Edom will be
killed.

¹⁰You did violence to your relatives, the Israelites,
so you will be covered with shame
and destroyed forever.

¹¹You stood aside without helping
while strangers carried Israel’s treasures away.
When foreigners entered Israel’s city gate
and threw lots to decide what part of Jerusalem they

would take,
you were like one of them.

Commands That Edom Broke

¹²“Edom, do not laugh at your brother Israel in his time of trouble
or be happy about the people of Judah when they are destroyed.

Do not brag when cruel things are done to them.

¹³Do not enter the city gate of my people
in their time of trouble
or laugh at their problems
in their time of trouble.
Do not take their treasures
in their time of trouble.

¹⁴Do not stand at the crossroads
to destroy those who are trying to escape.
Do not capture those who escape alive and turn them
over to their enemy
in their time of trouble.

The Nations Will Be Judged

¹⁵“The Lord’s day of judging is coming soon
to all the nations.

The same evil things you did to other people
will happen to you;
they will come back upon your own head.

¹⁶Because you drank in my Temple,
all the nations will drink on and on.
They will drink and drink
until they disappear.

¹⁷But on Mount Zion some will escape the judgment,
and it will be a holy place.
The people of Jacob will take back their land
from those who took it from them.

¹⁸The [people of Jacob](#) will be like a fire
and the [people of Joseph](#) like a flame.
But the [people of Esau](#) will be like dry stalks.
The people of Jacob will set them on fire and burn
them up.

There will be no one left of the people of Esau.”
This will happen because the Lord has said it.

¹⁹Then God's people will regain southern Judah from
Edom;
they will take back the mountains of Edom.
They will take back the western hills
from the Philistines.
They will regain the lands of Ephraim and Samaria,
and Benjamin will take over Gilead.

²⁰People from Israel who once were forced to leave
their homes

will take the land of the Canaanites,
all the way to Zarephath.

People from Judah who once were forced to leave
Jerusalem and live in Sepharad
will take back the cities of southern Judah.

²¹Powerful warriors will go up on Mount Zion,
where they will rule the people living on Edom's
mountains.

And the kingdom will belong to the Lord.

Edom The Edomites were the people who came from Esau, Jacob's twin brother. They were enemies of the Israelites.

people of Jacob ... Joseph The people who came from Jacob and Joseph, or the Israelites.

people of Esau The people who came from Esau, or the Edomites.

The Book of Jonah

Introduction

He had every right to run (he thought). Why should he go to that stinking city? He hated the place. Why should he warn the Ninevites about God's judgment? After how they had treated his people, they deserved to be wiped out. The last thing Jonah wanted was for his enemies to receive God's blessing.

So he ran ... as fast and as far as he could away from what God wanted him to do.

But God had other plans.

You know the story: God stirred up a storm. Jonah bailed out of the boat and ended up in the belly of the fish.

God gave Jonah time to think over his actions and attitudes. For the first time Jonah didn't complain, he prayed. (Probably the only time anyone ever prayed for a fish-burp.)

The prayer was answered and Jonah eventually traveled to hated Nineveh. He preached to the people there. Though his odor wasn't appealing, his message was and the Ninevites repented. God relented (as Jonah knew he would), and Jonah fumed, furious over the turn of events. He sulked.

We can be so difficult.

But God can be so patient.

The Book of Jonah is more than a fascinating account of one man's futile attempt to run away from God. It is a story of God's love for even the most unlovable, despicable people we can imagine—and of our responsibility to tell them the Good News.

About This Book

Author:

Probably Jonah

Date Written:

c. 750 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- God calls his people to relay his message even to their enemies.
- God is more powerful than our schemes and plans.
- We cannot tell when God's message will be received and heeded.

Key Verse:

“When my life had almost gone, I remembered the Lord. I prayed to you, and you heard my prayers in your Holy Temple” ([Jonah 2:7](#)).

Contents:

1. Jonah's Call and Escape Attempt [1:1–17](#)
2. Jonah's Repentance and Deliverance [2:1–10](#)
3. Jonah's Preaching and Nineveh's Repentance [3:1–10](#)
4. Jonah's Disappointment and God's Response [4:1–11](#)

Life Lessons

Jonah 1:1–2:10

Situation

God told Jonah to preach to the Assyrians in Nineveh. Jonah knew that if he preached to them, they would have an opportunity to avoid God's wrath. Jonah hoped to see these enemies punished by God, so he ran away.

Observation

Running away from God can't be done. Jonah discovered that. God's dominion extends everywhere.

Inspiration

How infinitely more difficult it is for us to grasp what Jesus meant when He said: "God is Spirit." Jesus knew! His mind was not limited as our minds are limited. His eyes were not focused on the mud puddle of life. He knew full well the borderless reaches of the Spirit, and He came to try to give us some understanding of its wonders, its comfort, and its peace.

The spirit is not something bound in a body. The Bible declares that God is a Spirit—that He is not limited to body; He is not limited to shape; He is not limited to boundaries or bonds; He is absolutely immeasurable and undiscernible by eyes that can see only physical things. The Bible tells us that because He has no such limitations He can be everywhere at once—that He can hear all, see all, and know all.

He can be everywhere at once, heeding the

prayers of all who call out in the name of Christ; performing the mighty miracles that keep the stars in their places and the plants bursting up through the earth and the fish swimming in the sea. There is no limit to God. There is no limit to His wisdom. There is no limit to His power. There is no limit to His love.

If you have been trying to limit God—stop it! You wouldn't try to limit the ocean. You cannot limit the universe. You wouldn't be bold enough to try to change the course of the moon, or to stop the earth as it turns on its axis! How everlastingly more foolish it is to try to limit the God who created and controls all these wonders! (From *Peace with God* by Billy Graham)

Application

Did you ever try to run away from your shadow as a child? You can't run from God either. When God tells you to go somewhere, listen and follow. Where is God sending you to tell others about him—to your family, next door, your coworkers? Will you run from God's call?

Exploration

Sovereignty—[Job 37:23](#); [38–41](#); [Revelation 19:16](#).

God Calls and Jonah Runs

The Lord spoke his word to Jonah son of Amittai: ²“Get up, go to the great city of Nineveh, and preach against it, because I see the evil things they do.”

³But Jonah got up to run away from the Lord by going to Tarshish. He went to the city of Joppa, where he found a ship that was going to the city of Tarshish. Jonah paid for the trip and went aboard, planning to go to Tarshish to run away from the Lord.

⁴But the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, which made the sea so stormy that the ship was in danger of breaking apart. ⁵The sailors were afraid, and each man cried to his own god. They began throwing the cargo from the ship into the sea to make the ship lighter.

But Jonah had gone down far inside the ship to lie down, and he fell fast asleep. ⁶The captain of the ship came and said, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray to your god! Maybe your god will pay attention to us, and we won’t die!”

⁷Then the men said to each other, “Let’s throw lots to see who caused these troubles to happen to us.”

When they threw lots, the lot showed that the trouble had happened because of Jonah. ⁸Then they said to him, “Tell us, who caused our trouble? What is your job? Where do you come from? What is your country? Who are your people?”

⁹Then Jonah said to them, “I am a Hebrew. I fear the Lord,

the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.”

¹⁰The men were very afraid, and they asked Jonah, “What terrible thing did you do?” (They knew he was running away from the Lord because he had told them.)

¹¹Since the wind and the waves of the sea were becoming much stronger, they said to him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?”

¹²Jonah said to them, “Pick me up, and throw me into the sea, and then it will calm down. I know it is my fault that this great storm has come on you.”

¹³Instead, the men tried to row the ship back to the land, but they could not, because the sea was becoming more stormy.

Jonah's Punishment

¹⁴So the men cried to the Lord, “Lord, please don't let us die because of this man's life; please don't think we are guilty of killing an innocent person. Lord, you have caused all this to happen; you wanted it this way.” ¹⁵So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea became calm. ¹⁶Then they began to fear the Lord very much; they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made promises to him.

¹⁷The Lord caused a big fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.

While Jonah was inside the fish, he prayed to the Lord his God and said,

²“When I was in danger,
I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.
I was about to die,
so I cried to you,
and you heard my voice.

³You threw me into the sea,
down, down into the deep sea.
The water was all around me,
and your powerful waves flowed over me.

⁴I said, ‘I was driven out of your presence,
but I hope to see your Holy Temple again.’

⁵The waters of the sea closed around my throat.
The deep sea was all around me;
seaweed was wrapped around my head.

⁶When I went down to where the mountains of the sea
start to rise,

I thought I was locked in this prison forever,
but you saved me from the pit of death,
Lord my God.

⁷“When my life had almost gone,
I remembered the Lord.
I prayed to you,
and you heard my prayers in your Holy Temple.

⁸“People who worship useless idols
give up their loyalty to you.

⁹But I will praise and thank you
while I give sacrifices to you,
and I will keep my promises to you.
Salvation comes from the Lord!”

¹⁰Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and the fish threw up
Jonah onto the dry land.

Life Lessons

Jonah 3:1–4:11

Situation

Jonah finally obeyed God and preached in Nineveh. The people and their king responded immediately, and God had compassion on them.

Observation

God's words can have a transforming effect on people, causing them to repent from their sins.

Inspiration

Violent strife and conflict have haunted the human race to one degree or another since the day Adam and Eve first chose to rebel against God.

At those times, death rides through every city and town bringing suffering and death. But sometimes, just as suddenly, we enter a time of peace and relative calm. Why? ... because many have listened to His message of warning and turned to Him in repentance and faith.

A good example of this is seen in God's dealings with the people of the ancient Assyrian capital of Nineveh. They were an evil, pagan people who worshiped idols and often fought against God's people. God sent the prophet Jonah to Nineveh to proclaim His coming judgment to them: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you... . Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." But when the king of Nineveh heard Jonah's message, he repented and ordered the whole

people to repent as well. As a result God's judgment was averted. Only later, when evil increased in the generations after Jonah and the people failed to repent, did God's judgment finally fall on Nineveh. God's judgment is often this way. Some day it will come in all its fullness and finality, but in the meantime it may be that God's hand of judgment will pause when we repent. (From *Storm Warning* by Billy Graham)

Application

If God tells you to speak to others about their actions, take courage. You might be surprised at how many accept your words and repent.

Exploration

Repentance—[2 Kings 22:19](#); [Matthew 3:8](#); [Acts 17:30](#).

God Calls and Jonah Obeys

The Lord spoke his word to Jonah again and said,²“Get up, go to the great city Nineveh, and preach to it what I tell you to say.”

³So Jonah obeyed the Lord and got up and went to Nineveh. It was a very large city; just to walk across it took a person three days.⁴After Jonah had entered the city and walked for one day, he preached to the people, saying, “After forty days, Nineveh will be destroyed!”

⁵The people of Nineveh believed God. They announced that they would stop eating for a while, and they put on rough cloth to show their sadness. All the people in the city did this, from the most important to the least important.

⁶When the king of Nineveh heard this news, he got up from his throne, took off his robe, and covered himself with rough cloth and sat in ashes to show how upset he was.

⁷He sent this announcement through Nineveh:

By command of the king and his important men: No person or animal, herd or flock, will be allowed to taste anything. Do not let them eat food or drink water.⁸But every person and animal should be covered with rough cloth, and people should cry loudly to God. Everyone must turn away from evil living and stop doing harm all the time.⁹Who knows? Maybe God will change his mind. Maybe he will stop being angry, and then we will not die.

¹⁰When God saw what the people did, that they stopped doing evil, he changed his mind and did not do what he had warned. He did not punish them.

God's Mercy Makes Jonah Angry

But this made Jonah very unhappy, and he became angry. ²He prayed to the Lord, "When I was still in my own country this is what I said would happen, and that is why I quickly ran away to Tarshish. I knew that you are a God who is kind and shows mercy. You don't become angry quickly, and you have great love. I knew you would choose not to cause harm. ³So now I ask you, Lord, please kill me. It is better for me to die than to live."

⁴Then the Lord said, "Do you think it is right for you to be angry?"

⁵Jonah went out and sat down east of the city. There he made a shelter for himself and sat in the shade, waiting to see what would happen to the city. ⁶The Lord made a plant grow quickly up over Jonah, which gave him shade and helped him to be more comfortable. Jonah was very pleased to have the plant. ⁷But the next day when the sun rose, God sent a worm to attack the plant so that it died.

⁸As the sun rose higher in the sky, God sent a very hot east wind to blow, and the sun became so hot on Jonah's head that he became very weak and wished he were dead. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

⁹But God said to Jonah, "Do you think it is right for you to be angry about the plant?"

Jonah answered, "It is right for me to be angry! I am so angry I could die!"

¹⁰And the Lord said, "You are so concerned for that plant

even though you did nothing to make it grow. It appeared one day, and the next day it died. ¹¹Then shouldn't I show concern for the great city Nineveh, which has more than one hundred twenty thousand people who do not know right from wrong, and many animals, too?"

[The Book of Micah](#)

Introduction

Sometime ago I did something I hadn't done in years. I listened to the airline attendant as she gave her warnings. I normally tune her out. I usually bury my nose in a book or magazine and ignore her cautions. But this time I didn't.

I didn't, because the day before a commercial plane had gone down. As I boarded the flight I realized that if this plane crashed I would not know what to do.

So I listened. As she held up a seat belt, I buckled mine. As she described the oxygen mask, I looked up to see where it was stored. When she pointed to the exit doors, I turned to find them. That's when I noticed what she notices on every flight. No one was listening!

No one was paying attention. I was shocked. I seriously considered standing up and getting everyone's attention and shouting, "You guys better listen up. One mishap and this plane becomes a flaming mausoleum. What this lady is telling you might save your life!"

I wondered what would happen if she used more drastic means. What if she took a gasoline drenched doll and set it on fire? What if the in-flight screen portrayed images of desperate people scrambling to deboard a blazing plane? What if she marched up and down the aisle yanking away the papers and snatching the magazines, demanding that the passengers listen if they wanted to survive this flying inferno?

She would lose her job. But she would be doing us a favor. Love cautions the loved.

The Book of Micah is a warning. God's prophet warns of the terrible judgment which awaits all who ignore God. "Be

prepared,” he pleads, and then explains how to prepare.

I wonder if he noticed what I noticed on the plane. Most people don’t listen to warnings. Let’s be the exception.

About This Book

Author:

Micah

Date Written:

750–650 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- God will punish those who oppress the poor.
- Micah claims Bethlehem to be the place of the Messiah’s birth.
- Religion should be practical and within the context of community and society.

Key Verse:

“The Lord has told you, human, what is good; he has told you what he wants from you: to do what is right to other people, love being kind to others, and live humbly, obeying your God” ([Micah 6:8](#)).

Contents:

1. Judgment Is Coming [1:1–3:12](#)
2. Restoration Is Coming [4:1–5:15](#)
3. Repent! [6:1–7:20](#)

Life Lessons

Micah 1:1–2:13

Situation

Micah, a prophet from Judah, prophesied to both Israel and Judah. The people told him to be quiet.

Observation

Micah's message to the sinful people was not well received because it pointed out the worthless idols that the people worshiped instead of the one true God.

Inspiration

The New Age is, in fact, another storm warning indicating man's search for "transcendence" without regard for righteousness. Whether it's Dianetics, est, Unity, Gaea, Transcendental Meditation, Taoism, ufology, crystalology, goddess worship, reincarnation, harmonics, numerology, astrology, holistic healing, positive thinking, or any of a hundred "consciousness raising" techniques of our day, the modern age is in search for some mystical "divine unity," a search which actually testifies to the failure of modern secular humanism to satisfy the spiritual hunger of the soul.

Humanity was designed for a relationship with God. As the body craves oxygen, so the spirit craves God. We all have a passionate desire to know God and to communicate with Him, but ever since Eden we have been guilty of sin, and nothing but repentance—by humbling ourselves before the cross of Christ—

will ever bring us back into fellowship with Him.

The real disaster of the cult of humanism and its New Age and other expressions is not just the foolishness of placing one's trust in such a frail, finite, and limited creature but that it separates man from the authentic source of power and meaning. David's lament in [Psalm 10](#) has never been truer than today: "The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts" ([Psalm 10:4](#), NKJV).

Many people have decided that there is no room for God in their lives, no need of Him. The God of Jacob is too confining. The problem, however, is that denying the existence of God cannot make Him go away any more than denying the existence of the Internal Revenue Service makes the tax man go away. Many people who have imagined a god of their own choosing will be horrified when they have to stand before the true God of heaven. For God is, and His is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. No pious idealism, no New Age fantasy, and no amount of denial can ever change that fact...

In this age of humanism, man wants to believe that he can become his own god. The remark attributed to Protagoras, that "man is the measure of all things," is the central tenet of human ideology. But it is the ultimate deception of Satan: to rob men of their relationship with the God of the universe through a lie as old as Eden, that "You will be like God" ([Genesis 3:5](#)).

Because it springs from false theology, and

especially because it is inspired by the deceiver himself, the New Age movement will not bow before God. Rather, it tries to manufacture its own infinitely forgiving and fallible god designed on the pantheistic concept of the oneness of man with the universe... . New Agers are terrified by their own mortality, and they want to believe that somehow the soul will survive. Of course it will but not as they imagine.

Someday the New Age gurus will die, even as we all must die, and their bodies will return to the earth from which God made it. Then what remains, their eternal spirits, will stand before the true and righteous and all-knowing God of creation and explain why they felt compelled to run so hard to escape the God who loved them and gave His Son as a sacrifice. They can explain why, instead, they publicized beliefs which are an abomination in the eyes of a jealous God, and they will hear His reply.

On that day, sincerity will mean nothing; hard work will mean nothing; good intentions will mean nothing. God judges every man, woman, and child by the standard of the only God-Man who ever lived, Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Innocent Lamb of God, pledged His innocence for us, to stand between our sin and the judgment of God the Father. (From *Storm Warning* by Billy Graham)

Application

Turn on the television or radio, pick up a magazine or a newspaper, and you will find teachers and gurus offering instant salvation and freedom. We are daily bombarded by false teachers and their teaching. In

such an environment, concentrated study of God's Word becomes crucial. An extensive and thorough knowledge of God's Word is our only means of defense. Begin a habit of studying God's Word diligently.

Exploration

False Teachers—[Deuteronomy 13:1–3](#); [Jeremiah 14:14](#); [Ezekiel 13:1ff](#); [Mark 13:22–23](#); [1 Timothy 1:3–4](#).

Samaria and Israel to Be Punished

During the time that Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah, the word of the Lord came to Micah, who was from Moresheth. He saw these visions about Samaria and Jerusalem.

²Hear this, all you nations;
listen, earth and all you who live on it.
The Lord God will be a witness against you,
the Lord from his Holy Temple.

³See, the Lord is coming out of his place;
he is coming down to walk on the tops of the
mountains.

⁴The mountains will melt under him,
and the valleys will crack open,
like wax near a fire,
like water running down a hillside.

⁵All this is because of Jacob's sin,
because of the sins of the nation of Israel.
What is the place of Jacob's sin?
Isn't it Samaria?
What is Judah's place of idol worship?
Isn't it Jerusalem?

The Lord Speaks

⁶“So I will make Samaria a pile of ruins in the open country,
a place for planting vineyards.
I will pour her stones down into the valley
and strip her down to her foundations.

⁷All her idols will be broken into pieces;
all the gifts to her idols will be burned with fire.
I will destroy all her idols,
and because Samaria earned her money by being
unfaithful to me,
this money will be carried off by others who are not
faithful to me.”

Micah's Great Sadness

⁸I will moan and cry because of this evil,
going around barefoot and naked.
I will cry loudly like the wild dogs
and make sad sounds like the owls do,

⁹because Samaria's wound cannot be healed.
It will spread to Judah;
it will reach the city gate of my people,
all the way to Jerusalem.

¹⁰Don't tell it in [Gath](#).

Don't cry in [Acco](#).
Roll in the dust
at [Beth Ophrah](#).

¹¹Pass on your way, naked and ashamed,
you who live in [Shaphir](#).
Those who live in [Zaanan](#)
won't come out.
The people in [Beth Ezel](#) will cry,
but they will not give you any support.

¹²Those who live in [Maroth](#)
will be anxious for good news to come,
because trouble will come from the Lord,
all the way to the gate of Jerusalem.

¹³You people living in [Lachish](#),
harness the fastest horse to the chariot.
Jerusalem's sins started in you;
yes, Israel's sins were found in you.

¹⁴So you must give farewell gifts
to [Moreseth](#) in Gath.
The houses in [Aczib](#) will be false help
to the kings of Israel.

¹⁵I will bring against you people who will take your
land,
you who live in [Mareshah](#).
The glory of Israel
will go in to Adullam.

¹⁶Cut off your hair to show you are sad
for the children you love.

Make yourself bald like the eagle,
because your children will be taken away to a foreign
land.

The Evil Plans of People

How terrible it will be for people who plan wickedness,
who lie on their beds and make evil plans.

When the morning light comes, they do what they
planned,
because they have the power to do so.

²They want fields, so they take them;
they want houses, so they take them away.
They cheat people to get their houses;
they rob them even of their property.

³That is why the Lord says:
“Look, I am planning trouble against such people,
and you won’t be able to save yourselves.
You will no longer walk proudly,
because it will be a terrible time.

⁴At that time people will make fun of you
and sing this sad song about you:
‘We are completely ruined;
the Lord has taken away my people’s land.
Yes, he has taken it away from me
and divided our fields among our enemies!’”

⁵So you will have no one from the Lord’s people
to throw lots to divide the land.

Micah Is Asked Not to Prophesy

⁶The prophets say, “Don’t prophesy to us!
Don’t prophesy about these things!
Nothing to make us feel bad will happen!”

⁷But I must say this, people of Jacob:
The Lord is becoming angry about what you have
done.

My words are welcome
to the person who does what is right.

⁸But you are fighting against my people like an enemy.
You take the coats from people who pass by;
you rob them of their safety;
you plan war.

⁹You’ve forced the women of my people
from their nice houses;
you’ve taken my glory
from their children forever.

¹⁰Get up and leave.
This is not your place of rest anymore.
You have made this place unclean,
and it is doomed to destruction.

¹¹But you people want a false prophet
who will tell you nothing but lies.
You want one who promises to prophesy good things
for you
if you give him wine and beer.

He's just the prophet for you.

The Lord Promises to Rescue His People

¹²“Yes, people of Jacob, I will bring all of you together;
I will bring together all those left alive in Israel.
I will put them together like sheep in a pen,
like a flock in its pasture;
the place will be filled with many people.

¹³Someone will open the way and lead the people out.
The people will break through the gate and leave the
city where they were held captive.
Their king will go out in front of them,
and the Lord will lead them.”

Life Lessons

Micah 3:1–5:15

Situation

Micah continued his prophecies to Judah and Jerusalem. He rebuked the present leaders but promised a perfect future leader, Christ.

Observation

God promises that one day all weapons of war will be done away with and God's people will live in total peace.

Inspiration

The Lord's promise that in "the last days" there will be peace symbolized by turning weapons into productive tools has been a hope of many Christians through the centuries including Toyohiko Kagawa, who was born in Japan in 1888.

At the age of fourteen, he enrolled in an English class taught by a Presbyterian missionary. Although he had been warned by relatives not to be influenced by Christianity, he could not resist. One year later he confessed his faith in Christ and was baptized. The real test of his faith came when Japan declared war on Russia. He was conscripted into the military along with other students, but his conscience would not permit him to train with a rifle. "All he could hear in his mind were the words of Jesus, 'Love your enemies,' and all he could see was Christ dying without resistance on the cross." His stand created an uproar. His instructor physically assaulted him,

and he was attacked by fellow students.

Following his college years, Kagawa took seminary training. But he soon left his studies in order to reach out with the gospel to the impoverished and destitute slums in the city of Kobe. He lived with the people in a tin hut with a dirt floor and bamboo walls, and quickly became known among the people as “the Christian.” But despite all his sacrifice, Kagawa realized that what the impoverished people in the inner-city needed most was not handouts but organizational strength. After studying for a time in America, he returned to Japan and organized labor unions and relief programs. Then, “in 1928 he initiated the ‘Kingdom of God Movement,’ a daring nationwide evangelistic campaign to win a million Japanese to Christ.”

Once again, however, Kagawa’s faith was tested by nationalism and militarism. When Japan attacked Manchuria in 1931, he made a public apology: “To my brethren in China, Forgive the sin of Japan. Though Japanese Christians have not the power to oppose military force, some of them regret the sin of Japan. I wish the day of reconciliation may soon come.” He was even more distressed by the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the U.S. retaliation—a retaliation that seemed incomprehensible to him because it was coming from a “Christian” nation.

Kagawa lived out his life seeking to beat swords into plowshares. He wanted to stop the senseless killing and to raise the standard of living of the poor. He seemed to meet with little success in light of the

military build-up in both the East and the West. At times he seemed to be one lone Christian against the rest of the world—a man whose motto was the hymn, “Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross.” (From *Stories of Faith* by Ruth A. Tucker)

Application

Christians should pray for peace and harmony in the world. Pick up today’s newspaper and pray for an area of the world where people are suffering from the horrible consequences of war. Pray that your fellow Christians there will stand strong in their difficult circumstances.

Exploration

Pursue Peace—[Psalm 34:14](#); [Matthew 5:9](#); [Mark 9:50](#); [Romans 12:18](#); [Colossians 3:15](#); [Hebrews 12:14](#).

The Leaders of Israel Are Guilty of Evil

Then I said,
“Listen, leaders of the people of Jacob;
listen, you rulers of the nation of Israel.
You should know how to decide cases fairly,

²but you hate good and love evil.
You skin my people alive
and tear the flesh off their bones.

³You eat my people’s flesh
and skin them and break their bones;
you chop them up like meat for the pot,
like meat in a cooking pan.

⁴They will cry to the Lord,
but he won’t answer them.
At that time he will hide his face from them,
because what they have done is evil.”

⁵The Lord says this about the prophets who teach his
people the wrong way of living:

“If these prophets are given food to eat,
they shout, ‘Peace!’
But if someone doesn’t give them what they ask for,
they call for a holy war against that person.

⁶So it will become like night for them, without visions.
It will become dark for them, without any way to tell
the future.

The sun is about to set for the prophets;
their day will become dark.

⁷The seers will be ashamed;
the people who see the future will be embarrassed.
Yes, all of them will cover their mouths,
because there will be no answer from God.”

Micah Is an Honest Prophet of God

⁸But I am filled with power,
with the Spirit of the Lord,
and with justice and strength,
to tell the people of Jacob how they have turned
against God,
and the people of Israel how they have sinned.

⁹Leaders of Jacob and rulers of Israel,
listen to me,
you who hate fairness and twist what is right.

¹⁰You build Jerusalem by murdering people;
you build it with evil.

¹¹Its judges take money to decide who wins in court.
Its priests only teach for pay,
and its prophets only look into the future when they

get paid.

But they lean on the Lord and say,
“The Lord is here with us,
so nothing bad will happen to us.”

¹²Because of you,
Jerusalem will be plowed like a field.
The city will become a pile of rocks,
and the hill on which the Temple stands will be
covered with bushes.

The Mountain of the Lord

In the last days
the mountain on which the Lord's Temple stands
will become the most important of all mountains.
It will be raised above the hills,
and people from other nations will come streaming to
it.

²Many nations will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the Temple of the God of Jacob,
so that he can teach us his ways,
and we can obey his teachings."
His teachings will go out from Jerusalem,
the word of the Lord from that city.

³The Lord will judge many nations;
he will make decisions about strong nations that are far
away.

They will hammer their swords into plow blades
and their spears into hooks for trimming trees.
Nations will no longer raise swords against other
nations;
they will not train for war anymore.

⁴Everyone will sit under his own vine and fig tree,
and no one will make them afraid,
because the Lord All-Powerful has said it.

⁵All other nations may follow their own gods,

but we will follow the Lord our God forever and ever.

⁶The Lord says, “At that time,

I will gather the crippled;
I will bring together those who were sent away,
those whom I caused to have trouble.

⁷I will keep alive those who were crippled,
and I will make a strong nation of those who were sent
away.

The Lord will be their king in Mount Zion from now on
and forever.

⁸And you, [watchtower of the flocks](#), hill of Jerusalem,
to you will come the kingdom as in the past.
Jerusalem, the right to rule will come again to you.”

Why the Israelites Must Go to Babylon

⁹Now, why do you cry so loudly?
Is your king gone?
Have you lost your helper,
so that you are in pain, like a woman trying to give
birth?

¹⁰People of Jerusalem, strain and be in pain.
Be like a woman trying to give birth,
because now you must leave the city
and live in the field.

You will go to Babylon,
but you will be saved from that place.
The Lord will go there
and buy you back from your enemies.

¹¹But now many nations
have come to fight against you,
saying, "Let's destroy Jerusalem.
We will look at her and be glad we have defeated her."

¹²But they don't know
what the Lord is thinking;
they don't understand his plan.
He has gathered them like bundles of grain to the
threshing floor.

¹³"Get up and beat them, people of Jerusalem.
I will make you strong as if you had horns of iron
and hoofs of bronze.
You will beat many nations into small pieces
and give their wealth to the Lord,
their treasure to the Lord of all the earth."

So, strong city, gather your soldiers together,
because we are surrounded and attacked.
They will hit the leader of Israel
in the face with a club.

The Ruler to Be Born in Bethlehem

²“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are too small to be among the army groups
from Judah,
from you will come one who will rule Israel for me.
He comes from very old times,
from days long ago.”

³The Lord will give up his people
until the one who is having a baby gives birth;
then the rest of his relatives will return
to the people of Israel.

⁴At that time the ruler of Israel will stand
and take care of his people
with the Lord’s strength
and with the power of the name of the Lord his God.
The Israelites will live in safety,
because his greatness will reach all over the earth.

⁵He will bring peace.

Rescue and Punishment

Assyria will surely come into our country

and walk over our large buildings.
We will set up seven shepherds,
eight leaders of the people.

⁶They will destroy the Assyrians with their swords;
they will conquer the land of Assyria with their swords
drawn.

They will rescue us from the Assyrians when they
come into our land,
when they walk over our borders.

⁷Then the people of Jacob who are left alive
will be to other people
like dew from the Lord
or rain on the grass—
it does not wait for human beings;
it does not pause for any person.

⁸Those of Jacob's people who are left alive
will be scattered among many nations and peoples.
They will be like a lion among the animals of the forest,
like a young lion in a flock of sheep:
As it goes, it jumps on them
and tears them to pieces,
and no one can save them.

⁹So you will raise your fist in victory over your
enemies,
and all your enemies will be destroyed.

¹⁰The Lord says, "At that time,
I will take your horses from you
and destroy your chariots.

¹¹I will destroy the cities in your country
and tear down all your defenses.

¹²I will take away the magic charms you use
so you will have no more fortune-tellers.

¹³I will destroy your statues of gods
and the stone pillars you worship
so that you will no longer worship
what your hands have made.

¹⁴I will tear down Asherah idols from you
and destroy your cities.

¹⁵In my anger and rage,
I will pay back the nations that have not listened.”

Life Lessons

Micah 6:1–7:20

Situation

These chapters include both an indictment of Israel for her sin and a promise of future blessing.

Observation

Micah knew that sacrifices were outward expressions of inner faith and trust. What God desired most of all was for Israel to relate to him in a heartfelt, personal way—not just in some superficial, ritualistic fashion.

Inspiration

In my closet is a varsity football jacket. I earned it by playing two years of high-school football. It, too, is a symbol. It's symbolic of sweat and work and long hours on the practice field. The jacket and a sore knee are reminders of something I could do twenty years ago. Do you think if I put the jacket on now I'd instantly be twenty pounds lighter and a whole lot faster? Do you think if I wore that jacket into the office of a coach he'd extend his hand and say, "We've been waiting for a player like you. Go out there and suit up!"?

Hogwash. That jacket is merely a memoir of something I once did. It says nothing about what I could do today. It alone doesn't transform me, empower me, or enable me.

Neither does your heritage, even if you're a descendant of John Wesley.

Neither does your communion service, even if you double up on the wafers.

Neither does your baptism, even if you got dunked in the Jordan River.

Please understand. Symbols are important. Some of them, like communion and baptism, illustrate the cross of Christ. They symbolize salvation, demonstrate salvation, even articulate salvation. But they do not impart salvation.

Putting your trust in a symbol is like claiming to be a sailor because you have a tattoo or claiming to be a good husband because you have a ring or claiming to be a football player because you have a letter jacket.

Do we honestly think God would save his children based upon a symbol?

What kind of God would look at a religious hypocrite and say, “You’ve never loved me, sought me or obeyed me, but because your name was on the roll of a church in the right denomination I will save you”?

On the other hand, what kind of God would look at the sincere seeker and say, “You dedicated your life to loving me and loving my children. You surrendered your heart and confessed your sins. I want to save you so badly. I’m so sorry, your church took communion one time a month too many. Because of a technicality, you are forever lost in hell”?

Hogwash. Our God is abundant in love and steadfast in mercy. He saves us, not because we trust in a symbol, but because we trust in a Savior. (From

In the Grip of Grace by Max Lucado)

Application

What are you trusting to save you from your sins? The blood of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice alone? Or are you adding to it some symbol, tradition, or religious practice? What God wants is a personal relationship, not an external connection only. Make sure you are connected to him by faith. If you are trusting in Christ alone for your salvation, then study the Scriptures to find a proper place for symbols, ceremonies, and observances.

Exploration

Faith Alone—[Acts 4:12](#); [Ephesians 2:8–9](#); [Colossians 2:8–23](#); [1 Timothy 2:5](#); [1 Peter 1:3–5](#).

The Lord's Case

Now hear what the Lord says:

“Get up; plead your case in front of the mountains;
let the hills hear your story.

²Mountains, listen to the Lord's legal case.
Foundations of the earth, listen.
The Lord has a legal case against his people,
and he will accuse Israel.”

³He says, “My people, what did I do to you?
How did I make you tired of me?
Tell me.

⁴I brought you from the land of Egypt
and freed you from slavery;
I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to you.

⁵My people, remember
the evil plans of Balak king of Moab
and what Balaam son of Beor told Balak.
Remember what happened from Acacia to Gilgal
so that you will know the Lord does what is right!”

⁶You say, “What can I bring with me
when I come before the Lord,
when I bow before God on high?

Should I come before him with burnt offerings,
with year-old calves?

⁷Will the Lord be pleased with a thousand male sheep?
Will he be pleased with ten thousand rivers of oil?
Should I give my first child for the evil I have done?
Should I give my very own child for my sin?"

⁸The Lord has told you, human, what is good;
he has told you what he wants from you:
to do what is right to other people,
love being kind to others,
and live humbly, obeying your God.

⁹The voice of the Lord calls to the city,
and the wise person honors him.
So pay attention to the rod of punishment;
pay attention to the One who threatens to punish.

¹⁰Are there still in the wicked house
wicked treasures
and the cursed false measure?

¹¹Can I forgive people who cheat others
with wrong weights and scales?

¹²The rich people of the city
do cruel things.
Its people tell lies;
they do not tell the truth.

¹³As for me, I will make you sick.
I will attack you, ruining you because of your sins.

¹⁴You will eat, but you won't become full;
you will still be hungry and empty.
You will store up, but save nothing,
and what you store up, the sword will destroy.

¹⁵You will plant,
but you won't harvest.
You will step on your olives,
but you won't get any oil from them.
You will crush the grapes,
but you will not drink the new wine.

¹⁶This is because you obey the laws of King Omri
and do all the things that Ahab's family does;
you follow their advice.
So I will let you be destroyed.
The people in your city will be laughed at,
and other nations will make fun of you.

The Evil That People Do

Poor me! I am like a hungry man,
and all the summer fruit has been picked—
there are no grapes left to eat,
none of the early figs I love.

²All of the faithful people are gone;
there is not one good person left in this country.
Everyone is waiting to kill someone;
everyone is trying to trap someone else.

³With both hands they are doing evil.
Rulers ask for money,
and judges' decisions are bought for a price.
Rich people tell what they want,
and they get it.

⁴Even the best of them is like a thornbush;
the most honest of them is worse than a prickly plant.
The day that your [watchmen](#) warned you about has
come.
Now they will be confused.

⁵Don't believe your neighbor
or trust a friend.
Don't say anything,
even to your wife.

⁶A son will not honor his father,
a daughter will turn against her mother,

and a daughter-in-law will be against her mother-in-law;
a person's enemies will be members of his own family.

The Lord's Kindness

⁷Israel says, "I will look to the Lord for help.
I will wait for God to save me;
my God will hear me.

⁸Enemy, don't laugh at me.
I have fallen, but I will get up again.
I sit in the shadow of trouble now,
but the Lord will be a light for me.

⁹I sinned against the Lord,
so he was angry with me,
but he will defend my case in court.
He will bring about what is right for me.
Then he will bring me out into the light,
and I will see him set things right.

¹⁰Then my enemies will see this,
and they will be ashamed,
those who said to me,
'Where is the Lord your God?'
I will look down on them.
They will get walked on, like mud in the street."

Israel Will Return

¹¹The time will come when your walls will be built again,
when your country will grow.

¹²At that time your people will come back to you
from Assyria and the cities of Egypt,
and from Egypt to the Euphrates River,
and from sea to sea and mountain to mountain.

¹³The earth will be ruined for the people who live in it
because of their deeds.

A Prayer to God

¹⁴So shepherd your people with your stick;
tend the flock of people who belong to you.
That flock now lives alone in the forest
in the middle of a garden land.
Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead
as in days long ago.

¹⁵“As in the days when I brought you out of Egypt,
I will show them miracles.”

¹⁶When the nations see those miracles,
they will no longer brag about their power.
They will put their hands over their mouths,
refusing to listen.

¹⁷They will crawl in the dust like a snake

They will crawl in the dust like a snake,
like insects crawling on the ground.
They will come trembling from their holes to the Lord
our God
and will turn in fear before you.

¹⁸There is no God like you.
You forgive those who are guilty of sin;
you don't look at the sins of your people
who are left alive.
You will not stay angry forever,
because you enjoy being kind.

¹⁹You will have mercy on us again;
you will conquer our sins.
You will throw away all our sins
into the deepest part of the sea.

²⁰You will be true to the people of Jacob,
and you will be kind to the people of Abraham
as you promised to our ancestors long ago.

Gath This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “tell.”

Acco This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “cry.”

Beth Ophrah This name means “house of dust.”

Shaphir This name means “beautiful.”

Zaanan This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “come out.”

Beth Ezel This name means “house by the side of another,” suggesting help or support.

Maroth This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “sad” or “miserable.”

Lachish This name sounds like the Hebrew word for “horses.”

Moresheth This may be a play on the word “engaged,” referring to a farewell gift to a bride.

Aczib This name means “lie” or “trick.”

Maresah This name sounds like the Hebrew word for a person who captures other cities and lands.

watchtower ... flocks This probably means a part of Jerusalem. The leaders would be like shepherds in a tower watching their sheep.

watchmen Another name for prophets. The prophets were like guards who stood on a city’s wall and watched for trouble coming from far away.

[The Book of Nahum](#)

Introduction

Remember the playground bully? He was big and tough and he enjoyed pushing kids around. Everyone was afraid of him (even some of the teachers, you thought)—he seemed invincible. But over the next few years, the other boys grew past him—bigger, stronger, faster. Then the bully didn't seem so tough or frightening as before.

Assyria was the bully of the Middle East, the conqueror of many nations including Israel. This nation's power, epitomized by Nineveh, the capital city, was awesome and overwhelming. Proud and defiant, Assyria plundered, oppressed, and slaughtered its victims.

Enter Nahum, the prophet.

Nahum pronounced God's judgment upon this prideful and wicked people, exclaiming that powerful Assyria would be utterly destroyed. His prediction was fulfilled within fifty years.

This book provides strong testimony to God's ultimate power and justice—he calls all people to live under his rule: nations, cities, parents, neighborhood bullies ... and you.

Perhaps you don't have to *remember* a bully. There may be one in your world today. Huge debt, ugly guilt. Bossy employer. If so, remember what Nahum announced thousands of years ago: Your father is bigger than any bully.

About This Book

Author:

Nahum

Date Written:

c. 650 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- God warned Nineveh through Jonah. His warnings are not to be ignored.
- God is more powerful than any nation or world power.
- Those who ignore God's warnings will suffer the consequences.

Key Verse:

“The Lord is good, giving protection in times of trouble. He knows who trusts in him” ([Nahum 1:7](#)).

Contents:

1. God's Mercy and Judgment [1:1–15](#)
2. Nineveh's Destruction [2:1–13](#)
3. The Cause and Inevitability of the Destruction [3:1–19](#)

Life Lessons

[Nahum 1:1–3:19](#)

Situation

The Assyrian Empire conquered Israel and harassed Judah. God offered to free Judah from Assyrian oppression by destroying Assyria's wicked capital, Nineveh.

Observation

God doesn't want people to fail; rather, he gives them opportunities to repent and enter Heaven. But if they persist in sin, they will be punished.

Inspiration

God has no needs. Human love, as Plato teaches us, is the child of Poverty—of want or lack; it is caused by a real or supposed good in its beloved which the lover needs and desires. But God's love, far from being caused by goodness in the object, causes all the goodness which the object has, loving it first into existence and then into real, though derivative, loveability. God is Goodness. He can give good, but cannot need or get it. In that sense all His love is, as it were, bottomlessly selfless by very definition; it has everything to give and nothing to receive. (From *The Problem of Pain* by C. S. Lewis as quoted in *The Quotable Lewis*)

Application

Do you feel empty? Overwhelmed? Do you wonder why you have to face difficult trials? Memorize [Nahum 1:7](#) and take confidence in God who

remains good.

Exploration

God's Judgment—[1 Chronicles 13:10–14](#); [Psalm 75:8](#); [Matthew 24:51](#); [Romans 2:5–11](#).

This is the message for the city of [Nineveh](#). This is the book of the vision of Nahum, who was from the town of Elkosh.

The Lord Is Angry with Nineveh

²The Lord is a jealous God who punishes;
the Lord punishes and is filled with anger.
The Lord punishes those who are against him,
and he stays angry with his enemies.

³The Lord does not become angry quickly,
and his power is great.
The Lord will not let the guilty go unpunished.
Where the Lord goes, there are whirlwinds and storms,
and the clouds are the dust beneath his feet.

⁴He speaks to the sea and makes it dry;
he dries up all the rivers.
The areas of Bashan and Carmel dry up,
and the flowers of Lebanon dry up.

⁵The mountains shake in front of him,
and the hills melt.
The earth trembles when he comes;
the world and all who live in it shake with fear.

⁶No one can stay alive when he is angry;
no one can survive his strong anger.

His anger is poured out like fire;
the rocks are smashed by him.

⁷The Lord is good,
giving protection in times of trouble.
He knows who trusts in him.

⁸But like a rushing flood,
he will completely destroy Nineveh;
he will chase his enemies until he kills them.

⁹The Lord will completely destroy
anyone making plans against him.
Trouble will not come a second time.

¹⁰Those people will be like tangled thorns
or like people drunk from their wine;
they will be burned up quickly like dry weeds.

¹¹Someone has come from Nineveh
who makes evil plans against the Lord
and gives wicked advice.

¹²This is what the Lord says:

“Although Assyria is strong and has many people,
it will be defeated and brought to an end.
Although I have made you suffer, Judah,
I will make you suffer no more.

¹³Now I will free you from their control
and tear away your chains.”

¹⁴The Lord has given you this command, Nineveh:
“You will not have descendants to carry on your name.

I will destroy the idols and metal images
that are in the temple of your gods.

I will make a grave for you,
because you are wicked.”

¹⁵Look, there on the hills,
someone is bringing good news!

He is announcing peace!

Celebrate your feasts, people of Judah,
and give your promised sacrifices to God.

The wicked will not come to attack you again;
they have been completely destroyed.

Nineveh Will Be Defeated

The [destroyer](#) is coming to attack you, Nineveh.
Guard the defenses.
Watch the road.
Get ready.
Gather all your strength!

²Destroyers have destroyed God's people
and ruined their vines,
but the Lord will bring back Jacob's greatness
like Israel's greatness.

³The shields of his soldiers are red;
the army is dressed in red.
The metal on the chariots flashes like fire
when they are ready to attack;
their horses are excited.

⁴The chariots race through the streets
and rush back and forth through the city squares.
They look like torches;
they run like lightning.

⁵[He](#) calls his officers,
but they stumble on the way.
They hurry to the city wall,
and the shield is put into place.

⁶The river gates are thrown open,
and the palace is destroyed.

⁷It has been announced that the people of Nineveh

will be captured and carried away.
The slave girls moan like doves
and beat their breasts, because they are sad.

⁸Nineveh is like a pool,
and now its water is draining away.
“Stop! Stop!” the people yell,
but no one turns back.

⁹Take the silver!
Take the gold!
There is no end to the treasure—
piles of wealth of every kind.

¹⁰Nineveh is robbed, ruined, and destroyed.
The people lose their courage, and their knees knock.
Stomachs ache, and everyone’s face grows pale.

¹¹Where is the [lions’](#) den
and the place where they feed their young?
Where did the lion, lioness, and cubs go
without being afraid?

¹²The lion killed enough for his cubs,
enough for his mate.
He filled his cave with the animals he caught;
he filled his den with meat he had killed.

¹³“I am against you, Nineveh,”
says the Lord All-Powerful.
“I will burn up your chariots in smoke,
and the sword will kill your young lions.
I will stop you from hunting down others on the earth,

and your messengers' voices
will no longer be heard.”

It Will Be Terrible for Nineveh

How terrible it will be for the city that has killed so many.

It is full of lies
and goods stolen from other countries.
It is always killing somebody.

²Hear the sound of whips
and the noise of the wheels.
Hear horses galloping
and chariots bouncing along!

³Horses are charging,
swords are shining,
spears are gleaming!
Many are dead;
their bodies are piled up—
too many to count.
People stumble over the dead bodies.

⁴The city was like a prostitute;
she was charming and a lover of magic.
She made nations slaves with her prostitution
and her witchcraft.

⁵“I am against you, Nineveh,” says the Lord All-Powerful.

“I will pull your dress up over your face
and show the nations your nakedness
and the kingdoms your shame.

⁶I will throw filthy garbage on you
and make a fool of you.
I will make people stare at you.

⁷Everyone who sees you will run away and say,
‘Nineveh is in ruins. Who will cry for her?’
Nineveh, where will I find anyone to comfort you?”

⁸You are no better than [Thebes](#),
who sits by the Nile River
with water all around her.
The river was her defense;
the waters were like a wall around her.

⁹Cush and Egypt gave her endless strength;
Put and Libya supported her.

¹⁰But Thebes was captured
and went into captivity.
Her small children were beaten to death
at every street corner.
Lots were thrown for her important men,
and all of her leaders were put in chains.

¹¹Nineveh, you will be drunk, too.
You will hide;
you will look for a place safe from the enemy.

¹²All your defenses are like fig trees with ripe fruit.
When the tree is shaken, the figs fall into the mouth of
the eater.

¹³Look at your soldiers.
They are all women!

The gates of your land
are wide open for your enemies;
fire has burned the bars of your gates.

¹⁴Get enough water before the long war begins.
Make your defenses strong!
Get mud,
mix clay,
make bricks!

¹⁵There the fire will burn you up.
The sword will kill you;
like grasshoppers eating crops, the battle will
completely destroy you.
Grow in number like hopping locusts;
grow in number like swarming locusts!

¹⁶Your traders are more than the stars in the sky,
but like locusts, they strip the land and then fly away.

¹⁷Your guards are like locusts.
Your officers are like swarms of locusts
that hang on the walls on a cold day.
When the sun comes up, they fly away,
and no one knows where they have gone.

¹⁸King of Assyria, your rulers are asleep;
your important men lie down to rest.
Your people have been scattered on the mountains,
and there is no one to bring them back.

¹⁹Nothing can heal your wound;

your injury will not heal.
Everyone who hears about you applauds,
because everyone has felt your endless cruelty.

Nineveh The capital city of the country of Assyria. Nahum uses Nineveh to stand for all of Assyria.

destroyer The Babylonians, the Scythians, and the Medes destroyed Nineveh.

He This probably means the king of Assyria.

lions' The symbol of Assyria was the lion.

Thebes A great city in Egypt.

The Book of Habakkuk

Introduction

Here's a challenge. Find one sincere seeker whom God ignored. Search the Bible for one honest person spurned by heaven. Go ahead. Flip the pages. Examine the Scriptures. Read the stories. Where in the Bible did God turn away the genuine heart? Where in history did God spurn the authentic soul?

Thomas came with doubts. Did Christ turn him away?

Moses had his reservations. Did God tell him to go home?

Job had his struggles. Did God avoid him?

Paul had his hard times. Did God abandon him?

And Habakkuk had his questions. Tough questions. Get-down-and-get-honest type of questions.

Lord, how long must I ask for help and you ignore me? (1:2).

How can you put up with those evil people? (1:13).

Did God tell him to talk to someone else?

No. God never turns away the sincere heart. Tough questions don't stump God. He invites our probing. And that is what Habakkuk did. He probed. As well as speaking for God, he spoke to God. He dared to ask his own troubling questions.

Were all his questions answered? I don't know. But I do know Habakkuk was satisfied. You might want to underline his declaration of devotion found in chapter three:

Fig trees may not grow figs, and there may be no grapes on the vines. There may be no olives growing and no food growing in the fields. There may be no sheep in the pens and no cattle in the barns. But I will still be glad in the Lord; I will rejoice in God my Savior (vv. 17–18).

Mark it down. God never turns away the honest seeker. Go

to God with your questions. You may not find all the answers, but in finding God, you know the One who does.

About This Book

Author:

Habakkuk

Date Written:

625–575 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- God will discipline even his most beloved when they live apart from him.
- Sometimes God uses the wicked to discipline the righteous.
- Even in the midst of the consequences of our sin, we can worship.

Key Verse:

“Those who are right with God will live by trusting in him” ([Habakkuk 2:4](#)).

Contents:

1. Habakkuk Questions God [1:1–2:20](#)
2. Habakkuk Praises God [3:1–19](#)

Life Lessons

Habakkuk 1:1–3:19

Situation

Judah was making alliances with other nations. God was bringing judgment on Judah through the Babylonians. Habakkuk prophesied at the same time as Jeremiah.

Observation

In the face of great trouble, Habakkuk brought his questions to God. After hearing God's answer, he responded with a prayer of faith ([3:2](#)). He asked God to do great miracles.

Inspiration

Have you ever seen someone unconscious? Such a person will usually have vital signs but is not aware of anything that is occurring. There is also a lack of any perception of reality.

There is a difference between revival and resuscitation. *Resuscitation* is used on a person who is dead and whom the doctors are trying to bring back to life. *Revival* is for a person who is alive but unconscious. Spiritually, we can be unconscious and completely out of touch with the Spirit of God. We may be unaware of the God who made us and what He wants to do in and through us.

When one comes to Christ in faith and is born again, he or she is brought back from the dead into life. But when revival occurs, a person who is already a Christian is brought back from the brink of apathy,

of taking God for granted, of ignoring God and trying to live under one's own power and strength. This can be deadly for others, because the Christian in need of revival is not producing any fruit for God.

We have not seen a revival in America since shortly after the turn of the twentieth century. But, as the hymn says, "Lord, send a revival and let it begin with me." If we are to see a revival in our nation, it must begin in the hearts of individual believers. What are you doing in your daily walk with God that will bring revival to your life? (From *Unto the Hills* by Billy Graham)

Application

What are three Situations that could depress you or make you anxious today? Give them to God in prayer. Ask God to help you trust him and give you the strength to do his will.

Exploration

Strength Through Prayer—[Matthew 21:21-22](#);
[James 1:5-6](#).

This is one piece of luggage God hates. He doesn't dislike arrogance. He doesn't disapprove of arrogance. He's not unfavorably disposed toward arrogance. God hates arrogance. —Max Lucado (*Traveling Light*)

This is the message Habakkuk the prophet received.

Habakkuk Complains

²Lord, how long must I ask for help
and you ignore me?
I cry out to you about violence,
but you do not save us!

³Why do you make me see wrong things
and make me look at trouble?
People are destroying things and hurting others in
front of me;
they are arguing and fighting.

⁴So the teachings are weak,
and justice never comes.
Evil people gain while good people lose;
the judges no longer make fair decisions.

The Lord Answers

^{5c}Look at the nations!

Watch them and be amazed and shocked.
I will do something in your lifetime
that you won't believe even when you are told about
it.

⁶I will use the Babylonians,
those cruel and wild people
who march across the earth
and take lands that don't belong to them.

⁷They scare and frighten people.
They do what they want to do
and are good only to themselves.

⁸Their horses are faster than leopards
and quicker than wolves at sunset.
Their horse soldiers attack quickly;
they come from places far away.
They attack quickly, like an eagle swooping down for
food.

⁹They all come to fight.
Nothing can stop them.
Their prisoners are as many as the grains of sand.

¹⁰They laugh at kings
and make fun of rulers.
They laugh at all the strong, walled cities
and build dirt piles to the top of the walls to capture
them.

¹¹Then they leave like the wind and move on.

They are guilty of worshiping their own strength.”

Habakkuk Complains Again

¹²Lord, you live forever,
my God, my holy God.
We will not die.

Lord, you have chosen the Babylonians to punish
people;
our Rock, you picked them to punish.

¹³Your eyes are too good to look at evil;
you cannot stand to see those who do wrong.
So how can you put up with those evil people?
How can you be quiet when the wicked swallow up
people who are better than they are?

¹⁴You treat people like fish in the sea,
like sea animals without a leader.

¹⁵The enemy brings them in with hooks.
He catches them in his net
and drags them in his fishnet.
So he rejoices and sings for joy.

¹⁶The enemy offers sacrifices to his net
and burns incense to worship it,
because it lets him live like the rich
and enjoy the best food.

¹⁷Will he keep on taking riches with his net?

Will he go on destroying people without showing mercy?

I will stand like a guard to watch
and place myself at the tower.
I will wait to see what he will say to me;
I will wait to learn how God will answer my complaint.

The Lord Answers

²The Lord answered me:

“Write down the vision;
write it clearly on clay tablets
so whoever reads it can run to tell others.

³It is not yet time for the message to come true,
but that time is coming soon;
the message will come true.
It may seem like a long time,
but be patient and wait for it,
because it will surely come;
it will not be delayed.

⁴The evil nation is very proud of itself;
it is not living as it should.
But those who are right with God will live by trusting
in him.

⁵“Just as wine can trick a person,
those who are too proud will not last,
because their desire is like a grave’s desire for death,
and like death they always want more.
They gather other nations for themselves

and collect for themselves all the countries.

⁶But all the nations the Babylonians have hurt will laugh at them.

They will make fun of the Babylonians
and say, 'How terrible it will be for the one that steals
many things.

How long will that nation get rich by forcing others to
pay them?'

⁷“One day the people from whom you have taken
money will turn against you.

They will realize what is happening and make you
shake with fear.

Then they will take everything you have.

⁸Because you have stolen from many nations,
those who are left will take much from you.

This is because you have killed many people,
destroying countries and cities and everyone in them.

⁹“How terrible it will be for the nation that becomes
rich by doing wrong,
thinking they will live in a safe place
and escape harm.

¹⁰Because you have made plans to destroy many
people,

you have made your own houses ashamed of you.
Because of it, you will lose your lives.

¹¹The stones of the walls will cry out against you,
and the boards that support the roof will agree that

you are wrong.

¹²“How terrible it will be for the nation that kills people
to build a city,
that wrongs others to start a town.

¹³The Lord All-Powerful will send fire
to destroy what those people have built;
all the nations’ work will be for nothing.

¹⁴Then, just as water covers the sea,
people everywhere will know the Lord’s glory.

¹⁵“How terrible for the nation that makes its neighbors
drink,
pouring from the jug of wine until they are drunk
so that it can look at their naked bodies.

¹⁶You Babylonians will be filled with disgrace, not
respect.

It’s your turn to drink and fall to the ground like a
drunk person.

The cup of anger from the Lord’s right hand is coming
around to you.

You will receive disgrace, not respect.

¹⁷You hurt many people in Lebanon,
but now you will be hurt.

You killed many animals there,
and now you must be afraid
because of what you did

to that land, those cities, and the people who lived in
them.

The Message About Idols

¹⁸“An idol does no good, because a human made it;
it is only a statue that teaches lies.

The one who made it expects his own work to help him,
but he makes idols that can't even speak!

¹⁹How terrible it will be for the one who says to a
wooden statue, ‘Come to life!’

How terrible it will be for the one who says to a silent
stone, ‘Get up!’

It cannot tell you what to do.

It is only a statue covered with gold and silver;
there is no life in it.

²⁰The Lord is in his Holy Temple;
all the earth should be silent in his presence.”

Habakkuk's Prayer

This is the prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on shigionoth.

²Lord, I have heard the news about you;
I am amazed at what you have done.
Lord, do great things once again in our time;
make those things happen again in our own days.
Even when you are angry,
remember to be kind.

³God is coming from [Teman](#);
[the Holy One comes from Mount Paran](#).

Selah

His glory covers the skies,
and his praise fills the earth.

⁴He is like a bright light.
Rays of light shine from his hand,
and there he hides his power.

⁵Sickness goes before him,
and disease follows behind him.

⁶He stands and shakes the earth.
He looks, and the nations shake with fear.
The mountains, which stood for ages, break into
pieces;
the old hills fall down.
God has always done this.

⁷I saw that the tents of Cushan were in trouble
and that the tents of Midian trembled.

⁸Lord, were you angry at the rivers,
or were you angry at the streams?
Were you angry with the [sea](#)
[when you rode your horses and chariots of victory?](#)

⁹You uncovered your bow
and commanded many arrows to be brought to you.

Selah

You split the earth with rivers.

¹⁰The mountains saw you and shook with fear.
The rushing water flowed.
The sea made a loud noise,
and its waves rose high.

¹¹The sun and moon stood still in the sky;
they stopped when they saw the flash of your flying
arrows
and the gleam of your shining spear.

¹²In anger you marched on the earth;
in anger you punished the nations.

¹³You came out to save your people,
to save your chosen one.
You crushed the leader of the wicked ones
and took everything he had, from head to toe.

Selah

¹⁴With the enemy's own spear you stabbed the leader of his army.

His soldiers rushed out like a storm to scatter us.

They were happy

as they were robbing the poor people in secret.

¹⁵But you marched through the sea with your horses, stirring the great waters.

¹⁶I hear these things, and my body trembles;

my lips tremble when I hear the sound.

My bones feel weak,

and my legs shake.

But I will wait patiently for the day of disaster that will come to the people who attack us.

¹⁷Fig trees may not grow figs,

and there may be no grapes on the vines.

There may be no olives growing

and no food growing in the fields.

There may be no sheep in the pens

and no cattle in the barns.

¹⁸But I will still be glad in the Lord;

I will rejoice in God my Savior.

¹⁹The Lord God is my strength.

He makes me like a deer that does not stumble

so I can walk on the steep mountains.

For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.

Teman ... Paran God is seen as again coming from the direction of Mount Sinai. He came from Sinai when he rescued his people from Egypt.

sea ... victory This is probably talking about the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.

The Book of Zephaniah

Introduction

Rain can be depressing—constant dripping, wet clothes, mud, gray skies, and distant thunder. After many days of rain, we listen intently for positive clues in weather reports and search the skies for a sunny break in the clouds. We look for signs of change.

God's spokesman, Zephaniah, had nothing but doom and gloom to tell the people of Judah. Most of his prophecies, and thus most of this book (two and one-half chapters to be exact), tell of God's terrible judgment upon the nations, including Judah herself. His words, like the steady pounding of rain, continued to beat the depressing truth that God was not happy with the way people had flaunted his laws and had worshiped idols and he would punish their sin, wiping out entire nations.

That constant negative, and truthful, message would be enough to depress even the most positive optimist.

Suddenly, a ray of hope broke through the clouds. Check out the last eleven verses of the book. God says: "*At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you back home. I will give you honor and praise from people everywhere when I make things go well again for you, as you will see with your own eyes*" ([3:20](#)).

Hear God's Word through his faithful prophet—surely he will judge sin. But there is hope, deliverance, and salvation for those who trust in him. The storm is over; take a walk in the sun!

About This Book

Author:

The prophet Zephaniah

Date Written:

650–600 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- God's judgment, a day of reckoning, is inevitable.
- It is never too late to seek God and turn to him.
- God will judge both those who claim to have faith and those who don't.

Key Verse:

"Come to the Lord, all you who are not proud, who obey his laws. Do what is right. Learn to be humble. Maybe you will escape on the day the Lord shows his anger" ([Zephaniah 2:3](#)).

Contents:

1. God's Judgment on Judah [1:1–18](#)
2. God's Judgment on the Other Nations [2:1–3:8](#)
3. The Day of the Lord [3:9–20](#)

Life Lessons

[Zephaniah 1:1–3:20](#)

Situation

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah and warned the Israelites that their sins would bring God's approaching judgment.

Observation

After prophecies involving judgment, Zephaniah spoke of future blessings.

Inspiration

To whom was he [God] speaking when he said, "I love you people with a love that will last forever" ([Jeremiah 31:3](#))? Was he playing games when he said, "Nothing ... will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ" ([Romans 8:39](#))? Buried in the seldom-quarried mines of the minor prophets is this jewel:

The Lord your God is with you; the mighty One will save you. He will rejoice over you. You will rest in his love; he will sing and be joyful about you. ([Zephaniah 3:17](#))

Don't move too quickly through that verse. Read it again and prepare yourself for a surprise.

The Lord your God is with you; the mighty One will save you. He will rejoice over you. You will rest in his love; he will sing and be joyful about you. ([Zephaniah 3:17](#))

Note who is active and who is passive. Who is singing, and who is resting? Who is rejoicing over his

loved one, and who is being rejoiced over?

We tend to think we are the singers and God is the “singer.” Most certainly that is often the case. But apparently there are times when God wishes we would just be still and (what a stunning thought!) let him sing over us.

I can see you squirming. You say you aren’t worthy of such affection? Neither was Judas, but Jesus washed his feet. Neither was Peter, but Jesus fixed him breakfast. Neither were the Emmaus-bound disciples, but Jesus took time to sit at their table.

Besides, who are we to determine if we are worthy? Our job is simply to be still long enough to let him have us and let him love us.

(From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you feel unworthy of God’s love? Allow yourself to bask in his love, his rest, and yes, even his song for you! Take time today to sit quietly before the Lord and ask him to show you how much he cares personally about you.

Exploration

God’s Love—[Psalm 36](#); [John 3:16](#); [Romans 5:8](#); [8:39](#); [Ephesians 1:4–5](#); [1 John 4:10–11](#).

This is the word of the Lord that came through Zephaniah while Josiah son of Amon was king of Judah. Zephaniah was the son of Cushi, who was the son of Gedaliah. Gedaliah was the son of Amariah, who was the son of Hezekiah.

The Lord's Judgment

²“I will sweep away everything from the earth,” says the Lord.

³“I will sweep away the people and animals;
I will destroy the birds in the air
and the fish of the sea.
I will ruin the evil people,
and I will remove human beings from the earth,” says the Lord.

The Future of Judah

⁴“I will punish Judah
and all the people living in Jerusalem.
I will remove from this place
all signs of Baal, the false priests, and the other priests.

⁵I will destroy those who worship
the stars from the [roofs](#),
and those who worship and make promises

by both the Lord and the god Molech,

⁶and those who turned away from the Lord,
and those who quit following the Lord and praying to
him for direction.

⁷Be silent before the Lord God,
because the Lord's day for judging people is coming
soon.

The Lord has prepared a sacrifice;
he has made holy his invited guests.

⁸On the day of the Lord's sacrifice,
I, the Lord, will punish the princes and the king's sons
and all those who wear foreign clothes.

⁹On that day I will punish those who worship Dagon,
those who hurt others and tell lies in the temples of
their gods.

¹⁰“On that day,” says the Lord,
“a cry will be heard at the Fish Gate.
A wail will come from the new area of the city,
and a loud crash will echo from the hills.

¹¹Cry, you people living in the market area,
because all the merchants will be dead;
all the silver traders will be gone.

¹²At that time I, the Lord, will search Jerusalem with
lamps.

I will punish those who are satisfied with themselves,
who think, ‘The Lord won’t help us or punish us.’

¹³Their wealth will be stolen
and their houses destroyed.
They may build houses,
but they will not live in them.
They may plant vineyards,
but they will not drink any wine from them.

The Lord's Day of Judging

¹⁴“The Lord's day of judging is coming soon;
it is near and coming fast.
The cry will be very sad on the day of the Lord;
even soldiers will cry.

¹⁵That day will be a day of anger,
a day of terror and trouble,
a day of destruction and ruin,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and blackness,

¹⁶a day of alarms and battle cries.
‘Attack the strong, walled cities!
Attack the corner towers!’

¹⁷I will make life hard on the people;
they will walk around like the blind,
because they have sinned against the Lord.
Their blood will be poured out like dust,
and their insides will be dumped like trash.

¹⁸On the day that God will show his anger,

neither their silver nor gold will save them.
The Lord's anger will be like a fire
that will burn up the whole world;
suddenly he will bring an end, yes, an end
to everyone on earth."

The Lord Asks People to Change

Gather together, gather,
you unwanted people.

²Do it before it's too late,
before you are blown away like chaff,
before the Lord's terrible anger reaches you,
before the day of the Lord's anger comes to you.

³Come to the Lord, all you who are not proud,
who obey his laws.
Do what is right. Learn to be humble.
Maybe you will escape
on the day the Lord shows his anger.

Philistia Will Be Punished

⁴No one will be left in the city of Gaza,
and the city of Ashkelon will be destroyed.
Ashdod will be empty by noon,
and the people of Ekron will be chased away.

⁵How terrible it will be for you who live by the
Mediterranean Sea,
you Philistines!
The word of the Lord is against you,
Canaan, land of the Philistines.
“I will destroy you

so that no one will be left.”

⁶The land by the Mediterranean Sea, in which you live, will become pastures, fields for shepherds, and pens for sheep.

⁷It will belong to the descendants of Judah who are left alive.

There they will let their sheep eat grass.

At night they will sleep
in the houses of Ashkelon.

The Lord their God will pay attention to them
and will make their life good again.

Moab and Ammon Will Be Punished

⁸“I have heard the insults of the country of Moab
and the threats of the people of Ammon.
They have insulted my people
and have taken their land.”

⁹So the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says,
“As surely as I live,
Moab will be destroyed like [Sodom](#),
and Ammon will be destroyed like [Gomorrah](#)—
a heap of weeds, a pit of salt,
and a ruin forever.

Those of my people who are left alive will take
whatever they want from them;
those who are left from my nation will take their land.”

¹⁰This is what Moab and Ammon get for being proud,
because they insulted and made fun of the people of
the Lord All-Powerful.

¹¹The Lord will frighten them,
because he will destroy all the gods of the earth.
Then everyone in faraway places
will worship him wherever they are.

Cush and Assyria Will Be Destroyed

¹²“You Cushites also
will be killed by my sword.”

¹³Then the Lord will turn against the north
and destroy Assyria.
He will make Nineveh
a ruin as dry as a desert.

¹⁴Flocks and herds will lie down there,
and all wild animals.
The owls and crows will sit
on the stone pillars.
The owl will hoot through the windows,
trash will be in the doorways,
and the wooden boards of the buildings will be gone.

¹⁵This is the happy and safe city
that thinks there is no one else as strong as it is.
But what a ruin it will be,
a place where wild animals live.

All those who pass by will make fun
and shake their fists.

Jerusalem Will Be Punished

How terrible for the wicked, stubborn city of Jerusalem,
which hurts its own people.

²It obeys no voice;
it can't be taught to do right.
It doesn't trust the Lord;
it doesn't worship its God.

³Its officers are like roaring lions.
Its rulers are like hungry wolves that attack in the
evening,
and in the morning nothing is left of those they
attacked.

⁴Its prophets are proud;
they are people who cannot be trusted.
Its priests don't respect holy things;
they break God's teachings.

⁵But the Lord is good, and he is there in that city.
He does no wrong.
Every morning he governs the people fairly;
every day he can be trusted.
But evil people are not ashamed of what they do.

⁶"I have destroyed nations;
their towers were ruined.
I made their streets empty
so no one goes there anymore.
Their cities are ruined;

no one lives there at all.

⁷I said, 'Surely now Jerusalem will respect me
and will accept my teaching.'

Then the place where they lived would not be
destroyed,

and I would not have to punish them.

But they were still eager
to do evil in everything they did.

⁸Just wait," says the Lord.

"Some day I will stand up as a witness.

I have decided that I will gather nations
and assemble kingdoms.

I will pour out my anger on them,
all my strong anger.

My anger will be like fire
that will burn up the whole world.

A New Day for God's People

⁹"Then I will give the people of all nations pure speech
so that all of them will speak the name of the Lord
and worship me together.

¹⁰People will come from where the Nile River begins;
my scattered people will come with gifts for me.

¹¹Then Jerusalem will not be ashamed
of the wrongs done against me,
because I will remove from this city

those who like to brag;
there will never be any more proud people
on my holy mountain in Jerusalem.

¹²But I will leave in the city
the humble and those who are not proud,
and they will trust in the Lord.

¹³Those who are left alive in Israel won't do wrong or
tell lies;
they won't trick people with their words.
They will eat and lie down
with no one to make them afraid."

A Happy Song

¹⁴Sing, Jerusalem.
Israel, shout for joy!
Jerusalem, be happy
and rejoice with all your heart.

¹⁵The Lord has stopped punishing you;
he has sent your enemies away.
The King of Israel, the Lord, is with you;
you will never again be afraid of being harmed.

¹⁶On that day Jerusalem will be told,
"Don't be afraid, city of Jerusalem.
Don't give up.

¹⁷The Lord your God is with you.

“The Lord your God is with you;
the mighty One will save you.
He will rejoice over you.
You will rest in his love;
he will sing and be joyful about you.”

¹⁸“I will take away the sadness planned for you,
which would have made you very ashamed.

¹⁹At that time I will punish
all those who harmed you.
I will save my people who cannot walk
and gather my people who have been thrown out.
I will give them praise and honor
in every place where they were shamed.

²⁰At that time I will gather you;
at that time I will bring you back home.
I will give you honor and praise
from people everywhere
when I make things go well again for you,
as you will see with your own eyes,” says the Lord.

roofs In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

Sodom ... Gomorrah Two cities God destroyed because the people were so evil.

The Book of Haggai

Introduction

C.S. Lewis wrote, “You can’t get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first” (*God in the Dock*). Wise advice about setting priorities. Unfortunately, it’s easy to focus on second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth “things” instead.

What should be first? A person’s relationship with God.

God’s message through the prophet Haggai hit the Jews where it hurt—right in their priorities. They had returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon with the challenge of rebuilding the Temple. They had begun the work but somewhere along the line had left the task.

The Temple was not just another building or church edifice; it was the holy place where sacrifices were made and people met with God. And it symbolized the nation’s close relationship with the Almighty.

A shabby Temple indicated a break in that relationship. And that’s exactly what had happened—the people had built fine homes for themselves while leaving God’s house in ruins.

Priorities. Values. God’s people had it wrong.

Have you made a value check lately? Discover what God told the Jerusalem Jews through Haggai, and make sure you are putting first things first.

About This Book

Author:

Haggai

Date Written:

c. 520 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- The people needed to complete the Temple in order to show their priority on worship.
- God will judge evil, both in his own people and in those who reject him.
- God has blessings in store for those who believe in him.

Key Verse:

“This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: ‘Think about what you have done’” ([Haggai 1:7](#)).

Contents:

1. Completing the Temple [1:1–15](#)
2. God’s Blessing and the Temple [2:1–19](#)
3. The Lord’s Promise to Zerubbabel [2:20–23](#)

Life Lessons

Haggai 1:1–2:23

Situation

Twenty years passed since Israel's return from Babylon. But the people quickly forgot the lessons exile had taught them. They worked hard, but their crops failed. They earned money, but it was never enough.

Observation

If God gives you a task, follow it through. Don't make excuses or settle for halfhearted work.

Inspiration

In deciding my life's priorities, I should keep three things in mind—my relationship to God, my relationship to other people, and my relationship to myself.

Priority 1: Glorifying God. ... [Our] chief purpose is to know God and to glorify him forever. The first commandment says, "You shall have no other gods before me" ([Exodus 20:3](#)). God should come first in everything. This does not mean our faith should be fanatical pursuit of heaven to the detriment of everything else in the world. But the first question we should always ask is, Does this glorify God? If it doesn't glorify God, don't do it.

Priority 2: Loving others. God cares for the world so much that he gave his only Son to save it ([John 3:16](#)). Because of this, we can serve him by caring for the people around us. This means living the life of

Christ. How do we do that? By being gentle, humble, kind, and forgiving ([Colossians 3:12–17](#)).

Priority 3: Living in the light. Paul said, “Let the peace of Christ rule your hearts, ... [and] let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” ([Colossians 3:15, 16](#)). We should choose activities that enable us to be conscious of God all the time. We don’t have to walk around with our hands folded. But we should worship God on Sunday and carry the experience with us into Monday.

In deciding what to do ... these three priorities should guide us. But we have to use our judgment, which we can do through education, practice, and experience. Then, like Jesus, we will grow in wisdom and stature ([Luke 2:52](#)).

(From “Deciding Life’s Priorities” by Oswald Hoffman in *Practical Christianity*)

Application

List your top ten priorities for today. Where does Bible reading and prayer fall on the list? Did you plan time just to enjoy the world around you (the world God gave you)? Shift and sort your priorities until your schedule reflects his desires.

Exploration

Priorities—[2 Chronicles 1:11–12](#); [Malachi 2:1–2](#); [Matthew 6:33](#); [8:21–22](#); [Revelation 3:17](#).

It Is Time to Build the Temple

The prophet Haggai spoke the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, the governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. This message came in the second year that Darius was king, on the first day of the sixth month:

²“This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: ‘The people say the right time has not come to rebuild the Temple of the Lord.’”

³Then Haggai the prophet spoke the word of the Lord: ⁴“Is it right for you to be living in fancy houses while the Temple is still in ruins?”

⁵This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: “Think about what you have done. ⁶You have planted much, but you harvest little. You eat, but you do not become full. You drink, but you are still thirsty. You put on clothes, but you are not warm enough. You earn money, but then you lose it all as if you had put it into a purse full of holes.”

⁷This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: “Think about what you have done. ⁸Go up to the mountains, bring back wood, and build the Temple. Then I will be pleased with it and be honored,” says the Lord. ⁹“You look for much, but you find little. When you bring it home, I destroy it. Why?” asks the Lord All-Powerful. “Because you all work hard for your own houses while my house is still in ruins! ¹⁰Because of what you have done, the sky holds back its rain and the ground holds back its crops. ¹¹I have called for a time without rain on the

land, and on the mountains, and on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil, the plants which the earth produces, the people, the farm animals, and all the work of your hands.”

¹²Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the rest of the people who were left alive obeyed the Lord their God and the message from Haggai the prophet, because the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord.

¹³Haggai, the Lord’s messenger, gave the Lord’s message to the people, saying, “The Lord says, ‘I am with you.’” ¹⁴The Lord stirred up Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, the governor of Judah, and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the rest of the people who were left alive. So they came and worked on the Temple of their God, the Lord All-Powerful.

¹⁵They began on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year Darius was king.

The Beauty of the Temple

On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the Lord spoke his word through Haggai the prophet, saying, ²“Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the rest of the people who are left alive. Say, ³‘Do any of you remember how great the Temple was before it was destroyed? What does it look like now? Doesn’t it seem like nothing to you?’ ⁴But the Lord says, ‘Zerubbabel, be brave. Also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, be brave. And all you people who live in the land, be brave,’ says the Lord. ‘Work, because I am with you,’ says the Lord All-Powerful. ⁵‘I made a promise to you when you came out of Egypt, and my Spirit is still with you. So don’t be afraid.’

⁶“This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: ‘In a short time I will once again shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. ⁷I will shake all the nations, and they will bring their wealth. Then I will fill this Temple with glory,’ says the Lord All-Powerful. ⁸‘The silver is mine, and the gold is mine,’ says the Lord All-Powerful. ⁹‘The new Temple will be greater than the one before,’ says the Lord All-Powerful. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the Lord All-Powerful.”

¹⁰On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month in the second year Darius was king, the Lord spoke his word to Haggai the prophet, saying, ¹¹“This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: ‘Ask the priests for a teaching. ¹²Suppose a person carries in the fold of his clothes some meat made holy

for the Lord. If that fold touches bread, cooked food, wine, olive oil, or some other food, will that be made holy?"

The priests answered, "No."

¹³Then Haggai said, "A person who touches a dead body will become unclean. If he touches any of these foods, will it become unclean, too?"

The priests answered, "Yes, it would become unclean."

¹⁴Then Haggai answered, "The Lord says, 'This is also true for the people of this nation. They are unclean, and everything they do with their hands is unclean to me. Whatever they offer at the altar is also unclean.

¹⁵"Think about this from now on! Think about how it was before you started laying stones on top of stones to build the Temple of the Lord. ¹⁶A person used to come to a pile of grain expecting to find twenty basketfuls, but there were only ten. And a person used to come to the wine vat to take out fifty jarfuls, but only twenty were there. ¹⁷I destroyed your work with diseases, mildew, and hail, but you still did not come back to me,' says the Lord. ¹⁸'It is the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, the day in which the people finished working on the foundation of the Temple of the Lord. From now on, think about these things: ¹⁹Do you have seeds for crops still in the barn? Your vines, fig trees, pomegranates, and olive trees have not given fruit yet. But from now on I will bless you!"

The Lord Makes a Promise to Zerubbabel

²⁰Then the Lord spoke his word a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month. He said, ²¹"Tell Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, 'I am going to shake the heavens and

the earth.²² I will destroy the foreign kingdoms and take away the power of the kingdoms of the nations. I will destroy the chariots and their riders. The horses will fall with their riders, as people kill each other with swords.’²³ The Lord All-Powerful says, ‘On that day I will take you, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, my servant,’ says the Lord, ‘and I will make you important like my signet ring, because I have chosen you!’ says the Lord All-Powerful.”

[The Book of Zechariah](#)

Introduction

You wake with a start, sweating profusely. You aren't sure what the dream was about, you just know it was bad. You remember trying to run in the dream, but not being able to move your legs. It was pure fantasy, but it felt real and it was enough to wake you up.

Dreams can be caused by indigestion, anxiety, desires, concerns, and other mental and emotional conditions. Dreams can be fun, entertaining, and even enlightening. But they can also invoke fear, stress, and outright terror.

Zechariah, God's prophet in Jerusalem more than five hundred years before Christ, had a series of nighttime experiences that kept him awake for a week. More than mere dreams, these were visions of God's future plans for his people, including a description of the Messiah. Through these visions God gave his message to Zechariah, who then faithfully relayed them to his family, friends, neighbors, countrymen ... and us.

As you read Zechariah, take hope in knowing that God controls the future, *your* future, and that the King is coming. Then get a good night's sleep.

About This Book

Author:

Zechariah

Date Written:

520–480 B.C.

Key Themes:

-
- The Jews who had reinhabited Jerusalem still needed to complete the Temple, putting worship in the proper perspective.
- The Messiah is coming, but he will not be accepted by all of his people.

Key Verse:

“Your king is coming to you. He does what is right, and he saves. He is gentle and riding on a donkey, on the colt of a donkey” ([Zechariah 9:9](#)).

Contents:

1. Zechariah's Eight Visions [1:1–6:15](#)
2. Four Sermons [7:1–8:23](#)
3. Two Burdens Regarding the Messiah [9:1–14:21](#)

Life Lessons

Zechariah 1:1–6:8

Situation

The exiles returned from Babylon to rebuild the Temple. Enemies, however, thwarted and stalled the project. Zechariah motivated the people and encouraged them to resume their work.

Observation

God provides the strength we need to accomplish great deeds for him.

Inspiration

There is great power in dreaming big. Such vision implies a long-term approach to ministry. Many leaders suffer from having to constantly rethink their vision because it was so small they accomplished it quickly, or so insignificant it barely seemed worth the effort. God's vision for your life, though, is grand. His vision is not one you are likely to accomplish in a year or two. A few Christian visionaries have learned that once you catch His vision, it will outlive you. Your role is to grasp it, articulate it, and see that it gets acted upon. Your responsibility is not to see it come to a conclusion. Work toward that end, but do not feel incomplete if it is not fully accomplished in your lifetime. Along the way, simply being part of making that vision become reality will seem like sufficient reward.

Dreaming big, through God's enablement, is also one means of allowing the Church to see and to flaunt

God's power and majesty. His desires are so much better and more meaningful than our own that when we envision them and fully support them, the spiritual and emotional empowerment is incredible. People become genuinely excited over the grand possibilities. The magnitude of the task is dwarfed by the realization that He wants to do it, and He intends to make it happen through you.

(From *The Power of Vision* by George Barna)

Application

Do you have a friend who works hard in service to the church? Send that person an unexpected note of encouragement. Cheer your friend on in his or her work. Add that name to your prayer list.

Exploration

The Need for Vision—[Proverbs 29:18](#).
Faithfulness—[2 Timothy 1:3–7](#).

The Lord Calls His People Back

In the eighth month of the second year Darius was king, the Lord spoke his word to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, who was the son of Iddo. The Lord said, ²“The Lord was very angry with your ancestors. ³So tell the people: This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: ‘Return to me, and I will return to you,’ says the Lord All-Powerful. ⁴Don’t be like your ancestors. In the past the prophets said to them: This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: ‘Stop your evil ways and evil actions.’ But they wouldn’t listen or pay attention to me, says the Lord. ⁵Your ancestors are dead, and those prophets didn’t live forever. ⁶I commanded my words and laws to my servants the prophets, and they preached to your ancestors, who returned to me. They said, ‘The Lord All-Powerful did as he said he would. He punished us for the way we lived and for what we did.’”

The Vision of the Horses

⁷It was on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month of Shebat, in Darius’s second year as king. The Lord spoke his word to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, who was the son of Iddo.

⁸During the night I had a vision. I saw a man riding a red horse. He was standing among some myrtle trees in a ravine,

with red, brown, and white horses behind him.

⁹I asked, “What are these, sir?”

The angel who was talking with me answered, “I’ll show you what they are.”

¹⁰Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, “They are the ones the Lord sent through all the earth.”

¹¹Then they spoke to the Lord’s angel, who was standing among the myrtle trees. They said, “We have gone through all the earth, and everything is calm and quiet.”

¹²Then the Lord’s angel asked, “Lord All-Powerful, how long will it be before you show mercy to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah? You have been angry with them for seventy years now.” ¹³So the Lord answered the angel who was talking with me, and his words were comforting and good.

¹⁴Then the angel who was talking to me said to me, “Announce this: This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: ‘I have a strong love for Jerusalem. ¹⁵And I am very angry with the nations that feel so safe. I was only a little angry at them, but they made things worse.’

¹⁶“So this is what the Lord says: ‘I will return to Jerusalem with mercy. My Temple will be rebuilt,’ says the Lord All-Powerful, ‘and the measuring line will be used to rebuild Jerusalem.’

¹⁷“Also announce: This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: ‘My towns will be rich again. The Lord will comfort Jerusalem again, and I will again choose Jerusalem.’”

The Vision of the Horns

¹⁸Then I looked up and saw four animal horns. ¹⁹I asked the

angel who was talking with me, “What are these?”

He said, “These are the horns that scattered the people of Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.”

²⁰Then the Lord showed me four craftsmen. ²¹I asked, “What are they coming to do?”

He answered, “They have come to scare and throw down the horns. These horns scattered the people of Judah so that no one could even lift up his head. These horns stand for the nations that attacked the people of Judah and scattered them.”

The Vision of the Measuring Line

Then I looked up and saw a man holding a line for measuring things. ²I asked him, “Where are you going?”

He said to me, “I am going to measure Jerusalem, to see how wide and how long it is.”

³Then the angel who was talking with me left, and another angel came out to meet him. ⁴The second angel said to him, “Run and tell that young man, ‘Jerusalem will become a city without walls, because there will be so many people and cattle in it. ⁵I will be a wall of fire around it,’ says the Lord. ‘And I will be the glory within it.’”

⁶“Oh no! Oh no! Run away from Babylon, because I have scattered you like the four winds of heaven,” says the Lord.

⁷“Oh no, Jerusalem! Escape, you who live right in Babylon.” ⁸This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: “After he has honored me and sent me against the nations who took your possessions—because whoever touches you hurts what is precious to me—⁹I will shake my hand against them so that their slaves will rob them.”

Then you will know that the Lord All-Powerful sent me.

¹⁰“Shout and be glad, Jerusalem. I am coming, and I will live among you,” says the Lord. ¹¹“At that time people from many nations will join with the Lord and will become my people. Then I will live among you, and you will know that the Lord All-Powerful has sent me to you. ¹²The Lord will take Judah as his own part of the holy land, and Jerusalem will be his chosen city again. ¹³Be silent, everyone, in the presence of the Lord.

He is coming out of the holy place where he lives.”

The Vision of the High Priest

Then he showed me Joshua, the high priest, standing in front of the Lord's angel. And Satan was standing by Joshua's right side to accuse him. ²The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord says no to you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem says no to you! This man was like a burning stick pulled from the fire."

³Joshua was wearing dirty clothes and was standing in front of the angel. ⁴The angel said to those standing in front of him, "Take off those dirty clothes."

Then the angel said to Joshua, "Look, I have taken away your sin from you, and I am giving you beautiful, fine clothes."

⁵Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and dressed him while the Lord's angel stood there.

⁶Then the Lord's angel said to Joshua, ⁷"This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: 'If you do as I tell you and serve me, you will be in charge of my Temple and my courtyards. And I will let you be with these angels who are standing here.

⁸"Listen, Joshua, the high priest, and your friends who are sitting in front of you. They are symbols of what will happen. I am going to bring my servant called the Branch. ⁹Look, I put this stone in front of Joshua, a stone with seven sides. I will carve a message on it,' says the Lord All-Powerful. 'And in one day I will take away the sin of this land.'

¹⁰"The Lord All-Powerful says, 'In that day, each of you will invite your neighbor to sit under your own grapevine and under your own fig tree.'"

The Vision of the Lampstand

Then the angel who was talking with me returned and woke me up as if I had been asleep. ²He asked me, “What do you see?”

I said, “I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top. And there are seven lamps and also seven places for wicks. ³There are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on the left.”

⁴I asked the angel who talked with me, “Sir, what are these?”

⁵The angel said, “Don’t you know what they are?”

“No, sir,” I said.

⁶Then he told me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘You will not succeed by your own strength or power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord All-Powerful.

⁷“Who are you, big mountain? In front of Zerubbabel you will become flat land, and he will bring out the topmost stone, shouting, ‘It’s beautiful! It’s beautiful!’”

⁸Then the Lord spoke his word to me again, saying, ⁹“Zerubbabel has laid the foundation of this Temple, and he will complete it. Then you will know that the Lord All-Powerful has sent me to you.

¹⁰“The people should not think that small beginnings are unimportant. They will be happy when they see Zerubbabel with tools, building the Temple.

“(These are the seven eyes of the Lord, which look back and forth across the earth.)”

¹¹Then I asked the angel, “What are the two olive trees on

the right and left of the lampstand?”

¹²I also asked him, “What are the two olive branches beside the two gold pipes, from which the olive oil flows to the lamps?”

¹³He answered, “Don’t you know what they are?”

“No, sir,” I said.

¹⁴So he said, “They are symbols of the two who have been appointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.”

The Vision of the Flying Scroll

I looked up again and saw a flying scroll.

²The angel asked me, “What do you see?”

I answered, “I see a flying scroll, thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide.”

³And he said to me, “This is the curse that will go all over the land. One side says every thief will be taken away. The other side says everyone who makes false promises will be taken away. ⁴The Lord All-Powerful says, ‘I will send it to the houses of thieves and to those who use my name to make false promises. The scroll will stay in that person’s house and destroy it with its wood and stones.’”

The Vision of the Woman

⁵Then the angel who was talking with me came forward and said to me, “Look up and see what is going out.”

⁶“What is it?” I asked.

He answered, “It is a measuring basket going out.” He also said, “It is a symbol of the people’s sins in all the land.”

⁷Then the lid made of lead was raised, and there was a woman sitting inside the basket. ⁸The angel said, “The woman stands for wickedness.” Then he pushed her back into the basket and put the lid back down.

⁹Then I looked up and saw two women going out with the wind in their wings. Their wings were like those of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and the sky.

¹⁰I asked the angel who was talking with me, “Where are they taking the basket?”

¹¹“They are going to Babylonia to build a temple for it,” he answered. “When the temple is ready, they will set the basket there in its place.”

The Vision of the Four Chariots

I looked up again and saw four chariots going out between two mountains, mountains of bronze.²Red horses pulled the first chariot. Black horses pulled the second chariot.³White horses pulled the third chariot, and strong, spotted horses pulled the fourth chariot.⁴I asked the angel who was talking with me, “What are these, sir?”

⁵He said, “These are the four spirits of heaven. They have just come from the presence of the Lord of the whole world.⁶The chariot pulled by the black horses will go to the land of the north. The white horses will go to the land of the west, and the spotted horses will go to the land of the south.”

⁷When the powerful horses went out, they were eager to go through all the earth. So he said, “Go through all the earth,” and they did.

⁸Then he called to me, “Look, the horses that went north have caused my spirit to rest in the land of the north.”

Life Lessons

[Zechariah 6:9–8:23](#)

Situation

God wanted his people to enjoy life. He gave many encouraging promises that would allow Israel to rejoice because of God’s love for them.

Observation

Religious ceremonies, while sacred and orderly, are meant to make us rejoice in God.

Inspiration

Worship is a function of the spiritual health of a congregation. A church may have a beautiful choir singing uplifting songs with theologically correct words, a tremendous organ, and a beautiful sanctuary. But if the people's hearts are far from God and there is no foundation of prayer, worship does not take place. It is an empty experience. A healthy spiritual life results from a church's individual and corporate prayer life, the presenting of the gospel in both word and action, the presence of community and theological soundness.

Our experience of God in worship depends on our commitment and attitude toward God. Developing an attitude of worship is not a matter of aesthetics or strategy, but an awareness of the presence of God's Spirit. A service that fosters this attitude includes no parts simply as aesthetic decoration. Every part helps concentrate people's attention on their union with Christ. In fact, the beauty of a service often has little to do with how conducive it is to worship. In many simple forms of worship, aesthetic elements are missing, but worship takes place because God is pleased to be there.

Our personal receptivity also affects our worship experience. We can go into a service one morning and get nothing out of it, not because the service is mediocre but because we are not open to receiving God's Spirit. If we are not ready to listen and worship, it doesn't matter how wonderful the service is.

Our individual backgrounds also influence our

experience. We can get tired of one style of worship. If I were shut up in a room and listened to nothing but the nine Beethoven symphonies for three years, I would become utterly immune to them. People who attended unstructured church services as children may go to a liturgical service and discover a tremendous freedom in that style of worship. Other people who have been hardened by a liturgical pattern will come alive in a free-style Situation....

We need to find the style of worship that scratches where we itch, and we should not be afraid of changing worship styles if we find ourselves in a rut. The psalmist said, “Sing to the Lord a new song” ([Psalm 149:1](#)). God is a fountain of endless novelty. He is a source of constant freshness, like a symphony that uses the same themes but constantly unfolds new meanings, new ways of combining things. (From “Developing an Attitude of Worship” by Richard Lovelace in *Practical Christianity*)

Application

What forms of worship do you enjoy most? Are there some forms that bore you? What can you contribute to worship? Let your heart be open to God’s direction.

Exploration

Worship—[Leviticus 7:38](#); [Numbers 29:1–2](#); [2 Kings 17:27–29](#); [Nehemiah 9:2–3](#); [Psalm 100:4](#); [Jeremiah 7:2–3](#); [John 4:23–24](#).

A Crown for Joshua

⁹The Lord spoke his word to me, saying, ¹⁰“Take silver and gold from Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, who were captives in Babylon. Go that same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah, who came from Babylon. ¹¹Make the silver and gold into a crown, and put it on the head of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. ¹²Tell him this is what the Lord All-Powerful says: ‘A man whose name is the Branch will branch out from where he is, and he will build the Temple of the Lord. ¹³[One man](#) will build the Temple of the Lord, and the [other](#) will receive honor. One man will sit on his throne and rule, and the other will be a priest on his throne. And these two men will work together in peace.’ ¹⁴The crown will be kept in the Temple of the Lord to remind Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Josiah son of Zephaniah. ¹⁵People living far away will come and build the Temple of the Lord. Then you will know the Lord All-Powerful has sent me to you. This will happen if you completely obey the Lord your God.”

The People Should Show Mercy

In the fourth year Darius was king, on the fourth day of the ninth month, which is called Kislev, the Lord spoke his word to Zechariah.²The city of Bethel sent Sharezer, Regem-Melech, and their men to ask the Lord a question.³They went to the prophets and priests who were at the Temple of the Lord All-Powerful. The men said, “For years in the fifth month of each year we have shown our sadness and gone without food. Should we continue to do this?”

⁴The Lord All-Powerful spoke his word to me, saying, ⁵“Tell the priests and the people in the land: ‘For seventy years you went without food and cried in the fifth and seventh months, but that was not really for me.⁶ And when you ate and drank, it was really for yourselves.⁷ The Lord used the earlier prophets to say the same thing, when Jerusalem and the surrounding towns were at peace and wealthy, and people lived in the southern area and the western hills.’”

⁸And the Lord spoke his word to Zechariah again, saying, ⁹“This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: ‘Do what is right and true. Be kind and merciful to each other.¹⁰ Don’t hurt widows and orphans, foreigners or the poor; don’t even think of doing evil to somebody else.’

¹¹“But they refused to pay attention; they were stubborn and did not want to listen anymore.¹²They made their hearts as hard as rock and would not listen to the teachings of the Lord All-Powerful. And they would not hear the words he sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord All-Powerful

became very angry.

¹³“When I called to them, they would not listen. So when they called to me, I would not listen,” says the Lord All-Powerful. ¹⁴“I scattered them like a hurricane to other countries they did not know. This good land was left so ruined behind them that no one could live there. They had made the desired land a ruin.””

The Lord Will Bless Jerusalem

The Lord All-Powerful spoke his word, saying, ²This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: “I have a very strong love for Jerusalem. My strong love for her is like a fire burning in me.”

³This is what the Lord says: “I will return to Jerusalem and live in it. Then it will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord All-Powerful will be called the Holy Mountain.”

⁴This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: “Old men and old women will again sit along Jerusalem’s streets, each carrying a cane because of age. ⁵And the streets will be filled with boys and girls playing.”

⁶This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: “Those who are left alive then may think it is too difficult to happen, but it is not too difficult for me,” says the Lord All-Powerful. ⁷This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: “I will save my people from countries in the east and west. ⁸I will bring them back, and they will live in Jerusalem. They will be my people, and I will be their good and loyal God.”

⁹This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: “Work hard, you who are hearing these words today. The prophets spoke these words when the foundation was laid for the house of the Lord All-Powerful, for the building of the Temple. ¹⁰Before that time there was no money to hire people or animals. People could not safely come and go because of the enemies; I had turned everyone against his neighbor. ¹¹But I will not do to these people who are left what I did in the past,” says the Lord All-

Powerful.

¹²“They will plant their seeds in peace, their grapevines will have fruit, the ground will give good crops, and the sky will send rain. I will give all this to the people who are left alive.

¹³Judah and Israel, your names have been used as curses in other nations. But I will save you, and you will become a blessing. So don’t be afraid; work hard.”

¹⁴This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: “When your ancestors made me angry, I planned to punish you. I did not change my mind,” says the Lord All-Powerful. ¹⁵“But now I will do something different. I am planning to do good to Jerusalem and Judah. So don’t be afraid. ¹⁶These are the things you should do: Tell each other the truth. In the courts judge with truth and complete fairness. ¹⁷Do not make plans to hurt your neighbors, and don’t love false promises. I hate all these things,” says the Lord.

¹⁸The Lord All-Powerful spoke his word to me again. ¹⁹This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: “The special days when you give up eating in the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months will become good, joyful, happy feasts in Judah. But you must love truth and peace.”

²⁰This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: “Many people from many cities will still come to Jerusalem. ²¹People from one city will go and say to those from another city, ‘We are going to pray to the Lord and to ask the Lord All-Powerful for help. Come and go with us.’ ²²Many people and powerful nations will come to worship the Lord All-Powerful in Jerusalem and to pray to the Lord for help.”

²³This is what the Lord All-Powerful says: “At that time, ten men from different countries will come and take hold of a

Judean by his coat. They will say to him, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’”

Life Lessons

[Zechariah 9:1–14:21](#)

Situation

Zechariah prophesied that the key to Israel's future was the coming Messiah, whose gentle leadership would triumph through suffering.

Observation

In [12:10](#) the prophet foretold a future outpouring of the Holy Spirit as repentant people seek his grace.

Inspiration

Where the grace of God is missed, bitterness is born. But where the grace of God is embraced, forgiveness flourishes. In what many believe to be Paul's final letter, he urges Timothy to "be strong in the grace we have in Christ Jesus" ([2 Timothy 2:1](#)).

How insightful is this last exhortation. Paul doesn't urge Timothy to be strong in prayer or Bible study or benevolence, as vital as each may be. He wants his son in the faith to major in grace. Claim this territory. Dwell on this truth. If you miss anything, don't miss the grace of God.

The longer we walk in the garden, the more likely we are to smell like flowers. The more we immerse ourselves in grace, the more likely we are to give grace. Could this be the clue for coping with anger? Could it be the secret is not in demanding payment but in pondering the payment of your Savior?

Your friend broke his promises? Your boss didn't keep her word? I'm sorry, but before you take action,

answer this question: How did God react when you broke your promises to him?

You've been lied to? It hurts to be deceived. But before you double your fists, think: How did God respond when you lied to him?

You've been neglected? Forgotten? Left behind? Rejection hurts. But before you get even, get honest with yourself. Have you ever neglected God? Have you always been attentive to his will? None of us have. How did he react when you neglected him?

The key to forgiving others is to quit focusing on what they did to you and start focusing on what God did for you.

But, Max, that's not fair! Somebody has to pay for what he did.

I agree. Someone must pay, and Someone already has.

You don't understand, Max, this guy doesn't deserve grace. He doesn't deserve mercy. He's not worthy of forgiveness.

I'm not saying he is. But are you? (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Application

In what ways has God showered his grace on you? Take time to thank him for this undeserved gift. Now, think of the people in your life—whether it's a friend, a family member, a coworker, or a neighbor—who need grace from you. Write down how you specifically can show grace to them this week.

Exploration

God's Grace—[Ephesians 3:7](#); [Hebrews 4:14–16](#).

Misuse of God's Grace—[Romans 6:1–4](#); [Galatians 5:4](#);
[Jude 4](#).

Punishment on Israel's Enemies

This message is the word of the Lord.

The message is against the land of Hadrach
and the city of Damascus.

The tribes of Israel and all people
belong to the Lord.

²The message is also against the city of Hamath, on
the border,
and against Tyre and Sidon, with their skill.

³Tyre has built a strong wall for herself.
She has piled up silver like dust
and gold like the mud in the streets.

⁴But the Lord will take away all she has
and destroy her power on the sea.
That city will be destroyed by fire.

⁵The city of Ashkelon will see it and be afraid.
The people of Gaza will shake with fear,
and the people of Ekron will lose hope.
No king will be left in Gaza,
and no one will live in Ashkelon anymore.

⁶Foreigners will live in Ashdod

foreigners will live in Ashdod,
and I will destroy the pride of the Philistines.

⁷I will stop them from drinking blood
and from eating forbidden food.
Those left alive will belong to God.
They will be leaders in Judah,
and Ekron will become like the Jebusites.

⁸I will protect my Temple
from armies who would come or go.
No one will hurt my people again,
because now I am watching them.

The King Is Coming

⁹Rejoice greatly, people of Jerusalem!
Shout for joy, people of Jerusalem!
Your king is coming to you.
He does what is right, and he saves.
He is gentle and riding on a donkey,
on the colt of a donkey.

¹⁰I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
and the horses from Jerusalem.
The bows used in war will be broken.
The king will talk to the nations about peace.
His kingdom will go from sea to sea,
and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.

¹¹As for you, because of the blood of the agreement
with you

I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

¹²You prisoners who have hope,
return to your place of safety.
Today I am telling you
that I will give you back twice as much as before.

¹³I will use Judah like a bow
and Ephraim like the arrows.
Jerusalem, I will use your men
to fight the men of Greece.
I will use you like a warrior's sword.
¹⁴Then the Lord will appear above them,
and his arrows will shoot like lightning.
The Lord God will blow the trumpet,
and he will march in the storms of the south.

¹⁵The Lord All-Powerful will protect them;
they will destroy the enemy with slingshots.
They will drink and shout like drunk men.
They will be filled like a bowl
used for sprinkling blood at the corners of the altar.

¹⁶On that day the Lord their God will save them
as if his people were sheep.
They will shine in his land
like jewels in a crown.

¹⁷They will be so pretty and beautiful.
The young men will grow strong on the grain
and the young women on new wine.

The Lord 's Promises

Ask the Lord for rain during the springtime rains.
The Lord is the one who makes the clouds.
He sends the showers
and gives everyone green fields.

²Idols tell lies;
fortune-tellers see false visions
and tell about false dreams.
The comfort they give is worth nothing.
So the people are like lost sheep.
They are abused, because there is no shepherd.
³The Lord says, "I am angry at my shepherds,
and I will punish the leaders.
I, the Lord All-Powerful, care
for my flock, the people of Judah.
I will make them like my proud war horses.

⁴From Judah will come the cornerstone,
and the tent peg,
the battle bow,
and every ruler.

⁵Together they will be like soldiers
marching to battle through muddy streets.
The Lord is with them,
so they will fight and defeat the horsemen.

⁶"I will strengthen the people of Judah
and save the people of Joseph.
I will bring them back,

because I care about them.
It will be as though
I had never left them,
because I am the Lord their God,
and I will answer them.

⁷The people of Ephraim will be strong like soldiers;
they will be glad as when they have drunk wine.
Their children will see it and rejoice;
they will be happy in the Lord.

⁸I will call my people
and gather them together.
I will save them,
and they will grow in number as they grew in number
before.

⁹I have scattered them among the nations,
but in those faraway places, they will remember me.
They and their children will live and return.

¹⁰I will bring them back from the land of Egypt
and gather them from Assyria.
I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon
until there isn't enough room for them all.

¹¹They will come through the sea of trouble.
The waves of the sea will be calm,
and the Nile River will dry up.
I will defeat Assyria's pride
and destroy Egypt's power over other countries.

¹²I will make my people strong,
and they will live as I say,” says the Lord.

Lebanon, open your gates
so fire may burn your cedar [trees](#).

²Cry, pine trees, because the cedar has fallen,
because the tall trees are ruined.
Cry, oaks in Bashan,
because the mighty forest has been cut down.

³Listen to the shepherds crying
because their rich pastures are destroyed.
Listen to the lions roaring
because the lovely land of the Jordan River is ruined.

The Two Shepherds

⁴This is what the Lord my God says: “Feed the flock that are about to be killed. ⁵Their buyers kill them and are not punished. Those who sell them say, ‘Praise the Lord, I am rich.’ Even the shepherds don’t feel sorry for their sheep. ⁶I don’t feel sorry anymore for the people of this country,” says the Lord. “I will let everyone be under the power of his neighbor and king. They will bring trouble to the country, and I will not save anyone from them.”

⁷So I fed the flock about to be killed, particularly the weakest ones. Then I took two sticks; I called one Pleasant and the other Union, and I fed the flock. ⁸In one month I got rid of three shepherds. The flock did not pay attention to me, and I got impatient with them. ⁹I said, “I will no longer take care of you like a shepherd. Let those that are dying die, and let those that are to be destroyed be destroyed. Let those that are left

eat each other.”

¹⁰Then I broke the stick named Pleasant to break the agreement God made with all the nations. ¹¹That day it was broken. The weak ones in the flock who were watching me knew this message was from the Lord.

¹²Then I said, “If you want to pay me, pay me. If not, then don’t.” So they paid me thirty pieces of silver.

¹³The Lord said to me, “Throw the money to the potter.” That is how little they thought I was [worth](#). So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter in the Temple of the Lord.

¹⁴Then I broke the second stick, named Union, to break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

¹⁵Then the Lord said to me, “Get the things used by a foolish shepherd again, ¹⁶because I am going to get a new shepherd for the country. He will not care for the dying sheep, or look for the young ones, or heal the injured ones, or feed the healthy. But he will eat the best sheep and tear off their hoofs.

¹⁷“How terrible it will be for the useless shepherd who abandoned the flock.

A sword will strike his arm and his right eye.

His arm will lose all its strength,
and his right eye will go blind.”

Jerusalem Will Be Saved

This message is the word of the Lord to Israel. This is what the Lord says, who stretched out the skies, and laid the foundations of the earth, and put the human spirit within: ²“I will make Jerusalem like a cup of poison to the nations around her. They will come and attack Jerusalem and Judah. ³One day all the nations on earth will come together to attack Jerusalem, but I will make it like a heavy rock; anyone who tries to move it will get hurt. ⁴At that time I will confuse every horse and cause its rider to go crazy,” says the Lord. “I will watch over Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the enemies. ⁵Then the leaders of Judah will say to themselves, ‘The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the Lord All-Powerful is their God.’

⁶“At that time I will make the leaders of Judah like a fire burning a stack of wood or like a fire burning straw. They will destroy all the people around them left and right. But the people of Jerusalem will remain safe.

⁷“The Lord will save the homes of Judah first so that the honor given to David’s family and to the people of Jerusalem won’t be greater than the honor given to Judah. ⁸At that time the Lord will protect the people in Jerusalem. Then even the weakest of them will be strong like David. And the family of David will be like God, like an angel of the Lord in front of them. ⁹At that time I will go to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.

Crying for the One They Stabbed

¹⁰“I will pour out on David’s family and the people in Jerusalem a spirit of kindness and mercy. They will look at me, the one they have stabbed, and they will cry like someone crying over the death of an only child. They will be as sad as someone who has lost a firstborn son. ¹¹At that time there will be much crying in Jerusalem, like the crying for Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. ¹²The land will cry, each family by itself: the family of David by itself and their wives by themselves, the family of Nathan by itself and their wives by themselves, ¹³the family of Levi by itself and their wives by themselves, the family of Shimei by itself and their wives by themselves, ¹⁴and all the rest of the families by themselves and their wives by themselves.

“At that time a fountain will be open for David’s descendants and for the people of Jerusalem to cleanse them of their sin and uncleanness.”

²The Lord All-Powerful says, “At that time I will get rid of the names of the idols from the land; no one will remember them anymore. I will also remove the prophets and unclean spirits from the land. ³If a person continues to prophesy, his own father and mother, the ones who gave birth to him, will tell him, ‘You have told lies using the Lord’s name, so you must die.’ When he prophesies, his own father and mother who gave birth to him will stab him.

⁴“At that time the prophets will be ashamed of their visions and prophecies. They won’t wear the prophet’s clothes made of hair to trick people. ⁵Each of them will say, ‘I am not a prophet. I am a farmer and have been a farmer since I was young.’ ⁶But someone will ask, ‘What are the deep cuts on your body?’ And each will answer, ‘I was hurt at my friend’s house.’

The Shepherd Is Killed

⁷“Sword, hit the shepherd.
Attack the man who is my friend,”
says the Lord All-Powerful.
“Kill the shepherd,
and the sheep will scatter,
and I will punish the little ones.”

⁸The Lord says, “Two-thirds of the people
through all the land will die. They will be gone,

and one-third will be left.

⁹The third that is left I will test with fire,
purifying them like silver,
testing them like gold.

Then they will call on me,
and I will answer them.

I will say, 'You are my people,'
and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'”

The Day of Punishment

The Lord's day of judging is coming when the wealth you have taken will be divided among you.

²I will bring all the nations together to fight Jerusalem. They will capture the city and rob the houses and attack the women. Half the people will be taken away as captives, but the rest of the people won't be taken from the city.

³Then the Lord will go to war against those nations; he will fight as in a day of battle. ⁴On that day he will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives will split in two, forming a deep valley that runs east and west. Half the mountain will move toward the north, and half will move toward the south. ⁵You will run through this mountain valley to the other side, just as you ran from the earthquake when Uzziah was king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come and all the holy ones with him.

⁶On that day there will be no light, cold, or frost. ⁷There will be no other day like it, and the Lord knows when it will come. There will be no day or night; even at evening it will still be light.

⁸At that time fresh water will flow from Jerusalem. Half of it will flow east to the Dead Sea, and half will flow west to the Mediterranean Sea. It will flow summer and winter.

He lived among us. He donned the costliest of robes: a human body. He made a throne out of a manger and a royal court out of some cows. He took a common name—Jesus—and made it holy. He took common people and made them the same. —Max Lucado (*When Christ Comes*)

⁹Then the Lord will be king over the whole world. At that time there will be only one Lord, and his name will be the only name.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The Coming King

His Majesty. The emperor of Judah. The soaring eagle of eternity. The noble admiral of the Kingdom. All the splendor of heaven revealed in a human body. For a period ever so brief, the doors to the throne room were open and God came near. His Majesty was seen. Heaven touched the earth and, as a result, earth can know heaven. In astounding tandem a human body housed divinity. Holiness and earthliness intertwined.

This is no run-of-the-mill messiah. His story was extraordinary. He called himself divine, yet allowed a minimum-wage Roman soldier to drive a nail into his wrist. He demanded purity, yet stood for the rights of a repentant whore. He called men to march, yet refused to allow them to call him King. He sent men into all the world, yet equipped them with only bended knees and memories of a resurrected carpenter....

Let's follow his sandalprints. Let's sit on the cold, hard floor of the cave in which he was born. Let's smell the sawdust of the carpentry shop. Let's hear his sandals slap the hard trails of Galilee. Let's sigh as we touch the healed sores of the leper. Let's smile as we see his compassion with the woman at the well.

Let's cringe as we hear the hissing of hell's Satan. Let's let our voices soar with the praises of the multitudes. Let's try to see him.

One warning. Something happens to a person who has witnessed his Majesty. He becomes addicted. One glimpse of the King and you are consumed by a desire to see more of him and say more about him. Pew-warming is no longer an option. Junk religion will no longer suffice. Sensation-seeking is needless. Once you have seen his face you will forever long to see it again. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

¹⁰All the land south of Jerusalem from Geba to Rimmon will be turned into a plain. Jerusalem will be raised up, but it will stay in the same place. The city will reach from the Benjamin Gate and to the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses. ¹¹People will live there, and it will never be destroyed again. Jerusalem will be safe.

¹²But the Lord will bring a terrible disease on the nations that fought against Jerusalem. Their flesh will rot away while they are still standing up. Their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. ¹³At that time the Lord will cause panic. Everybody will grab his neighbor, and they will attack each other. ¹⁴The people of Judah will fight in Jerusalem. And the wealth of the nations around them will be collected—much gold, silver, and clothes. ¹⁵A similar disease will strike the horses, mules, camels, donkeys, and all the animals in the camps.

¹⁶All of those left alive of the people who came to fight Jerusalem will come back to Jerusalem year after year to worship the King, the Lord All-Powerful, and to celebrate the Feast of Shelters. ¹⁷Anyone from the nations who does not go to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord All-Powerful, will not have rain fall on his land. ¹⁸If the Egyptians do not go to Jerusalem, they will not have rain. Then the Lord will send them the same terrible disease he sent the other nations that did not celebrate the Feast of Shelters. ¹⁹This will be the punishment for Egypt and any nation which does not go to celebrate the Feast of Shelters.

²⁰At that time the horses' bells will have written on them:

HOLY TO THE LORD. The cooking pots in the Temple of the Lord will be like the holy altar bowls. ²¹Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the Lord All-Powerful, and everyone who offers sacrifices will be able to take food from them and cook in them. At that time there will not be any buyers or sellers in the Temple of the Lord All-Powerful.

One man This probably refers to Zerubbabel.

other This probably refers to Joshua.

trees In this poem, trees, bushes, and animals stand for leaders of countries around Judah.

worth This was a small amount. It was about the price paid for a slave.

The Book of Malachi

Introduction

“You have shown [me disrespect] by bringing unclean food to my altar” (1:7).

The image is vivid. A family on their way to the Temple realizes they have forgotten the sheep. He turns to her and says “Did you bring a sacrifice?” “No I thought you did,” she replies. He stops the wagon and says, “You go ahead and take the kids, I’ll go back.”

He goes back to the pen and begins to sort through the sheep looking for the one to be sacrificed. He picks up a big fat one with thick wool, “Too valuable,” he decides and puts it down. He picks up another fat one, “No, I want to enter this one in a contest.” He finds another healthy one, “No, I need to save this one for breeding.”

Finally comes upon a frail lamb with a broken leg and spotted wool. “Ahh,” he says. “This will be a good one to get rid of ...”

What the fellow doesn’t know is that God has been watching the process. God has been observing the choosing. What God has heard the man say is, “I will give a token, but I won’t give my heart.”

Such an attitude angers God. And such anger is found in this, the last book of the Old Testament.

“You bring hurt, crippled, and sick animals as gifts. You bring them as gifts, but I won’t accept them from you” (1:13).

We don’t offer sheep, but every Sunday we have an opportunity to give. Some people arrive at the altar with no thought given at all to their financial responsibility before God. As the plate comes she elbows him and says, “What do you

want to give?”

He says, “Let me see what I’ve got.”

Wallets come out and the process of proclamation begins. We begin to sort through the sheep pen. We consider that big sheep with the picture of Franklin, no, that’s too much. We think about writing a check with a couple of zeros. “Better not,” we decide.

We forget that the process itself is a statement.

We forget that God is watching.

We forget that God has challenged us to challenge him.

“‘Bring to the storehouse a full tenth of what you earn so there will be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the Lord All-Powerful. ‘I will open the windows of heaven for you and pour out all the blessings you need’” ([3:10](#)).

The Book of Malachi is a challenge to take God seriously, not just in giving but in every aspect of life.

About This Book

Author:

Malachi

Date Written:

c. 430 B.C.

Key Themes:

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- Church leadership has more to do with the heart than ceremony.
- God’s people must serve him carefully.
- God has asked for a portion of the gifts we receive

in life.

- The coming of the Messiah is a promise of God.

Key Verse:

“Listen to me. Pay attention to what I say. Honor my name,’ says the Lord All-Powerful” ([Malachi 2:2](#)).

Contents:

1. Israel and Her Priests [1:1–2:9](#)
2. The Sins of the People [2:10–3:15](#)
3. The Future [3:16–4:6](#)

Life Lessons

Malachi 1:1–4:6

Situation

God condemned Israel's complacent and contemptuous attitude toward him. The priests withheld their best animals from the sacrifice, and the people got tired of waiting for the Messiah.

Observation

We can learn the most from God when we give him our undivided attention.

Inspiration

I wish there were some way to announce over a loudspeaker system outside every worship gathering, “The pew zone is for learning and listening and changing only. No parking.” God is saying, “Guard your steps! You’re about to take a risk. Watch out! Be alert! Listen carefully. Truth will be deposited in your head that is designed to change your life.” But chances are good that even though a loudspeaker made such an announcement, the same thing would occur—folks would still “park” and turn a deaf ear to the recording.

You see why that’s important? Because our favorite place to park is in a pew. Just come, sit (“Whew! Finally got a seat!”), listen, and leave...

So much of today’s worship is dull-edge stuff—meaningless words, clichés that sit like tombstones over dead ideas. God is speaking. That’s the reason for the command. The living God is communicating.

Henry David Thoreau once wrote: “It takes two to speak the truth. One to speak and another to listen.” Walt Whitman confessed: “To have great poets there must be great audiences.” I like that!—someone to write and someone to appreciate. To have great messages from God, there must be a well-prepared spokesman and there must be an equally well-prepared congregation. They work in tandem with each other.

Come to terms with your lips, with your ears, as you envision yourself preparing for worship. Experiment with something different for a change. Be quiet. Try silence.

From the first strains of music to the last word of the benediction ... learn to hitchhike on God’s thoughts. Sometimes those thoughts come in the silence of the offertory. Sometimes they come as someone else is leading in prayer. Occasionally they come in the singing of a hymn. Draw near. Listen well, because God is communicating. (From *Living on the Ragged Edge* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

What steals your attention during worship? Do your thoughts wander toward the day’s demands? Do you become preoccupied with later activities? What are some strategies you could employ to help keep your mind focused?

Exploration

Faithful Worship—[Joshua 22:27](#); [Psalm 95:6](#); [Daniel 3:16–18](#); [John 4:23–24](#).

This message is the word of the Lord given to Israel through Malachi.

God Loves Israel

²The Lord said, “I have loved you.”

But you ask, “How have you loved us?”

The Lord said, “Esau and Jacob were brothers. I loved Jacob, ³but I hated Esau. I destroyed his mountain country and left his land to the wild dogs of the desert.”

⁴The people of Edom might say, “We were destroyed, but we will go back and rebuild the ruins.”

But the Lord All-Powerful says, “If they rebuild them, I will destroy them. People will say, ‘Edom is a wicked country. The Lord is always angry with the Edomites.’ ⁵You will see these things with your own eyes. And you will say, ‘The Lord is great, even outside the borders of Israel!’”

The Priests Don’t Respect God

⁶The Lord All-Powerful says, “A child honors his father, and a servant honors his master. I am a father, so why don’t you honor me? I am a master, so why don’t you respect me? You priests do not respect me.

“But you ask, ‘How have we shown you disrespect?’

⁷“You have shown it by bringing unclean food to my altar.

“But you ask, ‘What makes it unclean?’

“It is unclean because you don’t respect the altar of the Lord.⁸ When you bring blind animals as sacrifices, that is wrong. When you bring crippled and sick animals, that is wrong. Try giving them to your governor. Would he be pleased with you? He wouldn’t accept you,” says the Lord All-Powerful.

⁹“Now ask God to be kind to you, but he won’t accept you with such offerings,” says the Lord All-Powerful.

¹⁰“I wish one of you would close the Temple doors so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you and will not accept your gifts,” says the Lord All-Powerful. ¹¹“From the east to the west I will be honored among the nations. Everywhere they will bring incense and clean offerings to me, because I will be honored among the nations,” says the Lord All-Powerful.

¹²“But you don’t honor me. You say about the Lord’s altar, ‘It is unclean, and the food has no worth.’ ¹³You say, ‘We are tired of doing this,’ and you sniff at it in disgust,” says the Lord All-Powerful.

“And you bring hurt, crippled, and sick animals as gifts. You bring them as gifts, but I won’t accept them from you,” says the Lord. ¹⁴“The person who cheats will be cursed. He has a male animal in his flock and promises to offer it, but then he offers to the Lord an animal that has something wrong with it. I am a great king,” says the Lord All-Powerful, “and I am feared by all the nations.

Rules for Priests

“Priests, this command is for you.² Listen to me. Pay attention to what I say. Honor my name,” says the Lord All-Powerful. “If you don’t, I will send a curse on you and on your blessings. I have already cursed them, because you don’t pay attention to what I say.

³“I will punish your descendants. I will smear your faces with the animal insides left from your feasts, and you will be thrown away with it. ⁴Then you will know that I am giving you this command so my agreement with Levi will continue,” says the Lord All-Powerful. ⁵“My agreement for priests was with the tribe of Levi. I promised them life and peace so they would honor me. And they did honor me and fear me. ⁶They taught the true teachings and spoke no lies. With peace and honesty they did what I said they should do, and they kept many people from sinning.

⁷“A priest should teach what he knows, and people should learn the teachings from him, because he is the messenger of the Lord All-Powerful. ⁸But you priests have stopped obeying me. With your teachings you have caused many people to do wrong. You have broken the agreement with the tribe of Levi!” says the Lord All-Powerful. ⁹“You have not been careful to do what I say, but instead you take sides in court cases. So I have caused you to be hated and disgraced in front of everybody.”

Judah Was Not Loyal to God

¹⁰We all have the same father; the same God made us. So why do people break their promises to each other and show no respect for the agreement our ancestors made with God? ¹¹The people of Judah have broken their promises. They have done something God hates in Israel and Jerusalem: The people of Judah did not respect the Temple that the Lord loves, and the men of Judah married women who worship foreign gods. ¹²Whoever does this might bring offerings to the Lord All-Powerful, but the Lord will still cut that person off from the community of Israel.

¹³This is another thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with your tears. You cry and moan, because he does not accept your offerings and is not pleased with what you bring. ¹⁴You ask, "Why?" It is because the Lord sees how you treated the wife you married when you were young. You broke your promise to her, even though she was your partner and you had an agreement with her. ¹⁵God made husbands and wives to become one body and one spirit for his purpose—so they would have children who are true to God.

So be careful, and do not break your promise to the wife you married when you were young.

¹⁶The Lord God of Israel says, "I hate divorce. And I hate people who do cruel things as easily as they put on clothes," says the Lord All-Powerful.

So be careful. And do not break your trust.

The Special Day of Judging

¹⁷You have tired the Lord with your words.

You ask, "How have we tired him?"

You did it by saying, “The Lord thinks anyone who does evil is good, and he is pleased with them.” Or you asked, “Where is the God who is fair?”

The Lord All-Powerful says, "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way for me. Suddenly, the Lord you are looking for will come to his Temple; the messenger of the agreement, whom you want, will come."²No one can live through that time; no one can survive when he comes. He will be like a purifying fire and like laundry soap.³Like someone who heats and purifies silver, he will purify the Levites and make them pure like gold and silver. Then they will bring offerings to the Lord in the right way.⁴And the Lord will accept the offerings from Judah and Jerusalem, as it was in the past.⁵The Lord All-Powerful says, "Then I will come to you and judge you. I will be quick to testify against those who take part in evil magic, adultery, and lying under oath, those who cheat workers of their pay and who cheat widows and orphans, those who are unfair to foreigners, and those who do not respect me.

Stealing from God

⁶"I the Lord do not change. So you descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed.⁷Since the time of your ancestors, you have disobeyed my rules and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord All-Powerful.

"But you ask, 'How can we return?'

⁸"Should a person rob God? But you are robbing me.

"You ask, 'How have we robbed you?'

"You have robbed me in your offerings and the tenth of your crops.⁹So a curse is on you, because the whole nation has robbed me.¹⁰Bring to the storehouse a full tenth of what you earn so there will be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord All-Powerful. "I will open the windows of heaven

for you and pour out all the blessings you need. ¹¹I will stop the insects so they won't eat your crops. The grapes won't fall from your vines before they are ready to pick," says the Lord All-Powerful. ¹²"All the nations will call you blessed, because you will have a pleasant country," says the Lord All-Powerful.

The Lord's Promise of Mercy

¹³The Lord says, "You have said terrible things about me.

"But you ask, 'What have we said about you?'

¹⁴"You have said, 'It is useless to serve God. It did no good to obey his laws and to show the Lord All-Powerful that we were sorry for what we did. ¹⁵So we say that proud people are happy. Evil people succeed. They challenge God and get away with it.'"

¹⁶Then those who honored the Lord spoke with each other, and the Lord listened and heard them. The names of those who honored the Lord and respected him were written in his presence in a book to be remembered.

¹⁷The Lord All-Powerful says, "They belong to me; on that day they will be my very own. As a parent shows mercy to his child who serves him, I will show mercy to my people. ¹⁸You will again see the difference between good and evil people, between those who serve God and those who don't.

The Day of the Lord's Judging

“There is a day coming that will burn like a hot furnace, and all the proud and evil people will be like straw. On that day they will be completely burned up so that not a root or branch will be left,” says the Lord All-Powerful. ²“But for you who honor me, goodness will shine on you like the sun, with healing in its rays. You will jump around, like well-fed calves. ³Then you will crush the wicked like ashes under your feet on the day I will do this,” says the Lord All-Powerful.

⁴“Remember the teaching of Moses my servant, those laws and rules I gave to him on Mount Sinai for all the Israelites.

⁵“But I will send you Elijah the prophet before that great and terrifying day of the Lord’s judging. ⁶Elijah will help parents love their children and children love their parents. Otherwise, I will come and put a curse on the land.”

The New Testament

The Book of Matthew

Introduction

You gotta wonder what Jesus saw in Matthew.

He was a tax collector. The profession hasn't been too popular in any era, but especially not in the days of Christ. Tax collectors were the quislings of Palestine. They took from their own people and gave to Rome. As long as they met their quota, they could tax whatever they wanted and as much as they wanted.

People ducked when they saw these guys coming.

Not only was Matthew a tax collector, he was a public tax collector. Some collectors did their business underground. They hired runners to do their dirty work. Matthew did his own. He was the leech at the bottom of the pit. He pulled his stretch limo right into the greasiest parts of town and set up his table and held out his hand.

That's where he was when Jesus called him.

You gotta wonder what Jesus saw in Matthew. At the same time, you gotta wonder what Matthew saw in Jesus. I mean, look at him. Dirt under his nails. Calloused hands. Holes in his sandals. No headquarters. No office. No committee. No clout with the local church.

The clergy won't give him the time of day. His followers look more like dockhands or pool sharks than seminarians.

This guy claims to be the Messiah?

Quite a pair, these two. You gotta wonder what they saw in each other. Whatever it was, it must've been something. Matthew heard the call and never went back. He spent the rest of his life convincing folks that the carpenter was the King. Jesus gave the call and never took it back. He spent his life

dying for people like Matthew, convincing a lot of us that if he had a place for Matthew, he just might have a place for us.

About This Book

Author:

Matthew, the tax collector, who later became Jesus' disciple

Date Written:

c. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

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- God kept his promise of a deliverer for his people.
- God's ideas about his kingdom are often different from his people's ideas of the same kingdom.
- Jesus lived fully as a human and as God.
- Jesus' ministry and sacrifice changed the world forever.

Key Verse:

“So go and make followers of all people in the world. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” ([Matthew 28:19](#)).

Contents:

1. The Birth and Preparation of the Messiah [1:1–4:11](#)
2. Jesus' Ministry in Galilee [4:12–20:29](#)
3. Jesus' Last Days on Earth [21:1–28:20](#)

Life Lessons

Matthew 1:1-25

Situation

Because Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience, he began his Gospel by showing through family records that Jesus was a descendant of both King David and Abraham.

Observation

Joseph found it difficult to understand the supernatural conception and birth of Jesus Christ.

Inspiration

Perhaps changes are in the air right now. Maybe you're in the midst of a decision. It's disrupting, isn't it? You like your branch... And, like Joseph, you've been a pretty good branch-sitter. And then you hear the call. "I need you to go out on the limb and

... move. Take your family and move overseas, I have a special work for you."

... forgive. It doesn't matter who hurt who first. What matters is that you go and build the bridge."

... evangelize. That new family down the block? They don't know anyone in town. Go meet them."

... sacrifice. The orphanage has a mortgage payment due this month. They can't meet it. Remember the bonus you received last week?"

Regardless of the nature of the call, the consequences are the same: civil war. Though your heart may say yes, your feet say no. Excuses blow numerous as golden leaves in an autumn wind.

“That’s not my talent.” “It’s time for someone else to take charge.” “Not now. I’ll get to it tomorrow.”

But eventually you’re left staring at a bare tree and a hard choice: His will or yours?

(From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

God’s plan encompasses your personality, your talents, and your future. Ask God today to help you be a witness, open to new assignments, and eager to grow in faith.

Exploration

Jesus’ Family History—[Ruth 4:18–22](#); [1 Chronicles 3:10–17](#); [Luke 3:23–38](#). Virgin Birth of Jesus—[Isaiah 7:14](#).

The Family History of Jesus

This is the family history of Jesus Christ. He came from the family of David, and David came from the family of Abraham.

²Abraham was the [father](#) of Isaac.

Isaac was the father of Jacob.

Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.

³Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah.

(Their mother was Tamar.)

Perez was the father of Hezron.

Hezron was the father of Ram.

⁴Ram was the father of Amminadab.

Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.

Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

⁵Salmon was the father of Boaz.

(Boaz's mother was Rahab.)

Boaz was the father of Obed.

(Obed's mother was Ruth.)

Obed was the father of Jesse.

⁶Jesse was the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon.

(Solomon's mother had been Uriah's wife.)

⁷Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.

Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.

Abijah was the father of Asa.

⁸Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat.
Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram.
Jehoram was the ancestor of Uzziah.

⁹Uzziah was the father of Jotham.
Jotham was the father of Ahaz.
Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.

¹⁰Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.
Manasseh was the father of Amon.
Amon was the father of Josiah.

¹¹Josiah was the grandfather of Jehoiachin and his brothers.

(This was at the time that the people were taken to Babylon.)

¹²After they were taken to Babylon:
Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel.
Shealtiel was the grandfather of Zerubbabel.

¹³Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.
Abiud was the father of Eliakim.
Eliakim was the father of Azor.

¹⁴Azor was the father of Zadok.
Zadok was the father of Akim.
Akim was the father of Eliud.

¹⁵Eliud was the father of Eleazar.
Eleazar was the father of Matthan.
Matthan was the father of Jacob.

¹⁶Jacob was the father of Joseph.
Joseph was the husband of Mary,
and Mary was the mother of Jesus.
Jesus is called the Christ.

¹⁷So there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David. And there were fourteen generations from David until the people were taken to Babylon. And there were fourteen generations from the time when the people were taken to Babylon until Christ was born.

The Birth of Jesus Christ

¹⁸This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was engaged to marry Joseph, but before they married, she learned she was pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹Because Mary's husband, Joseph, was a good man, he did not want to disgrace her in public, so he planned to divorce her secretly.

²⁰While Joseph thought about these things, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, descendant of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the baby in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

²²All this happened to bring about what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³"The virgin will be pregnant. She will have a son, and they will name him Immanuel." which means "God is with us."

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the Lord's angel had told him to do. Joseph took Mary as his wife, ²⁵but he did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to the son. And Joseph named him Jesus.

Life Lessons

Matthew 2:1-23

Situation

Jesus was born a descendant of King David during the reign of King Herod. The Roman Senate had appointed Herod to rule Judea.

Observation

Reaction to Jesus' birth was mixed. The Magi came to worship Jesus, while King Herod tried to kill him.

Inspiration

Have you ever been at a party where an attempt was made to celebrate just for the sake of celebration? I have, and I found it to be exceptionally contrived and boring. A true celebration must be rooted in an event.

In both the Old and New Testaments, worship is rooted in an actual event. The content of Old Testament worship is determined by the Exodus-event, while the content of New Testament worship is determined by the Christ-event. In either case, biblical worship celebrates the event and makes it come alive again.

... We don't go to worship to celebrate what we have done. We don't say, "Look, Lord, isn't it wonderful that I believe in you!" No! We go to worship to praise and thank God for what *he* has done, is doing, and will do. God's work in Christ is the focus of worship. And it is the focus we need to

recapture as we seek to renew our public worship experience. (From *Worship Is a Verb* by Robert E. Webber)

Application

How do I respond to Jesus, the King? Do I worship him? Do I celebrate his birth, life, death, and resurrection? What do I bring to give to him? Bring a gift to Jesus in your prayer, worship, or service.

Exploration

Prophecies About Jesus—[Jeremiah 31:15](#); [Micah 5:2](#).

Wise Men Come to Visit Jesus

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea during the time when Herod was king. When Jesus was born, some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem.² They asked, “Where is the baby who was born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

³When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, as well as all the people in Jerusalem. ⁴Herod called a meeting of all the leading priests and teachers of the law and asked them where the Christ would be born. ⁵They answered, “In the town of Bethlehem in Judea. The prophet wrote about this in the Scriptures:

⁶“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are important among the tribes of Judah.
A ruler will come from you
who will be like a shepherd for my people Israel.””

[Micah 5:2](#)

⁷Then Herod had a secret meeting with the wise men and learned from them the exact time they first saw the star. ⁸He sent the wise men to Bethlehem, saying, “Look carefully for the child. When you find him, come tell me so I can worship him too.”

⁹After the wise men heard the king, they left. The star that

they had seen in the east went before them until it stopped above the place where the child was. ¹⁰When the wise men saw the star, they were filled with joy. ¹¹They came to the house where the child was and saw him with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. They opened their gifts and gave him treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²But God warned the wise men in a dream not to go back to Herod, so they returned to their own country by a different way.

Jesus' Parents Take Him to Egypt

¹³After they left, an angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt, because Herod is starting to look for the child so he can kill him. Stay in Egypt until I tell you to return."

¹⁴So Joseph got up and left for Egypt during the night with the child and his mother. ¹⁵And Joseph stayed in Egypt until Herod died. This happened to bring about what the Lord had said through the prophet: "I called my son out of Egypt."

Herod Kills the Baby Boys

¹⁶When Herod saw that the wise men had tricked him, he was furious. So he gave an order to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem and in the surrounding area who were two years old or younger. This was in keeping with the time he learned from the wise men. ¹⁷So what God had said through the prophet Jeremiah came true:

¹⁸"A voice was heard in Ramah

of painful crying and deep sadness:
Rachel crying for her children.
She refused to be comforted,
because her children are dead.”

[Jeremiah 31:15](#)

Joseph and Mary Return

¹⁹After Herod died, an angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream while he was in Egypt. ²⁰The angel said, “Get up! Take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, because the people who were trying to kill the child are now dead.”

²¹So Joseph took the child and his mother and went to Israel. ²²But he heard that Archelaus was now king in Judea since his father Herod had died. So Joseph was afraid to go there. After being warned in a dream, he went to the area of Galilee, ²³to a town called Nazareth, and lived there. And so what God had said through the prophets came true: “He will be called a [Nazarene](#).”

Life Lessons

Matthew 3:1–17

Situation

Two major religious groups existed in Israel at the time of Jesus. The Pharisees were more religiously minded, while the Sadducees were more politically minded. These groups were united in their hatred of Jesus.

Observation

True repentance prepares the way for Jesus in our lives.

Inspiration

Then there was what John the Baptist said—that he had come to prepare the way for the Lord. And everyone got excited. They knew their prophecies, and were watching out for God to come and visit and redeem his people. Then Jesus suddenly appears on the scene. And John seems to have known something about Jesus—something that made him hesitate before baptizing him. That seems significant. It was as if he knew that Jesus didn't *need* to be baptized. It was as if he had no sin to be washed away. If anybody needed to baptize anyone else, it was John who needed to be baptized by Jesus....

What seemed ridiculous if Jesus was just a man makes perfect sense if he really was God... . Jesus conveyed the impression that he had the authority to act and speak as God. It is almost as if he anticipated the verdict of the resurrection—that he was

authorized to speak and act in this way. And didn't people say that he taught with authority?

Suppose it were true... . If Jesus is God, it means we have a revelation of God which goes far beyond anything and everything we have ever had in the past....

It means that the great gulf between God and ourselves has been bridged....

And it would mean that any idea of God as some distant and remote figure would have to go. (From *What Was God Doing on the Cross?* by Alister E. McGrath)

Application

Have you followed this example of Jesus through baptism? Give it prayerful consideration.

Exploration

Jesus' Baptism—[Mark 1:1–11](#); [Luke 3:21–22](#).

The Work of John the Baptist

About that time John the Baptist began preaching in the desert area of Judea.²John said, “Change your hearts and lives because the kingdom of heaven is near.”³John the Baptist is the one Isaiah the prophet was talking about when he said:

“This is a voice of one
who calls out in the desert:
‘Prepare the way for the Lord.
Make the road straight for him.’”

[Isaiah 40:3](#)

⁴John’s clothes were made from camel’s hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food, he ate locusts and wild honey.⁵Many people came from Jerusalem and Judea and all the area around the Jordan River to hear John.⁶They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan River.

⁷Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to the place where John was baptizing people. When John saw them, he said, “You are all snakes! Who warned you to run away from God’s coming punishment?”⁸Do the things that show you really have changed your hearts and lives.⁹And don’t think you can say to yourselves, ‘Abraham is our father.’ I tell you that God could make children for Abraham from these rocks.

¹⁰[The ax is now ready to cut down the trees, and every tree that](#)

does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize you with water to show that your hearts and lives have changed. But there is one coming after me who is greater than I am, whose sandals I am not good enough to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²He will come ready to clean the grain, separating the good grain from the chaff. He will put the good part of the grain into his barn, but he will burn the chaff with a fire that cannot be put out.”

Jesus Is Baptized by John

¹³At that time Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River and wanted John to baptize him. ¹⁴But John tried to stop him, saying, “Why do you come to me to be baptized? I need to be baptized by you!”

¹⁵Jesus answered, “Let it be this way for now. We should do all things that are God’s will.” So John agreed to baptize Jesus.

¹⁶As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. Then heaven opened, and he saw God’s Spirit coming down on him like a dove. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love, and I am very pleased with him.”

Life Lessons

Matthew 4:1–25

Situation

Jesus told John the Baptist, “We should do all things that are God’s will” ([Matthew 3:15](#)). Jesus followed God’s will by resisting the devil’s temptations and by teaching, preaching, and healing.

Observation

Jesus gave his disciples the most rewarding job. He taught them to reach out to people with the Good News of God.

Inspiration

When I was in high school, our family used to fish every year during spring break. One year my brother and my mom couldn’t go, so my dad let me invite a friend. I asked Mark. He was a good pal and a great sport. He got permission from his parents, and we began planning our trip. . . .

We loaded our camper and set out for the lake.

We arrived late at night, unfolded the camper, and went to bed—dreaming of tomorrow’s day in the sun. But during the night, an unseasonably strong norther blew in. It got cold fast! The wind was so strong that we could barely open the camper door the next morning. The sky was gray. The lake was a mountain range of white-topped waves. There was no way we could fish in that weather.

“No problem,” we said. “We’ll spend the day in the camper. After all, we have Monopoly. We have

Reader's Digest. We all know a few jokes. It's not what we came to do, but we'll make the best of it and fish tomorrow."

We were in for a surprise. The next morning it wasn't the wind that made the door hard to open, it was the ice!

It was a long day. It was a long, cold night.

When we awoke the next morning to the sound of sleet slapping the canvas, we didn't even pretend to be cheerful. We were flat-out grumpy. Mark became more of a jerk with each passing moment; I wondered what spell of ignorance I must have been in when I invited him. Dad couldn't do anything right; I wondered how someone so irritable could have such an even-tempered son. We sat in misery the whole day, our fishing equipment still unpacked.

The next day was even colder. "We're going home" were my father's first words. No one objected.

I learned a hard lesson that week. Not about fishing, but about people.

When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight.

But note the other side of this fish tale: When those who are called to fish, fish—they flourish!

Leave soldiers inside the barracks with no time on the front line and see what happens to their attitude. The soldiers will invent things to complain about. Bunks will be too hard. Food will be too cold. Leadership will be too tough. The company will be too stale. Yet place those same soldiers in the trench and let them duck a few bullets, and what was a

boring barracks will seem like a haven. The beds will feel great. The food will be almost ideal. The leadership will be courageous. The company will be exciting.

When those who are called to fish, fish—they flourish! (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

Are you a faithful worker in God's service? Is it easier for you to share your faith or argue with another Christian? Ask God to help you become a successful fisher of people.

Exploration

Temptation of Jesus—[Mark 1:12–13](#); [Luke 4:1–13](#).
Jesus' Preaching—[Mark 12:14–15](#); [Luke 4:14–15](#);
[John 4:42–45](#). Jesus' Followers—[Mark 1:16–20](#).

The Temptation of Jesus

Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ²Jesus ate nothing for forty days and nights. After this, he was very hungry. ³The devil came to Jesus to tempt him, saying, “If you are the Son of God, tell these rocks to become bread.”

⁴Jesus answered, “It is written in the Scriptures, [‘A person does not live by eating only bread, but by everything God says.’](#)”

⁵Then the devil led Jesus to the holy city of Jerusalem and put him on a high place of the Temple. ⁶The devil said, “If you are the Son of God, jump down, because it is written in the Scriptures:

‘He has put his angels in charge of you.
They will catch you in their hands
so that you will not hit your foot on a rock.’”

[Psalm 91:11–12](#)

⁷Jesus answered him, “It also says in the Scriptures, [‘Do not test the Lord your God.’](#)”

⁸Then the devil led Jesus to the top of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and all their splendor. ⁹The devil said, “If you will bow down and worship me, I will give you all these things.”

¹⁰Jesus said to the devil, “Go away from me, Satan! It is written in the Scriptures, [‘You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’](#)”

¹¹So the devil left Jesus, and angels came and took care of him.

Jesus Begins Work in Galilee

¹²When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he went back to Galilee. ¹³He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum, a town near Lake Galilee, in the area near Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴Jesus did this to bring about what the prophet Isaiah had said:

¹⁵“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali
along the sea,
beyond the Jordan River.

This is Galilee where the non-Jewish people live.

¹⁶These people who live in darkness
will see a great light.

They live in a place covered with the shadows of death,
but a light will shine on them.”

[Isaiah 9:1–2](#)

Jesus Chooses Some Followers

¹⁷From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Change your hearts and lives, because the kingdom of heaven is near.”

¹⁸As Jesus was walking by Lake Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (called Peter) and his brother Andrew. They were throwing a net into the lake because they were fishermen. ¹⁹Jesus said, “Come follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” ²⁰So Simon and Andrew immediately left their nets and followed him.

²¹As Jesus continued walking by Lake Galilee, he saw two other brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. Jesus told them to come with him. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father, and they followed Jesus.

Jesus Teaches and Heals People

²³Jesus went everywhere in Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the Good News about the kingdom of heaven, and healing all the people’s diseases and sicknesses. ²⁴The news about Jesus spread all over Syria, and people brought all the sick to him. They were suffering from different kinds of diseases. Some were in great pain, some had demons, some were [epileptics](#), and some were paralyzed. Jesus healed all of them. ²⁵Many people from Galilee, the [Ten Towns](#), Jerusalem, Judea, and the land across the Jordan River followed him.

Life Lessons

Matthew 5:1–48

Situation

Jesus gave this sermon (chapters [5–7](#)) on a hillside near the town of Capernaum. Matthew presented four other great discourses of Jesus ([Matthew 10](#); [13](#); [18](#); [24–25](#)).

Observation

Jesus did not come to destroy the law of Moses or the teaching of the prophets, but to fulfill what they said. Jesus told us to be perfect, just as our Father in heaven is perfect.

Inspiration

Sacred delight is good news coming through the back door of your heart. It's what you'd always dreamed but never expected. It's the too-good-to-be-true coming true. It's having God as your pinch-hitter, your lawyer, your dad, your biggest fan, and your best friend. God on your side, in your heart, out in front, and protecting your back. It's hope where you least expected it: a flower in life's sidewalk.

It is *sacred* because only God can grant it. It is a *delight* because it thrills. Since it is sacred, it can't be stolen. And since it is delightful, it can't be predicted.

It was this gladness that danced through the Red Sea. It was this joy that blew the trumpet at Jericho. It was this secret that made Mary sing. It was this surprise that put the springtime into Easter morning...

It is this sacred delight that Jesus promises in the Sermon on the Mount.

Nine times he promises it. And he promises it to an unlikely crowd:

“The poor in spirit ... Those who mourn ... The meek ... Those who hunger and thirst ... The merciful ... The pure in heart ... The peacemakers ... The persecuted ...”

It is to this band of pilgrims that God promises a special blessing. A heavenly joy. A sacred delight. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

How are you fulfilling Jesus’ command to be perfect before God? Do you fall short by lying, lust, cheating, coveting, or gossiping? When you battle one of these temptations, instead of giving in, pray, sing a worshipful song, or think of a memorized verse. Praise God instead of giving in.

Exploration

Happiness—[Luke 6:17–49](#). The Law—[Exodus 19–24](#).

Jesus Teaches the People

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a hill and sat down. His followers came to him,² and he began to teach them, saying:

³“Those people who know they have great spiritual needs are happy,

because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

⁴Those who are sad now are happy,
because God will comfort them.

⁵Those who are humble are happy,
because the earth will belong to them.

⁶Those who want to do right more than anything else are happy,
because God will fully satisfy them.

⁷Those who show mercy to others are happy,
because God will show mercy to them.

⁸Those who are pure in their thinking are happy,
because they will be with God.

⁹Those who work to bring peace are happy,
because God will call them his children.

¹⁰Those who are treated badly for doing good are happy,
because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

¹¹“People will insult you and hurt you. They will lie and say all kinds of evil things about you because you follow me. But when they do, you will be happy. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because you have a great reward waiting for you in heaven. People did the same evil things to the prophets who lived before you.

You Are Like Salt and Light

¹³“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its salty taste, it cannot be made salty again. It is good for nothing, except to be thrown out and walked on.

¹⁴“You are the light that gives light to the world. A city that is built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵And people don’t hide a light under a bowl. They put it on a lampstand so the light shines for all the people in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, you should be a light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do and will praise your Father in heaven.

The Importance of the Law

¹⁷“Don’t think that I have come to destroy the law of Moses or the teaching of the prophets. I have not come to destroy them but to bring about what they said. ¹⁸I tell you the truth, nothing will disappear from the law until heaven and earth are gone. Not even the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will be lost until everything has happened. ¹⁹Whoever refuses to obey any command and teaches other people not to obey that command will be the least important in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys the commands and teaches other people to

obey them will be great in the kingdom of heaven.²⁰I tell you that if you are no more obedient than the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus Teaches About Anger

²¹“You have heard that it was said to our people long ago, ‘You must not murder anyone.’ Anyone who murders another will be judged.” ²²But I tell you, if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be judged. If you say bad things to a brother or sister, you will be judged by the council. And if you call someone a fool, you will be in danger of the fire of hell.

²³“So when you offer your gift to God at the altar, and you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there at the altar. Go and make peace with that person, and then come and offer your gift.

²⁵“If your enemy is taking you to court, become friends quickly, before you go to court. Otherwise, your enemy might turn you over to the judge, and the judge might give you to a guard to put you in jail. ²⁶I tell you the truth, you will not leave there until you have paid everything you owe.

Jesus Teaches About Sexual Sin

²⁷“You have heard that it was said, ‘You must not be guilty of adultery.’ ²⁸But I tell you that if anyone looks at a woman and wants to sin sexually with her, in his mind he has already done that sin with the woman. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to sin, take it out and throw it away. It is better to lose one part of

your body than to have your whole body thrown into hell. ³⁰If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Jesus Teaches About Divorce

³¹“It was also said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a written divorce paper.’ ³²But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife forces her to be guilty of adultery. The only reason for a man to divorce his wife is if she has sexual relations with another man. And anyone who marries that divorced woman is guilty of adultery.

Make Promises Carefully

³³“You have heard that it was said to our people long ago, ‘Don’t break your promises, but keep the promises you make to the Lord.’ ³⁴But I tell you, never swear an oath. Don’t swear an oath using the name of heaven, because heaven is God’s throne. ³⁵Don’t swear an oath using the name of the earth, because the earth belongs to God. Don’t swear an oath using the name of Jerusalem, because that is the city of the great King. ³⁶Don’t even swear by your own head, because you cannot make one hair on your head become white or black. ³⁷Say only yes if you mean yes, and no if you mean no. If you say more than yes or no, it is from the Evil One.

Don’t Fight Back

³⁸“You have heard that it was said, ‘[An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.](#)’ ³⁹But I tell you, don’t stand up against an evil person. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other cheek also. ⁴⁰If someone wants to sue you in court and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. ⁴¹If someone forces you to go with him one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴²If a person asks you for something, give it to him. Don’t refuse to give to someone who wants to borrow from you.

Love All People

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘[Love your neighbor](#) and hate your enemies.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, love your enemies. Pray for those who hurt you. ⁴⁵If you do this, you will be true children of your Father in heaven. He causes the sun to rise on good people and on evil people, and he sends rain to those who do right and to those who do wrong. ⁴⁶If you love only the people who love you, you will get no reward. Even the tax collectors do that. ⁴⁷And if you are nice only to your friends, you are no better than other people. Even those who don’t know God are nice to their friends. ⁴⁸So you must be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Life Lessons

Matthew 6:1–34

Situation

After teaching about happiness and honoring the Law, Jesus taught about giving, praying, and worshiping.

Observation

The Lord's Prayer, a model prayer, is really the disciples' prayer.

Inspiration

When David says, "I will live in the house of the Lord forever" ([Psalm 23:6](#)), he's not saying he wants to get away from people. He's saying that he yearns to be in God's presence, wherever he is.

David longs to be in God's house.

I know what you're thinking: Sure, Max, but he was David. He was the poet and the prince and giant-killer. He didn't have carpools and diapers and a boss who breathes deadlines like a dragon breathes fire. I'd love to live in God's house, too, but for the time being, I'm stuck in the real world.

Forgive me, but I beg to differ. You aren't stuck in the real world. Just the opposite, you are one step away from the house of God. Wherever you are. Whatever time it is. Whether in the office on Thursday or at soccer practice on Saturday, you are only a decision away from the presence of your Father. You need never leave the house of God. You don't need to change your zip code or your

neighborhood; all you need to change is your perception.

When your car is stuck in traffic, you can step into the chapel. When the gust of temptation unbalances your stride, step behind the wall of his strength. When the employees belittle you, take a seat in the porch swing next to your Father; he'll comfort you. Remember, this is no house of stone. You won't find it on a map. You won't find it described in a realtor journal.

But you will find it in your Bible. You've seen the blueprint before. You've read the names of the rooms and recited the layout. You're familiar with the design. But chances are you never considered it to be a house plan. You viewed the verses as a prayer.

Indeed they are. The Lord's Prayer. It would be difficult to find someone who hasn't quoted the prayer or read the words...

Children memorize it. Parishioners recite it. Students study it ... but I want to challenge us to do something different. I want us to live in it ... to view it as the floor plan to our spiritual house. In these verses Christ has provided more than a model for prayer, he has provided a model for living. These words do more than tell us what to say to God; they tell us how to exist with God. These words describe a grand house in which God's children were intended to live ... with him, forever. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Application

Take each section of the Lord's Prayer and recast

it in your own words. Consider what it means to you to have a Father in heaven. What aspects of God's kingdom can you help to build this week? Who do you need to forgive today? What "food" do you need for today? Live in the Lord's Prayer today!

Exploration

Jesus' Example—[Matthew 14:23](#); [Mark 6:46](#); [Luke 6:12](#); [9:28–29](#).

Jesus Teaches About Giving

“Be careful! When you do good things, don’t do them in front of people to be seen by them. If you do that, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²“When you give to the poor, don’t be like the hypocrites. They blow trumpets in the synagogues and on the streets so that people will see them and honor them. I tell you the truth, those hypocrites already have their full reward. ³So when you give to the poor, don’t let anyone know what you are doing. ⁴Your giving should be done in secret. Your Father can see what is done in secret, and he will reward you.

Jesus Teaches About Prayer

⁵“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites. They love to stand in the synagogues and on the street corners and pray so people will see them. I tell you the truth, they already have their full reward. ⁶When you pray, you should go into your room and close the door and pray to your Father who cannot be seen. Your Father can see what is done in secret, and he will reward you.

⁷“And when you pray, don’t be like those people who don’t know God. They continue saying things that mean nothing, thinking that God will hear them because of their many

words. ⁸Don't be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him. ⁹So when you pray, you should pray like this:

‘Our Father in heaven,
may your name always be kept holy.

¹⁰May your kingdom come
and what you want be done,
here on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us the food we need for each day.

¹²Forgive us for our sins,
just as we have forgiven those who sinned against us.

¹³And do not cause us to be tempted,
but save us from the Evil One.’

¹⁴Yes, if you forgive others for their sins, your Father in heaven will also forgive you for your sins. ¹⁵But if you don't forgive others, your Father in heaven will not forgive your sins.

Jesus Teaches About Worship

¹⁶“When you give up eating, don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They make their faces look sad to show people they are giving up eating. I tell you the truth, those hypocrites already have their full reward. ¹⁷So when you give up eating, comb your hair and wash your face. ¹⁸Then people will not know that you are giving up eating, but your Father, whom you cannot see, will see you. Your Father sees what is done in secret, and he will reward you.

God Is More Important than Money

¹⁹“Don’t store treasures for yourselves here on earth where moths and rust will destroy them and thieves can break in and steal them. ²⁰But store your treasures in heaven where they cannot be destroyed by moths or rust and where thieves cannot break in and steal them. ²¹Your heart will be where your treasure is.

²²“The eye is a light for the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³But if your eyes are evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. And if the only light you have is really darkness, then you have the worst darkness.

²⁴“No one can serve two masters. The person will hate one master and love the other, or will follow one master and refuse to follow the other. You cannot serve both God and worldly riches.

Don’t Worry

²⁵“So I tell you, don’t worry about the food or drink you need to live, or about the clothes you need for your body. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothes. ²⁶Look at the birds in the air. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, but your heavenly Father feeds them. And you know that you are worth much more than the birds. ²⁷You cannot add any time to your life by worrying about it.

²⁸“And why do you worry about clothes? Look at how the lilies in the field grow. They don’t work or make clothes for themselves. ²⁹But I tell you that even Solomon with his riches was not dressed as beautifully as one of these flowers. ³⁰God

clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today but tomorrow is thrown into the fire. So you can be even more sure that God will clothe you. Don't have so little faith! ³¹Don't worry and say, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ³²The people who don't know God keep trying to get these things, and your Father in heaven knows you need them. ³³The thing you should want most is God's kingdom and doing what God wants. Then all these other things you need will be given to you. ³⁴So don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will have its own worries. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Life Lessons

Matthew 7:1–29

Situation

Matthew recorded the ending of Jesus' sermon. Jesus called his hearers to put his teaching into practice.

Observation

Jesus said that the true way which leads to life is based on an internal transformation, not on external deeds.

Inspiration

You want to make a difference in your world? Live a holy life:

Be faithful to your spouse.

Be the one at the office who refuses to cheat.

Be the neighbor who acts neighborly.

Be the employee who does the work and doesn't complain.

Pay your bills.

Do your part and enjoy life.

Don't speak one message and live another.

Note the last line of Paul's words in [1 Thessalonians 4:11–12](#), "Do all you can to live a peaceful life. Take care of your own business, and do your own work as we have already told you. If you do, then people who are not believers will respect you."

A peaceful life leads nonbelievers to respect believers. What if John's life had not matched his

words? What if he'd preached repentance and lived in immorality? What if he'd called for holiness and yet had a reputation for dishonesty? If John's life had not matched his words, his message would have fallen on deaf ears.

So will ours.

People are watching the way we act more than they are listening to what we say.

Saint Francis of Assisi once invited a young monk to accompany him to town to preach. The novice was honored at the opportunity. The two set out for the city, then walked up and down the main street, then several side streets. They chatted with peddlers and greeted the citizens. After some time they returned by another route to the abbey.

The younger man reminded Francis of his original intent. "You have forgotten, Father, that we went to town to preach."

"My son," he replied, "we have preached. We have been seen by many. Our behavior was closely watched. Our attitudes were closely measured. Our words have been overheard. It was by thus that we preached our morning sermon."

John was a voice for Christ with more than his voice. His life matched his words. When a person's ways and words are the same, the fusion is explosive. But when a person says one thing and lives another, the result is destructive. People will know we are Christians, not because we bear the name, but because we live the life. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

What would others say about your life? What kind of fruit are you producing? Think of three specific steps you can take to live the life of a Christian.

Exploration

Producing Fruit—[Isaiah 3:10](#); [Matthew 3:8](#); [21:43](#); [John 15:1–17](#); [Colossians 1:10](#); [James 3:18](#).

Be Careful About Judging Others

“Don’t judge other people, or you will be judged. ²You will be judged in the same way that you judge others, and the amount you give to others will be given to you.

³“Why do you notice the little piece of dust in your friend’s eye, but you don’t notice the big piece of wood in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your friend, ‘Let me take that little piece of dust out of your eye’ ? Look at yourself! You still have that big piece of wood in your own eye. ⁵You hypocrite! First, take the wood out of your own eye. Then you will see clearly to take the dust out of your friend’s eye.

⁶“Don’t give holy things to dogs, and don’t throw your pearls before pigs. Pigs will only trample on them, and dogs will turn to attack you.

Christ Through the Bible

The Acceptance of Jesus

Labels. A fellow gave me one the other day. We got into a lively discussion about some ethical issues. Somewhere in our conversation he asked me what kind of work I was in. I told him I was minister, and he said, “Oh, I see,” and grew silent.

I wanted to say, “No, you don’t. Don’t you put me in that box. I’m not a minister. I am Max-who-

ministers. Don't you put me in that box with all those hucksters and hypocrites you may know. That's not fair."

Labels. So convenient. Stick them on a person, and you know what pantry to use.

What if God did that with us? What if God judged us by our outward appearance? What if he judged us based on where we grew up? Or what we do for a living? Or the mistakes we made when we were young? He wouldn't do that, would he?

"Don't judge other people, or you will be judged. You will be judged in the same way that you judge others, and the amount you give to others will be given to you" ([Matthew 7:1-2](#)).

Be careful when you judge. That doesn't mean we shouldn't discern. That does mean we shouldn't pass the verdict. The amount of grace you give is the amount you get.

Jesus had another view of the man born blind. Rather than see him as an opportunity for discussion, he saw him as an opportunity for God. Why was he blind? "So that God's power could be shown in him" ([John 9:3](#)).

What a perspective! The man wasn't a victim of fate; he was a miracle waiting to happen. Jesus didn't label him. He helped him. Jesus was more concerned about the future than the past.

Who do you best relate to in this story? Some of you relate to the man born blind. You have been the topic of conversation. You have been left on the outside looking in. You've been labeled.

If so, learn what this man learned: When everyone else rejects you, Christ accepts you. When everyone else leaves you, Christ finds you. When no one else wants you, Christ claims you. When no one else will give you the time of day, Jesus will give you the words of eternity.

Others of you will relate to the observers. You've judged. You've labeled. You've slammed the gavel and proclaimed the guilt before knowing the facts. If that is you, go back to [John 9:4](#) and understand what the work of God is: "While it is daytime, we must continue doing the work of the One who sent me."

What is the work of God? Accepting people. Loving before judging. Caring before condemning.

Look before you label. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

Ask God for What You Need

⁷“Ask, and God will give to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will open for you. ⁸Yes, everyone who asks will receive. Everyone who searches will find. And everyone who knocks will have the door opened.

⁹“If your children ask for bread, which of you would give them a stone? ¹⁰Or if your children ask for a fish, would you give them a snake? ¹¹Even though you are bad, you know how to give good gifts to your children. How much more your heavenly Father will give good things to those who ask him!

The Most Important Rule

¹²“Do to others what you want them to do to you. This is the meaning of the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets.

The Way to Heaven Is Hard

¹³“Enter through the narrow gate. The gate is wide and the road is wide that leads to hell, and many people enter through that gate. ¹⁴But the gate is small and the road is narrow that leads to true life. Only a few people find that road.

People Know You by Your Actions

¹⁵“Be careful of false prophets. They come to you looking gentle like sheep, but they are really dangerous like wolves. ¹⁶You will know these people by what they do. Grapes don’t come from thornbushes, and figs don’t come from thorny weeds. ¹⁷In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰In the same way, you will know these false prophets by what they do.

²¹“Not all those who say that I am their Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven. The only people who will enter the kingdom of heaven are those who do what my Father in heaven wants. ²²On the last day many people will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, we spoke for you, and through you we forced out demons and did many miracles.’ ²³Then I will tell them clearly, ‘Get away from me, you who do evil. I never knew you.’

Two Kinds of People

²⁴“Everyone who hears my words and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵It rained hard, the floods came, and the winds blew and hit that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on rock. ²⁶Everyone who hears my words and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷It rained hard, the floods came, and the winds blew and hit that house, and it fell with a big crash.”

²⁸When Jesus finished saying these things, the people were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹because he did not teach like their teachers of the law. He taught like a person who had authority.

Life Lessons

Matthew 8:1-34

Situation

Matthew recorded Jesus' miracles involving people who were sick and diseased.

Observation

Jesus' display of power over nature was one way that the Lord revealed himself to his disciples. It illustrates faith and peace.

Inspiration

If you lose your faith, you will probably do so gradually. In tiny increments you will get spiritually sloppy. You will let a few days slip by without consulting your compass. Your sails will go untrimmed. Your rigging will go unprepared. And worst of all, you will forget to anchor your boat. And, before you know it, you'll be bouncing from wave to wave in stormy seas....

Stability in the storm comes not from seeking a new message, but from understanding an old one. The most reliable anchor points are not recent discoveries, but are time-tested truths that have held their ground against the winds of change....

Attach your soul to these boulders and no wave is big enough to wash you under.

(From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

Application

How faithfully do you pray, read the Bible, attend church? Are prayer and Bible study regular parts of

your life, or do you just resort to them in emergency Situations? Ask God to help you become more faithful in anchoring your life in Jesus, even when there are no storms on the horizon.

Exploration

Spiritual Discipline—[1 Corinthians 9:25–27](#); [1 Timothy 4:7–8](#); [Hebrews 12:1–3](#).

Jesus Heals a Sick Man

When Jesus came down from the hill, great crowds followed him.² Then a man with a skin disease came to Jesus. The man bowed down before him and said, “Lord, you can heal me if you will.”

³Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man and said, “I will. Be healed!” And immediately the man was healed from his disease.⁴ Then Jesus said to him, “Don’t tell anyone about this. But go and [show yourself to the priest](#) and offer the gift [Moses commanded](#) for people who are made well. This will show the people what I have done.”

Jesus Heals a Soldier’s Servant

⁵When Jesus entered the city of Capernaum, an army officer came to him, begging for help.⁶ The officer said, “Lord, my servant is at home in bed. He can’t move his body and is in much pain.”

⁷Jesus said to the officer, “I will go and heal him.”

⁸The officer answered, “Lord, I am not worthy for you to come into my house. You only need to command it, and my servant will be healed.⁹ I, too, am a man under the authority of others, and I have soldiers under my command. I tell one soldier, ‘Go,’ and he goes. I tell another soldier, ‘Come,’ and he

comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and my servant does it.

¹⁰When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. He said to those who were following him, “I tell you the truth, this is the greatest faith I have found, even in Israel. ¹¹Many people will come from the east and from the west and will sit and eat with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹²But those people who should be in the kingdom will be thrown outside into the darkness, where people will cry and grind their teeth with pain.”

¹³Then Jesus said to the officer, “Go home. Your servant will be healed just as you believed he would.” And his servant was healed that same hour.

Jesus Heals Many People

¹⁴When Jesus went to Peter’s house, he saw that Peter’s mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever. ¹⁵Jesus touched her hand, and the fever left her. Then she stood up and began to serve Jesus.

¹⁶That evening people brought to Jesus many who had demons. Jesus spoke and the demons left them, and he healed all the sick. ¹⁷He did these things to bring about what Isaiah the prophet had said:

“He took our suffering on him
and carried our diseases.”

[Isaiah 53:4](#)

People Want to Follow Jesus

¹⁸When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he told his followers to go to the other side of the lake. ¹⁹Then a teacher of the law came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, I will follow you any place you go.”

²⁰Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes to live in, and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to rest his head.”

²¹Another man, one of Jesus’ followers, said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

²²But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the people who are dead bury their own dead.”

Jesus Calms a Storm

²³Jesus got into a boat, and his followers went with him. ²⁴A great storm arose on the lake so that waves covered the boat, but Jesus was sleeping. ²⁵His followers went to him and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We will drown!”

²⁶Jesus answered, “Why are you afraid? You don’t have enough faith.” Then Jesus got up and gave a command to the wind and the waves, and it became completely calm.

²⁷The men were amazed and said, “What kind of man is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

Jesus Heals Two Men with Demons

²⁸When Jesus arrived at the other side of the lake in the area of the [Gadarene](#) people, two men who had demons in them met him. These men lived in the burial caves and were so

dangerous that people could not use the road by those caves.
²⁹They shouted, “What do you want with us, Son of God? Did you come here to torture us before the right time?”

³⁰Near that place there was a large herd of pigs feeding.
³¹The demons begged Jesus, “If you make us leave these men, please send us into that herd of pigs.”

³²Jesus said to them, “Go!” So the demons left the men and went into the pigs. Then the whole herd rushed down the hill into the lake and were drowned. ³³The herdsmen ran away and went into town, where they told about all of this and what had happened to the men who had demons. ³⁴Then the whole town went out to see Jesus. When they saw him, they begged him to leave their area.

Life Lessons

Matthew 9:1-38

Situation

Although he was neither rude nor arrogant, Jesus aggravated the teachers of the Law when he exercised his privileges as Son of God. When he forgave sins, mingled with sinners, raised the dead, and healed the sick, the teachers thought his actions were either inappropriate or unexplainable.

Observation

The Kingdom of God had come. Jesus used his power over sickness and death to show his compassion for needy humanity. As a true friend, he meets the needs we bring him. He asks us to join his mission and reach out to those around us.

Inspiration

Tell me, why are these stories in the Bible? Why are the Gospels full of such people? Such hopeless people? Though their Situations vary, their conditions don't. They are trapped. Estranged. Rejected. They have nowhere to turn. On their lips, a desperate prayer. In their hearts, desolate dreams. And in their hands, a broken rope. But before their eyes a never-say-die Galilean who majors in stepping in when everyone else steps out.

Surprisingly simple, the actions of this man. Just words of mercy or touches of kindness. Fingers on sightless eyes. A hand on a weary shoulder. Words for sad hearts ... all fulfilling the prophecy: "A

bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out” ([Isaiah 42:3](#), NIV).

Again I ask. Why are these portraits in the Bible? ... Why did God leave us one tale after another of wounded lives being restored? So we could be grateful for the past? So we could look back with amazement at what Jesus did?

No. No. No. A thousand times no. The purpose of these stories is not to tell us what Jesus *did*. Their purpose is to tell us what Jesus *does*.

“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us,” Paul penned. “The Scriptures give us patience and encouragement so that we can have hope” ([Romans 15:4](#)).

These are not just Sunday school stories. Not romantic fables. Not somewhere-over-the-rainbow illusions. They are historic moments in which a real God met real pain so we could answer the question, “Where is God when I hurt?”

How does God react to dashed hopes? Read the story of Jairus. How does the Father feel about those who are ill? Stand with him at the pool of Bethesda. Do you long for God to speak to your lonely heart? Then listen as he speaks to the Emmaus-bound disciples. What is God’s word for the shameful? Watch as his finger draws in the dirt of the Jerusalem courtyard.

He’s not doing it just for them. He’s doing it for me. He’s doing it for you....

I know there used to be a stone in front of a tomb. And I do know it was moved. And I also know that

there are stones in your path. Stones that trip and stones that trap. Stones too big for you.

Please remember, the goal of these stories is not to help us look back with amazement, but forward with faith. The God who spoke still speaks. The God who forgave still forgives. The God who came still comes. He comes into our world. He comes into your world. He comes to do what you can't. He comes to move the stones you can't budge.

Stones are no match for God. Not then and not now. He still moves stones. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you see Jesus as a close friend or far away? Jesus desires to relate to us as a friend. Talk with him. Tell him all of your needs.

Exploration

God Cares—[Deuteronomy 7:9](#); [Nehemiah 1:5](#); [Psalms 67:4](#); [Habakkuk 3:17-19](#).

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

Jesus got into a boat and went back across the lake to his own town. ²Some people brought to Jesus a man who was paralyzed and lying on a mat. When Jesus saw the faith of these people, he said to the paralyzed man, “Be encouraged, young man. Your sins are forgiven.”

³Some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This man speaks as if he were God. That is blasphemy!”

⁴Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why are you thinking evil thoughts? ⁵Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to tell him, ‘Stand up and walk’? ⁶But I will prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” Then Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “Stand up, take your mat, and go home.” ⁷And the man stood up and went home. ⁸When the people saw this, they were amazed and praised God for giving power like this to human beings.

Jesus Chooses Matthew

⁹When Jesus was leaving, he saw a man named Matthew sitting in the tax collector’s booth. Jesus said to him, “Follow me,” and he stood up and followed Jesus.

¹⁰As Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and “sinners” came and ate with Jesus and his

followers.¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they asked Jesus' followers, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹²When Jesus heard them, he said, "It is not the healthy people who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³Go and learn what this means: 'I want kindness more than I want animal sacrifices.' I did not come to invite good people but to invite sinners."

Jesus' Followers Are Criticized

¹⁴Then the followers of John came to Jesus and said, "Why do we and the Pharisees often give up eating for a certain time, but your followers don't?"

¹⁵Jesus answered, "The friends of the bridegroom are not sad while he is with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will give up eating.

¹⁶"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth over a hole in an old coat. If he does, the patch will shrink and pull away from the coat, making the hole worse. ¹⁷Also, people never pour new wine into old leather bags. Otherwise, the bags will break, the wine will spill, and the wine bags will be ruined. But people always pour new wine into new wine bags. Then both will continue to be good."

Jesus Gives Life to a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman

¹⁸While Jesus was saying these things, a leader of the synagogue came to him. He bowed down before Jesus and

said, “My daughter has just died. But if you come and lay your hand on her, she will live again.” ¹⁹So Jesus and his followers stood up and went with the leader.

²⁰Then a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years came behind Jesus and touched the edge of his coat. ²¹She was thinking, “If I can just touch his clothes, I will be healed.”

²²Jesus turned and saw the woman and said, “Be encouraged, dear woman. You are made well because you believed.” And the woman was healed from that moment on.

²³Jesus continued along with the leader and went into his house. There he saw the funeral musicians and many people crying. ²⁴Jesus said, “Go away. The girl is not dead, only asleep.” But the people laughed at him. ²⁵After the crowd had been thrown out of the house, Jesus went into the girl’s room and took hold of her hand, and she stood up. ²⁶The news about this spread all around the area.

Jesus Heals More People

²⁷When Jesus was leaving there, two blind men followed him. They cried out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”

²⁸After Jesus went inside, the blind men went with him. He asked the men, “Do you believe that I can make you see again?”

They answered, “Yes, Lord.”

²⁹Then Jesus touched their eyes and said, “Because you believe I can make you see again, it will happen.” ³⁰Then the men were able to see. But Jesus warned them strongly, saying, “Don’t tell anyone about this.” ³¹But the blind men left and spread the news about Jesus all around that area.

³²When the two men were leaving, some people brought another man to Jesus. This man could not talk because he had a demon in him. ³³After Jesus forced the demon to leave the man, he was able to speak. The crowd was amazed and said, “We have never seen anything like this in Israel.”

³⁴But the Pharisees said, “The prince of demons is the one that gives him power to force demons out.”

³⁵Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News about the kingdom, and healing all kinds of diseases and sicknesses.

³⁶When he saw the crowds, he felt sorry for them because they were hurting and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

³⁷Jesus said to his followers, “There are many people to harvest but only a few workers to help harvest them.” ³⁸Pray to the Lord, who owns the harvest, that he will send more workers to gather his harvest.”

Life Lessons

Matthew 10:1–11:19

Situation

The Jews viewed suffering as God's punishment. The disciples could not understand Jesus' message that they would suffer for being obedient.

Observation

Although believers will be persecuted, they can trust that God has a plan for all difficult circumstances.

Inspiration

Could you use some courage? Are you backing down more than you are standing up? If so, let the Master lead you up the mountain again. Let him remind you why you should "fear not." Listen to the time Jesus scattered the butterflies out of the stomachs of his nervous disciples and see if his words help you.

We need to remember that the disciples were common men given a compelling task. Before they were the stained-glassed saints in the windows of cathedrals, they were somebody's next-door-neighbors trying to make a living and raise a family. They weren't cut from theological cloth or raised on supernatural milk. But they were an ounce more devoted than they were afraid and, as a result, did some extraordinary things....

Earthly fears are no fears at all. All the mystery is revealed. The final destination is guaranteed. Answer

the big question of eternity, and the little questions of life fall into perspective. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

Jesus promised hard times, but he also promised comfort. Are you experiencing opposition for being a Christian but neglecting to accept his comfort? Look forward to the day when you will no longer be persecuted but will be rewarded for persevering. Let the reality of that reward encourage you.

Exploration

Do Not Be Afraid—[Joshua 1:9](#); [2 Kings 6:15–17](#); [Psalms 37:7, 13, 28](#); [Isaiah 41:10](#); [43:1–2](#); [Luke 12:32](#); [Hebrews 13:6](#); [1 Peter 5:7](#).

Jesus Sends Out His Apostles

Jesus called his twelve followers together and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every kind of disease and sickness.² These are the names of the twelve apostles: Simon (also called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John;³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew, the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who turned against Jesus.

⁵Jesus sent out these twelve men with the following order: “Don’t go to the non-Jewish people or to any town where the Samaritans live. ⁶But go to the people of Israel, who are like lost sheep. ⁷When you go, preach this: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ ⁸Heal the sick, raise the dead to life again, heal those who have skin diseases, and force demons out of people. I give you these powers freely, so help other people freely. ⁹Don’t carry any money with you—gold or silver or copper. ¹⁰Don’t carry a bag or extra clothes or sandals or a walking stick. Workers should be given what they need.

¹¹“When you enter a city or town, find some worthy person there and stay in that home until you leave. ¹²When you enter that home, say, ‘Peace be with you.’ ¹³If the people there welcome you, let your peace stay there. But if they don’t welcome you, take back the peace you wished for them. ¹⁴And

if a home or town refuses to welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake its dust off your feet. ¹⁵I tell you the truth, on the Judgment Day it will be better for the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah than for the people of that town.

Jesus Warns His Apostles

¹⁶“Listen, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. So be as smart as snakes and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷Be careful of people, because they will arrest you and take you to court and whip you in their synagogues. ¹⁸Because of me you will be taken to stand before governors and kings, and you will tell them and the non-Jewish people about me. ¹⁹When you are arrested, don’t worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given the things to say. ²⁰It will not really be you speaking but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

²¹“Brothers will give their own brothers to be killed, and fathers will give their own children to be killed. Children will fight against their own parents and have them put to death. ²²All people will hate you because you follow me, but those people who keep their faith until the end will be saved. ²³When you are treated badly in one city, run to another city. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through all the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

²⁴“A student is not better than his teacher, and a servant is not better than his master. ²⁵A student should be satisfied to become like his teacher; a servant should be satisfied to become like his master. If the head of the family is called Beelzebul, then the other members of the family will be called

worse names!

Fear God, Not People

²⁶“So don’t be afraid of those people, because everything that is hidden will be shown. Everything that is secret will be made known. ²⁷I tell you these things in the dark, but I want you to tell them in the light. What you hear whispered in your ear you should shout from the housetops. ²⁸Don’t be afraid of people, who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. The only one you should fear is the one who can destroy the soul and the body in hell. ²⁹Two sparrows cost only a penny, but not even one of them can die without your Father’s knowing it. ³⁰God even knows how many hairs are on your head. ³¹So don’t be afraid. You are worth much more than many sparrows.

Tell People About Your Faith

³²“All those who stand before others and say they believe in me, I will say before my Father in heaven that they belong to me. ³³But all who stand before others and say they do not believe in me, I will say before my Father in heaven that they do not belong to me.

³⁴“Don’t think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵I have come so that

‘a son will be against his father,
a daughter will be against her mother,
a daughter-in-law will be against her mother-in-law.

³⁶A person’s enemies will be members of his own

family.’

[Micah 7:6](#)

³⁷“Those who love their father or mother more than they love me are not worthy to be my followers. Those who love their son or daughter more than they love me are not worthy to be my followers. ³⁸Whoever is not willing to carry the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Those who try to hold on to their lives will give up true life. Those who give up their lives for me will hold on to true life. ⁴⁰Whoever accepts you also accepts me, and whoever accepts me also accepts the One who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever meets a prophet and accepts him will receive the reward of a prophet. And whoever accepts a good person because that person is good will receive the reward of a good person. ⁴²Those who give one of these little ones a cup of cold water because they are my followers will truly get their reward.”

Jesus and John the Baptist

After Jesus finished telling these things to his twelve followers, he left there and went to the towns in Galilee to teach and preach.

²John the Baptist was in prison, but he heard about what Christ was doing. So John sent some of his followers to Jesus. ³They asked him, “Are you the One who is to come, or should we wait for someone else?”

⁴Jesus answered them, “Go tell John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind can see, the crippled can walk, and people with skin diseases are healed. The deaf can hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is preached to the poor. ⁶Those who do not stumble in their faith because of me are blessed.”

⁷As John’s followers were leaving, Jesus began talking to the people about John. Jesus said, “What did you go out into the desert to see? A [reed](#) blown by the wind? ⁸What did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes live in kings’ palaces. ⁹So why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, and I tell you, John is more than a prophet. ¹⁰This was written about him:

‘I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare the way for you.’

[Malachi 3:1](#)

¹¹I tell you the truth, John the Baptist is greater than any other person ever born, but even the least important person in

the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. ¹²Since the time John the Baptist came until now, the kingdom of heaven has been going forward in strength, and people have been trying to take it by force. ¹³All the prophets and the law of Moses told about what would happen until the time John came. ¹⁴And if you will believe what they said, you will believe that John is Elijah, whom they said would come. ¹⁵You people who can hear me, listen!

¹⁶“What can I say about the people of this time? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace, who call out to each other,

¹⁷“We played music for you, but you did not dance;
we sang a sad song, but you did not cry.”

¹⁸John came and did not eat or drink like other people. So people say, ‘He has a demon.’ ¹⁹The Son of Man came, eating and drinking, and people say, ‘Look at him! He eats too much and drinks too much wine, and he is a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved to be right by what it does.”

Life Lessons

Matthew 11:20–12:50

Situation

Fourteen hundred years before Jesus’ birth, Israel received God’s command to keep the Sabbath holy. In their zeal to obey this command, the Jewish leaders gradually developed many rules and traditions to avoid working on the Sabbath. Jesus overruled the

traditions and focused on God's purpose in establishing this command.

Observation

When God commanded the Israelites not to work on the Sabbath, Jesus knew that law was given to relieve the people. Jesus focused on the purpose of the Sabbath. Therefore, he knew it was not sin to take care of one's needs or to help others on the Sabbath.

Inspiration

The purpose of Sabbath rest is physical and emotional renewal, but it is also fellowship—a delightful space on the weekly calendar reserved for becoming better acquainted with ourselves, others, and God; it is a time for good talk, holy laughter, serious ideas, and shared intimacies between Creator and creature. Our souls are replenished, quieted, nurtured, caressed. Rest without spiritual rest is incomplete. One of the reasons for the frantic search for leisure activities in our culture (the rushing off to one weekend event or another, then breathlessly returning when Sunday is ended) is that we cannot find true renewal when we deny the spiritual. . . .

When we cease from our work and let Christ do his work within us, we realize that our work is not so important. We can stop and the world goes on. It is God's activity that is important, not ours. It is finally the death and resurrection of Christ that allowed fellowship with God to be a perpetual covenant. When we participate in his resurrected life by the memorial of Sunday, when we bring to that memorial day a Sabbath understanding, "We should," as

Jonathan Edwards says, “have sympathy with Christ in His joy. He was refreshed on this day; we should be refreshed as those whose hearts are united with His.” (From *Making Sunday Special* by Karen Burton Mains)

Application

How do you keep the Sabbath command? What makes Sunday a unique day for you? How can you avoid “business as usual” on Sunday?

Exploration

Sabbath—[Exodus 20:8–11](#); [35:1–3](#); [Deuteronomy 5:12–15](#); [Isaiah 58:13–14](#); [Luke 6:1–10](#); [13:10–17](#); [John 7:22–24](#); [9:13–16](#); [Colossians 2:16–17](#).

Jesus Warns Unbelievers

²⁰Then Jesus criticized the cities where he did most of his miracles, because the people did not change their lives and stop sinning. ²¹He said, “How terrible for you, [Korazin](#)! How terrible for you, [Bethsaida](#)! If the same miracles I did in you had happened in [Tyre and Sidon](#), those people would have changed their lives a long time ago. They would have worn rough cloth and put ashes on themselves to show they had changed. ²²But I tell you, on the Judgment Day it will be better for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ²³And you, [Capernaum](#), will you be lifted up to heaven? No, you will be thrown down to the depths. If the miracles I did in you had happened in [Sodom](#), its people would have stopped sinning, and it would still be a city today. ²⁴But I tell you, on the Judgment Day it will be better for Sodom than for you.”

Jesus Offers Rest to People

²⁵At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the people who are wise and smart. But you have shown them to those who are like little children. ²⁶Yes, Father, this is what you really wanted.

²⁷“My Father has given me all things. No one knows the Son, except the Father. And no one knows the Father, except the Son and those whom the Son chooses to tell.

²⁸“Come to me, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Accept my teachings and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest for your lives. ³⁰The teaching that I ask you to accept is easy; the load I give you to carry is light.”

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

At that time Jesus was walking through some fields of grain on a Sabbath day. His followers were hungry, so they began to pick the grain and eat it. ²When the Pharisees saw this, they said to Jesus, “Look! Your followers are doing what is unlawful to do on the Sabbath day.”

³Jesus answered, “Have you not read what David did when he and the people with him were hungry? ⁴He went into God’s house, and he and those with him ate the holy bread, which was lawful only for priests to eat. ⁵And have you not read in the law of Moses that on every Sabbath day the priests in the Temple break this law about the Sabbath day? But the priests are not wrong for doing that. ⁶I tell you that there is something here that is greater than the Temple. ⁷The Scripture says, [‘I want kindness more than I want animal sacrifices.’](#) You don’t really know what those words mean. If you understood them, you would not judge those who have done nothing wrong.

⁸“So the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath day.”

Jesus Heals a Man’s Hand

⁹Jesus left there and went into their synagogue, ¹⁰where there was a man with a crippled hand. They were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they asked him, [“Is it right to heal on the Sabbath day?”](#)

¹¹Jesus answered, “If any of you has a sheep, and it falls into a ditch on the Sabbath day, you will help it out of the

ditch. ¹²Surely a human being is more important than a sheep. So it is lawful to do good things on the Sabbath day.”

¹³Then Jesus said to the man with the crippled hand, “Hold out your hand.” The man held out his hand, and it became well again, like the other hand. ¹⁴But the Pharisees left and made plans to kill Jesus.

Jesus Is God’s Chosen Servant

¹⁵Jesus knew what the Pharisees were doing, so he left that place. Many people followed him, and he healed all who were sick. ¹⁶But Jesus warned the people not to tell who he was. ¹⁷He did these things to bring about what Isaiah the prophet had said:

¹⁸“Here is my servant whom I have chosen.
I love him, and I am pleased with him.
I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he will tell of my justice to all people.

¹⁹He will not argue or cry out;
no one will hear his voice in the streets.

²⁰He will not break a crushed blade of grass
or put out even a weak flame
until he makes justice win the victory.

²¹In him will the non-Jewish people find hope.”

[Isaiah 42:1–4](#)

Jesus’ Power Is from God

²²Then some people brought to Jesus a man who was blind and could not talk, because he had a demon. Jesus healed the man so that he could talk and see. ²³All the people were amazed and said, "Perhaps this man is the Son of David!"

²⁴When the Pharisees heard this, they said, "Jesus uses the power of Beelzebul, the ruler of demons, to force demons out of people."

²⁵Jesus knew what the Pharisees were thinking, so he said to them, "Every kingdom that is divided against itself will be destroyed. And any city or family that is divided against itself will not continue. ²⁶And if Satan forces out himself, then Satan is divided against himself, and his kingdom will not continue. ²⁷You say that I use the power of Beelzebul to force out demons. If that is true, then what power do your people use to force out demons? So they will be your judges. ²⁸But if I use the power of God's Spirit to force out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

²⁹"If anyone wants to enter a strong person's house and steal his things, he must first tie up the strong person. Then he can steal the things from the house.

³⁰"Whoever is not with me is against me. Whoever does not work with me is working against me. ³¹So I tell you, people can be forgiven for every sin and everything they say against God. But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. ³²Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man can be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, now or in the future.

People Know You by Your Words

³³“If you want good fruit, you must make the tree good. If your tree is not good, it will have bad fruit. A tree is known by the kind of fruit it produces.”³⁴You snakes! You are evil people, so how can you say anything good? The mouth speaks the things that are in the heart.³⁵Good people have good things in their hearts, and so they say good things. But evil people have evil in their hearts, so they say evil things.³⁶And I tell you that on the Judgment Day people will be responsible for every careless thing they have said.³⁷The words you have said will be used to judge you. Some of your words will prove you right, but some of your words will prove you guilty.”

The People Ask for a Miracle

³⁸Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law answered Jesus, saying, “Teacher, we want to see you work a miracle as a sign.”

³⁹Jesus answered, “Evil and sinful people are the ones who want to see a miracle for a sign. But no sign will be given to them, except the sign of the prophet Jonah.”⁴⁰Jonah was in the stomach of the big fish for three days and three nights. In the same way, the Son of Man will be in the grave three days and three nights.⁴¹On the Judgment Day the people from [Nineveh](#) will stand up with you people who live now, and they will show that you are guilty. When Jonah preached to them, they were sorry and changed their lives. And I tell you that someone greater than Jonah is here.⁴²On the Judgment Day, the [Queen of the South](#) will stand up with you people who live today. She will show that you are guilty, because she came from far away to listen to Solomon’s wise teaching. And I tell you that

someone greater than Solomon is here.

People Today Are Full of Evil

⁴³“When an evil spirit comes out of a person, it travels through dry places, looking for a place to rest, but it doesn’t find it. ⁴⁴So the spirit says, ‘I will go back to the house I left.’ When the spirit comes back, it finds the house still empty, swept clean, and made neat. ⁴⁵Then the evil spirit goes out and brings seven other spirits even more evil than it is, and they go in and live there. So the person has even more trouble than before. It is the same way with the evil people who live today.”

Jesus’ True Family

⁴⁶While Jesus was talking to the people, his mother and brothers stood outside, trying to find a way to talk to him. ⁴⁷Someone told Jesus, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, and they want to talk to you.”

⁴⁸He answered, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹Then he pointed to his followers and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰My true brother and sister and mother are those who do what my Father in heaven wants.”

Life Lessons

Matthew 13:1–58

Situation

The Jewish people eagerly looked forward to the kingdom of heaven but also had some mistaken ideas about it. Jesus' teaching told about this kingdom.

Observation

Jesus taught about the kingdom of heaven through parables in order to clear up wrong ideas. Many explanations in the Gospels show that the kingdom of heaven (or kingdom of God) means we must recognize God's authority and work to do his will.

Inspiration

The natural inclination in Christian living is to act on the impulse of a good idea. Not every good idea is from God. Sometimes good ideas get in the way of God ideas.

Where does your Inspiration come from? The vision of the transfigured Christ inspired Peter: "O Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah" ([Matthew 17:4](#)). Our natural impulse is to do something good for God and suggest it to Him.

The tendency of the well-meaning person is to prepare a plan to do some good idea, and then pray, "Jesus, this is my plan. It is a good plan. It hurts no one, and I want it to please You. Lord, please bless

my plan.” It is plan, then pray.

So many of our ideas are impetuous. They are not what the Lord wants to do. They do not resemble in any way the things which concern Him. We have good ideas, but they are not God ideas. His agenda and our agenda conflict. We want to build Him a shelter, but that is not what He wants....

When Peter, James, and John heard the voice of the Lord ... they abandoned their inventive-but-self-made idea. The presence of the Lord magnified, and His holiness brought them to their senses. Jesus gained their attention, not by subduing them with a stern scolding, but by magnifying His presence until all the genius of their human ideas was bleached out by His refulgent face.

When they abandoned their good idea and fell facedown before the Lord, He could work with them again....

When you and I abandon our good idea and fall to our face before the Lord, then He will come and touch us, too. When we pursue our own plan, He cannot use us. We must abandon our good idea and fall facedown before Him. Then He will be able to use us again. Then He will reveal what He is doing—a God idea... . It is pray, then plan. Through prayer, Jesus instructs of His plan, a God idea.

Prayer removes the impulse of the good idea, the good idea born of human ingenuity but not of God. Pray, then plan. It is the habit of the surrendered saint. (From *Walking with Christ in the Details of Life* by Patrick M. Morley)

Application

In what ways are you supporting God's kingdom? Are you looking for God's plan and following it? Or are you following your own plan and asking God to bless it? Allow God to adjust your dreams to match his plans.

Exploration

Kingdom of Heaven—[Isaiah 24:23](#); [Daniel 2:44](#); [Matthew 3:2](#); [6:9–10](#), [33](#); [Mark 10:14–15](#), [23–25](#); [Luke 9:61–62](#); [12:31](#); [17:20–21](#); [John 3:3](#); [18:36](#).

A Story About Planting Seed

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ²Large crowds gathered around him, so he got into a boat and sat down, while the people stood on the shore. ³Then Jesus used stories to teach them many things. He said: “A farmer went out to plant his seed. ⁴While he was planting, some seed fell by the road, and the birds came and ate it all up. ⁵Some seed fell on rocky ground, where there wasn’t much dirt. That seed grew very fast, because the ground was not deep. ⁶But when the sun rose, the plants dried up, because they did not have deep roots. ⁷Some other seed fell among thorny weeds, which grew and choked the good plants. ⁸Some other seed fell on good ground where it grew and produced a crop. Some plants made a hundred times more, some made sixty times more, and some made thirty times more. ⁹You people who can hear me, listen.”

Why Jesus Used Stories to Teach

¹⁰The followers came to Jesus and asked, “Why do you use stories to teach the people?”

¹¹Jesus answered, “You have been chosen to know the secrets about the kingdom of heaven, but others cannot know these secrets. ¹²Those who have understanding will be given

more, and they will have all they need. But those who do not have understanding, even what they have will be taken away from them.¹³ This is why I use stories to teach the people: They see, but they don't really see. They hear, but they don't really hear or understand.¹⁴ So they show that the things Isaiah said about them are true:

‘You will listen and listen, but you will not understand.
You will look and look, but you will not learn.

¹⁵For the minds of these people have become stubborn.

They do not hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise they might really understand
what they see with their eyes
and hear with their ears.

They might really understand in their minds
and come back to me and be healed.’

[Isaiah 6:9–10](#)

¹⁶But you are blessed, because you see with your eyes and hear with your ears.¹⁷ I tell you the truth, many prophets and good people wanted to see the things that you now see, but they did not see them. And they wanted to hear the things that you now hear, but they did not hear them.

Jesus Explains the Seed Story

¹⁸“So listen to the meaning of that story about the farmer.

¹⁹What is the seed that fell by the road? That seed is like the

person who hears the message about the kingdom but does not understand it. The Evil One comes and takes away what was planted in that person's heart. ²⁰And what is the seed that fell on rocky ground? That seed is like the person who hears the teaching and quickly accepts it with joy. ²¹But he does not let the teaching go deep into his life, so he keeps it only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the teaching he accepted, he quickly gives up. ²²And what is the seed that fell among the thorny weeds? That seed is like the person who hears the teaching but lets worries about this life and the temptation of wealth stop that teaching from growing. So the teaching does not produce fruit in that person's life. ²³But what is the seed that fell on the good ground? That seed is like the person who hears the teaching and understands it. That person grows and produces fruit, sometimes a hundred times more, sometimes sixty times more, and sometimes thirty times more."

God loves you. Personally. Powerfully. Passionately. Others have promised and failed. —Max Lucado (*A Love Worth Giving*)

NewLife in Christ

"You have been chosen to know the secrets about the kingdom of heaven."—[Matthew 13:11](#)

God Speaks Our Language

God speaks all languages—including yours. Has he not said, "I will ... show you where to go" ([Psalm 32:8](#))? Are we not urged to "accept teaching from his mouth" ([Job 22:22](#))? What language is God speaking to you?

And aren't you glad he is speaking? Aren't you grateful that he cares enough to talk? Isn't it good to know that "the Lord tells his secrets to those who respect him" ([Psalm 25:14](#))?

My Uncle Carl was grateful that someone spoke to him. A childhood case of the measles left him unable to hear or speak. Nearly all of his sixty-plus years were lived in stony silence. Few people spoke his language.

My father was one of them. Being the older brother, maybe he felt protective. After their father died, perhaps he felt he should take over. Whatever the reason, my dad learned sign language. Dad wasn't an avid student. He never finished high school. Never went to college. Never saw the need to learn Spanish or French. But he did take the time to learn the language of his brother.

Let Dad enter the room, and Carl's face would brighten. The two would find a corner, and the hands would fly, and they would have a great time. And though I never heard Carl say thanks (he couldn't), his huge smile left no doubt that he was grateful. My dad had learned his language.

Your father has learned to speak your language as well. "You have been chosen to know the secrets about the kingdom of heaven" ([Matthew 13:11](#)). Think a word of thanks to him would be appropriate? And while you're at it, ask him if you might be missing any signs he is sending your way.

It's one thing to miss a message from your wife about cleaning up a room. It's something else entirely

to miss one from God about the destiny of your life.
(From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Question: What can you do this week to thank
God for speaking your language?

For more on [“New Life in Christ.”](#)

A Story About Wheat and Weeds

²⁴Then Jesus told them another story: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who planted good seed in his field. ²⁵That night, when everyone was asleep, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat and then left. ²⁶Later, the wheat sprouted and the heads of grain grew, but the weeds also grew. ²⁷Then the man’s servants came to him and said, ‘You planted good seed in your field. Where did the weeds come from?’ ²⁸The man answered, ‘An enemy planted weeds.’ The servants asked, ‘Do you want us to pull up the weeds?’ ²⁹The man answered, ‘No, because when you pull up the weeds, you might also pull up the wheat. ³⁰Let the weeds and the wheat grow together until the harvest time. At harvest time I will tell the workers, “First gather the weeds and tie them together to be burned. Then gather the wheat and bring it to my barn.” ’”

Stories of Mustard Seed and Yeast

³¹Then Jesus told another story: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man planted in his field. ³²That seed is the smallest of all seeds, but when it grows, it is one of the largest garden plants. It becomes big enough for the wild birds to come and build nests in its branches.”

³³Then Jesus told another story: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and hid in a large tub of flour until it made all the dough rise.”

³⁴Jesus used stories to tell all these things to the people; he always used stories to teach them. ³⁵This is as the prophet said:

“I will speak using stories;
I will tell things that have been secret since the world was made.”

[Psalm 78:2](#)

Jesus Explains About the Weeds

³⁶Then Jesus left the crowd and went into the house. His followers came to him and said, “Explain to us the meaning of the story about the weeds in the field.”

³⁷Jesus answered, “The man who planted the good seed in the field is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world, and the good seed are all of God’s children who belong to the kingdom. The weeds are those people who belong to the Evil One. ³⁹And the enemy who planted the bad seed is the devil. The harvest time is the end of the world, and the workers who gather are God’s angels.

⁴⁰“Just as the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all who cause sin and all who do evil. ⁴²The angels will throw them into the blazing furnace, where the people will cry and grind their teeth with pain. ⁴³Then the good people will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. You people who can hear me, listen.

Stories of a Treasure and a Pearl

⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. One day a man found the treasure, and then he hid it in the field again. He was so happy that he went and sold everything he owned to buy that field.

⁴⁵“Also, the kingdom of heaven is like a man looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found a very valuable pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it.

A Story of a Fishing Net

⁴⁷“Also, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was put into the lake and caught many different kinds of fish. ⁴⁸When it was full, the fishermen pulled the net to the shore. They sat down and put all the good fish in baskets and threw away the bad fish. ⁴⁹It will be this way at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the evil people from the good people. ⁵⁰The angels will throw the evil people into the blazing furnace, where people will cry and grind their teeth with pain.”

⁵¹Jesus asked his followers, “Do you understand all these things?”

They answered, “Yes, we understand.”

⁵²Then Jesus said to them, “So every teacher of the law who has been taught about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house. He brings out both new things and old things he has saved.”

Jesus Goes to His Hometown

⁵³When Jesus finished teaching with these stories, he left there. ⁵⁴He went to his hometown and taught the people in the synagogue, and they were amazed. They said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and this power to do miracles? ⁵⁵He is just the son of a carpenter. His mother is Mary, and his brothers are James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. ⁵⁶And all his sisters are here with us. Where then does this man get all these things?” ⁵⁷So the people were upset with Jesus.

But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is honored everywhere except in his hometown and in his own home.”

⁵⁸So he did not do many miracles there because they had no faith.

Life Lessons

Matthew 14:1–36

Situation

Jesus demonstrated his power over the laws of nature when he fed the five thousand and walked on the water.

Observation

John's unfair execution disturbed Jesus deeply, but he could not escape either the crowds of people or his disciples. Yet, Jesus showed compassion on the people and met their needs.

Inspiration

"Come on" is the invitation.

And Peter doesn't have to be told twice. It's not every day that you walk on water through waves that are taller than you are....

The first few steps go well. But a few strides out onto the water, and he forgets to look to the One who got him there in the first place, and down he plunges....

Peter knows better than to bite the hand that can save him. His response may lack class—it probably wouldn't get him on the cover of *Gentleman's Quarterly* or even *Sports Illustrated*—but it gets him out of some deep water:

"Help me!"

And since Peter would rather swallow pride than water, a hand comes through the rain and pulls him up.

The message is clear.

As long as Jesus is one of many options, he is no option. As long as you can carry your burdens alone, you don't need a burden bearer. As long as your Situation brings you no grief, you will receive no comfort. And as long as you can take him or leave him, you might as well leave him, because he won't be taken halfheartedly. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

Imitate Christ's compassion by putting the needs of others ahead of your own. Be willing to stay up late with a disappointed friend rather than getting your sleep. Let your schedule be interrupted to comfort or listen to somebody else.

Exploration

Jesus' Compassion—[Matthew 20:30–34](#); [23:37](#); [Mark 1:40–42](#); [8:1–3](#); [Luke 7:12–15](#); [John 11:33–36](#).

How John the Baptist Was Killed

At that time Herod, the ruler of Galilee, heard the reports about Jesus.² So he said to his servants, “Jesus is John the Baptist, who has risen from the dead. That is why he can work these miracles.”

³Sometime before this, Herod had arrested John, tied him up, and put him into prison. Herod did this because of Herodias, who had been the wife of Philip, Herod’s brother. ⁴John had been telling Herod, “It is not lawful for you to be married to Herodias.” ⁵Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they believed John was a prophet.

⁶On Herod’s birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced for Herod and his guests, and she pleased him. ⁷So he promised with an oath to give her anything she wanted. ⁸Herodias told her daughter what to ask for, so she said to Herod, “Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.” ⁹Although King Herod was very sad, he had made a promise, and his dinner guests had heard him. So Herod ordered that what she asked for be done. ¹⁰He sent soldiers to the prison to cut off John’s head. ¹¹And they brought it on a platter and gave it to the girl, and she took it to her mother. ¹²John’s followers came and got his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

More than Five Thousand Fed

¹³When Jesus heard what had happened to John, he left in a boat and went to a lonely place by himself. But the crowds heard about it and followed him on foot from the towns.

¹⁴When he arrived, he saw a great crowd waiting. He felt sorry for them and healed those who were sick.

¹⁵When it was evening, his followers came to him and said, “No one lives in this place, and it is already late. Send the people away so they can go to the towns and buy food for themselves.”

¹⁶But Jesus answered, “They don’t need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

¹⁷They said to him, “But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish.”

¹⁸Jesus said, “Bring the bread and the fish to me.” ¹⁹Then he told the people to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fish and, looking to heaven, he thanked God for the food. Jesus divided the bread and gave it to his followers, who gave it to the people. ²⁰All the people ate and were satisfied. Then the followers filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of food. ²¹There were about five thousand men there who ate, not counting women and children.

Jesus Walks on the Water

²²Immediately Jesus told his followers to get into the boat and go ahead of him across the lake. He stayed there to send the people home. ²³After he had sent them away, he went by himself up into the hills to pray. It was late, and Jesus was

there alone. ²⁴By this time, the boat was already far away from land. It was being hit by waves, because the wind was blowing against it.

²⁵Between three and six o'clock in the morning, Jesus came to them, walking on the water. ²⁶When his followers saw him walking on the water, they were afraid. They said, "It's a ghost!" and cried out in fear.

²⁷But Jesus quickly spoke to them, "Have courage! It is I. Do not be afraid."

²⁸Peter said, "Lord, if it is really you, then command me to come to you on the water."

²⁹Jesus said, "Come."

And Peter left the boat and walked on the water to Jesus.

³⁰But when Peter saw the wind and the waves, he became afraid and began to sink. He shouted, "Lord, save me!"

³¹Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught Peter. Jesus said, "Your faith is small. Why did you doubt?"

³²After they got into the boat, the wind became calm.

³³Then those who were in the boat worshiped Jesus and said, "Truly you are the Son of God!"

³⁴When they had crossed the lake, they came to shore at Gennesaret. ³⁵When the people there recognized Jesus, they told people all around there that Jesus had come, and they brought all their sick to him. ³⁶They begged Jesus to let them touch just the edge of his coat, and all who touched it were healed.

Life Lessons

Matthew 15:1-39

Situation

Although Pharisees were experts in God's Law, they lacked proper understanding of the purpose of the Law. Most importantly, they lacked faith in God.

Observation

The Pharisees had faith in the religious system. Jesus pointed to God who was beyond the system.

Inspiration

The disciples are annoyed. As Jesus sits in silence, they grow more smug. "Send her away," they demand. The spotlight is put on Jesus. He looks at the disciples, then looks at the woman. And what follows is one of the most intriguing dialogues in the New Testament.

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel," he says.

"Lord, help me!"

"It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs," he answers.

"But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' tables," she responds.

Is Jesus being rude? Is he worn-out? Is he frustrated? Is he calling this woman a dog? How do we explain this dialogue? ...

Could it be that Jesus' tongue is poking his cheek? Could it be that he and the woman are engaging in satirical banter? Is it wry exchange in

which God's unlimited grace is being highlighted? Could Jesus be so delighted to have found one who is not bartering with a religious system or proud of a heritage that he can't resist a bit of satire?

He knows he can heal her daughter. He knows he isn't bound by a plan. He knows her heart is good. So he decides to engage in a humorous moment with a faithful woman. In essence, here's what they said:

"Now, you know that God only cares about Jews," he says smiling.

And when she catches on, she volleys back, "But your bread is so precious, I'll be happy to eat the crumbs."

In a spirit of exuberance, he bursts out, "Never have I seen such faith! Your daughter is healed."

This story does not portray a contemptuous God. It portrays a willing One who delights in a sincere seeker.

Aren't you glad he does?

(From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

When you obey certain rules today, think through *why* you obey. "I don't speed because..." "I don't falsify expense reports because..." "I honor my parents because..."

Exploration

The Spirit and Letter of the Law—[1 Samuel 15:22](#); [Psalms 51:17](#); [Isaiah 1:13–17](#); [29:13](#); [Hosea 6:6](#); [Matthew 23:23](#); [Mark 12:29–31](#); [Acts 15:5–11](#); [2 Corinthians 3:6](#); [Galatians 2:16](#); [3:2–5](#); [6:2](#).

Obey God's Law

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem. They asked him, ²“Why don't your followers obey the unwritten laws which have been handed down to us? They don't wash their hands before they eat.”

³Jesus answered, “And why do you refuse to obey God's command so that you can follow your own teachings? ⁴God said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and ‘Anyone who says cruel things to his father or mother must be put to death.’

⁵But you say a person can tell his father or mother, ‘I have something I could use to help you, but I have given it to God already.’ ⁶You teach that person not to honor his father or his mother. You rejected what God said for the sake of your own rules. ⁷You are hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he said about you:

⁸“These people show honor to me with words,
but their hearts are far from me.

⁹Their worship of me is worthless.

The things they teach are nothing but human rules.”

[Isaiah 29:13](#)

¹⁰After Jesus called the crowd to him, he said, “Listen and understand what I am saying. ¹¹It is not what people put into their mouths that makes them unclean. It is what comes out of

their mouths that makes them unclean.”

¹²Then his followers came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees are angry because of what you said?”

¹³Jesus answered, “Every plant that my Father in heaven has not planted himself will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴Stay away from the Pharisees; they are blind leaders. And if a blind person leads a blind person, both will fall into a ditch.”

¹⁵Peter said, “Explain the example to us.”

¹⁶Jesus said, “Do you still not understand? ¹⁷Surely you know that all the food that enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then goes out of the body. ¹⁸But what people say with their mouths comes from the way they think; these are the things that make people unclean. ¹⁹Out of the mind come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual sins, stealing, lying, and speaking evil of others. ²⁰These things make people unclean; eating with unwashed hands does not make them unclean.”

Jesus Helps a Non-Jewish Woman

²¹Jesus left that place and went to the area of Tyre and Sidon.

²²A Canaanite woman from that area came to Jesus and cried out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter has a demon, and she is suffering very much.”

²³But Jesus did not answer the woman. So his followers came to Jesus and begged him, “Tell the woman to go away. She is following us and shouting.”

²⁴Jesus answered, “God sent me only to the lost sheep, the people of Israel.”

²⁵Then the woman came to Jesus again and bowed before him and said, “Lord, help me!”

²⁶Jesus answered, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and give it to the dogs.”

²⁷The woman said, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

²⁸Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! I will do what you asked.” And at that moment the woman’s daughter was healed.

Jesus Heals Many People

²⁹After leaving there, Jesus went along the shore of Lake Galilee. He went up on a hill and sat there.

³⁰Great crowds came to Jesus, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, those who could not speak, and many others. They put them at Jesus’ feet, and he healed them. ³¹The crowd was amazed when they saw that people who could not speak before were now able to speak. The crippled were made strong. The lame could walk, and the blind could see. And they praised the God of Israel for this.

More than Four Thousand Fed

³²Jesus called his followers to him and said, “I feel sorry for these people, because they have already been with me three days, and they have nothing to eat. I don’t want to send them away hungry. They might faint while going home.”

³³His followers asked him, “How can we get enough bread to feed all these people? We are far away from any town.”

³⁴Jesus asked, “How many loaves of bread do you have?” They answered, “Seven, and a few small fish.”

³⁵Jesus told the people to sit on the ground. ³⁶He took the seven loaves of bread and the fish and gave thanks to God. Then he divided the food and gave it to his followers, and they gave it to the people. ³⁷All the people ate and were satisfied. Then his followers filled seven baskets with the leftover pieces of food. ³⁸There were about four thousand men there who ate, besides women and children. ³⁹After sending the people home, Jesus got into the boat and went to the area of Magadan.

Life Lessons

[Matthew 16:1–28](#)

Situation

The Pharisees and the Sadducees were two prestigious groups of Jewish teachers who jockeyed for influence and power. Leaders in both groups failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

Observation

Jesus did not seek to have earthly power like the Pharisees and Sadducees. He sought to build a kingdom that would last into eternity.

Inspiration

The pole of power is greasy.

The Roman emperor Charlemagne knew that. An interesting story surrounds the burial of this famous king. Legend has it that he asked to be entombed sitting upright in his throne. He asked that his crown be placed on his head and his scepter in his hand. He requested that the royal cape be draped around his shoulders and an open book be placed in his lap.

That was A.D. 814. Nearly two hundred years later, Emperor Othello determined to see if the burial request had been carried out. He allegedly sent a team of men to open the tomb and make a report. They found the body just as Charlemagne had requested. Only now, nearly two centuries later, the scene was gruesome.... But open on the skeletal thighs was the book Charlemagne had requested—the Bible. One bony finger pointed to [Matthew 16:26](#): “What good

will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”

You can answer that one. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

It is easy for us to be wary of false teachers who don't know Christ at all—such as people from other world religions. But we must also guard against those teachers who claim to follow Christ, yet misinterpret his Word.

Exploration

False Teaching—[Jeremiah 50:6](#); [Matthew 7:15–20](#); [Romans 16:17–18](#); [2 Corinthians 11:13–15](#); [1 Timothy 1:6–7](#); [4:1–2](#); [2 Timothy 4:3–4](#); [2 Peter 2:1–3](#).

The ratio between those who missed him and those who sought him[baby Jesus] is thousands to one. But the ratio between those who sought him and those who found him was one to one. —Max Lucado (*Just Like Jesus*)

The Leaders Ask for a Miracle

The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus, wanting to trick him. So they asked him to show them a miracle from God.

²Jesus answered, “At sunset you say we will have good weather, because the sky is red. ³And in the morning you say that it will be a rainy day, because the sky is dark and red. You see these signs in the sky and know what they mean. In the same way, you see the things that I am doing now, but you don’t know their meaning. ⁴Evil and sinful people ask for a miracle as a sign, but they will not be given any sign, except the [sign of Jonah](#).” Then Jesus left them and went away.

Guard Against Wrong Teachings

⁵Jesus’ followers went across the lake, but they had forgotten to bring bread. ⁶Jesus said to them, “Be careful! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.”

⁷His followers discussed the meaning of this, saying, “He said this because we forgot to bring bread.”

⁸Knowing what they were talking about, Jesus asked them,

“Why are you talking about not having bread? Your faith is small.⁹ Do you still not understand? Remember the five loaves of bread that fed the five thousand? And remember that you filled many baskets with the leftovers?¹⁰ Or the seven loaves of bread that fed the four thousand and the many baskets you filled then also?¹¹ I was not talking to you about bread. Why don’t you understand that? I am telling you to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.”¹² Then the followers understood that Jesus was not telling them to beware of the yeast used in bread but to beware of the teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Peter Says Jesus Is the Christ

¹³When Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his followers, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴They answered, “Some say you are John the Baptist. Others say you are Elijah, and still others say you are Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵Then Jesus asked them, “And who do you say I am?”

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷Jesus answered, “You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because no person taught you that. My Father in heaven showed you who I am.¹⁸ So I tell you, you are [Peter](#). On this rock I will build my church, and the power of death will not be able to defeat it.¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; the things you don’t allow on earth will be the things that God does not allow, and the things you allow on earth will be the things that God allows.”²⁰ Then Jesus warned his

followers not to tell anyone he was the Christ.

Jesus Says that He Must Die

²¹From that time on Jesus began telling his followers that he must go to Jerusalem, where the older Jewish leaders, the leading priests, and the teachers of the law would make him suffer many things. He told them he must be killed and then be raised from the dead on the third day.

²²Peter took Jesus aside and told him not to talk like that. He said, “God save you from those things, Lord! Those things will never happen to you!”

²³Then Jesus said to Peter, “Go away from me, [Satan](#)! You are not helping me! You don’t care about the things of God, but only about the things people think are important.”

²⁴Then Jesus said to his followers, “If people want to follow me, they must give up the things they want. They must be willing even to give up their lives to follow me. ²⁵Those who want to save their lives will give up true life, and those who give up their lives for me will have true life. ²⁶It is worth nothing for them to have the whole world if they lose their souls. They could never pay enough to buy back their souls. ²⁷The Son of Man will come again with his Father’s glory and with his angels. At that time, he will reward them for what they have done. ²⁸I tell you the truth, some people standing here will see the Son of Man coming with his kingdom before they die.”

Christ Through the Bible Jesus: The Foundation of the Church

Could someone build a temple and forget why?
Could someone construct a palace, yet forget the king?
Could someone sculpt a tribute and forget the hero?

You answer those questions. Answer them in a church. The next time you enter an assembly of worship, position yourself where you can see the people. Then decide.

You can tell the ones who remember the slain one. They're wide-eyed and expectant. They're children watching the unwrapping of a gift. They're servants standing still as a king passes. You don't doze in the presence of royalty. And you don't yawn while receiving a gift, especially when the giver is the king himself!

You can also tell the ones who see only the temple. Their eyes wander. Their feet shuffle. Their hands doodle, and their mouths open—not to sing, but to yawn. For no matter how hard they try to stay amazed, their eyes start to glaze over. All temples, even the Taj Mahal, lose their luster after a while.

The temple gazers don't mean to be bored. They love the church. They can cite its programs and praise its pastors. They don't mean to grow stale. They put on hats and hose and coats and ties and come every week. But still, something is missing. The one they once planned to honor hasn't been seen in a while.

But those who have seen him can't seem to forget him. They find him, often in spite of the temple rather than because of it. They brush the dust away and

stand ever impressed before his tomb—his empty tomb.

The temple builders and the Savior seekers. You'll find them both in the same church, on the same pew—at times, even in the same suit. One sees the structure and says, "O What a great church." The other sees the Savior and says, "O What a great Christ!"

Which do you see? (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

Life Lessons

Matthew 17:1–18:14

Situation

Jesus' followers took a risk when they believed that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God.

Observation

Though they had seen Jesus' power and authority daily, this transformation of Jesus proved that Jesus was God's Son—the Messiah.

Inspiration

How deity and humanity can coexist in one person is beyond our understanding. Let me give an example. We know that God cannot die, and we know that Jesus is God. Yet Jesus died. How can that be? ... He did not lay aside the glory of deity; rather, He veiled that glory in a garb of flesh. If a prince leaves the royal palace to go and live in the slums, his position has changed, but he is still the same person. He can empty himself of his privileged place and veil his true identity, but he cannot empty himself of his personhood. So it was with the Lord Jesus. He did not consider His position with the Father in heaven something He had to hold on to at all costs. He came as a man so that He might die for humankind.

... We hold to the truth that “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” ([Colossians 2:9](#)), and that means He always possessed all the attributes of deity. (From *Alone in Majesty* by William MacDonald)

Application

When did God open your eyes to accept him? Recount the experience when God took your heart and made it new. Thank him for his grace. In your daily routine today, look for a way to tell someone your story.

Exploration

Jesus Glorified—[Mark 9:2–8; 16:19; Luke 9:28–36; John 1:14; 17:5, 24; Ephesians 1:21–22; Philippians 2:9–10; Colossians 1:15–18; 1 Peter 3:22; Revelation 5:7–14; 19:11–16.](#)

Humility isn't the same as low self-esteem. Being humble doesn't mean you think you have nothing to offer; it means you know exactly what you have to offer and no more. —Max Lucado (*Traveling Light*)

Jesus Talks with Moses and Elijah

Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John, the brother of James, up on a high mountain by themselves.² While they watched, Jesus' appearance was changed; his face became bright like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.³ Then [Moses and Elijah](#) appeared to them, talking with Jesus.

⁴Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you want, I will put up three tents here—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

⁵While Peter was talking, a bright cloud covered them. A voice came from the cloud and said, "This is my Son, whom I love, and I am very pleased with him. Listen to him!"

⁶When his followers heard the voice, they were so frightened they fell to the ground.⁷ But Jesus went to them and touched them and said, "Stand up. Don't be afraid."⁸ When they looked up, they saw Jesus was now alone.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone about what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

¹⁰Then his followers asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

¹¹Jesus answered, “They are right to say that Elijah is coming and that he will make everything the way it should be. ¹²But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him. They did to him whatever they wanted to do. It will be the same with the Son of Man; those same people will make the Son of Man suffer.” ¹³Then the followers understood that Jesus was talking about John the Baptist.

Jesus Heals a Sick Boy

¹⁴When Jesus and his followers came back to the crowd, a man came to Jesus and bowed before him. ¹⁵The man said, “Lord, have mercy on my son. He has [epilepsy](#) and is suffering very much, because he often falls into the fire or into the water. ¹⁶I brought him to your followers, but they could not cure him.”

¹⁷Jesus answered, “You people have no faith, and your lives are all wrong. How long must I put up with you? How long must I continue to be patient with you? Bring the boy here.” ¹⁸Jesus commanded the demon inside the boy. Then the demon came out, and the boy was healed from that time on.

¹⁹The followers came to Jesus when he was alone and asked, “Why couldn’t we force the demon out?”

²⁰Jesus answered, “Because your faith is too small. I tell you the truth, if your faith is as big as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. All things will be possible for you.” ²¹[n](#)

Jesus Talks About His Death

²²While Jesus' followers were gathering in Galilee, he said to them, "The Son of Man will be handed over to people, ²³and they will kill him. But on the third day he will be raised from the dead." And the followers were filled with sadness.

Jesus Talks About Paying Taxes

²⁴When Jesus and his followers came to Capernaum, the men who collected the Temple tax came to Peter. They asked, "Does your teacher pay the Temple tax?"

²⁵Peter answered, "Yes, Jesus pays the tax."

Peter went into the house, but before he could speak, Jesus said to him, "What do you think? The kings of the earth collect different kinds of taxes. But who pays the taxes—the king's children or others?"

²⁶Peter answered, "Other people pay the taxes."

Jesus said to Peter, "Then the children of the king don't have to pay taxes. ²⁷But we don't want to upset these tax collectors. So go to the lake and fish. After you catch the first fish, open its mouth and you will find a coin. Take that coin and give it to the tax collectors for you and me."

Who Is the Greatest?

At that time the followers came to Jesus and asked, “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

²Jesus called a little child to him and stood the child before his followers. ³Then he said, “I tell you the truth, you must change and become like little children. Otherwise, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴The greatest person in the kingdom of heaven is the one who makes himself humble like this child.

⁵“Whoever accepts a child in my name accepts me. ⁶If one of these little children believes in me, and someone causes that child to sin, it would be better for that person to have a large stone tied around the neck and be drowned in the sea. ⁷How terrible for the people of the world because of the things that cause them to sin. Such things will happen, but how terrible for the one who causes them to happen! ⁸If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose part of your body and live forever than to have two hands and two feet and be thrown into the fire that burns forever. ⁹If your eye causes you to sin, take it out and throw it away. It is better for you to have only one eye and live forever than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

A Lost Sheep

¹⁰“Be careful. Don’t think these little children are worth nothing. I tell you that they have angels in heaven who are

always with my Father in heaven. ¹¹[n](#)

¹²“If a man has a hundred sheep but one of the sheep gets lost, he will leave the other ninety-nine on the hill and go to look for the lost sheep. ¹³I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that were never lost. ¹⁴In the same way, your Father in heaven does not want any of these little children to be lost.

Life Lessons

Matthew 18:15–19:30

Situation

Jesus crossed the Jordan River into Perea before coming back through Jericho to Jerusalem. Herod imprisoned and killed John the Baptist for expressing his opinion publicly on Herod's marriage. The Jews hoped to trap Jesus also.

Observation

Jesus taught about the demands of discipleship. Disciples must honor marriage vows, have childlike humility, and refuse to be dominated by wealth.

Inspiration

Humility is a fruit of the Spirit, the result of his ministry in our hearts. But this ministry does not occur without deliberate, conscious effort on our part. The Spirit does not make us humble; he enables us to humble ourselves in these difficult Situations... . A very common occasion for showing humility is through *serving one another*. In this area Jesus is our greatest teacher and pacesetter... . Jesus' whole life was one of serving others. He said he did not come to

be served but to serve; he went around doing good for others... . Jesus also taught us the importance of serving one another... . He promised blessing to those who followed his example in serving others... . Dependence upon the grace of God results in God being glorified; it also makes it possible for those who are not natural servants to practice humility. His grace is sufficient for all of our needs. We can, by his ennoblement, *learn* to serve one another. (From *The Practice of Godliness* by Jerry Bridges)

Application

Judge yourself: When do you put your needs ahead of your spouse or your parents or your children? What step can you take to put their needs ahead of yours?

Exploration

Humility—[Luke 14:7–11](#); [Romans 12:3](#); [Ephesians 4:2](#); [Philippians 2:3–4](#).

He loves you when no one else loves you. Others may abandon you, divorce you, and ignore you, but God will love you. Always. No matter what. —Max Lucado (*A Love Worth Giving*)

When a Person Sins Against You

¹⁵“If your fellow believer sins against you, go and tell him in private what he did wrong. If he listens to you, you have helped that person to be your brother or sister again. ¹⁶But if he refuses to listen, go to him again and take one or two other people with you. ‘Every case may be proved by two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen to the church, then treat him like a person who does not believe in God or like a tax collector.

¹⁸“I tell you the truth, the things you don’t allow on earth will be the things God does not allow. And the things you allow on earth will be the things that God allows.

¹⁹“Also, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about something and pray for it, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰This is true because if two or three people come together in my name, I am there with them.”

An Unforgiving Servant

²¹Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, when my fellow believer sins against me, how many times must I forgive him? Should I forgive him as many as seven times?”

²²Jesus answered, “I tell you, you must forgive him more than seven times. You must forgive him even if he wrongs you seventy times seven.

²³“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who decided to collect the money his servants owed him. ²⁴When the king began to collect his money, a servant who owed him several million dollars was brought to him. ²⁵But the servant did not have enough money to pay his master, the king. So the master ordered that everything the servant owned should be sold, even the servant’s wife and children. Then the money would be used to pay the king what the servant owed.

²⁶“But the servant fell on his knees and begged, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you everything I owe.’ ²⁷The master felt sorry for his servant and told him he did not have to pay it back. Then he let the servant go free.

²⁸“Later, that same servant found another servant who owed him a few dollars. The servant grabbed him around the neck and said, ‘Pay me the money you owe me!’

²⁹“The other servant fell on his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you everything I owe.’

³⁰“But the first servant refused to be patient. He threw the other servant into prison until he could pay everything he owed. ³¹When the other servants saw what had happened, they were very sorry. So they went and told their master all that had happened.

³²“Then the master called his servant in and said, ‘You evil servant! Because you begged me to forget what you owed, I told you that you did not have to pay anything. ³³You should have showed mercy to that other servant, just as I showed mercy to you.’ ³⁴The master was very angry and put the

servant in prison to be punished until he could pay everything he owed.

³⁵“This king did what my heavenly Father will do to you if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Christ Through the Bible

The Compassion of Christ

A boy went into a pet shop, looking for a puppy. The store owner showed him a litter in a box. The boy looked at the puppies. He picked each one up, examined it, and put it back into the box.

After several minutes, he walked back to the owner and said, “I picked one out. How much will it cost?”

The man gave him the price, and the boy promised to be back in a few days with the money....

The boy went to work—weeding, washing windows, cleaning yards. He worked hard and saved his money. When he had enough for the puppy, he returned to the store.

He walked up to the counter and laid down a pocketful of wadded bills. The store owner sorted and counted the cash... . “All right, son, you can go get your puppy.”

The boy reached into the back of the box, pulled out a skinny dog with a limp leg, and started to leave.

The owner stopped him.

“Don’t take that puppy,” he objected. “He’s crippled. He can’t play. He’ll never run with you. He can’t fetch. Get one of the healthy pups.”

“No thank you, sir,” the boy replied. “This is exactly the kind of dog I’ve been looking for.”

As the boy turned to leave, the store owner started to speak but remained silent. Suddenly he understood. For extending from the bottom of the boy’s trousers was a brace—a brace for his crippled leg.

Why did the boy want the dog? Because he knew how it felt. And he knew it was very special...

Jesus knows how you feel. You’re under the gun at work? Jesus knows how you feel. You’ve got more to do than is humanly possible? So did he. You’ve got children who make a “piranha hour” out of your dinner hour? Jesus knows what that’s like. People take more from you than they give? Jesus understands... (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

Jesus Teaches About Divorce

After Jesus said all these things, he left Galilee and went into the area of Judea on the other side of the Jordan River. ²Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

³Some Pharisees came to Jesus and tried to trick him. They asked, “Is it right for a man to divorce his wife for any reason he chooses?”

⁴Jesus answered, “Surely you have read in the Scriptures: When God made the world, ‘he made them male and female.’

⁵And God said, ‘So a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one body.’ ⁶So there are not two, but one. God has joined the two together, so no one should separate them.”

⁷The Pharisees asked, “Why then did Moses give a command for a man to divorce his wife by giving her divorce papers?”

⁸Jesus answered, “Moses allowed you to divorce your wives because you refused to accept God’s teaching, but divorce was not allowed in the beginning. ⁹I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman is guilty of adultery. The only reason for a man to divorce his wife is if his wife has sexual relations with another man.”

¹⁰The followers said to him, “If that is the only reason a man can divorce his wife, it is better not to marry.”

¹¹Jesus answered, “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but God has made some able to accept it. ¹²There are different reasons why some men cannot marry. Some men were born

without the ability to become fathers. Others were made that way later in life by other people. And some men have given up marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. But the person who can marry should accept this teaching about marriage.”

Jesus Welcomes Children

¹³Then the people brought their little children to Jesus so he could put his hands on them and pray for them. His followers told them to stop, ¹⁴but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me. Don’t stop them, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to people who are like these children.” ¹⁵After Jesus put his hands on the children, he left there.

A Rich Young Man’s Question

¹⁶A man came to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to have life forever?”

¹⁷Jesus answered, “Why do you ask me about what is good? Only God is good. But if you want to have life forever, obey the commands.”

¹⁸The man asked, “Which commands?”

Jesus answered, “‘You must not murder anyone; you must not be guilty of adultery; you must not steal; you must not tell lies about your neighbor; ¹⁹honor your father and mother; and love your neighbor as you love yourself.’”

²⁰The young man said, “I have obeyed all these things. What else do I need to do?”

²¹Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, then go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor. If you

do this, you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.”

²²But when the young man heard this, he left sorrowfully, because he was rich.

²³Then Jesus said to his followers, “I tell you the truth, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.

²⁴Yes, I tell you that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁵When Jesus’ followers heard this, they were very surprised and asked, “Then who can be saved?”

²⁶Jesus looked at them and said, “This is something people cannot do, but God can do all things.”

²⁷Peter said to Jesus, “Look, we have left everything and followed you. So what will we have?”

²⁸Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, when the age to come has arrived, the Son of Man will sit on his great throne. All of you who followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹And all those who have left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children, or farms to follow me will get much more than they left, and they will have life forever. ³⁰Many who have the highest place now will have the lowest place in the future. And many who have the lowest place now will have the highest place in the future.

Life Lessons

Matthew 20:1–34

Situation

Jesus traveled toward Jerusalem for the last time. He refuted the Jewish leaders' ideas that their heritage would ensure them membership in heaven. His disciples were also slow to learn and argued over kingdom status for themselves.

Observation

Jesus emphasized that salvation depends on God's love, mercy, and kindness. No one deserves it.

Inspiration

A certain landowner needs workers. At 6:0 A.M. he picks his crew, they agree on a wage, and he puts them to work. At 9:0 he is back at the unemployment agency and picks a few more. At noon he is back and at 3:0 in the afternoon he is back and at 5:0, you guessed it. He's back again.

Now, the punchline of the story is the anger the twelve-hour laborers felt when the other guys got the same wage. That's a great message, but we'll save it for another book.

I want to hone in on an often forgotten scene in the story: the choosing. Can you see it? It happened at 9:0. It happened at noon. It happened at 3:0. But most passionately, it happened at 5:0.

Five in the afternoon. Tell me. What is a worker still doing in the yard at 5:0 in the afternoon? The best have long since gone. The mediocre workers

went at lunch. The last string went at 3:0. What kind of worker is left at 5:0 P.M.?

All day they get passed by. They are unskilled. Untrained. Uneducated. They are hanging with one hand from the bottom of the ladder. They are absolutely dependent upon a merciful boss giving them a chance they don't deserve.

So, by the way, were we. Lest we get a bit cocky, we might take Paul's advice and look at what we were when God called us. Do you remember?

Some of us were polished and sharp but papier-mâché thin. Others of us didn't even try to hide our despair. We drank it. We smelled it. We shot it. We sold it. Life was a passion-pursuit. We were on a treasure hunt for an empty chest in a dead-end canyon.

Do you remember how you felt? Do you remember the perspiration on your forehead and the crack in your soul? Do you remember how you tried to hide the loneliness until it got bigger than you and then you just tried to survive?

Hold that picture for a moment. Now answer this. Why did he choose you? Why did he choose me? Honestly. Why? What do we have that he needs?

Intellect? Do we honestly think for one minute that we have—or ever will have—a thought he hasn't had?

Willpower? I can respect that. Some of us are stubborn enough to walk on water if we feel called to do so ... but to think God's kingdom would have done a belly-up without our determination?

How about money? We came into the kingdom with a nice little nest egg. Perhaps that's why we were chosen. Perhaps the creator of heaven and earth could use a little of our cash. Maybe the owner of every breath and every person and the author of history was getting low on capital and he saw us and our black ink and...

Get the point?

We were chosen for the same reason the five o'clock workers were. You and me? We are the five o'clock workers.

That's us leaning against the orchard fence sucking cigarettes we can't afford and betting beers we'll never buy on a game of penny-toss. Migrant workers with no jobs and no futures. The tattoo on your arm reads "Betty." The one on my biceps is nameless but her hips bounce when I flex. We should have given up and gone home after the lunch whistle but home is a one-bedroom motel with a wife whose first question will be, "Did you get on or not?"

So we wait. The too little, too late.

And Jesus? Well, Jesus is the guy in the black pickup who owns the hillside acreage. He's the fellow who noticed us as he drove by leaving us in his dust. He's the one who stopped the truck, put it in reverse, and backed up to where we were standing.

He's the one you'll tell your wife about tonight as you walk to the grocery with a jingle in your pocket. "I'd never seen this guy before. He just stopped, rolled down his window, and asked us if we wanted to work. It was already near quitting time, but he said he

had some work that wouldn't wait. I swear, Martha, I only worked one hour and he paid me for the full day."

"No, I don't know his name."

"Of course, I'm gonna find out. Too good to be true, that guy."

Why did he pick you? He wanted to. After all, you are his. He made you. He brought you home. He owns you. And once upon a time, he tapped you on the shoulder and reminded you of that fact. No matter how long you'd waited or how much time you'd wasted, you are his and he has a place for you. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

Application

If you are a Christian ask yourself, "What are my special skills or abilities?" List your answers: administration, technical work, or cooking. Now that God has brought you to work in his kingdom, how can you use these gifts for him?

Exploration

Kingdom Citizens—[Matthew 7:13–23](#); [21:28–32](#); [James 2:5](#); [1 Corinthians 4:20](#); [2 Peter 1:5–11](#).

A Story About Workers

“The kingdom of heaven is like a person who owned some land. One morning, he went out very early to hire some people to work in his vineyard. ²The man agreed to pay the workers one [coin](#) for working that day. Then he sent them into the vineyard to work. ³About nine o’clock the man went to the marketplace and saw some other people standing there, doing nothing. ⁴So he said to them, ‘If you go and work in my vineyard, I will pay you what your work is worth.’ ⁵So they went to work in the vineyard. The man went out again about twelve o’clock and three o’clock and did the same thing. ⁶About five o’clock the man went to the marketplace again and saw others standing there. He asked them, ‘Why did you stand here all day doing nothing?’ ⁷They answered, ‘No one gave us a job.’ The man said to them, ‘Then you can go and work in my vineyard.’

⁸“At the end of the day, the owner of the vineyard said to the boss of all the workers, ‘Call the workers and pay them. Start with the last people I hired and end with those I hired first.’

⁹“When the workers who were hired at five o’clock came to get their pay, each received one coin. ¹⁰When the workers who were hired first came to get their pay, they thought they would be paid more than the others. But each one of them also received one coin. ¹¹When they got their coin, they complained

to the man who owned the land. ¹²They said, ‘Those people were hired last and worked only one hour. But you paid them the same as you paid us who worked hard all day in the hot sun.’ ¹³But the man who owned the vineyard said to one of those workers, ‘Friend, I am being fair to you. You agreed to work for one coin. ¹⁴So take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same pay that I gave you. ¹⁵I can do what I want with my own money. Are you jealous because I am good to those people?’

¹⁶“So those who have the last place now will have the first place in the future, and those who have the first place now will have the last place in the future.”

Jesus Talks About His Own Death

¹⁷While Jesus was going to Jerusalem, he took his twelve followers aside privately and said to them, ¹⁸“Look, we are going to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be turned over to the leading priests and the teachers of the law, and they will say that he must die. ¹⁹They will give the Son of Man to the non-Jewish people to laugh at him and beat him with whips and crucify him. But on the third day, he will be raised to life again.”

A Mother Asks Jesus a Favor

²⁰Then the wife of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons. She bowed before him and asked him to do something for her.

²¹Jesus asked, “What do you want?”

She said, “Promise that one of my sons will sit at your right side and the other will sit at your left side in your kingdom.”

²²But Jesus said, “You don’t understand what you are asking. Can you [drink the cup that I am about to drink?](#)”

The sons answered, “Yes, we can.”

²³Jesus said to them, “You will drink from my cup. But I cannot choose who will sit at my right or my left; those places belong to those for whom my Father has prepared them.”

²⁴When the other ten followers heard this, they were angry with the two brothers.

²⁵Jesus called all the followers together and said, “You know that the rulers of the non-Jewish people love to show their power over the people. And their important leaders love to use all their authority. ²⁶But it should not be that way among you. Whoever wants to become great among you must serve the rest of you like a servant. ²⁷Whoever wants to become first among you must serve the rest of you like a slave. ²⁸In the same way, the Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many people.”

Jesus Heals Two Blind Men

²⁹When Jesus and his followers were leaving Jericho, a great many people followed him. ³⁰Two blind men sitting by the road heard that Jesus was going by, so they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

³¹The people warned the blind men to be quiet, but they shouted even more, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

³²Jesus stopped and said to the blind men, “What do you want me to do for you?”

³³They answered, “Lord, we want to see.”

³⁴Jesus felt sorry for the blind men and touched their eyes, and at once they could see. Then they followed Jesus.

Life Lessons

Matthew 21:1-46

Situation

A week after Jesus entered Jerusalem as a king, the Jews killed him. Jesus' dynamic entrance into Jerusalem fulfilled prophecy ([Zechariah 9:9](#)), affirmed his messianic royalty, and set the stage for his crucifixion.

Observation

During this last week, Jesus taught about faithful workers in the kingdom of God. He encouraged all to work faithfully without procrastinating.

Inspiration

As the husband looks in the jewelry case, he rationalizes, "Sure she would want the watch, but it's too expensive. She's a practical woman, she'll understand. I'll just get the bracelet today. I'll buy the watch ... someday."

Someday. The enemy of risky love is a snake whose tongue has mastered the talk of deception. "Someday," he hisses.

"Someday, I can take her on the cruise."

"Someday, I will have time to call and chat."

"Someday, the children will understand why I was so busy."

But you know the truth, don't you? You know even before I write it. You could say it better than I.

Some days never come.

And the price of practicality is sometimes higher

than extravagance.

But the rewards of risky love are always greater than its cost.

Go to the effort. Invest the time. Write the letter. Make the apology. Take the trip. Purchase the gift. Do it. The seized opportunity renders joy. The neglected brings regret. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

Application

If you died today, would you be happy with the level of service you have given to God's kingdom? If not, plan to be more involved in serving others.

Exploration

Jesus the King—[Psalm 118](#); [Zechariah 9:9](#); [Luke 19:28–44](#); [Ephesians 1:19–23](#); [Philippians 2:5–11](#); [Colossians 1:17–18](#); [2:10](#); [Revelation 4:9–5:14](#).

Jesus Enters Jerusalem as a King

As Jesus and his followers were coming closer to Jerusalem, they stopped at Bethphage at the hill called the Mount of Olives. From there Jesus sent two of his followers ²and said to them, “Go to the town you can see there. When you enter it, you will quickly find a donkey tied there with its colt. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone asks you why you are taking the donkeys, say that the Master needs them, and he will send them at once.”

⁴This was to bring about what the prophet had said:

⁵“Tell the people of Jerusalem,
‘Your king is coming to you.
He is gentle and riding on a donkey,
on the colt of a donkey.’”

[Isaiah 62:11; Zechariah 9:9](#)

⁶The followers went and did what Jesus told them to do. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt to Jesus and laid their coats on them, and Jesus sat on them. ⁸Many people spread their coats on the road. Others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The people were walking ahead of Jesus and behind him, shouting,

“[Praise](#) to the Son of David!

God bless the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

[Psalm 118:26](#)

Praise to God in heaven!”

¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, all the city was filled with excitement. The people asked, “Who is this man?”

¹¹The crowd said, “This man is Jesus, the prophet from the town of Nazareth in Galilee.”

Jesus Goes to the Temple

¹²Jesus went into the Temple and threw out all the people who were buying and selling there. He turned over the tables of those who were exchanging different kinds of money, and he upset the benches of those who were selling doves. ¹³Jesus said to all the people there, “It is written in the Scriptures, [‘My Temple will be called a house for prayer.’](#) But you are changing it into a [‘hideout for robbers.’](#)”

¹⁴The blind and crippled people came to Jesus in the Temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵The leading priests and the teachers of the law saw that Jesus was doing wonderful things and that the children were praising him in the Temple, saying, [“Praise to the Son of David.”](#) All these things made the priests and the teachers of the law very angry.

¹⁶They asked Jesus, “Do you hear the things these children are saying?”

Jesus answered, “Yes. Haven’t you read in the Scriptures, [‘You have taught children and babies to sing praises’?](#)”

¹⁷Then Jesus left and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

The Power of Faith

¹⁸Early the next morning, as Jesus was going back to the city, he became hungry. ¹⁹Seeing a fig tree beside the road, Jesus went to it, but there were no figs on the tree, only leaves. So Jesus said to the tree, “You will never again have fruit.” The tree immediately dried up.

²⁰When his followers saw this, they were amazed. They asked, “How did the fig tree dry up so quickly?”

²¹Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will be able to do what I did to this tree and even more. You will be able to say to this mountain, ‘Go, fall into the sea.’ And if you have faith, it will happen. ²²If you believe, you will get anything you ask for in prayer.”

Leaders Doubt Jesus’ Authority

²³Jesus went to the Temple, and while he was teaching there, the leading priests and the older leaders of the people came to him. They said, “What authority do you have to do these things? Who gave you this authority?”

²⁴Jesus answered, “I also will ask you a question. If you answer me, then I will tell you what authority I have to do these things. ²⁵Tell me: When John baptized people, did that come from God or just from other people?”

They argued about Jesus’ question, saying, “If we answer, ‘John’s baptism was from God,’ Jesus will say, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ²⁶But if we say, ‘It was from people,’ we are afraid of what the crowd will do because they all believe that John was a prophet.”

²⁷So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Jesus said to them, “Then I won’t tell you what authority I have to do these things.

A Story About Two Sons

²⁸“Tell me what you think about this: A man had two sons. He went to the first son and said, ‘Son, go and work today in my vineyard.’ ²⁹The son answered, ‘I will not go.’ But later the son changed his mind and went. ³⁰Then the father went to the other son and said, ‘Son, go and work today in my vineyard.’ The son answered, ‘Yes, sir, I will go and work,’ but he did not go.

³¹Which of the two sons obeyed his father?”

The priests and leaders answered, “The first son.”

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God before you do. ³²John came to show you the right way to live. You did not believe him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes believed him. Even after seeing this, you still refused to change your ways and believe him.

A Story About God’s Son

³³“Listen to this story: There was a man who owned a vineyard. He put a wall around it and dug a hole for a winepress and built a tower. Then he leased the land to some farmers and left for a trip. ³⁴When it was time for the grapes to be picked, he sent his servants to the farmers to get his share of the grapes. ³⁵But the farmers grabbed the servants, beat one, killed another, and then killed a third servant with stones. ³⁶So the man sent some

other servants to the farmers, even more than he sent the first time. But the farmers did the same thing to the servants that they had done before.³⁷ So the man decided to send his son to the farmers. He said, 'They will respect my son.'³⁸ But when the farmers saw the son, they said to each other, 'This son will inherit the vineyard. If we kill him, it will be ours!'³⁹ Then the farmers grabbed the son, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.⁴⁰ So what will the owner of the vineyard do to these farmers when he comes?"

⁴¹The priests and leaders said, "He will surely kill those evil men. Then he will lease the vineyard to some other farmers who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

⁴²Jesus said to them, "Surely you have read this in the Scriptures:

'The stone that the builders rejected
became the cornerstone.
The Lord did this,
and it is wonderful to us.'

[Psalm 118:22-23](#)

⁴³"So I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to people who do the things God wants in his kingdom.⁴⁴ The person who falls on this stone will be broken, and on whomever that stone falls, that person will be crushed."ⁿ

⁴⁵When the leading priests and the Pharisees heard these stories, they knew Jesus was talking about them.⁴⁶ They wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the people, because the people believed that Jesus was a prophet.

Life Lessons

Matthew 22:1-46

Situation

Three Jewish factions confronted Jesus. The Pharisees opposed Roman occupation of Palestine. The Herodians supported Herod Antipas and Roman policies. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, because they could not find it directly taught in the books of the Law.

Observation

Jesus continued to show that God's Word was superior to the Jewish leaders' human reasoning.

Inspiration

No doubt you've had your share of words that wound. You've felt the sting of a well-aimed gibe. Maybe you're still feeling it. Someone you love or respect slams you to the floor with a slur or slip of the tongue. And there you lie, wounded and bleeding. Perhaps the words were intended to hurt you, perhaps not; but that doesn't matter. The wound is deep. The injuries are internal. Broken heart, wounded pride, bruised feelings. Or maybe your wound is old... . The old pain flares unpredictably and decisively, reminding you of harsh words yet unforgiven. If you have suffered or are suffering because of someone else's words, you'll be glad to know there is a balm for this laceration....

Did you see what Jesus did not do? He did not retaliate. He did not bite back. He did not say, "I'll get

you!” He left the judging to God. He did not take on the task of seeking revenge. He demanded no apology. He hired no bounty hunters and sent out no posse.... If ever a person deserved a shot at revenge, Jesus did. But he didn't take it. Instead he died for them. How could he do it? I don't know. But I do know that all of a sudden my wounds seem very painless. My grudges and hard feelings are suddenly childish.

(From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

Application

When someone challenges your integrity, disregards your opinion, and ignores your work, how do you respond? Do you lose your temper, hold a grudge, or put the person down? Next time you face criticism, consider how Jesus carefully chose his words and used Scripture to answer his opponents.

Exploration

Jesus' Wisdom—[Matthew 11:27](#); [John 2:24–25](#); [Acts 1:24–25](#); [1 Corinthians 4:5](#); [Revelation 2:18–19](#).

A Story About a Wedding Feast

Jesus again used stories to teach the people. He said, ²“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son. ³The king invited some people to the feast. When the feast was ready, the king sent his servants to tell the people, but they refused to come.

⁴“Then the king sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited that my feast is ready. I have killed my best bulls and calves for the dinner, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.’

⁵“But the people refused to listen to the servants and left to do other things. One went to work in his field, and another went to his business. ⁶Some of the other people grabbed the servants, beat them, and killed them. ⁷The king was furious and sent his army to kill the murderers and burn their city.

⁸“After that, the king said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready. I invited those people, but they were not worthy to come. ⁹So go to the street corners and invite everyone you find to come to my feast.’ ¹⁰So the servants went into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹“When the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man who was not dressed for a wedding. ¹²The king said, ‘Friend, how were you allowed to come in here? You are not dressed for

a wedding.’ But the man said nothing. ¹³So the king told some servants, ‘Tie this man’s hands and feet. Throw him out into the darkness, where people will cry and grind their teeth with pain.’

¹⁴“Yes, many people are invited, but only a few are chosen.”

Is It Right to Pay Taxes or Not?

¹⁵Then the Pharisees left that place and made plans to trap Jesus in saying something wrong. ¹⁶They sent some of their own followers and some people from the group called [Herodians](#). They said, “Teacher, we know that you are an honest man and that you teach the truth about God’s way. You are not afraid of what other people think about you, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷So tell us what you think. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

¹⁸But knowing that these leaders were trying to trick him, Jesus said, “You hypocrites! Why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹Show me a coin used for paying the tax.” So the men showed him a [coin](#). ²⁰Then Jesus asked, “Whose image and name are on the coin?”

²¹The men answered, “Caesar’s.”

Then Jesus said to them, “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and give to God the things that are God’s.”

²²When the men heard what Jesus said, they were amazed and left him and went away.

Some Sadducees Try to Trick Jesus

²³That same day some Sadducees came to Jesus and asked him a question. (Sadducees believed that people would not rise from the dead.) ²⁴They said, “Teacher, Moses said if a married man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. ²⁵Once there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died. Since he had no children, his brother married the widow. ²⁶Then the second brother also died. The same thing happened to the third brother and all the other brothers. ²⁷Finally, the woman died. ²⁸Since all seven men had married her, when people rise from the dead, whose wife will she be?”

²⁹Jesus answered, “You don’t understand, because you don’t know what the Scriptures say, and you don’t know about the power of God. ³⁰When people rise from the dead, they will not marry, nor will they be given to someone to marry. They will be like the angels in heaven. ³¹Surely you have read what God said to you about rising from the dead. ³²God said, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ God is the God of the living, not the dead.”

³³When the people heard this, they were amazed at Jesus’ teaching.

The Most Important Command

³⁴When the Pharisees learned that the Sadducees could not argue with Jesus’ answers to them, the Pharisees met together. ³⁵One Pharisee, who was an expert on the law of Moses, asked Jesus this question to test him: ³⁶“Teacher, which command in the law is the most important?”

³⁷Jesus answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your

heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' ³⁸This is the first and most important command. ³⁹And the second command is like the first: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' ⁴⁰All the law and the writings of the prophets depend on these two commands."

Jesus Questions the Pharisees

⁴¹While the Pharisees were together, Jesus asked them,

⁴²"What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?"

They answered, "The Christ is the Son of David."

⁴³Then Jesus said to them, "Then why did David call him 'Lord'? David, speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit, said,

⁴⁴"The Lord said to my Lord:

Sit by me at my right side,

until I put your enemies under your control.'

[Psalm 110:1](#)

⁴⁵David calls the Christ 'Lord,' so how can the Christ be his son?"

⁴⁶None of the Pharisees could answer Jesus' question, and after that day no one was brave enough to ask him any more questions.

Life Lessons

Matthew 23:1-39

Situation

Human rules, practices, and interpretations became more important than God's Law; Jesus condemned the Pharisees as hypocrites.

Observation

God hates religious hypocrisy.

Inspiration

Consider for a moment a few brief epithets that Jesus reserved for the Pharisees: "You snakes!" "You brood of vipers!" "Blind guides!" "Children of hell!" "Blind fools!" These forms of address can hardly be considered compliments. Jesus spared no invectives in His denunciations of these men. His words were uncharacteristically harsh, though not unjustifiably harsh. They were different from His usual style. The normal form of rebuke He made to sinners was gentle. He spoke tenderly, though firmly to the woman caught in adultery, and to the woman at the well. It seems that Jesus saved His severe comments for the big boys, the theological professionals. With them He asked no quarter and gave none.

It has been said that nothing dispels a lie faster than the truth; nothing exposes the counterfeit faster than the genuine. Clever counterfeit dollars may be unnoticed by the untrained eye. What every counterfeiter fears is that someone will examine his bogus bill while holding a genuine one next to it. The

presence of Jesus represented the presence of the genuine in the midst of the bogus. Here authentic holiness appeared.

(From *The Holiness of God* by R.C. Sproul)

Application

Do you practice what you preach? Or do people snicker when you announce a new set of resolutions? Pray for strength to live what you claim to believe.

Exploration

Hypocrisy—[Isaiah 29:13](#); [Ezekiel 33:30–32](#); [Malachi 1:6–14](#); [Matthew 16:5–12](#); [Romans 2:17–24](#); [Titus 1:16](#).

Jesus Accuses Some Leaders

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his followers,²“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees have the authority to tell you what the law of Moses says.³So you should obey and follow whatever they tell you, but their lives are not good examples for you to follow. They tell you to do things, but they themselves don’t do them.⁴They make strict rules and try to force people to obey them, but they are unwilling to help those who struggle under the weight of their rules.

⁵“They do good things so that other people will see them. They make the [boxes](#) of Scriptures that they wear bigger, and they make their special prayer clothes very long.⁶Those Pharisees and teachers of the law love to have the most important seats at feasts and in the synagogues.⁷They love people to greet them with respect in the marketplaces, and they love to have people call them ‘Teacher.’

⁸“But you must not be called ‘Teacher,’ because you have only one Teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters together.⁹And don’t call any person on earth ‘Father,’ because you have one Father, who is in heaven.¹⁰And you should not be called ‘Master,’ because you have only one Master, the Christ.¹¹Whoever is your servant is the greatest among you.¹²Whoever makes himself great will be made humble. Whoever makes himself humble will be made great.

^{13c}“How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You are hypocrites! You close the door for people to enter the kingdom of heaven. You yourselves don’t enter, and you stop others who are trying to enter. ¹⁴[n](#)

^{15c}“How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You are hypocrites! You travel across land and sea to find one person who will change to your ways. When you find that person, you make him more fit for hell than you are.

^{16c}“How terrible for you! You guide the people, but you are blind. You say, ‘If people swear by the Temple when they make a promise, that means nothing. But if they swear by the gold that is in the Temple, they must keep that promise.’ ¹⁷You are blind fools! Which is greater: the gold or the Temple that makes that gold holy? ¹⁸And you say, ‘If people swear by the altar when they make a promise, that means nothing. But if they swear by the gift on the altar, they must keep that promise.’ ¹⁹You are blind! Which is greater: the gift or the altar that makes the gift holy? ²⁰The person who swears by the altar is really using the altar and also everything on the altar. ²¹And the person who swears by the Temple is really using the Temple and also everything in the Temple. ²²The person who swears by heaven is also using God’s throne and the One who sits on that throne.

^{23c}“How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You are hypocrites! You give to God one-tenth of everything you earn—even your [mint, dill, and cumin](#). But you don’t obey the really important teachings of the law—justice, mercy, and being loyal. These are the things you should do, as well as those other things. ²⁴[You guide the people, but you are blind! You are like a person who picks a fly out of a drink and then](#)

swallows a camel!

²⁵“How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You are hypocrites! You wash the outside of your cups and dishes, but inside they are full of things you got by cheating others and by pleasing only yourselves. ²⁶Pharisees, you are blind! First make the inside of the cup clean, and then the outside of the cup can be truly clean.

²⁷“How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You are hypocrites! You are like tombs that are painted white. Outside, those tombs look fine, but inside, they are full of the bones of dead people and all kinds of unclean things. ²⁸It is the same with you. People look at you and think you are good, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and evil.

²⁹“How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You are hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets, and you show honor to the graves of those who lived good lives. ³⁰You say, ‘If we had lived during the time of our ancestors, we would not have helped them kill the prophets.’ ³¹But you give proof that you are children of those who murdered the prophets. ³²And you will complete the sin that your ancestors started.

³³“You are snakes! A family of poisonous snakes! How are you going to escape God’s judgment? ³⁴So I tell you this: I am sending to you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify. Some of them you will beat in your synagogues and chase from town to town. ³⁵So you will be guilty for the death of all the good people who have been killed on earth—from the murder of that good man [Abel to the murder of Zechariah](#) son of Berakiah, whom you murdered between the Temple and the altar. ³⁶I tell you the truth, all of these things will happen to you people who are living now.

Jesus Feels Sorry for Jerusalem

³⁷“Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone to death those who are sent to you. Many times I wanted to gather your people as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you did not let me.³⁸ Now your house will be left completely empty. ³⁹I tell you, you will not see me again until that time when you will say, ‘God bless the One who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Life Lessons

Matthew 24:1–51

Situation

Jesus prophesied about the second coming. He delivered this teaching from the Mount of Olives, where the prophet Zechariah predicted that the Messiah would stand when he came to establish his kingdom.

Observation

Christians need to be watchful and prepare for Jesus' return, because we don't know when it will be.

Inspiration

What kind of people should we be? Peter tells us: "You should live holy lives and serve God, as you wait for and [here is that word again] look forward to the coming of the day of God" [[2 Peter 3:11–12](#)].

Hope of the future is not a license for irresponsibility in the present. Let us wait forwardly, but let us wait.

But for most of us, waiting is not our problem Or, maybe I should state, waiting is our problem. We are so good at waiting that we don't wait forwardly. We forget to look. We are so patient that we become complacent. We are too content. We seldom search the skies. We rarely run to the temple. We seldom, if ever, allow the Holy Spirit to interrupt our plans and lead us to worship so that we might see Jesus.

It is to those of us who are strong in waiting and weak in watching that our Lord was speaking when

he said, “No one knows when that day or time will be, not the angels in heaven, not even the Son. Only the Father knows... . So always be ready, because you don’t know the day your Lord will come... . The Son of Man will come at a time you don’t expect him” ([Matthew 24:36](#), [42](#), [44](#)).

Simeon reminds us to “wait forwardly.” Patiently vigilant. But not so patient that we lose our vigilance. Nor so vigilant that we lose our patience.

In the end, the prayer of Simeon was answered. “Simeon took the baby in his arms and thanked God; ‘Now, Lord, you can let me, your servant, die in peace as you said’” ([Luke 2:28–29](#)).

One look into the face of Jesus, and Simeon knew it was time to go home. And one look into the face of our Savior, and we will know the same. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

Application

If Jesus were to return today, would you be prepared? If not, what steps should you take to be more prepared? Notice that the Lord first of all asks you to lead a holy life.

Exploration

Jesus’ Return—[Mark 13:1–23](#); [Luke 21:5–24](#); [Acts 1:10–12](#); [1 Corinthians 15:50–57](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:1–10](#); [2 Timothy 3:1–5](#); [Revelation 19](#).

The Temple Will Be Destroyed

As Jesus left the Temple and was walking away, his followers came up to show him the Temple's buildings. ²Jesus asked, "Do you see all these buildings? I tell you the truth, not one stone will be left on another. Every stone will be thrown down to the ground."

³Later, as Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, his followers came to be alone with him. They said, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that it is time for you to come again and for this age to end?"

⁴Jesus answered, "Be careful that no one fools you. ⁵Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will fool many people. ⁶You will hear about wars and stories of wars that are coming, but don't be afraid. These things must happen before the end comes. ⁷Nations will fight against other nations; kingdoms will fight against other kingdoms. There will be times when there is no food for people to eat, and there will be earthquakes in different places. ⁸These things are like the first pains when something new is about to be born.

⁹"Then people will arrest you, hand you over to be hurt, and kill you. They will hate you because you believe in me. ¹⁰At that time, many will lose their faith, and they will turn against each other and hate each other. ¹¹Many false prophets will come and cause many people to believe lies. ¹²There will be more and more evil in the world, so most people will stop

showing their love for each other. ¹³But those people who keep their faith until the end will be saved. ¹⁴The Good News about God's kingdom will be preached in all the world, to every nation. Then the end will come.

¹⁵“Daniel the prophet spoke about [‘the destroying terror.’](#) You will see this standing in the holy place.” (You who read this should understand what it means.) ¹⁶“At that time, the people in Judea should run away to the mountains. ¹⁷If people are on the [roofs](#) of their houses, they must not go down to get anything out of their houses. ¹⁸If people are in the fields, they must not go back to get their coats. ¹⁹At that time, how terrible it will be for women who are pregnant or have nursing babies! ²⁰Pray that it will not be winter or a Sabbath day when these things happen and you have to run away, ²¹because at that time there will be much trouble. There will be more trouble than there has ever been since the beginning of the world until now, and nothing as bad will ever happen again. ²²God has decided to make that terrible time short. Otherwise, no one would go on living. But God will make that time short to help the people he has chosen. ²³At that time, someone might say to you, ‘Look, there is the Christ!’ Or another person might say, ‘There he is!’ But don’t believe them. ²⁴False Christs and false prophets will come and perform great wonders and miracles. They will try to fool even the people God has chosen, if that is possible. ²⁵Now I have warned you about this before it happens.

²⁶“If people tell you, ‘The Christ is in the desert,’ don’t go there. If they say, ‘The Christ is in the inner room,’ don’t believe it. ²⁷When the Son of Man comes, he will be seen by everyone, like lightning flashing from the east to the west. ²⁸Wherever the dead body is, there the vultures will gather.

²⁹“Soon after the trouble of those days,
‘the sun will grow dark,
and the moon will not give its light.
The stars will fall from the sky.
And the powers of the heavens will be shaken.’

[Isaiah 13:10; 34:4](#)

³⁰“At that time, the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. Then all the peoples of the world will cry. They will see the Son of Man coming on clouds in the sky with great power and glory. ³¹He will use a loud trumpet to send his angels all around the earth, and they will gather his chosen people from every part of the world.

³²“Learn a lesson from the fig tree: When its branches become green and soft and new leaves appear, you know summer is near. ³³In the same way, when you see all these things happening, you will know that the time is near, ready to come. ³⁴I tell you the truth, all these things will happen while the people of this time are still living. ³⁵Earth and sky will be destroyed, but the words I have said will never be destroyed.

When Will Jesus Come Again?

³⁶“No one knows when that day or time will be, not the angels in heaven, not even the Son. Only the Father knows. ³⁷When the Son of Man comes, it will be like what happened during Noah’s time. ³⁸In those days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving their children to be married, until the day Noah entered the boat. ³⁹They knew

nothing about what was happening until the flood came and destroyed them. It will be the same when the Son of Man comes. ⁴⁰Two men will be in the field. One will be taken, and the other will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding grain with a [mill](#). One will be taken, and the other will be left.

⁴²“So always be ready, because you don’t know the day your Lord will come. ⁴³Remember this: If the owner of the house knew what time of night a thief was coming, the owner would watch and not let the thief break in. ⁴⁴So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at a time you don’t expect him.

⁴⁵“Who is the wise and loyal servant that the master trusts to give the other servants their food at the right time? ⁴⁶When the master comes and finds the servant doing his work, the servant will be blessed. ⁴⁷I tell you the truth, the master will choose that servant to take care of everything he owns. ⁴⁸But suppose that evil servant thinks to himself, ‘My master will not come back soon,’ ⁴⁹and he begins to beat the other servants and eat and get drunk with others like him? ⁵⁰The master will come when that servant is not ready and is not expecting him. ⁵¹Then the master will cut him in pieces and send him away to be with the hypocrites, where people will cry and grind their teeth with pain.

Life Lessons

Matthew 25:1–46

Situation

Jesus used parables to teach his disciples to be ready for his return.

Observation

Jesus wants his followers to be busy in service and in sharing the good news right up until the day of his return. Watchfulness and active service go hand in hand.

Inspiration

I don't have to be afraid of Judgment Day because all my sins are forgiven and forgotten. They are blotted out and remembered no more... All the things in my life that are rotten and filthy, and all the things that are so shameful that I have never dared to share them with anyone, will be erased from my records. In place of all that garbage will be recorded all the magnificent things that Jesus did...

The joy that comes from thinking about glory is a joy available to all who have surrendered their lives to Christ. All they have to do is just stop and *reflect* on it all from time to time. (From *Who Switched the Price Tags?* by Tony Campolo)

Application

Do you know the joy of being forgiven? If not, come to Jesus and lay your past as well as your future in his hands. Take comfort in knowing that no matter what the circumstances, Christ remains within

you.

Exploration

Faithfulness to the End—[Luke 12:35–40](#); [1 Timothy 6:12–14](#); [Titus 2:11–13](#); [James 5:7–9](#); [1 Peter 1:13–15](#).

A Story About Ten Bridesmaids

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to wait for the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³The five foolish bridesmaids took their lamps, but they did not take more oil for the lamps to burn. ⁴The wise bridesmaids took their lamps and more oil in jars. ⁵Because the bridegroom was late, they became sleepy and went to sleep.

⁶“At midnight someone cried out, ‘The bridegroom is coming! Come and meet him!’ ⁷Then all the bridesmaids woke up and got their lamps ready. ⁸But the foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.’ ⁹The wise bridesmaids answered, ‘No, the oil we have might not be enough for all of us. Go to the people who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

¹⁰“So while the five foolish bridesmaids went to buy oil, the bridegroom came. The bridesmaids who were ready went in with the bridegroom to the wedding feast. Then the door was closed and locked.

¹¹“Later the others came back and said, ‘Sir, sir, open the door to let us in.’ ¹²But the bridegroom answered, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t want to know you.’

¹³“So always be ready, because you don’t know the day or the hour the Son of Man will come.

A Story About Three Servants

¹⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who was going to another place for a visit. Before he left, he called for his servants and told them to take care of his things while he was gone. ¹⁵He gave one servant five bags of gold, another servant two bags of gold, and a third servant one bag of gold, to each one as much as he could handle. Then he left. ¹⁶The servant who got five bags went quickly to invest the money and earned five more bags. ¹⁷In the same way, the servant who had two bags invested them and earned two more. ¹⁸But the servant who got one bag went out and dug a hole in the ground and hid the master’s money.

¹⁹“After a long time the master came home and asked the servants what they did with his money. ²⁰The servant who was given five bags of gold brought five more bags to the master and said, ‘Master, you trusted me to care for five bags of gold, so I used your five bags to earn five more.’ ²¹The master answered, ‘You did well. You are a good and loyal servant. Because you were loyal with small things, I will let you care for much greater things. Come and share my joy with me.’

²²“Then the servant who had been given two bags of gold came to the master and said, ‘Master, you gave me two bags of gold to care for, so I used your two bags to earn two more.’ ²³The master answered, ‘You did well. You are a good and loyal servant. Because you were loyal with small things, I will let you care for much greater things. Come and share my joy with me.’

²⁴“Then the servant who had been given one bag of gold came to the master and said, ‘Master, I knew that you were a hard man. You harvest things you did not plant. You gather

crops where you did not sow any seed. ²⁵So I was afraid and went and hid your money in the ground. Here is your bag of gold.’ ²⁶The master answered, ‘You are a wicked and lazy servant! You say you knew that I harvest things I did not plant and that I gather crops where I did not sow any seed. ²⁷So you should have put my gold in the bank. Then, when I came home, I would have received my gold back with interest.’

²⁸“So the master told his other servants, ‘Take the bag of gold from that servant and give it to the servant who has ten bags of gold. ²⁹Those who have much will get more, and they will have much more than they need. But those who do not have much will have everything taken away from them.’ ³⁰Then the master said, ‘Throw that useless servant outside, into the darkness where people will cry and grind their teeth with pain.’

The King Will Judge All People

³¹“The Son of Man will come again in his great glory, with all his angels. He will be King and sit on his great throne. ³²All the nations of the world will be gathered before him, and he will separate them into two groups as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³The Son of Man will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴“Then the King will say to the people on his right, ‘Come, my Father has given you his blessing. Receive the kingdom God has prepared for you since the world was made. ³⁵I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was alone and away from home, and you invited me into your house. ³⁶I was without clothes, and you gave me something to wear. I was sick, and you cared for me. I

was in prison, and you visited me.'

³⁷“Then the good people will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you alone and away from home and invite you into our house? When did we see you without clothes and give you something to wear? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and care for you?’

⁴⁰“Then the King will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.’

⁴¹“Then the King will say to those on his left, ‘Go away from me. You will be punished. Go into the fire that burns forever that was prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink. ⁴³I was alone and away from home, and you did not invite me into your house. I was without clothes, and you gave me nothing to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you did not care for me.’

⁴⁴“Then those people will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or alone and away from home or without clothes or sick or in prison? When did we see these things and not help you?’

⁴⁵“Then the King will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, anything you refused to do for even the least of my people here, you refused to do for me.’

⁴⁶“These people will go off to be punished forever, but the good people will go to live forever.”

Life Lessons

Matthew 26:1-75

Situation

Jesus looked toward the Passover and his death. He prepared his disciples by teaching them and spending time alone in prayer.

Observation

Jesus willingly obeyed God during the events leading up to his death. This obedience made salvation possible.

Inspiration

Consider the holiness of Christ. We need this first of all *to be firmly grounded in our security in Christ*. ... It is important therefore that we understand the righteousness of Christ, and the fact that His righteousness is credited to us.

On numerous occasions the Scriptures testify that Jesus during His time on earth lived a perfectly holy life....

But the holiness of Jesus was more than simply the absence of actual sin. It was also a perfect conformity to the will of His Father....

It is possible to do the right action from the wrong motive, but this does not please God. Holiness has to do with more than mere acts. Our motives must be holy, that is, arising from a desire to do something simply because it is the will of God....

Consider the holiness of Christ, because His life is meant to be an example of holiness for us....

Consider then His statement, “I always do what pleases Him.” Do we dare take that as our personal goal in life? Are we truly willing to scrutinize all our activities, our goals and plans, and all of our impulsive actions in the light of this statement: “I am doing this to please God”? ...

This is the example we are to follow. In all of our thoughts, all of our actions, in every part of our character, the ruling principle that motivates and guides us should be the desire to follow Christ in doing the will of the Father. This is the high road we must follow in the pursuit of holiness. (From *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges)

Application

Do you really want to follow Christ’s example by doing the will of the Father? Are you ready and willing to submit your plans, thoughts, and behavior to him? If submitting is difficult for you in a particular area, pray specifically that God will help you.

Exploration

Loyalty and Obedience—[Joshua 22:2–5](#); [Psalm 119:33–37](#); [John 21:15–17](#); [Philippians 4:3](#); [1 Peter 1:14–16](#).

The cross was heavy, the blood was real, and the price was extravagant. It would have bankrupted you or me, so he paid it for us. Call it simple. Call it a gift. But don't call it easy. —Max Lucado (*A Gentle Thunder*)

The Plan to Kill Jesus

After Jesus finished saying all these things, he told his followers,²“You know that the day after tomorrow is the day of the Passover Feast. On that day the Son of Man will be given to his enemies to be crucified.”

³Then the leading priests and the older leaders had a meeting at the palace of the high priest, named Caiaphas. ⁴At the meeting, they planned to set a trap to arrest Jesus and kill him. ⁵But they said, “We must not do it during the feast, because the people might cause a riot.”

Perfume for Jesus' Burial

⁶Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon, who had a skin disease. ⁷While Jesus was there, a woman approached him with an alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. She poured this perfume on Jesus' head while he was eating.

⁸His followers were upset when they saw the woman do this. They asked, “Why waste that perfume? ⁹It could have been sold for a great deal of money and the money given to the

poor.”

¹⁰Knowing what had happened, Jesus said, “Why are you troubling this woman? She did an excellent thing for me. ¹¹You will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹²This woman poured perfume on my body to prepare me for burial. ¹³I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached in all the world, what this woman has done will be told, and people will remember her.”

Judas Becomes an Enemy of Jesus

¹⁴Then one of the twelve apostles, Judas Iscariot, went to talk to the leading priests. ¹⁵He said, “What will you pay me for giving Jesus to you?” And they gave him thirty silver coins. ¹⁶After that, Judas watched for the best time to turn Jesus in.

Jesus Eats the Passover Meal

¹⁷On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the followers came to Jesus. They said, “Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover meal?”

¹⁸Jesus answered, “Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: The chosen time is near. I will have the Passover with my followers at your house.’” ¹⁹The followers did what Jesus told them to do, and they prepared the Passover meal.

²⁰In the evening Jesus was sitting at the table with his twelve followers. ²¹As they were eating, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, one of you will turn against me.”

²²This made the followers very sad. Each one began to say to Jesus, “Surely, Lord, I am not the one who will turn against you, am I?”

²³Jesus answered, “The man who has dipped his hand with me into the bowl is the one who will turn against me. ²⁴The Son of Man will die, just as the Scriptures say. But how terrible it will be for the person who hands the Son of Man over to be killed. It would be better for him if he had never been born.”

²⁵Then Judas, who would give Jesus to his enemies, said to Jesus, “Teacher, surely I am not the one, am I?”

Jesus answered, “Yes, it is you.”

The Lord’s Supper

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took some bread and thanked God for it and broke it. Then he gave it to his followers and said, “Take this bread and eat it; this is my body.”

²⁷Then Jesus took a cup and thanked God for it and gave it to the followers. He said, “Every one of you drink this. ²⁸This is my blood which is the new agreement that God makes with his people. This blood is poured out for many to forgive their sins. ²⁹I tell you this: I will not drink of this [fruit of the vine](#) again until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

³⁰After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus’ Followers Will Leave Him

³¹Jesus told his followers, “Tonight you will all stumble in your

faith on account of me, because it is written in the Scriptures:

‘I will kill the shepherd,
and the sheep will scatter.’

[Zechariah 13:7](#)

³²But after I rise from the dead, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

³³Peter said, “Everyone else may stumble in their faith because of you, but I will not.”

³⁴Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, tonight before the rooster crows you will say three times that you don’t know me.”

³⁵But Peter said, “I will never say that I don’t know you! I will even die with you!” And all the other followers said the same thing.

Jesus Prays Alone

³⁶Then Jesus went with his followers to a place called Gethsemane. He said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him, and he began to be very sad and troubled. ³⁸He said to them, “My heart is full of sorrow, to the point of death. Stay here and watch with me.”

³⁹After walking a little farther away from them, Jesus fell to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, do not give me this [cup](#) of suffering. But do what you want, not what I want.” ⁴⁰Then Jesus went back to his followers and found them asleep. He said to Peter, “You men could not stay awake with me for one hour?” ⁴¹Stay awake and pray for strength against

temptation. The spirit wants to do what is right, but the body is weak.”

⁴²Then Jesus went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this painful thing to be taken from me, and if I must do it, I pray that what you want will be done.”

⁴³Then he went back to his followers, and again he found them asleep, because their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So Jesus left them and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing.

⁴⁵Then Jesus went back to his followers and said, “Are you still sleeping and resting? The time has come for the Son of Man to be handed over to sinful people. ⁴⁶Get up, we must go. Look, here comes the man who has turned against me.”

Jesus Is Arrested

⁴⁷While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve apostles, came up. With him were many people carrying swords and clubs who had been sent from the leading priests and the older Jewish leaders of the people. ⁴⁸Judas had planned to give them a signal, saying, “The man I kiss is Jesus. Arrest him.” ⁴⁹At once Judas went to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Teacher!” and kissed him.

⁵⁰Jesus answered, “Friend, do what you came to do.”

Then the people came and grabbed Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹When that happened, one of Jesus’ followers reached for his sword and pulled it out. He struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear.

⁵²Jesus said to the man, “Put your sword back in its place.

All who use swords will be killed with swords.⁵³ Surely you know I could ask my Father, and he would give me more than twelve armies of angels.⁵⁴ But it must happen this way to bring about what the Scriptures say.”

⁵⁵Then Jesus said to the crowd, “You came to get me with swords and clubs as if I were a criminal. Every day I sat in the Temple teaching, and you did not arrest me there.⁵⁶ But all these things have happened so that it will come about as the prophets wrote.” Then all of Jesus’ followers left him and ran away.

Jesus Before the Leaders

⁵⁷Those people who arrested Jesus led him to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the older leaders were gathered.⁵⁸ Peter followed far behind to the courtyard of the high priest’s house, and he sat down with the guards to see what would happen to Jesus.

⁵⁹The leading priests and the whole Jewish council tried to find something false against Jesus so they could kill him.⁶⁰ Many people came and told lies about him, but the council could find no real reason to kill him. Then two people came and said,⁶¹ “This man said, ‘I can destroy the Temple of God and build it again in three days.’”

⁶²Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Aren’t you going to answer? Don’t you have something to say about their charges against you?”⁶³ But Jesus said nothing.

Again the high priest said to Jesus, “I command you by the power of the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”

⁶⁴Jesus answered, “Those are your words. But I tell you, in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God, the Powerful One, and coming on clouds in the sky.”

⁶⁵When the high priest heard this, he tore his clothes and said, “This man has said things that are against God! We don’t need any more witnesses; you all heard him say these things against God. ⁶⁶What do you think?”

The people answered, “He should die.”

⁶⁷Then the people there spat in Jesus’ face and beat him with their fists. Others slapped him. ⁶⁸They said, “Prove to us that you are a prophet, you Christ! Tell us who hit you!”

Peter Says He Doesn’t Know Jesus

⁶⁹At that time, as Peter was sitting in the courtyard, a servant girl came to him and said, “You also were with Jesus of Galilee.”

⁷⁰But Peter said to all the people there that he was never with Jesus. He said, “I don’t know what you are talking about.”

⁷¹When he left the courtyard and was at the gate, another girl saw him. She said to the people there, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.”

⁷²Again, Peter said he was never with him, saying, “I swear I don’t know this man Jesus!”

⁷³A short time later, some people standing there went to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of those who followed Jesus. The way you talk shows it.”

⁷⁴Then Peter began to place a curse on himself and swear, “I don’t know the man.” At once, a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵And Peter remembered what Jesus had told him: “Before the rooster

crowds, you will say three times that you don't know me." Then Peter went outside and cried painfully.

Life Lessons

Matthew 27:1–66

Situation

The Jewish leaders decided that Jesus must die. Because they were not allowed to execute anyone, they turned him over to the Romans. Jesus appeared before Pontius Pilate (governor of Samaria and Judea from A.D. 26 to 36) prior to his crucifixion.

Observation

Jewish leaders refused to believe Jesus was the Messiah and insisted that Pilate execute him. Yet Jesus died for their sins, and ours, too.

Inspiration

Six hours. One Friday.

Let me ask you a question: What do you do with that day in history? What do you do with its claims?

If it really happened ... if God did commandeer his own crucifixion ... if he did turn his back on his own son ... if he did storm Satan's gate, then those six hours that Friday were packed with tragic triumph. If that was God on that cross, then the hill called Skull is a granite studded with stakes to which you can anchor.

Those six hours were no normal six hours. They were the most critical hours in history. For during those six hours on that Friday, God embedded in the earth three anchor points sturdy enough to withstand any hurricane.

Anchor point #1—*My life is not futile*. This rock

secures the hull of your heart. Its sole function is to give you something which you can grip when facing the surging tides of futility and relativism... . Someone is in control and I have a purpose.

Anchor point #2—*My failures are not fatal*. It's not that he loves what you did, but he loves who you are... . The one who has the right to condemn you has provided the way to acquit you. You make mistakes. God doesn't. And he made you.

Anchor point #3—*My death is not final*. There is one more stone to which you should tie... . It blocked the door of a grave. It wasn't big enough, though... . He only went in to prove he could come out. And on the way out he took the stone with him and turned it into an anchor point... . Tie it to his rock and the typhoon of the tomb becomes a spring breeze on Easter Sunday.

There they are. Three anchor points. The anchor points of the cross. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

Application

Some people would rather see Jesus dead than controlling their lives. What room in the castle of your life (career, family, church) needs to be placed under Christ's control? Don't hesitate a day. Pray now. Give your life fully to him.

Exploration

Jesus' Death Saves Us—[John 3:14-17](#); [11:25-26](#); [Romans 3:23-26](#); [1 Corinthians 1:18](#); [Colossians 1:20-22](#); [Titus 3:3-7](#).

Jesus Is Taken to Pilate

Early the next morning, all the leading priests and older leaders of the people decided that Jesus should die. ²They tied him, led him away, and turned him over to Pilate, the governor.

Judas Kills Himself

³Judas, the one who had given Jesus to his enemies, saw that they had decided to kill Jesus. Then he was very sorry for what he had done. So he took the thirty silver coins back to the priests and the leaders, ⁴saying, “I sinned; I handed over to you an innocent man.”

The leaders answered, “What is that to us? That’s your problem, not ours.”

⁵So Judas threw the money into the Temple. Then he went off and hanged himself.

⁶The leading priests picked up the silver coins in the Temple and said, “Our law does not allow us to keep this money with the Temple money, because it has paid for a man’s death.” ⁷So they decided to use the coins to buy Potter’s Field as a place to bury strangers who died in Jerusalem. ⁸That is why that field is still called the Field of Blood. ⁹So what Jeremiah the prophet had said came true: “They took thirty silver coins. That is how little the Israelites thought he was

worth. ¹⁰[They used those thirty silver coins to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.](#)

Pilate Questions Jesus

¹¹Jesus stood before Pilate the governor, and Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “Those are your words.”

¹²When the leading priests and the older leaders accused Jesus, he said nothing.

¹³So Pilate said to Jesus, “Don’t you hear them accusing you of all these things?”

¹⁴But Jesus said nothing in answer to Pilate, and Pilate was very surprised at this.

Pilate Tries to Free Jesus

¹⁵Every year at the time of Passover the governor would free one prisoner whom the people chose. ¹⁶At that time there was a man in prison, named Barabbas, who was known to be very bad. ¹⁷When the people gathered at Pilate’s house, Pilate said, “Whom do you want me to set free: Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Christ?” ¹⁸Pilate knew that the people turned Jesus in to him because they were jealous.

¹⁹While Pilate was sitting there on the judge’s seat, his wife sent this message to him: “Don’t do anything to that man, because he is innocent. Today I had a dream about him, and it troubled me very much.”

²⁰But the leading priests and older leaders convinced the

crowd to ask for Barabbas to be freed and for Jesus to be killed.

²¹Pilate said, "I have Barabbas and Jesus. Which do you want me to set free for you?"

The people answered, "Barabbas."

²²Pilate asked, "So what should I do with Jesus, the one called the Christ?"

They all answered, "Crucify him!"

²³Pilate asked, "Why? What wrong has he done?"

But they shouted louder, "Crucify him!"

²⁴When Pilate saw that he could do nothing about this and that a riot was starting, he took some water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. Then he said, "I am not guilty of this man's death. You are the ones who are causing it!"

²⁵All the people answered, "We and our children will be responsible for his death."

²⁶Then he set Barabbas free. But Jesus was beaten with whips and handed over to the soldiers to be crucified.

²⁷The governor's soldiers took Jesus into the governor's palace, and they all gathered around him. ²⁸They took off his clothes and put a red robe on him. ²⁹Using thorny branches, they made a crown, put it on his head, and put a stick in his right hand. Then the soldiers bowed before Jesus and made fun of him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰They spat on Jesus. Then they took his stick and began to beat him on the head. ³¹After they finished, the soldiers took off the robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.

Jesus Is Crucified

³²As the soldiers were going out of the city with Jesus, they forced a man from Cyrene, named Simon, to carry the cross for Jesus. ³³They all came to the place called Golgotha, which means the Place of the Skull. ³⁴The soldiers gave Jesus wine mixed with [gall](#) to drink. He tasted the wine but refused to drink it. ³⁵When the soldiers had crucified him, they threw lots to decide who would get his clothes. ³⁶The soldiers sat there and continued watching him. ³⁷They put a sign above Jesus' head with a charge against him. It said: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS. ³⁸Two robbers were crucified beside Jesus, one on the right and the other on the left. ³⁹People walked by and insulted Jesus and shook their heads, ⁴⁰saying, "You said you could destroy the Temple and build it again in three days. So save yourself! Come down from that cross if you are really the Son of God!"

⁴¹The leading priests, the teachers of the law, and the older Jewish leaders were also making fun of Jesus. ⁴²They said, "He saved others, but he can't save himself! He says he is the king of Israel! If he is the king, let him come down now from the cross. Then we will believe in him. ⁴³He trusts in God, so let God save him now, if God really wants him. He himself said, 'I am the Son of God.'"⁴⁴And in the same way, the robbers who were being crucified beside Jesus also insulted him.

Jesus Dies

⁴⁵At noon the whole country became dark, and the darkness lasted for three hours. ⁴⁶About three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" This means, "My God, my God, why have you rejected me?"

⁴⁷Some of the people standing there who heard this said, “He is calling Elijah.”

⁴⁸Quickly one of them ran and got a sponge and filled it with vinegar and tied it to a stick and gave it to Jesus to drink.

⁴⁹But the others said, “Don’t bother him. We want to see if Elijah will come to save him.”

⁵⁰But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice and died.

⁵¹Then the [curtain in the Temple](#) was torn into two pieces, from the top to the bottom. Also, the earth shook and rocks broke apart. ⁵²The graves opened, and many of God’s people who had died were raised from the dead. ⁵³They came out of the graves after Jesus was raised from the dead and went into the holy city, where they appeared to many people.

⁵⁴When the army officer and the soldiers guarding Jesus saw this earthquake and everything else that happened, they were very frightened and said, “He really was the Son of God!”

⁵⁵Many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee to help him were standing at a distance from the cross, watching.

⁵⁶Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of James and John were there.

Jesus Is Buried

⁵⁷That evening a rich man named Joseph, a follower of Jesus from the town of Arimathea, came to Jerusalem. ⁵⁸Joseph went to Pilate and asked to have Jesus’ body. So Pilate gave orders for the soldiers to give it to Joseph. ⁵⁹Then Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth. ⁶⁰He put Jesus’ body in a new tomb that he had cut out of a wall of rock, and he rolled a very large stone to block the entrance of the tomb.

Then Joseph went away. ⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other woman named Mary were sitting near the tomb.

The Tomb of Jesus Is Guarded

⁶²The next day, the day after Preparation Day, the leading priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ⁶³They said, “Sir, we remember that while that liar was still alive he said, ‘After three days I will rise from the dead.’ ⁶⁴So give the order for the tomb to be guarded closely till the third day. Otherwise, his followers might come and steal the body and tell people that he has risen from the dead. That lie would be even worse than the first one.”

⁶⁵Pilate said, “Take some soldiers and go guard the tomb the best way you know.” ⁶⁶So they all went to the tomb and made it safe from thieves by sealing the stone in the entrance and putting soldiers there to guard it.

Life Lessons

Matthew 28:1–20

Situation

When Jesus rose from the dead, he conquered sin and death. Mary Magdalene and another Mary were the first to see the empty tomb and the risen Savior.

Observation

Jesus' resurrection proved that what he had taught was correct. He used his ultimate authority when he gave the Great Commission, but showed his unlimited power by promising to be with his followers forever.

Inspiration

Mary and Mary knew a task had to be done—Jesus' body had to be prepared for burial. Peter didn't offer to do it. Andrew didn't volunteer. The forgiven adulteress or healed lepers are nowhere to be seen. So the two Marys decide to do it.

I wonder if halfway to the tomb they had sat down and reconsidered. What if they'd looked at each other and shrugged, "What's the use?" What if they had given up? What if one had thrown up her arms in frustration and bemoaned, "I'm tired of being the only one who cares. Let Andrew do something for a change. Let Nathaniel show some leadership"?

Whether or not they were tempted to, I'm glad they didn't quit. That would have been tragic. You see, we know something they didn't. We know the Father was watching. Mary and Mary thought they

were alone. They weren't. They thought their journey was unnoticed. They were wrong. God knew. He was watching them walk up the mountain. He was measuring their steps. He was smiling at their hearts and thrilled at their devotion. And he had a surprise waiting for them...

Why did the angel move the stone? For whom did he roll away the rock?

For Jesus? That's what I always thought. I just assumed that the angel moved the stone so Jesus could come out. But think about it. Did the stone have to be removed in order for Jesus to exit? Did God have to have help? Was the death conqueror so weak that he couldn't push away a rock? ("Hey, could somebody out there move this rock so I can get out?")

I don't think so. The text gives the impression that Jesus was already out when the stone was moved! Nowhere do the Gospels say that the angel moved the stone for Jesus. For whom, then was the stone moved?

Listen to what the angel says: "Come and see the place where his body was" (v. [6](#)).

The stone was moved—not for Jesus—but for the women; not so Jesus could come out, but so the women could see in! ...

"Go quickly and tell his followers, 'Jesus has risen from the dead. He is going into Galilee ahead of you, and you will see him there'" (v. [7](#)).

Mary and Mary don't have to be told twice. They turn and start running to Jerusalem. The darkness is

gone. The sun is up. The Son is out. But the Son isn't finished.

One surprise still awaits them.

“Suddenly, Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings.’ The women came up to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. Go and tell my followers to go on to Galilee, and they will see me there’” (vv. [9–10](#)).

The God of surprises strikes again. It’s as if he said, “I can’t wait any longer. They came this far to see me; I’m going to drop in on them.”

God does that for the faithful. Just when the womb gets too old for babies, Sarai gets pregnant. Just when the failure is too great for grace, David is pardoned. And just when the road is too dark for Mary and Mary, the angel glows and the Savior shows and the two women will never be the same.

The lesson? Three words. Don’t give up.

Is the trail dark? Don’t sit.

Is the road long? Don’t stop ...

Is the night black? Don’t quit.

God is watching. For all you know right at this moment he may be telling the angel to move the stone.

The check may be in the mail...

The apology may be in the making.

The job contract may be on the desk.

Don’t quit. For if you do, you may miss the answer to your prayers.

God still sends angels. And God still moves stones. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

Has the Great Commission of [Matthew 28:18–20](#) made a practical difference in your life? Perhaps a ministry with your church's outreach program needs your help. Ask God for wisdom as you call to volunteer.

Exploration

The Great Commission—[Mark 1:17](#); [16:15–20](#); [Acts 1:8](#); [14:21–22](#); [Colossians 1:28–29](#).

Jesus Rises from the Dead

The day after the Sabbath day was the first day of the week. At dawn on the first day, Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary went to look at the tomb.

²At that time there was a strong earthquake. An angel of the Lord came down from heaven, went to the tomb, and rolled the stone away from the entrance. Then he sat on the stone. ³He was shining as bright as lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The soldiers guarding the tomb shook with fear because of the angel, and they became like dead men.

⁵The angel said to the women, “Don’t be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus, who has been crucified. ⁶He is not here. He has risen from the dead as he said he would. Come and see the place where his body was. ⁷And go quickly and tell his followers, ‘Jesus has risen from the dead. He is going into Galilee ahead of you, and you will see him there.’” Then the angel said, “Now I have told you.”

⁸The women left the tomb quickly. They were afraid, but they were also very happy. They ran to tell Jesus’ followers what had happened. ⁹Suddenly, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings.” The women came up to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Go and tell my followers to go on to Galilee, and they will see me there.”

The Soldiers Report to the Leaders

¹¹While the women went to tell Jesus' followers, some of the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb went into the city to tell the leading priests everything that had happened. ¹²Then the priests met with the older leaders and made a plan. They paid the soldiers a large amount of money ¹³and said to them, "Tell the people that Jesus' followers came during the night and stole the body while you were asleep. ¹⁴If the governor hears about this, we will satisfy him and save you from trouble." ¹⁵So the soldiers kept the money and did as they were told. And that story is still spread among the people even today.

Jesus Talks to His Followers

¹⁶The eleven followers went to Galilee to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷On the mountain they saw Jesus and worshiped him, but some of them did not believe it was really Jesus. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All power in heaven and on earth is given to me. ¹⁹So go and make followers of all people in the world. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, and I will be with you always, even until the end of this age."

father “Father” in Jewish lists of ancestors can sometimes mean grandfather or more distant relative.

engaged For the Jewish people an engagement was a lasting agreement, which could only be broken by a divorce. If a bride-to-be was unfaithful, it was considered adultery, and she could be put to death.

Jesus The name “Jesus” means “salvation.”

“The virgin ... Immanuel” Quotation from [Isaiah 7:14](#).

“I called ... Egypt.” Quotation from [Hosea 11:1](#).

Nazarene A person from the city of Nazareth, a name probably meaning “branch” (see [Isaiah 11:1](#)).

The ax ... fire. This means that God is ready to punish his people who do not obey him.

He will ... out. This means that Jesus will come to separate good people from bad people, saving the good and punishing the bad.

‘A person ... says.’ Quotation from [Deuteronomy 8:3](#).

‘Do ... God.’ Quotation from [Deuteronomy 6:16](#).

‘You ... him.’ Quotation from [Deuteronomy 6:13](#).

epileptics People with a disease that causes them sometimes to lose control of their bodies and maybe faint, shake strongly, or not be able to move.

Ten Towns In Greek, called “Decapolis.” It was an area east of Lake Galilee that once had ten main towns.

You ... anyone. Quotation from [Exodus 20:13](#); [Deuteronomy 5:17](#).

brother ... sister Although the Greek text reads “brother” here and throughout this book, Jesus’ words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

‘You ... adultery.’ Quotation from [Exodus 20:14](#); [Deuteronomy 5:18](#).

'Anyone ... divorce paper.' Quotation from Deuteronomy 24:1.

'Don't ... Lord.' This refers to Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21.

'An eye ... tooth.' Quotation from Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21.

'Love your neighbor' Quotation from Leviticus 19:18.

give up eating This is called "fasting." The people would give up eating for a special time of prayer and worship to God. It was also done to show sadness and disappointment.

show ... priest The Law of Moses said a priest must say when a Jewish person with a skin disease was well.

Moses commanded Read about this in Leviticus 14:1–32.

Gadarene From Gadara, an area southeast of Lake Galilee.

blasphemy Saying things against God or not showing respect for God.

'I want ... sacrifices.' Quotation from Hosea 6:6.

John John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ's coming (Matthew 3, Luke 3).

give up ... time This is called "fasting." The people would give up eating for a special time of prayer and worship to God. It was also done to show sadness and disappointment.

"There are ... harvest." As a farmer sends workers to harvest the grain, Jesus sends his followers to bring people to God.

shake ... feet A warning. It showed that they had rejected these people.

Sodom and Gomorrah Two cities that God destroyed because the people were so evil.

reed It means that John was not ordinary or weak like grass blown by the wind.

Tyre and Sidon Towns where wicked people lived.

Korazin ... Bethsaida ... Capernaum Towns by Lake Galilee where Jesus preached to the people.

Sodom A city that God destroyed because the people were so evil.

'I... sacrifices.' Quotation from **Hosea 6:6**.

"Is it right ... day?" It was against Jewish Law to work on the Sabbath day.

Nineveh The city where Jonah preached to warn the people. Read **Jonah 3**.

Queen of the South The Queen of Sheba. She traveled a thousand miles to learn God's wisdom from Solomon. Read **1 Kings 10:1-13**.

produce fruit To produce fruit means to have in your life the good things God wants.

'Honor ... mother.' Quotation from **Exodus 20:12**; **Deuteronomy 5:16**.

'Anyone ... death.' Quotation from **Exodus 21:17**.

sign of Jonah Jonah's three days in the fish are like Jesus' three days in the tomb. The story about Jonah is in the Book of Jonah.

Peter The Greek name "Peter," like the Aramaic name "Cephas," means "rock."

Satan Name for the devil, meaning "the enemy." Jesus means that Peter was talking like Satan.

Moses and Elijah Two of the most important Jewish leaders in the past. God had given Moses the Law, and Elijah was an important prophet.

epilepsy A disease that causes a person sometimes to lose control of his body and maybe faint, shake strongly, or not be able to move.

Verse 21 Some Greek copies add verse [21](#): “That kind of spirit comes out only if you use prayer and give up eating.”

Verse 11 Some Greek copies add verse [11](#): “The Son of Man came to save lost people.”

[‘Every ... witnesses.’](#) Quotation from [Deuteronomy 19:15](#).

[‘he made ... female.’](#) Quotation from [Genesis 1:27](#) or [5:2](#).

[‘So ... body.’](#) Quotation from [Genesis 2:24](#).

[But ... marriage.](#) This may also mean, “The person who can accept this teaching about not marrying should accept it.”

[put his hands on them](#) Showing that Jesus gave special blessings to these children.

[‘You ... mother.’](#) Quotation from [Exodus 20:12–16](#); [Deuteronomy 5:16–20](#).

[‘love ... yourself.’](#) Quotation from [Leviticus 19:18](#).

[coin](#) A Roman denarius. One coin was the average pay for one day’s work.

[drink ... drink](#) Jesus used the idea of drinking from a cup to ask if they could accept the same terrible things that would happen to him.

[Praise](#) Literally, “Hosanna,” a Hebrew word used at first in praying to God for help. At this time it was probably a shout of joy used in praising God or his Messiah.

[‘My Temple ... prayer.’](#) Quotation from [Isaiah 56:7](#).

[‘hideout for robbers.’](#) Quotation from [Jeremiah 7:11](#).

[Praise](#) Literally, “Hosanna,” a Hebrew word used at first in praying to God for help. At this time it was probably a shout of joy used in praising God or his Messiah.

[‘You ... praises’](#) Quotation from the Septuagint (Greek) version of [Psalm 8:2](#).

Verse 44 Some copies do not have verse [44](#).

[Herodians](#) A political group that followed Herod and his

family.

coin A Roman denarius. One coin was the average pay for one day's work.

'I am ... Jacob.' Quotation from [Exodus 3:6](#).

'Love ... mind.' Quotation from [Deuteronomy 6:5](#).

'Love ... yourself.' Quotation from [Leviticus 19:18](#).

boxes Small leather boxes containing four important Scriptures. Some Jews tied these to their foreheads and left arms, probably to show they were very religious.

Verse 14 Some Greek copies add verse 14: "How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees. You are hypocrites. You take away widows' houses, and you say long prayers so that people will notice you. So you will have a worse punishment."

mint, dill, and cumin Small plants grown in gardens and used for spices. Only very religious people would be careful enough to give a tenth of these plants.

You ... camel! Meaning, "You worry about the smallest mistakes but commit the biggest sin."

Abel ... Zechariah In the order of the books of the Hebrew Old Testament, the first and last men to be murdered.

'God ... Lord.' Quotation from [Psalm 118:26](#).

'the destroying terror' Mentioned in [Daniel 9:27](#); [12:11](#) (see also [Daniel 11:31](#)).

roofs In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

mill Two large, round, flat rocks used for grinding grain to make flour.

fruit of the vine Product of the grapevine; this may also be

translated “wine.”

cup Jesus is talking about the terrible things that will happen to him. Accepting these things will be very hard, like drinking a cup of something bitter.

“They ... commanded me.” See [Zechariah 11:12–13](#) and [Jeremiah 32:6–9](#).

washed his hands He did this as a sign to show that he wanted no part in what the people did.

gall Probably a drink of wine mixed with drugs to help a person feel less pain.

curtain in the Temple A curtain divided the Most Holy Place from the other part of the Temple. That was the special building in Jerusalem where God commanded the Jewish people to worship him.

[The Book of Mark](#)

Introduction

The drama of Mark's Gospel peaks in Caesarea Philippi.

It's a religious mecca. Every major religion can be found here. Temples dot the landscape. Priests stride the streets.

Jesus and his followers are here? Why? If Jesus preached a sermon, it's not recorded. If he performed a miracle, we don't know it. As far as we know, all he did was ask two questions.

The first, "Who do people say that I am?"

The disciples are quick to respond. They've overheard the chatter. "Some say you are John the Baptist. Others say you are Elijah, and others say you are one of the prophets."

Good answers. True answers. But wrong answers.

Jesus then turns and asks them the question. *The* question. "But who do you say I am?"

He doesn't ask, "What do you think about what I've done." He asks, "Who do you say I am?"

He doesn't ask, "Who *did* you think I was when the crowds were great and the miracles were many?" He asks, "Who *do* you think I am? Here against the backdrop of religion. Me, a penniless itinerant surrounded by affluent temples. Who do you say I am?"

He doesn't ask, "Who do your friends think ... Who do your parents think ... Who do your peers think?" He poses instead a starkly personal query, "Who do you think I am?"

The disciples aren't as quick to respond. One ducks his eyes. Another shuffles his feet. A third clears his throat. But Peter lifts his head. He lifts his head and looks at the Nazarene and speaks the words heaven has longed to hear. "You are the Christ."

You have been asked some important questions in your life:
Will you marry me?

Would you be interested in a transfer?

What would you think if I told you I was pregnant?

You've been asked some important questions. But the grandest of them is an anthill compared to the Everest found in the eighth chapter of Mark.

Who do you say I am?

About This Book

Author:

Mark, also called John Mark

Date Written:

c. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

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- Jesus was a savior and yet a servant.
- Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice for humanity's broken relationship with God.
- Jesus performed miracles through the power of God.
- Jesus taught about the kingdom of God.

Key Verse:

"In the same way, the Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many people" ([Mark 10:45](#)).

Contents:

1. Jesus' Introduction and Preparation [1:1–2:12](#)
2. Public Ministry [2:13–8:26](#)
3. Teachings [8:27–10:52](#)
4. Trial, Death, and Resurrection [11:1–16:20](#)

Life Lessons

Mark 1:1–45

Situation

Persecution and martyrdom in Rome created a dangerous environment for Christians. Mark wrote this Gospel to the Christians in Rome to encourage and strengthen their faith. He recorded Christ's baptism, temptation, and the beginning of his ministry with his disciples.

Observation

Jesus came to be active and compassionate to the people around him. He exemplified tenderness when he healed the leper by touching him.

Inspiration

Jesus was a master at communicating love and personal acceptance. He did so when He blessed and held ... little children. But another time His sensitivity to touch someone was even more graphic. This was when Jesus met a grown man's need for meaningful touch, a man who was barred by law from ever touching anyone again....

To touch a leper was unthinkable. Banishing lepers from society, people would not get within a stone's throw of them. (In fact, they would throw stones at them if they did come close!) ... With their open sores and dirty bandages, lepers were the last persons anyone would want to touch. Yet the first thing Christ did for this man was touch him.

Even before Jesus spoke to him, He reached out

His hand and touched him. Can you imagine what that scene must have looked like? Think how this man must have longed for someone to touch him, not throw stones at him to drive him away. Jesus could have healed him first and then touched him. But recognizing his deepest need, Jesus stretched out His hand even before He spoke words of physical and spiritual healing.

(From *The Gift of the Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent)

Application

Jesus shows us the power of gentle compassion. Who do you have trouble “touching” because they are not attractive in any way? Compassion requires more than words; compassion requires action. Look for ways to express compassion to those who are starving for a tender touch.

Exploration

Jesus’ Compassion—[Matthew 8:3, 15; 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 17:7; 20:34; 23:37;](#) [Mark 10:13–16;](#) [Luke 7:13; 22:51;](#) [John 11:35.](#)

John Prepares for Jesus

This is the beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, [the Son of God](#),² as the prophet Isaiah wrote:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way.”

[Malachi 3:1](#)

³“This is a voice of one
who calls out in the desert:
‘Prepare the way for the Lord.
Make the road straight for him.’”

[Isaiah 40:3](#)

⁴John was baptizing people in the desert and preaching a baptism of changed hearts and lives for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵All the people from Judea and Jerusalem were going out to him. They confessed their sins and were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶John wore clothes made from camel’s hair, had a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷This is what John preached to the people: “There is one coming after me who is greater than I; I am not good enough even to kneel down and untie his sandals. ⁸I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus Is Baptized

⁹At that time Jesus came from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan River. ¹⁰Immediately, as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven open. The Holy Spirit came down on him like a dove, ¹¹and a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love, and I am very pleased with you.”

¹²Then the Spirit sent Jesus into the desert. ¹³He was in the desert forty days and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels came and took care of him.

Jesus Chooses Some Followers

¹⁴After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, preaching the Good News from God. ¹⁵He said, “The right time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Change your hearts and lives and believe the Good News!”

¹⁶When Jesus was walking by Lake Galilee, he saw [Simon](#) and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the lake because they were fishermen. ¹⁷Jesus said to them, “Come follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” ¹⁸So Simon and Andrew immediately left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹Going a little farther, Jesus saw two more brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in a boat, mending their nets. ²⁰Jesus immediately called them, and they left their father in the boat with the hired workers and followed Jesus.

Jesus Forces Out an Evil Spirit

²¹Jesus and his followers went to Capernaum. On the Sabbath day He went to the synagogue and began to teach. ²²The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught like a person who had authority, not like their teachers of the law. ²³Just then, a man was there in the synagogue who had an evil spirit in him. He shouted, ²⁴“Jesus of Nazareth! What do you want with us? Did you come to destroy us? I know who you are—God’s Holy One!”

²⁵Jesus commanded the evil spirit, “Be quiet! Come out of the man!” ²⁶The evil spirit shook the man violently, gave a loud cry, and then came out of him.

²⁷The people were so amazed they asked each other, “What is happening here? This man is teaching something new, and with authority. He even gives commands to evil spirits, and they obey him.” ²⁸And the news about Jesus spread quickly everywhere in the area of Galilee.

Jesus Heals Many People

²⁹As soon as Jesus and his followers left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of [Simon](#) and Andrew.

³⁰Simon’s mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever, and the people told Jesus about her. ³¹So Jesus went to her bed, took her hand, and helped her up. The fever left her, and she began serving them.

³²That evening, after the sun went down, the people brought to Jesus all who were sick and had demons in them.

³³The whole town gathered at the door. ³⁴Jesus healed many who had different kinds of sicknesses, and he forced many demons to leave people. But he would not allow the demons to

Speak, because they knew who he was.

³⁵Early the next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus woke and left the house. He went to a lonely place, where he prayed.

³⁶Simon and his friends went to look for Jesus. ³⁷When they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you!"

³⁸Jesus answered, "We should go to other towns around here so I can preach there too. That is the reason I came." ³⁹So he went everywhere in Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and forcing out demons.

Jesus Heals a Sick Man

⁴⁰A man with a skin disease came to Jesus. He fell to his knees and begged Jesus, "You can heal me if you will."

⁴¹Jesus felt sorry for the man, so he reached out his hand and touched him and said, "I will. Be healed!" ⁴²Immediately the disease left the man, and he was healed.

⁴³Jesus told the man to go away at once, but he warned him strongly, ⁴⁴"Don't tell anyone about this. But go and show yourself to the priest. And offer the gift [Moses commanded for people who are made well](#). This will show the people what I have done." ⁴⁵The man left there, but he began to tell everyone that Jesus had healed him, and so he spread the news about Jesus. As a result, Jesus could not enter a town if people saw him. He stayed in places where nobody lived, but people came to him from everywhere.

Life Lessons

Mark 2:1–28

Situation

Jesus' power over illness and evil spirits quickly became exciting news to the people around him. They came to him from everywhere, looking for help.

Observation

Jesus offers hope, healing, and new life to all who come to him in faith.

Inspiration

I'll never forget Steven. I met him in St. Louis. His twenty-three years had been hard on him, his arm scarred from the needle and his wrist scarred from the knife. His pride was his fist and his weakness was his girl... .

He wanted to change.

But his girlfriend would have none of it. Oh, she would listen politely and would be very sweet, but her heart was gripped by darkness. Any changes Steve made would be quickly muffled as she would craftily maneuver him back into his old habits. She was the last thing between him and the Kingdom. We begged him to leave her. He was trying to put new wine into an old wineskin.

He wrestled for days trying to decide what to do. Finally, he reached a conclusion. He couldn't leave her.

The last time I saw Steve he wept ... uncontrollably. I held big, tough, macho Steve in my

arms. The prophecy of Jesus was true. By putting his new wine into an old skin, it was lost.

... No friendship or romance is worth your soul. Repentance means change. And change means purging your heart of anything that can't coexist with Christ.

You can't put new life into an old lifestyle. The inevitable tragedy occurs. The new life is lost. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you need a big change to put your life on course? Boldly put your life in Christ's hands and let God do a miracle!

Exploration

Bringing People to Jesus for Miracles—[Matthew 4:24](#); [8:16](#); [Mark 9:17–20](#); [Luke 5:18–19](#).

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

A few days later, when Jesus came back to Capernaum, the news spread that he was at home.² Many people gathered together so that there was no room in the house, not even outside the door. And Jesus was teaching them God's message.³ Four people came, carrying a paralyzed man.⁴ Since they could not get to Jesus because of the crowd, they dug a hole in the roof right above where he was speaking. When they got through, they lowered the mat with the paralyzed man on it.⁵ When Jesus saw the faith of these people, he said to the paralyzed man, "Young man, your sins are forgiven."

⁶Some of the teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷"Why does this man say things like that? He is speaking as if he were God. Only God can forgive sins."

⁸Jesus knew immediately what these teachers of the law were thinking. So he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? ⁹Which is easier: to tell this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to tell him, 'Stand up. Take your mat and walk'?" ¹⁰But I will prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So Jesus said to the paralyzed man, ¹¹"I tell you, stand up, take your mat, and go home." ¹²Immediately the paralyzed man stood up, took his mat, and walked out while everyone was watching him.

The people were amazed and praised God. They said, "We have never seen anything like this!"

¹³Jesus went to the lake again. The whole crowd followed him there, and he taught them. ¹⁴While he was walking along, he saw a man named Levi son of Alphaeus, sitting in the tax collector's booth. Jesus said to him, "Follow me," and he stood up and followed Jesus.

¹⁵Later, as Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating there with Jesus and his followers. Many people like this followed Jesus. ¹⁶When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw Jesus eating with the tax collectors and "sinners," they asked his followers, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹⁷Jesus heard this and said to them, "It is not the healthy people who need a doctor, but the sick. I did not come to invite good people but to invite sinners."

Jesus' Followers Are Criticized

¹⁸Now the followers of [John](#) and the Pharisees often [gave up eating for a certain time](#). Some people came to Jesus and said, "Why do John's followers and the followers of the Pharisees often give up eating, but your followers don't?"

¹⁹Jesus answered, "The friends of the bridegroom do not give up eating while the bridegroom is still with them. As long as the bridegroom is with them, they cannot give up eating. ²⁰But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will give up eating.

²¹"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth over a hole in an old coat. Otherwise, the patch will shrink and pull away—the new patch will pull away from the old coat. Then the hole will be worse. ²²Also, no one ever pours new wine into old leather

bags. Otherwise, the new wine will break the bags, and the wine will be ruined along with the bags. But new wine should be put into new leather bags.”

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

²³One Sabbath day, as Jesus was walking through some fields of grain, his followers began to pick some grain to eat. ²⁴The Pharisees said to Jesus, “Why are your followers doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?”

²⁵Jesus answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and those with him were hungry and needed food? ²⁶During the time of Abiathar the high priest, David went into God’s house and ate the holy bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And David also gave some of the bread to those who were with him.”

²⁷Then Jesus said to the Pharisees, “The Sabbath day was made to help people; they were not made to be ruled by the Sabbath day. ²⁸So then, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day.”

Life Lessons

Mark 3:1–35

Situation

Mark affirmed the spiritual authority and power present in Jesus' ministry. Jesus properly interpreted the Mosaic Law. His power was greater than evil spirits. This passage also revealed Jesus' ministry to call his spiritual brothers and sisters to do the will of God.

Observation

Jesus demonstrated remarkable patience. Though many questioned his authority, he patiently refuted them. When his immediate family thought that Jesus was a lunatic, he expanded the concept of his family to include the kinship of people who love God.

Inspiration

Can you still remember? Are you still in love with Him? ... Remember Jesus. Before you remember anything, remember Him. If you forget anything, don't forget Him.

Oh, but how quickly we forget. So much happens through the years. So many changes within. So many alterations without. And, somewhere, back there, we leave Him. We don't turn away from Him ... we just don't take Him with us. Assignments come. Promotions come. Budgets are made. Kids are born, and the Christ ... the Christ is forgotten.

Has it been a while since you stared at the heavens in speechless amazement? Has it been a

while since you realized God's divinity and your carnality?

If it has, then you need to know something. He is still there. He hasn't left. Under all those papers and books and reports and years. In the midst of all those voices and faces and memories and pictures, He is still there.

(From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

Application

Have you forgotten Jesus? Has your love for him slipped through time? Let Christ renew your love and let it flow freely again, as it once did.

Exploration

Spiritual Family—[Isaiah 63:16](#); [John 1:12](#); [Galatians 4:6](#); [Ephesians 2:19](#); [Hebrews 2:11](#).

Jesus Heals a Man's Hand

Another time when Jesus went into a synagogue, a man with a crippled hand was there. ²Some people watched Jesus closely to see if he would heal the man on the Sabbath day so they could accuse him.

³Jesus said to the man with the crippled hand, "Stand up here in the middle of everyone."

⁴Then Jesus asked the people, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath day: to do good or to do evil, to save a life or to kill?" But they said nothing to answer him.

⁵Jesus was angry as he looked at the people, and he felt very sad because they were stubborn. Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." The man held out his hand and it was healed. ⁶Then the Pharisees left and began making plans with the [Herodians](#) about a way to kill Jesus.

Many People Follow Jesus

⁷Jesus left with his followers for the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed him. ⁸Also many people came from Judea, from Jerusalem, from Idumea, from the lands across the Jordan River, and from the area of Tyre and Sidon. When they heard what Jesus was doing, many people came to him. ⁹When Jesus saw the crowds, he told his followers to get a boat ready for

him to keep people from crowding against him. ¹⁰He had healed many people, so all the sick were pushing toward him to touch him. ¹¹When evil spirits saw Jesus, they fell down before him and shouted, “You are the Son of God!” ¹²But Jesus strongly warned them not to tell who he was.

Jesus Chooses His Twelve Apostles

¹³Then Jesus went up on a mountain and called to him the men he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴Jesus chose twelve men and called them apostles. He wanted them to be with him, and he wanted to send them out to preach ¹⁵and to have the authority to force demons out of people. ¹⁶These are the twelve men he chose: Simon (Jesus named him Peter), ¹⁷James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Jesus named them Boanerges, which means “Sons of Thunder”), ¹⁸Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, ¹⁹and Judas Iscariot, who later turned against Jesus.

Some People Say Jesus Has a Devil

²⁰Then Jesus went home, but again a crowd gathered. There were so many people that Jesus and his followers could not eat. ²¹When his family heard this, they went to get him because they thought he was out of his mind. ²²But the teachers of the law from Jerusalem were saying, “Beelzebul is living inside him! He uses power from the ruler of demons to force demons out of people.”

²³So Jesus called the people together and taught them with stories. He said, “Satan will not force himself out of people. ²⁴A kingdom that is divided cannot continue, ²⁵and a family that is divided cannot continue. ²⁶And if Satan is against himself and fights against his own people, he cannot continue; that is the end of Satan. ²⁷No one can enter a strong person’s house and steal his things unless he first ties up the strong person. Then he can steal things from the house. ²⁸I tell you the truth, all sins that people do and all the things people say against God can be forgiven. ²⁹But anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of a sin that continues forever.”

³⁰Jesus said this because the teachers of the law said that he had an evil spirit inside him.

Jesus’ True Family

³¹Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to tell him to come out. ³²Many people were sitting around Jesus, and they said to him, “Your mother and brothers are waiting for you outside.”

³³Jesus asked, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴Then he looked at those sitting around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵My true brother and sister and mother are those who do what God wants.”

Life Lessons

Mark 4:1–41

Situation

Jesus used parables to teach. These stories contained great truths and insights about God and man. While quoting from Isaiah, Jesus also demonstrated how he fulfilled prophecy through his stories. Mark related not only the power of Jesus in stories but also his authority over creation in his command of the weather at sea.

Observation

Even in the middle of a dangerous sea, when Jesus patiently calmed the storm, he showed the fearful disciples that he truly cared for them. Sometimes even those close to Jesus were slow to realize how much he loved them.

Inspiration

“God, don’t you care?”

Such an honest cry, a doggedly painful cry. I’ve asked that one before, haven’t you? It’s been screamed countless times....

A mother weeps over a stillborn child. A husband is torn from his wife by a tragic accident. The tears of an eight-year-old fall on a daddy’s casket. And the question wails.

“God, don’t you care?” “Why me?” “Why my friend?” “Why my business?” “Don’t you care?”

It’s the timeless question. The question asked by literally every person that has stalked this globe.

There has never been a president, a worker, or a businessman who hasn't asked it. There has never been a soul who hasn't wrestled with this aching question. Does my God care? Or is my pain God's great goof?

As the winds howled and the sea raged, the impatient and frightened disciples screamed their fear at the sleeping Jesus. "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die?" He could have kept on sleeping. He could have told them to shut up. He could have impatiently jumped up and angrily dismissed the storm. He could have pointed out their immaturity... But he didn't.

With all the patience that only one who cares can have, he answered the question. He hushed the storm so the shivering disciples wouldn't miss his response. Jesus answered once and for all the aching dilemma of man—"Where is God when I hurt?"

Listening and healing. That's where he is. He cares.

(From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado,)

Application

What stories of Jesus' love and ministry can you share with others? Consider the impact of stories that have taught you. Dare yourself to discover the ways God shows he cares for you in the storms of your life.

Exploration

Christ as a Teacher—[Matthew 4:23](#); [5:2](#); [7:29](#); [Mark 6:34](#); [Luke 4:15](#); [5:3](#); [John 3:2](#); [7:14](#); [8:2](#). Divine Power—[Exodus 4:21](#); [15:11](#); [Joshua 3:5](#); [Psalm 77:14](#); [Daniel 4:3](#); [Joel 2:30](#); [Acts 6:8](#).

A Story About Planting Seed

Again Jesus began teaching by the lake. A great crowd gathered around him, so he sat down in a boat near the shore. All the people stayed on the shore close to the water. ²Jesus taught them many things, using stories. He said, ³“Listen! A farmer went out to plant his seed. ⁴While he was planting, some seed fell by the road, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some seed fell on rocky ground where there wasn’t much dirt. That seed grew very fast, because the ground was not deep. ⁶But when the sun rose, the plants dried up because they did not have deep roots. ⁷Some other seed fell among thorny weeds, which grew and choked the good plants. So those plants did not produce a crop. ⁸Some other seed fell on good ground and began to grow. It got taller and produced a crop. Some plants made thirty times more, some made sixty times more, and some made a hundred times more.”

⁹Then Jesus said, “You people who can hear me, listen!”

Jesus Tells Why He Used Stories

¹⁰Later, when Jesus was alone, the twelve apostles and others around him asked him about the stories.

¹¹Jesus said, “You can know the secret about the kingdom of God. But to other people I tell everything by using stories

¹²so that:

‘They will look and look, but they will not learn.

They will listen and listen, but they will not understand.

If they did learn and understand,

they would come back to me and be forgiven.’”

[Isaiah 6:9–10](#)

Jesus Explains the Seed Story

¹³Then Jesus said to his followers, “Don’t you understand this story? If you don’t, how will you understand any story? ¹⁴The farmer is like a person who plants God’s message in people. ¹⁵Sometimes the teaching falls on the road. This is like the people who hear the teaching of God, but Satan quickly comes and takes away the teaching that was planted in them. ¹⁶Others are like the seed planted on rocky ground. They hear the teaching and quickly accept it with joy. ¹⁷But since they don’t allow the teaching to go deep into their lives, they keep it only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the teaching they accepted, they quickly give up. ¹⁸Others are like the seed planted among the thorny weeds. They hear the teaching, ¹⁹but the worries of this life, the temptation of wealth, and many other evil desires keep the teaching from growing and [producing fruit](#) in their lives. ²⁰Others are like the seed planted in the good ground. They hear the teaching and accept it. Then they grow and produce fruit—sometimes thirty times more, sometimes sixty times more, and sometimes a hundred

times more.”

Use What You Have

²¹Then Jesus said to them, “Do you hide a lamp under a bowl or under a bed? No! You put the lamp on a lampstand.

²²Everything that is hidden will be made clear and every secret thing will be made known. ²³You people who can hear me, listen!

²⁴“Think carefully about what you hear. The way you give to others is the way God will give to you, but God will give you even more. ²⁵Those who have understanding will be given more. But those who do not have understanding, even what they have will be taken away from them.”

Jesus Uses a Story About Seed

²⁶Then Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is like someone who plants seed in the ground. ²⁷Night and day, whether the person is asleep or awake, the seed still grows, but the person does not know how it grows. ²⁸By itself the earth produces grain. First the plant grows, then the head, and then all the grain in the head. ²⁹When the grain is ready, the farmer cuts it, because this is the harvest time.”

A Story About Mustard Seed

³⁰Then Jesus said, “How can I show you what the kingdom of God is like? What story can I use to explain it? ³¹The kingdom

of God is like a mustard seed, the smallest seed you plant in the ground. ³²But when planted, this seed grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants. It produces large branches, and the wild birds can make nests in its shade.”

³³Jesus used many stories like these to teach the crowd God’s message—as much as they could understand. ³⁴He always used stories to teach them. But when he and his followers were alone, Jesus explained everything to them.

Jesus Calms a Storm

³⁵That evening, Jesus said to his followers, “Let’s go across the lake.” ³⁶Leaving the crowd behind, they took him in the boat just as he was. There were also other boats with them. ³⁷A very strong wind came up on the lake. The waves came over the sides and into the boat so that it was already full of water. ³⁸Jesus was at the back of the boat, sleeping with his head on a cushion. His followers woke him and said, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are drowning!”

³⁹Jesus stood up and commanded the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind stopped, and it became completely calm.

⁴⁰Jesus said to his followers, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

⁴¹The followers were very afraid and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

Life Lessons

Mark 5:1–43

Situation

Jesus ministered to the most important people and the most despised people in town. His power surpassed demons, sickness, and death.

Observation

Although Jesus brought life to those who were physically dead, he spent most of his energy reaching those who were spiritually dead. He wanted to give them a new spiritual life.

Inspiration

The funeral had begun. The people thought the best Jesus could do was offer some kind words about Jairus's girl. Jesus had some words all right. Not about the girl, but for the girl.

"My child, stand up!" ...

The next thing the father knew, she was eating, Jesus was laughing, and the hired mourners were sent home early...

He'll do it again, you know. He's promised he would. And he's shown that he can.

"The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command" ([1 Thessalonians 4:16](#)).

The same voice that awoke the boy near Nain, that stirred the still daughter of Jairus, that awakened the corpse of Lazarus—the same voice will speak again. The earth and the sea will give up their dead. There will be no more death.

Jesus made sure of that. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

What could you do to show love and acceptance for a homeless beggar in rags? Could you share God's love with an alcoholic, a street gang member, an AIDS victim? These people are worthy of God's love and your love, too. Join with other Christians this week in an effort to share God's Word with people you would not normally approach.

Exploration

Impartiality—[Ruth 1:16](#); [Luke 5:13](#); [Galatians 3:28](#).

A Man with Demons Inside Him

Jesus and his followers went to the other side of the lake to the area of the Gerasene people. ²When Jesus got out of the boat, instantly a man with an evil spirit came to him from the burial caves. ³This man lived in the caves, and no one could tie him up, not even with a chain. ⁴Many times people had used chains to tie the man's hands and feet, but he always broke them off. No one was strong enough to control him. ⁵Day and night he would wander around the burial caves and on the hills, screaming and cutting himself with stones. ⁶While Jesus was still far away, the man saw him, ran to him, and fell down before him.

⁷The man shouted in a loud voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I command you in God's name not to torture me!" ⁸He said this because Jesus was saying to him, "You evil spirit, come out of the man."

⁹Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

He answered, "My name is [Legion](#), because we are many spirits." ¹⁰He begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of that area.

¹¹A large herd of pigs was feeding on a hill near there. ¹²The demons begged Jesus, "Send us into the pigs; let us go into them." ¹³So Jesus allowed them to do this. The evil spirits left the man and went into the pigs. Then the herd of pigs—about

two thousand of them—rushed down the hill into the lake and were drowned.

¹⁴The herdsmen ran away and went to the town and to the countryside, telling everyone about this. So people went out to see what had happened. ¹⁵They came to Jesus and saw the man who used to have the many evil spirits, sitting, clothed, and in his right mind. And they were frightened. ¹⁶The people who saw this told the others what had happened to the man who had the demons living in him, and they told about the pigs. ¹⁷Then the people began to beg Jesus to leave their area.

¹⁸As Jesus was getting back into the boat, the man who was freed from the demons begged to go with him.

¹⁹But Jesus would not let him. He said, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.” ²⁰So the man left and began to tell the people in the [Ten Towns](#) about what Jesus had done for him. And everyone was amazed.

Jesus Gives Life to a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman

²¹When Jesus went in the boat back to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him there. ²²A leader of the synagogue, named Jairus, came there, saw Jesus, and fell at his feet. ²³He begged Jesus, saying again and again, “My daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so she will be healed and will live.” ²⁴So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed Jesus and pushed very close around him. ²⁵Among them was a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶She had suffered very much from many doctors and had spent all the money she had, but instead

of improving, she was getting worse.²⁷ When the woman heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his coat.²⁸ She thought, “If I can just touch his clothes, I will be healed.”²⁹ Instantly her bleeding stopped, and she felt in her body that she was healed from her disease.

³⁰At once Jesus felt power go out from him. So he turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

³¹His followers said, “Look at how many people are pushing against you! And you ask, ‘Who touched me?’”

³²But Jesus continued looking around to see who had touched him.³³ The woman, knowing that she was healed, came and fell at Jesus’ feet. Shaking with fear, she told him the whole truth.³⁴ Jesus said to her, “Dear woman, you are made well because you believed. Go in peace; be healed of your disease.”

³⁵While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of the synagogue leader. They said, “Your daughter is dead. There is no need to bother the teacher anymore.”

³⁶But Jesus paid no attention to what they said. He told the synagogue leader, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”

³⁷Jesus let only Peter, James, and John the brother of James go with him.³⁸ When they came to the house of the synagogue leader, Jesus found many people there making lots of noise and crying loudly.³⁹ Jesus entered the house and said to them, “Why are you crying and making so much noise? The child is not dead, only asleep.”⁴⁰ But they laughed at him. So, after throwing them out of the house, Jesus took the child’s father and mother and his three followers into the room where the child was.⁴¹ Taking hold of the girl’s hand, he said to her, “Talitha, koum!” (This means, “Young girl, I tell you to stand up!”)⁴² At once the girl stood right up and began walking. (She

was twelve years old.) Everyone was completely amazed.
⁴³Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell people about this.
Then he told them to give the girl something to eat.

Life Lessons

Mark 6:1–7:23

Situation

This record of a particularly busy day is found in all four Gospels. Particularly significant is the feeding of the five thousand.

Observation

Jesus experienced stressful, chaotic days like ours. He knows what the pace of our life is like.

Inspiration

A day in the Life of Christ...

[A] day in which Jesus experiences more stress than he will any other day of his life—aside from his crucifixion. Before the morning becomes evening, he has reason to weep ... run ... shout ... curse ... praise ... doubt.

From calm to chaos. From peace to perplexity. Within moments his world is turned upside down....

The morning has been a jungle trail of the unexpected. First Jesus grieves over the death of a dear friend and relative. Then his life is threatened. Next he celebrates the triumphant return of his followers. Then he is nearly suffocated by a brouhaha of humanity.

Bereavement ... jeopardy ... jubilation ... bedlam...

Ponder this the next time your world goes from calm to chaos....

Jesus knows how you feel.

A friend of mine was recently trying to teach his six-year-old son how to shoot a basket. The boy would take the basketball and push it as hard as he could toward the goal, but it always fell short. The father would then take the ball and toss it toward the basket, saying something like, “Just do it like this, son. It’s easy.”

Then the boy would try, and miss, again. My friend would then take the ball and make another basket, encouraging his son to push the ball a bit harder.

After several minutes and many misses, the boy responded to his father’s encouragement by saying, “Yeah, but it’s easy for you up there. You don’t know how hard it is from down here.”

You and I can never say that about God. Of the many messages Jesus taught us that day about stress, the first one is this: “God knows how you feel.” (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

Follow Jesus’ example in handling stress. If today starts to get hectic, take five minutes to be alone with God. If your work gets interrupted, ask God for patience to deal with the interruption and for endurance to finish the task.

Exploration

Stress—[Isaiah 26:3](#); [Matthew 11:28](#); [Luke 10:38–42](#); [Philippians 4:6](#).

Jesus Goes to His Hometown

Jesus left there and went to his hometown, and his followers went with him.²On the Sabbath day he taught in the synagogue. Many people heard him and were amazed, saying, “Where did this man get these teachings? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? And where did he get the power to do miracles?”³He is just the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters are here with us.” So the people were upset with Jesus.

⁴Jesus said to them, “A prophet is honored everywhere except in his hometown and with his own people and in his own home.”⁵So Jesus was not able to work any miracles there except to heal a few sick people by putting his hands on them.⁶He was amazed at how many people had no faith.

Then Jesus went to other villages in that area and taught.⁷He called his twelve followers together and got ready to send them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.⁸This is what Jesus commanded them: “Take nothing for your trip except a walking stick. Take no bread, no bag, and no money in your pockets.⁹Wear sandals, but take only the clothes you are wearing.¹⁰When you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.¹¹If the people in a certain place refuse to welcome you or listen to you, leave that place. [Shake its dust off your feet](#) as a warning to them.”

¹²So the followers went out and preached that people should change their hearts and lives. ¹³They forced many demons out and put olive oil on many sick people and healed them.

How John the Baptist Was Killed

¹⁴King Herod heard about Jesus, because he was now well known. Some people said, “He is John the Baptist, who has risen from the dead. That is why he can work these miracles.”

¹⁵Others said, “He is [Elijah](#).”

Other people said, “Jesus is a prophet, like the prophets who lived long ago.”

¹⁶When Herod heard this, he said, “I killed John by cutting off his head. Now he has risen from the dead!”

¹⁷Herod himself had ordered his soldiers to arrest John and put him in prison in order to please his wife, Herodias. She had been the wife of Philip, Herod’s brother, but then Herod had married her. ¹⁸John had been telling Herod, “It is not lawful for you to be married to your brother’s wife.” ¹⁹So Herodias hated John and wanted to kill him. But she couldn’t, ²⁰because Herod was afraid of John and protected him. He knew John was a good and holy man. Also, though John’s preaching always bothered him, he enjoyed listening to John.

²¹Then the perfect time came for Herodias to cause John’s death. On Herod’s birthday, he gave a dinner party for the most important government leaders, the commanders of his army, and the most important people in Galilee. ²²When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and the people eating with him.

So King Herod said to the girl, “Ask me for anything you want, and I will give it to you.”²³He promised her, “Anything you ask for I will give to you—up to half of my kingdom.”

²⁴The girl went to her mother and asked, “What should I ask for?”

Her mother answered, “Ask for the head of John the Baptist.”

²⁵At once the girl went back to the king and said to him, “I want the head of John the Baptist right now on a platter.”

²⁶Although the king was very sad, he had made a promise, and his dinner guests had heard it. So he did not want to refuse what she asked. ²⁷Immediately the king sent a soldier to bring John’s head. The soldier went and cut off John’s head in the prison ²⁸and brought it back on a platter. He gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹When John’s followers heard this, they came and got John’s body and put it in a tomb.

More than Five Thousand Fed

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him about all the things they had done and taught. ³¹Crowds of people were coming and going so that Jesus and his followers did not even have time to eat. He said to them, “Come away by yourselves, and we will go to a lonely place to get some rest.”

³²So they went in a boat by themselves to a lonely place.

³³But many people saw them leave and recognized them. So from all the towns they ran to the place where Jesus was going, and they got there before him. ³⁴When he arrived, he saw a great crowd waiting. He felt sorry for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began to teach them

many things.

³⁵When it was late in the day, his followers came to him and said, “No one lives in this place, and it is already very late.

³⁶Send the people away so they can go to the countryside and towns around here to buy themselves something to eat.”

³⁷But Jesus answered, “You give them something to eat.”

They said to him, “We would all have to work a month to earn enough money to buy that much bread!”

³⁸Jesus asked them, “How many loaves of bread do you have? Go and see.”

When they found out, they said, “Five loaves and two fish.”

³⁹Then Jesus told his followers to have the people sit in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰So they sat in groups of fifty or a hundred. ⁴¹Jesus took the five loaves and two fish and, looking up to heaven, he thanked God for the food. He divided the bread and gave it to his followers for them to give to the people. Then he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴²All the people ate and were satisfied. ⁴³The followers filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴There were five thousand men who ate.

Jesus Walks on the Water

⁴⁵Immediately Jesus told his followers to get into the boat and go ahead of him to Bethsaida across the lake. He stayed there to send the people home. ⁴⁶After sending them away, he went into the hills to pray.

⁴⁷That night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and Jesus was alone on the land. ⁴⁸He saw his followers struggling

hard to row the boat, because the wind was blowing against them. Between three and six o'clock in the morning, Jesus came to them, walking on the water, and he wanted to walk past the boat. ⁴⁹But when they saw him walking on the water, they thought he was a ghost and cried out. ⁵⁰They all saw him and were afraid. But quickly Jesus spoke to them and said, "Have courage! It is I. Do not be afraid." ⁵¹Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind became calm. The followers were greatly amazed. ⁵²They did not understand about the miracle of the five loaves, because their minds were closed.

⁵³When they had crossed the lake, they came to shore at Gennesaret and tied the boat there. ⁵⁴When they got out of the boat, people immediately recognized Jesus. ⁵⁵They ran everywhere in that area and began to bring sick people on mats wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶And everywhere he went—into towns, cities, or countryside—the people brought the sick to the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch just the edge of his coat, and all who touched it were healed.

Obey God's Law

When some Pharisees and some teachers of the law came from Jerusalem, they gathered around Jesus. ²They saw that some of Jesus' followers ate food with hands that were not clean, that is, they hadn't washed them. ³(The Pharisees and all the Jews never eat before washing their hands in a special way according to their unwritten laws. ⁴And when they buy something in the market, they never eat it until they wash themselves in a special way. They also follow many other unwritten laws, such as the washing of cups, pitchers, and pots.) ⁵The Pharisees and the teachers of the law said to Jesus, "Why don't your followers obey the unwritten laws which have been handed down to us? Why do your followers eat their food with hands that are not clean?"

⁶Jesus answered, "Isaiah was right when he spoke about you hypocrites. He wrote,

‘These people show honor to me with words,
but their hearts are far from me.

⁷Their worship of me is worthless.

The things they teach are nothing but human rules.’

[Isaiah 29:13](#)

⁸You have stopped following the commands of God, and you follow only human teachings.”

⁹Then Jesus said to them, “You cleverly ignore the commands of God so you can follow your own teachings.

¹⁰Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and ‘Anyone who says cruel things to his father or mother must be put to death.’ ¹¹But you say a person can tell his father or mother, ‘I have something I could use to help you, but it is Corban—a gift to God.’ ¹²You no longer let that person use that money for his father or his mother. ¹³By your own rules, which you teach people, you are rejecting what God said. And you do many things like that.”

¹⁴After Jesus called the crowd to him again, he said, “Every person should listen to me and understand what I am saying. ¹⁵There is nothing people put into their bodies that makes them unclean. People are made unclean by the things that come out of them.”¹⁶[n](#)

¹⁷When Jesus left the people and went into the house, his followers asked him about this story. ¹⁸Jesus said, “Do you still not understand? Surely you know that nothing that enters someone from the outside can make that person unclean. ¹⁹It does not go into the mind, but into the stomach. Then it goes out of the body.” (When Jesus said this, he meant that no longer was any food unclean for people to eat.)

²⁰And Jesus said, “The things that come out of people are the things that make them unclean. ²¹All these evil things begin inside people, in the mind: evil thoughts, sexual sins, stealing, murder, adultery, ²²greed, evil actions, lying, doing sinful things, jealousy, speaking evil of others, pride, and foolish living. ²³All these evil things come from inside and make people unclean.”

Life Lessons

Mark 7:24–8:38

Situation

The Pharisees doubted Jesus' divine nature. They asked him for a sign from heaven that would proclaim him as Messiah.

Observation

To see God's presence at work, we must look at the power behind the miracle first—God.

Inspiration

His lunch wasn't much. In fact, it wasn't anything compared to what was needed for more than five thousand people.

He probably wrestled with the silliness of it all. What was one lunch for so many.

How far could one lunch go?

I think that's why he didn't give the lunch to the crowd. Instead he gave it to Jesus. Something told him that if he would plant the seed, God would grant the crop.

So he did.

He summoned his courage, got up off the grass, and walked into the circle of grownups. He must have been nervous. No one likes to appear silly.

Someone probably snickered at him.

If they didn't snicker, they shook their heads. "The little fellow doesn't know any better."

If they didn't shake their heads, they rolled their eyes. "Here we have a hunger crisis, and this little boy thinks that a sack lunch will solve it."

But it wasn't the men's heads or eyes that the boy saw; he saw only Jesus. (From *In the Eye of the Storm*

by Max Lucado)

Application

What do you believe about miracles? Look for the amazing things that have happened in your life: at work, at home, and with friends. They are all God's blessings. Help meet the needs of another, and be a part of God's miracle in that life.

Exploration

Miracles—[Matthew 8:23–27](#); [Mark 3:20–30](#); [Luke 18:35–43](#); [John 2:1–11](#); [4:43–54](#); [11:1–44](#).

[Jesus] comes as a dove. He comes bearing fruit from a distant land, from our future home. He comes with a leaf of hope. —Max Lucado (*A Love Worth Giving*)

Jesus Helps a Non-Jewish Woman

²⁴Jesus left that place and went to the area around Tyre. When he went into a house, he did not want anyone to know he was there, but he could not stay hidden. ²⁵A woman whose daughter had an evil spirit in her heard that he was there. So she quickly came to Jesus and fell at his feet. ²⁶She was Greek, born in Phoenicia, in Syria. She begged Jesus to force the demon out of her daughter.

²⁷Jesus told the woman, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and give it to the dogs. First let the children eat all they want.”

²⁸But she answered, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table can eat the children’s crumbs.”

²⁹Then Jesus said, “Because of your answer, you may go. The demon has left your daughter.”

³⁰The woman went home and found her daughter lying in bed; the demon was gone.

Jesus Heals a Deaf Man

³¹Then Jesus left the area around Tyre and went through Sidon to Lake Galilee, to the area of the [Ten Towns](#). ³²While he was there, some people brought a man to him who was deaf and

could not talk plainly. The people begged Jesus to put his hand on the man to heal him.

³³Jesus led the man away from the crowd, by himself. He put his fingers in the man's ears and then spit and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴Looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to the man, "Ephphatha!" (This means, "Be opened.") ³⁵Instantly the man was able to hear and to use his tongue so that he spoke clearly.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: Our Hope and Comfort

Jesus is presented with a man who is deaf and has a speech impediment. Perhaps he stammered. Maybe he spoke with a lisp. Perhaps, because of his deafness, he never learned to articulate words properly.

Jesus, refusing to exploit the situation, took the man aside. He looked him in the face. Knowing it would be useless to talk, he explained what he was about to do through gestures. He spat and touched the man's tongue, telling him that whatever restricted his speech was about to be removed. He touched his ears. They, for the first time, were about to hear.

But before the man said a word or heard a sound, Jesus did something I never would have anticipated.

He sighed...

No doubt you've done your share of sighing.

If you have teenagers, you've probably sighed. If you're tried to resist temptation, you've probably sighed. If you've had your motives questioned or

your best acts of love rejected, you have been forced to take a deep breath and let escape a painful sigh....

All these sighs come from the same anxiety; a recognition of pain that was never intended, or of hope deferred.

Man was not created to be separated from his creator; hence he sighs, longing for home. The creation was never intended to be inhabited by evil; hence she sighs, yearning for the Garden....

And when Jesus looked into the eyes of Satan's victim, the only appropriate thing to do was sigh. "It was never intended to be this way," the sigh said. "Your ears weren't made to be deaf, your tongue wasn't made to stumble." The imbalance of it all caused the Master to languish.

So, I found a place for the word. You might think it strange, but I placed it beside the word *comfort*, for in an indirect way, God's pain is our comfort.

And in the agony of Jesus lies our hope. Had he not sighed, had he not felt the burden for what was not intended, we would be in a pitiful condition. Had he simply chalked it all up to the inevitable or washed his hands of the whole stinking mess, what hope would we have?

But he didn't. That holy sigh assures us that God still groans for his people. He groans for the day when all sighs will cease, when what was intended to be will be. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

³⁶Jesus commanded the people not to tell anyone about what happened. But the more he commanded them, the more they told about it. ³⁷They were completely amazed and said, “Jesus does everything well. He makes the deaf hear! And those who can’t talk he makes able to speak.”

More than Four Thousand People Fed

Another time there was a great crowd with Jesus that had nothing to eat. So Jesus called his followers and said,²“I feel sorry for these people, because they have already been with me for three days, and they have nothing to eat.³If I send them home hungry, they will faint on the way. Some of them live a long way from here.”

⁴Jesus’ followers answered, “How can we get enough bread to feed all these people? We are far away from any town.”

⁵Jesus asked, “How many loaves of bread do you have?”

They answered, “Seven.”

⁶Jesus told the people to sit on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves, gave thanks to God, and divided the bread. He gave the pieces to his followers to give to the people, and they did so.⁷The followers also had a few small fish. After Jesus gave thanks for the fish, he told his followers to give them to the people also.⁸All the people ate and were satisfied. Then his followers filled seven baskets with the leftover pieces of food.⁹There were about four thousand people who ate. After they had eaten, Jesus sent them home.¹⁰Then right away he got into a boat with his followers and went to the area of Dalmanutha.

The Leaders Ask for a Miracle

¹¹The Pharisees came to Jesus and began to ask him questions. Hoping to trap him, they asked Jesus for a miracle from God.

¹²Jesus sighed deeply and said, “Why do you people ask for a miracle as a sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to you.” ¹³Then Jesus left the Pharisees and went in the boat to the other side of the lake.

Guard Against Wrong Teachings

¹⁴His followers had only one loaf of bread with them in the boat; they had forgotten to bring more. ¹⁵Jesus warned them, “Be careful! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.”

¹⁶His followers discussed the meaning of this, saying, “He said this because we have no bread.”

¹⁷Knowing what they were talking about, Jesus asked them, “Why are you talking about not having bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your minds closed? ¹⁸You have eyes, but you don’t really see. You have ears, but you don’t really listen. Remember when ¹⁹I divided five loaves of bread for the five thousand? How many baskets did you fill with leftover pieces of food?”

They answered, “Twelve.”

²⁰“And when I divided seven loaves of bread for the four thousand, how many baskets did you fill with leftover pieces of food?”

They answered, “Seven.”

²¹Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand yet?”

Jesus Heals a Blind Man

²²Jesus and his followers came to Bethsaida. There some people brought a blind man to Jesus and begged him to touch the man. ²³So Jesus took the blind man's hand and led him out of the village. Then he spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on the man and asked, "Can you see now?"

²⁴The man looked up and said, "Yes, I see people, but they look like trees walking around."

²⁵Again Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then the man opened his eyes wide and they were healed, and he was able to see everything clearly. ²⁶Jesus told him to go home, saying, "Don't go into the town."

Peter Says Jesus Is the Christ

²⁷Jesus and his followers went to the towns around Caesarea Philippi. While they were traveling, Jesus asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

²⁸They answered, "Some say you are John the Baptist. Others say you are [Elijah](#), and others say you are one of the prophets."

²⁹Then Jesus asked, "But who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Christ."

³⁰Jesus warned his followers not to tell anyone who he was.

³¹Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and that he would be rejected by the older Jewish leaders, the leading priests, and the teachers of the law. He told them that the Son of Man must be killed and then rise from the dead after three days. ³²Jesus told them plainly what would happen. Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to tell him not to talk like that. ³³But Jesus turned and

looked at his followers. Then he told Peter not to talk that way. He said, “Go away from me, [Satan](#)! You don’t care about the things of God, but only about things people think are important.”

³⁴Then Jesus called the crowd to him, along with his followers. He said, “If people want to follow me, they must give up the things they want. They must be willing even to give up their lives to follow me. ³⁵Those who want to save their lives will give up true life. But those who give up their lives for me and for the Good News will have true life. ³⁶It is worth nothing for them to have the whole world if they lose their souls. ³⁷They could never pay enough to buy back their souls. ³⁸The people who live now are living in a sinful and evil time. If people are ashamed of me and my teaching, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes with his Father’s glory and with the holy angels.”

Life Lessons

Mark 9:1–50

Situation

Jesus explained what God's kingdom was about. The disciples could not fathom God's eternal plan. Jesus brought Peter, James, and John up on a mountaintop. There Jesus' true glory was revealed, and Elijah and Moses appeared to the disciples as God spoke to them.

Observation

Even the majestic Son of God sympathizes with our most desperate cries.

Inspiration

Some of you pray like a Concorde jet—smooth, sleek, high, and mighty. Your words reverberate in the clouds and send sonic booms throughout the heavens. If you pray like a Concorde, I salute you. If you don't, I understand.

Maybe you are like me, more a crop duster than a Concorde. You aren't flashy, you fly low, you seem to cover the same ground a lot, and some mornings it's tough to get the old engine cranked up.

Most of us are like that. Most of our prayer lives could use a tune-up.

Some prayer lives lack consistency. They're either a desert or an oasis. . . . We go days or weeks without consistent prayer, but then something happens—we hear a sermon, read a book, experience a tragedy—something leads us to pray, so we dive in. We

submerge ourselves in prayer and leave refreshed and renewed. But as the journey resumes, our prayers don't.

Others of us need sincerity. Our prayers are a bit hollow, memorized, and rigid. More liturgy than life. And though they are daily, they are dull.

Still others lack, well, honesty. We honestly wonder if prayer makes a difference. Why on earth would God in heaven want to talk to me? ...

If you struggle with prayer, I've got just the guy for you. Don't worry, he's not a monastic saint. He's not a calloused-kneed apostle. Nor is he a prophet whose middle name is meditation. He's not a too-holy-to-be-you reminder of how far you need to go in prayer. He's just the opposite. A fellow crop duster. A parent with a sick son in need of a miracle. The father's prayer isn't much, but the answer is, and the result reminds us: The power is not in the prayer; it's in the one who hears it.

He prayed out of desperation. His son, his only son, was demon-possessed. Not only was he a deaf mute and an epileptic, he was also possessed by an evil spirit. Ever since the boy was young, the demon had thrown him into fires and water.

Imagine the pain of the father. Other dads could watch their children grow and mature; he could only watch his suffer. While others were teaching their sons an occupation, he was just trying to keep his son alive....

He was desperate and tired, and his prayer reflects both.

“If you can do anything for him, please have pity on us and help us.”

Listen to that prayer. Does it sound courageous? Confident? Strong? Hardly.

One word would have made a lot of difference. Instead of *if*, what if he'd said *since*? “*Since* you can do anything for him, please have pity on us and help us.”

But that's not what he said. He said *if*. The Greek is even more emphatic. The tense implies doubt. It's as if the man were saying, “This one's probably out of your league, but if you can...”

A classic crop-duster appeal. More meek than might. More timid than towering. More like a crippled lamb coming to a shepherd than a proud lion roaring in the jungle. If his prayer sounds like yours, then don't be discouraged, for that's where prayer begins.

It begins as a yearning. An honest appeal. Ordinary people staring at Mount Everest. No pretense. No boasting. No posturing. Just prayer. Feeble prayer, but prayer nonetheless. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

What is your most desperate prayer? Does a rebellious child cause you grief? Is a parent dying without Christ? Are you frantic about tomorrow's bills? Tell God about your grief and anxiety.

Exploration

Accepting Christ—[Luke 2:9-11](#); [19:6-20](#); [John 3:1-20](#).

Then Jesus said to the people, “I tell you the truth, some people standing here will see the kingdom of God come with power before they die.”

Jesus Talks with Moses and Elijah

²Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a high mountain by themselves. While they watched, Jesus’ appearance was changed. ³His clothes became shining white, whiter than any person could make them. ⁴Then [Elijah and Moses](#) appeared to them, talking with Jesus.

⁵Peter said to Jesus, “Teacher, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶Peter did not know what to say, because he and the others were so frightened.

⁷Then a cloud came and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

⁸Suddenly Peter, James, and John looked around, but they saw only Jesus there alone with them.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone about what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

¹⁰So the followers obeyed Jesus, but they discussed what he meant about rising from the dead.

¹¹Then they asked Jesus, “Why do the teachers of the law

say that Elijah must come first?”

¹²Jesus answered, “They are right to say that Elijah must come first and make everything the way it should be. But why does the Scripture say that the Son of Man will suffer much and that people will treat him as if he were nothing? ¹³I tell you that Elijah has already come. And people did to him whatever they wanted to do, just as the Scriptures said it would happen.”

Jesus Heals a Sick Boy

¹⁴When Jesus, Peter, James, and John came back to the other followers, they saw a great crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵But as soon as the crowd saw Jesus, the people were surprised and ran to welcome him.

¹⁶Jesus asked, “What are you arguing about?”

¹⁷A man answered, “Teacher, I brought my son to you. He has an evil spirit in him that stops him from talking. ¹⁸When the spirit attacks him, it throws him on the ground. Then my son foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes very stiff. I asked your followers to force the evil spirit out, but they couldn’t.”

¹⁹Jesus answered, “You people have no faith. How long must I stay with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”

²⁰So the followers brought him to Jesus. As soon as the evil spirit saw Jesus, it made the boy lose control of himself, and he fell down and rolled on the ground, foaming at the mouth.

²¹Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has this been

happening?”

The father answered, “Since he was very young.²² The spirit often throws him into a fire or into water to kill him. If you can do anything for him, please have pity on us and help us.”

²³Jesus said to the father, “You said, ‘If you can!’ All things are possible for the one who believes.”

²⁴Immediately the father cried out, “I do believe! Help me to believe more!”

²⁵When Jesus saw that a crowd was quickly gathering, he ordered the evil spirit, saying, “You spirit that makes people unable to hear or speak, I command you to come out of this boy and never enter him again!”

²⁶The evil spirit screamed and caused the boy to fall on the ground again. Then the spirit came out. The boy looked as if he were dead, and many people said, “He is dead!”²⁷ But Jesus took hold of the boy’s hand and helped him to stand up.

²⁸When Jesus went into the house, his followers began asking him privately, “Why couldn’t we force that evil spirit out?”

²⁹Jesus answered, “That kind of spirit can only be forced out by prayer.”

Jesus Talks About His Death

³⁰Then Jesus and his followers left that place and went through Galilee. He didn’t want anyone to know where he was,³¹ because he was teaching his followers. He said to them, “The Son of Man will be handed over to people, and they will kill him. After three days, he will rise from the dead.”³² But the followers did not understand what Jesus meant, and they were

afraid to ask him.

Who Is the Greatest?

³³Jesus and his followers went to Capernaum. When they went into a house there, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” ³⁴But the followers did not answer, because their argument on the road was about which one of them was the greatest.

³⁵Jesus sat down and called the twelve apostles to him. He said, “Whoever wants to be the most important must be last of all and servant of all.”

³⁶Then Jesus took a small child and had him stand among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said, ³⁷“Whoever accepts a child like this in my name accepts me. And whoever accepts me accepts the One who sent me.”

Anyone Not Against Us Is for Us

³⁸Then John said, “Teacher, we saw someone using your name to force demons out of a person. We told him to stop, because he does not belong to our group.”

³⁹But Jesus said, “Don’t stop him, because anyone who uses my name to do powerful things will not easily say evil things about me. ⁴⁰Whoever is not against us is with us. ⁴¹I tell you the truth, whoever gives you a drink of water because you belong to the Christ will truly get his reward.

⁴²“If one of these little children believes in me, and someone causes that child to sin, it would be better for that person to

have a large stone tied around his neck and be drowned in the sea. ⁴³If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to lose part of your body and live forever than to have two hands and go to hell, where the fire never goes out. ⁴⁴[n](#) ⁴⁵If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to lose part of your body and to live forever than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁶[n](#) ⁴⁷If your eye causes you to sin, take it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁸In hell the worm does not die; the fire is never put out. ⁴⁹Every person will be salted with fire.

⁵⁰“Salt is good, but if the salt loses its salty taste, you cannot make it salty again. So, be full of salt, and have peace with each other.”

Life Lessons

Mark 10:1–52

Situation

To serve others rather than to be served best exemplified Jesus' message to humanity. People, then as now, often hoped that others would meet their needs. They committed to ideals such as marriage and trust in God as long as these seemed convenient. Giving up personal freedoms, wealth, and status to serve others was too great a price for many people.

Observation

Jesus urges us to discard material security to follow him. By sacrificing the treasures of this world, we gain the treasures of heaven.

Inspiration

Jesus gets to the point. "If you want to be perfect, then go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."

The statement leaves the young man distraught and the disciples bewildered.

Their question could be ours: "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus' answer shell-shocks the listeners, "With man this is impossible...."

Impossible.

He doesn't say improbable. He doesn't say unlikely. He doesn't even say it will be tough. He says it is "impossible." ...

Does that strike you as cold? All your life you've

been rewarded according to your performance. You get grades according to your study. You get commendations according to your success. You get money in response to your work.

That's why the rich young ruler thought heaven was just a payment away. It only made sense. You work hard, you pay your dues, and "zap"—your account is credited as paid in full. Jesus says, "No way." What you want costs far more than what you can pay. You don't need a system, you need a Savior. You don't need a resume, you need a Redeemer. For "what is impossible with men is possible with God."

... You see, it wasn't the money that hindered the rich man; it was the self-sufficiency. It wasn't the possessions; it was the pomp. It wasn't the big bucks; it was the big head....

Astounding. These people are standing before the throne of God and bragging about themselves. The great trumpet has sounded, and they are still tooting their own horns. Rather than sing his praises, they sing their own. Rather than worship God, they read their resumes. When they should be speechless, they speak. In the very aura of the King they boast of self. What is worse—their arrogance or their blindness?

... God does not save us because of what we've done....

And only a great God does for his children what they can't do for themselves.

That is the message of Paul: "For what the law was powerless to do ... God did" [[Romans 8:3](#), NIV].

And that is the message of the first beatitude.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit ...” [[Matthew 5:3](#), NIV].

The jewel of joy is given to the impoverished spirits, not the affluent. God’s delight is received upon surrender, not awarded upon conquest.

(From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

Don’t let money stand between you and God. You can’t buy a ticket into heaven, you only have to ask in faith. Think about the rich value of faith throughout the day.

Exploration

Selfishness—[Proverbs 28:25](#); [Matthew 19:21–22](#); [Mark 8:34–37](#); [Luke 12:15–21](#); [16:19–31](#); [Philippians 2:3](#).

Jesus Teaches About Divorce

Then Jesus left that place and went into the area of Judea and across the Jordan River. Again, crowds came to him, and he taught them as he usually did.

²Some Pharisees came to Jesus and tried to trick him. They asked, “Is it right for a man to divorce his wife?”

³Jesus answered, “What did Moses command you to do?”

⁴They said, “Moses allowed a man to write out divorce papers and send her away.”

⁵Jesus said, “Moses wrote that command for you because you were stubborn. ⁶But when God made the world, ‘he made them male and female.’ ⁷‘So a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife,’ ⁸‘and the two will become one body.’ So there are not two, but one. ⁹God has joined the two together, so no one should separate them.”

¹⁰Later, in the house, his followers asked Jesus again about the question of divorce. ¹¹He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman is guilty of adultery against her. ¹²And the woman who divorces her husband and marries another man is also guilty of adultery.”

Jesus Accepts Children

¹³Some people brought their little children to Jesus so he could

touch them, but his followers told them to stop. ¹⁴When Jesus saw this, he was upset and said to them, “Let the little children come to me. Don’t stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to people who are like these children. ¹⁵I tell you the truth, you must accept the kingdom of God as if you were a little child, or you will never enter it.” ¹⁶Then Jesus took the children in his arms, put his hands on them, and blessed them.

A Rich Young Man’s Question

¹⁷As Jesus started to leave, a man ran to him and fell on his knees before Jesus. The man asked, “Good teacher, what must I do to have life forever?”

¹⁸Jesus answered, “Why do you call me good? Only God is good. ¹⁹You know the commands: ‘You must not murder anyone. You must not be guilty of adultery. You must not steal. You must not tell lies about your neighbor. [You must not cheat. Honor your father and mother.](#)”

²⁰The man said, “Teacher, I have obeyed all these things since I was a boy.”

²¹Jesus, looking at the man, loved him and said, “There is one more thing you need to do. Go and sell everything you have, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.”

²²He was very sad to hear Jesus say this, and he left sorrowfully, because he was rich.

²³Then Jesus looked at his followers and said, “How hard it will be for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

²⁴The followers were amazed at what Jesus said. But he said again, “My children, it is very hard to enter the kingdom of

God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁶The followers were even more surprised and said to each other, “Then who can be saved?”

²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, “This is something people cannot do, but God can. God can do all things.”

²⁸Peter said to Jesus, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”

²⁹Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, all those who have left houses, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or farms for me and for the Good News ³⁰will get more than they left. Here in this world they will have a hundred times more homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields. And with those things, they will also suffer for their belief. But in the age that is coming they will have life forever. ³¹Many who have the highest place now will have the lowest place in the future. And many who have the lowest place now will have the highest place in the future.”

Jesus Talks About His Death

³²As Jesus and the people with him were on the road to Jerusalem, he was leading the way. His followers were amazed, but others in the crowd who followed were afraid. Again Jesus took the twelve apostles aside and began to tell them what was about to happen in Jerusalem. ³³He said, “Look, we are going to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be turned over to the leading priests and the teachers of the law. They will say that he must die, and they will turn him over to the non-Jewish people, ³⁴who will laugh at him and spit on him. They will beat him with

whips and crucify him. But on the third day, he will rise to life again.”

Two Followers Ask Jesus a Favor

³⁵Then James and John, sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we want to ask you to do something for us.”

³⁶Jesus asked, “What do you want me to do for you?”

³⁷They answered, “Let one of us sit at your right side and one of us sit at your left side in your glory in your kingdom.”

³⁸Jesus said, “You don’t understand what you are asking. [Can you drink the cup that I must drink? And can you be baptized with the same kind of baptism that I must go through?](#)”

³⁹They answered, “Yes, we can.”

Jesus said to them, “You will drink the same cup that I will drink, and you will be baptized with the same baptism that I must go through. ⁴⁰But I cannot choose who will sit at my right or my left; those places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

⁴¹When the other ten followers heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.

⁴²Jesus called them together and said, “The other nations have rulers. You know that those rulers love to show their power over the people, and their important leaders love to use all their authority. ⁴³But it should not be that way among you. Whoever wants to become great among you must serve the rest of you like a servant. ⁴⁴Whoever wants to become the first among you must serve all of you like a slave. ⁴⁵In the same way, the Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to

serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many people.”

Jesus Heals a Blind Man

⁴⁶Then they came to the town of Jericho. As Jesus was leaving there with his followers and a great many people, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus son of Timaeus was sitting by the road. ⁴⁷When he heard that Jesus from Nazareth was walking by, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁸Many people warned the blind man to be quiet, but he shouted even more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁹Jesus stopped and said, “Tell the man to come here.”

So they called the blind man, saying, “Cheer up! Get to your feet. Jesus is calling you.” ⁵⁰The blind man jumped up, left his coat there, and went to Jesus.

⁵¹Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

The blind man answered, “Teacher, I want to see.”

⁵²Jesus said, “Go, you are healed because you believed.” At once the man could see, and he followed Jesus on the road.

Life Lessons

Mark 11:1–33

Situation

Jesus and his disciples made a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem during the Passover. The people heralded Jesus, calling him the Messiah. He threw merchants and money changers out of the Temple for profiting from people's worship. During this week, he traveled between Bethany and Jerusalem frequently.

Observation

Have faith in God. He always fulfills his word. Jesus promised that through faith his disciples would accomplish great things.

Inspiration

The story is told about the time Napoleon's steed got away from him. An alert private jumped on his own horse and chased down the general's horse. When he presented the reins of the animal to Napoleon, the ruler took them, smiled at his willing private, and said, "Thank you, Captain."

The soldier's eyes widened at what he had heard. He then straightened. Saluted. And snapped, "Thank you, sir!"

He immediately went to the barracks. Got his bags. Moved into the officers' quarters. Took his uniform to the quartermaster and exchanged it for that of a captain. By the general's word, he had become a private-turned-commissioned officer. He didn't argue. He didn't shrug. He didn't doubt. He knew that the

one who had the power to do it had done it. And he accepted that.

If only we would do the same. If only we would have the faith of the private... . If only, when God smiles and says we are saved, we'd salute him, and live like those who have just received a gift from the commander in chief.

(From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

Develop regular prayer times when you tell both your troubles and your joys to God.

Exploration

Faith—[Matthew 21:21](#); [Hebrews 11:1–6](#); [James 5:13–18](#); [1 John 5:14](#).

Jesus Enters Jerusalem as a King

As Jesus and his followers were coming closer to Jerusalem, they came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany near the Mount of Olives. From there Jesus sent two of his followers² and said to them, “Go to the town you can see there. When you enter it, you will quickly find a colt tied, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here to me.³ If anyone asks you why you are doing this, tell him its Master needs the colt, and he will send it at once.”

⁴The followers went into the town, found a colt tied in the street near the door of a house, and untied it.⁵ Some people were standing there and asked, “What are you doing? Why are you untying that colt?”⁶ The followers answered the way Jesus told them to answer, and the people let them take the colt.

⁷They brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it, and Jesus sat on it.⁸ Many people spread their coats on the road. Others cut branches in the fields and spread them on the road.⁹ The people were walking ahead of Jesus and behind him, shouting,

“Praise God!

God bless the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

[Psalm 118:26](#)

¹⁰God bless the kingdom of our father David!

That kingdom is coming!
Praise to God in heaven!”

¹¹Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the Temple. After he had looked at everything, since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve apostles.

¹²The next day as Jesus was leaving Bethany, he became hungry. ¹³Seeing a fig tree in leaf from far away, he went to see if it had any figs on it. But he found no figs, only leaves, because it was not the right season for figs. ¹⁴So Jesus said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And Jesus’ followers heard him say this.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The One Who Kept His Focus

One of the incredible abilities of Jesus was to stay on target. His life never got off track. Not once do we find him walking down the wrong side of the fairway. He had no money, no computers, no jets, no administrative assistants or staff; yet Jesus did what many of us fail to do. He kept his life on course.

As Jesus looked across the horizon of his future, he could see many targets. Many flags were flapping in the wind, each of which he could have pursued. He could have been a political revolutionary. He could have been a national leader. He could have been content to be a teacher and educate minds or to be a physician and heal bodies. But in the end he chose to be a Savior and save souls.

Anyone near Christ for any length of time heard it

from Jesus himself. “The Son of Man came to find lost people and save them” ([Luke 19:10](#)). “The Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many people” ([Mark 10:45](#)).

The heart of Christ was relentlessly focused on one task. The day he left the carpentry shop of Nazareth he had one ultimate aim—the cross of Calvary. He was so focused that his final words were, “It is finished” ([John 19:30](#)).

How could Jesus say he was finished? There were still the hungry to feed, the sick to heal, the untaught to instruct, and the unloved to love. How could he say he was finished? Simple. He had completed his designated task. His commission was fulfilled. The painter could set aside his brush, the sculptor lay down his chisel, the writer put away his pen. The job was done. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

Jesus Goes to the Temple

¹⁵When Jesus returned to Jerusalem, he went into the Temple and began to throw out those who were buying and selling there. He turned over the tables of those who were exchanging different kinds of money, and he upset the benches of those who were selling doves. ¹⁶Jesus refused to allow anyone to carry goods through the Temple courts. ¹⁷Then he taught the people, saying, “It is written in the Scriptures, ‘My Temple will be called a house for prayer for people from all nations.’ But you are changing God’s house into a ‘hideout for robbers.’”

¹⁸The leading priests and the teachers of the law heard all this and began trying to find a way to kill Jesus. They were afraid of him, because all the people were amazed at his teaching. ¹⁹That evening, Jesus and his followers left the city.

The Power of Faith

²⁰The next morning as Jesus was passing by with his followers, they saw the fig tree dry and dead, even to the roots. ²¹Peter remembered the tree and said to Jesus, “Teacher, look! The fig tree you cursed is dry and dead!”

²²Jesus answered, “Have faith in God. ²³I tell you the truth, you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, fall into the sea.’ And if you have no doubts in your mind and believe that what you say will happen, God will do it for you. ²⁴So I tell you to believe that you have received the things you ask for in prayer, and God

will give them to you. ²⁵When you are praying, if you are angry with someone, forgive him so that your Father in heaven will also forgive your sins.” ²⁶[n](#)

Leaders Doubt Jesus’ Authority

²⁷Jesus and his followers went again to Jerusalem. As Jesus was walking in the Temple, the leading priests, the teachers of the law, and the older leaders came to him. ²⁸They said to him, “What authority do you have to do these things? Who gave you this authority?”

²⁹Jesus answered, “I will ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you what authority I have to do these things. ³⁰Tell me: When John baptized people, was that authority from God or just from other people?”

³¹They argued about Jesus’ question, saying, “If we answer, ‘John’s baptism was from God,’ Jesus will say, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ³²But if we say, ‘It was from other people,’ the crowd will be against us.” (These leaders were afraid of the people, because all the people believed that John was a prophet.)

³³So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Jesus said to them, “Then I won’t tell you what authority I have to do these things.”

Life Lessons

Mark 12:1–44

Situation

The time for Jesus' death was approaching quickly. Nearing his final hour, Jesus wanted God's love to be made clear through his teaching and example.

Observation

As a result of God's love for us, we can love God and others. God's love also gives us hope that we have eternal life.

Inspiration

Love for the Master is not some sweet sentimental emotion that sweeps over the soul in moments of special piety. Love for Christ is a deliberate setting of the will to carry out His commands at any cost. It is the fixed attitude of heart that decides to do His will at all times. It is the desire and delight of accomplishing our Father's highest purposes, no matter how challenging....

In our highly permissive society, where the so-called "me" generation is encouraged to be so self-centered and so self-preoccupied, the call to obey Christ and comply with His commands cuts across our culture and our cynical conduct.

It simply is not normal nor natural for most of us to "love" God or "love" others in the drastic discipline of a laid-down life. We are a selfish, self-serving people. And when called upon to serve

others we feel insulted. We have the strange, worldly idea that to be of lowly service is to be “used” or “abused.”

Yet God, very God, in Christ came among us in lowly service. He came to minister to us. He came to give Himself to us. And so, because He first “loved” us, we in turn are to be willing and ready to “love” Him and others. (From *Lessons from a Sheep Dog* by Phillip Keller)

Application

When you are fed up with life and utterly exhausted, look for a way to love someone around you. Being patient and maintaining a caring attitude when you don’t feel like it shows that you have experienced God’s love.

Exploration

God’s Sacrifice—[Romans 5:8](#); [Ephesians 5:2](#); [1 John 4:10](#).

Having pressed the grapes of service, we drink life's sweetest wine—the wine of giving. We are at our best when we are giving. In fact, we are most like God when we are giving. —Max Lucado (*He Chose the Nails*)

A Story About God's Son

Jesus began to use stories to teach the people. He said, “A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it and dug a hole for a winepress and built a tower. Then he leased the land to some farmers and left for a trip.² When it was time for the grapes to be picked, he sent a servant to the farmers to get his share of the grapes.³ But the farmers grabbed the servant and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.⁴ Then the man sent another servant. They hit him on the head and showed no respect for him.⁵ So the man sent another servant, whom they killed. The man sent many other servants; the farmers beat some of them and killed others.

⁶“The man had one person left to send, his son whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’

⁷“But the farmers said to each other, ‘This son will inherit the vineyard. If we kill him, it will be ours.’⁸ So they took the son, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

⁹“So what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those farmers and will give the vineyard to other farmers.¹⁰ Surely you have read this Scripture:

‘The stone that the builders rejected
became the cornerstone.

¹¹The Lord did this,
and it is wonderful to us.”

[Psalm 118:22–23](#)

¹²The Jewish leaders knew that the story was about them. So they wanted to find a way to arrest Jesus, but they were afraid of the people. So the leaders left him and went away.

Is It Right to Pay Taxes or Not?

¹³Later, the Jewish leaders sent some Pharisees and [Herodians](#) to Jesus to trap him in saying something wrong. ¹⁴They came to him and said, “Teacher, we know that you are an honest man. You are not afraid of what other people think about you, because you pay no attention to who they are. And you teach the truth about God’s way. Tell us: Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? ¹⁵Should we pay them, or not?”

But knowing what these men were really trying to do, Jesus said to them, “Why are you trying to trap me? Bring me a coin to look at.” ¹⁶They gave Jesus a coin, and he asked, “Whose image and name are on the coin?”

They answered, “Caesar’s.”

¹⁷Then Jesus said to them, “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and give to God the things that are God’s.” The men were amazed at what Jesus said.

Some Sadducees Try to Trick Jesus

¹⁸Then some Sadducees came to Jesus and asked him a question. (Sadducees believed that people would not rise from the dead.) ¹⁹They said, “Teacher, Moses wrote that if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, then that man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. ²⁰Once there were seven brothers. The first brother married and died, leaving no children. ²¹So the second brother married the widow, but he also died and had no children. The same thing happened with the third brother. ²²All seven brothers married her and died, and none of the brothers had any children. Finally the woman died too. ²³Since all seven brothers had married her, when people rise from the dead, whose wife will she be?”

²⁴Jesus answered, “Why don’t you understand? Don’t you know what the Scriptures say, and don’t you know about the power of God? ²⁵When people rise from the dead, they will not marry, nor will they be given to someone to marry. They will be like the angels in heaven. ²⁶Surely you have read what God said about people rising from the dead. In the book in which Moses wrote about the [burning bush](#), it says that God told Moses, [‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’](#) ²⁷God is the God of the living, not the dead. You Sadducees are wrong!”

The Most Important Command

²⁸One of the teachers of the law came and heard Jesus arguing with the Sadducees. Seeing that Jesus gave good answers to their questions, he asked Jesus, “Which of the commands is most important?”

²⁹Jesus answered, “The most important command is this:

'Listen, people of Israel! The Lord our God is the only Lord.
³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all
your mind, and all your strength.'³¹The second command is
this: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' There are no
commands more important than these."

³²The man answered, "That was a good answer, Teacher. You were right when you said God is the only Lord and there is no other God besides him.³³One must love God with all his heart, all his mind, and all his strength. And one must love his neighbor as he loves himself. These commands are more important than all the animals and sacrifices we offer to God."

³⁴When Jesus saw that the man answered him wisely, Jesus said to him, "You are close to the kingdom of God." And after that, no one was brave enough to ask Jesus any more questions.

³⁵As Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he asked, "Why do the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David?"

³⁶David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, said:

'The Lord said to my Lord:
Sit by me at my right side,
until I put your enemies under your control.'

Psalm 110:1

³⁷David himself calls the Christ 'Lord,' so how can the Christ be his son?" The large crowd listened to Jesus with pleasure.

³⁸Jesus continued teaching and said, "Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around wearing fancy clothes, and they love for people to greet them with respect in

the marketplaces. ³⁹They love to have the most important seats in the synagogues and at feasts. ⁴⁰But they cheat widows and steal their houses and then try to make themselves look good by saying long prayers. They will receive a greater punishment.”

True Giving

⁴¹Jesus sat near the Temple money box and watched the people put in their money. Many rich people gave large sums of money. ⁴²Then a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which were only worth a few cents.

⁴³Calling his followers to him, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow gave more than all those rich people.

⁴⁴They gave only what they did not need. This woman is very poor, but she gave all she had; she gave all she had to live on.”

Life Lessons

Mark 13:1-37

Situation

Jesus taught his disciples about the signs of the end times. While he taught, he stood on the Mount of Olives directly opposite the Temple in Jerusalem. Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him to explain when the end would come.

Observation

Be ready for the return of Christ. Some of the signs that will precede his coming are war, hunger, earthquakes, false Christs, false prophets, rumors of wars, loss of faith, persecution of believers, the increase of evil, and the preaching of the Good News to all the world.

Inspiration

I was with American soldiers, near the front line at Danang. Can you imagine what it meant to them that an old lady came to see them? Their wives and mothers were far away in America... . At first I made them laugh heartily. Americans have a great sense of humor. But then I spoke to them very seriously. "Boys," I said, "we all know that you are in danger of your lives. It is possible that tomorrow you will be killed. Are you ready to look a righteous God in the eyes? It is possible if you repent and take your sins to Jesus. He wants to forgive you and to cleanse your heart with His blood and fill it with His spirit. He said: 'Come to Me: and him that cometh to me I will in no

wise cast out' ([John 6:37](#)).” Many of these boys and men came. It is quite possible that now they are in heaven.

What about you who are reading this? Perhaps you will say: I am not on the front line of a war; my life is not in danger. But we all know that every person will have to die one day and after that the judgment—everyone, whether he wants it or not. Are you ready? (From *Not I but Christ* by Corrie ten Boom)

Application

If Jesus returned today, would you be among those who welcome him or among those who dread his coming? Reconsider your priorities and stand ready to go at a moment's notice.

Exploration

Ready for Jesus Christ's Return—[Matthew 24:1–25:13](#); [Luke 21:5–36](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:1–11](#).

The Temple Will Be Destroyed

As Jesus was leaving the Temple, one of his followers said to him, “Look, Teacher! How beautiful the buildings are! How big the stones are!”

²Jesus said, “Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone will be left on another. Every stone will be thrown down to the ground.”

³Later, as Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, opposite the Temple, he was alone with Peter, James, John, and Andrew. They asked Jesus, ⁴“Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are going to happen?”

⁵Jesus began to answer them, “Be careful that no one fools you. ⁶Many people will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the One,’ and they will fool many people. ⁷When you hear about wars and stories of wars that are coming, don’t be afraid. These things must happen before the end comes. ⁸Nations will fight against other nations, and kingdoms against other kingdoms. There will be earthquakes in different places, and there will be times when there is no food for people to eat. These things are like the first pains when something new is about to be born.

⁹“You must be careful. People will arrest you and take you to court and beat you in their synagogues. You will be forced to stand before kings and governors, to tell them about me. This will happen to you because you follow me. ¹⁰But before

these things happen, the Good News must be told to all people.
¹¹When you are arrested and judged, don't worry ahead of time about what you should say. Say whatever is given you to say at that time, because it will not really be you speaking; it will be the Holy Spirit.

¹²“Brothers will give their own brothers to be killed, and fathers will give their own children to be killed. Children will fight against their own parents and cause them to be put to death. ¹³All people will hate you because you follow me, but those people who keep their faith until the end will be saved.

¹⁴“You will see ‘the destroying terror’ standing where it should not be.” (You who read this should understand what it means.) “At that time, the people in Judea should run away to the mountains. ¹⁵If people are on the roofs of their houses, they must not go down or go inside to get anything out of their houses. ¹⁶If people are in the fields, they must not go back to get their coats. ¹⁷At that time, how terrible it will be for women who are pregnant or have nursing babies! ¹⁸Pray that these things will not happen in winter, ¹⁹because those days will be full of trouble. There will be more trouble than there has ever been since the beginning, when God made the world, until now, and nothing as bad will ever happen again. ²⁰God has decided to make that terrible time short. Otherwise, no one would go on living. But God will make that time short to help the people he has chosen. ²¹At that time, someone might say to you, ‘Look, there is the Christ!’ Or another person might say, ‘There he is!’ But don't believe them. ²²False Christs and false prophets will come and perform great wonders and miracles. They will try to fool even the people God has chosen, if that is possible. ²³So be careful. I have warned you about all this before it happens.

²⁴“During the days after this trouble comes,

‘the sun will grow dark,
and the moon will not give its light.

²⁵The stars will fall from the sky.

And the powers of the heavens will be shaken.’

[Isaiah 13:10; 34:4](#)

²⁶“Then people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷Then he will send his angels all around the earth to gather his chosen people from every part of the earth and from every part of heaven.

²⁸“Learn a lesson from the fig tree: When its branches become green and soft and new leaves appear, you know summer is near. ²⁹In the same way, when you see these things happening, you will know that the time is near, ready to come. ³⁰I tell you the truth, all these things will happen while the people of this time are still living. ³¹Earth and sky will be destroyed, but the words I have said will never be destroyed.

³²“No one knows when that day or time will be, not the angels in heaven, not even the Son. Only the Father knows. ³³Be careful! Always be ready, because you don’t know when that time will be. ³⁴It is like a man who goes on a trip. He leaves his house and lets his servants take care of it, giving each one a special job to do. The man tells the servant guarding the door always to be watchful. ³⁵So always be ready, because you don’t know when the owner of the house will come back. It might be in the evening, or at midnight, or in the morning while it is still dark, or when the sun rises. ³⁶Always be ready. Otherwise he might come back suddenly and find you sleeping.

³⁷I tell you this, and I say this to everyone: ‘Be ready!’”

Life Lessons

Mark 14:1-72

Situation

Jesus neared the time of his death. He triumphantly entered Jerusalem and chased men from the Temple who exploited worship. Excitement filled the air in Jerusalem because the people considered Jesus to be the conquering Messiah. Instead, Jesus prepared to face the cross.

Observation

The people thought that Jesus would be a glorious hero and give the nation a majestic destiny. Instead, Jesus humbled himself according to God's plan and won our salvation.

Inspiration

Would you do what Jesus did? He swapped a spotless castle for a grimy stable. He exchanged the worship of angels for the company of killers. He could hold the universe in his palm but gave it up to float in the womb of a maiden.

If you were God, would you sleep on straw, nurse from a breast, and be clothed in a diaper? I wouldn't, but Christ did.

If you knew that only a few would care that you came, would you still come? If you knew that those you loved would laugh in your face, would you still care? If you knew that the tongues you made would mock you, the mouths you made would spit at you, the hands you made would crucify you, would you

still make them? Christ did. Would you regard the immobile and invalid more important than yourself? Jesus did.

He humbled himself. He went from commanding angels to sleeping in the straw. From holding stars to clutching Mary's finger. The palm that held the universe took the nail of a soldier.

Why? Because that's what love does. It puts the beloved before itself. Your soul was more important than his blood. Your eternal life was more important than his earthly life. Your place in heaven was more important to him than his place in heaven, so he gave up his so you could have yours.

He loves you that much, and because he loves you, you are of prime importance to him.

Christ stands in contrast to the barnyard. He points to the sparrow, the most inexpensive bird of his day, and says, "Five sparrows are sold for only two pennies, and God does not forget any of them. . . . You are worth much more than many sparrows" ([Luke 12:6-7](#)).

God remembers the small birds of the world. We remember the eagles. We make bronze statues of the hawk. We name our athletic teams after the falcons. But God notices the sparrows. He makes time for the children and takes note of the lepers. He offers the woman in adultery a second chance and the thief on the cross a personal invitation. Christ is partial to the beat up and done in and urges us to follow suit. "When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" ([Luke 14:13](#)).

Want to love others as God has loved you? Come thirsty. Drink deeply of God's love for you, and ask him to fill your heart with a love worth giving. (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

Application

Instead of campaigning at work or church for a high and honored office, commit six months to doing what everyone else avoids. Look for ways to identify with the Servant Messiah, Jesus.

Exploration

Servanthood—[Matthew 20:26–28](#); [Luke 18:14](#); [John 13:13–17](#); [Philippians 2:5–11](#).

Not only did Jesus find good in the bad, he found purpose in the pain. Of the ninety-eight words Jesus spoke at his arrest, thirty refer to the purpose of God. —Max Lucado (*Just Like Jesus*)

The Plan to Kill Jesus

It was now only two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The leading priests and teachers of the law were trying to find a trick to arrest Jesus and kill him.² But they said, “We must not do it during the feast, because the people might cause a riot.”

A Woman with Perfume for Jesus

³Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon, who had a skin disease. While Jesus was eating there, a woman approached him with an alabaster jar filled with very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She opened the jar and poured the perfume on Jesus’ head.

⁴Some who were there became upset and said to each other, “Why waste that perfume? ⁵It was worth a full year’s work. It could have been sold and the money given to the poor.” And they got very angry with the woman.

⁶Jesus said, “Leave her alone. Why are you troubling her? She did an excellent thing for me. ⁷You will always have the

poor with you, and you can help them anytime you want. But you will not always have me.⁸ This woman did the only thing she could do for me; she poured perfume on my body to prepare me for burial.⁹ I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached in all the world, what this woman has done will be told, and people will remember her.”

Judas Becomes an Enemy of Jesus

¹⁰One of the twelve apostles, Judas Iscariot, went to talk to the leading priests to offer to hand Jesus over to them. ¹¹These priests were pleased about this and promised to pay Judas money. So he watched for the best time to turn Jesus in.

Jesus Eats the Passover Meal

¹²It was now the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread when the Passover lamb was sacrificed. Jesus’ followers said to him, “Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover meal?”

¹³Jesus sent two of his followers and said to them, “Go into the city and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. ¹⁴When he goes into a house, tell the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher says: Where is my guest room in which I can eat the Passover meal with my followers?’ ¹⁵The owner will show you a large room upstairs that is furnished and ready. Prepare the food for us there.”

¹⁶So the followers left and went into the city. Everything happened as Jesus had said, so they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁷In the evening, Jesus went to that house with the twelve.
¹⁸While they were all eating, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, one of you will turn against me—one of you eating with me now.”

¹⁹The followers were very sad to hear this. Each one began to say to Jesus, “I am not the one, am I?”

²⁰Jesus answered, “It is one of the twelve—the one who dips his bread into the bowl with me. ²¹The Son of Man will die, just as the Scriptures say. But how terrible it will be for the person who hands the Son of Man over to be killed. It would be better for him if he had never been born.”

The Lord’s Supper

²²While they were eating, Jesus took some bread and thanked God for it and broke it. Then he gave it to his followers and said, “Take it; this is my body.”

²³Then Jesus took a cup and thanked God for it and gave it to the followers, and they all drank from the cup.

²⁴Then Jesus said, “This is my blood which is the new agreement that God makes with his people. This blood is poured out for many. ²⁵I tell you the truth, I will not drink of this [fruit of the vine](#) again until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

²⁶After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus’ Followers Will Leave Him

²⁷Then Jesus told the followers, “You will all stumble in your faith, because it is written in the Scriptures:

‘I will kill the shepherd,
and the sheep will scatter.’

[Zechariah 13:7](#)

²⁸But after I rise from the dead, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

²⁹Peter said, “Everyone else may stumble in their faith, but I will not.”

³⁰Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, tonight before the rooster crows twice you will say three times you don’t know me.”

³¹But Peter insisted, “I will never say that I don’t know you! I will even die with you!” And all the other followers said the same thing.

Jesus Prays Alone

³²Jesus and his followers went to a place called Gethsemane. He said to them, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him, and he began to be very sad and troubled. ³⁴He said to them, “My heart is full of sorrow, to the point of death. Stay here and watch.”

³⁵After walking a little farther away from them, Jesus fell to the ground and prayed that, if possible, he would not have this time of suffering. ³⁶He prayed, “[Abba](#), Father! You can do all things. Take away this [cup](#) of suffering. But do what you want, not what I want.”

³⁷Then Jesus went back to his followers and found them asleep. He said to Peter, “Simon, are you sleeping? Couldn’t you stay awake with me for one hour?” ³⁸Stay awake and pray for strength against temptation. The spirit wants to do what is right, but the body is weak.”

³⁹Again Jesus went away and prayed the same thing. ⁴⁰Then he went back to his followers, and again he found them asleep, because their eyes were very heavy. And they did not know what to say to him.

⁴¹After Jesus prayed a third time, he went back to his followers and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? That’s enough. The time has come for the Son of Man to be handed over to sinful people. ⁴²Get up, we must go. Look, here comes the man who has turned against me.”

Jesus Is Arrested

⁴³At once, while Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve apostles, came up. With him were many people carrying swords and clubs who had been sent from the leading priests, the teachers of the law, and the older Jewish leaders.

⁴⁴Judas had planned a signal for them, saying, “The man I kiss is Jesus. Arrest him and guard him while you lead him away.” ⁴⁵So Judas went straight to Jesus and said, “Teacher!” and kissed him. ⁴⁶Then the people grabbed Jesus and arrested him. ⁴⁷One of his followers standing nearby pulled out his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear.

⁴⁸Then Jesus said, “You came to get me with swords and clubs as if I were a criminal. ⁴⁹Every day I was with you

teaching in the Temple, and you did not arrest me there. But all these things have happened to make the Scriptures come true.”

⁵⁰Then all of Jesus’ followers left him and ran away.

⁵¹A young man, wearing only a linen cloth, was following Jesus, and the people also grabbed him. ⁵²But the cloth he was wearing came off, and he ran away naked.

Jesus Before the Leaders

⁵³The people who arrested Jesus led him to the house of the high priest, where all the leading priests, the older leaders, and the teachers of the law were gathered. ⁵⁴Peter followed far behind and entered the courtyard of the high priest’s house. There he sat with the guards, warming himself by the fire.

⁵⁵The leading priests and the whole Jewish council tried to find something that Jesus had done wrong so they could kill him. But the council could find no proof of anything. ⁵⁶Many people came and told false things about him, but all said different things—none of them agreed.

⁵⁷Then some people stood up and lied about Jesus, saying, ⁵⁸“We heard this man say, ‘I will destroy this Temple that people made. And three days later, I will build another Temple not made by people.’” ⁵⁹But even the things these people said did not agree.

⁶⁰Then the high priest stood before them and asked Jesus, “Aren’t you going to answer? Don’t you have something to say about their charges against you?” ⁶¹But Jesus said nothing; he did not answer.

The high priest asked Jesus another question: “Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed God?”

⁶²Jesus answered, “I am. And in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God, the Powerful One, and coming on clouds in the sky.”

⁶³When the high priest heard this, he tore his clothes and said, “We don’t need any more witnesses! ⁶⁴You all heard him say these things against God. What do you think?”

They all said that Jesus was guilty and should die. ⁶⁵Some of the people there began to spit at Jesus. They blindfolded him and beat him with their fists and said, “Prove you are a prophet!” Then the guards led Jesus away and beat him.

Peter Says He Doesn’t Know Jesus

⁶⁶While Peter was in the courtyard, a servant girl of the high priest came there. ⁶⁷She saw Peter warming himself at the fire and looked closely at him.

Then she said, “You also were with Jesus, that man from Nazareth.”

⁶⁸But Peter said that he was never with Jesus. He said, “I don’t know or understand what you are talking about.” Then Peter left and went toward the entrance of the courtyard. [And the rooster crowed.](#)

⁶⁹The servant girl saw Peter there, and again she said to the people who were standing nearby, “This man is one of those who followed Jesus.” ⁷⁰Again Peter said that it was not true.

A short time later, some people were standing near Peter saying, “Surely you are one of those who followed Jesus, because you are from Galilee, too.”

⁷¹Then Peter began to place a curse on himself and swear, “I don’t know this man you’re talking about!”

⁷²At once, the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had told him: “Before the rooster crows twice, you will say three times that you don’t know me.” Then Peter lost control of himself and began to cry.

Life Lessons

Mark 15:1–47

Situation

Judas betrayed Jesus, and the religious authorities arrested God's Son. The disciples scattered, and Peter denied him three times. Jesus, beaten and mocked throughout the night, provided salvation through his death and resurrection.

Observation

The hours before Jesus' crucifixion were extremely painful for him, yet he faced the sacrifice with love, courage, and conviction so great that he willingly gave up his life for us!

Inspiration

He looked around the hill and foresaw a scene. Three figures hung on three crosses. Arms spread. Heads fallen forward. They moaned with the wind.

Men clad in soldiers' garb sat on the ground near the trio. They played games in the dirt and laughed.

Men clad in religion stood off to one side. They smiled. Arrogant, cocky. They had protected God, they thought, by killing this false one.

Women clad in sorrow huddled at the foot of the hill. Speechless. Faces tear streaked. Eyes downward. One put her arm around another and tried to lead her away. She wouldn't leave. "I will stay," she said softly. "I will stay."

All heaven stood to fight. All nature rose to rescue. All eternity poised to protect. But the Creator

gave no command.

“It must be done ...,” he said, and withdrew.

But as he stepped back in time, he heard the cry that he would someday scream: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He wrenched at tomorrow’s agony.

The angel spoke again. “It would be less painful ...”

The Creator interrupted softly. “But it wouldn’t be love.” (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

What have you given up for others recently? Remember how great Christ’s generosity was to you as you think of these “sacrifices.”

Exploration

Christ’s Sacrifice—[John 3:16](#); [Romans 5:6–8](#); [Philippians 2:5–8](#); [Hebrews 12:1–3](#).

And as the hands of Jesus opened for the nail, the doors of heaven opened for you. —Max Lucado (*He Chose the Nails*)

Pilate Questions Jesus

Very early in the morning, the leading priests, the older leaders, the teachers of the law, and all the Jewish council decided what to do with Jesus. They tied him, led him away, and turned him over to Pilate, the governor.

²Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “Those are your words.”

³The leading priests accused Jesus of many things. ⁴So Pilate asked Jesus another question, “You can see that they are accusing you of many things. Aren’t you going to answer?”

⁵But Jesus still said nothing, so Pilate was very surprised.

Pilate Tries to Free Jesus

⁶Every year at the time of the Passover the governor would free one prisoner whom the people chose. ⁷At that time, there was a man named Barabbas in prison who was a rebel and had committed murder during a riot. ⁸The crowd came to Pilate and began to ask him to free a prisoner as he always did.

⁹So Pilate asked them, “Do you want me to free the king of the Jews?” ¹⁰Pilate knew that the leading priests had turned

Jesus in to him because they were jealous. ¹¹But the leading priests had persuaded the people to ask Pilate to free Barabbas, not Jesus.

¹²Then Pilate asked the crowd again, “So what should I do with this man you call the king of the Jews?”

¹³They shouted, “Crucify him!”

¹⁴Pilate asked, “Why? What wrong has he done?”

But they shouted even louder, “Crucify him!”

¹⁵Pilate wanted to please the crowd, so he freed Barabbas for them. After having Jesus beaten with whips, he handed Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified.

¹⁶The soldiers took Jesus into the governor’s palace (called the Praetorium) and called all the other soldiers together. ¹⁷They put a purple robe on Jesus and used thorny branches to make a crown for his head. ¹⁸They began to call out to him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” ¹⁹The soldiers beat Jesus on the head many times with a stick. They spit on him and made fun of him by bowing on their knees and worshiping him. ²⁰After they finished, the soldiers took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him out of the palace to be crucified.

Jesus Is Crucified

²¹A man named Simon from Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was coming from the fields to the city. The soldiers forced Simon to carry the cross for Jesus. ²²They led Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the Place of the Skull. ²³The soldiers tried to give Jesus wine mixed with myrrh to drink, but he refused. ²⁴The soldiers crucified Jesus and

divided his clothes among themselves, throwing lots to decide what each soldier would get.

²⁵It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified Jesus. ²⁶There was a sign with this charge against Jesus written on it: THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁷They also put two robbers on crosses beside Jesus, one on the right, and the other on the left. ²⁸[n](#) ²⁹People walked by and insulted Jesus and shook their heads, saying, "You said you could destroy the Temple and build it again in three days. ³⁰So save yourself! Come down from that cross!"

³¹The leading priests and the teachers of the law were also making fun of Jesus. They said to each other, "He saved other people, but he can't save himself. ³²If he is really the Christ, the king of Israel, let him come down now from the cross. When we see this, we will believe in him." The robbers who were being crucified beside Jesus also insulted him.

Jesus Dies

³³At noon the whole country became dark, and the darkness lasted for three hours. ³⁴At three o'clock Jesus cried in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani." This means, "My God, my God, why have you rejected me?"

³⁵When some of the people standing there heard this, they said, "Listen! He is calling Elijah."

³⁶Someone there ran and got a sponge, filled it with vinegar, tied it to a stick, and gave it to Jesus to drink. He said, "We want to see if Elijah will come to take him down from the cross."

³⁷Then Jesus cried in a loud voice and died.

³⁸The [curtain in the Temple](#) was torn into two pieces, from

the top to the bottom.³⁹When the army officer who was standing in front of the cross saw what happened when Jesus died, he said, “This man really was the Son of God!”

⁴⁰Some women were standing at a distance from the cross, watching; among them were Mary Magdalene, Salome, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph. (James was her youngest son.)⁴¹These women had followed Jesus in Galilee and helped him. Many other women were also there who had come with Jesus to Jerusalem.

Jesus Is Buried

⁴²This was Preparation Day. (That means the day before the Sabbath day.) That evening,⁴³Joseph from Arimathea was brave enough to go to Pilate and ask for Jesus’ body. Joseph, an important member of the Jewish council, was one of the people who was waiting for the kingdom of God to come.

⁴⁴Pilate was amazed that Jesus would have already died, so he called the army officer who had guarded Jesus and asked him if Jesus had already died.⁴⁵The officer told Pilate that he was dead, so Pilate told Joseph he could have the body.⁴⁶Joseph bought some linen cloth, took the body down from the cross, and wrapped it in the linen. He put the body in a tomb that was cut out of a wall of rock. Then he rolled a very large stone to block the entrance of the tomb.⁴⁷And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw the place where Jesus was laid.

Life Lessons

Mark 16:1–20

Situation

Jesus was crucified and his body buried. His followers were dismayed because he did not create a kingdom on earth. Because he died so close to the Sabbath (a day on which Israelites could do no work), his body was not completely prepared for burial. Once the Sabbath was over, some women set out, intending to put sweet-smelling spices on his body.

Observation

Jesus was not simply a man who led a good life and died. He rose from the dead. Death cannot hold him or his followers. God conquered death, and gave us hope.

Inspiration

The year 1899 marked the deaths of two well-known men—Dwight L. Moody, the acclaimed evangelist, and Robert Ingersoll, the famous lawyer, orator, and political leader.

The two men had many similarities. Both were raised in Christian homes. Both were skilled orators... Both drew immense crowds when they spoke and attracted loyal followings. But there was one striking difference between them—their view of God.

Ingersoll was an agnostic; he had no belief in the eternal, but stressed the importance of living only in the here and now. Ingersoll made light of the Bible.... The Bible was “a fable, an obscenity, a humbug, a

sham and a lie.” ...

Dwight L. Moody, had different convictions. He dedicated his life to presenting a resurrected King to a dying people. He embraced the Bible as the hope for humanity and the cross as the turning point of history. He left behind a legacy of written and spoken words, institutions of education, churches, and changed lives.

Two men. Both powerful speakers and influential leaders. One rejected God; the other embraced him. The impact of their decisions is seen most clearly in the way they died....

Ingersoll died suddenly. The news of his death stunned his family. His body was kept at home for several days because his wife was reluctant to part with it. It was eventually removed for the sake of the family's health.

Ingersoll's remains were cremated, and the public response to his passing was altogether dismal. For a man who put all his hopes on the world, death was tragic and came without the consolation of hope....

Moody's legacy was different. On December 22, 1899, Moody awoke to his last winter dawn. Having grown increasingly weak during the night, he began to speak in slow measured words. "Earth recedes, heaven opens before me!" Son Will, who was nearby, hurried across the room to his father's side.

"Father, you are dreaming," he said.

"No. This is no dream, Will," Moody said. "It is beautiful. It is like a trance. If this is death, it is sweet. God is calling me, and I must go. Don't call me back."

At that point, the family gathered around, and moments later the great evangelist died. It was his coronation day—a day he had looked forward to for many years. He was with his Lord.

... There was no despair. Loved ones gathered to sing praise to God at a triumphant home-going service. Many remembered the words the evangelist had spoken earlier that year in New York City: “Someday you will read in the papers that Moody is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it. At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. . . . I was born of the flesh in 1837, I was born of the spirit in 1855. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit shall live forever.” (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

What do you fear about death? Remember that Jesus did the impossible by rising from the dead. One day your body and spirit will rise from the dead.

Exploration

Victory over Death—[Psalm 23:4](#); [Hosea 13:14](#); [Romans 8:2](#); [1 Corinthians 15:54–57](#); [Ephesians 2:4–5](#).

Jesus Rises from the Dead

The day after the Sabbath day, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought some sweet-smelling spices to put on Jesus' body. ²Very early on that day, the first day of the week, soon after sunrise, the women were on their way to the tomb. ³They said to each other, "Who will roll away for us the stone that covers the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴Then the women looked and saw that the stone had already been rolled away, even though it was very large. ⁵The women entered the tomb and saw a young man wearing a white robe and sitting on the right side, and they were afraid.

⁶But the man said, "Don't be afraid. You are looking for Jesus from Nazareth, who has been crucified. He has risen from the dead; he is not here. Look, here is the place they laid him. ⁷Now go and tell his followers and Peter, 'Jesus is going into Galilee ahead of you, and you will see him there as he told you before.'"

⁸The women were confused and shaking with fear, so they left the tomb and ran away. They did not tell anyone about what happened, because they were afraid.

Verses [9-20](#) are not included in two of the best and oldest Greek manuscripts of Mark.

Some Followers See Jesus

[⁹After Jesus rose from the dead early on the first day of the week, he showed himself first to Mary Magdalene. One time in the past, he had forced seven demons out of her. ¹⁰After Mary saw Jesus, she went and told his followers, who were very sad and were crying. ¹¹But Mary told them that Jesus was alive. She said that she had seen him, but the followers did not believe her.

¹²Later, Jesus showed himself to two of his followers while they were walking in the country, but he did not look the same as before. ¹³These followers went back to the others and told them what had happened, but again, the followers did not believe them.

Jesus Talks to the Apostles

¹⁴Later Jesus showed himself to the eleven apostles while they were eating, and he criticized them because they had no faith. They were stubborn and refused to believe those who had seen him after he had risen from the dead.

¹⁵Jesus said to his followers, “Go everywhere in the world, and tell the Good News to everyone. ¹⁶Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved, but anyone who does not believe will be punished. ¹⁷And those who believe will be able to do these things as proof: They will use my name to force out demons. They will speak in new [languages](#). ¹⁸They will pick up snakes and drink poison without being hurt. They will touch the sick, and the sick will be healed.”

¹⁹After the Lord Jesus said these things to his followers, he was carried up into heaven, and he sat at the right side of God. ²⁰The followers went everywhere in the world and told the

Good News to people, and the Lord helped them. The Lord proved that the Good News they told was true by giving them power to work miracles.]

the Son of God Some Greek copies omit these words.

Simon Simon's other name was Peter.

Simon Simon's other name was Peter.

Moses...well Read about this in [Leviticus 14:1-32](#).

John John the Baptist, who preached to the Jewish people about Christ's coming ([Mark 1:4-8](#)).

gave ... time This is called "fasting." The people would give up eating for a special time of prayer and worship to God. It was also done to show sadness and disappointment.

Herodians A political group that followed Herod and his family.

producing fruit To produce fruit means to have in your life the good things God wants.

Legion Means very many. A legion was about five thousand men in the Roman army.

Ten Towns In Greek, called "Decapolis." It was an area east of Lake Galilee that once had ten main towns.

Shake ... feet A warning. It showed that they were rejecting these people.

Elijah A great prophet who spoke for God and who lived hundreds of years before Christ. See [1 Kings 17](#).

'Honor ... mother' Quotation from [Exodus 20:12](#); [Deuteronomy 5:16](#).

'Anyone ... death.' Quotation from [Exodus 21:17](#).

Verse 16 Some Greek copies add verse [16](#): "You people who can hear me, listen!"

Ten Towns In Greek, called "Decapolis." It was an area east of Lake Galilee that once had ten main towns.

Elijah A man who spoke for God and who lived hundreds of years before Christ. See [1 Kings 17](#).

Satan Name for the devil meaning "the enemy." Jesus

means that Peter was talking like Satan.

Elijah and Moses Two of the most important Jewish leaders in the past. God had given Moses the Law, and Elijah was an important prophet.

Verse 44 Some Greek copies of Mark add verse [44](#), which is the same as verse [48](#).

Verse 46 Some Greek copies of Mark add verse [46](#), which is the same as verse [48](#).

“Moses ... away.” Quotation from [Deuteronomy 24:1](#).

‘he made ... female.’ Quotation from [Genesis 1:27](#).

‘So ... body.’ Quotation from [Genesis 2:24](#).

‘You ... mother.’ Quotation from [Exodus 20:12–16](#); [Deuteronomy 5:16–20](#).

Can you ... through? Jesus was asking if they could suffer the same terrible things that would happen to him.

Praise Literally, “Hosanna,” a Hebrew word used at first in praying to God for help, but at this time it was probably a shout of joy used in praising God or his Messiah.

‘My Temple ... nations.’ Quotation from [Isaiah 56:7](#).

‘hideout for robbers.’ Quotation from [Jeremiah 7:11](#).

Verse 26 Some early Greek copies add verse [26](#): “But if you don’t forgive other people, then your Father in heaven will not forgive your sins.”

Herodians A political group that followed Herod and his family.

burning bush Read [Exodus 3:1–12](#) in the Old Testament.

‘I am ... Jacob.’ Quotation from [Exodus 3:6](#).

‘Listen ... strength.’ Quotation from [Deuteronomy 6:4–5](#).

‘Love ... yourself.’ Quotation from [Leviticus 19:18](#).

‘the destroying terror’ Mentioned in [Daniel 9:27](#); [12:11](#) (cf. [Daniel 11:31](#)).

roofs In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

fruit of the vine Product of the grapevine; this may also be translated “wine.”

Abba Name that a Jewish child called his father.

cup Jesus is talking about the terrible things that will happen to him. Accepting these things will be very hard, like drinking a cup of something bitter.

And ... crowed. A few, early Greek copies leave out this phrase.

Verse 28 Some Greek copies add verse 28: “And the Scripture came true that says, ‘They put him with criminals.’”

curtain in the Temple A curtain divided the Most Holy Place from the other part of the Temple. That was the special building in Jerusalem where God commanded the Jewish people to worship him.

languages This can also be translated “tongues.”

The Book of Luke

Introduction

Nearly two thousand years ago a doctor named Luke began a letter to a friend with these words:

Many have tried to report on the things that happened among us. They have written the same things that we learned from others—the people who saw those things from the beginning and served God by telling people his message. Since I myself have studied everything carefully from the beginning, most excellent Theophilus, it seemed good for me to write it out for you. I arranged it in order to help you know that what you have been taught is true (1:1–4).

Luke and Theophilus shared two loves: a love for Christ and a love for the facts. They didn't want legends, they wanted truth. And so Dr. Luke begins to sort the truth and report the facts to Theophilus. The result is part letter and part research paper.

It is part letter because it was written for a friend. What a bond must have existed between these two that Luke would labor so! It is part research paper, because Luke had *studied everything carefully from the beginning* and he wanted Theophilus to benefit from his study.

Can't you envision him in the home of Mary? "Tell me again what happened in Bethlehem." Can't you see him peppering Matthew with questions? "Let me see if I got this parable right." Or on long walks with Peter, "When you denied him the third time, did Jesus know?" With the skill of a surgeon, Luke probes for truth.

Why?

So his friend could know that what he had been taught was

true.

Did Luke have any idea that millions of us would benefit from his study? I doubt it. All he did was share the truth with a friend.

Can you imagine what would happen if we all did the same?

About This Book

Author:

Luke, the non-Jewish doctor

Date Written:

C. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

-
- Jesus was fully man and fully God.
- Jesus experienced the conflicts of life, yet performed miracles.
- Jesus fulfilled God's mission and taught of God's kingdom.
- Jesus' death and resurrection made possible our relationship with God.

Key Verses:

“Since I myself have studied everything carefully from the beginning, ... it seemed good for me to write it out for you. I arranged it in order to help you know that what you have been taught is true” ([Luke 1:3–4](#)).

Contents:

1. Jesus' Birth and Preparation [1:1–4:13](#)
2. Jesus' Ministry [4:14–9:50](#)
3. Jesus' Ministry in the Midst of Conflict [9:51–18:43](#)
4. Jesus' Last Week, Resurrection, and Ascension [19:1–24:53](#)

Life Lessons

Luke 1:1–80

Situation

Scholars have suggested that these events took place around 6 B.C. during the rule of Herod the Great. God set the stage for the coming of Jesus into the world.

Observation

The events leading up to Jesus' birth can be summarized by the angel's words: "God can do anything!"

Inspiration

Hope is not what you expect; it is what you would never dream. It is a wild, improbable tale with a pinch-me-I'm-dreaming ending. It's Abraham adjusting his bifocals so he can see not his grandson, but his son. It's Moses standing in the Promised Land not with Aaron or Miriam at his side, but with Elijah and the transfigured Christ. It's Zechariah left speechless at the sight of wife Elizabeth, gray-headed and pregnant. And it is the two Emmaus-bound pilgrims reaching out to take a piece of bread only to see the hands from which it is offered are pierced.

Hope is not a granted wish or a favor performed; no, it is far greater than that. It is a zany, unpredictable dependence on a God who loves to surprise us out of our socks and be there in the flesh to see our reaction. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

What are your greatest dreams? Remember, God can do anything, and he loves to fulfill dreams. Ask God to show you what he wants you to do, and then ask him for the power and courage to do it.

Exploration

God's Ability—[Joshua 3:5](#); [Job 42:2](#); [Psalm 77:14](#); [Daniel 4:3](#); [Matthew 19:26](#); [Romans 16:25–26](#); [Ephesians 3:20](#).

Luke Writes About Jesus' Life

Many have tried to report on the things that happened among us.² They have written the same things that we learned from others—the people who saw those things from the beginning and served God by telling people his message.³ Since I myself have studied everything carefully from the beginning, most [excellent](#) Theophilus, it seemed good for me to write it out for you. I arranged it in order⁴ to help you know that what you have been taught is true.

Zechariah and Elizabeth

⁵During the time Herod ruled Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah who belonged to [Abijah's group](#). Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth, came from the family of Aaron.⁶ Zechariah and Elizabeth truly did what God said was good. They did everything the Lord commanded and were without fault in keeping his law.⁷ But they had no children, because Elizabeth could not have a baby, and both of them were very old.

⁸One day Zechariah was serving as a priest before God, because his group was on duty.⁹ According to the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to go into the Temple of the Lord and burn incense.¹⁰ There were a great many people outside praying at the time the incense was offered.¹¹ Then an

angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah, standing on the right side of the incense table. ¹²When he saw the angel, Zechariah was startled and frightened. ¹³But the angel said to him, “Zechariah, don’t be afraid. God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give birth to a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴He will bring you joy and gladness, and many people will be happy because of his birth. ¹⁵John will be a great man for the Lord. He will never drink wine or beer, and even from birth, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶He will help many people of Israel return to the Lord their God. ¹⁷He will go before the Lord in spirit and power like Elijah. He will make peace between parents and their children and will bring those who are not obeying God back to the right way of thinking, to make a people ready for the coming of the Lord.”

¹⁸Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I know that what you say is true? I am an old man, and my wife is old, too.”

¹⁹The angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand before God, who sent me to talk to you and to tell you this good news. ²⁰Now, listen! You will not be able to speak until the day these things happen, because you did not believe what I told you. But they will really happen.”

²¹Outside, the people were still waiting for Zechariah and were surprised that he was staying so long in the Temple. ²²When Zechariah came outside, he could not speak to them, and they knew he had seen a vision in the Temple. He could only make signs to them and remained unable to speak. ²³When his time of service at the Temple was finished, he went home.

²⁴Later, Zechariah’s wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and did not go out of her house for five months. Elizabeth said,

²⁵“Look what the Lord has done for me! My people were

ashamed of me, but now the Lord has taken away that shame.”

An Angel Appears to Mary

²⁶During Elizabeth’s sixth month of pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin. She was engaged to marry a man named Joseph from the family of David. Her name was Mary. ²⁸The angel came to her and said, “Greetings! The Lord has blessed you and is with you.”

²⁹But Mary was very startled by what the angel said and wondered what this greeting might mean.

³⁰The angel said to her, “Don’t be afraid, Mary; God has shown you his grace. ³¹Listen! You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of King David, his ancestor. ³³He will rule over the people of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end.”

³⁴Mary said to the angel, “How will this happen since I am a virgin?”

³⁵The angel said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you. For this reason the baby will be holy and will be called the Son of God. ³⁶Now Elizabeth, your relative, is also pregnant with a son though she is very old. Everyone thought she could not have a baby, but she has been pregnant for six months. ³⁷God can do anything!”

³⁸Mary said, “I am the servant of the Lord. Let this happen to me as you say!” Then the angel went away.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

³⁹Mary got up and went quickly to a town in the hills of Judea.
⁴⁰She came to Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth.
⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the unborn baby inside her jumped, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.
⁴²She cried out in a loud voice, "God has blessed you more than any other woman, and he has blessed the baby to which you will give birth. ⁴³Why has this good thing happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴When I heard your voice, the baby inside me jumped with joy. ⁴⁵You are blessed because you believed that what the Lord said to you would really happen."

Mary Praises God

⁴⁶Then Mary said,

"My soul praises the Lord;

⁴⁷my heart rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸because he has shown his concern for his humble servant girl.

From now on, all people will say that I am blessed,

⁴⁹because the Powerful One has done great things for me.

His name is holy.

⁵⁰God will show his mercy forever and ever to those who worship and serve him.

⁵¹He has done mighty deeds by his power. He has scattered the people who are proud

and think great things about themselves.

⁵²He has brought down rulers from their thrones and raised up the humble.

⁵³He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with nothing.

⁵⁴He has helped his servant, the people of Israel, remembering to show them mercy

⁵⁵as he promised to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his children forever.”

⁵⁶Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

The Birth of John

⁵⁷When it was time for Elizabeth to give birth, she had a boy.

⁵⁸Her neighbors and relatives heard how good the Lord was to her, and they rejoiced with her.

⁵⁹When the baby was eight days old, they came to circumcise him. They wanted to name him Zechariah because this was his father’s name, ⁶⁰but his mother said, “No! He will be named John.”

⁶¹The people said to Elizabeth, “But no one in your family has this name.” ⁶²Then they made signs to his father to find out what he would like to name him.

⁶³Zechariah asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John,” and everyone was surprised. ⁶⁴Immediately Zechariah could talk again, and he began praising God. ⁶⁵All their neighbors became alarmed, and in all the mountains of Judea people continued talking about all these things. ⁶⁶The people

who heard about them wondered, saying, “What will this child be?” because the Lord was with him.

Zechariah Praises God

⁶⁷Then Zechariah, John’s father, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

⁶⁸“Let us praise the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to help his people and has given
them freedom.

⁶⁹He has given us a powerful Savior
from the family of God’s servant David.

⁷⁰He said that he would do this
through his holy prophets who lived long ago:

⁷¹He promised he would save us from our enemies
and from the power of all those who hate us.

⁷²He said he would give mercy to our fathers
and that he would remember his holy promise.

⁷³God promised Abraham, our father,

⁷⁴that he would save us from the power of our enemies
so we could serve him without fear,

⁷⁵being holy and good before God as long as we live.

⁷⁶“Now you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most
High God.

You will go before the Lord to prepare his way.

⁷⁷You will make his people know that they will be
saved

by having their sins forgiven.

⁷⁸With the loving mercy of our God,

a new day from heaven will dawn upon us.

⁷⁹It will shine on those who live in darkness,
in the shadow of death.

It will guide us into the path of peace.”

⁸⁰And so the child grew up and became strong in spirit.
John lived in the desert until the time when he came out to
preach to Israel.

Life Lessons

Luke 2:1-52

Situation

Luke gave an account of the birth of Jesus and his early life. In his culture, boys were considered responsible adults around the age of twelve. It was not, therefore, irresponsible of Joseph and Mary to accidentally leave Jesus behind. They must have thought he was traveling with another part of the group.

Observation

God's Son became a person and lived with us for a while. During his life he was sad, happy, excited, and disappointed. God knows what life on earth is like.

Inspiration

The implications of the name "Immanuel" are both comforting and unsettling. Comforting, because He has come to share the danger as well as the drudgery of our everyday lives. He desires to weep with us and to wipe away our tears. And what seems most bizarre, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, longs to share in and to be the source of the laughter and the joy we all too rarely know.

The implications are unsettling. It is one thing to claim that God looks down upon us, from a safe distance, and speaks to us (via long distance, we hope). But to say that He is right here, is to put ourselves and Him in a totally new Situation. He is no

longer the calm and benevolent observer in the sky, the kindly old caricature with the beard. His image becomes that of Jesus, who wept and laughed, who fasted and feasted, and who, above all, was fully present to those He loved. He was there with them. He is here with us....

Most incredible, however, are the times we know He is with us in the midst of our daily, routine lives. In the middle of cleaning the house or driving somewhere in the pick-up, He stops us ... in our tracks and makes His presence known. Often it's in the middle of the most mundane task that He lets us know He is there with us. We realize, then, that there can be no "ordinary" moments for people who live their lives with Jesus.

Jesus paid a tremendous price to be with us. Certainly the cross was the most obvious cost. But I believe more is in view.

We focus so much on the fact that Jesus died for us, we sometimes forget that He also lived for us and lives for us still. If Jesus had simply come as Himself, and not as one of us, the Bible makes it quite clear that we could not have borne the sight of His presence, any more than Moses could have looked directly at the face of God.

Imagine what it would be like to be at the Father's side one moment and struggling to sleep in a cattle trough the next. Imagine what it would be like to go from hearing the praise of angels to suffering the taunts of stupid men. The cost to Jesus is an indication of the incredible value of what He came to

give us. And because no one will ever fully know what that cost Jesus, we can only begin to understand the incredible value of His gift to us. (From *Immanuel* by Michael Card)

Application

Take a moment and reflect on what “Immanuel—God with us” means to you in your daily life. Make it a point to seek God even in the mundane tasks of your life.

Exploration

God with Us—[Exodus 33:20–23](#); [Isaiah 7:14](#); [Matthew 1:23](#); [John 14:18–21](#); [Acts 17:28](#); [2 Corinthians 6:16](#).

The Birth of Jesus

At that time, Augustus Caesar sent an order that all people in the countries under Roman rule must list their names in a register.²This was the first [registration](#); it was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.³And all went to their own towns to be registered.

⁴So Joseph left Nazareth, a town in Galilee, and went to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, known as the town of David. Joseph went there because he was from the family of David.⁵Joseph registered with Mary, to whom he was [engaged](#) and who was now pregnant.⁶While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to have the baby,⁷and she gave birth to her first son. Because there were no rooms left in the inn, she wrapped the baby with pieces of cloth and laid him in a box where animals are fed.

Shepherds Hear About Jesus

⁸That night, some shepherds were in the fields nearby watching their sheep.⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them. The glory of the Lord was shining around them, and they became very frightened.¹⁰The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I am bringing you good news that will be a great joy to all the people.¹¹Today your Savior was born in the town of

David. He is Christ, the Lord. ¹²This is how you will know him: You will find a baby wrapped in pieces of cloth and lying in a feeding box.”

¹³Then a very large group of angels from heaven joined the first angel, praising God and saying:

¹⁴“Give glory to God in heaven,
and on earth let there be peace among the people who
please God.”

¹⁵When the angels left them and went back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem. Let’s see this thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶So the shepherds went quickly and found Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in a feeding box. ¹⁷When they had seen him, they told what the angels had said about this child. ¹⁸Everyone was amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured these things and continued to think about them. ²⁰Then the shepherds went back to their sheep, praising God and thanking him for everything they had seen and heard. It had been just as the angel had told them.

²¹When the baby was eight days old, he was circumcised and was named Jesus, the name given by the angel before the baby began to grow inside Mary.

Jesus Is Presented in the Temple

²²When the time came for Mary and Joseph to do what the law of Moses taught about being made pure, they took Jesus to

Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. ²³(It is written in the law of the Lord: “Every firstborn male shall be given to the Lord.”)

²⁴Mary and Joseph also went to offer a sacrifice, as the law of the Lord says: “You must sacrifice two doves or two young pigeons.”

Simeon Sees Jesus

²⁵In Jerusalem lived a man named Simeon who was a good man and godly. He was waiting for the time when God would take away Israel’s sorrow, and the Holy Spirit was in him. ²⁶Simeon had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he saw the Christ promised by the Lord. ²⁷The Spirit led Simeon to the Temple. When Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the Temple to do what the law said they must do, ²⁸Simeon took the baby in his arms and thanked God:

²⁹“Now, Lord, you can let me, your servant,
die in peace as you said.

³⁰With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,

³¹which you prepared before all people.

³²It is a light for the non-Jewish people to see

and an honor for your people, the Israelites.”

³³Jesus’ father and mother were amazed at what Simeon had said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, “God has chosen this child to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel. He will be a sign from God that many people will not accept ³⁵so that the thoughts of many will be made known. And the things that will happen will make your heart sad, too.”

Anna Sees Jesus

³⁶There was a prophetess, Anna, from the family of Phanuel in the tribe of Asher. Anna was very old. She had once been married for seven years. ³⁷Then her husband died, and she was a widow for eighty-four years. Anna never left the Temple but worshiped God, going without food and praying day and night. ³⁸Standing there at that time, she thanked God and spoke about Jesus to all who were waiting for God to free Jerusalem.

Joseph and Mary Return Home

³⁹When Joseph and Mary had done everything the law of the Lord commanded, they went home to Nazareth, their own town in Galilee. ⁴⁰The little child grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's goodness was upon him.

Jesus As a Boy

⁴¹Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. ⁴²When he was twelve years old, they went to the feast as they always did. ⁴³After the feast days were over, they started home. The boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Thinking that Jesus was with them in the group, they traveled for a whole day. Then they began to look for him among their family and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him there. ⁴⁶After three days they found Jesus sitting in the Temple with the teachers, listening to them and asking them

questions.⁴⁷ All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and answers.⁴⁸ When Jesus' parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why did you do this to us? Your father and I were very worried about you and have been looking for you."

⁴⁹Jesus said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰But they did not understand the meaning of what he said.

⁵¹Jesus went with them to Nazareth and was obedient to them. But his mother kept in her mind all that had happened.
⁵²Jesus became wiser and grew physically. People liked him, and he pleased God.

Life Lessons

[Luke 3:1–38](#)

Situation

John the Baptist began his ministry and called people to repent of their sins.

Observation

John was a humble man who submitted to God. Not concerned with his own popularity, he knew that his ministry was to point people to Jesus Christ.

Inspiration

John the Baptizer is a powerful example of a called man... . John seems to have had from the very beginning a vivid sense of destiny, the result of a heavenly assignment that came from deep inside himself...

To those who questioned him regarding his feelings about the growing popularity of the Man from Nazareth, he likened his purpose to that of the best man at a wedding: “He who has the bride is the Bridegroom; but the friend [that’s John] of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice” ([John 3:29](#)). The purpose of the best man is simply to stand with the groom, to make sure that all attention is riveted upon him. The best man would be a fool if in the middle of the wedding processional he suddenly turned to the wedding guests and began to sing a song or engage in a humorous monologue. The best man has fulfilled his purpose most admirably when he

draws no attention to himself but focuses all attention upon the bride and groom.

And that is what John did. If Jesus Christ was the groom, to use John's metaphor, then the Baptizer was committed to being the best man *and nothing else*. That was the purpose that flowed from his call, and he had no desire to aspire to anything beyond. Thus to see the crowd headed toward Christ was all the affirmation John needed; his purpose had been fulfilled. (From *Ordering Your Private World* by Gordon MacDonald)

Application

Like John, Believers should point people to Jesus Christ. Who are the people God is placing on your heart to pray for, to witness to, and to help?

Exploration

Witnesses for Christ—[Matthew 5:13–16](#); [28:18–20](#); [Mark 16:15](#); [John 15:26–27](#); [2 Timothy 4:2](#).

The Preaching of John

It was the fifteenth year of the rule of Tiberius Caesar. These men were under Caesar: Pontius Pilate, the ruler of Judea; Herod, the ruler of Galilee; Philip, Herod's brother, the ruler of Iturea and Traconitis; and Lysanias, the ruler of Abilene.² Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. At this time, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.³ He went all over the area around the Jordan River preaching a baptism of changed hearts and lives for the forgiveness of sins.⁴ As it is written in the book of Isaiah the prophet:

“This is a voice of one
who calls out in the desert:

‘Prepare the way for the Lord.
Make the road straight for him.

⁵Every valley should be filled in,
and every mountain and hill should be made flat.
Roads with turns should be made straight,
and rough roads should be made smooth.

⁶And all people will know about the salvation of God!’

”

[Isaiah 40:3–5](#)

⁷To the crowds of people who came to be baptized by John, he said, “You are all snakes! Who warned you to run away

from God's coming punishment? ⁸Do the things that show you really have changed your hearts and lives. Don't begin to say to yourselves, 'Abraham is our father.' I tell you that God could make children for Abraham from these rocks. ⁹The ax is now ready to cut down the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

¹⁰The people asked John, "Then what should we do?"

¹¹John answered, "If you have two shirts, share with the person who does not have one. If you have food, share that also."

¹²Even tax collectors came to John to be baptized. They said to him, "Teacher, what should we do?"

¹³John said to them, "Don't take more taxes from people than you have been ordered to take."

¹⁴The soldiers asked John, "What about us? What should we do?"

John said to them, "Don't force people to give you money, and don't lie about them. Be satisfied with the pay you get."

¹⁵Since the people were hoping for the Christ to come, they wondered if John might be the one.

¹⁶John answered everyone, "I baptize you with water, but there is one coming who is greater than I am. I am not good enough to untie his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷He will come ready to clean the grain, separating the good grain from the chaff. He will put the good part of the grain into his barn, but he will burn the chaff with a fire that cannot be put out." ¹⁸And John continued to preach the Good News, saying many other things to encourage the people.

¹⁹But John spoke against Herod, the governor, because of

his sin with Herodias, the wife of Herod's brother, and because of the many other evil things Herod did.²⁰ So Herod did something even worse: He put John in prison.

Jesus Is Baptized by John

²¹When all the people were being baptized by John, Jesus also was baptized. While Jesus was praying, heaven opened ²²and the Holy Spirit came down on him in the form of a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "You are my Son, whom I love, and I am very pleased with you."

The Family History of Jesus

²³When Jesus began his ministry, he was about thirty years old. People thought that Jesus was Joseph's son.

Joseph was the [son](#) of Heli.

²⁴Heli was the son of Matthat.

Matthat was the son of Levi.

Levi was the son of Melki.

Melki was the son of Jannai.

Jannai was the son of Joseph.

²⁵Joseph was the son of Mattathias.

Mattathias was the son of Amos.

Amos was the son of Nahum.

Nahum was the son of Esli.

Esli was the son of Naggai.

²⁶Naggai was the son of Maath.

Maath was the son of Mattathias.

Mattathias was the son of Semein.

Semein was the son of Josech.

Josech was the son of Joda.

²⁷Joda was the son of Joanan.

Joanan was the son of Rhesa.

Rhesa was the son of Zerubbabel.

Zerubbabel was the grandson of Shealtiel.

Shealtiel was the son of Neri.

²⁸Neri was the son of Melki.

Melki was the son of Addi.

Addi was the son of Cosam.

Cosam was the son of Elmadam.

Elmadam was the son of Er.

²⁹Er was the son of Joshua.

Joshua was the son of Eliezer.

Eliezer was the son of Jorim.

Jorim was the son of Matthat.

Matthat was the son of Levi.

³⁰Levi was the son of Simeon.

Simeon was the son of Judah.

Judah was the son of Joseph.

Joseph was the son of Jonam.

Jonam was the son of Eliakim.

³¹Eliakim was the son of Melea.

Melea was the son of Menna.

Menna was the son of Mattatha.

Mattatha was the son of Nathan.

Nathan was the son of David.

³²David was the son of Jesse.

Jesse was the son of Obed.

Obed was the son of Boaz.
Boaz was the son of Salmon.
Salmon was the son of Nahshon.
³³Nahshon was the son of Amminadab.
Amminadab was the son of Admin.
Admin was the son of Arni.
Arni was the son of Hezron.
Hezron was the son of Perez.
Perez was the son of Judah.
³⁴Judah was the son of Jacob.
Jacob was the son of Isaac.
Isaac was the son of Abraham.
Abraham was the son of Terah.
Terah was the son of Nahor.
³⁵Nahor was the son of Serug.
Serug was the son of Reu.
Reu was the son of Peleg.
Peleg was the son of Eber.
Eber was the son of Shelah.
³⁶Shelah was the son of Cainan.
Cainan was the son of Arphaxad.
Arphaxad was the son of Shem.
Shem was the son of Noah.
Noah was the son of Lamech.
³⁷Lamech was the son of Methuselah.
Methuselah was the son of Enoch.
Enoch was the son of Jared.
Jared was the son of Mahalalel.
Mahalalel was the son of Kenan.
³⁸Kenan was the son of Enosh.

Enosh was the son of Seth.
Seth was the son of Adam.
Adam was the son of God.

Life Lessons

Luke 4:1–44

Situation

The Jewish people had been expecting the Messiah for a long time. They believed that he would free Israel from foreign rule and restore the nation to its prominence and greatness. As Jesus served, performed miracles, and spoke words with wisdom, the people were amazed and confused. Jesus was not the type of messiah they had been expecting.

Observation

Because the Jews assumed they knew what the Messiah would look like, they had a difficult time recognizing Jesus as God's Messiah.

Inspiration

Early one Saturday morning Jesus returned to Nazareth to speak in the synagogue. His friends and relatives and neighbors gathered in great excitement. They had watched Him grow to manhood; they knew His parents, Mary and Joseph. So they were astonished at His air of authority as He strode to the center of the crowded stone room and was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah from the Torah shrine. He found the passage He wanted, then read the ancient prophecy: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the

Lord's favor."

Jesus handed the Scriptures back to the attendant and stared quietly at the rows of townspeople. "Today," He said slowly, "this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

At first there were gasps, then excited murmurings. Was Jesus claiming that their hopes were to be realized? Had the long-dreamed-of day of the Lord—the coming of Messiah—arrived?

Jesus knew what they were thinking. "No prophet," He said steadily, "is accepted in his hometown." Then He reminded them of two stories they knew well from their heritage: During a great drought, the prophet Elijah had brought water not to the dying widows of Israel, but to a heathen widow; and his successor Elisha had ignored Jewish lepers and cleansed a Syrian instead.

His words were like a dash of cold water in the faces of the crowd. They expected liberation for the Jews and judgment for all others. Now this arrogant young man was extending the long-awaited promise of their liberation with one hand and insinuating their own judgment with the other.

The crowd surged forward and dragged Jesus out of the building, shoving Him to the brow of the hill on which the synagogue perched. But when they reached the edge, they discovered that in the confusion, Jesus had slipped away.

This humble message at the remote Nazareth synagogue was the inaugural address for Jesus' entire ministry. Through it He formally announced His

messiahship and the rule of God in this world. As a result, human history was forever altered.

The Kingdom of God had come. (From *Kingdoms in Conflict* by Charles Colson)

Application

Who is Jesus? Don't try to squeeze him into your own mold of a Savior. The Bible gives a clear picture. Study the Word of God and discover the real Jesus: God in the flesh who wants to change lives.

Exploration

The Messiah—[Matthew 3:17](#); [John 1:1–18](#); [10:30](#); [Colossians 1:15–20](#).

Jesus Is Tempted by the Devil

Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. The Spirit led Jesus into the desert ²where the devil tempted Jesus for forty days. Jesus ate nothing during that time, and when those days were ended, he was very hungry.

³The devil said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, tell this rock to become bread.”

⁴Jesus answered, “It is written in the Scriptures: [‘A person does not live by eating only bread.’](#)”

⁵Then the devil took Jesus and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in an instant. ⁶The devil said to Jesus, “I will give you all these kingdoms and all their power and glory. It has all been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I wish. ⁷If you worship me, then it will all be yours.”

⁸Jesus answered, “It is written in the Scriptures: [‘You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’](#)”

⁹Then the devil led Jesus to Jerusalem and put him on a high place of the Temple. He said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, jump down. ¹⁰It is written in the Scriptures:

‘He has put his angels in charge of you
to watch over you.’

[Psalm 91:11](#)

¹¹It is also written:

“They will catch you in their hands
so that you will not hit your foot on a rock.”

[Psalm 91:12](#)

¹²Jesus answered, “But it also says in the Scriptures: [‘Do not test the Lord your God.’](#)”

¹³After the devil had tempted Jesus in every way, he left him to wait until a better time.

Jesus Teaches the People

¹⁴Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit, and stories about him spread all through the area. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

¹⁶Jesus traveled to Nazareth, where he had grown up. On the Sabbath day he went to the synagogue, as he always did, and stood up to read. ¹⁷The book of Isaiah the prophet was given to him. He opened the book and found the place where this is written:

¹⁸“The Lord has put his Spirit in me,
because he appointed me to tell the Good News to the poor.

He has sent me to tell the captives they are free
and to tell the blind that they can see again.

[Isaiah 61:1](#)

God sent me to free those who have been treated unfairly

[Isaiah 58:6](#)

¹⁹and to announce the time when the Lord will show his kindness.”

Isaiah 61:2

²⁰Jesus closed the book, gave it back to the assistant, and sat down. Everyone in the synagogue was watching Jesus closely. ²¹He began to say to them, “While you heard these words just now, they were coming true!”

²²All the people spoke well of Jesus and were amazed at the words of grace he spoke. They asked, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

²³Jesus said to them, “I know that you will tell me the old saying: ‘Doctor, heal yourself.’ You want to say, ‘We heard about the things you did in Capernaum. Do those things here in your own town!’” ²⁴Then Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, a prophet is not accepted in his hometown. ²⁵But I tell you the truth, there were many widows in Israel during the time of Elijah. It did not rain in Israel for three and one-half years, and there was no food anywhere in the whole country. ²⁶But Elijah was sent to none of those widows, only to a widow in Zarephath, a town in Sidon. ²⁷And there were many with skin diseases living in Israel during the time of the prophet Elisha. But none of them were healed, only Naaman, who was from the country of Syria.”

²⁸When all the people in the synagogue heard these things, they became very angry. ²⁹They got up, forced Jesus out of town, and took him to the edge of the cliff on which the town was built. They planned to throw him off the edge, ³⁰but Jesus walked through the crowd and went on his way.

Jesus Forces Out an Evil Spirit

³¹Jesus went to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and on the Sabbath day, he taught the people. ³²They were amazed at his teaching, because he spoke with authority. ³³In the synagogue a man who had within him an evil spirit shouted in a loud voice, ³⁴“Jesus of Nazareth! What do you want with us? Did you come to destroy us? I know who you are—God’s Holy One!”

³⁵Jesus commanded the evil spirit, “Be quiet! Come out of the man!” The evil spirit threw the man down to the ground before all the people and then left the man without hurting him.

³⁶The people were amazed and said to each other, “What does this mean? With authority and power he commands evil spirits, and they come out.” ³⁷And so the news about Jesus spread to every place in the whole area.

Jesus Heals Many People

³⁸Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of [Simon](#). Simon’s mother-in-law was sick with a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. ³⁹He came to her side and commanded the fever to leave. It left her, and immediately she got up and began serving them.

⁴⁰When the sun went down, the people brought those who were sick to Jesus. Putting his hands on each sick person, he healed every one of them. ⁴¹Demons came out of many people, shouting, “You are the Son of God.” But Jesus commanded the demons and would not allow them to speak, because they knew Jesus was the Christ.

⁴²At daybreak, Jesus went to a lonely place, but the people

looked for him. When they found him, they tried to keep him from leaving. ⁴³But Jesus said to them, “I must preach about God’s kingdom to other towns, too. This is why I was sent.”

⁴⁴Then he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Life Lessons

Luke 5:1–39

Situation

Luke continued to tell about what Jesus did on earth. Jesus began to call his disciples and perform various miracles.

Observation

Luke emphasized how people responded in faith to Jesus and were rewarded by blessings greater than they could imagine.

Inspiration

Whether he was born paralyzed or became paralyzed—the end result was the same: total dependence on others... . When people looked at him, they didn't see the man; they saw a body in need of a miracle. That's not what Jesus saw, but that's what the people saw. And that's certainly what his friends saw. So they did what any of us would do for a friend. They tried to get him some help... .

By the time his friends arrived at the place, the house was full. People jammed the doorways. Kids sat in the windows. Others peeked over shoulders. How would this small band of friends ever attract Jesus' attention? They had to make a choice. Do we go in or give up?

What would have happened had the friends given up? What if they had shrugged their shoulders and mumbled something about the crowd being big and dinner getting cold and turned and left? After all, they

had done a good deed in coming this far. Who could fault them for turning back? You can only do so much for somebody. But these friends hadn't done enough.

One said that he had an idea. The four huddled over the paralytic and listened to the plan to climb to the top of the house, cut through the roof, and lower their friend down with their sashes.

It was risky—they could fall. It was dangerous—*he* could fall. It was unorthodox—de-roofing is antisocial. It was intrusive—Jesus was busy. But it was their only chance to see Jesus. So they climbed to the roof.

Faith does these things. Faith does the unexpected. And faith gets God's attention...

Jesus was moved by the scene of faith. So he applauds—if not with his hands, at least with his heart. And not only does he applaud, he blesses. And we witness a divine loveburst.

The friends want him to heal their friend. But Jesus won't settle for a simple healing of the body—he wants to heal the soul. He leapfrogs the physical and deals with the spiritual. To heal the body is temporal; to heal the soul is eternal... So strong was his love for this crew of faith that he went beyond their appeal and went straight to the cross.

Jesus already knows the cost of grace. He already knows the price of forgiveness. But he offers it anyway. Love bursts in his heart...

And though we can't hear it here, the angels can hear him there. All of heaven must pause as another burst of love declares the only words that really

matter: “Your sins are forgiven.” (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you believe God knows your problem? Do you have a disability or lack of resources that robs your faith? Remember, you don’t have to go it alone. Find a group of Christians at school, work, or church who will get together weekly with you to present your requests to God.

Exploration

Faith—[Habakkuk 2:4](#); [Matthew 7:7](#); [Mark 9:24](#); [Galatians 2:20](#).

Jesus' First Followers

One day while Jesus was standing beside Lake Galilee, many people were pressing all around him to hear the word of God.² Jesus saw two boats at the shore of the lake. The fishermen had left them and were washing their nets.³ Jesus got into one of the boats, the one that belonged to [Simon](#), and asked him to push off a little from the land. Then Jesus sat down and continued to teach the people from the boat.

⁴When Jesus had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Take the boat into deep water, and put your nets in the water to catch some fish."

⁵Simon answered, "Master, we worked hard all night trying to catch fish, and we caught nothing. But you say to put the nets in the water, so I will." ⁶When the fishermen did as Jesus told them, they caught so many fish that the nets began to break. ⁷They called to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full that they were almost sinking.

⁸When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he bowed down before Jesus and said, "Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man!" ⁹He and the other fishermen were amazed at the many fish they caught, as were ¹⁰James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid. From now on you will fish for people." ¹¹When the men brought their boats to the

shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.

Jesus Heals a Sick Man

¹²When Jesus was in one of the towns, there was a man covered with a skin disease. When he saw Jesus, he bowed before him and begged him, “Lord, you can heal me if you will.”

¹³Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man and said, “I will. Be healed!” Immediately the disease disappeared.

¹⁴Then Jesus said, “Don’t tell anyone about this, but go and [show yourself to the priest](#) and offer a gift for your healing, as [Moses commanded](#). This will show the people what I have done.”

¹⁵But the news about Jesus spread even more. Many people came to hear Jesus and to be healed of their sicknesses, ¹⁶but Jesus often slipped away to be alone so he could pray.

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

¹⁷One day as Jesus was teaching the people, the Pharisees and teachers of the law from every town in Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem were there. The Lord was giving Jesus the power to heal people. ¹⁸Just then, some men were carrying on a mat a man who was paralyzed. They tried to bring him in and put him down before Jesus. ¹⁹But because there were so many people there, they could not find a way in. So they went up on the roof and lowered the man on his mat through the ceiling into the middle of the crowd right before Jesus. ²⁰Seeing their faith, Jesus said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

²¹The Jewish teachers of the law and the Pharisees thought

to themselves, “Who is this man who is speaking as if he were God? Only God can forgive sins.”

²²But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said, “Why are you thinking these things? ²³Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk?’ ²⁴But I will prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, stand up, take your mat, and go home.”

²⁵At once the man stood up before them, picked up his mat, and went home, praising God. ²⁶All the people were fully amazed and began to praise God. They were filled with much respect and said, “Today we have seen amazing things!”

Levi Follows Jesus

²⁷After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax collector’s booth. Jesus said to him, “Follow me!” ²⁸So Levi got up, left everything, and followed him.

²⁹Then Levi gave a big dinner for Jesus at his house. Many tax collectors and other people were eating there, too. ³⁰But the Pharisees and the men who taught the law for the Pharisees began to complain to Jesus’ followers, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

³¹Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy people who need a doctor, but the sick. ³²I have not come to invite good people but sinners to change their hearts and lives.”

Jesus Answers a Question

³³They said to Jesus, “John’s followers often give up eating for a certain time and pray, just as the Pharisees do. But your followers eat and drink all the time.”

³⁴Jesus said to them, “You cannot make the friends of the bridegroom give up eating while he is still with them. ³⁵But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will give up eating.”

³⁶Jesus told them this story: “No one takes cloth off a new coat to cover a hole in an old coat. Otherwise, he ruins the new coat, and the cloth from the new coat will not be the same as the old cloth. ³⁷Also, no one ever pours new wine into old leather bags. Otherwise, the new wine will break the bags, the wine will spill out, and the leather bags will be ruined. ³⁸New wine must be put into new leather bags. ³⁹No one after drinking old wine wants new wine, because he says, ‘The old wine is better.’”

Life Lessons

[Luke 6:1–49](#)

Situation

Jesus called and appointed his apostles. He spent the next three years teaching them.

Observation

The night before Jesus appointed the Twelve Apostles, he prayed.

Inspiration

“Jesus went off to a mountain to pray ...” ([Luke 6:12](#)).

Maybe he didn’t ask for anything. Maybe he just stood quietly in the presence of Presence and basked in the Majesty. Perhaps he placed his war-weary self before the throne and rested.

Maybe he lifted his head out of the confusion of earth long enough to hear the solution of heaven. Perhaps he was reminded that hard hearts don’t faze the Father. That problem people don’t perturb the Eternal One.

We don’t know what he did or what he said. But we do know the result. The hill became a steppingstone; the storm became a path. And the disciples saw Jesus as they had never seen him before.

During the storm, Jesus prayed. The sky darkened. The winds howled. Yet he prayed. The people grumbled. The disciples doubted. Yet he prayed. When forced to choose between the muscles

of men and the mountain of prayer, he prayed.

Jesus did not try to do it by himself. Why should you?

There are crevasses in your life that you cannot cross alone. There are hearts in your world that you cannot change without help. There are mountains that you cannot climb until you climb his mountain.

Climb it. You will be amazed. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

All around you people are hurting, even Christian brothers and sisters. Think of how you can meet their needs and encourage them. Follow Jesus' example and pray for them.

Exploration

Discipleship—[Matthew 10:42](#); [28:19](#); [Luke 14:33](#); [John 8:31–32](#); [13:35](#); [15:8](#).

Jesus Is Lord over the Sabbath

One Sabbath day Jesus was walking through some fields of grain. His followers picked the heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them.² Some Pharisees said, “Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?”

³Jesus answered, “Have you not read what David did when he and those with him were hungry? ⁴He went into God’s house and took and ate the holy bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he gave some to the people who were with him.” ⁵Then Jesus said to the Pharisees, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath day.”

Jesus Heals a Man’s Hand

⁶On another Sabbath day Jesus went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man with a crippled right hand was there. ⁷The teachers of the law and the Pharisees were watching closely to see if Jesus would heal on the Sabbath day so they could accuse him. ⁸But he knew what they were thinking, and he said to the man with the crippled hand, “Stand up here in the middle of everyone.” The man got up and stood there. ⁹Then Jesus said to them, “I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath day: to do good or to do evil, to save a life or to destroy it?” ¹⁰Jesus looked around at all of them and said to the

man, “Hold out your hand.” The man held out his hand, and it was healed.

¹¹But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were very angry and discussed with each other what they could do to Jesus.

Jesus Chooses His Apostles

¹²At that time Jesus went off to a mountain to pray, and he spent the night praying to God. ¹³The next morning, Jesus called his followers to him and chose twelve of them, whom he named apostles: ¹⁴Simon (Jesus named him Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, ¹⁵Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon (called the Zealot), ¹⁶Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who later turned Jesus over to his enemies.

Jesus Teaches and Heals

¹⁷Jesus and the apostles came down from the mountain, and he stood on level ground. A large group of his followers was there, as well as many people from all around Judea, Jerusalem, and the seacoast cities of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸They all came to hear Jesus teach and to be healed of their sicknesses, and he healed those who were troubled by evil spirits. ¹⁹All the people were trying to touch Jesus, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

²⁰Jesus looked at his followers and said,

“You people who are poor are happy,

because the kingdom of God belongs to you.

²¹You people who are now hungry are happy,
because you will be satisfied.

You people who are now crying are happy,
because you will laugh with joy.

²²“People will hate you, shut you out, insult you, and say you are evil because you follow the Son of Man. But when they do, you will be happy. ²³Be full of joy at that time, because you have a great reward waiting for you in heaven. Their ancestors did the same things to the prophets.

²⁴“But how terrible it will be for you who are rich,
because you have had your easy life.

²⁵How terrible it will be for you who are full now,
because you will be hungry.

How terrible it will be for you who are laughing now,
because you will be sad and cry.

²⁶“How terrible when everyone says only good things about you, because their ancestors said the same things about the false prophets.

Love Your Enemies

²⁷“But I say to you who are listening, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who are cruel to you. ²⁹If anyone slaps you on one cheek, offer him the other cheek, too. If someone takes your coat, do not stop him from taking your shirt. ³⁰Give to

everyone who asks you, and when someone takes something that is yours, don't ask for it back. ³¹Do to others what you would want them to do to you. ³²If you love only the people who love you, what praise should you get? Even sinners love the people who love them. ³³If you do good only to those who do good to you, what praise should you get? Even sinners do that! ³⁴If you lend things to people, always hoping to get something back, what praise should you get? Even sinners lend to other sinners so that they can get back the same amount! ³⁵But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without hoping to get anything back. Then you will have a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High God, because he is kind even to people who are ungrateful and full of sin. ³⁶Show mercy, just as your Father shows mercy.

Look at Yourselves

³⁷“Don't judge other people, and you will not be judged. Don't accuse others of being guilty, and you will not be accused of being guilty. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸Give, and you will receive. You will be given much. Pressed down, shaken together, and running over, it will spill into your lap. The way you give to others is the way God will give to you.”

³⁹Jesus told them this story: “Can a blind person lead another blind person? No! Both of them will fall into a ditch. ⁴⁰A student is not better than the teacher, but the student who has been fully trained will be like the teacher.

⁴¹“Why do you notice the little piece of dust in your friend's eye, but you don't notice the big piece of wood in your own eye? ⁴²How can you say to your friend, ‘Friend, let

me take that little piece of dust out of your eye' when you cannot see that big piece of wood in your own eye! You hypocrite! First, take the wood out of your own eye. Then you will see clearly to take the dust out of your friend's eye.

Two Kinds of Fruit

⁴³“A good tree does not produce bad fruit, nor does a bad tree produce good fruit. ⁴⁴Each tree is known by its own fruit. People don't gather figs from thornbushes, and they don't get grapes from bushes. ⁴⁵Good people bring good things out of the good they stored in their hearts. But evil people bring evil things out of the evil they stored in their hearts. People speak the things that are in their hearts.

Two Kinds of People

⁴⁶“Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' but do not do what I say? ⁴⁷I will show you what everyone is like who comes to me and hears my words and obeys. ⁴⁸That person is like a man building a house who dug deep and laid the foundation on rock. When the floods came, the water tried to wash the house away, but it could not shake it, because the house was built well. ⁴⁹But the one who hears my words and does not obey is like a man who built his house on the ground without a foundation. When the floods came, the house quickly fell and was completely destroyed.”

Life Lessons

Luke 7:1–50

Situation

People heard about the signs and wonders Jesus was performing and came to meet him. Jesus' popularity kept increasing.

Observation

Jesus pointed to people who had great faith in order to show what God desires from his people.

Inspiration

Two crowds. One entering the city and one leaving. They couldn't be more diverse. The group arriving buzzes with laughter and conversation. They follow Jesus. The group leaving the city is solemn—a herd of sadness hypnotized by the requiem of death. Above them rides the reason for their grief—a cold body on a wicker stretcher.

The woman at the back of the procession is the mother. She has walked this trail before. It seems like just yesterday she buried the body of her husband. Her son walked with her then. Now she walks alone, quarantined in her sadness. She is the victim of this funeral.

She is the one with no arm around her shoulder. She is the one who will sleep in the empty house tonight. She is the one who will make dinner for one and conversation with none. She is the one most violated. The thief stole her most treasured diamond—companionship.

The followers of Jesus stop and step aside as the procession shadows by. The blanket of mourning muffles the laughter of the disciples. No one spoke. What could they say? ...

Jesus, however, knew what to say and what to do. When he saw the mother, his heart began to break ... and his lips began to tighten. He glared at the angel of death that hovered over the body of the boy. "Not this time, Satan. This boy is mine."

At that moment the mother walked in front of him. Jesus spoke to her. "Don't cry." She stopped and looked into this stranger's face. If she wasn't shocked by his presumption, you can bet some of the witnesses were.

Don't cry? Don't cry? What kind of request is that?

A request only God can make.

Jesus stepped toward the bier and touched it. The pall-bearers stopped marching. The mourners ceased moaning. As Jesus stared at the boy, the crowd was silent....

Jesus turned his attention to the dead boy. "Young man," his voice was calm, "come back to life again."

The living stood motionless as the dead came to life. Wooden fingers moved. Gray-pale cheeks blushed. The dead man sat up....

Jesus must have smiled as the two embraced. Stunned, the crowd broke into cheers and applause. They hugged each other and slapped Jesus on the back. Someone proclaimed the undeniable, "God has

come to help his people.”

Jesus gave the woman much more than her son. He gave her a secret—a whisper that was overheard by us. “That,” he said pointing at the cot, “that is fantasy. This,” he grinned, putting an arm around the boy, “this is reality.” (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

Application

What can you do to demonstrate your faith? Is there something you are afraid to do? Someone you don't want to see? A relationship that needs repair? Ask God to help you do it. Believe he will, then step out and act.

Exploration

Faith—[1 Samuel 17:37](#); [2 Chronicles 20:20](#); [John 6:28–29](#); [Romans 10:9, 17](#); [Ephesians 6:16](#); [Hebrews 11:1, 6](#); [James 2:17](#).

Jesus Heals a Soldier's Servant

When Jesus finished saying all these things to the people, he went to Capernaum.² There was an army officer who had a servant who was very important to him. The servant was so sick he was nearly dead.³ When the officer heard about Jesus, he sent some older Jewish leaders to him to ask Jesus to come and heal his servant.⁴ The men went to Jesus and begged him, saying, "This officer is worthy of your help.⁵ He loves our people, and he built us a synagogue."

⁶So Jesus went with the men. He was getting near the officer's house when the officer sent friends to say, "Lord, don't trouble yourself, because I am not worthy to have you come into my house.⁷ That is why I did not come to you myself. But you only need to command it, and my servant will be healed.⁸ I, too, am a man under the authority of others, and I have soldiers under my command. I tell one soldier, 'Go,' and he goes. I tell another soldier, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and my servant does it."

⁹When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. Turning to the crowd that was following him, he said, "I tell you, this is the greatest faith I have found anywhere, even in Israel."

¹⁰Those who had been sent to Jesus went back to the house where they found the servant in good health.

Jesus Brings a Man Back to Life

¹¹Soon afterwards Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his followers and a large crowd traveled with him. ¹²When he came near the town gate, he saw a funeral. A mother, who was a widow, had lost her only son. A large crowd from the town was with the mother while her son was being carried out. ¹³When the Lord saw her, he felt very sorry for her and said, "Don't cry." ¹⁴He went up and touched the coffin, and the people who were carrying it stopped. Jesus said, "Young man, I tell you, get up!" ¹⁵And the son sat up and began to talk. Then Jesus gave him back to his mother.

¹⁶All the people were amazed and began praising God, saying, "A great prophet has come to us! God has come to help his people."

¹⁷This news about Jesus spread through all Judea and into all the places around there.

John Asks a Question

¹⁸John's followers told him about all these things. He called for two of his followers ¹⁹and sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the One who is to come, or should we wait for someone else?"

²⁰When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you with this question: 'Are you the One who is to come, or should we wait for someone else?'"

²¹At that time, Jesus healed many people of their sicknesses, diseases, and evil spirits, and he gave sight to many blind people. ²²Then Jesus answered John's followers,

“Go tell John what you saw and heard here. The blind can see, the crippled can walk, and people with skin diseases are healed. The deaf can hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is preached to the poor. ²³Those who do not stumble in their faith because of me are blessed!”

²⁴When John’s followers left, Jesus began talking to the people about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A [reed](#) blown by the wind? ²⁵What did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, people who have fine clothes and much wealth live in kings’ palaces. ²⁶But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, and I tell you, John is more than a prophet. ²⁷This was written about him:

‘I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare the way for you.’

[Malachi 3:1](#)

²⁸I tell you, John is greater than any other person ever born, but even the least important person in the kingdom of God is greater than John.”

²⁹(When the people, including the tax collectors, heard this, they all agreed that God’s teaching was good, because they had been baptized by John. ³⁰But the Pharisees and experts on the law refused to accept God’s plan for themselves; they did not let John baptize them.)

³¹Then Jesus said, “What shall I say about the people of this time? What are they like? ³²They are like children sitting in the marketplace, calling to one another and saying,

‘We played music for you, but you did not dance;

we sang a sad song, but you did not cry.’

³³John the Baptist came and did not eat bread or drink wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon in him.’ ³⁴The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! He eats too much and drinks too much wine, and he is a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ ³⁵But wisdom is proved to be right by what it does.”

A Woman Washes Jesus’ Feet

³⁶One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, so Jesus went into the Pharisee’s house and sat at the table. ³⁷A sinful woman in the town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house. So she brought an alabaster jar of perfume ³⁸and stood behind Jesus at his feet, crying. She began to wash his feet with her tears, and she dried them with her hair, kissing them many times and rubbing them with the perfume. ³⁹When the Pharisee who asked Jesus to come to his house saw this, he thought to himself, “If Jesus were a prophet, he would know that the woman touching him is a sinner!”

⁴⁰Jesus said to the Pharisee, “Simon, I have something to say to you.”

Simon said, “Teacher, tell me.”

⁴¹Jesus said, “Two people owed money to the same banker. One owed five hundred [coins](#) and the other owed fifty. ⁴²They had no money to pay what they owed, but the banker told both of them they did not have to pay him. Which person will love the banker more?”

⁴³Simon, the Pharisee, answered, “I think it would be the

one who owed him the most money.”

Jesus said to Simon, “You are right.” ⁴⁴Then Jesus turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? When I came into your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵You gave me no kiss of greeting, but she has been kissing my feet since I came in. ⁴⁶You did not put oil on my head, but she poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷I tell you that her many sins are forgiven, so she showed great love. But the person who is forgiven only a little will love only a little.”

⁴⁸Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

⁴⁹The people sitting at the table began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

⁵⁰Jesus said to the woman, “Because you believed, you are saved from your sins. Go in peace.”

Life Lessons

Luke 8:1–9:17

Situation

Because of increasing hostility from the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus stopped going to the synagogues. Instead, he began to preach in the countryside.

Observation

Jesus emphasized that not only must we hear God's words, but we must act on them, too.

Inspiration

Only when I reach the point where I solemnly place great store upon what He says will it ever become a powerful force in my life.

Only when I really take Him seriously will His word be made Spirit and life (supernatural life) to me.

Only when I recognize that what I am hearing is in fact and in truth divine revelation designed by deity for my own good, will I hear it as a word from above.

God has chosen to articulate Himself to me as a man in four ways: through the natural created universe around me; through His word expressed by inspired men who reported it in human language I can read and understand; through the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, exemplified in human form; through those other men and women in whom He deigns to reside by His own Gracious Spirit.

He may speak to me deliberately and distinctly through any one or all of these ways. It is my

responsibility then to recognize: “O God, You are communicating with me. I will listen. I do recognize Your voice communing with me.” ...

I must set aside whatever else preoccupies my thoughts and give my undivided attention to the Lord.

It is not good enough to “half listen” to God. He demands my total concentration on what He is conveying to me. He knows that anything less will leave me halfhearted....

My positive response results in immediate action on my part. His will is done. His wishes are carried out. His desires are complied with happily. His commands are executed without delay or debate.

In short I simply do what He asks me to do.

This is faith in action—the faith of obedience.

This is the gateway into the good ground of God’s garden.

This is to “hear” the Word and have it come alive.

This is to have Him implant the good seed of His good intentions for me in the good, warm, open, prepared soil of my responsive soul.

The seed will germinate. The young plants will prosper and grow vigorously. There will be fruit production of His choosing—a harvest that delights Him and refreshes others. (From *A Gardener Looks at the Fruits of the Spirit* by Phillip Keller)

Application

As you read God’s Word, listen to the Holy Spirit. What is God telling you to *do*? Don’t ignore his prodding—obey him now.

Exploration

Hearing—[Exodus 22:27](#); [2 Chronicles 7:14](#); [Isaiah 59:1](#); [John 5:24](#); [Romans 2:13](#); [10:17](#); [Revelation 3:20](#).

The Group with Jesus

After this, while Jesus was traveling through some cities and small towns, he preached and told the Good News about God's kingdom. The twelve apostles were with him,² and also some women who had been healed of sicknesses and evil spirits: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out;³ Joanna, the wife of Cuza (the manager of Herod's house); Susanna; and many others. These women used their own money to help Jesus and his apostles.

A Story About Planting Seed

⁴When a great crowd was gathered, and people were coming to Jesus from every town, he told them this story:

⁵"A farmer went out to plant his seed. While he was planting, some seed fell by the road. People walked on the seed, and the birds ate it up. ⁶Some seed fell on rock, and when it began to grow, it died because it had no water. ⁷Some seed fell among thorny weeds, but the weeds grew up with it and choked the good plants. ⁸And some seed fell on good ground and grew and made a hundred times more."

As Jesus finished the story, he called out, "You people who can hear me, listen!"

⁹Jesus' followers asked him what this story meant.

¹⁰Jesus said, “You have been chosen to know the secrets about the kingdom of God. But I use stories to speak to other people so that:

‘They will look, but they may not see.
They will listen, but they may not understand.’

Isaiah 6:9

¹¹“This is what the story means: The seed is God’s message. ¹²The seed that fell beside the road is like the people who hear God’s teaching, but the devil comes and takes it away from them so they cannot believe it and be saved. ¹³The seed that fell on rock is like those who hear God’s teaching and accept it gladly, but they don’t allow the teaching to go deep into their lives. They believe for a while, but when trouble comes, they give up. ¹⁴The seed that fell among the thorny weeds is like those who hear God’s teaching, but they let the worries, riches, and pleasures of this life keep them from growing and producing good fruit. ¹⁵And the seed that fell on the good ground is like those who hear God’s teaching with good, honest hearts and obey it and patiently produce good fruit.

Use What You Have

¹⁶“No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a bowl or hides it under a bed. Instead, the person puts it on a lampstand so those who come in will see the light. ¹⁷Everything that is hidden will become clear, and every secret thing will be made known. ¹⁸So be careful how you listen. Those who have

understanding will be given more. But those who do not have understanding, even what they think they have will be taken away from them.”

Jesus’ True Family

¹⁹Jesus’ mother and brothers came to see him, but there was such a crowd they could not get to him. ²⁰Someone said to Jesus, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.”

²¹Jesus answered them, “My mother and my brothers are those who listen to God’s teaching and obey it!”

Jesus Calms a Storm

²²One day Jesus and his followers got into a boat, and he said to them, “Let’s go across the lake.” And so they started across. ²³While they were sailing, Jesus fell asleep. A very strong wind blew up on the lake, causing the boat to fill with water, and they were in danger.

²⁴The followers went to Jesus and woke him, saying, “Master! Master! We will drown!”

Jesus got up and gave a command to the wind and the waves. They stopped, and it became calm. ²⁵Jesus said to his followers, “Where is your faith?”

The followers were afraid and amazed and said to each other, “Who is this that commands even the wind and the water, and they obey him?”

A Man with Demons Inside Him

²⁶Jesus and his followers sailed across the lake from Galilee to the area of the Gerasene people. ²⁷When Jesus got out on the land, a man from the town who had demons inside him came to Jesus. For a long time he had worn no clothes and had lived in the burial caves, not in a house. ²⁸When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him. He said with a loud voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" ²⁹He said this because Jesus was commanding the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had taken hold of him. Though he had been kept under guard and chained hand and foot, he had broken his chains and had been forced by the demon out into a lonely place.

³⁰Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

He answered, "[Legion](#)," because many demons were in him.

³¹The demons begged Jesus not to send them into [eternal darkness](#). ³²A large herd of pigs was feeding on a hill, and the demons begged Jesus to allow them to go into the pigs. So Jesus allowed them to do this. ³³When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd ran down the hill into the lake and was drowned.

³⁴When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran away and told about this in the town and the countryside. ³⁵And people went to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and in his right mind, because the demons were gone. But the people were frightened. ³⁶The people who saw this happen told the others how Jesus had made the man well. ³⁷All the people of the Gerasene country asked Jesus to leave,

because they were all very afraid. So Jesus got into the boat and went back to Galilee.

³⁸The man whom Jesus had healed begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹“Go back home and tell people how much God has done for you.” So the man went all over town telling how much Jesus had done for him.

Jesus Gives Life to a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman

⁴⁰When Jesus got back to Galilee, a crowd welcomed him, because everyone was waiting for him. ⁴¹A man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, came to Jesus and fell at his feet, begging him to come to his house. ⁴²Jairus’ only daughter, about twelve years old, was dying.

While Jesus was on his way to Jairus’ house, the people were crowding all around him. ⁴³A woman was in the crowd who had been bleeding for twelve years, but no one was able to heal her. ⁴⁴She came up behind Jesus and touched the edge of his coat, and instantly her bleeding stopped. ⁴⁵Then Jesus said, “Who touched me?”

When all the people said they had not touched him, Peter said, “Master, the people are all around you and are pushing against you.”

⁴⁶But Jesus said, “Someone did touch me, because I felt power go out from me.” ⁴⁷When the woman saw she could not hide, she came forward, shaking, and fell down before Jesus. While all the people listened, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. ⁴⁸Jesus said to her, “Dear woman, you are made well because you believed. Go in peace.”

⁴⁹While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of the synagogue leader and said to him, “Your daughter is dead. Don’t bother the teacher anymore.”

⁵⁰When Jesus heard this, he said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid. Just believe, and your daughter will be well.”

⁵¹When Jesus went to the house, he let only Peter, John, James, and the girl’s father and mother go inside with him. ⁵²All the people were crying and feeling sad because the girl was dead, but Jesus said, “Stop crying. She is not dead, only asleep.”

⁵³The people laughed at Jesus because they knew the girl was dead. ⁵⁴But Jesus took hold of her hand and called to her, “My child, stand up!” ⁵⁵Her spirit came back into her, and she stood up at once. Then Jesus ordered that she be given something to eat. ⁵⁶The girl’s parents were amazed, but Jesus told them not to tell anyone what had happened.

Jesus Sends Out the Apostles

Jesus called the twelve apostles together and gave them power and authority over all demons and the ability to heal sicknesses.² He sent the apostles out to tell about God's kingdom and to heal the sick.³ He said to them, "Take nothing for your trip, neither a walking stick, bag, bread, money, or extra clothes.⁴ When you enter a house, stay there until it is time to leave.⁵ If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off of your feet as you leave the town, as a warning to them."

⁶So the apostles went out and traveled through all the towns, preaching the Good News and healing people everywhere.

Herod Is Confused About Jesus

⁷Herod, the governor, heard about all the things that were happening and was confused, because some people said, "John the Baptist has risen from the dead."⁸ Others said, "Elijah has come to us." And still others said, "One of the prophets who lived long ago has risen from the dead."⁹ Herod said, "I cut off John's head, so who is this man I hear such things about?" And Herod kept trying to see Jesus.

More than Five Thousand Fed

¹⁰When the apostles returned, they told Jesus everything they had done. Then Jesus took them with him to a town called

Bethsaida where they could be alone together. ¹¹But the people learned where Jesus went and followed him. He welcomed them and talked with them about God's kingdom and healed those who needed to be healed.

¹²Late in the afternoon, the twelve apostles came to Jesus and said, "Send the people away. They need to go to the towns and countryside around here and find places to sleep and something to eat, because no one lives in this place."

¹³But Jesus said to them, "You give them something to eat."

They said, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish, unless we go buy food for all these people." ¹⁴(There were about five thousand men there.)

Jesus said to his followers, "Tell the people to sit in groups of about fifty people."

¹⁵So the followers did this, and all the people sat down.

¹⁶Then Jesus took the five loaves of bread and two fish, and looking up to heaven, he thanked God for the food. Then he divided the food and gave it to the followers to give to the people. ¹⁷They all ate and were satisfied, and what was left over was gathered up, filling twelve baskets.

Life Lessons

Luke 9:18–10:42

Situation

Luke recorded the stories of busy people. Religious leaders neglected the injured Samaritan because they were too busy. Martha was too busy to merely listen to Jesus. He encouraged his hearers never to be too busy to love God or serve others.

Observation

Demonstrate your love for God by showing love to those who are difficult to love.

Inspiration

A driving rainstorm in an area suffering from drought does not discriminate. All receive the benefits. The same can be said for the sun. It bathes all homes alike with warmth and light. Why? Because God is love. Grace is His style. That is why Christ would minister so graciously to those who hated Him. Love and grace prompt the rain to fall on all the ground and the sun to shine on all the homes. For love to replace hate and grace to replace prejudice, playing favorites must cease. Love and grace befit those who are Fatherlike.

Then how far do we take this love-your-neighbor stuff? Do we love atheists? Yes! Scoffers? Yes! Criminals? Yes! Love, remember, sees the soul and focuses on the heart.

(From *Simple Faith* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Name someone you see often who is unlovely or neglected. What can you do this week to help reach out to that person with God's love?

Exploration

Love the Poor—[Proverbs 31:20](#); [1 Corinthians 13:3](#).

Search for one example of one person who desired to see the infant Jesus and was turned away. You won't find it.
—Max Lucado (*Just Like Jesus*)

Jesus Is the Christ

¹⁸One time when Jesus was praying alone, his followers were with him, and he asked them, “Who do the people say I am?”

¹⁹They answered, “Some say you are John the Baptist. Others say you are [Elijah](#). And others say you are one of the prophets from long ago who has come back to life.”

²⁰Then Jesus asked, “But who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Christ from God.”

²¹Jesus warned them not to tell anyone, saying, ²²“The Son of Man must suffer many things. He will be rejected by the older Jewish leaders, the leading priests, and the teachers of the law. He will be killed and after three days will be raised from the dead.”

²³Jesus said to all of them, “If people want to follow me, they must give up the things they want. They must be willing to give up their lives daily to follow me. ²⁴Those who want to save their lives will give up true life. But those who give up their lives for me will have true life. ²⁵It is worth nothing for them to have the whole world if they themselves are destroyed or lost. ²⁶If people are ashamed of me and my teaching, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and with the glory of the Father and the holy angels. ²⁷I tell you the truth, some people standing here will see the

kingdom of God before they die.”

Jesus Talks with Moses and Elijah

²⁸About eight days after Jesus said these things, he took Peter, John, and James and went up on a mountain to pray. ²⁹While Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became shining white. ³⁰Then two men, [Moses and Elijah](#), were talking with Jesus. ³¹They appeared in heavenly glory, talking about his departure which he would soon bring about in Jerusalem. ³²Peter and the others were very sleepy, but when they awoke fully, they saw the glory of Jesus and the two men standing with him. ³³When Moses and Elijah were about to leave, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” (Peter did not know what he was talking about.) ³⁴While he was saying these things, a cloud came and covered them, and they became afraid as the cloud covered them. ³⁵A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen. Listen to him!”

³⁶When the voice finished speaking, only Jesus was there. Peter, John, and James said nothing and told no one at that time what they had seen.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The Son of God

One of the most dramatic scenes in the New Testament occurred in a city known as Caesarea Phillipi... . It was indeed a dramatic picture. In the

midst of this carnival of marble columns and golden idols, a penniless, homeless, nameless Nazarene asks his band of followers, “Who do you say that I am?”

The immensity of the question is staggering. I would imagine that Peter’s answer did not come without some hesitation. Shuffling of feet. Anxious silence. How absurd that this man should be the Son of God. No trumpets. No purple robes. No armies. Yet there was that glint of determination in his eye and that edge of certainty in his message. Peter’s response sliced the silence. “I believe that you are ... the Son of God.”

Many have looked at Jesus; but few have seen him. Many have seen his shadow, his people, his story. But only a handful have seen Jesus. Only a few have looked through the fog of religiosity and found him. Only a few have dared to stand eye to eye and heart to heart with Jesus and say, “I believe that you are the Son of God.” (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

Jesus Heals a Sick Boy

³⁷The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Jesus. ³⁸A man in the crowd shouted to him, “Teacher, please come and look at my son, because he is my only child. ³⁹An evil spirit seizes my son, and suddenly he screams. It causes him to lose control of himself and foam at the mouth. The evil spirit keeps on hurting him and almost never leaves him. ⁴⁰I begged your followers to force the evil spirit out, but they could not do it.”

⁴¹Jesus answered, “You people have no faith, and your lives are all wrong. How long must I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.”

⁴²While the boy was coming, the demon threw him on the ground and made him lose control of himself. But Jesus gave a strong command to the evil spirit and healed the boy and gave him back to his father. ⁴³All the people were amazed at the great power of God.

Jesus Talks About His Death

While everyone was wondering about all that Jesus did, he said to his followers, ⁴⁴“Don’t forget what I tell you now: The Son of Man will be handed over to people.” ⁴⁵But the followers did not understand what this meant; the meaning was hidden from them so they could not understand. But they were afraid to ask Jesus about it.

Who Is the Greatest?

⁴⁶Jesus' followers began to have an argument about which one of them was the greatest. ⁴⁷Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he took a little child and stood the child beside him. ⁴⁸Then Jesus said, "Whoever accepts this little child in my name accepts me. And whoever accepts me accepts the One who sent me, because whoever is least among you all is really the greatest."

Anyone Not Against Us Is for Us

⁴⁹John answered, "Master, we saw someone using your name to force demons out of people. We told him to stop, because he does not belong to our group."

⁵⁰But Jesus said to him, "Don't stop him, because whoever is not against you is for you."

A Town Rejects Jesus

⁵¹When the time was coming near for Jesus to depart, he was determined to go to Jerusalem. ⁵²He sent some men ahead of him, who went into a town in Samaria to make everything ready for him. ⁵³But the people there would not welcome him, because he was set on going to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴When James and John, followers of Jesus, saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven and destroy those people?" [n](#)

⁵⁵But Jesus turned and scolded them. ⁵⁶Then [n](#) they went to another town.

Following Jesus

⁵⁷As they were going along the road, someone said to Jesus, “I will follow you any place you go.”

⁵⁸Jesus said to them, “The foxes have holes to live in, and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to rest his head.”

⁵⁹Jesus said to another man, “Follow me!”

But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

⁶⁰But Jesus said to him, “Let the people who are dead bury their own dead. You must go and tell about the kingdom of God.”

⁶¹Another man said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say goodbye to my family.”

⁶²Jesus said, “Anyone who begins to plow a field but keeps looking back is of no use in the kingdom of God.”

Jesus Sends Out the Seventy-Two

After this, the Lord chose [seventy-two](#) others and sent them out in pairs ahead of him into every town and place where he planned to go.²He said to them, “There are a great many people to harvest, but there are only a few workers. So pray to God, who owns the harvest, that he will send more workers to help gather his harvest.³Go now, but listen! I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.⁴Don’t carry a purse, a bag, or sandals, and don’t waste time talking with people on the road.⁵Before you go into a house, say, ‘Peace be with this house.’⁶If peaceful people live there, your blessing of peace will stay with them, but if not, then your blessing will come back to you.⁷Stay in the peaceful house, eating and drinking what the people there give you. A worker should be given his pay. Don’t move from house to house.⁸If you go into a town and the people welcome you, eat what they give you.⁹Heal the sick who live there, and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God is near you.’¹⁰But if you go into a town, and the people don’t welcome you, then go into the streets and say,¹¹‘Even the [dirt from your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you](#). But remember that the kingdom of God is near.’¹²I tell you, on the Judgment Day it will be better for the people of [Sodom](#) than for the people of that town.

Jesus Warns Unbelievers

¹³“How terrible for you, [Korazin](#)! How terrible for you,

Bethsaida! If the miracles I did in you had happened in Tyre and Sidon, those people would have changed their lives long ago. They would have worn rough cloth and put ashes on themselves to show they had changed. ¹⁴But on the Judgment Day it will be better for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ¹⁵And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to heaven? No! You will be thrown down to the depths!

¹⁶“Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever refuses to accept you refuses to accept me. And whoever refuses to accept me refuses to accept the One who sent me.”

Satan Falls

¹⁷When the seventy-two came back, they were very happy and said, “Lord, even the demons obeyed us when we used your name!”

¹⁸Jesus said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹Listen, I have given you power to walk on snakes and scorpions, power that is greater than the enemy has. So nothing will hurt you. ²⁰But you should not be happy because the spirits obey you but because your names are written in heaven.”

Jesus Prays to the Father

²¹Then Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the people who are wise and smart. But you have shown them to those who are like little children. Yes, Father, this is what you really wanted.

²²“My Father has given me all things. No one knows who the Son is, except the Father. And no one knows who the Father is, except the Son and those whom the Son chooses to tell.”

²³Then Jesus turned to his followers and said privately, “You are blessed to see what you now see. ²⁴I tell you, many prophets and kings wanted to see what you now see, but they did not, and they wanted to hear what you now hear, but they did not.”

The Good Samaritan

²⁵Then an expert on the law stood up to test Jesus, saying, “Teacher, what must I do to get life forever?”

²⁶Jesus said, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?”

²⁷The man answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.” Also, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

²⁸Jesus said to him, “Your answer is right. Do this and you will live.”

²⁹But the man, wanting to show the importance of his question, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰Jesus answered, “As a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, some robbers attacked him. They tore off his clothes, beat him, and left him lying there, almost dead. ³¹It happened that a priest was going down that road. When he saw the man, he walked by on the other side. ³²Next, a Levite came there, and after he went over and looked at the man, he walked by on the other side of the road. ³³Then a Samaritan

traveling down the road came to where the hurt man was. When he saw the man, he felt very sorry for him.³⁴The Samaritan went to him, poured [olive oil and wine](#) on his wounds, and bandaged them. Then he put the hurt man on his own donkey and took him to an inn where he cared for him.³⁵The next day, the Samaritan brought out two [coins](#), gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of this man. If you spend more money on him, I will pay it back to you when I come again.’”

³⁶Then Jesus said, “Which one of these three men do you think was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by the robbers?”

³⁷The expert on the law answered, “The one who showed him mercy.”

Jesus said to him, “Then go and do what he did.”

Mary and Martha

³⁸While Jesus and his followers were traveling, Jesus went into a town. A woman named Martha let Jesus stay at her house.

³⁹Martha had a sister named Mary, who was sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to him teach.⁴⁰But Martha was busy with all the work to be done. She went in and said, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me alone to do all the work? Tell her to help me.”

⁴¹But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things.⁴²Only one thing is important. Mary has chosen the better thing, and it will never be taken away from her.”

Life Lessons

[Luke 11:1–54](#)

Situation

Jesus gave the disciples a good example by praying constantly. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray.

Observation

Jesus used a parable to show them they should be persistent in prayer. He said that everyone who asks would receive.

Inspiration

I like the King James translation [of [Hebrews 11:6](#)]: “He is a rewarder of them that *diligently* seek him” (italics mine).

“Diligently”—what a great word. Be diligent in your search. Be hungry in your quest, relentless in your pilgrimage. Let this book be but one of dozens you read about Jesus and this hour be but one of hundreds in which you seek him. Step away from the puny pursuits of possessions and positions, and seek your king.

Don’t be satisfied with angels. Don’t be content with stars in the sky. Seek him out as the shepherds did. Long for him as Simeon did. Worship him as the wise men did. Do as John and Andrew did: ask for his address. Do as Matthew: invite Jesus into your house. Imitate Zacchaeus. Risk whatever it takes to see Christ.

God rewards those who seek *him*. Not those who

seek doctrine or religion or systems or creeds. Many settle for these lesser passions, but the reward goes to those who settle for nothing less than Jesus himself. And what is the reward? What awaits those who seek Jesus? Nothing short of the heart of Jesus. “We all show the Lord’s glory, and we are being changed to be like him” ([2 Corinthians 3:18](#)).

Can you think of a greater gift than to be like Jesus? Christ felt no guilt; God wants to banish yours. Jesus had no bad habits; God wants to remove yours. Jesus had no fear of death; God wants you to be fearless. Jesus had kindness for the diseased and mercy for the rebellious and courage for the challenges. God wants you to have the same.

He loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus.

(From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

Describe your spiritual life. In what ways are you diligently seeking after God? How often do you pray, and what do you pray about? Develop a plan to increase your prayer life.

Exploration

Prayer—[Matthew 7:7–11](#); [John 14:13–14](#); [15:7](#); [Philippians 4:6](#).

Unity creates belief. Disunity fosters disbelief. —Max Lucado (*In the Grip of Grace*)

Jesus Teaches About Prayer

One time Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his followers said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his followers.”

²Jesus said to them, “When you pray, say:

‘Father, may your name always be kept holy.
May your kingdom come.

³Give us the food we need for each day.

⁴Forgive us for our sins,
because we forgive everyone who has done wrong to
us.

And do not cause us to be tempted.”

Continue to Ask

⁵Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose one of you went to your friend’s house at midnight and said to him, ‘Friend, loan me three loaves of bread. ⁶A friend of mine has come into town to visit me, but I have nothing for him to eat.’ ⁷Your friend inside the house answers, ‘Don’t bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I cannot get up and

give you anything.’⁸ I tell you, if friendship is not enough to make him get up to give you the bread, your boldness will make him get up and give you whatever you need.⁹ So I tell you, ask, and God will give to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will open for you.¹⁰ Yes, everyone who asks will receive. The one who searches will find. And everyone who knocks will have the door opened.¹¹ If your children ask for a fish, which of you would give them a snake instead? ¹²Or, if your children ask for an egg, would you give them a scorpion? ¹³Even though you are bad, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more your heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Jesus’ Power Is from God

¹⁴One time Jesus was sending out a demon that could not talk. When the demon came out, the man who had been unable to speak, then spoke. The people were amazed.¹⁵ But some of them said, “Jesus uses the power of Beelzebul, the ruler of demons, to force demons out of people.”

¹⁶Other people, wanting to test Jesus, asked him to give them a sign from heaven.¹⁷ But knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom that is divided against itself will be destroyed. And a family that is divided against itself will not continue.¹⁸ So if Satan is divided against himself, his kingdom will not continue. You say that I use the power of Beelzebul to force out demons.¹⁹ But if I use the power of Beelzebul to force out demons, what power do your people use to force demons out? So they will be your judges.²⁰ But if I use the power of God to force out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to

you.

²¹“When a strong person with many weapons guards his own house, his possessions are safe. ²²But when someone stronger comes and defeats him, the stronger one will take away the weapons the first man trusted and will give away the possessions.

²³“Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not work with me is working against me.

The Empty Person

²⁴“When an evil spirit comes out of a person, it travels through dry places, looking for a place to rest. But when it finds no place, it says, ‘I will go back to the house I left.’ ²⁵And when it comes back, it finds that house swept clean and made neat. ²⁶Then the evil spirit goes out and brings seven other spirits more evil than it is, and they go in and live there. So the person has even more trouble than before.”

People Who Are Truly Happy

²⁷As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out to Jesus, “Happy is the mother who gave birth to you and nursed you.”

²⁸But Jesus said, “No, happy are those who hear the teaching of God and obey it.”

The People Want a Miracle

²⁹As the crowd grew larger, Jesus said, “The people who live today are evil. They want to see a miracle for a sign, but no sign will be given them, except the [sign of Jonah](#).³⁰ As Jonah was a sign for those people who lived in Nineveh, the Son of Man will be a sign for the people of this time.³¹ On the Judgment Day the [Queen of the South](#) will stand up with the people who live now. She will show they are guilty, because she came from far away to listen to Solomon’s wise teaching. And I tell you that someone greater than Solomon is here.³² On the Judgment Day the people of Nineveh will stand up with the people who live now, and they will show that you are guilty. When Jonah preached to them, they were sorry and changed their lives. And I tell you that someone greater than Jonah is here.

Be a Light for the World

³³“No one lights a lamp and puts it in a secret place or under a bowl, but on a lampstand so the people who come in can see.³⁴ Your eye is a light for the body. When your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But when your eyes are evil, your whole body will be full of darkness.³⁵ So be careful not to let the light in you become darkness.³⁶ If your whole body is full of light, and none of it is dark, then you will shine bright, as when a lamp shines on you.”

Jesus Accuses the Pharisees

³⁷After Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee asked Jesus to eat with him. So Jesus went in and sat at the table.³⁸ But the

Pharisee was surprised when he saw that Jesus did not wash his hands before the meal.³⁹ The Lord said to him, “You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are full of greed and evil.”⁴⁰ You foolish people! The same one who made what is outside also made what is inside.⁴¹ So give what is in your dishes to the poor, and then you will be fully clean.⁴² How terrible for you Pharisees! You give God one-tenth of even your mint, your rue, and every other plant in your garden. But you fail to be fair to others and to love God. These are the things you should do while continuing to do those other things.⁴³ How terrible for you Pharisees, because you love to have the most important seats in the synagogues, and you love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces.⁴⁴ How terrible for you, because you are like hidden graves, which people walk on without knowing.”

Jesus Talks to Experts on the Law

⁴⁵One of the experts on the law said to Jesus, “Teacher, when you say these things, you are insulting us, too.”

⁴⁶Jesus answered, “How terrible for you, you experts on the law! You make strict rules that are very hard for people to obey, but you yourselves don’t even try to follow those rules.”⁴⁷ How terrible for you, because you build tombs for the prophets whom your ancestors killed!⁴⁸ And now you show that you approve of what your ancestors did. They killed the prophets, and you build tombs for them!⁴⁹ This is why in his wisdom God said, ‘I will send prophets and apostles to them. They will kill some, and they will treat others cruelly.’⁵⁰ So you who live now will be punished for the deaths of all the prophets who were

killed since the beginning of the world— ⁵¹from the killing of [Abel to the killing of Zechariah](#), who died between the altar and the Temple. Yes, I tell you that you who are alive now will be punished for them all.

⁵²“How terrible for you, you experts on the law. You have taken away the key to learning about God. You yourselves would not learn, and you stopped others from learning, too.”

⁵³When Jesus left, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees began to give him trouble, asking him questions about many things, ⁵⁴trying to catch him saying something wrong.

Life Lessons

Luke 12:1–59

Situation

Thousands of people gathered around Jesus. Yet he spoke to his disciples, letting the crowd overhear.

Observation

Believers shouldn't worry about the basic necessities of life. If we keep God first in our lives, he will sustain us. He is in control.

Inspiration

Be honest. Are we glad he says no to what we want and yes to what we need? Not always. If we ask for a new marriage, and he says honor the one you've got, we aren't happy. If we ask for healing, and he says learn through the pain, we aren't happy. If we ask for more money, and he says treasure the unseen, we aren't always happy.

When God doesn't do what we want, it's not easy. Never has been. Never will be. But faith is the conviction that God knows more than we do about this life and he will get us through it.

Remember, disappointment is caused by unmet expectations. Disappointment is cured by revamped expectations.

I like that story about the fellow who went to the pet store in search of a singing parakeet. Seems he was a bachelor and his house was too quiet. The store owner had just the bird for him, so the man bought it. The next day the bachelor came home from

work to a house full of music. He went to the cage to feed the bird and noticed for the first time that the parakeet had only one leg.

He felt cheated that he'd been sold a one-legged bird, so he called and complained.

"What do you want," the store owner responded, "a bird who can sing or a bird who can dance?" ...

We need to hear that God is still in control. We need to hear that it's not over until he says so. We need to hear that life's mishaps and tragedies are not a reason to bail out. They are simply a reason to sit tight.

Corrie ten Boom used to say, "When the train goes through a tunnel and the world gets dark, do you jump out? Of course not. You sit still and trust the engineer to get you through." ...

Next time you're disappointed, don't panic. Don't jump out. Don't give up. Just be patient and let God remind you he's still in control. It ain't over till it's over.

(From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

What worries consume your thoughts? Turn them over to God ... then breathe a sigh of relief and live for him. Let God carry your burdens.

Exploration

Strong Faith—[Proverbs 3:6](#); [Matthew 6:33](#); [Mark 8:14–21](#).

Don't Be Like the Pharisees

So many thousands of people had gathered that they were stepping on each other. Jesus spoke first to his followers, saying, "Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, because they are hypocrites. ²Everything that is hidden will be shown, and everything that is secret will be made known. ³What you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in an inner room will be shouted from the housetops.

⁴"I tell you, my friends, don't be afraid of people who can kill the body but after that can do nothing more to hurt you. ⁵I will show you the one to fear. Fear the one who has the power to kill you and also to throw you into hell. Yes, this is the one you should fear.

⁶"Five sparrows are sold for only two pennies, and God does not forget any of them. ⁷But God even knows how many hairs you have on your head. Don't be afraid. You are worth much more than many sparrows.

Don't Be Ashamed of Jesus

⁸"I tell you, all those who stand before others and say they believe in me, I, the Son of Man, will say before the angels of God that they belong to me. ⁹But all who stand before others

and say they do not believe in me, I will say before the angels of God that they do not belong to me.

¹⁰“Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man can be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

¹¹“When you are brought into the synagogues before the leaders and other powerful people, don’t worry about how to defend yourself or what to say. ¹²At that time the Holy Spirit will teach you what you must say.”

Jesus Warns Against Selfishness

¹³Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide with me the property our father left us.”

¹⁴But Jesus said to him, “Who said I should judge or decide between you?” ¹⁵Then Jesus said to them, “Be careful and guard against all kinds of greed. Life is not measured by how much one owns.”

¹⁶Then Jesus told this story: “There was a rich man who had some land, which grew a good crop. ¹⁷He thought to himself, ‘What will I do? I have no place to keep all my crops.’

¹⁸Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and other goods. ¹⁹Then I can say to myself, “I have enough good things stored to last for many years. Rest, eat, drink, and enjoy life!”’

²⁰“But God said to him, ‘Foolish man! Tonight your life will be taken from you. So who will get those things you have prepared for yourself?’

²¹“This is how it will be for those who store up things for

themselves and are not rich toward God.”

Don't Worry

²²Jesus said to his followers, “So I tell you, don’t worry about the food you need to live, or about the clothes you need for your body. ²³Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothes. ²⁴Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest, they don’t have storerooms or barns, but God feeds them. And you are worth much more than birds. ²⁵You cannot add any time to your life by worrying about it. ²⁶If you cannot do even the little things, then why worry about the big things? ²⁷Consider how the lilies grow; they don’t work or make clothes for themselves. But I tell you that even Solomon with his riches was not dressed as beautifully as one of these flowers. ²⁸God clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today but tomorrow is thrown into the fire. So how much more will God clothe you? Don’t have so little faith! ²⁹Don’t always think about what you will eat or what you will drink, and don’t keep worrying. ³⁰All the people in the world are trying to get these things, and your Father knows you need them. ³¹But seek God’s kingdom, and all the other things you need will be given to you.

Don't Trust in Money

³²“Don’t fear, little flock, because your Father wants to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Get for yourselves purses that will not wear out, the treasure in heaven that never runs out, where thieves can’t steal and

moths can't destroy. ³⁴Your heart will be where your treasure is.

Always Be Ready

³⁵“Be dressed, ready for service, and have your lamps shining. ³⁶Be like servants who are waiting for their master to come home from a wedding party. When he comes and knocks, the servants immediately open the door for him. ³⁷They will be blessed when their master comes home, because he sees that they were watching for him. I tell you the truth, the master will dress himself to serve and tell the servants to sit at the table, and he will serve them. ³⁸Those servants will be happy when he comes in and finds them still waiting, even if it is midnight or later.

³⁹“Remember this: If the owner of the house knew what time a thief was coming, he would not allow the thief to enter his house. ⁴⁰So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at a time when you don't expect him!”

Who Is the Trusted Servant?

⁴¹Peter said, “Lord, did you tell this story to us or to all people?”

⁴²The Lord said, “Who is the wise and trusted servant that the master trusts to give the other servants their food at the right time? ⁴³When the master comes and finds the servant doing his work, the servant will be blessed. ⁴⁴I tell you the truth, the master will choose that servant to take care of

everything he owns.⁴⁵ But suppose the servant thinks to himself, 'My master will not come back soon,' and he begins to beat the other servants, men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk.⁴⁶ The master will come when that servant is not ready and is not expecting him. Then the master will cut him in pieces and send him away to be with the others who don't obey.

⁴⁷“The servant who knows what his master wants but is not ready, or who does not do what the master wants, will be beaten with many blows!⁴⁸ But the servant who does not know what his master wants and does things that should be punished will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded. And from the one trusted with much, much more will be expected.

Jesus Causes Division

⁴⁹“I came to set fire to the world, and I wish it were already burning!⁵⁰ [I have a baptism](#) to suffer through, and I feel very troubled until it is over.⁵¹ Do you think I came to give peace to the earth? No, I tell you, I came to divide it.⁵² From now on, a family with five people will be divided, three against two, and two against three.⁵³ They will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

Understanding the Times

⁵⁴Then Jesus said to the people, “When you see clouds

coming up in the west, you say, ‘It’s going to rain,’ and it happens. ⁵⁵When you feel the wind begin to blow from the south, you say, ‘It will be a hot day,’ and it happens. ⁵⁶Hypocrites! You know how to understand the appearance of the earth and sky. Why don’t you understand what is happening now?

Settle Your Problems

⁵⁷“Why can’t you decide for yourselves what is right? ⁵⁸If your enemy is taking you to court, try hard to settle it on the way. If you don’t, your enemy might take you to the judge, and the judge might turn you over to the officer, and the officer might throw you into jail. ⁵⁹I tell you, you will not get out of there until you have paid everything you owe.”

Life Lessons

[Luke 13:1–35](#)

Situation

Many Jews believed that good fortune, health, and wealth were signs of God's approval and that hardships or tragedies were signs of God's judgment.

Observation

When others experience hardship, it is easy to judge them. Jesus taught that the best response is compassion.

Inspiration

God has a beautiful way of taking what is negative and turning it around for His glory—if we let Him... If we will respond properly to our failure, God can use it to bring Himself glory and to better prepare us for His service.

The first stage in the recovery process is *repentance*...

Genuine repentance involves several things. First of all, confession. Not just, "Lord, I am sorry for my mistake," but, "Lord, I have sinned against You." Confession acknowledges guilt. Second, repentance involves the recognition that the sin was against God...

Last, repentance requires total honesty with God. You know, we won't always be holy, but we can always be honest. I believe God is looking for us to be honest about our sin—honest about our weaknesses, our failures, and our frustrations.

Honesty promotes fellowship. As long as we continue to be open and honest with God, He can continue to work with us, even after we have committed our most grievous sin.

(From *Winning the War Within* by Charles Stanley)

Application

Don't fool yourself by thinking that sins will be ignored. Confess your sins today, and enjoy the freedom that God wants for you.

Exploration

Repentance—[2 Chronicles 7:14](#); [Psalms 51:17](#); [Proverbs 28:13](#); [Ezekiel 18:30–32](#); [Matthew 3:2](#); [Acts 3:19](#); [2 Corinthians 7:10](#); [1 John 1:9](#).

Change Your Hearts

At that time some people were there who told Jesus that [Pilate](#) had killed some people from Galilee while they were worshipping. He mixed their blood with the blood of the animals they were sacrificing to God.² Jesus answered, “Do you think this happened to them because they were more sinful than all others from Galilee? ³No, I tell you. But unless you change your hearts and lives, you will be destroyed as they were! ⁴What about those eighteen people who died when the tower of Siloam fell on them? Do you think they were more sinful than all the others who live in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you. But unless you change your hearts and lives, you will all be destroyed too!”

The Useless Tree

⁶Jesus told this story: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for some fruit on the tree, but he found none. ⁷So the man said to his gardener, ‘I have been looking for fruit on this tree for three years, but I never find any. Cut it down. Why should it waste the ground?’ ⁸But the servant answered, ‘Master, let the tree have one more year to produce fruit. Let me dig up the dirt around it and put on some fertilizer. ⁹If the tree produces fruit next year, good. But if not,

you can cut it down.””

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

¹⁰Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. ¹¹A woman was there who, for eighteen years, had an evil spirit in her that made her crippled. Her back was always bent; she could not stand up straight. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are free from your sickness.” ¹³Jesus put his hands on her, and immediately she was able to stand up straight and began praising God.

¹⁴The synagogue leader was angry because Jesus healed on the Sabbath day. He said to the people, “There are six days when one has to work. So come to be healed on one of those days, and not on the Sabbath day.”

¹⁵The Lord answered, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you untie your work animals and lead them to drink water every day—even on the Sabbath day? ¹⁶This woman that I healed, a daughter of Abraham, has been held by Satan for eighteen years. Surely it is not wrong for her to be freed from her sickness on a Sabbath day!” ¹⁷When Jesus said this, all of those who were criticizing him were ashamed, but the entire crowd rejoiced at all the wonderful things Jesus was doing.

Stories of Mustard Seed and Yeast

¹⁸Then Jesus said, “What is God’s kingdom like? What can I compare it with? ¹⁹It is like a mustard seed that a man plants in his garden. The seed grows and becomes a tree, and the wild birds build nests in its branches.”

²⁰Jesus said again, “What can I compare God’s kingdom with? ²¹It is like yeast that a woman took and hid in a large tub of flour until it made all the dough rise.”

The Narrow Door

²²Jesus was teaching in every town and village as he traveled toward Jerusalem. ²³Someone said to Jesus, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?”

Jesus said, ²⁴“Try hard to enter through the narrow door, because many people will try to enter there, but they will not be able. ²⁵When the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you can stand outside and knock on the door and say, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ ²⁶Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in the streets of our town.’ ²⁷But he will say to you, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Go away from me, all you who do evil!’ ²⁸You will cry and grind your teeth with pain when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in God’s kingdom, but you yourselves thrown outside. ²⁹People will come from the east, west, north, and south and will sit down at the table in the kingdom of God. ³⁰There are those who have the lowest place in life now who will have the highest place in the future. And there are those who have the highest place now who will have the lowest place in the future.”

Jesus Will Die in Jerusalem

³¹At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said, “Go away from here! Herod wants to kill you!”

³²Jesus said to them, “Go tell that fox Herod, ‘Today and tomorrow I am forcing demons out and healing people. Then, on the third day, I will reach my goal.’” ³³Yet I must be on my way today and tomorrow and the next day. Surely it cannot be right for a prophet to be killed anywhere except in Jerusalem.

³⁴“Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone to death those who are sent to you. Many times I wanted to gather your people as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let me.” ³⁵Now your house is left completely empty. I tell you, you will not see me until that time when you will say, ‘God bless the One who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Life Lessons

Luke 14:1–35

Situation

While these characteristics are all too common, Jesus' stories explain that pride, laziness, and the desire for honor have no place among his disciples.

Observation

Being a disciple of Christ requires humility, commitment, and servanthood.

Inspiration

They splashed and they flopped, those aspiring wind surfers. Day after day we chronicled their struggles. It looked simple enough: a surfboard, a detachable sail with a length of rope tied to it, water, wind and, of course, instruction...

The following summer we discovered a few surfers who had more or less mastered the art. They skimmed about with surprising skill even on rough days. One had so much confidence that he even sailed with his jacket on, maneuvering his craft skillfully wherever he wished it to go. He was so cocky. I kept hoping he would flop just once, but he had learned well.

He was, we discovered, the instructor...

Like wind surfing, the Christian life is simple but not easy...

We who are older in the Christian walk and those who, through experience, have earned the status of instructor should be quick to encourage, quick to

help the one who has fallen.

We who have not yet mastered the art of Christian living need to keep carefully studying our Book of Instructions, listening attentively when our Instructor speaks, and promptly following His instructions.

Alexander Whyte of Edinburgh once said: “The perseverance of the saints consists in ever new beginnings.”

(From *The Legacy of a Pack Rat* by Ruth Bell Graham)

Application

Putting Christ first in all things takes practice and persistence. Day after day we learn to follow him.

Exploration

Discipleship—[Deuteronomy 6:5](#); [Matthew 6:33](#); [16:24](#); [Mark 10:28](#); [John 15:8](#); [Galatians 5:24](#); [Colossians 3:1–3](#); [2 Timothy 2:15](#); [Revelation 3:19](#).

God offers authentic love. His devotion is the real deal. But he won't give you the genuine until you surrender the imitations. —Max Lucado (*A Love Worth Giving*)

Healing on the Sabbath

On a Sabbath day, when Jesus went to eat at the home of a leading Pharisee, the people were watching Jesus very closely. ²And in front of him was a man with [dropsy](#). ³Jesus said to the Pharisees and experts on the law, “Is it right or wrong to heal on the Sabbath day?” ⁴But they would not answer his question. So Jesus took the man, healed him, and sent him away. ⁵Jesus said to the Pharisees and teachers of the law, “If your child or ox falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not pull him out quickly?” ⁶And they could not answer him.

Don't Make Yourself Important

⁷When Jesus noticed that some of the guests were choosing the best places to sit, he told this story: ⁸“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, don't take the most important seat, because someone more important than you may have been invited. ⁹The host, who invited both of you, will come to you and say, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then you will be embarrassed and will have to move to the last place. ¹⁰So when you are invited, go sit in a seat that is not important. When the

host comes to you, he may say, 'Friend, move up here to a more important place.' Then all the other guests will respect you. ¹¹All who make themselves great will be made humble, but those who make themselves humble will be made great."

You Will Be Rewarded

¹²Then Jesus said to the man who had invited him, "When you give a lunch or a dinner, don't invite only your friends, your family, your other relatives, and your rich neighbors. At another time they will invite you to eat with them, and you will be repaid. ¹³Instead, when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴Then you will be blessed, because they have nothing and cannot pay you back. But you will be repaid when the good people rise from the dead."

A Story About a Big Banquet

¹⁵One of those at the table with Jesus heard these things and said to him, "Happy are the people who will share in the meal in God's kingdom."

¹⁶Jesus said to him, "A man gave a big banquet and invited many people. ¹⁷When it was time to eat, the man sent his servant to tell the guests, 'Come. Everything is ready.'

¹⁸"But all the guests made excuses. The first one said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go look at it. Please excuse me.' ¹⁹Another said, 'I have just bought five pairs of oxen; I must go and try them. Please excuse me.' ²⁰A third person said, 'I just got married; I can't come.' ²¹So the servant returned and

told his master what had happened. Then the master became angry and said, ‘Go at once into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ ²²Later the servant said to him, ‘Master, I did what you commanded, but we still have room.’ ²³The master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes, and urge the people there to come so my house will be full. ²⁴I tell you, none of those whom I invited first will eat with me.’”

The Cost of Being Jesus’ Follower

²⁵Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶“If anyone comes to me but loves his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters—or even life—more than me, he cannot be my follower. ²⁷Whoever is not willing to carry the cross and follow me cannot be my follower. ²⁸If you want to build a tower, you first sit down and decide how much it will cost, to see if you have enough money to finish the job. ²⁹If you don’t, you might lay the foundation, but you would not be able to finish. Then all who would see it would make fun of you, ³⁰saying, ‘This person began to build but was not able to finish.’

³¹“If a king is going to fight another king, first he will sit down and plan. He will decide if he and his ten thousand soldiers can defeat the other king who has twenty thousand soldiers. ³²If he can’t, then while the other king is still far away, he will send some people to speak to him and ask for peace.

³³In the same way, you must give up everything you have to be my follower.

Don't Lose Your Influence

³⁴“Salt is good, but if it loses its salty taste, you cannot make it salty again. ³⁵It is no good for the soil or for manure; it is thrown away.

“You people who can hear me, listen.”

Life Lessons

Luke 15:1–32

Situation

The Pharisees and teachers of the Law were intrigued by Jesus' teaching; they were always nearby to hear him and watch him—and criticize him. The Pharisees went to great lengths to be ceremonially clean, which they believed made them righteous in God's sight. Jesus' great concern, however, was offering salvation to sinners.

Observation

Jesus told three parables to correct the Pharisees' misconception about God. These parables show that God loves *all* people and wants everyone—especially sinners—to come to him. God doesn't play favorites, and he rejoices when anyone turns to him.

Inspiration

Theresa Briones is a tender, loving mother. She also has a stout left hook that she used to punch a lady in a coin laundry. Why'd she do it?

Some kids were making fun of Theresa's daughter, Alicia.

Alicia is bald. Her knees are arthritic. Her nose is pinched. Her hips are creaky. Her hearing is bad. She has the stamina of a seventy-year-old. And she is only ten.

"Mom," the kids taunted, "come and look at the monster!"

Alicia weighs only twenty-two pounds and is

shorter than most preschoolers. She suffers from progeria—a genetic aging disease that strikes one child in eight million. The life expectancy of progeria victims is twenty years. There are only fifteen known cases of this disease in the world.

“She is not an alien. She is not a monster,” Theresa defended. “She is just like you and me.”

Mentally, Alicia is a bubbly, fun-loving third grader. She has a long list of friends. She watches television in a toddler-sized rocking chair. She plays with Barbie dolls and teases her younger brother.

Theresa has grown accustomed to the glances and questions. She is patient with the constant curiosity. Genuine inquiries she accepts. Insensitive slanders she does not.

The mother of the finger-pointing children came to investigate. “I see ‘it,’” she told the kids.

“My child is not an ‘it,’” Theresa stated. Then she decked the woman.

Who could blame her? Such is the nature of parental love. Mothers and fathers have a God-given ability to love their children regardless of imperfections. Not because the parents are blind. Just the opposite. They see vividly.

Theresa sees Alicia’s inability as clearly as anyone. But she also sees Alicia’s value.

So does God.

God sees us with the eyes of a Father. He sees our defects, errors, and blemishes. But he also sees our value.

... What did Jesus know that enabled him to do

what he did?

Here's part of the answer. He knew the value of people. He knew that each human being is a treasure. And because he did, people were not a source of stress, but a source of joy. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

God offers salvation to everyone. If you find yourself judging others, remember that God values them. Think of what you can do to show God's love to the unlovely.

Exploration

God's Impartiality—[Job 34:19](#); [Acts 10:28, 34–35](#); [Romans 10:11–13](#); [Galatians 3:28](#); [1 Timothy 2:3–4](#); [2 Peter 3:9](#); [Revelation 3:20](#).

A Lost Sheep, a Lost Coin

The tax collectors and sinners all came to listen to Jesus.² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to complain: “Look, this man welcomes sinners and even eats with them.”

³Then Jesus told them this story: ⁴“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep but loses one of them. Then he will leave the other ninety-nine sheep in the open field and go out and look for the lost sheep until he finds it. ⁵And when he finds it, he happily puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home. He calls to his friends and neighbors and says, ‘Be happy with me because I found my lost sheep.’ ⁷In the same way, I tell you there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who changes his heart and life, than over ninety-nine good people who don’t need to change.

⁸“Suppose a woman has ten [silver coins](#), but loses one. She will light a lamp, sweep the house, and look carefully for the coin until she finds it. ⁹And when she finds it, she will call her friends and neighbors and say, ‘Be happy with me because I have found the coin that I lost.’ ¹⁰In the same way, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God when one sinner changes his heart and life.”

The Son Who Left Home

¹¹Then Jesus said, “A man had two sons. ¹²The younger son said to his father, ‘Give me my share of the property.’ So the father divided the property between his two sons. ¹³Then the younger son gathered up all that was his and traveled far away to another country. There he wasted his money in foolish living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, a time came when there was no food anywhere in the country, and the son was poor and hungry. ¹⁵So he got a job with one of the citizens there who sent the son into the fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶The son was so hungry that he wanted to eat the pods the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷When he realized what he was doing, he thought, ‘All of my father’s servants have plenty of food. But I am here, almost dying with hunger. ¹⁸I will leave and return to my father and say to him, “Father, I have sinned against God and have done wrong to you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son, but let me be like one of your servants.”’ ²⁰So the son left and went to his father.

“While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for his son. So the father ran to him and hugged and kissed him. ²¹The son said, ‘Father, I have sinned against God and have done wrong to you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²²But the father said to his servants, ‘Hurry! Bring the best clothes and put them on him. Also, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get our fat calf and kill it so we can have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴My son was dead, but now he is alive again! He was lost, but now he is found!’ So they began to celebrate.

²⁵“The older son was in the field, and as he came closer to the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. ²⁶So he called to one of the servants and asked what all this meant.

²⁷The servant said, 'Your brother has come back, and your father killed the fat calf, because your brother came home safely.' ²⁸The older son was angry and would not go in to the feast. So his father went out and begged him to come in. ²⁹But the older son said to his father, 'I have served you like a slave for many years and have always obeyed your commands. But you never gave me even a young goat to have at a feast with my friends. ³⁰But your other son, who wasted all your money on prostitutes, comes home, and you kill the fat calf for him!' ³¹The father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. ³²We had to celebrate and be happy because your brother was dead, but now he is alive. He was lost, but now he is found.'"

Life Lessons

Luke 16:1–31

Situation

Jesus taught the Pharisees to value the Law and the Prophets and the righteousness of God.

Observation

As convincing as it might be for someone to come back from the dead and warn others about hell, God provides his Word to be the most powerful testimony about Jesus Christ and the afterlife.

Inspiration

A physician, Dr. Marshall Goldberg, has interviewed many patients resuscitated from cardiac arrest. Since it takes three or four minutes for the brain to die after the heart ceases to function, some patients (interviewed before a rapidly developing amnesia effaces the memory) have related some remarkable visions, feelings, sounds, and related OBE [out-of-body experiences]. A few of the more recurrent descriptions include:

-
- Surprisingly peaceful surroundings
- An almost sound-proof, pain-deadening “curtain” that descends
- “Flashbacks,” in which one’s entire life passes in review—one person referred to it as “an autobiographical slide show”

- Bright light, warm feelings, buzzing, and ringing sounds....

I am grateful that we aren't limited to opinions of observers and feelings of people on deathbeds. The Scripture addresses the subject often and freely....

Even though we cannot turn to any Scripture that states that a believer was interviewed after death ... there is, however, an extremely vivid account where an *unbeliever* is interviewed. Don't misunderstand, we're not gong to read of another fascinating OBE, but a startling narrative of the afterlife related by the ultimate authority on the subject—the Son of God Himself....

We will not read of some paranormal experience reported by a man who saw lights and heard buzzing. This, I believe, is an event, not a vision. It becomes an interview, as it were.

Notice several things that occur. First there is *agony*. There is literal pain. He is in torment. And somehow he catches a glimpse of those who are at peace. Second, he is *fully conscious*. Third he not only has his *senses*, he has his *memory*. Neither is obliterated by death....

Since he was unable to escape, his number-one concern was that someone might go to his brothers and communicate the truth about hell to those who are still living... . Talk about evangelistic zeal! If it exists nowhere else, an evangelistic passion exists in hell....

[Yet] if you could bring someone back from the dead—someone who has been in hell—to tell the

people what the future holds, it would not be as effective as Holy Scripture! (From *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Do you have friends like this rich man? Don't keep the Good News to yourself. Look for a way this week to share with them the news that can save their souls.

Exploration

On Life After Death—[Job 19:25–27](#); [Daniel 12:2–3](#); [Hosea 13:14](#); [Matthew 25:31–46](#); [1 Corinthians 15:50–58](#); [2 Corinthians 5:6–8](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:13–18](#); [Revelation 21:3–4](#); [22:5](#).

True Wealth

Jesus also said to his followers, “Once there was a rich man who had a manager to take care of his business. This manager was accused of cheating him. ²So he called the manager in and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give me a report of what you have done with my money, because you can’t be my manager any longer.’ ³The manager thought to himself, ‘What will I do since my master is taking my job away from me? I am not strong enough to dig ditches, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I know what I’ll do so that when I lose my job people will welcome me into their homes.’

⁵“So the manager called in everyone who owed the master any money. He asked the first one, ‘How much do you owe?’ ⁶He answered, ‘Eight hundred gallons of olive oil.’ The manager said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write four hundred gallons.’ ⁷Then the manager asked another one, ‘How much do you owe?’ He answered, ‘One thousand bushels of wheat.’ Then the manager said to him, ‘Take your bill and write eight hundred bushels.’ ⁸So, the master praised the dishonest manager for being smart. Yes, worldly people are smarter with their own kind than spiritual people are.

⁹“I tell you, make friends for yourselves using worldly riches so that when those riches are gone, you will be welcomed in those homes that continue forever. ¹⁰Whoever can be trusted with a little can also be trusted with a lot, and

whoever is dishonest with a little is dishonest with a lot. ¹¹If you cannot be trusted with worldly riches, then who will trust you with true riches? ¹²And if you cannot be trusted with things that belong to someone else, who will give you things of your own?

¹³“No servant can serve two masters. The servant will hate one master and love the other, or will follow one master and refuse to follow the other. You cannot serve both God and worldly riches.”

God's Law Cannot Be Changed

¹⁴The Pharisees, who loved money, were listening to all these things and made fun of Jesus. ¹⁵He said to them, “You make yourselves look good in front of people, but God knows what is really in your hearts. What is important to people is hateful in God's sight.

¹⁶“The law of Moses and the writings of the prophets were preached until [John](#) came. Since then the Good News about the kingdom of God is being told, and everyone tries to enter it by force. ¹⁷It would be easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for the smallest part of a letter in the law to be changed.

Divorce and Remarriage

¹⁸“If a man divorces his wife and marries another woman, he is guilty of adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman is also guilty of adultery.”

The Rich Man and Lazarus

¹⁹Jesus said, “There was a rich man who always dressed in the finest clothes and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰And a very poor man named Lazarus, whose body was covered with sores, was laid at the rich man’s gate. ²¹He wanted to eat only the small pieces of food that fell from the rich man’s table. And the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²Later, Lazarus died, and the angels carried him to the arms of Abraham. The rich man died, too, and was buried. ²³In the place of the dead, he was in much pain. The rich man saw Abraham far away with Lazarus at his side. ²⁴He called, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me! Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am suffering in this fire!’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember when you were alive you had the good things in life, but bad things happened to Lazarus. Now he is comforted here, and you are suffering. ²⁶Besides, there is a big pit between you and us, so no one can cross over to you, and no one can leave there and come here.’ ²⁷The rich man said, ‘Father, then please send Lazarus to my father’s house. ²⁸I have five brothers, and Lazarus could warn them so that they will not come to this place of pain.’ ²⁹But Abraham said, ‘They have the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets; let them learn from them.’ ³⁰The rich man said, ‘No, father Abraham! If someone goes to them from the dead, they would believe and change their hearts and lives.’ ³¹But Abraham said to him, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not listen to someone who comes back from the dead.’”

Life Lessons

[Luke 17:1-37](#)

Situation

Jesus taught about the power of sin, forgiveness, and faith. He instilled a passion in his disciples for the kingdom of God.

Observation

In this passage, Jesus warned his disciples against the danger of causing others to sin. Jesus said that their lives should be marked by forgiveness, thankfulness, and faith.

Inspiration

“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth” ([1 Corinthians 13:6](#), NIV). In this verse lies a test for love.

Want to separate the fake from the factual, the counterfeit from the real thing? Want to know if what you feel is genuine love? Ask yourself this:

Do I encourage this person to do what is right?

...

For instance, one lady calls another and says, “We’re friends, right?”

“Yeah, we’re friends.”

“If my husband asks, you tell him we were together at the movies last night.”

“But we weren’t.”

“I know, but I was, well, I was with another guy and—hey, you’ll do this for me, won’t you? We’re friends, right? Tighter than sisters, right?”

Does this person pass the test? No way. The room key doesn't work. Love doesn't ask someone to do what is wrong....

If you find yourself prompting evil in others, heed the alarm. This is not love. And if others prompt evil in you, be alert. Check the room key.

Here's an example. A classic one. A young couple are on a date. His affection goes beyond her comfort zone. She resists. But he tries to persuade her with the oldest line in the book: "But I love you. I just want to be near you. If you loved me ..."

That siren you hear? It's the phony-love detector. This guy doesn't love her. He may love having sex with her. He may love her body. He may love boasting to his buddies about his conquest. But he doesn't love her. True love will never ask the "beloved" to do what he or she thinks is wrong.

Love doesn't tear down the convictions of others. Quite the contrary.

"Love builds up" ([1 Corinthians 8:1](#)).

"Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light and will not cause anyone to stumble" ([1 John 2:10](#)).

"When you sin against your brothers and sisters in Christ like this and cause them to do what they feel is wrong, you are also sinning against Christ" ([1 Corinthians 8:12](#)).

Do you want to know if your love for someone is true? If your friendship is genuine? Check the room key. Ask yourself: Do I influence this person to do what is right? (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max

Lucado)

Application

Are you influencing people for good or for evil? Set aside some time to figure out your motivation for being involved in people's lives. Make sure you never get yourself in a Situation where you could cause someone to stumble.

Exploration

Loving Others—[Leviticus 19:18](#); [Proverbs 17:17](#); [Matthew 5:44](#); [22:39](#); [1 John 4:7–8](#).

Sin and Forgiveness

Jesus said to his followers, “Things that cause people to sin will happen, but how terrible for the person who causes them to happen! ²It would be better for you to be thrown into the sea with a large stone around your neck than to cause one of these little ones to sin. ³So be careful!

“If another follower sins, warn him, and if he is sorry and stops sinning, forgive him. ⁴If he sins against you seven times in one day and says that he is sorry each time, forgive him.”

How Big Is Your Faith?

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, “Give us more faith!”

⁶The Lord said, “If your faith were the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Dig yourself up and plant yourself in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

Be Good Servants

⁷“Suppose one of you has a servant who has been plowing the ground or caring for the sheep. When the servant comes in from working in the field, would you say, ‘Come in and sit down to eat’? ⁸No, you would say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat. Then get yourself ready and serve me. After I

finish eating and drinking, you can eat.’⁹The servant does not get any special thanks for doing what his master commanded.¹⁰It is the same with you. When you have done everything you are told to do, you should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done the work we should do.’”

Be Thankful

¹¹While Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, he was going through the area between Samaria and Galilee.¹²As he came into a small town, ten men who had a skin disease met him there. They did not come close to Jesus¹³but called to him, “Jesus! Master! Have mercy on us!”

¹⁴When Jesus saw the men, he said, “Go and [show yourselves to the priests.](#)”

As the ten men were going, they were healed.¹⁵When one of them saw that he was healed, he went back to Jesus, praising God in a loud voice.¹⁶Then he bowed down at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. (And this man was a Samaritan.)¹⁷Jesus said, “Weren’t ten men healed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸Is this Samaritan the only one who came back to thank God?”¹⁹Then Jesus said to him, “Stand up and go on your way. You were healed because you believed.”

God’s Kingdom Is Within You

²⁰Some of the Pharisees asked Jesus, “When will the kingdom of God come?”

Jesus answered, “God’s kingdom is coming, but not in a

way that you will be able to see with your eyes. ²¹People will not say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' because God's kingdom is [within](#) you."

²²Then Jesus said to his followers, "The time will come when you will want very much to see one of the days of the Son of Man. But you will not see it. ²³People will say to you, 'Look, there he is!' or, 'Look, here he is!' Stay where you are; don't go away and search.

When Jesus Comes Again

²⁴"When the Son of Man comes again, he will shine like lightning, which flashes across the sky and lights it up from one side to the other. ²⁵But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by the people of this time. ²⁶When the Son of Man comes again, it will be as it was when Noah lived. ²⁷People were eating, drinking, marrying, and giving their children to be married until the day Noah entered the boat. Then the flood came and killed them all. ²⁸It will be the same as during the time of Lot. People were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, and building. ²⁹But the day Lot left [Sodom](#), fire and sulfur rained down from the sky and killed them all. ³⁰This is how it will be when the Son of Man comes again.

³¹"On that day, a person who is on the roof and whose belongings are in the house should not go inside to get them. A person who is in the field should not go back home. ³²Remember [Lot's wife](#). ³³Those who try to keep their lives will lose them. But those who give up their lives will save them. ³⁴I tell you, on that night two people will be sleeping in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. ³⁵There will be two

women grinding grain together; one will be taken, and the other will be left.” ³⁶[n](#)

³⁷The followers asked Jesus, “Where will this be, Lord?”

Jesus answered, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.”

Life Lessons

Luke 18:1–43

Situation

Through a series of short illustrations, Jesus taught the people how to obtain eternal life and how to pray so that God would hear.

Observation

When we pray we must be persistent and humble. Most of all, we can't depend on our own resources to get us through problems. We need to trust God and his strength.

Inspiration

One of my favorite stories concerns a bishop who was traveling by ship to visit a church across the ocean. While en route, the ship stopped at an island for a day. He went for a walk on a beach. He came upon three fishermen mending their nets.

Curious about their trade he asked them some questions. Curious about his ecclesiastical robes, they asked him some questions. When they found out he was a Christian leader, they got excited. "We Christians!" they said, proudly pointing to one another.

The bishop was impressed but cautious. Did they know the Lord's Prayer? They had never heard of it.

"What do you say, then, when you pray?"

"We pray, 'O We are three, you are three, have mercy on us.'"

The bishop was appalled at the primitive nature of

the prayer. "That will not do." So he spent the day teaching them the Lord's Prayer. The fishermen were poor but willing learners. And before the bishop sailed away the next day, they could recite the prayer with no mistakes.

The bishop was proud.

On the return trip the bishop's ship drew near the island again. When the island came into view the bishop came to the deck and recalled with pleasure the men he had taught and resolved to go see them again. As he was thinking a light appeared on the horizon near the island. It seemed to be getting nearer. As the bishop gazed in wonder he realized the three fishermen were walking toward him on the water. Soon all the passengers and crew were on the deck to see the sight.

When they were within speaking distance, the fisherman cried out, "Bishop, we come hurry to meet you."

"What is it you want?" asked the stunned bishop.

"We are so sorry. We forget lovely prayer. We say, 'O Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name ... ' and then we forget. Please tell us prayer again."

The bishop was humbled. "Go back to your homes, my friends, and when you pray say, 'O We are three, you are three, have mercy on us.'"

(From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you mean what you pray? Do you get caught

up in just saying words and miss their meaning? Continue to pray often—but do so out of a humble, honest heart. If the fancy prayers and big words aren't you—use your own. God wants to hear what you honestly pray.

Exploration

Prayer—[Psalm 5:1–3](#); [55:17](#); [116:2](#).

God Will Answer His People

Then Jesus used this story to teach his followers that they should always pray and never lose hope. ²“In a certain town there was a judge who did not respect God or care about people. ³In that same town there was a widow who kept coming to this judge, saying, ‘Give me my rights against my enemy.’ ⁴For a while the judge refused to help her. But afterwards, he thought to himself, ‘Even though I don’t respect God or care about people, ⁵I will see that she gets her rights. Otherwise she will continue to bother me until I am worn out.’”

⁶The Lord said, “Listen to what the unfair judge said. ⁷God will always give what is right to his people who cry to him night and day, and he will not be slow to answer them. ⁸I tell you, God will help his people quickly. But when the Son of Man comes again, will he find those on earth who believe in him?”

Being Right with God

⁹Jesus told this story to some people who thought they were very good and looked down on everyone else: ¹⁰“A Pharisee and a tax collector both went to the Temple to pray. ¹¹The Pharisee stood alone and prayed, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people who steal, cheat, or take part in adultery,

or even like this tax collector. ¹²I give up eating twice a week, and I give one-tenth of everything I get!’

¹³“The tax collector, standing at a distance, would not even look up to heaven. But he beat on his chest because he was so sad. He said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ¹⁴I tell you, when this man went home, he was right with God, but the Pharisee was not. All who make themselves great will be made humble, but all who make themselves humble will be made great.”

Who Will Enter God’s Kingdom?

¹⁵Some people brought even their babies to Jesus so he could touch them. When the followers saw this, they told them to stop. ¹⁶But Jesus called for the children, saying, “Let the little children come to me. Don’t stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to people who are like these children. ¹⁷I tell you the truth, you must accept the kingdom of God as if you were a child, or you will never enter it.”

A Rich Man’s Question

¹⁸A certain leader asked Jesus, “Good Teacher, what must I do to have life forever?”

¹⁹Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? Only God is good. ²⁰You know the commands: ‘You must not be guilty of adultery. You must not murder anyone. You must not steal. You must not tell lies about your neighbor. Honor your father and mother.’”

²¹But the leader said, “I have obeyed all these commands

since I was a boy.”

²²When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “There is still one more thing you need to do. Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.” ²³But when the man heard this, he became very sad, because he was very rich.

²⁴Jesus looked at him and said, “It is very hard for rich people to enter the kingdom of God. ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

Who Can Be Saved?

²⁶When the people heard this, they asked, “Then who can be saved?”

²⁷Jesus answered, “God can do things that are not possible for people to do.”

²⁸Peter said, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”

²⁹Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, all those who have left houses, wives, brothers, parents, or children for the kingdom of God ³⁰will get much more in this life. And in the age that is coming, they will have life forever.”

Jesus Will Rise from the Dead

³¹Then Jesus took the twelve apostles aside and said to them, “We are going to Jerusalem. Everything the prophets wrote about the Son of Man will happen. ³²He will be turned over to

those who are evil. They will laugh at him, insult him, spit on him, ³³beat him with whips, and kill him. But on the third day, he will rise to life again.” ³⁴The apostles did not understand this; the meaning was hidden from them, and they did not realize what was said.

NewLife in Christ

“God will always give what is right to his people ... , and he will not be slow to answer them.”—[Luke 18:7](#)

God Does What Is Best

Mark tells us that during the storm Jesus “saw his followers struggling” ([Mark 6:48](#)). Through the night he saw them. Through the storm he saw them. And like a loving father he waited. He waited until the right time, until the right moment. He waited until he knew it was time to come, and then he came.

What made it the right time? I don’t know. Why was the ninth hour better than the fourth or fifth? I can’t answer that. Why does God wait until the money is gone? Why does he wait until the sickness has lingered? Why does he choose to wait until the other side of the grave to answer the prayers for healing?

I don’t know. I only know his timing is always right. I can only say he will do what is best. “God will always give what is right to his people who cry to him night and day, and he will not be slow to answer them” ([Luke 18:7](#)).

Though you hear nothing, he is speaking.

Though you see nothing, he is acting. With God there are no accidents. Every incident is intended to bring us closer to him. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Question: What is there in your life that is keeping you from calling out to the Lord?

For more on ["New Life in Christ."](#)

Jesus Heals a Blind Man

³⁵As Jesus came near the city of Jericho, a blind man was sitting beside the road, begging. ³⁶When he heard the people coming down the road, he asked, “What is happening?”

³⁷They told him, “Jesus, from Nazareth, is going by.”

³⁸The blind man cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

³⁹The people leading the group warned the blind man to be quiet. But the blind man shouted even more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁰Jesus stopped and ordered the blind man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, ⁴¹“What do you want me to do for you?”

He said, “Lord, I want to see.”

⁴²Jesus said to him, “Then see. You are healed because you believed.”

⁴³At once the man was able to see, and he followed Jesus, thanking God. All the people who saw this praised God.

Life Lessons

[Luke 19:1–48](#)

Situation

The testimony of Zacchaeus as well as Jesus' tears for Jerusalem demonstrate that God desires genuine faith from his people.

Observation

God will judge those who peddle the faith and those who prevent people from worshipping.

Inspiration

It's tough to be let down. It's disappointing when you think someone is interested in you, only to find they are interested in your money. When salespeople do it, it's irritating—but when people of faith do it, it can be devastating.

It's a sad but true fact of the faith: religion is used for profit and prestige. When it is there are two results: people are exploited and God is infuriated.

There's no better example of this than what happened at the temple. After he had entered the city on the back of a donkey, Jesus “went into the Temple. After he had looked at everything, since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve apostles” [[Mark 11:11](#)] ...

Want to know what he saw? Then read what he did on Monday, the next morning when he returned. “Jesus went into the Temple and threw out all the people who were buying and selling there. He turned over the tables of those who were exchanging

different kinds of money, and he upset the benches of those who were selling doves. Jesus said to all the people there, ‘It is written in the Scriptures, “My temple will be called a house for prayer.” But you are changing it into a “hideout for robbers”’” [[Matthew 21:12–13](#)].

What did he see? Hucksters. Faith peddlers. What lit the fire under Jesus’ broiler? What was his first thought on Monday? People in the temple making a franchise out of the faith.

It was Passover week. The Passover was the highlight of the Jewish calendar. People came from all regions and many countries to be present for the celebration. Upon arriving they were obligated to meet two requirements.

First, an animal sacrifice, usually a dove. The dove had to be perfect, without blemish. The animal could be brought in from anywhere, but odds were that if you brought a sacrifice from another place, yours would be considered insufficient by the authorities in the temple. So, under the guise of keeping the sacrifice pure, the dove sellers sold doves—at their price.

Second, the people had to pay a tax, a temple tax. It was due every year. During Passover the tax had to be rendered in local currency. Knowing many foreigners would be in Jerusalem to pay the tax, money changers conveniently set up tables and offered to exchange the foreign money for local—for a modest fee, of course.

It’s not difficult to see what angered Jesus.

Pilgrims journeyed days to see God, to witness the holy, to worship His Majesty. But before they were taken into the presence of God, they were taken to the cleaners. What was promised and what was delivered were two different things....

“I’ve had enough,” was written all over the Messiah’s face. In he stormed. Doves flapped and tables flew. People scampered and traders scattered.

This was not an impulsive show. This was not a temper tantrum. It was a deliberate act with an intentional message. Jesus had seen the money changers the day before. He went to sleep with pictures of this midway and its barkers in his memory. And when he woke up the next morning, knowing his days were drawing to a close, he chose to make a point: “You cash in on my people and you’ve got me to answer to.” God will never hold guiltless those who exploit the privilege of worship. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

Application

Be careful that you are motivated to attend church to worship and get to know God better. We can become like the people in this chapter if we attend church in order to meet business contacts.

Exploration

God’s Compassion—[Exodus 33:19](#); [Psalms 84:11](#); [Nahum 1:7](#); [Matthew 9:36](#); [Romans 8:32](#).

Zacchaeus Meets Jesus

Jesus was going through the city of Jericho. ²A man was there named Zacchaeus, who was a very important tax collector, and he was wealthy. ³He wanted to see who Jesus was, but he was not able because he was too short to see above the crowd. ⁴He ran ahead to a place where Jesus would come, and he climbed a sycamore tree so he could see him. ⁵When Jesus came to that place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down! I must stay at your house today.”

⁶Zacchaeus came down quickly and welcomed him gladly. ⁷All the people saw this and began to complain, “Jesus is staying with a sinner!”

⁸But Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “I will give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times more.”

⁹Jesus said to him, “Salvation has come to this house today, because this man also belongs to the family of Abraham. ¹⁰The Son of Man came to find lost people and save them.”

A Story About Three Servants

¹¹As the people were listening to this, Jesus told them a story because he was near Jerusalem and they thought God’s

kingdom would appear immediately. ¹²He said: “A very important man went to a country far away to be made a king and then to return home. ¹³So he called ten of his servants and gave a [coin](#) to each servant. He said, ‘Do business with this money until I get back.’ ¹⁴But the people in the kingdom hated the man. So they sent a group to follow him and say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’

¹⁵“But the man became king. When he returned home, he said, ‘Call those servants who have my money so I can know how much they earned with it.’

¹⁶“The first servant came and said, ‘Sir, I earned ten coins with the one you gave me.’ ¹⁷The king said to the servant, ‘Excellent! You are a good servant. Since I can trust you with small things, I will let you rule over ten of my cities.’

¹⁸“The second servant said, ‘Sir, I earned five coins with your one.’ ¹⁹The king said to this servant, ‘You can rule over five cities.’

²⁰“Then another servant came in and said to the king, ‘Sir, here is your coin which I wrapped in a piece of cloth and hid. ²¹I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You even take money that you didn’t earn and gather food that you didn’t plant.’ ²²Then the king said to the servant, ‘I will condemn you by your own words, you evil servant. You knew that I am a hard man, taking money that I didn’t earn and gathering food that I didn’t plant. ²³Why then didn’t you put my money in the bank? Then when I came back, my money would have earned some interest.’

²⁴“The king said to the men who were standing by, ‘Take the coin away from this servant and give it to the servant who earned ten coins.’ ²⁵They said, ‘But sir, that servant already

has ten coins.’ ²⁶The king said, ‘Those who have will be given more, but those who do not have anything will have everything taken away from them. ²⁷Now where are my enemies who didn’t want me to be king? Bring them here and kill them before me.’”

Jesus Enters Jerusalem as a King

²⁸After Jesus said this, he went on toward Jerusalem. ²⁹As Jesus came near Bethphage and Bethany, towns near the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent out two of his followers.

³⁰He said, “Go to the town you can see there. When you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here to me. ³¹If anyone asks you why you are untying it, say that the Master needs it.”

³²The two followers went into town and found the colt just as Jesus had told them. ³³As they were untying it, its owners came out and asked the followers, “Why are you untying our colt?”

³⁴The followers answered, “The Master needs it.” ³⁵So they brought it to Jesus, threw their coats on the colt’s back, and put Jesus on it. ³⁶As Jesus rode toward Jerusalem, others spread their coats on the road before him.

³⁷As he was coming close to Jerusalem, on the way down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of followers began joyfully shouting praise to God for all the miracles they had seen. ³⁸They said,

“God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord!

There is peace in heaven and glory to God!”

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell your followers not to say these things.”

⁴⁰But Jesus answered, “I tell you, if my followers didn’t say these things, then the stones would cry out.”

Jesus Cries for Jerusalem

⁴¹As Jesus came near Jerusalem, he saw the city and cried for it, ⁴²saying, “I wish you knew today what would bring you peace. But now it is hidden from you. ⁴³The time is coming when your enemies will build a wall around you and will hold you in on all sides. ⁴⁴They will destroy you and all your people, and not one stone will be left on another. All this will happen because you did not recognize the time when God came to save you.”

Jesus Goes to the Temple

⁴⁵Jesus went into the Temple and began to throw out the people who were selling things there. ⁴⁶He said, “It is written in the Scriptures, [‘My Temple will be a house for prayer.’](#) But you have changed it into a [‘hideout for robbers’](#)!”

⁴⁷Jesus taught in the Temple every day. The leading priests, the experts on the law, and some of the leaders of the people wanted to kill Jesus. ⁴⁸But they did not know how they could do it, because all the people were listening closely to him.

Life Lessons

Luke 20:1–47

Situation

The Jewish leaders feared Jesus' popularity. They believed that an emotional crowd following Jesus would bring unwanted Roman oppression and undermine the limited self-rule the Jews were allowed to exercise.

Observation

Jesus hates a hypocritical and rebellious attitude from those who claim to be religious.

Inspiration

The Pharisees prayed, praised, and proclaimed in worship to God with their lips. But, as Christ points out in this text, their clinging to personal and false traditions demonstrated that their hearts were far from God.

We pastors are in a unique position to watch people worship on Sunday morning. Many have come to worship our true and living God, but I periodically notice other attitudes displayed. A few, while preparing for the awesome privilege of worship, see an activity in the bulletin that they do not like. They turn to their neighbor: "Did you see what the youth department is doing? We would never have done that when I was growing up."

Then the leader calls them to worship: "Let us all turn to hymn forty-two, 'Amazing Grace,' and lift our voices to our gracious Savior."

They sigh and reach for the hymnals. What was that number again? “Amazing Grace”? We sang that three weeks ago. Why don’t they pick something else?

“Let us stand as we worship Him.”

Stand! Why do we have to stand?

“We will sing all four stanzas.”

All four stanzas! Why not sing one and get on with it?

The lips move as they sing but the heart is far from Him.

Then comes the pastoral prayer. I once had a deacon who would time my pastoral prayers. At the deacon’s meeting he would report the length and denounce the fact that we spent too much time in prayer.

Then the Word of God is proclaimed. Sermon time, and they start dropping like flies. Twenty minutes into it and someone is checking his watch to see why it stopped. At noon all the wristwatch alarms start to go off.

Our worship traditions say a lot about our heart condition.

I think there must be times when God weeps at 11:0 A.M. on Sunday.

God measures us at the heart level. Externals are only symptomatic, superficial, and cosmetic. Externally we can fool all the people most of the time. But God? Never!

I was preparing to go into the evening service one Sunday night when I heard that Bob, my friend and a

deacon in the church, had just collapsed on the sidewalk. As I approached, the emergency unit pulled up, and three medical technicians jumped out. Did they attempt to rearrange his motionless body? Did they straighten his tie? Did they comb his hair and polish his shoes?

Not on your life. It was no time for cosmetics. They went right for the heart. That was the crux of the matter.

God goes right for the heart. It is where He meets us. It is where He evaluates us. It is where He desires that the flame of an intimate, life-changing relationship with Him be fanned into a great source of spiritual heart and light. He desperately seeks to dwell with us at the core....

The call of authentic Christianity is to “have a heart”—a heart for God. A heart for God requires that we move from externals to internals, that we reject the easy way of ritual and habit. It requires that we develop a vibrant relationship with Christ at the very core of our being.

(From *Fan the Flame* by Joseph Stowell)

Application

Why do you go to church? Do you go to worship God or to fulfill an obligation? Be honest. Make a list of ideal motives for church involvement and compare it with your reasons. When you wake up next Sunday, decide to go for the right reasons.

Exploration

Hypocrisy—[Psalm 5:9](#); [Isaiah 29:13](#); [Ezekiel 33:31–32](#); [Matthew 16:5–12](#); [Romans 2:17–24](#); [Titus 1:16](#); [1](#)

Peter 2:1.

Jewish Leaders Question Jesus

One day Jesus was in the Temple, teaching the people and telling them the Good News. The leading priests, teachers of the law, and older leaders came up to talk with him, ²saying, “Tell us what authority you have to do these things? Who gave you this authority?”

³Jesus answered, “I will also ask you a question. Tell me: ⁴When John baptized people, was that authority from God or just from other people?”

⁵They argued about this, saying, “If we answer, ‘John’s baptism was from God,’ Jesus will say, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’ ⁶But if we say, ‘It was from other people,’ all the people will stone us to death, because they believe John was a prophet.” ⁷So they answered that they didn’t know where it came from.

⁸Jesus said to them, “Then I won’t tell you what authority I have to do these things.”

A Story About God’s Son

⁹Then Jesus told the people this story: “A man planted a vineyard and leased it to some farmers. Then he went away for a long time. ¹⁰When it was time for the grapes to be picked, he sent a servant to the farmers to get some of the grapes. But

they beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹Then he sent another servant. They beat this servant also, and showed no respect for him, and sent him away empty-handed. ¹²So the man sent a third servant. The farmers wounded him and threw him out. ¹³The owner of the vineyard said, 'What will I do now? I will send my son whom I love. Maybe they will respect him.' ¹⁴But when the farmers saw the son, they said to each other, 'This son will inherit the vineyard. If we kill him, it will be ours.' ¹⁵So the farmers threw the son out of the vineyard and killed him.

"What will the owner of this vineyard do to them? ¹⁶He will come and kill those farmers and will give the vineyard to other farmers."

When the people heard this story, they said, "Let this never happen!"

¹⁷But Jesus looked at them and said, "Then what does this verse mean:

'The stone that the builders rejected
became the cornerstone'?"

[Psalm 118:22](#)

¹⁸Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken, and the person on whom it falls, that person will be crushed!"

¹⁹The teachers of the law and the leading priests wanted to arrest Jesus at once, because they knew the story was about them. But they were afraid of what the people would do.

Is It Right to Pay Taxes or Not?

²⁰So they watched Jesus and sent some spies who acted as if they were sincere. They wanted to trap Jesus in saying something wrong so they could hand him over to the authority and power of the governor. ²¹So the spies asked Jesus, “Teacher, we know that what you say and teach is true. You pay no attention to who people are, and you always teach the truth about God’s way. ²²Tell us, is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

²³But Jesus, knowing they were trying to trick him, said, ²⁴“Show me a coin. Whose image and name are on it?”

They said, “Caesar’s.”

²⁵Jesus said to them, “Then give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and give to God the things that are God’s.”

²⁶So they were not able to trap Jesus in anything he said in the presence of the people. And being amazed at his answer, they became silent.

Some Sadducees Try to Trick Jesus

²⁷Some Sadducees, who believed people would not rise from the dead, came to Jesus. ²⁸They asked, “Teacher, Moses wrote that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, then that man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. ²⁹Once there were seven brothers. The first brother married and died, but had no children. ³⁰Then the second brother married the widow, and he died. ³¹And the third brother married the widow, and he died. The same thing happened with all seven brothers; they died and had no children. ³²Finally, the woman died also. ³³Since all seven brothers had married her, whose wife will she be when people rise from the dead?”

³⁴Jesus said to them, “On earth, people marry and are given to someone to marry. ³⁵But those who will be worthy to be raised from the dead and live again will not marry, nor will they be given to someone to marry. ³⁶In that life they are like angels and cannot die. They are children of God, because they have been raised from the dead. ³⁷Even Moses clearly showed that the dead are raised to life. When he wrote about the [burning bush](#), he said that the Lord is ‘[the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.](#)’ ³⁸God is the God of the living, not the dead, because all people are alive to him.”

³⁹Some of the teachers of the law said, “Teacher, your answer was good.” ⁴⁰No one was brave enough to ask him another question.

Is the Christ the Son of David?

⁴¹Then Jesus said, “Why do people say that the Christ is the Son of David? ⁴²In the book of Psalms, David himself says:

‘The Lord said to my Lord:

Sit by me at my right side,

⁴³[until I put your enemies under your control.](#)’

[Psalm 110:1](#)

⁴⁴David calls the Christ ‘Lord,’ so how can the Christ be his son?”

Jesus Accuses Some Leaders

⁴⁵While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his followers, ⁴⁶“Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around wearing fancy clothes, and they love for people to greet them with respect in the marketplaces. They love to have the most important seats in the synagogues and at feasts. ⁴⁷But they cheat widows and steal their houses and then try to make themselves look good by saying long prayers. They will receive a greater punishment.”

Life Lessons

Luke 21:1–22:71

Situation

The Temple was rebuilt about 516 B.C.. In addition, Herod had undertaken a massive renovation and enlargement of the Temple. Jesus prophesied that persecution would come and the Temple would be destroyed.

Observation

As Jesus' disciples, we should be prepared for persecution and be discerning about world events. In this world's turmoil, we can also have great comfort that Jesus will return.

Inspiration

When my wife flew to Canada to celebrate her parents' fiftieth wedding anniversary, my two sons and I remained at home. None of us was particularly adept at household things, proved by our initial meal of pizza and ice cream floats. There was one particular problem—we didn't know when my wife would return home. We divided the household responsibilities: preparing meals, doing the dishes, and washing the laundry. As we anticipated when she might be coming, we cleaned the house in earnest; we even decorated the living room with colorful streamers. She was coming at any time, and we wanted to be ready.

The teaching that Christ can come at anytime is called the "imminent" return of Christ. It does not say He is coming soon, but rather that He may come at

any moment. What is the significance? Does that affect the way we live?

Reflecting on the trials and sufferings in this present age, Paul said we are “waiting eagerly” for the completion of our redemption ([Romans 8:23, 25](#)). As a pregnant mother anticipates the birth of her child, so all creation is groaning with labor pains, waiting for release. Paul exhorted the Philippians not to center their attention on earthly things because “our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” ([Philippians 3:20](#)).

We eagerly wait for our Savior because He can come at any moment. If we know His coming is far off, we don’t wait eagerly. As we look for Him, we want to be pleasing to Him when He returns; therefore we are instructed to “deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age” ([Titus 2:12–13](#)). The Thessalonian believers left their idolatry to search for the true God and “to wait for His Son from heaven” ([1 Thessalonians 1:10](#)). What a simple, beautiful statement. Are you waiting for your Savior each day? As G. Campbell Morgan said, “I never begin my work in the morning without thinking that perhaps He may interrupt my work and begin His own. I am not looking for death—I am looking for Him.” He may come today—what a glorious hope! (From *Approaching God* by Paul Enns)

Application

We have all eagerly waited for one event or

another in our lives. Do you look forward to Christ's return? Do you get more excited anticipating a birthday or anniversary? Why or why not? What can you do to prepare for Christ's return?

Exploration

Signs of Christ's Return—[Mark 13:6](#); [2 Timothy 4:3–4](#); [2 Peter 3:3–4](#); [Revelation 13:1–8](#).

True Giving

As Jesus looked up, he saw some rich people putting their gifts into the Temple [money box](#).² Then he saw a poor widow putting two small copper coins into the box.³ He said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow gave more than all those rich people.⁴ They gave only what they did not need. This woman is very poor, but she gave all she had to live on.”

The Temple Will Be Destroyed

⁵Some people were talking about the Temple and how it was decorated with beautiful stones and gifts offered to God.

But Jesus said, ⁶“As for these things you are looking at, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another. Every stone will be thrown down.”

⁷They asked Jesus, “Teacher, when will these things happen? What will be the sign that they are about to take place?”

⁸Jesus said, “Be careful so you are not fooled. Many people will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the One’ and, ‘The time has come!’ But don’t follow them. ⁹When you hear about wars and riots, don’t be afraid, because these things must happen first, but the end will come later.”

¹⁰Then he said to them, “Nations will fight against other

nations, and kingdoms against other kingdoms.¹¹ In various places there will be great earthquakes, sicknesses, and a lack of food. Fearful events and great signs will come from heaven.

¹²“But before all these things happen, people will arrest you and treat you cruelly. They will judge you in their synagogues and put you in jail and force you to stand before kings and governors, because you follow me.¹³ But this will give you an opportunity to tell about me.¹⁴ Make up your minds not to worry ahead of time about what you will say.¹⁵ I will give you the wisdom to say things that none of your enemies will be able to stand against or prove wrong.¹⁶ Even your parents, brothers, relatives, and friends will turn against you, and they will kill some of you.¹⁷ All people will hate you because you follow me.¹⁸ But none of these things can really harm you.¹⁹ By continuing to have faith you will save your lives.

Jerusalem Will Be Destroyed

²⁰“When you see armies all around Jerusalem, you will know it will soon be destroyed.²¹ At that time, the people in Judea should run away to the mountains. The people in Jerusalem must get out, and those who are near the city should not go in.²² These are the days of punishment to bring about all that is written in the Scriptures.²³ How terrible it will be for women who are pregnant or have nursing babies! Great trouble will come upon this land, and God will be angry with these people.²⁴ They will be killed by the sword and taken as prisoners to all nations. Jerusalem will be crushed by non-Jewish people until their time is over.

Don't Fear

²⁵“There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On earth, nations will be afraid and confused because of the roar and fury of the sea. ²⁶People will be so afraid they will faint, wondering what is happening to the world, because the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷Then people will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸When these things begin to happen, look up and hold your heads high, because the time when God will free you is near!”

Jesus' Words Will Live Forever

²⁹Then Jesus told this story: “Look at the fig tree and all the other trees. ³⁰When their leaves appear, you know that summer is near. ³¹In the same way, when you see these things happening, you will know that God's kingdom is near.

³²“I tell you the truth, all these things will happen while the people of this time are still living. ³³Earth and sky will be destroyed, but the words I have spoken will never be destroyed.

Be Ready All the Time

³⁴“Be careful not to spend your time feasting, drinking, or worrying about worldly things. If you do, that day might come on you suddenly, ³⁵like a trap on all people on earth. ³⁶So be ready all the time. Pray that you will be strong enough to escape all these things that will happen and that you will be

able to stand before the Son of Man.”

³⁷During the day, Jesus taught the people in the Temple, and at night he went out of the city and stayed on the Mount of Olives. ³⁸Every morning all the people got up early to go to the Temple to listen to him.

Judas Becomes an Enemy of Jesus

It was almost time for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover Feast.²The leading priests and teachers of the law were trying to find a way to kill Jesus, because they were afraid of the people.

³Satan entered Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' twelve apostles.⁴Judas went to the leading priests and some of the soldiers who guarded the Temple and talked to them about a way to hand Jesus over to them.⁵They were pleased and agreed to give Judas money.⁶He agreed and watched for the best time to hand Jesus over to them when he was away from the crowd.

Jesus Eats the Passover Meal

⁷The Day of Unleavened Bread came when the Passover lambs had to be sacrificed.⁸Jesus said to Peter and John, "Go and prepare the Passover meal for us to eat."

⁹They asked, "Where do you want us to prepare it?"¹⁰Jesus said to them, "After you go into the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters,¹¹and tell the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says: Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover meal with my followers?'"¹²Then he will show you a large, furnished room upstairs. Prepare the Passover meal there."

¹³So Peter and John left and found everything as Jesus had said. And they prepared the Passover meal.

The Lord's Supper

¹⁴When the time came, Jesus and the apostles were sitting at the table. ¹⁵He said to them, "I wanted very much to eat this Passover meal with you before I suffer. ¹⁶I will not eat another Passover meal until it is given its true meaning in the kingdom of God."

¹⁷Then Jesus took a cup, gave thanks, and said, "Take this cup and share it among yourselves. ¹⁸I will not drink again from the [fruit of the vine](#) until God's kingdom comes."

¹⁹Then Jesus took some bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to the apostles, saying, "This is my body, which I am giving for you. Do this to remember me." ²⁰In the same way, after supper, Jesus took the cup and said, "This cup is the new agreement that God makes with his people. This new agreement begins with my blood which is poured out for you."

Who Will Turn Against Jesus?

²¹"But one of you will turn against me, and his hand is with mine on the table. ²²What God has planned for the Son of Man will happen, but how terrible it will be for that one who turns against the Son of Man."

²³Then the apostles asked each other which one of them would do that.

Be Like a Servant

²⁴The apostles also began to argue about which one of them

was the most important. ²⁵But Jesus said to them, “The kings of the non-Jewish people rule over them, and those who have authority over others like to be called ‘friends of the people.’ ²⁶But you must not be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the leader should be like the servant. ²⁷Who is more important: the one sitting at the table or the one serving? You think the one at the table is more important, but I am like a servant among you.

²⁸“You have stayed with me through my struggles. ²⁹Just as my Father has given me a kingdom, I also give you a kingdom ³⁰so you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom. And you will sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Don't Lose Your Faith!

³¹“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to test all of you as a farmer sifts his wheat. ³²I have prayed that you will not lose your faith! Help your brothers be stronger when you come back to me.”

³³But Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and even to die with you!”

³⁴But Jesus said, “Peter, before the rooster crows this day, you will say three times that you don't know me.”

Be Ready for Trouble

³⁵Then Jesus said to the apostles, “When I sent you out without a purse, a bag, or sandals, did you need anything?”

They said, “No.”

³⁶He said to them, “But now if you have a purse or a bag, carry that with you. If you don’t have a sword, sell your coat and buy one. ³⁷The Scripture says, ‘He was treated like a criminal.’ and I tell you this scripture must have its full meaning. It was written about me, and it is happening now.”

³⁸His followers said, “Look, Lord, here are two swords.”
He said to them, “That is enough.”

Jesus Prays Alone

³⁹Jesus left the city and went to the Mount of Olives, as he often did, and his followers went with him. ⁴⁰When he reached the place, he said to them, “Pray for strength against temptation.”

⁴¹Then Jesus went about a stone’s throw away from them. He knelt down and prayed, ⁴²“Father, if you are willing, take away this cup of suffering. But do what you want, not what I want.” ⁴³Then an angel from heaven appeared to him to strengthen him. ⁴⁴Being full of pain, Jesus prayed even harder. His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. ⁴⁵When he finished praying, he went to his followers and found them asleep because of their sadness. ⁴⁶Jesus said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray for strength against temptation.”

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: Master of God’s Domain

God hasn’t kept the ending a secret. He wants us to see the big picture. He wants us to know that he

wins. And he also wants us to know that the evil we witness on the stage of life is not as mighty as we might think.

Many passages teach these truths, but my favorite is a couple of verses recorded by Luke. Jesus speaks the words on the night before his death. He is in the upper room with his followers. They are shocked to hear his prophecy that one of them will betray the Master. Their defensiveness leads to an argument, and the argument leads Jesus to exhort them to servanthood.

Then in an abrupt shift, Jesus turns to Simon Peter and makes this intriguing statement: “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to test all of you as a farmer sifts his wheat. I have prayed that you will not lose your faith! Help your brothers be stronger when you come back to me” ([Luke 22:31–32](#)).

This passage gives us a glimpse into an unseen world. It raises many questions, but it also affords many assurances, the chief of which is the chain of command. God is clearly in control, and the devil is on a short leash. Did you notice the verb that followed Satan’s name? Ask. “Satan has asked....”

The devil didn’t demand, resolve, or decide. He asked. Just as he requested permission to tempt Job, he requested permission to tempt Simon Peter. Sort of recasts our image of the old snake, doesn’t it? Instead of the mighty Darth Vader of Gloom, a better caricature is a skinny, back-alley punk who acts tough, but ducks fast when God flexes. “Uh, uh ... I’d ... uh ... like to do a number on Peter—that is, if you

don't mind." The chain of command is clear. Satan does nothing outside of God's domain, and God uses Satan to advance the cause of his kingdom. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

Jesus Is Arrested

⁴⁷While Jesus was speaking, a crowd came up, and Judas, one of the twelve apostles, was leading them. He came close to Jesus so he could kiss him.

⁴⁸But Jesus said to him, “Judas, are you using the kiss to give the Son of Man to his enemies?”

⁴⁹When those who were standing around him saw what was happening, they said, “Lord, should we strike them with our swords?” ⁵⁰And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear.

⁵¹Jesus said, “Stop! No more of this.” Then he touched the servant’s ear and healed him.

⁵²Those who came to arrest Jesus were the leading priests, the soldiers who guarded the Temple, and the older leaders. Jesus said to them, “You came out here with swords and clubs as though I were a criminal. ⁵³I was with you every day in the Temple, and you didn’t arrest me there. But this is your time—the time when darkness rules.”

Peter Says He Doesn’t Know Jesus

⁵⁴They arrested Jesus, and led him away, and brought him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed far behind them.

⁵⁵After the soldiers started a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat together, Peter sat with them. ⁵⁶A servant girl saw Peter sitting there in the firelight, and looking closely at him, she

said, “This man was also with him.”

⁵⁷But Peter said this was not true; he said, “Woman, I don’t know him.”

⁵⁸A short time later, another person saw Peter and said, “You are also one of them.”

But Peter said, “Man, I am not!”

⁵⁹About an hour later, another man insisted, “Certainly this man was with him, because he is from Galilee, too.”

⁶⁰But Peter said, “Man, I don’t know what you are talking about!”

At once, while Peter was still speaking, a rooster crowed.

⁶¹Then the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. And Peter remembered what the Lord had said: “Before the rooster crows this day, you will say three times that you don’t know me.”

⁶²Then Peter went outside and cried painfully.

The People Make Fun of Jesus

⁶³The men who were guarding Jesus began making fun of him and beating him.

⁶⁴They blindfolded him and said, “Prove that you are a prophet, and tell us who hit you.” ⁶⁵They said many cruel things to Jesus.

Jesus Before the Leaders

⁶⁶When day came, the council of the older leaders of the people, both the leading priests and the teachers of the law, came together and led Jesus to their highest court. ⁶⁷They said,

“If you are the Christ, tell us.”

Jesus said to them, “If I tell you, you will not believe me.
⁶⁸And if I ask you, you will not answer. ⁶⁹But from now on, the
Son of Man will sit at the right hand of the powerful God.”

⁷⁰They all said, “Then are you the Son of God?”

Jesus said to them, “You say that I am.”

⁷¹They said, “Why do we need witnesses now? We
ourselves heard him say this.”

Life Lessons

Luke 23:1-56

Situation

Incited by the Temple priests, an angry mob demanded that Pilate crucify Jesus. Pilate knew that he did not have justification for using the death penalty.

Observation

Through his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus fulfilled his earthly mission and atoned for sin.

Inspiration

The King swallowed....

He looked at the Prince of Light. "The darkness will be great." He passed his hand over the spotless face of his Son. "The pain will be awful." Then he paused and looked at his darkened dominion. When he looked up, his eyes were moist. "But there is no other way."

The Son looked into the stars as he heard the answer. "Then, let it be done."

Slowly the words that would kill the Son began to come from the lips of the Father.

"Hour of death, moment of sacrifice, it is your moment. Rehearsed a million times on false altars with false lambs; the moment of truth has come....

"Oh, my Son, my Child. Look up into the heavens and see my face before I turn it. Hear my voice before I silence it. Would that I could save you and them. But they don't see and they don't hear.

“The living must die so that the dying can live. The time has come to kill the Lamb.” ...

God must have wept as he performed his task. Every lie, every lure, every act done in shadows was in that cup. Slowly, hideously they were absorbed into the body of the Son. The final act of incarnation....

The throne room is dark and cavernous. The eyes of the King are closed. He is resting.

In his dream he is again in the Garden. The cool of the evening floats across the river as the three walk. They speak of the Garden—of how it is, of how it will be.

“Father ...” the Son begins. The King replays the word again. Father. Father. The word was a flower, petal-delicate, yet so easily crushed. Oh, how he longed for his children to call him Father again.

A noise snaps him from his dream. He opens his eyes and sees a transcendent figure gleaming in the doorway. “It is finished, Father. I have come home.”
(From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

Application

By faith in Christ, we gain access to all of God’s treasures—joy, peace, and eternal life. Don’t wait another minute. Receive Christ as your Savior and Lord. Commit the rest of your life to following his teachings.

Exploration

Sacrifice—[1 Samuel 15:22](#); [Psalms 50:5–13](#); [51:17](#).

Pilate Questions Jesus

Then the whole group stood up and led Jesus to [Pilate](#). ²They began to accuse Jesus, saying, “We caught this man telling things that mislead our people. He says that we should not pay taxes to Caesar, and he calls himself the Christ, a king.”

³Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “Those are your words.”

⁴Pilate said to the leading priests and the people, “I find nothing against this man.”

⁵They were insisting, saying, “But Jesus makes trouble with the people, teaching all around Judea. He began in Galilee, and now he is here.”

Pilate Sends Jesus to Herod

⁶Pilate heard this and asked if Jesus was from Galilee. ⁷Since Jesus was under Herod’s authority, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, who was in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, because he had heard about Jesus and had wanted to meet him for a long time. He was hoping to see Jesus work a miracle. ⁹Herod asked Jesus many questions, but Jesus said nothing. ¹⁰The leading priests and teachers of the law were standing there, strongly accusing Jesus. ¹¹After Herod and his soldiers had made fun of Jesus, they dressed him in a kingly

robe and sent him back to Pilate. ¹²In the past, Pilate and Herod had always been enemies, but on that day they became friends.

Jesus Must Die

¹³Pilate called the people together with the leading priests and the rulers. ¹⁴He said to them, “You brought this man to me, saying he makes trouble among the people. But I have questioned him before you all, and I have not found him guilty of what you say. ¹⁵Also, Herod found nothing wrong with him; he sent him back to us. Look, he has done nothing for which he should die. ¹⁶So, after I punish him, I will let him go free.” ¹⁷[n](#)

¹⁸But the people shouted together, “Take this man away! Let Barabbas go free!” ¹⁹(Barabbas was a man who was in prison for his part in a riot in the city and for murder.)

²⁰Pilate wanted to let Jesus go free and told this to the crowd. ²¹But they shouted again, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

²²A third time Pilate said to them, “Why? What wrong has he done? I can find no reason to kill him. So I will have him punished and set him free.”

²³But they continued to shout, demanding that Jesus be crucified. Their yelling became so loud that ²⁴Pilate decided to give them what they wanted. ²⁵He set free the man who was in jail for rioting and murder, and he handed Jesus over to them to do with him as they wished.

Jesus Is Crucified

²⁶As they led Jesus away, Simon, a man from Cyrene, was

coming in from the fields. They forced him to carry Jesus' cross and to walk behind him.

²⁷A large crowd of people was following Jesus, including some women who were sad and crying for him. ²⁸But Jesus turned and said to them, "Women of Jerusalem, don't cry for me. Cry for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹The time is coming when people will say, 'Happy are the women who cannot have children and who have no babies to nurse.' ³⁰Then people will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' And they will say to the hills, 'Cover us!' ³¹If they act like this now when life is good, what will happen when bad times come?"

³²There were also two criminals led out with Jesus to be put to death. ³³When they came to a place called the Skull, the soldiers crucified Jesus and the criminals—one on his right and the other on his left. ³⁴Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, because they don't know what they are doing."ⁿ

The soldiers threw lots to decide who would get his clothes. ³⁵The people stood there watching. And the leaders made fun of Jesus, saying, "He saved others. Let him save himself if he is God's Chosen One, the Christ."

³⁶The soldiers also made fun of him, coming to Jesus and offering him some vinegar. ³⁷They said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸At the top of the cross these words were written: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁹One of the criminals on a cross began to shout insults at Jesus: "Aren't you the Christ? Then save yourself and us."

⁴⁰But the other criminal stopped him and said, "You should fear God! You are getting the same punishment he is. ⁴¹We are punished justly, getting what we deserve for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴²Then he said, "Jesus,

remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

⁴³Jesus said to him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in [paradise](#).”

Jesus Dies

⁴⁴It was about noon, and the whole land became dark until three o’clock in the afternoon, ⁴⁵because the sun did not shine. The [curtain in the Temple](#) was torn in two. ⁴⁶Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Father, I give you my life.” After Jesus said this, he died.

⁴⁷When the army officer there saw what happened, he praised God, saying, “Surely this was a good man!”

⁴⁸When all the people who had gathered there to watch saw what happened, they returned home, beating their chests because they were so sad. ⁴⁹But those who were close friends of Jesus, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance and watched.

Joseph Takes Jesus’ Body

⁵⁰There was a good and religious man named Joseph who was a member of the council. ⁵¹But he had not agreed to the other leaders’ plans and actions against Jesus. He was from the town of Arimathea and was waiting for the kingdom of God to come.

⁵²Joseph went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus. ⁵³He took the body down from the cross, wrapped it in cloth, and put it in a tomb that was cut out of a wall of rock. This tomb had never been used before. ⁵⁴This was late on Preparation Day, and

when the sun went down, the Sabbath day would begin.

⁵⁵The women who had come from Galilee with Jesus followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how Jesus' body was laid. ⁵⁶Then the women left to prepare spices and perfumes.

On the Sabbath day they rested, as the law of Moses commanded.

Life Lessons

Luke 24:1–53

Situation

The disciples failed to understand what Jesus was saying when he told them that he would rise again.

Observation

God uses other believers to reveal his will to us.

Inspiration

To pray, “Thy will be done” is to seek the heart of God. The word “will” means “strong desire.” The study is where we learn what God desires. What is his heart? His passion? He wants you to know it.

Shall God hide from us what he is going to do? Apparently not, for he has gone to great lengths to reveal his will to us. Could he have done more than send his Son to lead us? Could he have done more than give his word to teach us? Could he have done more than orchestrate events to awaken us? Could he have done more than send his Holy Spirit to counsel us?

God is not the God of confusion, and wherever he sees sincere seekers with confused hearts, you can bet your sweet December that he will do whatever it takes to help them see his will. That’s what he was doing on the road to Emmaus.

Everybody else was on-line, and they were on foot. They saw the death of Jesus as the death of the movement, and they packed their bags and headed home. And that is where they were going when Jesus

appeared to them. How sweet is the appearance of Jesus on the road. Let a lamb take the wrong turn and miss the pasture and our Shepherd, unwilling to let him wander too far, comes to guide him home. How does he do this? How does he reveal his will to us? You might be surprised at the simplicity of the process.

The first mistake of the duo was to disregard the words of their fellow disciples. God reveals his will through a community of believers. On the first Easter, he spoke through women who spoke to the others. “Today some women among us amazed us. Early this morning they went to the tomb, but they did not find his body there. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said Jesus was alive!” ([Luke 24:22–23](#)).

His plan hasn’t changed. Jesus still speaks to believers through believers. “The whole body depends on Christ, and all the parts of the body are joined and held together. Each part does its own work to make the whole body grow and be strong with love” ([Ephesians 4:15](#)). (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Application

Who in your life has helped make God’s will known to you? Take time in the next couple of weeks to send them a thank-you note for their involvement in your life. Ask God how he can use you to help build the body of Christ.

Exploration

Body of Believers—[Acts 14:21](#); [Romans 12:4–8](#); [1](#)

[Corinthians 12](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:1–11](#); [Hebrews 12:1](#).

Jesus Rises from the Dead

Very early on the first day of the week, at dawn, the women came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared.² They found the stone rolled away from the entrance of the tomb,³ but when they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.⁴ While they were wondering about this, two men in shining clothes suddenly stood beside them.⁵ The women were very afraid and bowed their heads to the ground. The men said to them, “Why are you looking for a living person in this place for the dead? ⁶He is not here; he has risen from the dead. Do you remember what he told you in Galilee? ⁷He said the Son of Man must be handed over to sinful people, be crucified, and rise from the dead on the third day.” ⁸Then the women remembered what Jesus had said.

⁹The women left the tomb and told all these things to the eleven apostles and the other followers.¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and some other women who told the apostles everything that had happened at the tomb.¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because it sounded like nonsense.¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb. Bending down and looking in, he saw only the cloth that Jesus’ body had been wrapped in. Peter went away to his home, wondering about what had happened.

Jesus on the Road to Emmaus

¹³That same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a town named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴They were talking about everything that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and began walking with them, ¹⁶but they were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷Then he said, "What are these things you are talking about while you walk?"

The two followers stopped, looking very sad. ¹⁸The one named Cleopas answered, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who does not know what just happened there?"

¹⁹Jesus said to them, "What are you talking about?"

They said, "About Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet who said and did many powerful things before God and all the people. ²⁰Our leaders and the leading priests handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. ²¹But we were hoping that he would free Israel. Besides this, it is now the third day since this happened. ²²And today some women among us amazed us. Early this morning they went to the tomb, ²³but they did not find his body there. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said that Jesus was alive! ²⁴So some of our group went to the tomb, too. They found it just as the women said, but they did not see Jesus."

²⁵Then Jesus said to them, "You are foolish and slow to believe everything the prophets said. ²⁶They said that the Christ must suffer these things before he enters his glory." ²⁷Then starting with what Moses and all the prophets had said about him, Jesus began to explain everything that had been written about himself in the Scriptures.

²⁸They came near the town of Emmaus, and Jesus acted as if he were going farther. ²⁹But they begged him, “Stay with us, because it is late; it is almost night.” So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰When Jesus was at the table with them, he took some bread, gave thanks, divided it, and gave it to them. ³¹And then, they were allowed to recognize Jesus. But when they saw who he was, he disappeared. ³²They said to each other, “It felt like a fire burning in us when Jesus talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us.”

³³So the two followers got up at once and went back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven apostles and others gathered. ³⁴They were saying, “The Lord really has risen from the dead! He showed himself to Simon.”

³⁵Then the two followers told what had happened on the road and how they recognized Jesus when he divided the bread.

Jesus Appears to His Followers

³⁶While the two followers were telling this, Jesus himself stood right in the middle of them and said, “Peace be with you.”

³⁷They were fearful and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸But Jesus said, “Why are you troubled? Why do you doubt what you see? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have a living body as you see I have.”

⁴⁰After Jesus said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹While they still could not believe it because they were amazed and happy, Jesus said to them, “Do you have any food

here?” ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish. ⁴³While the followers watched, Jesus took the fish and ate it.

⁴⁴He said to them, “Remember when I was with you before? I said that everything written about me must happen—everything in the law of Moses, the books of the prophets, and the Psalms.”

⁴⁵Then Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶He said to them, “It is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day ⁴⁷and that a change of hearts and lives and forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name to all nations, starting at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹I will send you what my Father has promised, but you must stay in Jerusalem until you have received that power from heaven.”

Jesus Goes Back to Heaven

⁵⁰Jesus led his followers as far as Bethany, and he raised his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹While he was blessing them, he was separated from them and carried into heaven. ⁵²They worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem very happy. ⁵³They stayed in the Temple all the time, praising God.

excellent This word was used to show respect to an important person like a king or ruler.

Abijah's group The Jewish priests were divided into twenty-four groups. See [1 Chronicles 24](#).

ashamed The Jewish people thought it was a disgrace for women not to have children.

registration Census. A counting of all the people and the things they own.

engaged For the Jewish people, an engagement was a lasting agreement. It could only be broken by divorce.

pure The Law of Moses said that forty days after a Jewish woman gave birth to a son, she must be cleansed by a ceremony at the Temple. Read [Leviticus 12:2-8](#).

"Every ... Lord." Quotation from [Exodus 13:2](#).

"You ... pigeons." Quotation from [Leviticus 12:8](#).

The ax ... fire. This means that God is ready to punish his people who do not obey him.

He will ... out. This means that Jesus will come to separate good people from bad people, saving the good and punishing the bad.

son "Son" in Jewish lists of ancestors can sometimes mean grandson or more distant relative.

'A person...bread.' Quotation from [Deuteronomy 8:3](#).

'You ... him.' Quotation from [Deuteronomy 6:13](#).

'Do ... God.' Quotation from [Deuteronomy 6:16](#).

Simon Simon's other name was Peter.

show ... priest The Law of Moses said a priest must say when a Jewish person with a skin disease was well.

Moses commanded Read about this in [Leviticus 14:1-32](#).

give up eating This is called "fasting." The people would give up eating for a special time of prayer and worship to God.

It was also done to show sadness and disappointment.

reed It means that John was not ordinary or weak like grass blown by the wind.

coins Roman denarii. One coin was the average pay for one day's work.

“Legion” Means very many. A legion was about five thousand men in the Roman army.

eternal darkness Literally, “the abyss,” something like a pit or a hole that has no end.

shake ... feet A warning. It showed that they had rejected these people.

Elijah A man who spoke for God and who lived hundreds of years before Christ. See [1 Kings 17](#).

Moses and Elijah Two of the most important Jewish leaders in the past. God had given Moses the Law, and Elijah was an important prophet.

Verse 54 Here, some Greek copies add: “... as Elijah did.”

Verses 55–56 Some copies read: “But Jesus turned and scolded them. And Jesus said, ‘You don’t know what kind of spirit you belong to. ⁵⁶The Son of Man did not come to destroy the souls of people but to save them.’ Then...”

seventy-two Many Greek copies read seventy.

dirt ... you A warning. It showed that they had rejected these people.

Sodom City that God destroyed because the people were so evil.

Tyre and Sidon Towns where wicked people lived.

Korazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum Towns by Lake Galilee where Jesus preached to the people.

seventy-two Many Greek copies read seventy.

“Love ... mind.” Quotation from [Deuteronomy 6:5](#).

“Love ... yourself.” Quotation from [Leviticus 19:18](#).

Levite Levites were members of the tribe of Levi who helped the Jewish priests with their work in the Temple. Read [1 Chronicles 23:24–32](#).

Samaritan Samaritans were people from Samaria. These people were part Jewish, but the Jews did not accept them as true Jews. Samaritans and Jews disliked each other.

olive oil and wine Oil and wine were used like medicine to soften and clean wounds.

coins Roman denarii. One coin was the average pay for one day’s work.

sign of Jonah Jonah’s three days in the fish are like Jesus’ three days in the tomb. See [Matthew 12:40](#).

Queen of the South The Queen of Sheba. She traveled a thousand miles to learn God’s wisdom from Solomon. Read [1 Kings 10:1–3](#).

wash his hands This was a Jewish religious custom that the Pharisees thought was very important.

Abel ... Zechariah In the Hebrew Old Testament, the first and last men to be murdered.

I ... baptism Jesus was talking about the suffering he would soon go through.

Pilate Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from A.D. 26 to A.D. 36.

‘God ... Lord.’ Quotation from [Psalm 118:26](#).

dropsy A sickness that causes the body to swell larger and larger.

silver coins Roman denarii. One coin was the average pay for one day’s work.

John John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ’s coming ([Matthew 3](#), [Luke 3](#)).

show ... priests The Law of Moses said a priest must say when a person with a skin disease became well.

within Or “among.”

Sodom City that God destroyed because the people were so evil.

Lot's wife A story about what happened to Lot's wife is found in Genesis 19:15–17, 26.

Verse 36 A few Greek copies add verse 36: “Two people will be in the field. One will be taken, and the other will be left.”

give up eating This is called “fasting.” The people would give up eating for a special time of prayer and worship to God. It was also done to show sadness and disappointment.

‘You ... mother.’ Quotation from Exodus 20:12–16; Deuteronomy 5:16–20.

coin A Greek “mina.” One mina was enough money to pay a person for working three months.

‘My Temple ... prayer.’ Quotation from Isaiah 56:7.

‘hideout for robbers’ Quotation from Jeremiah 7:11.

burning bush Read Exodus 3:1–12 in the Old Testament.

‘the God of ... Jacob’ These words are taken from Exodus 3:6.

until ... control Literally, “until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

money box A special box in the Jewish place of worship where people put their gifts to God.

fruit of the vine Product of the grapevine; this may also be translated “wine.”

‘He ... criminal’ Quotation from Isaiah 53:12.

cup Jesus is talking about the painful things that will happen to him. Accepting these things will be hard, like drinking a cup of something bitter.

Pilate Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from A.D. 26 to A.D. 36.

Verse 17 A few Greek copies add verse 17: “Every year at the Passover Feast, Pilate had to release one prisoner to the people.”

If ... come? Literally, “If they do these things in the green tree, what will happen in the dry?”

Verse 34 Some early Greek copies do not have this first part of the verse.

paradise Another word for heaven.

curtain in the Temple A curtain divided the Most Holy Place from the other part of the Temple, the special building in Jerusalem where God commanded the Jewish people to worship him.

[The Book of John](#)

Introduction

He's an old man, this one who sits on the stool and leans against the wall. Eyes closed and face soft, were it not for his hand stroking his beard, you'd think he was asleep.

Some in the room assume he is. He does this often during worship. As the people sing, his eyes will close and his chin will fall until it rests on his chest, and there he will remain motionless. Silent.

Those who know him well know better. They know he is not resting. He is traveling. Atop the music he journeys back, back, back until he is young again. Strong again. There again. There on the seashore with James and the apostles. There on the trail with the disciples and the women. There in the Temple with Caiaphas and the accusers.

It's been sixty years, but John sees him still. The decades took John's strength, but they didn't take his memory. The years dulled his sight, but they didn't dull his vision. The seasons may have wrinkled his face, but they didn't soften his love.

He had been with God. God had been with him. How could he forget?

The wine that moments before had been water—John could still taste it.

The mud placed on the eyes of the blind man in Jerusalem—John could still remember it.

The aroma of Mary's perfume as it filled the room—John could still smell it.

And the voice. Oh, the voice. His voice. John could still hear it.

I am the light of the world, it rang ... I am the door ... I am the way, the truth, the life.

I will come back, it promised, and take you to be with me.

Those who believe in me, it assured, will have life even if they die.

John could hear him. John could see him. Scenes branded on his heart. Words seared into his soul. John would never forget. How could he? He had been there.

He opens his eyes and blinks. The singing has stopped. The teaching has begun. John looks at the listeners and listens to the teacher.

If only you could have been there, he thinks.

But he wasn't. Most weren't. Most weren't even born. And most who were there are dead. Peter is. So is James. Nathanael, Martha, Philip. They are all gone. Even Paul, the apostle who came late, is dead.

Only John remains.

He looks again at the church. Small but earnest. They lean forward to hear the teacher. John listens to him. What a task. Speaking of one he never saw. Explaining words he never heard. John is there if the teacher needs him.

But what will happen when John is gone? What will the teacher do then? When John's voice is silent and his tongue stilled? Who will tell them how Jesus silenced the waves? Will they hear how he fed the thousands? Will they remember how he prayed for unity?

How will they know? If only they could have been there.

Suddenly, in his heart he knows what to do.

Later, under the light of a sunlit shaft, the old fisherman unfolds the scroll and begins to write the story of his life ...

In the beginning there was the Word ...

About This Book

Author:

John, the disciple

Date Written:

A.D. 65–95

Key Themes:

-
- Jesus was and is eternally present in spirit
- While he was on earth, Jesus communicated with many kinds of people about his mission.
- Jesus performed many miracles to show the nature of his love and power.
- Jesus prepared his followers for the future by promising them the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Key Verse:

“In the beginning there was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God” ([John 1:1](#)).

Contents:

1. John the Baptist, the Disciples, and Jesus [1:1–4:54](#)
2. Opposition to Jesus [5:1–12:50](#)
3. Preparation of the Disciples for Jesus’ Death and Resurrection [13:1–17:26](#)
4. Jesus’ Death, Resurrection, and Appearances [18:1–21:25](#)

Life Lessons

John 1:1–51

Situation

The Greeks and the Jews were familiar with the concept of the word. For the Jews it was an expression of God's wisdom, and for the Greeks it meant reason and intellect.

Observation

Leaving his heavenly home, Jesus put on human flesh to bring us God's Good News.

Inspiration

It all happened in a moment, a most remarkable moment... that was like none other. For through that segment of time a spectacular thing occurred. God became a man. While the creatures of earth walked unaware, Divinity arrived. Heaven opened herself and placed her most precious one in a human womb...

God as a fetus. Holiness sleeping in a womb. The creator of life being created.

God was given eyebrows, elbows, two kidneys, and a spleen. He stretched against the walls and floated in the amniotic fluids of his mother.

God had come near...

The hands that first held him were unmanicured, calloused, and dirty.

No silk. No ivory. No hype. No party. No hoopla.

Were it not for the shepherds, there would have been no reception. And were it not for a group of star-gazers, there would have been no gifts...

For thirty-three years he would feel everything you and I have ever felt. He felt weak. He grew weary. He was afraid of failure. He was susceptible to wooing women. He got colds, burped, and had body odor. His feelings got hurt. His feet got tired. And his head ached.

To think of Jesus in such a light is—well, it seems almost irreverent, doesn't it? It's not something we like to do; it's uncomfortable. It is much easier to keep the humanity out of the incarnation. He's easier to stomach that way....

But don't do it. For heaven's sake, don't. Let him be as human as he intended to be. Let him into the mire and muck of our world. For only if we let him in can he pull us out.

(From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

If people want to know what God is like, they can look at Jesus. If they want to know what Jesus is like, they should be able to look at his followers. Can people see Christ in you?

Exploration

The Word Is Born—[John 14:6–7](#); [1 Corinthians 8:5–6](#); [Galatians 4:4](#); [Philippians 2:7–8](#); [1 Timothy 3:16](#); [Hebrews 2:14](#); [1 John 1:1–2](#); [4:2](#).

Christ Comes to the World

In the beginning there was the [Word](#). The Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³All things were made by him, and nothing was made without him. ⁴In him there was life, and that life was the light of all people. ⁵The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overpowered it.

⁶There was a man named [John](#) who was sent by God. ⁷He came to tell people the truth about the Light so that through him all people could hear about the Light and believe. ⁸John was not the Light, but he came to tell people the truth about the Light. ⁹The true Light that gives light to all was coming into the world!

¹⁰The Word was in the world, and the world was made by him, but the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to the world that was his own, but his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who did accept him and believe in him he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³They did not become his children in any human way—by any human parents or human desire. They were born of God.

¹⁴The Word became a human and lived among us. We saw his glory—the glory that belongs to the only Son of the Father—and he was full of grace and truth. ¹⁵John tells the truth about him and cries out, saying, “This is the One I told you

about: “The One who comes after me is greater than I am, because he was living before me.”

¹⁶Because he was full of grace and truth, from him we all received one gift after another. ¹⁷The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. But God the only Son is very close to the Father, and he has shown us what God is like.

John Tells People About Jesus

¹⁹Here is the truth John told when the leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, “Who are you?”

²⁰John spoke freely and did not refuse to answer. He said, “I am not the Christ.”

²¹So they asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?”
He answered, “No, I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet?” they asked.
He answered, “No.”

²²Then they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to tell those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

²³John told them in the words of the prophet Isaiah:

“I am the voice of one
calling out in the desert:
‘Make the road straight for the Lord.’”

Isaiah 40:3

²⁴Some Pharisees who had been sent asked John: ²⁵“If you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet, why do you baptize people?”

²⁶John answered, “I baptize with water, but there is one here with you that you don’t know about.²⁷He is the One who comes after me. I am not good enough to untie the strings of his sandals.”

²⁸This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing people.

²⁹The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him. John said, “Look, the [Lamb of God](#), who takes away the sin of the world!³⁰This is the One I was talking about when I said, ‘A man will come after me, but he is greater than I am, because he was living before me.’³¹Even I did not know who he was, although I came baptizing with water so that the people of Israel would know who he is.”

^{32–33}Then John said, “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven in the form of a dove and rest on him. Until then I did not know who the Christ was. But the God who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘You will see the Spirit come down and rest on a man; he is the One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’³⁴I have seen this happen, and I tell you the truth: This man is the Son of God.”

The First Followers of Jesus

³⁵The next day [John](#) was there again with two of his followers.

³⁶When he saw Jesus walking by, he said, “Look, the [Lamb of God](#)!”

³⁷The two followers heard John say this, so they followed Jesus.³⁸When Jesus turned and saw them following him, he asked, “What are you looking for?”

They said, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” (“Rabbi”

means “Teacher.”)

³⁹He answered, “Come and see.” So the two men went with Jesus and saw where he was staying and stayed there with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon.

⁴⁰One of the two men who followed Jesus after they heard John speak about him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.

⁴¹The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and say to him, “We have found the Messiah.” (“Messiah” means “Christ.”)

⁴²Then Andrew took Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas.” (“Cephas” means “[Peter](#).”)

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”

⁴⁴Philip was from the town of Bethsaida, where Andrew and Peter lived. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the man that Moses wrote about in the law, and the prophets also wrote about him. He is Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth.”

⁴⁶But Nathanael said to Philip, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

Philip answered, “Come and see.”

⁴⁷As Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said, “Here is truly an Israelite. There is nothing false in him.”

⁴⁸Nathanael asked, “How do you know me?”

Jesus answered, “I saw you when you were under the fig tree, before Philip told you about me.”

⁴⁹Then Nathanael said to Jesus, “Teacher, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”

⁵⁰Jesus said to Nathanael, “Do you believe simply because

I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than that.”⁵¹ And Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and ‘angels of God going up and coming down’ on the Son of Man.”

Life Lessons

John 2:1–25

Situation

Weddings were an important part of Jewish culture. An entire village or town often participated in the festivities. Jesus performed his first miracle at this wedding in Cana.

Observation

Jesus is concerned about us because we are his children and his friends.

Inspiration

Picture six men walking on a narrow road...

The men's faces are eager, but common. Their leader is confident, but unknown. They call him Rabbi...

Where are they going? ... They haven't been told, but they each have their own idea...

Then a chorus of confusion breaks out and ends only when Jesus lifts his hand and says softly, "We're on our way to a wedding." ...

"Why would we go to a wedding?" ...

The answer? It's found in the second verse of [John 2](#). "Jesus and his followers were also invited to the wedding." ...

Big deal? I think so. I think it's significant that common folk in a little town enjoyed being with Jesus.... Jesus was a likable fellow. And his disciples should be the same. I'm not talking debauchery, drunkenness, and adultery. I'm not endorsing

compromise, coarseness, or obscenity. I am simply crusading for the freedom to enjoy a good joke, enliven a dull party, and appreciate a fun evening....

(From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

Application

How long has it been since you had a good laugh? A hilarious time of fun with Christian friends? Jesus wants us to rejoice and enjoy life. Celebrate!

Exploration

God's Care and Concern—[2 Kings 13:23](#); [Matthew 7:9–11](#); [John 11:33–38](#); [Acts 15:14](#).

The Wedding at Cana

Two days later there was a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there,² and Jesus and his followers were also invited to the wedding.³ When all the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴Jesus answered, "Dear woman, why come to me? My time has not yet come."

⁵His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you to do."

⁶In that place there were six stone water jars that the Jews used in their [washing ceremony](#). Each jar held about twenty or thirty gallons.

⁷Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled the jars to the top.

⁸Then he said to them, "Now take some out and give it to the master of the feast."

So they took the water to the master.⁹ When he tasted it, the water had become wine. He did not know where the wine came from, but the servants who had brought the water knew. The master of the wedding called the bridegroom¹⁰ and said to him, "People always serve the best wine first. Later, after the guests have been drinking awhile, they serve the cheaper wine. But you have saved the best wine till now."

¹¹So in Cana of Galilee Jesus did his first miracle. There he showed his glory, and his followers believed in him.

Jesus in the Temple

¹²After this, Jesus went to the town of Capernaum with his mother, brothers, and followers. They stayed there for just a few days. ¹³When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover Feast, Jesus went to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the Temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves. He saw others sitting at tables, exchanging different kinds of money. ¹⁵Jesus made a whip out of cords and forced all of them, both the sheep and cattle, to leave the Temple. He turned over the tables and scattered the money of those who were exchanging it. ¹⁶Then he said to those who were selling pigeons, “Take these things out of here! Don’t make my Father’s house a place for buying and selling!”

¹⁷When this happened, the followers remembered what was written in the Scriptures: [“My strong love for your Temple completely controls me.”](#)

¹⁸Some of his people said to Jesus, “Show us a miracle to prove you have the right to do these things.”

¹⁹Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will build it again in three days.”

²⁰They answered, “It took forty-six years to build this Temple! Do you really believe you can build it again in three days?”

²¹(But the temple Jesus meant was his own body. ²²After Jesus was raised from the dead, his followers remembered that Jesus had said this. Then they believed the Scripture and the words Jesus had said.)

²³When Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast, many people believed in him because they saw the miracles he

did.²⁴ But Jesus did not trust himself to them because he knew them all.²⁵ He did not need anyone to tell him about people, because he knew what was in people's minds.

Life Lessons

John 3:1–36

Situation

Nicodemus belonged to the highest governing body of the Jewish people, the Sanhedrin. Many of these Jewish leaders were bound by tradition and legalism.

Observation

Jesus came to free men and women from slavery to sin and from the chains of legalism.

Inspiration

The meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus was more than an encounter between two religious figures. It was a collision between two philosophies. Two opposing views on salvation.

Nicodemus thought the person did the work; Jesus says God does the work...

These two views encompass all views. All the world religions can be placed in one of two camps: legalism or grace...

A legalist believes the supreme force behind salvation is you. If you look right, speak right, and belong to the right segment of the right group, you will be saved. The brunt of responsibility doesn't lie with God; it lies within you...

Spirituality, Jesus says, comes not from church attendance or good deeds or correct doctrine, but from heaven itself. Such words must have set Nicodemus back on his heels. But Jesus was just

getting started....

Salvation is God's business. Grace is his idea, his work, and his expense. He offers it to whom he desires, when he desires. Our job in the process is to inform the people, not screen the people.

The question must have been written all over Nicodemus's face. Why would God do this? What would motivate him to offer such a gift? What Jesus told Nicodemus, Nicodemus could never have imagined. The motive behind the gift of new birth? Love. "God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life" (v. [16](#)).

Nicodemus has never heard such words. Never. He has had many discussions of salvation. But this is the first in which no rules were given. No system was offered. No code or ritual. "Everyone who believes can have eternal life in him," Jesus told him. Could God be so generous? (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

Are there religious "rules" you observe but do not understand? Did God command them, or did mere men create them? Do they help you feel close to God? If so, keep them. Are some confusing to you? Ask your pastor to explain them to you.

Exploration

Legalism—[Matthew 5:17, 21–22; 12:9–12; 1 Corinthians 10:25–27](#).

Nicodemus Comes to Jesus

There was a man named Nicodemus who was one of the Pharisees and an important Jewish leader. ²One night Nicodemus came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we know you are a teacher sent from God, because no one can do the miracles you do unless God is with him.”

³Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, unless one is born again, he cannot be in God’s kingdom.”

⁴Nicodemus said, “But if a person is already old, how can he be born again? He cannot enter his mother’s body again. So how can a person be born a second time?”

⁵But Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, unless one is born from water and the Spirit, he cannot enter God’s kingdom.

⁶Human life comes from human parents, but spiritual life comes from the Spirit. ⁷Don’t be surprised when I tell you, ‘You must all be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows where it wants to and you hear the sound of it, but you don’t know where the wind comes from or where it is going. It is the same with every person who is born from the Spirit.”

⁹Nicodemus asked, “How can this happen?”

¹⁰Jesus said, “You are an important teacher in Israel, and you don’t understand these things? ¹¹I tell you the truth, we talk about what we know, and we tell about what we have seen, but you don’t accept what we tell you. ¹²I have told you about

things here on earth, and you do not believe me. So you will not believe me if I tell you about things of heaven.¹³ The only one who has ever gone up to heaven is the One who came down from heaven—the Son of Man.

NewLife in Christ

“I tell you the truth, unless one is born again, he cannot be in God’s kingdom.”—[John 3:3](#)

The Second Birth: Life Eternal

Changing the clothes doesn’t change the man. Outward discipline doesn’t alter what is within. New habits don’t make a new soul. That’s not to say that outward change is not good. That is to say that outward change is not enough. If one would see the kingdom, he must be born again.

That phrase, “born again,” belongs to Jesus. He first used it when he was talking to Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a good man. A very good man. He was a Pharisee, a religious ruler, a member of the Sanhedrin, one of the decision makers in Jerusalem. No doubt he had been taught and had taught that if you change the outside, you change the inside. He, like Paul, revered the law. He, like Paul, wanted to do right.

He thought the right training could make a waiter out of a cat.

But Jesus told him, “I tell you the truth, unless one is born again, he cannot be in God’s kingdom” ([John 3:3](#)). Nicodemus’s response is sincere. He didn’t ask *Why*? He asked *How*? Perhaps you are

asking the same question. How is a person born again?

To get an idea, think back to your own birth. Put the VCR of your days in reverse, and pause at your first moments. Look at yourself. Brand-new. New hands. New eyes. New mouth. No pre-owned parts. All original material.

Now tell me, who gave you these parts? Who gave you eyes so you could see? Who gave you hands so you could work? Who gave you feet that you could walk? Did you make your own eyes? Your own hands? Your own feet?

No, you made nothing; God made everything. He was the one who made everything new the first time, and he is the one who makes everything new the second. The Creator creates again! "If anyone belongs to Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have gone; everything is made new!" ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#))

Here is (dare I say it?) the greatest miracle of God. It is astounding when God heals the body. It is extraordinary when God hears the prayer. It is incredible when God provides the new job, the new car, the new child. But none of these compares to when God creates new life.

At our new birth God remakes our souls and gives us what we need, again. New eyes so we can see by faith. A new mind so we can have the mind of Christ. New strength so we won't grow tired. A new vision so we won't lose heart. A new voice for praise and new hands for service. And most of all, a new heart.

A heart that has been cleansed by Christ.

And, oh, how we need it. We have soiled what he gave us the first time. We have used our eyes to see impurity, our hands to give pain, our feet to walk the wrong path, our minds to think evil thoughts. All of us need to be made new again.

The first birth was for earthly life; the second one is for eternal life. The first time we received a physical heart; the second time we receive a spiritual heart. The first birth enabled us to have life on earth. The second birth enables us to have life eternal. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Question: How do you know for certain that you are born again and will have everlasting life?

For more on [“New Life in Christ.”](#)

¹⁴“Just as [Moses lifted up the snake in the desert](#), the Son of Man must also be lifted up. ¹⁵So that everyone who believes can have eternal life in him.

¹⁶“God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life. ¹⁷God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world guilty, but to save the world through him.

¹⁸People who believe in God’s Son are not judged guilty. Those who do not believe have already been judged guilty, because they have not believed in God’s one and only Son. ¹⁹They are judged by this fact: The Light has come into the world, but they did not want light. They wanted darkness, because they were doing evil things. ²⁰All who do evil hate the light and will not come to the light, because it will show all the evil things they do. ²¹But those who follow the true way come to the light, and it shows that the things they do were done through God.”

Jesus and John the Baptist

²²After this, Jesus and his followers went into the area of Judea, where he stayed with his followers and baptized people.

²³John was also baptizing in Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there. People were going there to be baptized. ²⁴(This was before John was put into prison.)

²⁵Some of John’s followers had an argument with a Jew about [religious washing](#). ²⁶So they came to John and said, “Teacher, remember the man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you spoke about so much? He

is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.”

²⁷John answered, “A man can get only what God gives him. ²⁸You yourselves heard me say, ‘I am not the Christ, but I am the one sent to prepare the way for him.’ ²⁹The bride belongs only to the bridegroom. But the friend who helps the bridegroom stands by and listens to him. He is thrilled that he gets to hear the bridegroom’s voice. In the same way, I am really happy. ³⁰He must become greater, and I must become less important.

The One Who Comes from Heaven

³¹“The One who comes from above is greater than all. The one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and talks about things on the earth. But the One who comes from heaven is greater than all. ³²He tells what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts what he says. ³³Whoever accepts what he says has proven that God is true. ³⁴The One whom God sent speaks the words of God, because God gives him the Spirit fully. ³⁵The Father loves the Son and has given him power over everything. ³⁶Those who believe in the Son have eternal life, but those who do not obey the Son will never have life. God’s anger stays on them.”

Life Lessons

John 4:1–54

Situation

Although the Jews did not like the Samaritans, Jesus purposely went through their territory. His disciples were amazed to find Jesus talking with a Samaritan—especially a woman!

Observation

Jesus knows everything about us before we tell him.

Inspiration

Remarkable... It wasn't within the colonnades of a Roman court that he announced his identity.

No, it was in the shade of a well in a rejected land to an ostracized woman. His eyes must have danced as he whispered the secret.

"I am the Messiah." ...

Don't miss the drama of the moment. Look at her eyes, wide with amazement. Listen to her as she struggles for words. "Y-y-y-you a-a-a-are the M-m-m-messiah!" ...

Suddenly the insignificance of her life was swallowed by the significance of the moment. "God is here! God has come! God cares ... for me!" ...

That is why she grabbed the first person she saw and announced her discovery, "I just talked to a man who knows everything I ever did ... and he loves me anyway!"

The disciples offered Jesus some food. He refused

it—he was too excited! He had just done what he does best. He had taken a life that was drifting and given it direction.

He was exuberant! (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

Application

What doubts and misgivings about Jesus do you have that hinder your faith? First, realize that even the disciples doubted, right up to the end ([Matthew 28:17](#)). Second, commit your doubts to the Lord, and ask for faith to live for Christ. Third, have confidence in Jesus the living Word. He will refresh your faith.

Exploration

Doubts—[Genesis 3:1–6; 21:7; Numbers 11:21–22; Mark 8:17–21; Luke 1:18; 4:3; John 3:18; 20:25–28; James 1:5–8.](#)

Jesus and a Samaritan Woman

The Pharisees heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more followers than John,² although Jesus himself did not baptize people, but his followers did.³ Jesus knew that the Pharisees had heard about him, so he left Judea and went back to Galilee.⁴ But on the way he had to go through the country of Samaria.

⁵In Samaria Jesus came to the town called Sychar, which is near the field Jacob gave to his son Joseph.⁶ Jacob's well was there. Jesus was tired from his long trip, so he sat down beside the well. It was about twelve o'clock noon.⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to the well to get some water, Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink."⁸ (This happened while Jesus' followers were in town buying some food.)⁹ The woman said, "I am surprised that you ask me for a drink, since you are a Jewish man and I am a Samaritan woman." ([Jewish people are not friends with Samaritans.](#))

¹⁰Jesus said, "If you only knew the free gift of God and who it is that is asking you for water, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

¹¹The woman said, "Sir, where will you get this living water? The well is very deep, and you have nothing to get water with.

¹²Are you greater than Jacob, our father, who gave us this well and drank from it himself along with his sons and flocks?"

¹³Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be

thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give will never be thirsty. The water I give will become a spring of water gushing up inside that person, giving eternal life.”

¹⁵The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so I will never be thirsty again and will not have to come back here to get more water.”

¹⁶Jesus told her, “Go get your husband and come back here.”

¹⁷The woman answered, “I have no husband.”

Jesus said to her, “You are right to say you have no husband. ¹⁸Really you have had five husbands, and the man you live with now is not your husband. You told the truth.”

¹⁹The woman said, “Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.

²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that Jerusalem is the place where people must worship.”

²¹Jesus said, “Believe me, woman. The time is coming when neither in Jerusalem nor on this mountain will you actually worship the Father. ²²You Samaritans worship something you don’t understand. We understand what we worship, because salvation comes from the Jews. ²³The time is coming when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, and that time is here already. You see, the Father too is actively seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

²⁵The woman said, “I know that the Messiah is coming.” (Messiah is the One called Christ.) “When the Messiah comes, he will explain everything to us.”

²⁶Then Jesus said, “I am he—I, the one talking to you.”

²⁷Just then his followers came back from town and were surprised to see him talking with a woman. But none of them

asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

²⁸Then the woman left her water jar and went back to town. She said to the people, ²⁹“Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Do you think he might be the Christ?”

³⁰So the people left the town and went to see Jesus.

³¹Meanwhile, his followers were begging him, “Teacher, eat something.”

³²But Jesus answered, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

³³So the followers asked themselves, “Did somebody already bring him food?”

³⁴Jesus said, “My food is to do what the One who sent me wants me to do and to finish his work. ³⁵You have a saying, ‘Four more months till harvest.’ But I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields ready for harvest now. ³⁶Already, the one who harvests is being paid and is gathering crops for eternal life. So the one who plants and the one who harvests celebrate at the same time. ³⁷Here the saying is true, ‘One person plants, and another harvests.’ ³⁸[I sent you to harvest a crop that you did not work on. Others did the work, and you get to finish up their work.](#)”

³⁹Many of the Samaritans in that town believed in Jesus because of what the woman said: “He told me everything I ever did.” ⁴⁰When the Samaritans came to Jesus, they begged him to stay with them, so he stayed there two more days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of the things he said.

⁴²They said to the woman, “First we believed in Jesus because of your speech, but now we believe because we heard him ourselves. We know that this man really is the Savior of

the world.”

Jesus Heals an Officer's Son

⁴³Two days later, Jesus left and went to Galilee. ⁴⁴(Jesus had said before that a prophet is not respected in his own country.)

⁴⁵When Jesus arrived in Galilee, the people there welcomed him. They had seen all the things he did at the Passover Feast in Jerusalem, because they had been there, too.

⁴⁶Jesus went again to visit Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. One of the king's important officers lived in the city of Capernaum, and his son was sick.

⁴⁷When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to Jesus and begged him to come to Capernaum and heal his son, because his son was almost dead. ⁴⁸Jesus said to him, “You people must see signs and miracles before you will believe in me.”

⁴⁹The officer said, “Sir, come before my child dies.”

⁵⁰Jesus answered, “Go. Your son will live.”

The man believed what Jesus told him and went home. ⁵¹On the way the man's servants came and met him and told him, “Your son is alive.”

⁵²The man asked, “What time did my son begin to get well?”

They answered, “Yesterday at one o'clock the fever left him.”

⁵³The father knew that one o'clock was the exact time that Jesus had said, “Your son will live.” So the man and all the people who lived in his house believed in Jesus.

⁵⁴That was the second miracle Jesus did after coming from

Judea to Galilee.

Life Lessons

John 5:1–47

Situation

While he was traveling to Jerusalem to attend the feast of the Passover, Jesus made a detour to Bethesda to meet the needs of the people.

Observation

Jesus had special concern for the suffering and the neglected.

Inspiration

Picture a battleground strewn with wounded bodies, and you see Bethesda. Imagine a nursing home overcrowded and understaffed, and you see the pool. Call to mind the orphans in Bangladesh or the abandoned in New Delhi, and you will see what people saw when they passed Bethesda. As they passed, what did they hear? An endless wave of groans. What did they witness? A field of faceless need. What did they do? Most walked past, ignoring the people.

But not Jesus....

He is alone... . The people need him—so he's there.

Can you picture it? Jesus walking among the suffering....

It's worth the telling of the story if all we do is watch him walk. It's worth it just to know he even came. He didn't have to, you know. Surely there are more sanitary crowds in Jerusalem. Surely there are

more enjoyable activities. After all, this is the Passover feast. It's an exciting time in the holy city. People have come from miles around to meet God in the temple.

Little do they know that God is with the sick.

Little do they know that God is walking slowly, stepping carefully between the beggars and the blind.

Little do they know that the strong young carpenter who surveys the ragged landscape of pain is God. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you spend much time among suffering people? Think of how you can meet the needs of those who suffer, and with God's help, do it.

Exploration

Meeting Needs—[Exodus 20:1](#); [Numbers 10:29–32](#); [35:2–3](#); [2 Kings 6:1–7](#); [Matthew 25:34–40](#).

Jesus Heals a Man at a Pool

Later Jesus went to Jerusalem for a special feast. ²In Jerusalem there is a pool with five covered porches, which is called [Bethzatha](#) in the [Hebrew language](#). This pool is near the Sheep Gate. ³Many sick people were lying on the porches beside the pool. Some were blind, some were crippled, and some were paralyzed. ⁴[u](#) ⁵A man was lying there who had been sick for thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw the man and knew that he had been sick for such a long time, Jesus asked him, “Do you want to be well?”

⁷The sick man answered, “Sir, there is no one to help me get into the pool when the water starts moving. While I am coming to the water, someone else always gets in before me.”

⁸Then Jesus said, “Stand up. Pick up your mat and walk.” ⁹And immediately the man was well; he picked up his mat and began to walk.

The day this happened was a Sabbath day. ¹⁰So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “Today is the Sabbath. It is against our law for you to carry your mat on the Sabbath day.”

¹¹But he answered, “The man who made me well told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

¹²Then they asked him, “Who is the man who told you to pick up your mat and walk?”

¹³But the man who had been healed did not know who it was, because there were many people in that place, and Jesus had left.

¹⁴Later, Jesus found the man at the Temple and said to him, “See, you are well now. Stop sinning so that something worse does not happen to you.”

¹⁵Then the man left and told his people that Jesus was the one who had made him well.

¹⁶Because Jesus was doing this on the Sabbath day, some evil people began to persecute him. ¹⁷But Jesus said to them, “My Father never stops working, and so I keep working, too.”

¹⁸This made them try still harder to kill him. They said, “First Jesus was breaking the law about the Sabbath day. Now he says that God is his own Father, making himself equal with God!”

Jesus Has God's Authority

¹⁹But Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing alone. The Son does only what he sees the Father doing, because the Son does whatever the Father does. ²⁰The Father loves the Son and shows the Son all the things he himself does. But the Father will show the Son even greater things than this so that you can all be amazed. ²¹Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to those he wants to. ²²In fact, the Father judges no one, but he has given the Son power to do all the judging ²³so that all people will honor the Son as much as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

²⁴“I tell you the truth, whoever hears what I say and believes in the One who sent me has eternal life. That person will not be judged guilty but has already left death and entered life. ²⁵I tell you the truth, the time is coming and is already here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will have life. ²⁶Life comes from the Father himself, and he has allowed the Son to have life in himself as well. ²⁷And the Father has given the Son the power to judge, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸Don’t be surprised at this: A time is coming when all who are dead and in their graves will hear his voice. ²⁹Then they will come out of their graves. Those who did good will rise and have life forever, but those who did evil will rise to be judged guilty.

Jesus Is God’s Son

³⁰“I can do nothing alone. I judge only the way I am told, so my judgment is fair. I don’t try to please myself, but I try to please the One who sent me.

³¹“If only I tell people about myself, what I say is not true. ³²But there is another who tells about me, and I know that the things he says about me are true.

³³“You have sent people to John, and he has told you the truth. ³⁴It is not that I accept such human telling; I tell you this so you can be saved. ³⁵John was like a burning and shining lamp, and you were happy to enjoy his light for a while.

³⁶“But I have a proof about myself that is greater than that of John. The things I do, which are the things my Father gave me to do, prove that the Father sent me. ³⁷And the Father himself who sent me has given proof about me. You have never

heard his voice or seen what he looks like. ³⁸His teaching does not live in you, because you don't believe in the One the Father sent. ³⁹You carefully study the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. They do in fact tell about me, ⁴⁰but you refuse to come to me to have that life.

⁴¹“I don't need praise from people. ⁴²But I know you—I know that you don't have God's love in you. ⁴³I have come from my Father and speak for him, but you don't accept me. But when another person comes, speaking only for himself, you will accept him. ⁴⁴You try to get praise from each other, but you do not try to get the praise that comes from the only God. So how can you believe? ⁴⁵Don't think that I will stand before the Father and say you are wrong. The one who says you are wrong is Moses, the one you hoped would save you. ⁴⁶If you really believed Moses, you would believe me, because Moses wrote about me. ⁴⁷But if you don't believe what Moses wrote, how can you believe what I say?”

Life Lessons

John 6:1-71

Situation

Jesus demonstrated his power to meet spiritual and physical needs.

Observation

To gain eternal life, we must be nourished with God's Word, drawn to Christ, and united with him.

Inspiration

The stress seen that day is not on Jesus' face, but on the faces of the disciples. "Send the crowds away," they demand [see [Matthew 14:15-16](#)]. Fair request. "After all," they are saying, "You've taught them. You've healed them. You've accommodated them. And now they're getting hungry. If we don't send them away, they'll want you to feed them, too!"

I wish I could have seen the expression on the disciples' faces when they heard the Master's response....

"You give them something to eat." ...

Rather than look to God, they looked in their wallets. "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

"Y-y-y-you've got to be kidding."

"He can't be serious."

"It's one of Jesus' jokes."

"Do you know how many people are out there?"

Eyes watermelon-wide. Jaws dangling open. One

ear hearing the din of the crowd, the other the command of God.

Don't miss the contrasting views. When Jesus saw the people, he saw an opportunity to love and affirm value. When the disciples saw the people they saw thousands of problems.

Also, don't miss the irony. In the midst of a bakery-in the presence of the Eternal Baker—they tell the “Bread of Life” that there is no bread.

How silly we must appear to God.

Here's where Jesus should have given up. This is the point in the pressure-packed day where Jesus should have exploded. The sorrow, the life threats, the exuberance, the crowds, the interruptions, the demands, and now this. His own disciples can't do what he asks them. In front of five thousand men, they let him down.

“Beam me up, Father,” should have been Jesus' next words. But they weren't. Instead he inquires, “How many loaves do you have?”

The disciples bring him a little boy's lunch. A lunch pail becomes a banquet, and all are fed. No word of reprimand is given. No furrowed brow of anger is seen. No “I-told-you-so” speech is delivered. The same compassion Jesus extends to the crowd is extended to his friends. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

What is the source of your spiritual nourishment? Movies, television, or music? Do you need to change your diet so that Christ becomes the strong force in

your life? Do this by Bible reading, prayer, and worship.

Exploration

Choices—[Genesis 2:15–17](#); [Matthew 9:9](#); [Romans 1:24–32](#).

More than Five Thousand Fed

After this, Jesus went across Lake Galilee (or, Lake Tiberias).² Many people followed him because they saw the miracles he did to heal the sick. ³Jesus went up on a hill and sat down there with his followers. ⁴It was almost the time for the Jewish Passover Feast.

⁵When Jesus looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where can we buy enough bread for all these people to eat?” ⁶(Jesus asked Philip this question to test him, because Jesus already knew what he planned to do.)

⁷Philip answered, “We would all have to work a month to buy enough bread for each person to have only a little piece.”

⁸Another one of his followers, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said, ⁹“Here is a boy with five loaves of barley bread and two little fish, but that is not enough for so many people.”

¹⁰Jesus said, “Tell the people to sit down.” This was a very grassy place, and about five thousand men sat down there. ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves of bread, thanked God for them, and gave them to the people who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, giving as much as the people wanted.

¹²When they had all had enough to eat, Jesus said to his followers, “Gather the leftover pieces of fish and bread so that nothing is wasted.” ¹³So they gathered up the pieces and filled

twelve baskets with the pieces left from the five barley loaves.

¹⁴When the people saw this miracle that Jesus did, they said, “He must truly be the [Prophet](#) who is coming into the world.”

¹⁵Jesus knew that the people planned to come and take him by force and make him their king, so he left and went into the hills alone.

Jesus Walks on the Water

¹⁶That evening Jesus’ followers went down to Lake Galilee. ¹⁷It was dark now, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The followers got into a boat and started across the lake to Capernaum. ¹⁸By now a strong wind was blowing, and the waves on the lake were getting bigger. ¹⁹When they had rowed the boat about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the water, coming toward the boat. The followers were afraid, ²⁰but Jesus said to them, “It is I. Do not be afraid.” ²¹Then they were glad to take him into the boat. At once the boat came to land at the place where they wanted to go.

The People Seek Jesus

²²The next day the people who had stayed on the other side of the lake knew that Jesus had not gone in the boat with his followers but that they had left without him. And they knew that only one boat had been there. ²³But then some boats came from Tiberias and landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴When the people saw that Jesus and his followers were not there now,

they got into boats and went to Capernaum to find Jesus.

Jesus, the Bread of Life

²⁵When the people found Jesus on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Teacher, when did you come here?”

²⁶Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, you aren’t looking for me because you saw me do miracles. You are looking for me because you ate the bread and were satisfied. ²⁷Don’t work for the food that spoils. Work for the food that stays good always and gives eternal life. The Son of Man will give you this food, because on him God the Father has put his power.”

²⁸The people asked Jesus, “What are the things God wants us to do?”

²⁹Jesus answered, “The work God wants you to do is this: Believe the One he sent.”

³⁰So the people asked, “What miracle will you do? If we see a miracle, we will believe you. What will you do? ³¹Our fathers ate the manna in the desert. This is written in the Scriptures: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

³²Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven; it is my Father who is giving you the true bread from heaven. ³³God’s bread is the One who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴The people said, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

³⁵Then Jesus said, “I am the bread that gives life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶But as I told you before, you have seen me and still don’t believe. ³⁷The Father gives me my people. Every one of them will come to me, and I will always accept

them. ³⁸I came down from heaven to do what God wants me to do, not what I want to do. ³⁹Here is what the One who sent me wants me to do: I must not lose even one whom God gave me, but I must raise them all on the last day. ⁴⁰Those who see the Son and believe in him have eternal life, and I will raise them on the last day. This is what my Father wants.”

⁴¹Some people began to complain about Jesus because he said, “I am the bread that comes down from heaven.” ⁴²They said, “This is Jesus, the son of Joseph. We know his father and mother. How can he say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”

⁴³But Jesus answered, “Stop complaining to each other. ⁴⁴The Father is the One who sent me. No one can come to me unless the Father draws him to me, and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, [‘They will all be taught by God.’](#) Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. ⁴⁶No one has seen the Father except the One who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷I tell you the truth, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread that gives life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but still they died. ⁵⁰Here is the bread that comes down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will never die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give up so that the world may have life.”

⁵²Then the evil people began to argue among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

⁵³Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, you must eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood. Otherwise, you won’t have real life in you. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.

⁵⁵My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in me, and I live in them. ⁵⁷The living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father. So whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸I am not like the bread your ancestors ate. They ate that bread and still died. I am the bread that came down from heaven, and whoever eats this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹Jesus said all these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

The Words of Eternal Life

⁶⁰When the followers of Jesus heard this, many of them said, “This teaching is hard. Who can accept it?”

⁶¹Knowing that his followers were complaining about this, Jesus said, “Does this teaching bother you? ⁶²Then will it also bother you to see the Son of Man going back to the place where he came from? ⁶³It is the Spirit that gives life. The flesh doesn’t give life. The words I told you are spirit, and they give life. ⁶⁴But some of you don’t believe.” (Jesus knew from the beginning who did not believe and who would turn against him.) ⁶⁵Jesus said, “That is the reason I said, ‘If the Father does not bring a person to me, that one cannot come.’”

⁶⁶After Jesus said this, many of his followers left him and stopped following him.

⁶⁷Jesus asked the twelve followers, “Do you want to leave, too?”

⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, where would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. ⁶⁹We believe and know that you are the Holy One from God.”

⁷⁰Then Jesus answered, “I chose all twelve of you, but one

of you is a devil.”

⁷¹Jesus was talking about Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Judas was one of the twelve, but later he was going to turn against Jesus.

Life Lessons

John 7:1–53

Situation

Jesus prepared his followers for his death, and the leading priests and Pharisees became more determined than ever to arrest him.

Observation

Jesus knows how it feels to be persecuted and threatened. His own family did not believe in him. When we encounter difficult times, Jesus knows how we feel.

Inspiration

These are distressing times for a new Christian, but they will make you a better person and prepare you for something magnificent. For a brief effort, you will receive an everlasting reward, and for a passing difficulty, infinite glory.

Will you always enjoy spiritual comfort? No, even my most devoted saints had problems, temptations, and feelings of desolation. But they endured it all patiently, trusting me rather than themselves, knowing that the suffering of “this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed” ([Romans 8:18](#)). It is ridiculous for you to expect to receive instantly what others have barely obtained after many tears and great spiritual fatigue.

Wait patiently for me. Control your behavior. Take courage and never stop serving me because of suffering or fear. Offer your very life for my glory. I

will reward you for it, and I will not desert you when you are in trouble. (From *Growing in His Image* by Bernard Bangley)

Application

Does Jesus have a slot in your schedule? Do you plan your day around your time with him, or does he get whatever time is left? Give Jesus priority by praying often and by making decisions you believe he would make.

Exploration

Gift of Faith—[1 Corinthians 12:7–13](#); [Ephesians 2:8–9](#).

Jesus' Brothers Don't Believe

After this, Jesus traveled around Galilee. He did not want to travel in Judea, because some evil people there wanted to kill him.²It was time for the Feast of Shelters.³So Jesus' brothers said to him, "You should leave here and go to Judea so your followers there can see the miracles you do."⁴Anyone who wants to be well known does not hide what he does. If you are doing these things, show yourself to the world."⁵(Even Jesus' brothers did not believe in him.)⁶Jesus said to his brothers, "The right time for me has not yet come, but any time is right for you."⁷The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I tell it the evil things it does.⁸So you go to the feast. I will not go yet to this feast, because the right time for me has not yet come."⁹After saying this, Jesus stayed in Galilee.

¹⁰But after Jesus' brothers had gone to the feast, Jesus went also. But he did not let people see him.¹¹At the feast some people were looking for him and saying, "Where is that man?"

¹²Within the large crowd there, many people were whispering to each other about Jesus. Some said, "He is a good man."

Others said, "No, he fools the people."¹³But no one was brave enough to talk about Jesus openly, because they were afraid of the older leaders.

Jesus Teaches at the Feast

¹⁴When the feast was about half over, Jesus went to the Temple and began to teach. ¹⁵The people were amazed and said, “This man has never studied in school. How did he learn so much?”

¹⁶Jesus answered, “The things I teach are not my own, but they come from him who sent me. ¹⁷If people choose to do what God wants, they will know that my teaching comes from God and not from me. ¹⁸Those who teach their own ideas are trying to get honor for themselves. But those who try to bring honor to the one who sent him speak the truth, and there is nothing false in them. ¹⁹Moses gave you the [law](#), but none of you obeys that law. Why are you trying to kill me?”

²⁰The people answered, “A demon has come into you. We are not trying to kill you.”

²¹Jesus said to them, “I did one miracle, and you are all amazed. ²²Moses gave you the law about circumcision. (But really Moses did not give you circumcision; it came from our ancestors.) And yet you circumcise a baby on a Sabbath day. ²³If a baby can be circumcised on a Sabbath day to obey the law of Moses, why are you angry at me for healing a person’s whole body on the Sabbath day? ²⁴Stop judging by the way things look, but judge by what is really right.”

Is Jesus the Christ?

²⁵Then some of the people who lived in Jerusalem said, “This is the man they are trying to kill. ²⁶But he is teaching where everyone can see and hear him, and no one is trying to stop

him. Maybe the leaders have decided he really is the Christ.
²⁷But we know where this man is from. And when the real Christ comes, no one will know where he comes from.”

²⁸Jesus, teaching in the Temple, cried out, “Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. But I have not come by my own authority. I was sent by the One who is true, whom you don’t know. ²⁹But I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.”

³⁰When Jesus said this, the people tried to take him. But no one was able to touch him, because it was not yet the right time. ³¹But many of the people believed in Jesus. They said, “When the Christ comes, will he do more miracles than this man has done?”

The Leaders Try to Arrest Jesus

³²The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering these things about Jesus. So the leading priests and the Pharisees sent some Temple guards to arrest him. ³³Jesus said, “I will be with you a little while longer. Then I will go back to the One who sent me. ³⁴You will look for me, but you will not find me. And you cannot come where I am.”

³⁵Some people said to each other, “Where will this man go so we cannot find him? Will he go to the Greek cities where our people live and teach the Greek people there? ³⁶What did he mean when he said, ‘You will look for me, but you will not find me,’ and ‘You cannot come where I am’?”

Jesus Talks About the Spirit

³⁷On the last and most important day of the feast Jesus stood up and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸If anyone believes in me, rivers of living water will flow out from that person’s heart, as the Scripture says.” ³⁹Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been raised to glory. But later, those who believed in Jesus would receive the Spirit.

The People Argue About Jesus

⁴⁰When the people heard Jesus’ words, some of them said, “This man really is the [Prophet](#).”

⁴¹Others said, “He is the Christ.”

Still others said, “The Christ will not come from Galilee.

⁴²The Scripture says that the Christ will come from David’s family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived.” ⁴³So the people did not agree with each other about Jesus. ⁴⁴Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one was able to touch him.

Some Leaders Won’t Believe

⁴⁵The Temple guards went back to the leading priests and the Pharisees, who asked, “Why didn’t you bring Jesus?”

⁴⁶The guards answered, “The words he says are greater than the words of any other person who has ever spoken!”

⁴⁷The Pharisees answered, “So Jesus has fooled you also!

⁴⁸Have any of the leaders or the Pharisees believed in him? No!

⁴⁹But these people, who know nothing about the law, are under God’s curse.”

⁵⁰[Nicodemus, who had gone to see Jesus before, was in that group.](#) He said, ⁵¹“Our law does not judge a man without hearing him and knowing what he has done.”

⁵²They answered, “Are you from Galilee, too? Study the Scriptures, and you will learn that no prophet comes from Galilee.”

Some early Greek manuscripts do not contain [7:53–8:11.](#)

[⁵³And everyone left and went home.

Life Lessons

John 8:1–59

Situation

Jesus convinced the Pharisees that God could forgive the most hideous sins. He also tried to convince them of his divine lineage, but they assumed he was demon-possessed or mad. The Pharisees grew angry when Jesus told them that they had fallen out of favor with God.

Observation

We must seek God's wisdom to overcome difficult Situations in life.

Inspiration

Sightless and heartless redeemers... That's not the Redeemer of the New Testament.

Compare the blind Christ I saw in Rio to the compassionate one seen by a frightened woman early one morning in Jerusalem.

Jesus sits surrounded by a horseshoe of listeners. Some nod their heads in agreement and open their hearts in obedience....

We don't know his topic that morning. Prayer, perhaps. Or maybe kindness or anxiety. But whatever it was, it was soon interrupted when people burst into the courtyard....

The listeners scramble to get out of the way. The mob is made up of religious leaders, the elders and deacons of their day... And struggling to keep her balance on the crest of this angry wave is a scantily-

clad woman.

Only moments before she had been in bed with a man who was not her husband. Was this how she made her living? Maybe. Maybe not. We don't know.

But we do know that a door was jerked open and she was yanked from a bed....

And now, with holy strides, the mob storms toward the teacher. They throw the woman in his direction....

"We found this woman in bed with a man!" cries the leader. "The law says to stone her. What do you say?" ...

The accusers are persistent. "Tell us, teacher! What do you want us to do with her?"

He just raised his head and offered an invitation, "I guess if you've never made a mistake, then you have a right to stone this woman." He looked back down and began to draw on the earth again.

Someone cleared his throat as if to speak, but no one spoke. Feet shuffled. Eyes dropped. Then thud... . thud ... thud ... rocks fell to the ground... . And they walked away. They came as one, but they left one by one.

Jesus told the woman to look up. "Is there no one to condemn you?"

Maybe she expected him to scold her... . I'm not sure, but I do know this: What she got, she never expected. She got a promise and a commission.

The promise: "Then neither do I condemn you."

The commission: "Go and sin no more."

The woman turns and walks into anonymity... .

But we can be confident of one thing: On that morning in Jerusalem, she saw Jesus and Jesus saw her. And could we somehow transport her to Rio de Janeiro and let her stand at the base of the *Crist redentor*, I know what her response would be.

“That’s not the Jesus I saw,” she would say. For the Jesus she saw didn’t have a hard heart. And the Jesus that saw her didn’t have blind eyes.

However, if we could somehow transport her to Calvary and let her stand at the base of the cross ... you know what she would say. “That’s him.”

She would recognize his voice. It’s raspier and weaker, but the words are the same, “Father, forgive them... .” And she would recognize his eyes. Eyes that saw her not as she was, but as she was intended to be. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

Application

Discerning right from wrong is sometimes easy, sometimes hard. How about those who have made the wrong choice? How do you judge people? Seek God’s wisdom so that you are slow to condemn and quick to show compassion.

Exploration

Judgment—[Isaiah 11:3–5](#); [Matthew 13:40–43](#); [Acts 11:2–18](#); [Romans 2:12–15](#).

The Woman Caught in Adultery

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.² But early in the morning he went back to the Temple, and all the people came to him, and he sat and taught them.³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery. They forced her to stand before the people.⁴ They said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught having sexual relations with a man who is not her husband.⁵ The law of Moses commands that we stone to death every woman who does this. What do you say we should do?”⁶ They were asking this to trick Jesus so that they could have some charge against him.

But Jesus bent over and started writing on the ground with his finger.⁷ When they continued to ask Jesus their question, he raised up and said, “Anyone here who has never sinned can throw the first stone at her.”⁸ Then Jesus bent over again and wrote on the ground.

⁹ Those who heard Jesus began to leave one by one, first the older men and then the others. Jesus was left there alone with the woman standing before him.¹⁰ Jesus raised up again and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one judged you guilty?”

¹¹ She answered, “No one, sir.”

Then Jesus said, “I also don’t judge you guilty. You may go now, but don’t sin anymore.”]

Jesus Is the Light of the World

¹²Later, Jesus talked to the people again, saying, “I am the light of the world. The person who follows me will never live in darkness but will have the light that gives life.”

¹³The Pharisees said to Jesus, “When you talk about yourself, you are the only one to say these things are true. We cannot accept what you say.”

¹⁴Jesus answered, “Yes, I am saying these things about myself, but they are true. I know where I came from and where I am going. But you don’t know where I came from or where I am going. ¹⁵You judge by human standards. I am not judging anyone. ¹⁶But when I do judge, my judging is true, because I am not alone. The Father who sent me is with me. ¹⁷Your own law says that when two witnesses say the same thing, you must accept what they say. ¹⁸I am one of the witnesses who speaks about myself, and the Father who sent me is the other witness.”

¹⁹They asked, “Where is your father?”

Jesus answered, “You don’t know me or my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father, too.” ²⁰Jesus said these things while he was teaching in the Temple, near where the money is kept. But no one arrested him, because the right time for him had not yet come.

The People Misunderstand Jesus

²¹Again, Jesus said to the people, “I will leave you, and you will look for me, but you will die in your sins. You cannot come where I am going.”

²²So the Jews asked, “Will Jesus kill himself? Is that why he said, ‘You cannot come where I am going’?”

²³Jesus said, “You people are from here below, but I am from above. You belong to this world, but I don’t belong to this world. ²⁴So I told you that you would die in your sins. Yes, you will die in your sins if you don’t believe that I am he.”

²⁵They asked, “Then who are you?”

Jesus answered, “I am what I have told you from the beginning. ²⁶I have many things to say and decide about you. But I tell people only the things I have heard from the One who sent me, and he speaks the truth.”

²⁷The people did not understand that he was talking to them about the Father. ²⁸So Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, you will know that I am he. You will know that these things I do are not by my own authority but that I say only what the Father has taught me. ²⁹The One who sent me is with me. I always do what is pleasing to him, so he has not left me alone.” ³⁰While Jesus was saying these things, many people believed in him.

Freedom from Sin

³¹So Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him, “If you continue to obey my teaching, you are truly my followers.

³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

³³They answered, “We are Abraham’s children, and we have never been anyone’s slaves. So why do you say we will be free?”

³⁴Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, everyone who lives

in sin is a slave to sin.³⁵ A slave does not stay with a family forever, but a son belongs to the family forever.³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be truly free.³⁷ I know you are Abraham's children, but you want to kill me because you don't accept my teaching.³⁸ I am telling you what my Father has shown me, but you do what your father has told you."

³⁹They answered, "Our father is Abraham."

Jesus said, "If you were really Abraham's children, you would do the things Abraham did.⁴⁰ I am a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God, but you are trying to kill me. Abraham did nothing like that.⁴¹ So you are doing the things your own father did."

But they said, "We are not like children who never knew who their father was. God is our Father; he is the only Father we have."

⁴²Jesus said to them, "If God were really your Father, you would love me, because I came from God and now I am here. I did not come by my own authority; God sent me.⁴³ You don't understand what I say, because you cannot accept my teaching.⁴⁴ You belong to your father the devil, and you want to do what he wants. He was a murderer from the beginning and was against the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he shows what he is really like, because he is a liar and the father of lies.⁴⁵ But because I speak the truth, you don't believe me.⁴⁶ Can any of you prove that I am guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?⁴⁷ The person who belongs to God accepts what God says. But you don't accept what God says, because you don't belong to God."

Jesus Is Greater than Abraham

⁴⁸They answered, “We say you are a Samaritan and have a demon in you. Are we not right?”

⁴⁹Jesus answered, “I have no demon in me. I give honor to my Father, but you dishonor me. ⁵⁰I am not trying to get honor for myself. There is One who wants this honor for me, and he is the judge. ⁵¹I tell you the truth, whoever obeys my teaching will never die.”

⁵²They said to Jesus, “Now we know that you have a demon in you! Even Abraham and the prophets died. But you say, ‘Whoever obeys my teaching will never die.’ ⁵³Do you think you are greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died, too. Who do you think you are?”

⁵⁴Jesus answered, “If I give honor to myself, that honor is worth nothing. The One who gives me honor is my Father, and you say he is your God. ⁵⁵You don’t really know him, but I know him. If I said I did not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him, and I obey what he says. ⁵⁶Your father Abraham was very happy that he would see my day. He saw that day and was glad.”

⁵⁷They said to him, “You have never seen Abraham! You are not even fifty years old.”

⁵⁸Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I am!” ⁵⁹When Jesus said this, the people picked up stones to throw at him. But Jesus hid himself, and then he left the Temple.

Life Lessons

John 9:1–41

Situation

Jesus restored sight to a man born blind. The Pharisees questioned the man, but refused to believe that Jesus had healed him. Despite the obvious evidence, the scoffing Pharisees threw the healed man out of the Temple.

Observation

Some people doubt Christ's work, not for lack of evidence but because they don't want to believe it. Jesus' mission is often missed by the "wise" people of this world.

Inspiration

What about the blind man Jesus and the disciples discovered?

The followers thought he was a great theological case study.

"Why do you think he's blind?" one asked.

"He must have sinned."

"No, it's his folks' fault."

"Jesus, what do you think? Why is he blind?"

"He's blind to show what God can do."

The apostles knew what was coming; they had seen this look in Jesus' eyes before. They knew what he was going to do, but they didn't know how he was going to do it. "Lightning? Thunder? A shout? A clap of the hands?" They all watched.

Jesus began to work his mouth a little. The

onlookers stared. “What is he doing?” He moved his jaw as if he were chewing on something.

Some of the people began to get restless. Jesus just chewed. His jaw rotated around until he had what he wanted. Spit. Ordinary saliva.

If no one said it, somebody had to be thinking it: “Yuk!”

Jesus spat on the ground, stuck his finger into the puddle, and stirred. Soon it was a mud pie, and he smeared some of the mud across the blind man’s eyes.

The same One who’d turned a stick into a scepter and a pebble into a missile now turned saliva and mud into a balm for the blind.

Once again, the mundane became majestic. Once again the dull became divine, the humdrum holy. Once again God’s power was seen, not through the ability of the instrument, but through its availability.

“Blessed are the meek,” Jesus explained. Blessed are the available. Blessed are the conduits, the tunnels, the tools. Deliriously joyful are the ones who believe that if God has used sticks, rocks, and spit to do his will, then he can use us. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do Jesus’ miracles seem hard to believe? God can defy the laws of time and space because he created them. Miracles are easily within God’s power to perform. Remember, you serve a powerful God. Go ahead, then, and tell him how you need his help today.

Exploration

Belief—[2 Kings 5:10–15](#); [Matthew 8:5–10](#); [Mark 4:35–41](#); [9:17–27](#); [10:15](#).

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been born blind.² His followers asked him, “Teacher, whose sin caused this man to be born blind—his own sin or his parents’ sin?”

³Jesus answered, “It is not this man’s sin or his parents’ sin that made him be blind. This man was born blind so that God’s power could be shown in him.⁴ While it is daytime, we must continue doing the work of the One who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

⁶After Jesus said this, he spit on the ground and made some mud with it and put the mud on the man’s eyes.⁷ Then he told the man, “Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam.” (Siloam means Sent.) So the man went, washed, and came back seeing.

⁸The neighbors and some people who had earlier seen this man begging said, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?”

⁹Some said, “He is the one,” but others said, “No, he only looks like him.”

The man himself said, “I am the man.”

¹⁰They asked, “How did you get your sight?”

¹¹He answered, “The man named Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. Then he told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

¹²They asked him, “Where is this man?”
“I don’t know,” he answered.

Pharisees Question the Healing

¹³Then the people took to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴The day Jesus had made mud and healed his eyes was a Sabbath day. ¹⁵So now the Pharisees asked the man, “How did you get your sight?”

He answered, “He put mud on my eyes, I washed, and now I see.”

¹⁶So some of the Pharisees were saying, “This man does not keep the Sabbath day, so he is not from God.”

But others said, “A man who is a sinner can’t do miracles like these.” So they could not agree with each other.

¹⁷They asked the man again, “What do you say about him since it was your eyes he opened?”

The man answered, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸These leaders did not believe that he had been blind and could now see again. So they sent for the man’s parents ¹⁹and asked them, “Is this your son who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?”

²⁰His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. ²¹But we don’t know how he can now see. We don’t know who opened his eyes. Ask him. He is old enough to speak for himself.” ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the older leaders, who had already decided that anyone who said Jesus was the Christ would be avoided.

²³That is why his parents said, “He is old enough. Ask him.”

²⁴So for the second time, they called the man who had been

blind. They said, “You should give God the glory by telling the truth. We know that this man is a sinner.”

²⁵He answered, “I don’t know if he is a sinner. One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I see.”

²⁶They asked, “What did he do to you? How did he make you see again?”

²⁷He answered, “I already told you, and you didn’t listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his followers, too?”

²⁸Then they insulted him and said, “You are his follower, but we are followers of Moses. ²⁹We know that God spoke to Moses, but we don’t even know where this man comes from.”

³⁰The man answered, “This is a very strange thing. You don’t know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.

³¹We all know that God does not listen to sinners, but he listens to anyone who worships and obeys him. ³²Nobody has ever heard of anyone giving sight to a man born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

³⁴They answered, “You were born full of sin! Are you trying to teach us?” And they threw him out.

Spiritual Blindness

³⁵When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, Jesus found him and said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

³⁶He asked, “Who is the Son of Man, sir, so that I can believe in him?”

³⁷Jesus said to him, “You have seen him. The Son of Man is the one talking with you.”

³⁸He said, “Lord, I believe!” Then the man worshiped Jesus.

³⁹Jesus said, “I came into this world so that the world could be judged. I came so that the [blind](#) would see and so that those who see will become blind.”

⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees who were nearby heard Jesus say this and asked, “Are you saying we are blind, too?”

⁴¹Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin. But since you keep saying you see, your guilt remains.”

Life Lessons

John 10:1–42

Situation

The parable of the Good Shepherd described Jesus' role perfectly. Unlike a hired worker, Jesus, through love and affection, offered to lay down his life for his flock. Believers trust and know him.

Observation

Christ is our faithful shepherd. Put your trust in him.

Inspiration

By the end of July 1941, Auschwitz was working like a well organized killing machine, and the Nazis congratulated themselves on their efficiency....

About the only problem was the occasional prisoner from the work side of the camp who would figure out a way to escape. When these escapees were caught, as they usually were, they would be hung with special nooses that slowly choked out their miserable lives—a grave warning to others who might be tempted to try.

Then one July night as the frogs and insects in the marshy land surrounding the camp began their evening chorus, the air was suddenly filled with the baying of dogs, the curses of soldiers, and the roar of motorcycles. A man had escaped from Barracks 14.

The next morning there was a peculiar tension as the ranks of phantom-thin prisoners lined up for morning roll call in the central square, their eyes on

the large gallows before them. But there was no condemned man standing there, his hands bound behind him, his face bloodied from blows and dog bites. That meant the prisoner had made it out of Auschwitz. And that meant death for some of those who remained....

Soon there were ten men—ten numbers neatly listed on the death roll.

The chosen groaned, sweating with fear. “My poor wife!” one man cried. “My poor children! What will they do?” ...

Suddenly there was a commotion in the ranks. A prisoner had broken out of line, calling for the commandant....

The prisoners gasped. It was their beloved Father Kolbe, the priest who shared his last crust, who comforted the dying, who heard their confessions and nourished their souls.

The frail priest spoke softly, even calmly, to the Nazi butcher. “I would like to die in place of one of the men you condemned.” ...

“Why?” snapped the commandant....

“I am an old man, sir, and good for nothing. My life will serve no purpose.”

His ploy triggered the response Kolbe wanted. “In whose place do you want to die?” asked Fritsch.

“For that one,” Kolbe responded, pointing to the weeping prisoner who had bemoaned his wife and children....

Kolbe’s place on the death ledger was set....

Kolbe wasn’t looking for gratitude. If he was to

lay down his life for another, the fulfillment had to be in the act of obedience itself. The joy must be found in submitting his small will to the will of One more grand....

In the basement the ten men were herded into a dark, windowless cell.

As the hours and days passed, however, the camp became aware of something extraordinary happening in the death cell.... Coming from the death box, those outside heard the faint sounds of singing. For this time the prisoners had a shepherd to gently lead them through the shadows of the valley of death, pointing them to the Great Shepherd. And perhaps for that reason Father Kolbe was the last to die....

For those with eyes to see, it points to the Man who laid down His life for His friends, on the cross. To the only King in history who died for His subjects. (From *The Body* by Charles Colson)

Application

Think of people who are greatly trusted. How many of them would you entrust with your life? Or your family's life? Do you have the same trust in Christ as your shepherd? Put your self-centered wishes behind and learn what Christ's wishes are for you.

Exploration

Shepherd—[Genesis 48:15](#); [Psalm 23](#).

The Shepherd and His Sheep

Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, the person who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber. ²The one who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The one who guards the door opens it for him. And the sheep listen to the voice of the shepherd. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he brings all his sheep out, he goes ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a stranger. They will run away from him because they don’t know his voice.” ⁶Jesus told the people this story, but they did not understand what it meant.

Jesus Is the Good Shepherd

⁷So Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the door for the sheep. ⁸All the people who came before me were thieves and robbers. The sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the door, and the person who enters through me will be saved and will be able to come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰A thief comes to steal and kill and destroy, but I came to give life—life in all its fullness.

¹¹“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. ¹²The worker who is paid to keep the sheep is

different from the shepherd who owns them. When the worker sees a wolf coming, he runs away and leaves the sheep alone. Then the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them.¹³ The man runs away because he is only a paid worker and does not really care about the sheep.

¹⁴⁻¹⁵“I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, as the Father knows me. And my sheep know me, as I know the Father. I give my life for the sheep.¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not in this flock, and I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd.¹⁷ The Father loves me because I give my life so that I can take it back again.¹⁸ No one takes it away from me; I give my own life freely. I have the right to give my life, and I have the right to take it back. This is what my Father commanded me to do.”

¹⁹Again the leaders did not agree with each other because of these words of Jesus.²⁰ Many of them said, “A demon has come into him and made him crazy. Why listen to him?”

²¹But others said, “A man who is crazy with a demon does not say things like this. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

Jesus Is Rejected

²²The time came for the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter,²³ and Jesus was walking in the Temple in Solomon’s Porch.²⁴ Some people gathered around him and said, “How long will you make us wonder about you? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

²⁵Jesus answered, “I told you already, but you did not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name show who I am.

²⁶But you don't believe, because you are not my sheep. ²⁷My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never die, and no one can steal them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father gave my sheep to me. He is greater than all, and no person can steal my sheep out of my Father's hand. ³⁰The Father and I are one."

³¹Again some of the people picked up stones to kill Jesus. ³²But he said to them, "I have done many good works from the Father. Which of these good works are you killing me for?"

³³They answered, "We are not killing you because of any good work you did, but because you speak against God. You are only a human, but you say you are the same as God!"

³⁴Jesus answered, "It is written in your law that God said, [I said, you are gods.](#)' ³⁵This Scripture called those people gods who received God's message, and Scripture is always true. ³⁶So why do you say that I speak against God because I said, 'I am God's Son'? I am the one God chose and sent into the world. ³⁷If I don't do what my Father does, then don't believe me. ³⁸But if I do what my Father does, even though you don't believe in me, believe what I do. Then you will know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

³⁹They tried to take Jesus again, but he escaped from them.

⁴⁰Then he went back across the Jordan River to the place where John had first baptized. Jesus stayed there, ⁴¹and many people came to him and said, "John never did a miracle, but everything John said about this man is true." ⁴²And in that place many believed in Jesus.

Life Lessons

John 11:1–57

Situation

Jesus traveled from villages beyond the Jordan River to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead. Bethany was about two miles east of Jerusalem, and this miracle attracted the attention of many people, including the chief priests and Pharisees. As a result, the people welcomed him into Jerusalem like a king, but the Pharisees sought to kill him.

Observation

Jesus knew Lazarus would die, but he showed his power by raising him from the dead. Before seeing him perform this great miracle, however, we see that Jesus was sensitive to grief and pain.

Inspiration

Have you been there? Have you been called to stand at the thin line that separates the living from the dead? Have you lain awake at night listening to machines pumping air in and out of your lungs? Have you watched sickness corrode and atrophy the body of a friend? Have you lingered behind at the cemetery long after the others have left, gazing in disbelief at the metal casket that contains the body that contained the soul of the one you can't believe is gone?

If so, then this canyon is not unfamiliar to you.... Standing on the edge of the canyon draws all of life into perspective. What matters and what doesn't are

easily distinguished....

It is possible that I'm addressing someone who is walking the canyon wall... . If this is the case, please read the rest of this piece very carefully. Look carefully at the scene described in [John 11](#).

In this scene there are two people: Martha and Jesus. And for all practical purposes they are the only two people in the universe.

Her words were full of despair. "If you had been here... ." She stares into the Master's face with confused eyes... . Lazarus was dead. And the one man who could have made a difference didn't. He hadn't even made it for the burial... .

You see, if God is God anywhere, he has to be God in the face of death. Pop psychology can deal with depression. Pep talks can deal with pessimism. Prosperity can handle hunger. But only God can deal with our ultimate dilemma—death. And only the God of the Bible has dared to stand on the canyon's edge and offer an answer....

Jesus then made one of those claims that place him either on the throne or in the asylum: "Your brother will rise and live again" (v. [23](#)).

Martha misunderstood. (Who wouldn't have?) "I know that he will rise and live again in the resurrection on the last day" (v. [24](#)).

That wasn't what Jesus meant... . Imagine the setting: Jesus has intruded on the enemy's turf; he's standing in Satan's territory, Death Canyon. His stomach turns as he smells the sulfuric stench of the ex-angel, and he winces as he hears the oppressed

wails of those trapped in the prison. Satan has been here. He has violated one of God's creations.

With his foot planted on the serpent's head, Jesus speaks loudly enough that his words echo off the canyon walls.

"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will have life even if they die. And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (vv. [25-26](#)).

... Life confronts death—and wins! The wind stops. A cloud blocks the sun and a bird chirps in the distance while a humiliated snake slithers between the rocks and disappears into the ground....

But Jesus isn't through with Martha. With eyes locked on hers he asks the greatest question found in Scripture, a question meant as much for you and me as for Martha.

"Do you believe this?" ...

This is a canyon question... . For then we must face ourselves as we really are: rudderless humans tailspinning toward disaster. And we are forced to see him for what he claims to be: our only hope.

(From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

Are there ways to imitate Jesus' care and compassion for others in times of deep hurt? Responding to grief with your own emotion offers greater comfort than words.

Exploration

Responding to Emotion—[Job 6:26](#); [8:2](#); [Romans 12:15](#). Jesus' Compassion—[Matthew 9:36](#); [15:32](#);

20:34; 2 Corinthians 1:3.

The Death of Lazarus

A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in the town of Bethany, where Mary and her sister Martha lived. ²Mary was the woman who later put perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. Mary's brother was Lazarus, the man who was now sick. ³So Mary and Martha sent someone to tell Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

⁴When Jesus heard this, he said, "This sickness will not end in death. It is for the glory of God, to bring glory to the Son of God." ⁵Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶But when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two more days. ⁷Then Jesus said to his followers, "Let's go back to Judea."

⁸The followers said, "But Teacher, some people there tried to stone you to death only a short time ago. Now you want to go back there?"

⁹Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the daylight, he will not stumble, because he can see by this world's light. ¹⁰But if anyone walks at night, he stumbles because there is no light to help him see."

¹¹After Jesus said this, he added, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him."

¹²The followers said, "But Lord, if he is only asleep, he will be all right."

¹³Jesus meant that Lazarus was dead, but his followers thought he meant Lazarus was really sleeping. ¹⁴So then Jesus said plainly, “Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵And I am glad for your sakes I was not there so that you may believe. But let’s go to him now.”

¹⁶Then Thomas (the one called Didymus) said to the other followers, “Let us also go so that we can die with him.”

Jesus in Bethany

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he learned that Lazarus had already been dead and in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸Bethany was about two miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁹Many of the Jews had come there to comfort Martha and Mary about their brother.

²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But I know that even now God will give you anything you ask.”

²³Jesus said, “Your brother will rise and live again.”

²⁴Martha answered, “I know that he will rise and live again in the [resurrection](#) on the last day.”

²⁵Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will have life even if they die. ²⁶And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Martha, do you believe this?”

²⁷Martha answered, “Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the One coming to the world.”

Jesus Cries

²⁸After Martha said this, she went back and talked to her sister Mary alone. Martha said, “The Teacher is here and he is asking for you.” ²⁹When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Jesus. ³⁰Jesus had not yet come into the town but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The Jews were with Mary in the house, comforting her. When they saw her stand and leave quickly, they followed her, thinking she was going to the tomb to cry there.

³²But Mary went to the place where Jesus was. When she saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³When Jesus saw Mary crying and the Jews who came with her also crying, he was upset and was deeply troubled.

³⁴He asked, “Where did you bury him?”

“Come and see, Lord,” they said.

³⁵Jesus cried.

³⁶So the Jews said, “See how much he loved him.”

³⁷But some of them said, “If Jesus opened the eyes of the blind man, why couldn’t he keep Lazarus from dying?”

Jesus Raises Lazarus

³⁸Again feeling very upset, Jesus came to the tomb. It was a cave with a large stone covering the entrance. ³⁹Jesus said, “Move the stone away.”

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said, “But, Lord, it has been four days since he died. There will be a bad smell.”

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The Resurrection and the Life

As youngsters, we neighborhood kids would play street football. The minute we got home from school, we'd drop the books and hit the pavement. The kid across the street had a dad with a great arm and a strong addiction to football. As soon as he'd pull in the driveway from work we'd start yelling for him to come and play ball. He couldn't resist. Out of fairness he'd always ask, "Which team is losing?" Then he would join that team, which often seemed to be mine.

His appearance in the huddle changed the whole ball game. He was confident, strong, and most of all, he had a plan. We'd circle around him, and he'd look at us and say, "OK boys, here is what we are going to do." The other side was groaning before we left the huddle. You see, we not only had a new plan, we had a new leader.

He brought new life to our team. God does precisely the same. We didn't need a new play; we needed a new plan. We didn't need to trade positions; we needed a new player. That player is Jesus Christ, God's firstborn son.

"Though we were spiritually dead because of the things we did against God, he gave us new Life with Christ" ([Ephesians 2:5](#)). God's solution is not to preserve the dead—but to raise the dead. "If anyone belongs to Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have gone; everything is made new!" ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)).

What Jesus did with Lazarus, he is willing to do

with us. Which is good to know, for what Martha said about Lazarus can be said about us, “But, Lord, it has been four days since he died. There will be a bad smell” ([John 11:39](#)). Martha was speaking for us all. The human race is dead, and there is a bad smell. We have been dead and buried a long time. We don’t need someone to fix us up; we need someone to raise us up. In the muck and mire of what we call life, there is death, and we have been in it so long we’ve grown accustomed to the stink. But Christ hasn’t.

And Christ can’t stand the thought of his kids rotting in the cemetery. So he comes in and calls us out. We are the corpse, and he is the corpse-caller. We are the dead, and he is the dead-raiser. Our task is not to get up but to admit we are dead. The only ones who remain in the grave are the ones who don’t think they are there. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

⁴⁰Then Jesus said to her, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”

⁴¹So they moved the stone away from the entrance. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you heard me. ⁴²I know that you always hear me, but I said these things because of the people here around me. I want them to believe that you sent me.” ⁴³After Jesus said this, he cried out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with pieces of cloth, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take the cloth off of him and let him go.”

The Plan to Kill Jesus

⁴⁵Many of the people, who had come to visit Mary and saw what Jesus did, believed in him. ⁴⁶But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷Then the leading priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the council. They asked, “What should we do? This man is doing many miracles. ⁴⁸If we let him continue doing these things, everyone will believe in him. Then the Romans will come and take away our Temple and our nation.”

⁴⁹One of the men there was Caiaphas, the high priest that year. He said, “You people know nothing! ⁵⁰You don’t realize that it is better for one man to die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed.”

⁵¹Caiaphas did not think of this himself. As high priest that

year, he was really prophesying that Jesus would die for their nation ⁵²and for God's scattered children to bring them all together and make them one.

⁵³That day they started planning to kill Jesus. ⁵⁴So Jesus no longer traveled openly among the people. He left there and went to a place near the desert, to a town called Ephraim and stayed there with his followers.

⁵⁵It was almost time for the Passover Feast. Many from the country went up to Jerusalem before the Passover to do the special things to make themselves pure. ⁵⁶The people looked for Jesus and stood in the Temple asking each other, "Is he coming to the Feast? What do you think?" ⁵⁷But the leading priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where Jesus was, he must tell them. Then they could arrest him.

Life Lessons

John 12:1–50

Situation

Several groups turned out to see Jesus in the days just prior to his death. Some Jews still believed he was about to set up an earthly political kingdom. Others, especially the Pharisees, opposed Jesus.

Observation

Jesus proclaimed his kingship with an entry suitable for a king. In Jerusalem, he engaged the leaders and common folks alike in final words of teaching. He explained why he had to die and summarized his overall message.

Inspiration

“We would see Jesus.” ... It is a blessed thing for a man, when he has brought all his desires into a focus, so that they all center on one object. When he has fifty different desires, his heart resembles a mere of stagnant water, spread out into a marsh, breeding miasma and pestilence; but when all his desires are brought into one channel, his heart becomes like a river of pure water... . Happy is he who hath one desire, if that desire be set on Christ, though it may not yet have been realized. If Jesus be a soul's desire, it is a blessed sign of divine work within....

Is this thy condition, my reader, at this moment? Hast thou but one desire, and that is after Christ? Then thou are not far from the kingdom of heaven. Hast thou but one wish in thy heart, and that one

wish that thou mayest be washed from all thy sins in Jesus' blood? Canst thou really say, "I would give all I have to be a Christian; I would give up everything I have and hope for, if I might but feel that I have an interest in Christ"? Then, despite all thy fears, be of good cheer, the Lord loveth thee, and thou shalt come out into daylight soon, and rejoice in the liberty wherewith Christ makes men free. (From *Morning and Evening* by Charles H. Spurgeon)

Application

In what circumstances do you find it most difficult to believe that Jesus will protect and provide for you? Let today be your prayer-day. At the top of each hour, commit yourself more completely to the Savior by taking a moment to pray.

Exploration

Unbelief—[Numbers 14:11–12](#); [2 Kings 17:14, 18–20](#); [Luke 12:8–9](#); [John 3:18, 36](#); [Romans 9:30–33](#); [Hebrews 4:2–3, 6, 11](#).

Jesus with Friends in Bethany

Six days before the Passover Feast, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus lived. (Lazarus is the man Jesus raised from the dead.)² There they had a dinner for Jesus. Martha served the food, and Lazarus was one of the people eating with Jesus.³ Mary brought in a pint of very expensive perfume made from pure nard. She poured the perfume on Jesus' feet, and then she wiped his feet with her hair. And the sweet smell from the perfume filled the whole house.

⁴Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' followers who would later turn against him, was there. Judas said,⁵ "This perfume was worth three hundred [coins](#). Why wasn't it sold and the money given to the poor?"⁶ But Judas did not really care about the poor; he said this because he was a thief. He was the one who kept the money box, and he often stole from it.

⁷Jesus answered, "Leave her alone. It was right for her to save this perfume for today, the day for me to be prepared for burial."⁸ You will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me."

The Plot Against Lazarus

⁹A large crowd of people heard that Jesus was in Bethany. So they went there to see not only Jesus but Lazarus, whom Jesus

raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the leading priests made plans to kill Lazarus, too. ¹¹Because of Lazarus many of the Jews were leaving them and believing in Jesus.

Jesus Enters Jerusalem

¹²The next day a great crowd who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast heard that Jesus was coming there. ¹³So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Jesus, shouting,

[“Praise](#) God!

God bless the One who comes in the name of the Lord!
God bless the King of Israel!”

[Psalm 118:25–26](#)

¹⁴Jesus found a colt and sat on it. This was as the Scripture says,

¹⁵“Don’t be afraid, people of Jerusalem!
Your king is coming,
sitting on the colt of a donkey.”

[Zechariah 9:9](#)

¹⁶The followers of Jesus did not understand this at first. But after Jesus was raised to glory, they remembered that this had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.

People Tell About Jesus

¹⁷There had been many people with Jesus when he raised Lazarus from the dead and told him to come out of the tomb. Now they were telling others about what Jesus did. ¹⁸Many people went out to meet Jesus, because they had heard about this miracle. ¹⁹So the Pharisees said to each other, “You can see that nothing is going right for us. Look! The whole world is following him.”

Jesus Talks About His Death

²⁰There were some Greek people, too, who came to Jerusalem to worship at the Passover Feast. ²¹They went to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.” ²²Philip told Andrew, and then Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

²³Jesus said to them, “The time has come for the Son of Man to receive his glory. ²⁴I tell you the truth, a grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die to make many seeds. But if it never dies, it remains only a single seed. ²⁵Those who love their lives will lose them, but those who hate their lives in this world will keep true life forever. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me. Then my servant will be with me everywhere I am. My Father will honor anyone who serves me.

²⁷“Now I am very troubled. Should I say, ‘Father, save me from this time’? No, I came to this time so I could suffer. ²⁸Father, bring glory to your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have brought glory to it, and I will do it again.”

²⁹The crowd standing there, who heard the voice, said it

was thunder.

But others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”

³⁰Jesus said, “That voice was for your sake, not mine. ³¹Now is the time for the world to be judged; now the ruler of this world will be thrown down. ³²If I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people toward me.” ³³Jesus said this to show how he would die.

³⁴The crowd said, “We have heard from the law that the Christ will live forever. So why do you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?”

³⁵Then Jesus said, “The light will be with you for a little longer, so walk while you have the light. Then the darkness will not catch you. If you walk in the darkness, you will not know where you are going. ³⁶Believe in the light while you still have it so that you will become children of light.” When Jesus had said this, he left and hid himself from them.

Some People Won't Believe in Jesus

³⁷Though Jesus had done many miracles in front of the people, they still did not believe in him. ³⁸This was to bring about what Isaiah the prophet had said:

“Lord, who believed what we told them?
Who saw the Lord’s power in this?”

[Isaiah 53:1](#)

³⁹This is why the people could not believe: Isaiah also had said,

⁴⁰“He has blinded their eyes

... he has blinded their eyes,
and he has closed their minds.
Otherwise they would see with their eyes
and understand in their minds
and come back to me and be healed.”

[Isaiah 6:10](#)

⁴¹Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him.

⁴²But many believed in Jesus, even many of the leaders. But because of the Pharisees, they did not say they believed in him for fear they would be put out of the synagogue. ⁴³They loved praise from people more than praise from God.

⁴⁴Then Jesus cried out, “Whoever believes in me is really believing in the One who sent me. ⁴⁵Whoever sees me sees the One who sent me. ⁴⁶I have come as light into the world so that whoever believes in me would not stay in darkness.

⁴⁷“Anyone who hears my words and does not obey them, I do not judge, because I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. ⁴⁸There is a judge for those who refuse to believe in me and do not accept my words. The word I have taught will be their judge on the last day. ⁴⁹The things I taught were not from myself. The Father who sent me told me what to say and what to teach. ⁵⁰And I know that eternal life comes from what the Father commands. So whatever I say is what the Father told me to say.”

Life Lessons

[John 13:1-38](#)

Situation

Jesus began to teach in the upper room the night before his death. He looked forward to spending this last Passover with his disciples.

Observation

Jesus washed his disciples' feet, giving us a significant lesson in servanthood.

Inspiration

Of all the times we see the bowing knees of Jesus, none is so precious as when he kneels before his disciples and washes their feet.

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love [[John 13:1-5](#)].

It has been a long day. Jerusalem is packed with Passover guests, most of whom clamor for a glimpse of the Teacher. The spring sun is warm. The streets are dry. And the disciples are a long way from home. A splash of cool water would be refreshing.

The disciples enter, one by one, and take their places around the table. On the wall hangs a towel, and on the floor sits a pitcher and a basin. Any one of the disciples could volunteer for the job, but not one does.

After a few moments, Jesus stands and removes

his outer garment. He wraps a servant's girdle around his waist, takes up the basin, and kneels before one of the disciples. He unlaces a sandal and gently lifts the foot and places it in the basin, covers it with water, and begins to bathe it. One by one, one grimy foot after another, Jesus works his way down the row.

In Jesus' day the washing of feet was a task reserved not just for servants but for the lowest of servants. Every circle has its pecking order, and the circle of household workers was no exception. The servant at the bottom of the totem pole was expected to be the one on his knees with the towel and basin.

In this case the one with the towel and basin is the king of the universe. Hands that shaped the stars now wash away filth. Fingers that formed mountains now massage toes. And the one before whom all nations will one day kneel now kneels before his disciples. Hours before his own death, Jesus' concern is singular. He wants his disciples to know how much he loves them. More than removing dirt, Jesus is removing doubt.

Jesus knows what will happen to his hands at the crucifixion. Within twenty-four hours they will be pierced and lifeless. Of all the times we'd expect him to ask for the disciples' attention, this would be one. But he doesn't.

You can be sure Jesus knows the future of these feet he is washing. These twenty-four feet will not spend the next day following their master, defending his cause. These feet will dash for cover at the flash of a Roman sword. Only one pair of feet won't

abandon him in the garden. One disciple won't desert him at Gethsemane—Judas won't even make it that far! He will abandon Jesus that very night at the table.

I looked for a Bible translation that reads, "Jesus washed all the disciples' feet except the feet of Judas," but I couldn't find one. What a passionate moment when Jesus silently lifts the feet of his betrayer and washes them in the basin! Within hours the feet of Judas, cleansed by the kindness of the one he will betray, will stand in Caiaphas's court.

Behold the gift Jesus gives his followers! He knows what these men are about to do. He knows they are about to perform the vilest act of their lives. By morning they will bury their heads in shame and look down at their feet in disgust. And when they do, he wants them to remember how his knees knelt before them and he washed their feet. He wants them to realize those feet are still clean. "You don't understand now what I am doing, but you will understand later" ([John 13:7](#)).

Remarkable. He forgave their sin before they even committed it. He offered mercy before they even sought it. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

Take personal inventory of your life. Are there people you don't want to be around because you feel you're superior to them? Are there people you wouldn't "lower" yourself to help? Study the idea of servanthood. Ask God to put a particular person in your path over the course of the next few weeks.

Exploration

Servanthood—[Matthew 20:25–28](#); [John 12:24–26](#);
[Romans 14:16–19](#); [1 Corinthians 3:4–9](#); [2 Corinthians](#)
[3:4–6](#).

Jesus Washes His Followers' Feet

It was almost time for the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that it was time for him to leave this world and go back to the Father. He had always loved those who were his own in the world, and he loved them all the way to the end.

²Jesus and his followers were at the evening meal. The devil had already persuaded Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to turn against Jesus. ³Jesus knew that the Father had given him power over everything and that he had come from God and was going back to God. ⁴So during the meal Jesus stood up and took off his outer clothing. Taking a towel, he wrapped it around his waist. ⁵Then he poured water into a bowl and began to wash the followers' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶Jesus came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷Jesus answered, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but you will understand later."

⁸Peter said, "No, you will never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "If I don't wash your feet, you are not one of my people."

⁹Simon Peter answered, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but wash my hands and my head, too!"

¹⁰Jesus said, "After a person has had a bath, his whole body is clean. He needs only to wash his feet. And you men

are clean, but not all of you.”¹¹ Jesus knew who would turn against him, and that is why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

¹²When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and sat down again. He asked, “Do you understand what I have just done for you?”¹³ You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that is what I am. ¹⁴If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash each other’s feet. ¹⁵I did this as an example so that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶I tell you the truth, a servant is not greater than his master. A messenger is not greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷If you know these things, you will be happy if you do them.

¹⁸“I am not talking about all of you. I know those I have chosen. But this is to bring about what the Scripture said: [‘The man who ate at my table has turned against me.’](#) ¹⁹I am telling you this now before it happens so that when it happens, you will believe that I am he. ²⁰I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send also accepts me. And whoever accepts me also accepts the One who sent me.”

Jesus Talks About His Death

²¹After Jesus said this, he was very troubled. He said openly, “I tell you the truth, one of you will turn against me.”

²²The followers all looked at each other, because they did not know whom Jesus was talking about. ²³One of the followers [sitting](#) next to Jesus was the follower Jesus loved. ²⁴Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus whom he was talking about.

²⁵That follower leaned closer to Jesus and asked, “Lord, who is it?”

²⁶Jesus answered, “I will dip this bread into the dish. The man I give it to is the man who will turn against me.” So Jesus took a piece of bread, dipped it, and gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. ²⁷As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered him. Jesus said to him, “The thing that you will do—do it quickly.” ²⁸No one at the table understood why Jesus said this to Judas. ²⁹Since he was the one who kept the money box, some of the followers thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the feast or to give something to the poor.

³⁰Judas took the bread Jesus gave him and immediately went out. It was night.

³¹When Judas was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man receives his glory, and God receives glory through him. ³²If God receives glory through him, then God will give glory to the Son through himself. And God will give him glory quickly.”

³³Jesus said, “My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and what I told the Jews, I tell you now: Where I am going you cannot come.

³⁴“I give you a new command: Love each other. You must love each other as I have loved you. ³⁵All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other.”

Peter Will Say He Doesn't Know Jesus

³⁶Simon Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, where are you going?”

Jesus answered, “Where I am going you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.”

³⁷Peter asked, “Lord, why can't I follow you now? I am ready to die for you!”

³⁸Jesus answered, “Are you ready to die for me? I tell you

the truth, before the rooster crows, you will say three times that you don't know me."

Life Lessons

John 14:1-31

Situation

Jesus knew that the disciples were troubled at the thought of his departure. He reassured them by teaching about the Holy Spirit, who would help them.

Observation

Death did not need to be a terror to the disciples because Jesus was preparing a place for them.

Inspiration

What do we do with these worries? Take your anxieties to the cross—literally. Next time you're worried about your health or house or finances or flights, take a mental trip up the hill. Spend a few moments looking again at the pieces of passion.

Run your thumb over the tip of the spear. Balance a spike in the palm of your hand. Read the wooden sign written in your own language. And as you do, touch the velvet dirt, moist with the blood of God.

Blood he bled for you.

The spear he took for you.

The nails he felt for you.

The sign he left for you.

He did all of this for you. Knowing this, knowing all he did for you there, don't you think he'll look out for you here?

Or as Paul wrote, "He did not spare his own Son but gave him for us all. So with Jesus, God will surely give us all things" ([Romans 8:32](#)).

Do yourself a favor; take your anxious moments to the cross. Leave them there with your bad moments, your mad moments, and your anxious moments. And may I suggest one more? Your final moment.

Barring the return of Christ first, you and I will have one. A final moment. A final breath. A final widening of the eyes and beating of the heart. In a split second you'll leave what you know and enter what you don't.

That's what bothers us. Death is the great unknown. We're always a bit skittish about the unknown.

Sara certainly was. Denalyn and I thought it was a great idea. We would kidnap the girls from school and take them on a weekend trip. We made reservations at a hotel and cleared the trip with their teachers but kept it a secret from our girls. When we showed up at Sara's fourth grade classroom on Friday afternoon, we thought she'd be thrilled. She wasn't. She was afraid. She didn't want to leave!

As we left, I assured her nothing was wrong. We had come to take her to a fun place. Didn't work. By the time we got to the car, she was crying. She was confused. She didn't like the interruption.

Nor do we. God promises to come at an unexpected hour and take us from the gray world we know to a golden world we don't. But since we don't, we aren't sure we want to go. We even get upset at the thought of his coming.

For that reason God wants us to do what Sara

finally did—trust her father. “Don’t let your hearts be troubled,” he urged. “I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am” ([John 14:1, 3](#)).

By the way, in a short time Sara relaxed and enjoyed the trip. In fact, she didn’t want to come back. You won’t want to either.

Troubled about your final moments? Leave them at the foot of the cross.

Leave them there with your bad moments, mad moments, and anxious moments.

About this time someone is thinking, “You know, Max, if I leave all those moments at the cross, I won’t have any moments left but good ones.”

Well, what do you know? I guess you won’t.
(From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Application

Make a list of everything you’re worrying about—health, finances, family, job, and so on. Ask God to help you see all of them in light of eternity. Thank him that he’s looking out for you.

Exploration

Eternity—[John 10:25–30](#); [17:1–3](#); [2 Corinthians 4:16–5:5](#); [1 John 5:11–13](#).

Jesus Comforts His Followers

Jesus said, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me. ²There are many rooms in my Father’s house; I would not tell you this if it were not true. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³After I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going.”

⁵Thomas said to Jesus, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going. So how can we know the way?”

⁶Jesus answered, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. The only way to the Father is through me. ⁷If you really knew me, you would know my Father, too. But now you do know him, and you have seen him.”

⁸Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father. That is all we need.”

⁹Jesus answered, “I have been with you a long time now. Do you still not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. So why do you say, ‘Show us the Father’?

¹⁰Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you don’t come from me, but the Father lives in me and does his own work. ¹¹Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or believe because of the miracles I have done. ¹²I tell you the truth, whoever believes in me will do the same things that I do. Those

who believe will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³And if you ask for anything in my name, I will do it for you so that the Father's glory will be shown through the Son. ¹⁴If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

¹⁵“If you love me, you will obey my commands. ¹⁶I will ask the Father, and he will give you another [Helper](#) to be with you forever— ¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it does not see him or know him. But you know him, because he lives with you and he will be in you.

¹⁸“I will not leave you all alone like orphans; I will come back to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live, too. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and that you are in me and I am in you. ²¹Those who know my commands and obey them are the ones who love me, and my Father will love those who love me. I will love them and will show myself to them.”

²²Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you plan to show yourself to us and not to the rest of the world?”

²³Jesus answered, “If people love me, they will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Those who do not love me do not obey my teaching. This teaching that you hear is not really mine; it is from my Father, who sent me.

²⁵“I have told you all these things while I am with you. ²⁶But

the Helper will teach you everything and will cause you to remember all that I told you. This Helper is the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name.

²⁷“I leave you peace; my peace I give you. I do not give it to you as the world does. So don’t let your hearts be troubled or afraid. ²⁸You heard me say to you, ‘I am going, but I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you should be happy that I am going back to the Father, because he is greater than I am. ²⁹I have told you this now, before it happens, so that when it happens, you will believe. ³⁰I will not talk with you much longer, because the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me, ³¹but the world must know that I love the Father, so I do exactly what the Father told me to do.

“Come now, let us go.

Life Lessons

John 15:1–16:4a

Situation

The Old Testament referred to Israel as the vine. The Jews in Jesus' day believed that because they belonged to Israel, they were connected to God. But Israel often failed to produce the fruit God looked for. Jesus made a radical statement by claiming to be the vine.

Observation

Jesus emphasized that Christians must produce fruit. He expected that of his followers then and he expects that of his followers now.

Inspiration

God loves to find anything that impedes our growth. Jesus portrays him as the Good Gardener who cuts and trims the vine. "I am the true vine; my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that does not produce fruit. And he trims and cleans every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit" ([John 15:1–3](#)).

Jesus likely spoke these words while walking from the upper room to the Garden of Gethsemane. Perhaps he saw a vine hanging over a fence or draped along the wall. He lifted up a section of the plant and explained the chain of command in the universe. God is the Gardener. Jesus is the vine. We are the grapes.

Vines grew abundantly in Palestine. Carefully pruned, they produced sweet grapes. But left unkept,

they crept everywhere and into everything. The gardener trimmed the vines. Why? So they could bear more fruit. God trims us. Why? For the same reason.

“I gave you this work,” he explained, “to go and produce fruit, fruit that will last” ([John 15:16](#)).

A good gardener will do what it takes to help a vine bear fruit. What fruit does God want? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see [Galatians 5:22–23](#)). These are the fruits of the Spirit. And this is what God longs to see in us. And like a careful gardener, he will clip and cut away anything that interferes.

A good track coach looks into the face of the runner and says, “We can break the record, but this is what it will take.” And then the coach lists a regimen of practice and discipline.

A good editor reads the manuscript and says, “This work has potential, but here is what we need to cut.” And the writer groans as the red ink flows.

A good piano instructor says, “I think you can master this piece for the competition, but to do so here is our rehearsal schedule.” And the pianist sighs as she sees the hours required....

God lifts up a branch of his vine and says, “You can be fruitful, but I’m going to have to clip some diseased leaves.” And though the process is painful, we can see on the soil below us the spotted greenery he has clipped. Arrogance. Vain ambitions. Bad relationships. Dangerous opportunities. Revenge.

Does God take this process lightly? I don’t think so. Listen to this serious statement. “He cuts off

every branch of mine that does not produce fruit” ([John 15:2](#)). The verb “to cut off” is from the Greek word *airo*. It has at least two meanings; one is to “cut off,” and the other is to “pick up” or “lift up.” I believe both are implied.

Before God cuts a fruitless branch, he lifts it up. A gardener does this. He repositions the fruitless branch so it can get more sun or more space. Grapes are not like squash or pumpkins. They don’t develop while lying on the ground. They grow better hanging free. A good vine dresser will stretch the vine on the arbor to afford it more air and sun.

You’ve seen gardeners realign a plant, and you’ve probably seen God realign a life. The family uprooted and transferred to another city—was it so they could learn to trust God? The person so healthy, suddenly sick—was it to remind him to rely on the Gardener? The income stream dried up—was it God’s way of lifting you out of the soil of self and drawing you closer to himself? Leaders with questionable motives and morals are elected. Is it God’s way of stirring people to revival?

God “does everything just right and on time, but people can never completely understand what he is doing” ([Ecclesiastes 3:11](#)). (Did I just hear someone say “Amen”?) God is up to something. He is the busy, active Gardener who clears the field and removes the stones. He constructs the trellises and plants the seeds. He inspects the plants and pulls the weeds. And, most of all, he is good. He is the Good Gardener who cares for his vine. (From *A Gentle*

Thunder by Max Lucado)

Application

What fruit do you see in your life? Do you see how God may be pruning you so that you can bear more and better fruit? Grow closer to Jesus. Yield your life to him, and allow him to do anything in your life if it will lead to bearing more fruit.

Exploration

Bearing Fruit—[Psalm 1:2–3](#); [Micah 3:8](#); [Zechariah 4:6](#); [Matthew 13:23](#); [2 Corinthians 3:18](#); [Galatians 5:22–23](#); [Ephesians 3:16–17](#); [Philippians 1:6](#); [2 Peter 1:5–8](#); [1 John 3:6](#).

Jesus Is Like a Vine

“I am the true vine; my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch of mine that does not produce fruit. And he trims and cleans every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. ³You are already clean because of the words I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch cannot produce fruit alone but must remain in the vine. In the same way, you cannot produce fruit alone but must remain in me.

⁵“I am the vine, and you are the branches. If any remain in me and I remain in them, they produce much fruit. But without me they can do nothing. ⁶If any do not remain in me, they are like a branch that is thrown away and then dies. People pick up dead branches, throw them into the fire, and burn them. ⁷If you remain in me and follow my teachings, you can ask anything you want, and it will be given to you. ⁸You should produce much fruit and show that you are my followers, which brings glory to my Father. ⁹I loved you as the Father loved me. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰I have obeyed my Father’s commands, and I remain in his love. In the same way, if you obey my commands, you will remain in my love. ¹¹I have told you these things so that you can have the same joy I have and so that your joy will be the fullest possible joy.

¹²“This is my command: Love each other as I have loved

you. ¹³The greatest love a person can show is to die for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. But I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me; I chose you. And I gave you this work: to go and produce fruit, fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you anything you ask for in my name. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.

Jesus Warns His Followers

¹⁸“If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. ¹⁹If you belonged to the world, it would love you as it loves its own. But I have chosen you out of the world, so you don’t belong to it. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰Remember what I told you: A servant is not greater than his master. If people did wrong to me, they will do wrong to you, too. And if they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours, too. ²¹They will do all this to you on account of me, because they do not know the One who sent me. ²²If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³Whoever hates me also hates my Father. ²⁴I did works among them that no one else has ever done. If I had not done these works, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen what I have done, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. ²⁵But this happened so that what is written in their law would be true: ‘They hated me for no reason.’

²⁶“I will send you the [Helper](#) from the Father; he is the Spirit

of truth who comes from the Father. When he comes, he will tell about me,²⁷ and you also must tell people about me, because you have been with me from the beginning.

“I have told you these things to keep you from giving up.
²People will put you out of their synagogues. Yes, the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are offering service to God.³They will do this because they have not known the Father and they have not known me.⁴I have told you these things now so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you.

Life Lessons

John 16:4b–33

Situation

The disciples, who lived and worked with Jesus, had been his close friends for three years. They were saddened and afraid to hear him talk of leaving them. Jesus tried to help his friends see the bigger picture—that God had a purpose and a plan. But he also comforted them by promising to be with them through his Spirit.

Observation

The Holy Spirit was sent to complete several purposes among both Believers and nonBelievers, including pointing out sin and allowing people to understand truth. The Spirit always gives glory to Jesus. That should be our goal, too.

Inspiration

Spiritual greatness is not spiritual stardom; it is servanthood. God is looking for servants, not stars. The road to an improved contribution isn't moving up in the organization; it is surrendering your motives to the Holy Spirit. Don't ask the Holy Spirit to increase

your skill; ask Him to increase Christ. As Jesus becomes greater, your impact will enlarge, but because Christ is growing larger, not you.

The servant no longer wants to become a great man of God; he wants to become less. His love for the Lord Jesus becomes such an intense fire that he abandons all desire to be liked, to do a good job, to have a winning way, to be a great man of God. He loses interest in who holds first place. He stakes out his claim on last place. His highest aim becomes for Christ to increase, for himself to decrease. (From *Walking with Christ in the Details of Life* by Patrick Morley)

Application

Think of an area where you would like to do better or be more effective for God. Then pray that the Spirit will bring glory to God through you. Ask him to show you how to be more of a servant so that Christ is more readily seen by others.

Exploration

Bringing Glory to Jesus—[Matthew 5:16](#); [Mark 10:43-45](#); [John 13:14](#); [Romans 12:1](#); [15:4-6](#); [1 Corinthians 6:20](#).

The Work of the Holy Spirit

“I did not tell you these things at the beginning, because I was with you then. ⁵Now I am going back to the One who sent me. But none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶Your hearts are filled with sadness because I have told you these things. ⁷But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go away. When I go away, I will send the [Helper](#) to you. If I do not go away, the Helper will not come. ⁸When the Helper comes, he will prove to the people of the world the truth about sin, about being right with God, and about judgment. ⁹He will prove to them that sin is not believing in me. ¹⁰He will prove to them that being right with God comes from my going to the Father and not being seen anymore. ¹¹And the Helper will prove to them that judgment happened when the ruler of this world was judged.

¹²“I have many more things to say to you, but they are too much for you now. ¹³But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you into all truth. He will not speak his own words, but he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is to come. ¹⁴The Spirit of truth will bring glory to me, because he will take what I have to say and tell it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine. That is why I said that the Spirit will take what I have to say and tell it to you.

Sadness Will Become Happiness

¹⁶“After a little while you will not see me, and then after a little while you will see me again.”

¹⁷Some of the followers said to each other, “What does Jesus mean when he says, ‘After a little while you will not see me, and then after a little while you will see me again’? And what does he mean when he says, ‘Because I am going to the Father’?” ¹⁸They also asked, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We don’t understand what he is saying.”

¹⁹Jesus saw that the followers wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, “Are you asking each other what I meant when I said, ‘After a little while you will not see me, and then after a little while you will see me again’? ²⁰I tell you the truth, you will cry and be sad, but the world will be happy. You will be sad, but your sadness will become joy. ²¹When a woman gives birth to a baby, she has pain, because her time has come. But when her baby is born, she forgets the pain, because she is so happy that a child has been born into the world. ²²It is the same with you. Now you are sad, but I will see you again and you will be happy, and no one will take away your joy. ²³In that day you will not ask me for anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you anything you ask for in my name. ²⁴Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy will be the fullest possible joy.

Victory Over the World

²⁵“I have told you these things, using stories that hide the meaning. But the time will come when I will not use stories like that to tell you things; I will speak to you in plain words about

the Father. ²⁶In that day you will ask the Father for things in my name. I mean, I will not need to ask the Father for you. ²⁷The Father himself loves you. He loves you because you loved me and believed that I came from God. ²⁸I came from the Father into the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”

²⁹Then the followers of Jesus said, “You are speaking clearly to us now and are not using stories that are hard to understand. ³⁰We can see now that you know all things. You can answer a person’s question even before it is asked. This makes us believe you came from God.”

³¹Jesus answered, “So now you believe? ³²Listen to me; a time is coming when you will be scattered, each to his own home. That time is now here. You will leave me alone, but I am never really alone, because the Father is with me.

³³“I told you these things so that you can have peace in me. In this world you will have trouble, but be brave! I have defeated the world.”

Life Lessons

John 17:1–26

Situation

This is the longest prayer of Jesus recorded in the Bible. It marked the end of Jesus' earthly ministry but looked forward to the ongoing ministry of the immediate and future disciples. Prayer was an important aspect of Jesus' ministry. Whenever a strategic time approached, Jesus spent time in prayer.

Observation

The world is a battleground. Constant spiritual and physical warfare wages between the forces of God and Satan. Jesus prayed that God would keep his people pure, give them abundant joy, give them peace and unity, and protect them from Satan's power.

Inspiration

Jesus frequently prayed alone, separating Himself from every earthly distraction. I would strongly urge you to select a place—a room or corner in your home, place of work, or in your yard or garden—where you can regularly meet God alone....

A missionary and his family were forced to camp outside on a hill. They had money with them and were fearful of an attack by roving thieves. After praying, they went to sleep. Months later an injured man was brought into the mission hospital. He asked the missionary if he had soldiers guarding him on that special night. "We intended to rob you," he said, "but we were afraid of the twenty-seven soldiers."

When the missionary returned to his homeland, he related this strange story, and a member of his church said, “We had a prayer meeting that night, and I took the roll. There were just twenty-seven of us present.” (From *Hope for the Troubled Heart* by Billy Graham)

Application

Do you have special times reserved only for praying? Remember, Jesus regularly went to a quiet place and talked to God. Set up a prayer plan, keep it for a week, and ask God to bless it.

Exploration

Prayer—[Deuteronomy 4:7](#); [Psalms 32:6](#); [Matthew 14:23](#); [26:36](#); [Luke 6:28](#); [Ephesians 6:18](#).

Jesus Prays for His Followers

After Jesus said these things, he looked toward heaven and prayed, “Father, the time has come. Give glory to your Son so that the Son can give glory to you. ²You gave the Son power over all people so that the Son could give eternal life to all those you gave him. ³And this is eternal life: that people know you, the only true God, and that they know Jesus Christ, the One you sent. ⁴Having finished the work you gave me to do, I brought you glory on earth. ⁵And now, Father, give me glory with you; give me the glory I had with you before the world was made.

⁶“I showed what you are like to those you gave me from the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your teaching. ⁷Now they know that everything you gave me comes from you. ⁸I gave them the teachings you gave me, and they accepted them. They knew that I truly came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹I am praying for them. I am not praying for people in the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And my glory is shown through them. ¹¹I am coming to you; I will not stay in the world any longer. But they are still in the world. Holy Father, keep them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they will be one, just as you and I are one. ¹²While I

was with them, I kept them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me. I protected them, and only one of them, the one worthy of destruction, was lost so that the Scripture would come true.

¹³“I am coming to you now. But I pray these things while I am still in the world so that these followers can have all of my joy in them. ¹⁴I have given them your teaching. And the world has hated them, because they don’t belong to the world, just as I don’t belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world but to keep them safe from the Evil One. ¹⁶They don’t belong to the world, just as I don’t belong to the world. ¹⁷Make them ready for your service through your truth; your teaching is truth. ¹⁸I have sent them into the world, just as you sent me into the world. ¹⁹For their sake, I am making myself ready to serve so that they can be ready for their service of the truth.

²⁰“I pray for these followers, but I am also praying for all those who will believe in me because of their teaching. ²¹Father, I pray that they can be one. As you are in me and I am in you, I pray that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me. ²²I have given these people the glory that you gave me so that they can be one, just as you and I are one. ²³I will be in them and you will be in me so that they will be completely one. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you loved them just as much as you loved me.

²⁴“Father, I want these people that you gave me to be with me where I am. I want them to see my glory, which you gave me because you loved me before the world was made. ²⁵Father, you are the One who is good. The world does not know you, but I know you, and these people know you sent me. ²⁶I

showed them what you are like, and I will show them again. Then they will have the same love that you have for me, and I will live in them.”

Life Lessons

[John 18:1-27](#)

Situation

Events surrounding the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus form the climax of all four Gospels. The arrest of Jesus has the stamp of divine plan. Jesus suffered to give us eternal life.

Observation

The way of the cross provides the way to glory and victory, not defeat and humiliation.

Inspiration

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” ([1 Peter 4:12-13](#)).

God works through pain to bring glory! All of us have to understand that God’s fabulous treasures aren’t bought with cash and credit, slapping down a contract on a bargaining table and scratching a signature and a date. They just don’t come that way!

Our Lord Jesus suffered too, to show us the way. He suffered first and most—to purchase for Himself glory in our eyes ([Philippians 2:5-11](#)). First the pain, and then the prize.

“Come, let us return to the Lord,” says the prophet Hosea:

“He has torn us to pieces, but he will heal us;

he has injured us,
but he will bind up our wounds.
After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will restore us,
that we may live in his presence.” ([6:1–2](#))

Do you catch something here? It’s as if the shadow of a cross is falling across these words. God is totally involved in our suffering, as we will be totally involved in His ultimate triumph. The two processes are inseparable.

(From *My Sacrifice, His Fire* by Anne Ortlund)

Application

Think of specific instances when you have kept your Christian identity secret. Don’t be ashamed—Jesus paid such a high price for your life. Remember, God joins our suffering—strengthening and lifting us up so that we can share in his glory.

Exploration

Suffering—[Exodus 5:4–9](#); [Leviticus 26:40–45](#); [Job 3:23–26](#); [Psalm 44:9–26](#); [Mark 8:31–38](#); [Romans 8:17](#); [Philippians 1:29](#); [Hebrews 2:10, 18](#); [James 1:2–4](#); [Revelation 2:10–11](#).

Jesus Is Arrested

When Jesus finished praying, he went with his followers across the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and Jesus and his followers went into it.

²Judas knew where this place was, because Jesus met there often with his followers. Judas was the one who turned against Jesus. ³So Judas came there with a group of soldiers and some guards from the leading priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns, and weapons.

⁴Knowing everything that would happen to him, Jesus went out and asked, “Who is it you are looking for?”

⁵They answered, “Jesus from Nazareth.”

“I am he,” Jesus said. (Judas, the one who turned against Jesus, was standing there with them.) ⁶When Jesus said, “I am he,” they moved back and fell to the ground.

⁷Jesus asked them again, “Who is it you are looking for?”

They said, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

⁸“I told you that I am he,” Jesus said. “So if you are looking for me, let the others go.” ⁹This happened so that the words Jesus said before would come true: “I have not lost any of the ones you gave me.”

¹⁰Simon Peter, who had a sword, pulled it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.) ¹¹Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword back. Shouldn’t I drink the cup the Father gave me?”

Jesus Is Brought Before Annas

¹²Then the soldiers with their commander and the guards arrested Jesus. They tied him ¹³and led him first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴Caiaphas was the one who told the Jews that it would be better if one man died for all the people.

Peter Says He Doesn't Know Jesus

¹⁵Simon Peter and another one of Jesus' followers went along after Jesus. This follower knew the high priest, so he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard. ¹⁶But Peter waited outside near the door. The follower who knew the high priest came back outside, spoke to the girl at the door, and brought Peter inside. ¹⁷The girl at the door said to Peter, "Aren't you also one of that man's followers?"

Peter answered, "No, I am not!"

¹⁸It was cold, so the servants and guards had built a fire and were standing around it, warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

The High Priest Questions Jesus

¹⁹The high priest asked Jesus questions about his followers and his teaching. ²⁰Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to everyone. I have always taught in synagogues and in the Temple, where all the Jews come together. I never said anything in secret. ²¹So why do you question me? Ask the people who heard my teaching. They know what I said."

²²When Jesus said this, one of the guards standing there hit him. The guard said, “Is that the way you answer the high priest?”

²³Jesus answered him, “If I said something wrong, then show what it was. But if what I said is true, why do you hit me?”

²⁴Then Annas sent Jesus, who was still tied, to Caiaphas the high priest.

Peter Says Again He Doesn't Know Jesus

²⁵As Simon Peter was standing and warming himself, they said to him, “Aren't you one of that man's followers?”

Peter said it was not true; he said, “No, I am not.”

²⁶One of the servants of the high priest was there. This servant was a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. The servant said, “Didn't I see you with him in the garden?”

²⁷Again Peter said it wasn't true. At once a rooster crowed.

Life Lessons

[John 18:28–19:42](#)

Situation

Jewish leaders hoped to crucify Jesus but did not have the authority to do this, so they brought him to the Roman governor, Pilate. Shrewd Pilate knew that the Jewish leaders wanted him to act as their executioner. He pronounced Jesus innocent and tried to save him, but finally consented to the crucifixion because of public pressure.

Observation

Jesus knew that his trial was according to God's will and faced it with humility and self-control. In his cry, "It is finished," we hear the triumphant recognition that he has now fully accomplished God's will and paid for our sins in full.

Inspiration

Pilate wants to let Jesus go. *Just give me a reason*, he thinks, almost aloud. *I'll set you free.*

His thoughts are interrupted by a tap on the shoulder. A messenger leans and whispers. Strange. Pilate's wife has sent word not to get involved in the case. Something about a dream she had.

Pilate walks back to his chair, sits, and stares at Jesus. "Even the gods are on your side?" he states with no explanation....

How many wide eyes have stared at him, pleading for mercy, begging for acquittal?

But the eyes of this Nazarene are calm, silent....

He's not angry with me. He's not afraid ... he seems to understand....

"What should I do with Jesus, the one called the Christ?" ...

What do you do with a man who claims to be God, yet hates religion? ... What do you do with a man who knows the place and time of his death, yet goes there anyway? ...

You can reject him....

Or you can accept him. You can journey with him. You can listen for his voice amidst the hundreds of voices and follow him.

(From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

Application

What resources do you call upon to make tough decisions? Where do you go for advice? How do you process the options? Next time you need to make a decision, pray first. Then pray again all along the way until you decide.

Exploration

God's Will—[Psalm 40:8](#); [143:10](#); [Micah 6:8](#); [Matthew 6:10](#); [7:21](#); [John 6:38](#); [Philippians 2:13](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:3](#); [Hebrews 10:1–10](#).

Jesus Is Brought Before Pilate

²⁸Early in the morning they led Jesus from Caiaphas's house to the Roman governor's palace. They would not go inside the palace, because they did not want to make themselves unclean; they wanted to eat the Passover meal. ²⁹So Pilate went outside to them and asked, "What charges do you bring against this man?"

³⁰They answered, "If he were not a criminal, we wouldn't have brought him to you."

³¹Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."

"But we are not allowed to put anyone to death," the Jews answered. ³²(This happened so that what Jesus said about how he would die would come true.)

³³Then Pilate went back inside the palace and called Jesus to him and asked, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

³⁴Jesus said, "Is that your own question, or did others tell you about me?"

³⁵Pilate answered, "I am not one of you. It was your own people and their leading priests who handed you over to me. What have you done wrong?"

³⁶Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If it belonged to this world, my servants would fight so that I would not be given over to the Jews. But my kingdom is from another place."

³⁷Pilate said, "So you are a king!"

Jesus answered, “You are the one saying I am a king. This is why I was born and came into the world: to tell people the truth. And everyone who belongs to the truth listens to me.”

³⁸Pilate said, “What is truth?” After he said this, he went out to the crowd again and said to them, “I find nothing against this man. ³⁹But it is your custom that I free one prisoner to you at Passover time. Do you want me to free the ‘king of the Jews’?”

⁴⁰They shouted back, “No, not him! Let Barabbas go free!” (Barabbas was a robber.)

Then Pilate ordered that Jesus be taken away and whipped.
²The soldiers made a crown from some thorny branches and put it on Jesus' head and put a purple robe around him. ³Then they came to him many times and said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and hit him in the face.

⁴Again Pilate came out and said to them, "Look, I am bringing Jesus out to you. I want you to know that I find nothing against him." ⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"

⁶When the leading priests and the guards saw Jesus, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

But Pilate answered, "Crucify him yourselves, because I find nothing against him."

⁷The leaders answered, "We have a law that says he should die, because he said he is the Son of God."

⁸When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid. ⁹He went back inside the palace and asked Jesus, "Where do you come from?" But Jesus did not answer him. ¹⁰Pilate said, "You refuse to speak to me? Don't you know I have power to set you free and power to have you crucified?"

¹¹Jesus answered, "The only power you have over me is the power given to you by God. The man who turned me in to you is guilty of a greater sin."

¹²After this, Pilate tried to let Jesus go. But some in the crowd cried out, "Anyone who makes himself king is against Caesar. If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar."

¹³When Pilate heard what they were saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at the place called The Stone Pavement. (In the [Hebrew language](#) the name is

Gabbatha.)¹⁴It was about noon on Preparation Day of Passover week. Pilate said to the crowd, “Here is your king!”

¹⁵They shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!”

Pilate asked them, “Do you want me to crucify your king?”

The leading priests answered, “The only king we have is Caesar.”

¹⁶So Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified.

Jesus Is Crucified

The soldiers took charge of Jesus.¹⁷Carrying his own cross, Jesus went out to a place called The Place of the Skull, which in the [Hebrew language](#) is called Golgotha.¹⁸There they crucified Jesus. They also crucified two other men, one on each side, with Jesus in the middle.¹⁹Pilate wrote a sign and put it on the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.²⁰The sign was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Many of the people read the sign, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city.²¹The leading priests said to Pilate, “Don’t write, ‘The King of the Jews.’ But write, ‘This man said, “I am the King of the Jews.””

²²Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

²³After the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, with each soldier getting one part. They also took his long shirt, which was all one piece of cloth, woven from top to bottom.²⁴So the soldiers said to each other, “We should not tear this into parts. Let’s throw lots to see who will get it.” This happened so that this Scripture would come true:

“They divided my clothes among them,
and they threw lots for my clothing.”

[Psalm 22:18](#)

So the soldiers did this.

²⁵Standing near his cross were Jesus’ mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the follower he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son.” ²⁷Then he said to the follower, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, the follower took her to live in his home.

Jesus Dies

²⁸After this, Jesus knew that everything had been done. So that the Scripture would come true, he said, [“I am thirsty.”](#) ²⁹There was a jar full of vinegar there, so the soldiers soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a branch of a hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ mouth. ³⁰When Jesus tasted the vinegar, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and died.

³¹This day was Preparation Day, and the next day was a special Sabbath day. Since the religious leaders did not want the bodies to stay on the cross on the Sabbath day, they asked Pilate to order that the legs of the men be [broken](#) and the bodies be taken away. ³²So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man on the cross beside Jesus. Then they broke the legs of the man on the other cross beside Jesus. ³³But when the soldiers came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴But one of the soldiers stuck his spear into Jesus’ side, and at once blood and

water came out.³⁵(The one who saw this happen is the one who told us this, and whatever he says is true. And he knows that he tells the truth, and he tells it so that you might believe.)³⁶These things happened to make the Scripture come true: [“Not one of his bones will be broken.”](#)³⁷And another Scripture says, [“They will look at the one they stabbed.”](#)

Christ Through the Bible

The Clothing of Christ

Scripture says little about the clothes Jesus wore. We know what his cousin John the Baptist wore. We know what the religious leaders wore. But the clothing of Christ is nondescript: neither so humble as to touch hearts nor so glamorous as to turn heads.

One reference to Jesus' garments is noteworthy. “They took his clothes and divided them into four parts, with each soldier getting one part. They also took his long shirt, which was all one piece of cloth, woven from top to bottom. So the soldiers said to each other, ‘We should not tear this into parts. Let’s throw lots to see who will get it’” ([John 19:23–24](#)).

It must have been Jesus' finest possession. Jewish tradition called for a mother to make such a robe and present it to her son as a departure gift when he left home. Had Mary done this for Jesus? We don't know. But we do know the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom. Why is this significant?

Scripture often describes our behavior as the clothes we wear... . Garments can symbolize

character, and like his garment, Jesus' character was seamless. Coordinated. Unified. He was like his robe: uninterrupted perfection.

"Woven from top." Jesus wasn't led by his own mind; he was led by the mind of his Father. Listen to his words:

"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing alone. The Son does only what he sees the Father doing, because the Son does whatever the Father does" ([John 5:19](#)).

"I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge" ([John 5:30](#), NRSV).

The character of Jesus was a seamless fabric woven from heaven to earth ... from God's thoughts to Jesus' actions. From God's tears to Jesus' compassion. From God's word to Jesus' response. All one piece. All a picture of the character of Jesus.

But when Christ was nailed to the cross, he took off his robe of seamless perfection and assumed a different wardrobe, the wardrobe of indignity.

The indignity of nakedness. Stripped before his own mother and loved ones. Shamed before his family.

The indignity of failure. For a few pain-filled hours, the religious leaders were the victors, and Christ appeared the loser. Shamed before his accusers.

Worst of all, he wore *the indignity of sin*. "Christ carried our sins in his body on the cross so we would stop living for sin and start living for what is right" ([1 Peter 2:24](#)).

The clothing of Christ on the cross? Sin—yours and mine. The sins of all humanity. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

Jesus Is Buried

³⁸Later, Joseph from Arimathea asked Pilate if he could take the body of Jesus. (Joseph was a secret follower of Jesus, because he was afraid of some of the leaders.) Pilate gave his permission, so Joseph came and took Jesus' body away.

³⁹Nicodemus, who earlier had come to Jesus at night, went with Joseph. He brought about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes. ⁴⁰These two men took Jesus' body and wrapped it with the spices in pieces of linen cloth, which is how they bury the dead. ⁴¹In the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden. In the garden was a new tomb that had never been used before. ⁴²The men laid Jesus in that tomb because it was nearby, and they were preparing to start their Sabbath day.

Life Lessons

John 20:1-31

Situation

Tombs in ancient times were closed by a circular stone across the mouth of a cave. Matthew tells us that authorities sealed the tomb and guarded it ([Matthew 27:66](#)). When Mary saw the stone rolled away, she was shocked and amazed. She ran to tell Peter and John.

Observation

The resurrection of Jesus is true. We worship a living Savior and can live forever because he does.

Inspiration

There is something about a living testimony that gives us courage. Once we see someone else emerging from life's dark tunnels we realize that we, too, can overcome....

In the eyes of humanity, death was still the black veil that separated them from joy. There was no victory over this hooded foe. Its putrid odor invaded the nostrils of every human, convincing them that life was only meant to end abruptly and senselessly.

It was left to the Son of God to disclose the true nature of this force. It was on the cross that the showdown occurred. Christ called for Satan's cards. Weary of seeing humanity fooled by a coverup, he entered the tunnel death to prove that there was indeed an exit. And, as the world darkened, creation held her breath....

Christ emerged from death's tunnel, lifted a triumphant fist toward the sky, and freed all from the fear of death.

"Death has been swallowed up in victory!" (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

Pretend for a moment that you are a prisoner of a heartless regime, working in a labor camp, awaiting your execution. Overnight you are liberated, almost miraculously. Life is yours again. Describe the feelings. Now be glad, for Jesus has done that for you.

Exploration

Resurrection—[Matthew 22:31–32](#); [John 11:25](#); [Acts 1:21–22](#); [4:2](#), [33](#); [Romans 1:3–4](#); [6:5](#); [1 Peter 1:3](#); [3:21](#).

Jesus' Tomb Is Empty

Early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb while it was still dark. When she saw that the large stone had been moved away from the tomb,² she ran to Simon Peter and the follower whom Jesus loved. Mary said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him."

³So Peter and the other follower started for the tomb. ⁴They were both running, but the other follower ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down and looked in and saw the strips of linen cloth lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then following him, Simon Peter arrived and went into the tomb and saw the strips of linen lying there. ⁷He also saw the cloth that had been around Jesus' head, which was folded up and laid in a different place from the strips of linen. ⁸Then the other follower, who had reached the tomb first, also went in. He saw and believed. ⁹(They did not yet understand from the Scriptures that Jesus must rise from the dead.) Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹⁰Then the followers went back home. ¹¹But Mary stood outside the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she bent down and looked inside the tomb. ¹²She saw two angels dressed in white, sitting where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and one at the feet.

¹³They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

She answered, “They have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴When Mary said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus.

¹⁵Jesus asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Whom are you looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said to him, “Did you take him away, sir? Tell me where you put him, and I will get him.”

¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

Mary turned toward Jesus and said in [Hebrew](#), “Rabboni.” (This means Teacher.)

¹⁷Jesus said to her, “Don’t hold on to me, because I have not yet gone up to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am going back to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and said to the followers, “I saw the Lord!” And she told them what Jesus had said to her.

Jesus Appears to His Followers

¹⁹When it was evening on the first day of the week, the followers were together. The doors were locked, because they were afraid of the older leaders. Then Jesus came and stood right in the middle of them and said, “Peace be with you.”

²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The followers were thrilled when they saw the Lord.

²¹Then Jesus said again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, I now send you.” ²²After he said this, he breathed on

them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you don’t forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Jesus Appears to Thomas

²⁴Thomas (called Didymus), who was one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.²⁵ The other followers kept telling Thomas, “We saw the Lord.”

But Thomas said, “I will not believe it until I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side.”

²⁶A week later the followers were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came in and stood right in the middle of them. He said, “Peace be with you.”²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand here in my side. Stop being an unbeliever and believe.”

²⁸Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹Then Jesus told him, “You believe because you see me. Those who believe without seeing me will be truly happy.”

Why John Wrote This Book

³⁰Jesus did many other miracles in the presence of his followers that are not written in this book.³¹ But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Then, by believing, you may have life through his name.

Life Lessons

John 21:1–25

Situation

John explained that the story has not ended. Jesus Christ formed, commissioned, and empowered his church. The church continued Jesus' ministry.

Observation

Jesus does not let his followers wallow in failure. He forgave Peter, and he forgives us.

Inspiration

“Catch any fish?” Peter and John look up. Probably a villager. “No!” they yell. “Try the other side!” the voice yells back. John looks at Peter. What harm? So out sails the net. Peter wraps the rope around his wrist to wait...

He's so intense with the task, he misses the message.

John doesn't. The moment is déjà vu... . He lifts his eyes to the man on the shore. “It's him,” he whispers.

Then louder, “It's Jesus.”

Then shouting, “It's the Lord, Peter. It's the Lord!”

Peter turns and looks. Jesus has come... . Jesus the victor over darkness. Jesus the God of heaven and earth is on the shore ...

Peter plunges into the water, swims to the shore, and stumbles out wet and shivering and stands in front of the friend he betrayed...

For one of the few times in his life, Peter is silent. What words would suffice? The moment is too holy for words....

What do *you* say at a moment such as this?

It's just you and God. You and God both know what you did. And neither of you is proud of it. What do you do?

You might consider doing what Peter did. Stand in God's presence. Stand in his sight. Stand still and wait. Sometimes that's all a soul can do. Too repentant to speak, but too hopeful to leave—we just stand.

Stand amazed.

He has come back.

He invites you to try again. This time, with him.
(From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

Name the biggest blunders of your life—have you faced them, admitted them, wondered about them? Because Jesus restores and heals, you can be forgiven.

Exploration

Failure—[Joshua 7](#); [1 Samuel 15](#); [1 Chronicles 28:20](#); [Luke 22:31–34](#), [54–62](#).

Jesus Appears to Seven Followers

Later, Jesus showed himself to his followers again—this time at [Lake Galilee](#). This is how he showed himself: ²Some of the followers were together: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the two sons of Zebedee, and two other followers. ³Simon Peter said, “I am going out to fish.”

The others said, “We will go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat. They fished that night but caught nothing.

⁴Early the next morning Jesus stood on the shore, but the followers did not know it was Jesus. ⁵Then he said to them, “Friends, did you catch any fish?”

They answered, “No.”

⁶He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they did, and they caught so many fish they could not pull the net back into the boat.

⁷The follower whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Peter heard him say this, he wrapped his coat around himself. (Peter had taken his clothes off.) Then he jumped into the water. ⁸The other followers went to shore in the boat, dragging the net full of fish. They were not very far from shore, only about a hundred yards. ⁹When the followers stepped out of the boat and onto the shore, they saw a fire of hot coals. There were fish on the fire, and there was bread.

¹⁰Then Jesus said, “Bring some of the fish you just caught.”

¹¹Simon Peter went into the boat and pulled the net to the shore. It was full of big fish, one hundred fifty-three in all, but even though there were so many, the net did not tear. ¹²Jesus said to them, “Come and eat.” None of the followers dared ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, along with the fish.

¹⁴This was now the third time Jesus showed himself to his followers after he was raised from the dead.

Jesus Talks to Peter

¹⁵When they finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John do you love me more than these?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

¹⁶Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

¹⁷A third time he said, “Simon son of John do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” Peter said, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!”

He said to him, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸I tell you the truth, when you were younger, you tied your own belt and went where you wanted. But when you are old, you will put out your hands and someone else will tie you and take you where you don’t want

to go.”¹⁹(Jesus said this to show how Peter would die to give glory to God.) Then Jesus said to Peter, “Follow me!”

²⁰Peter turned and saw that the follower Jesus loved was walking behind them. (This was the follower who had leaned against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who will turn against you?”) ²¹When Peter saw him behind them, he asked Jesus, “Lord, what about him?”

²²Jesus answered, “If I want him to live until I come back, that is not your business. You follow me.”

²³So a story spread among the followers that this one would not die. But Jesus did not say he would not die. He only said, “If I want him to live until I come back, that is not your business.”

²⁴That follower is the one who is telling these things and who has now written them down. We know that what he says is true.

²⁵There are many other things Jesus did. If every one of them were written down, I suppose the whole world would not be big enough for all the books that would be written.

Word The Greek word is “logos,” meaning any kind of communication; it could be translated “message.” Here, it means Christ, because Christ was the way God told people about himself.

John John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ’s coming ([Matthew 3](#), [Luke 3](#)).

But ... Father This could be translated, “But the only God is very close to the Father.” Also, some Greek copies say, “But the only Son is very close to the Father.”

John John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ’s coming ([Matthew 3](#), [Luke 3](#)).

Elijah A prophet who spoke for God. He lived hundreds of years before Christ and was expected to return before Christ ([Malachi 4:5–6](#)).

Prophet They probably meant the prophet that God told Moses he would send ([Deuteronomy 18:15–19](#)).

Lamb of God Name for Jesus. Jesus is like the lambs that were offered for a sacrifice to God.

Peter The Greek name “Peter,” like the Aramaic name “Cephas,” means “rock.”

‘angels ... down’ These words are from [Genesis 28:12](#).

washing ceremony The Jewish people washed themselves in special ways before eating, before worshiping in the Temple, and at other special times.

“My ... me.” Quotation from [Psalm 69:9](#).

Moses ... desert When the Israelites were dying from snakebites, God told Moses to put a brass snake on a pole. The people who looked at the snake were healed ([Numbers 21:4–9](#)).

religious washing The Jewish people washed themselves in special ways before eating, before worshiping in the Temple,

and at other special times.

Jewish people ... Samaritans This can also be translated “Jewish people don’t use things that Samaritans have used.”

I ... their work. As a farmer sends workers to harvest grain, Jesus sends his followers out to bring people to God.

Bethzatha Also called Bethesda or Bethesda, it is a pool of water north of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Hebrew language Hebrew or Aramaic, the languages of many people in this region in the first century.

Verse 3 Some Greek copies add “and they waited for the water to move.” A few later copies add verse 4: “Sometimes an angel of the Lord came down to the pool and stirred up the water. After the angel did this, the first person to go into the pool was healed from any sickness he had.”

Prophet They probably meant the prophet that God told Moses he would send ([Deuteronomy 18:15–19](#)).

‘He gave ... eat.’ Quotation from [Psalm 78:24](#).

‘They ... God.’ Quotation from [Isaiah 54:13](#).

law Moses gave God’s people the Law that God gave him on Mount Sinai ([Exodus 34:29–32](#)).

Prophet They probably meant the prophet God told Moses he would send ([Deuteronomy 18:15–19](#)).

Nicodemus ... group. The story about Nicodemus going and talking to Jesus is in [John 3:1–21](#).

blind Jesus is talking about people who are spiritually blind, not physically blind.

‘I ... gods.’ Quotation from [Psalm 82:6](#).

resurrection Being raised from the dead to live again.

coins One coin, a denarius, was the average pay for one day’s work.

Praise Literally, “Hosanna,” a Hebrew word used at first in

praying to God for help, but at this time it was probably a shout of joy used in praising God or his Messiah.

'The man ... me.' Quotation from [Psalm 41:9](#).

sitting Literally, "lying." The people of that time ate lying down and leaning on one arm.

Helper "Counselor" or "Comforter." Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit.

'They ... reason.' These words could be from [Psalm 35:19](#) or [Psalm 69:4](#).

Helper "Counselor" or "Comforter." Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit.

cup Jesus is talking about the painful things that will happen to him. Accepting these things will be very hard, like drinking a cup of something bitter.

unclean Going into the Roman palace would make them unfit to eat the Passover Feast, according to their Law.

Hebrew language Hebrew or Aramaic, the languages of many people in this region in the first century.

"I am thirsty." Read [Psalms 22:15](#); [69:21](#).

broken The breaking of their bones would make them die sooner.

"Not one ... broken." Quotation from [Psalm 34:20](#). The idea is from [Exodus 12:46](#); [Numbers 9:12](#).

"They ... stabbed." Quotation from [Zechariah 12:10](#).

Hebrew language Hebrew or Aramaic, the languages of many people in this region in the first century.

Lake Galilee Literally, "Sea of Tiberias."

The Book of Acts

Introduction

They aren't the same men.

Oh, I know they look like it. They have the same names. The same faces. The same mannerisms. They look the same. But they aren't. On the surface they appear no different. Peter is still brazen. Nathanael is still reflective. Philip is still calculating.

They look the same. But they aren't. They aren't the same men you read about in the last four books. The fellows you got to know in the Gospels? These are the ones, but they're different.

You'll see it. As you read you'll see it. In their eyes. You hear it in their voices. You feel it in their passion. These men have changed.

As you read you'll wonder—are these the same guys? The ones who doubted in Galilee? The ones who argued in Capernaum? The ones who ran for their lives in Gethsemane? You'll wonder, “Are these the same men?”

The answer is no. They are different. They have stood face-to-face with God. They have sat at the feet of the resurrected King. They are different.

Within them dwells a fire not found on earth. Christ has taught them. The Father has forgiven them. The Spirit indwells them. They are not the same.

And because they are different, so is the world.

Read their adventures and be encouraged. Read their adventures and be listening. What God did to them, he longs to do for you.

About This Book

Author:

Luke, the doctor and gospel writer

Date Written:

C. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

-
- The foundations of the early church were established in the aftermath of Jesus' resurrection and ascension.
- The Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to spread the gospel into the world as Jesus commanded.
- The first struggle of the gospel was to stand independently of Jewish tradition and faith.
- The sacrifice Jesus made was for all people.

Key Verse:

“But when the Holy Spirit comes to you, you will receive power. You will be my witnesses—in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria, and in every part of the world” ([Acts 1:8](#)).

Contents:

1. The Gospel in Jerusalem [1:1–7:60](#)
2. The Gospel in Judea and Samaria [8:1–12:25](#)
3. The Gospel in the Non-Jewish World [13:1–28:31](#)

Life Lessons

Acts 1:1–2:47

Situation

The Book of Acts was written to give an accurate report of what happened to Jesus' followers and how the early church began and spread. It was written by Luke, the physician and historian, as a sequel to the Gospel that bears his name. Luke told how the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Samaria and finally to every part of the world.

Observation

God planned that the Holy Spirit would come to empower Believers. Jesus gave this plan to the apostles, his last promise before he ascended to heaven.

Inspiration

If the Christian life is simply a matter of doing our best, there was no need for God to send the Holy Spirit to help us. After all, our best is our best. How do we improve on that? Since God is omniscient, as we certainly believe He is, He knows when we have done all we can do. Why complicate matters?

Jesus let it be known, however, that God was looking for more than our best. He was looking for a lifestyle and attitude that superseded our best, a lifestyle and attitude that we could never attain through our own efforts....

Think about this. If we don't need any help, why send a Helper? The promise of a Helper presupposes

that we need help. The promise of a Helper was Jesus' way of tipping us off to one of the most profound truths concerning the Christian life—it's impossible! The quality of life Jesus expects from His followers is unattainable apart from outside intervention.

(From *The Wonderful Spirit-Filled Life* by Charles Stanley)

Application

Are you nervous about sharing your faith? Be bold. Open your mouth to share and let the reliable Holy Spirit direct your conversation.

Exploration

Promises About the Spirit—[John 14:16, 26, 15:26–27; 16:7–8, 13; Romans 8:11, 26; 2 Corinthians 1:21–22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13–14; Hebrews 10:23.](#)

To Theophilus.

The first book I wrote was about everything Jesus began to do and teach² until the day he was taken up into heaven. Before this, with the help of the Holy Spirit, Jesus told the apostles he had chosen what they should do.³ After his death, he showed himself to them and proved in many ways that he was alive. The apostles saw Jesus during the forty days after he was raised from the dead, and he spoke to them about the kingdom of God.⁴ Once when he was eating with them, he told them not to leave Jerusalem. He said, “Wait here to receive the promise from the Father which I told you about.”⁵ John baptized people with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus Is Taken Up into Heaven

⁶When the apostles were all together, they asked Jesus, “Lord, are you now going to give the kingdom back to Israel?”

⁷Jesus said to them, “The Father is the only One who has the authority to decide dates and times. These things are not for you to know.”⁸ But when the Holy Spirit comes to you, you will receive power. You will be my witnesses—in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria, and in every part of the world.”

⁹After he said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud hid him from their sight.¹⁰ As he was going, they were looking into the sky. Suddenly, two men wearing white

clothes stood beside them. ¹¹They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking into the sky? Jesus, whom you saw taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you saw him go.”

A New Apostle Is Chosen

¹²Then they went back to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. (This mountain is about half a mile from Jerusalem.) ¹³When they entered the city, they went to the upstairs room where they were staying. Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon (known as the Zealot), and Judas son of James were there. ¹⁴They all continued praying together with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and Jesus’ brothers.

¹⁵During this time there was a meeting of the believers (about one hundred twenty of them). Peter stood up and said, ^{16–17}“[Brothers and sisters](#), in the Scriptures the Holy Spirit said through David something that must happen involving Judas. He was one of our own group and served together with us. He led those who arrested Jesus.” ¹⁸(Judas bought a field with the money he got for his evil act. But he fell to his death, his body burst open, and all his intestines poured out. ¹⁹Everyone in Jerusalem learned about this so they named this place Akeldama. In their language Akeldama means “Field of Blood.”) ²⁰“In the Book of Psalms,” Peter said, “this is written:

‘May his place be empty;
leave no one to live in it.’

And it is also written:

‘Let another man replace him as leader.’

²¹⁻²²“So now a man must become a witness with us of Jesus’ being raised from the dead. He must be one of the men who were part of our group during all the time the Lord Jesus was among us—from the time John was baptizing people until the day Jesus was taken up from us to heaven.”

²³They put the names of two men before the group. One was Joseph Barsabbas, who was also called Justus. The other was Matthias. ²⁴⁻²⁵The apostles prayed, “Lord, you know the thoughts of everyone. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to do this work. Show us who should be an apostle in place of Judas, who turned away and went where he belongs.” ²⁶Then they used lots to choose between them, and the lots showed that Matthias was the one. So he became an apostle with the other eleven.

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a noise like a strong, blowing wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw something like flames of fire that were separated and stood over each person there. ⁴They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak different [languages](#) by the power the Holy Spirit was giving them.

⁵There were some religious Jews staying in Jerusalem who were from every country in the world. ⁶When they heard this noise, a crowd came together. They were all surprised, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷They were completely amazed at this. They said, "Look! Aren't all these people that we hear speaking from Galilee?" ⁸Then how is it possible that we each hear them in our own languages? We are from different places: ⁹Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, the areas of Libya near Cyrene, Rome ¹¹(both Jews and those who had become Jews), Crete, and Arabia. But we hear them telling in our own languages about the great things God has done!" ¹²They were all amazed and confused, asking each other, "What does this mean?"

¹³But others were making fun of them, saying, "They have had too much wine."

Peter Speaks to the People

¹⁴But Peter stood up with the eleven apostles, and in a loud voice he spoke to the crowd: “My fellow Jews, and all of you who are in Jerusalem, listen to me. Pay attention to what I have to say. ¹⁵These people are not drunk, as you think; it is only nine o’clock in the morning! ¹⁶But Joel the prophet wrote about what is happening here today:

¹⁷“God says: In the last days
I will pour out my Spirit on all kinds of people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy.
Your young men will see visions,
and your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸At that time I will pour out my Spirit
also on my male slaves and female slaves,
and they will prophesy.

¹⁹I will show miracles
in the sky and on the earth:
blood, fire, and thick smoke.

²⁰The sun will become dark,
the moon red as blood,
before the overwhelming and glorious day of the Lord
will come.

²¹Then anyone who calls on the Lord will be saved.’

[Joel 2:28–32](#)

²²“People of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus from Nazareth was a very special man. God clearly showed this to you by the miracles, wonders, and signs he did through Jesus. You all know this, because it happened right here among you.

²³Jesus was given to you, and with the help of those who don’t

know the law, you put him to death by nailing him to a cross. But this was God's plan which he had made long ago; he knew all this would happen. ²⁴God raised Jesus from the dead and set him free from the pain of death, because death could not hold him. ²⁵For David said this about him:

'I keep the Lord before me always.
Because he is close by my side,
I will not be hurt.

²⁶So I am glad, and I rejoice.

Even my body has hope,

²⁷because you will not leave me in the grave.

You will not let your Holy One rot.

²⁸You will teach me how to live a holy life.

Being with you will fill me with joy.'

[Psalm 16:8-11](#)

²⁹“Brothers and sisters, I can tell you truly that David, our ancestor, died and was buried. His grave is still here with us today. ³⁰He was a prophet and knew [God had promised him that he would make a person from David's family a king just as he was.](#) ³¹Knowing this before it happened, David talked about the Christ rising from the dead. He said:

'He was not left in the grave.
His body did not rot.'

³²So Jesus is the One whom God raised from the dead. And we are all witnesses to this. ³³Jesus was lifted up to heaven and is now at God's right side. The Father has given the Holy Spirit to Jesus as he promised. So Jesus has poured out that Spirit,

and this is what you now see and hear. ³⁴David was not the one who was lifted up to heaven, but he said:

‘The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit by me at my right side,
³⁵[until I put your enemies under your control.](#)” ’

[Psalm 110:1](#)

³⁶“So, all the people of Israel should know this truly: God has made Jesus—the man you nailed to the cross—both Lord and Christ.”

³⁷When the people heard this, they felt guilty and asked Peter and the other apostles, “What shall we do?”

³⁸Peter said to them, “Change your hearts and lives and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹This promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away. It is for everyone the Lord our God calls to himself.”

⁴⁰Peter warned them with many other words. He begged them, “Save yourselves from the evil of today’s people!”

⁴¹Then those people who accepted what Peter said were baptized. About three thousand people were added to the number of believers that day. ⁴²They spent their time learning the apostles’ teaching, sharing, [breaking bread](#), and praying together.

Christ Through the Bible
Jesus: The Name That Saves

Let's go back to my sailing invitation. I know I said you probably wouldn't go, but let's pretend that you aren't as smart as you look, and you accept and board the boat.

You begin to worry when you notice that I lift the sail only a few inches on the mast. You think it even stranger that I position myself behind the partially raised sail and begin to blow.

"Why don't you raise the sail?" you ask.

"Because I can't blow on the whole thing," I pant.

"Let the wind blow it," you urge.

"Oh, I can't do that. I'm sailing this boat by myself."

Those are the words of a legalist, huffing and puffing to push his vessel to heaven. (Ever wonder why so many religious folk seem out of breath?)

With time we drift out to sea, and a powerful storm hits. Rain splatters on the deck, and the little vessel bounces on the waves. "I'm going to set the anchor!" I yell. You're relieved that I at least know where the anchor is, but then you are stunned at where I put it.

First, I take the anchor and set it up near the bow. "That should steady the boat!" I shout. But, of course, it doesn't. Next I carry the anchor to the stern. "Now we are secure!" But the bouncing continues. I hang the anchor on the mast, but it doesn't help. Finally, in fear and frustration, you take the anchor and throw it out to the deep and scream, "Don't you know you have to anchor to something other than yourself!"

A legalist doesn't know that. He anchors only to himself. His security comes from what he does; his lineage, his law, and his tattoo. When the storm blows the legalist casts his anchor on his own works. He will save himself. After all, isn't he in the right group? Doesn't he have the right law? And hasn't he passed through the right initiation? (Ever wonder why so many religious people have such stormy lives?)

Here is the point: Salvation is God's business.

... God is the One who saves his children. There is only one name under heaven that has the power to save, and that name is not yours. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

The Believers Share

⁴³The apostles were doing many miracles and signs, and everyone felt great respect for God. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and shared everything. ⁴⁵They would sell their land and the things they owned and then divide the money and give it to anyone who needed it. ⁴⁶The believers met together in the Temple every day. They ate together in their homes, happy to share their food with joyful hearts. ⁴⁷They praised God and were liked by all the people. Every day the Lord added those who were being saved to the group of believers.

Life Lessons

Acts 3:1–4:37

Situation

At the end of this chapter Luke described the beginning of the early church—a group that was marked by its generosity, its unity, and its care for each other.

Observation

God desires that his followers live in unity, generosity, and love with one another. This account stands in sharp contrast with the example of Ananias and Sapphira found in chapter [5](#).

Inspiration

Of all the lessons we can draw from [\[John 13:35\]](#), don't miss the most important: Unity matters to God. The Father does not want his kids to squabble. Disunity disturbs him. Why? Because “all people will know that you are my followers if you love each other” ([John 13:35](#)). Unity creates belief. How will the world believe that Jesus was sent by God? Not if we agree with each other. Not if we solve every controversy. Not if we are unanimous on each vote. Not if we never make a doctrinal error. But if we love one another.

Unity creates belief. Disunity fosters disbelief. Who wants to board a ship of bickering sailors? Life on the ocean may be rough, but at least the waves don't call us names.

Paul Billheimer may very well be right when he

says:

“The continuous and widespread fragmentation of the Church has been the scandal of the ages. It has been Satan’s master strategy. The sin of disunity probably has caused more souls to be lost than all other sins combined.”

“All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other.” Stop and think about this verse for a minute. Could it be that unity is the key to reaching the world for Christ?

If unity is the key to evangelism, shouldn’t it have precedence in our prayers? Shouldn’t we, as Paul said, “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” ([Ephesians 4:3](#), NIV)? If unity matters to God, then shouldn’t unity matter to us? If unity is a priority in heaven, then shouldn’t it be a priority on earth?

Nowhere, by the way, are we told to build unity. We are told simply to keep unity. From God’s perspective there is but “one flock and one shepherd” ([John 10:16](#)). Unity does not need to be created; it simply needs to be protected.

How do we do that? How do we make every effort to keep the unity? Does that mean we compromise our convictions? No. Does that mean we abandon the truths we cherish? No. But it does mean we look long and hard at the attitudes we carry.

(From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Application

If unity is the way to reach the world for Christ, is there anything keeping you from pursuing that in

your local church and with other believers? When attending church meetings or working on committees, ask God for a sense of oneness and unity.

Exploration

Unity—[Romans 12:16](#); [15:5](#); [2 Corinthians 13:11](#); [Philippians 2:2](#).

Peter Heals a Crippled Man

One day Peter and John went to the Temple at three o'clock, the time set each day for the afternoon prayer service.² There, at the Temple gate called Beautiful Gate, was a man who had been crippled all his life. Every day he was carried to this gate to beg for money from the people going into the Temple.³ The man saw Peter and John going into the Temple and asked them for money.⁴ Peter and John looked straight at him and said, "Look at us!"⁵ The man looked at them, thinking they were going to give him some money.⁶ But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold, but I do have something else I can give you. By the power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth, stand up and walk!"⁷ Then Peter took the man's right hand and lifted him up. Immediately the man's feet and ankles became strong.⁸ He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk. He went into the Temple with them, walking and jumping and praising God.⁹⁻¹⁰ All the people recognized him as the crippled man who always sat by the Beautiful Gate begging for money. Now they saw this same man walking and praising God, and they were amazed. They wondered how this could happen.

Peter Speaks to the People

¹¹While the man was holding on to Peter and John, all the

people were amazed and ran to them at Solomon's Porch.
¹²When Peter saw this, he said to them, "People of Israel, why are you surprised? You are looking at us as if it were our own power or goodness that made this man walk. ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, gave glory to Jesus, his servant. But you handed him over to be killed. Pilate decided to let him go free, but you told Pilate you did not want Jesus. ¹⁴You did not want the One who is holy and good but asked Pilate to give you a [murderer](#) instead. ¹⁵And so you killed the One who gives life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses to this. ¹⁶It was faith in Jesus that made this crippled man well. You can see this man, and you know him. He was made completely well because of trust in Jesus, and you all saw it happen!

¹⁷"Brothers and sisters, I know you did those things to Jesus because neither you nor your leaders understood what you were doing. ¹⁸God said through the prophets that his Christ would suffer and die. And now God has made these things come true in this way. ¹⁹So you must change your hearts and lives! Come back to God, and he will forgive your sins. Then the Lord will send the time of rest. ²⁰And he will send Jesus, the One he chose to be the Christ. ²¹But Jesus must stay in heaven until the time comes when all things will be made right again. God told about this time long ago when he spoke through his holy prophets. ²²Moses said, ['The Lord your God will give you a prophet like me, who is one of your own people. You must listen to everything he tells you.'](#) ²³[Anyone who does not listen to that prophet will die, cut off from God's people.'](#) ²⁴Samuel, and all the other prophets who spoke for God after Samuel, told about this time now. ²⁵You are descendants of the

prophets. You have received the agreement God made with your ancestors. He said to your father Abraham, 'Through your descendants all the nations on the earth will be blessed.'

²⁶God has raised up his servant Jesus and sent him to you first to bless you by turning each of you away from doing evil.”

Peter and John at the Council

While Peter and John were speaking to the people, priests, the captain of the soldiers that guarded the Temple, and Sadducees came up to them. ²They were upset because the two apostles were teaching the people and were preaching that people will rise from the dead through the power of Jesus. ³The older leaders grabbed Peter and John and put them in jail. Since it was already night, they kept them in jail until the next day. ⁴But many of those who had heard Peter and John preach believed the things they said. There were now about five thousand in the group of believers.

⁵The next day the rulers, the older leaders, and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander were there, as well as everyone from the high priest's family. ⁷They made Peter and John stand before them and then asked them, "By what power or authority did you do this?"

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and you older leaders, ⁹are you questioning us about a good thing that was done to a crippled man? Are you asking us who made him well? ¹⁰We want all of you and all the people to know that this man was made well by the power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth. You crucified him, but God raised him from the dead. This man was crippled, but he is now well and able to stand here before you because of the power of Jesus. ¹¹Jesus is

'the [stone](#) that you builders rejected,

which has become the cornerstone.’

[Psalm 118:22](#)

¹²Jesus is the only One who can save people. His name is the only power in the world that has been given to save people. We must be saved through him.”

¹³The leaders saw that Peter and John were not afraid to speak, and they understood that these men had no special training or education. So they were amazed. Then they realized that Peter and John had been with Jesus. ¹⁴Because they saw the healed man standing there beside the two apostles, they could say nothing against them. ¹⁵After the leaders ordered them to leave the meeting, they began to talk to each other. ¹⁶They said, “What shall we do with these men? Everyone in Jerusalem knows they have done a great miracle, and we cannot say it is not true. ¹⁷But to keep it from spreading among the people, we must warn them not to talk to people anymore using that name.”

¹⁸So they called Peter and John in again and told them not to speak or to teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John answered them, “You decide what God would want. Should we obey you or God? ²⁰We cannot keep quiet. We must speak about what we have seen and heard.” ²¹The leaders warned the apostles again and let them go free. They could not find a way to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had been done. ²²The man who received the miracle of healing was more than forty years old.

The Believers Pray

²³After Peter and John left the meeting of leaders, they went to their own group and told them everything the leading priests and the older leaders had said to them. ²⁴When the believers heard this, they prayed to God together, “Lord, you are the One who made the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵By the Holy Spirit, through our father David your servant, you said:

‘Why are the nations so angry?
Why are the people making useless plans?
²⁶The kings of the earth prepare to fight,
and their leaders make plans together
against the Lord
and his Christ.’

[Psalm 2:1–2](#)

²⁷These things really happened when Herod, Pontius Pilate, and some of the people all came together against Jesus here in Jerusalem. Jesus is your holy servant, the One you made to be the Christ. ²⁸These people made your plan happen because of your power and your will. ²⁹And now, Lord, listen to their threats. Lord, help us, your servants, to speak your word without fear. ³⁰Help us to be brave by showing us your power to heal. Give proofs and make miracles happen by the power of Jesus, your holy servant.”

³¹After they had prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke God’s word without fear.

³²The group of believers were united in their hearts and spirit. All those in the group acted as though their private property belonged to everyone in the group. In fact, they shared everything. ³³With great power the apostles were telling people that the Lord Jesus was truly raised from the dead. And God blessed all the believers very much. ³⁴No one in the group needed anything. From time to time those who owned fields or houses sold them, brought the money, ³⁵and gave it to the apostles. Then the money was given to anyone who needed it.

³⁶One of the believers was named Joseph, a Levite born in Cyprus. The apostles called him Barnabas (which means “one who encourages”). ³⁷Joseph owned a field, sold it, brought the money, and gave it to the apostles.

Life Lessons

Acts 5:1–42

Situation

When God empowered the apostles to perform miracles and amazing signs, the disciples caught the attention of jealous and skeptical religious leaders. Even some Pharisees came to believe in Jesus.

Observation

The story of the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira follows the account in [Acts 4:32–35](#) where the believers shared their property and goods and gave to those in need.

Inspiration

Ananias and Sapphira represent just how much we humans do not trust the truth. They sold a piece of property and gave half the money to the church. They lied to Peter and the apostles, claiming that the land sold for the amount they gave. Their sin was not in holding back some of the money for themselves; it was in misrepresenting the truth. Their deceit resulted in their deaths. Luke writes: “The whole church and all the others who heard about these things were filled with fear” ([Acts 5:11](#)).

More than once I’ve heard people refer to this story with a nervous chuckle and say, “I’m glad God doesn’t still strike people dead for lying.” I’m not so sure he doesn’t. It seems to me that the wages of deceit is still death. Not death of the body, perhaps, but the death of:

-
- a marriage—Falsehoods are termites in the trunk of the family tree.
- a conscience—The tragedy of the second lie is that it is always easier to tell than the first.
- a career—Just ask the student who got booted out for cheating or the employee who got fired for embezzlement if the lie wasn't fatal.
- faith—The language of faith and the language of falsehood have two different vocabularies. Those fluent in the language of falsehood find terms like “confession” and “repentance” hard to pronounce.

We could also list the deaths of intimacy, trust, peace, credibility, and self-respect. But perhaps the most tragic death that occurs from deceit is our witness. The court won't listen to the testimony of a perjured witness. Neither will the world. Do we think our coworkers will believe our words about Christ when they can't even believe our words about how we handled our expense account? Even more significantly, do we think God will use us as a witness if we won't tell the truth?

Every high school football team has a player whose assignment is to carry the play from the coach to the huddle. What if the player doesn't tell the truth? What if the coach calls for a pass but the courier says the coach called for a run? One thing is certain: the coach won't call on that player very long. God says if we are faithful with the small things, he'll trust us with the greater things ([Matthew 25:21](#)). Can

he trust you with the small things? (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

Dishonesty can affect—and infect—every aspect of your life. In what areas of your life do you need to clear up deceitfulness? Ask the Holy Spirit to point out any deceitfulness in your life and pray for the courage to remove it from your life.

Exploration

Deceit—[Psalm 32:1–5](#); [50:19](#); [55:23](#); [Proverbs 12:5](#); [Jeremiah 17:9](#).

Christ Through the Bible

The Power of Christ

For three days Jesus' body decayed. It did not rest, mind you. It decayed. The cheeks sank and the skin paled. But after three days the process was reversed. There was a stirring, a stirring deep within the grave ... and the living Christ stepped forth.

And the moment he stepped forth, everything changed... . The resurrection is an exploding flare announcing to all sincere seekers that it is safe to believe. Safe to believe in ultimate justice. Safe to believe in eternal bodies. Safe to believe in heaven as our estate and the earth as its porch. Safe to believe in a time when questions won't keep us awake and pain won't keep us down. Safe to believe in open graves and endless days and genuine praise.

Because we can accept the resurrection story, it is safe to accept the rest of the story.

Because of the resurrection, everything changes.

Death changes. It used to be the end; now it is the beginning.

The cemetery changes. People once went there to say goodbye; now they go to say, "We'll be together again."

Even the coffin changes. The casket is no longer a box where we hide bodies, but rather a cocoon in which the body is kept until God sets it free to fly.

And someday, according to Christ, he will set us free. He will come back. “I will come back and take you to be with me” ([John 14:3](#)). And to prove that he was serious about his promise, the stone was rolled and his body was raised.

For he knows that someday this world will shake again. In the blink of an eye, as fast as the lightning flashes from the east to the west, he will come back. And everyone will see him—you will, I will. Bodies will push back the dirt and break the surface of the sea. The earth will tremble, the sky will roar, and those who do not know him will shudder. But in that hour you will not fear, because you know him. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

Ananias and Sapphira Die

But a man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold some land. ²He kept back part of the money for himself; his wife knew about this and agreed to it. But he brought the rest of the money and gave it to the apostles. ³Peter said, "Ananias, why did you let Satan rule your thoughts to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep for yourself part of the money you received for the land? ⁴Before you sold the land, it belonged to you. And even after you sold it, you could have used the money any way you wanted. Why did you think of doing this? You lied to God, not to us!" ⁵⁻⁶When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. Some young men came in, wrapped up his body, carried it out, and buried it. And everyone who heard about this was filled with fear.

⁷About three hours later his wife came in, but she did not know what had happened. ⁸Peter said to her, "Tell me, was the money you got for your field this much?"

Sapphira answered, "Yes, that was the price."

⁹Peter said to her, "Why did you and your husband agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." ¹⁰At that moment Sapphira fell down by his feet and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹The whole church and all the others who heard about these things were filled with

fear.

The Apostles Heal Many

¹²The apostles did many signs and miracles among the people. And they would all meet together on Solomon's Porch. ¹³None of the others dared to join them, but all the people respected them. ¹⁴More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to the group of believers. ¹⁵The people placed their sick on beds and mats in the streets, hoping that when Peter passed by at least his shadow might fall on them. ¹⁶Crowds came from all the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those who were bothered by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.

Leaders Try to Stop the Apostles

¹⁷The high priest and all his friends (a group called the Sadducees) became very jealous. ¹⁸They took the apostles and put them in jail. ¹⁹But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and led the apostles outside. The angel said, ²⁰“Go stand in the Temple and tell the people everything about this new life.” ²¹When the apostles heard this, they obeyed and went into the Temple early in the morning and continued teaching.

When the high priest and his friends arrived, they called a meeting of the leaders and all the important older men. They sent some men to the jail to bring the apostles to them. ²²But, upon arriving, the officers could not find the apostles. So they

went back and reported to the leaders.²³ They said, “The jail was closed and locked, and the guards were standing at the doors. But when we opened the doors, the jail was empty!”²⁴ Hearing this, the captain of the Temple guards and the leading priests were confused and wondered what was happening.

²⁵Then someone came and told them, “Listen! The men you put in jail are standing in the Temple teaching the people.”²⁶ Then the captain and his men went out and brought the apostles back. But the soldiers did not use force, because they were afraid the people would stone them to death.

²⁷The soldiers brought the apostles to the meeting and made them stand before the leaders. The high priest questioned them,²⁸ saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in that name. But look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are trying to make us responsible for this man’s death.”

²⁹Peter and the other apostles answered, “We must obey God, not human authority!”³⁰ You killed Jesus by hanging him on a cross. But God, the God of our ancestors, raised Jesus up from the dead!³¹ Jesus is the One whom God raised to be on his right side, as Leader and Savior. Through him, all people could change their hearts and lives and have their sins forgiven.³² We saw all these things happen. The Holy Spirit, whom God has given to all who obey him, also proves these things are true.”

³³When the leaders heard this, they became angry and wanted to kill them.³⁴ But a Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up in the meeting. He was a teacher of the law, and all the people respected him. He ordered the apostles to leave the meeting for

a little while. ³⁵Then he said, “People of Israel, be careful what you are planning to do to these men. ³⁶Remember when Theudas appeared? He said he was a great man, and about four hundred men joined him. But he was killed, and all his followers were scattered; they were able to do nothing. ³⁷Later, a man named Judas came from Galilee at the time of the [registration](#). He also led a group of followers and was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸And so now I tell you: Stay away from these men, and leave them alone. If their plan comes from human authority, it will fail. ³⁹But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them. You might even be fighting against God himself!”

The leaders agreed with what Gamaliel said. ⁴⁰They called the apostles in, beat them, and told them not to speak in the name of Jesus again. Then they let them go free. ⁴¹The apostles left the meeting full of joy because they were given the honor of suffering disgrace for Jesus. ⁴²Every day in the Temple and in people’s homes they continued teaching the people and telling the Good News—that Jesus is the Christ.

Life Lessons

Acts 6:1–15

Situation

The twelve apostles established their priorities and recognized they needed additional help, so they recruited others to assist them.

Observation

With the recruiting of the seven men, the apostles were able to give their full attention to prayer and the teaching of the Word of God.

Inspiration

Some of us have tried to have a daily quiet time and have not been successful. Others of us have a hard time concentrating. And all of us are busy. So rather than spend time with God, listening for his voice, we'll let others spend time with him and then benefit from their experience. Let them tell us what God is saying. After all, isn't that why we pay preachers? Isn't that why we read Christian books? These folks are good at daily devotions. I'll just learn from them.

If that is your approach, if your spiritual experiences are secondhand and not firsthand, I'd like to challenge you with this thought: Do you do that with other parts of your life? I don't think so.

You don't do that with vacations. You don't say, "Vacations are such a hassle, packing bags and traveling. I'm going to send someone on vacation for me. When he returns, I'll hear all about it and be

spared all the inconvenience.” Would you do that? No! You want the experience firsthand. You want the sights firsthand, and you want to rest firsthand. Certain things no one can do for you.

You don’t do that with romance. You don’t say, “I’m in love with that wonderful person, but romance is such a hassle. I’m going to hire a surrogate lover to enjoy the romance in my place. I’ll hear all about it and be spared the inconvenience.” Who would do that? Perish the thought. You want the romance firsthand. You don’t want to miss a word or a date, and you certainly don’t want to miss the kiss, right? Certain things no one can do for you.

You don’t let someone eat on your behalf, do you? You don’t say, “Chewing is such a bother. My jaws grow so tired, and the variety of tastes is so overwhelming. I’m going to hire someone to chew my food, and I’ll just swallow whatever he gives me.” Would you do that? Yuck! Of course not! Certain things no one can do for you.

And one of those is spending time with God.

Listening to God is a firsthand experience. When he asks for your attention, God doesn’t want you to send a substitute; he wants you. He invites you to vacation in his splendor. He invites you to feel the touch of his hand. He invites you to feast at his table. He wants to spend time with you. And with a little training, your time with God can be the highlight of your day. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

How much time do you spend a day—or a week—

in prayer and Bible study? Set aside a certain place and time each day to be alone with the Lord. Recognize that it has to be a priority if you want to know him better.

Exploration

Prayer and Bible Study—[Acts 17:11](#); [Ephesians 6:18](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#); [2 Timothy 2:15](#); [3:14–15](#).

Seven Leaders Are Chosen

The number of followers was growing. But during this same time, the Greek-speaking followers had an argument with the other followers. The Greek-speaking widows were not getting their share of the food that was given out every day.²The twelve apostles called the whole group of followers together and said, “It is not right for us to stop our work of teaching God’s word in order to serve tables.”³So, brothers and sisters, choose seven of your own men who are good, full of the Spirit and full of wisdom. We will put them in charge of this work.⁴Then we can continue to pray and to teach the word of God.”

⁵The whole group liked the idea, so they chose these seven men: Stephen (a man with great faith and full of the Holy Spirit), [Philip](#), Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas (a man from Antioch who had become a follower of the Jewish religion).⁶Then they put these men before the apostles, who prayed and [laid their hands](#) on them.

⁷The word of God was continuing to spread. The group of followers in Jerusalem increased, and a great number of the Jewish priests believed and obeyed.

Stephen Is Accused

⁸Stephen was richly blessed by God who gave him the power

to do great miracles and signs among the people.⁹ But some people were against him. They belonged to the synagogue of [Free Men](#) (as it was called), which included people from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia. They all came and argued with Stephen.

¹⁰But the Spirit was helping him to speak with wisdom, and his words were so strong that they could not argue with him.

¹¹So they secretly urged some men to say, “We heard Stephen speak against Moses and against God.”

¹²This upset the people, the older leaders, and the teachers of the law. They came and grabbed Stephen and brought him to a meeting of the leaders. ¹³They brought in some people to tell lies about Stephen, saying, “This man is always speaking against this holy place and the law of Moses. ¹⁴We heard him say that Jesus from Nazareth will destroy this place and that Jesus will change the customs Moses gave us.” ¹⁵All the people in the meeting were watching Stephen closely and saw that his face looked like the face of an angel.

Life Lessons

Acts 7:1–8:1a

Situation

Stephen's speech summarized Jewish history. God had blessed the Hebrew nation magnificently, Stephen recalled, but once again their leaders had turned against God.

Observation

Stephen's speech repeatedly referred to human rebelliousness toward God. It shows how desperately we try to avoid God's truth—even to the extent of killing the messenger. At his death, Stephen looked to Christ.

Inspiration

The story of young Matthew Huffman came across my desk the week I was writing this chapter. He was the six-year-old son of missionaries in Salvador, Brazil. One morning he began to complain of fever. As his temperature went up, he began losing his eyesight. His mother and father put him in the car and raced him to the hospital.

As they were driving and he was lying on his mother's lap, he did something his parents will never forget. He extended his hand in the air. His mother took it and he pulled it away. He extended it again. She again took it and he, again, pulled it back and reached into the air. Confused, the mother asked her son, "What are you reaching for, Matthew?"

"I'm reaching for Jesus' hand," he answered. And

with those words he closed his eyes and slid into a coma from which he never would awaken. He died two days later, a victim of bacterial meningitis.

Of all the things he didn't learn in his short life, he'd learned the most important: who to reach for in the hour of death. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

Application

Have you developed the practice of constantly looking to Jesus? If you have, you will reach to him during your most difficult hour. If you haven't, ask him to accompany you in all your thoughts.

Exploration

Spiritual Battle—[Ephesians 6:10-18](#); [Philippians 1:27-28](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:8](#); [1 Timothy 6:12](#); [James 1:2-4](#); [1 Peter 1:6-7](#).

Stephen's Speech

The high priest said to Stephen, "Are these things true?"

²Stephen answered, "Brothers and fathers, listen to me. Our glorious God appeared to Abraham, our ancestor, in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran. ³God said to Abraham, 'Leave your country and your relatives, and go to the land I will show you.' ⁴So Abraham left the country of Chaldea and went to live in Haran. After Abraham's father died, God sent him to this place where you now live. ⁵God did not give Abraham any of this land, not even a foot of it. But God promised that he would give this land to him and his descendants, even before Abraham had a child. ⁶This is what God said to him: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a land they don't own. The people there will make them slaves and will mistreat them for four hundred years. ⁷But I will punish the nation where they are slaves. Then your descendants will leave that land and will worship me in this place.' ⁸God made an agreement with Abraham, the sign of which was circumcision. And so when Abraham had his son Isaac, Abraham circumcised him when he was eight days old. Isaac also circumcised his son Jacob, and Jacob did the same for his sons, the twelve ancestors of our people.

⁹"Jacob's sons became jealous of Joseph and sold him to be a slave in Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰and saved him from all his troubles. The king of Egypt liked Joseph and

respected him because of the wisdom God gave him. The king made him governor of Egypt and put him in charge of all the people in his palace.

¹¹“Then all the land of Egypt and Canaan became so dry that nothing would grow, and the people suffered very much. Jacob’s sons, our ancestors, could not find anything to eat. ¹²But when Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, he sent his sons there. This was their first trip to Egypt. ¹³When they went there a second time, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and the king learned about Joseph’s family. ¹⁴Then Joseph sent messengers to invite Jacob, his father, to come to Egypt along with all his relatives (seventy-five persons altogether). ¹⁵So Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and his sons died. ¹⁶Later their bodies were moved to Shechem and put in a grave there. (It was the same grave Abraham had bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.) ¹⁷“The promise God made to Abraham was soon to come true, and the number of people in Egypt grew large. ¹⁸Then a new king, who did not know who Joseph was, began to rule Egypt. ¹⁹This king tricked our people and was cruel to our ancestors, forcing them to leave their babies outside to die. ²⁰At this time Moses was born, and he was very beautiful. For three months Moses was cared for in his father’s house. ²¹When they put Moses outside, the king’s daughter adopted him and raised him as if he were her own son. ²²The Egyptians taught Moses everything they knew, and he was a powerful man in what he said and did.

²³“When Moses was about forty years old, he thought it would be good to visit his own people, the people of Israel. ²⁴Moses saw an Egyptian mistreating one of his people, so he

defended the Israelite and punished the Egyptian by killing him.²⁵ Moses thought his own people would understand that God was using him to save them, but they did not.²⁶ The next day when Moses saw two men of Israel fighting, he tried to make peace between them. He said, 'Men, you are brothers. Why are you hurting each other?'²⁷ The man who was hurting the other pushed Moses away and said, 'Who made you our ruler and judge?²⁸Are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?'²⁹ When Moses heard him say this, he left Egypt and went to live in the land of Midian where he was a stranger. While Moses lived in Midian, he had two sons.

³⁰Forty years later an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush as he was in the desert near Mount Sinai.³¹ When Moses saw this, he was amazed and went near to look closer. Moses heard the Lord's voice say, ³²'I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' Moses began to shake with fear and was afraid to look.³³ The Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground.'³⁴I have seen the troubles my people have suffered in Egypt. I have heard their cries and have come down to save them. And now, Moses, I am sending you back to Egypt.'

³⁵This Moses was the same man the two men of Israel rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and judge?' Moses is the same man God sent to be a ruler and savior, with the help of the angel that Moses saw in the burning bush.³⁶ So Moses led the people out of Egypt. He worked miracles and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and then in the desert for forty years.³⁷ This is the same Moses that said to the people of Israel, 'God will give you a prophet like me, who is one of your own

people.' ³⁸This is the Moses who was with the gathering of the Israelites in the desert. He was with the angel that spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and he was with our ancestors. He received commands from God that give life, and he gave those commands to us.

³⁹“But our ancestors did not want to obey Moses. They rejected him and wanted to go back to Egypt. ⁴⁰They said to Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will lead us. Moses led us out of Egypt, but we don’t know what has happened to him.’ ⁴¹So the people made an idol that looked like a calf. Then they brought sacrifices to it and were proud of what they had made with their own hands. ⁴²But God turned against them and did not try to stop them from worshiping the sun, moon, and stars. This is what is written in the book of the prophets: God says,

‘People of Israel, you did not bring me sacrifices and offerings

while you traveled in the desert for forty years.

⁴³You have carried with you

the tent to worship Molech

and the idols of the star god Rephan that you made to worship.

So I will send you away beyond Babylon.’

[Amos 5:25–27](#)

⁴⁴“The Holy Tent where God spoke to our ancestors was with them in the desert. God told Moses how to make this Tent, and he made it like the plan God showed him. ⁴⁵Later, Joshua led our ancestors to capture the lands of the other nations. Our people went in, and God forced the other people out. When our

people went into this new land, they took with them this same Tent they had received from their ancestors. They kept it until the time of David, ⁴⁶who pleased God and asked God to let him build a house for him, the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷But Solomon was the one who built the Temple.

⁴⁸“But the Most High does not live in houses that people build with their hands. As the prophet says:

⁴⁹“Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
So do you think you can build a house for me? says
the Lord.
Do I need a place to rest?
⁵⁰Remember, my hand made all these things!”

[Isaiah 66:1–2](#)

⁵¹Stephen continued speaking: “You stubborn people! You have not given your hearts to God, nor will you listen to him! You are always against what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell you, just as your ancestors were. ⁵²Your ancestors tried to hurt every prophet who ever lived. Those prophets said long ago that the One who is good would come, but your ancestors killed them. And now you have turned against and killed the One who is good. ⁵³You received the law of Moses, which God gave you through his angels, but you haven’t obeyed it.”

Stephen Is Killed

⁵⁴When the leaders heard this, they became furious. They were so mad they were grinding their teeth at Stephen. ⁵⁵But

Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit. He looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right side. ⁵⁶He said, "Look! I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at God's right side."

⁵⁷Then they shouted loudly and covered their ears and all ran at Stephen. ⁵⁸They took him out of the city and began to throw stones at him to kill him. And those who told lies against Stephen left their coats with a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹While they were throwing stones, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰He fell on his knees and cried in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." After Stephen said this, he died.

Saul agreed that the killing of Stephen was good.

Life Lessons

Acts 8:1b-40

Situation

Persecution against the church after Stephen's death forced Believers to go beyond Jerusalem to share the gospel. Philip was the first example of such missionary activity.

Observation

The gospel is for everyone regardless of ethnic group. Therefore, Believers should be ready to witness to anyone who may be seeking.

Inspiration

You've heard the voice whispering your name, haven't you? You've felt the nudge to go and sensed the urge to speak. Hasn't it occurred to you?

You invite a couple over for coffee. Nothing heroic, just a nice evening with old friends. But from the moment you enter, you can feel the tension. Colder than glaciers, they are. You can tell something is wrong. Typically you're not one to inquire, but you feel a concern that won't be silent. So you ask.

You are in a business meeting where one of your coworkers gets raked over the coals. Everyone else is thinking, *I'm glad that wasn't me*. But the Holy Spirit is leading you to think, *How hard this must be*. So, after the meeting you approach the employee and express your concern.

You notice the fellow on the other side of the

church auditorium. He looks a bit out of place, what with his strange clothing and all. You learn that he is from Africa, in town on business. The next Sunday he is back. And the third Sunday he is present. You introduce yourself. He tells you how he is fascinated by the faith and how he wants to learn more. Rather than offer to teach him, you simply urge him to read the Bible.

Later in the week, you regret not being more direct. You call the office where he is consulting and learn that he is leaving today for home. You know in your heart you can't let him leave. So you rush to the airport and find him awaiting his flight, with a Bible open on his lap.

"Do you understand what you are reading?" you inquire.

"How can I, unless someone explains it to me?"

And so you, like Philip, explain. And he, like the Ethiopian, believes. Baptism is requested and baptism is offered. He catches a later flight and you catch a glimpse of what it means to be led by the Spirit.

Were there lights? You just lit one. Were there voices? You just were one. Was there a miracle? You just witnessed one. Who knows? If the Bible were being written today, that might be your name in the eighth chapter of Acts.

(From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

Application

Is there anyone you are not willing to tell about Jesus? Is there any place you are not willing to take

the Good News? Ask God to give you the willingness and the courage. Let him direct you where he wants, not where you want.

Exploration

Witnessing—[Acts 13:46–47](#); [Romans 1:14–16](#); [10:8–9](#); [1 Corinthians 15:1–4](#); [Galatians 2:7–9](#); [2 Timothy 1:8](#); [1 Peter 1:23–25](#).

Troubles for the Believers

On that day the church of Jerusalem began to be persecuted, and all the believers, except the apostles, were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

²And some religious people buried Stephen and cried loudly for him. ³Saul was also trying to destroy the church, going from house to house, dragging out men and women and putting them in jail. ⁴And wherever they were scattered, they told people the Good News.

Philip Preaches in Samaria

⁵Philip went to the city of Samaria and preached about the Christ. ⁶When the people there heard Philip and saw the miracles he was doing, they all listened carefully to what he said. ⁷Many of these people had evil spirits in them, but Philip made the evil spirits leave. The spirits made a loud noise when they came out. Philip also healed many weak and crippled people there. ⁸So the people in that city were very happy.

⁹But there was a man named Simon in that city. Before Philip came there, Simon had practiced magic and amazed all the people of Samaria. He bragged and called himself a great man. ¹⁰All the people—the least important and the most important—paid attention to Simon, saying, “This man has the power of God, called ‘the Great Power’!” ¹¹Simon had amazed them with his magic so long that the people became his

followers.¹² But when Philip told them the Good News about the kingdom of God and the power of Jesus Christ, men and women believed Philip and were baptized.¹³ Simon himself believed, and after he was baptized, he stayed very close to Philip. When he saw the miracles and the powerful things Philip did, Simon was amazed.

¹⁴When the apostles who were still in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.¹⁵ When Peter and John arrived, they prayed that the Samaritan believers might receive the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ These people had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, but the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them.¹⁷ Then, when the two apostles began laying their hands on the people, they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸Simon saw that the Spirit was given to people when the apostles laid their hands on them. So he offered the apostles money,¹⁹ saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands will receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰Peter said to him, "You and your money should both be destroyed, because you thought you could buy God's gift with money.²¹ You cannot share with us in this work since your heart is not right before God.²² Change your heart! Turn away from this evil thing you have done, and pray to the Lord. Maybe he will forgive you for thinking this.²³ I see that you are full of bitter jealousy and ruled by sin."

²⁴Simon answered, "Both of you pray for me to the Lord so the things you have said will not happen to me."

²⁵After Peter and John told the people what they had seen Jesus do and after they had spoken the message of the Lord, they went back to Jerusalem. On the way, they went through

many Samaritan towns and preached the Good News to the people.

Philip Teaches an Ethiopian

²⁶An angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get ready and go south to the road that leads down to Gaza from Jerusalem—the desert road.” ²⁷So Philip got ready and went. On the road he saw a man from Ethiopia, a eunuch. He was an important officer in the service of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians; he was responsible for taking care of all her money. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship. ²⁸Now, as he was on his way home, he was sitting in his chariot reading from the Book of Isaiah, the prophet. ²⁹The Spirit said to Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

³⁰So when Philip ran toward the chariot, he heard the man reading from Isaiah the prophet. Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

³¹He answered, “How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?” Then he invited Philip to climb in and sit with him. ³²The portion of Scripture he was reading was this:

“He was like a sheep being led to be killed.

He was quiet, as a lamb is quiet while its wool is being cut;

he never opened his mouth.

³³He was shamed and was treated unfairly.

He died without children to continue his family.

His life on earth has ended.”

[Isaiah 53:7–8](#)

³⁴The officer said to Philip, “Please tell me, who is the prophet talking about—himself or someone else?” ³⁵Philip began to speak, and starting with this same Scripture, he told the man the Good News about Jesus.

³⁶While they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The officer said, “Look, here is water. What is stopping me from being baptized?” ³⁷[n](#) ³⁸Then the officer commanded the chariot to stop. Both Philip and the officer went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away; the officer never saw him again. And the officer continued on his way home, full of joy. ⁴⁰But Philip appeared in a city called Azotus and preached the Good News in all the towns on the way from Azotus to Caesarea.

Life Lessons

Acts 9:1–43

Situation

Saul (later known as Paul) continued his aggressive persecution of the church. Many Believers had fled Jerusalem to seek refuge in other cities. Saul went as far as Damascus, Syria (150 miles from Jerusalem), to track down Christians. It was on this trip that God saved him. After Saul's conversion, the church enjoyed a time of peace during which Peter ministered in Lydda and Joppa.

Observation

Even such an unlikely prospect as Saul, who was a fanatical enemy of the church, can be saved by God's power.

Inspiration

Before he encountered Christ, Paul had been somewhat of a hero among the Pharisees...

Blueblooded and wild-eyed, this young zealot was hellbent on keeping the kingdom pure—and that meant keeping the Christians out. He marched through the countryside like a general demanding that backslidden Jews salute the flag of the motherland or kiss their family and hopes goodbye.

All this came to a halt, however, on the shoulder of a highway... . That's when someone slammed on the stadium lights, and he heard the voice.

When he found out whose voice it was, his jaw hit the ground, and his body followed. He braced

himself for the worst. He knew it was all over... . He prayed that death would be quick and painless.

But all he got was silence and the first of a lifetime of surprises.

He ended up bewildered and befuddled in a borrowed bedroom. God left him there a few days with scales on his eyes so thick that the only direction he could look was inside himself. And he didn't like what he saw.

He saw himself for what he really was—to use his own words, the worst of sinners.

... Alone in the room with his sins on his conscience and blood on his hands, he asked to be cleansed.

... The legalist Saul was buried, and the liberator Paul was born. He was never the same afterwards. And neither was the world....

The message is gripping: Show a man his failures without Jesus, and the result will be found in the roadside gutter. Give a man religion without reminding him of his filth, and the result will be arrogance in a three-piece suit. But get the two in the same heart—get sin to meet Savior and Savior to meet sin—and the result just might be another Pharisee turned preacher who sets the world on fire. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

Have you met people who are hostile to Christians? Maybe a popular celebrity or prominent people in your community make a stand against the church. Pray for these people by name. Ask God to

save them. Look at people who oppose your faith as needy people—not enemies.

Exploration

Conversion—[John 3:3–8](#), [16–21](#); [6:44](#), [65](#); [11:25–26](#); [Acts 22:13–16](#); [Romans 10:9–10](#); [Galatians 6:12–16](#).

Saul Is Converted

In Jerusalem Saul was still threatening the followers of the Lord by saying he would kill them. So he went to the high priest² and asked him to write letters to the synagogues in the city of Damascus. Then if Saul found any followers of Christ's Way, men or women, he would arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem.

³So Saul headed toward Damascus. As he came near the city, a bright light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. ⁴Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

⁵Saul said, "Who are you, Lord?"

The voice answered, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶Get up now and go into the city. Someone there will tell you what you must do."

⁷The people traveling with Saul stood there but said nothing. They heard the voice, but they saw no one. ⁸Saul got up from the ground and opened his eyes, but he could not see. So those with Saul took his hand and led him into Damascus. ⁹For three days Saul could not see and did not eat or drink.

¹⁰There was a follower of Jesus in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision, "Ananias!" Ananias answered, "Here I am, Lord."

¹¹The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to Straight Street. Find the house of [Judas](#), and ask for a man named Saul from

the city of Tarsus. He is there now, praying. ¹²Saul has seen a vision in which a man named Ananias comes to him and lays his hands on him. Then he is able to see again.”

¹³But Ananias answered, “Lord, many people have told me about this man and the terrible things he did to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴Now he has come here to Damascus, and the leading priests have given him the power to arrest everyone who worships you.”

¹⁵But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! I have chosen Saul for an important work. He must tell about me to those who are not Jews, to kings, and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

¹⁷So Ananias went to the house of Judas. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus sent me. He is the one you saw on the road on your way here. He sent me so that you can see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

¹⁸Immediately, something that looked like fish scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he was able to see again! Then Saul got up and was baptized. ¹⁹After he ate some food, his strength returned.

Saul Preaches in Damascus

Saul stayed with the followers of Jesus in Damascus for a few days. ²⁰Soon he began to preach about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “Jesus is the Son of God.”

²¹All the people who heard him were amazed. They said, “This is the man who was in Jerusalem trying to destroy those who trust in this name! He came here to arrest the followers of Jesus and take them back to the leading priests.”

²²But Saul grew more powerful. His proofs that Jesus is the Christ were so strong that his own people in Damascus could not argue with him.

²³After many days, they made plans to kill Saul. ²⁴They were watching the city gates day and night, but Saul learned about their plan. ²⁵One night some followers of Saul helped him leave the city by lowering him in a basket through an opening in the city wall.

Saul Preaches in Jerusalem

²⁶When Saul went to Jerusalem, he tried to join the group of followers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he was really a follower. ²⁷But Barnabas accepted Saul and took him to the apostles. Barnabas explained to them that Saul had seen the Lord on the road and the Lord had spoken to Saul. Then he told them how boldly Saul had preached in the name of Jesus in Damascus.

²⁸And so Saul stayed with the followers, going everywhere in Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹He would often talk and argue with the Jewish people who spoke Greek, but they were trying to kill him. ³⁰When the followers learned about this, they took Saul to Caesarea and from there sent him to Tarsus.

³¹The church everywhere in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had a time of peace and became stronger. Respecting the Lord by the way they lived, and being encouraged by the Holy Spirit, the group of believers continued to grow.

Peter Heals Aeneas

³²As Peter was traveling through all the area, he visited God's people who lived in Lydda. ³³There he met a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had not been able to leave his bed for the past eight years. ³⁴Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Stand up and make your bed." Aeneas stood up immediately. ³⁵All the people living in Lydda and on the Plain of Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

Peter Heals Tabitha

³⁶In the city of Joppa there was a follower named Tabitha (whose Greek name was Dorcas). She was always doing good deeds and kind acts. ³⁷While Peter was in Lydda, Tabitha became sick and died. Her body was washed and put in a room upstairs. ³⁸Since Lydda is near Joppa and the followers in Joppa heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two messengers to Peter. They begged him, "Hurry, please come to us!" ³⁹So Peter got ready and went with them. When he arrived, they took him to the upstairs room where all the widows stood around Peter, crying. They showed him the shirts and coats Tabitha had made when she was still alive. ⁴⁰Peter sent everyone out of the room and knelt and prayed. Then he turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, stand up." She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. ⁴¹He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then he called the saints and the widows into the room and showed them that Tabitha was alive. ⁴²People everywhere in Joppa learned about this, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³Peter stayed in Joppa for many days with a man named Simon who was a tanner.

Life Lessons

Acts 10:1–11:30

Situation

Peter explained to Jewish believers what happened to Cornelius. They needed clarification because they mistakenly thought that salvation was only for Jews.

Observation

Peter convinced the Jewish church leaders of the rightness of reaching out to the Gentiles, and many Gentiles were subsequently added to the church, notably at Antioch.

Inspiration

The Father sighs because he has a dream. “I have other sheep that are not in this flock, and I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd” ([John 10:16](#)).

God has only one flock. Somehow we missed that. Religious division is not his idea. Franchises and sectarianism are not in God’s plan. God has one flock. The flock has one shepherd. And though we may think there are many, we are wrong. There is only one.

Never in the Bible are we told to create unity. We are simply told to maintain the unity that exists. Paul exhorts us to preserve “the unity which the Spirit gives” ([Ephesians 4:3](#), NEB). Our task is not to invent unity, but to acknowledge it.

I have two sisters and a brother. We are siblings because we came from the same family. We have the

same father and mother. I'm sure there have been times when they didn't want to call me their brother, but they don't have that choice.

Nor do we. When I see someone calling God "Father" and Jesus "Savior," I meet a brother or a sister—regardless of the name of their church or denomination.

By the way, the church names we banter about? They do not exist in heaven. The Book of Life does not list your denomination next to your name. Why? Because it is not the denomination that saves you. And I wonder, if there are no denominations in heaven, why do we have denominations on earth?

What would happen (I know this is a crazy thought), but what would happen if all the churches agreed, on a given day, to change their names to simply "church"? What if any reference to any denomination were removed and we were all just Christians? And then when people chose which church to attend, they wouldn't do so by the sign outside ... they'd do so by the hearts of the people inside. And then when people were asked what church they attended, their answer wouldn't be a label but just a location.

And then we Christians wouldn't be known for what divides us; instead we'd be known for what unites us—our common Father.

Crazy idea? Perhaps.

But I think God would like it. It was his to begin with.

(From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

We are instructed to build up the body of Christ. Make a list of ways you can be involved. If there are certain ways you could be tearing down the body of Christ, list those as well. Be brutally honest. Ask a family member or good friend to be honest with you.

Exploration

Unity—[John 13:35](#); [Ephesians 4:3](#); [Colossians 3:14](#).

Be careful when you judge. That doesn't mean we shouldn't discern. That does mean we shouldn't pass the verdict. —Max Lucado (*A Gentle Thunder*)

Peter Teaches Cornelius

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, an officer in the Italian group of the Roman army. ²Cornelius was a religious man. He and all the other people who lived in his house worshiped the true God. He gave much of his money to the poor and prayed to God often. ³One afternoon about three o'clock, Cornelius clearly saw a vision. An angel of God came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

⁴Cornelius stared at the angel. He became afraid and said, "What do you want, Lord?"

The angel said, "God has heard your prayers. He has seen that you give to the poor, and he remembers you. ⁵Send some men now to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is also called Peter. ⁶He is staying with a man, also named Simon, who is a tanner and has a house beside the sea." ⁷When the angel who spoke to Cornelius left, Cornelius called two of his servants and a soldier, a religious man who worked for him. ⁸Cornelius explained everything to them and sent them to Joppa.

⁹About noon the next day as they came near Joppa, Peter was going up to the [roof](#) to pray. ¹⁰He was hungry and wanted to eat, but while the food was being prepared, he had a vision.

¹¹He saw heaven opened and something coming down that looked like a big sheet being lowered to earth by its four corners. ¹²In it were all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds.

¹³Then a voice said to Peter, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.”

¹⁴But Peter said, “No, Lord! I have never eaten food that is unholy or unclean.”

¹⁵But the voice said to him again, “God has made these things clean so don’t call them ‘unholy’!” ¹⁶This happened three times, and at once the sheet was taken back to heaven.

¹⁷While Peter was wondering what this vision meant, the men Cornelius sent had found Simon’s house and were standing at the gate. ¹⁸They asked, “Is Simon Peter staying here?”

¹⁹While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Listen, three men are looking for you. ²⁰Get up and go downstairs. Go with them without doubting, because I have sent them to you.”

²¹So Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for. Why did you come here?”

²²They said, “A holy angel spoke to Cornelius, an army officer and a good man; he worships God. All the people respect him. The angel told Cornelius to ask you to come to his house so that he can hear what you have to say.” ²³So Peter asked the men to come in and spend the night.

The next day Peter got ready and went with them, and some of the followers from Joppa joined him. ²⁴On the following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet, and worshiped him.

²⁶But Peter helped him up, saying, “Stand up. I too am only a

human.”²⁷ As he talked with Cornelius, Peter went inside where he saw many people gathered.²⁸ He said, “You people understand that it is against our law for Jewish people to associate with or visit anyone who is not Jewish. But God has shown me that I should not call any person ‘unholy’ or ‘unclean.’²⁹ That is why I did not argue when I was asked to come here. Now, please tell me why you sent for me.”

³⁰ Cornelius said, “Four days ago, I was praying in my house at this same time—three o’clock in the afternoon. Suddenly, there was a man standing before me wearing shining clothes.”³¹ He said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and has seen that you give to the poor and remembers you.’³² So send some men to Joppa and ask Simon Peter to come. Peter is staying in the house of a man, also named Simon, who is a tanner and has a house beside the sea.’³³ So I sent for you immediately, and it was very good of you to come. Now we are all here before God to hear everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The Judge of the Living and the Dead

“If you think you can judge others, you are wrong. When you judge them, you are really judging yourself guilty, because you do the same things they do” ([Romans 2:1](#)).

Who is this person? It could be anyone (“O man, whoever you are”) who filters God’s grace through his own opinion. Anyone who dilutes God’s mercy with his own prejudice. He is the prodigal son’s elder

brother who wouldn't attend the party (see [Luke 15:11–32](#)). He is the ten-hour worker, upset because the one-hour worker got the same wage (see [Matthew 20:1–16](#)). He is the fault-finding brother obsessed by his brother's sins and oblivious to his own.

If you “think you can judge others” ([Romans 2:1](#)), Paul has a stern reminder for you. It's not your job to hold the gavel. “God judges those who do wrong things, and we know that his judging is right” ([Romans 2:2](#)).

The key word here is “judges.” It's one thing to have an opinion. It's quite another to pass a verdict. It's one thing to have a conviction; it's another to convict the person. It's one thing to be repulsed at the acts of a Jeffrey Dahmer (and I am). It's another entirely to claim that I am superior (I'm not) or that he is beyond the grace of God (no one is).

As John Stott writes: “This [verse] is not a call either to suspend our critical faculties or to renounce all criticism and rebuke of others as illegitimate: it is rather a prohibition of standing in judgment on other people and condemning them (which as human beings we have no right to do), especially when we fail to condemn ourselves.”

It's our job to hate the sin. But it's God's job to deal with the sinner. God has called us to despise evil, but he's never called us to despise the evildoer.

But, oh, how we would like to. Is there any act more delightful than judging others? There is something smug and self-satisfying about donning the robe, stepping behind the bench, and slamming

down the gavel. “Guilty!”

Besides, judging others is the quick and easy way to feel good about ourselves. A convenience-store ego-boost. Standing next to all the Mussolinis and Hitlers and Dahmers of the world, we boast, “Look, God, compared to them, I’m not too bad.”

But that’s the problem. God doesn’t compare us to them. They aren’t the standard. God is. And compared to him, Paul will argue, “There is no one who does anything good” ([Romans 3:12](#)). (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

³⁴Peter began to speak: “I really understand now that to God every person is the same. ³⁵In every country God accepts anyone who worships him and does what is right. ³⁶You know the message that God has sent to the people of Israel is the Good News that peace has come through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Lord of all people! ³⁷You know what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after [John](#) preached to the people about baptism. ³⁸You know about Jesus from Nazareth, that God gave him the Holy Spirit and power. You know how Jesus went everywhere doing good and healing those who were ruled by the devil, because God was with him. ³⁹We saw what Jesus did in Judea and in Jerusalem, but the Jews in Jerusalem killed him by hanging him on a cross. ⁴⁰Yet, on the third day, God raised Jesus to life and caused him to be seen, ⁴¹not by all the people, but only by the witnesses God had already chosen. And we are those witnesses who ate and drank with him after he was raised from the dead. ⁴²He told us to preach to the people and to tell them that he is the one whom God chose to be the judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets say it is true that all who believe in Jesus will be forgiven of their sins through Jesus’ name.”

⁴⁴While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who were listening. ⁴⁵The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been given even to the nations. ⁴⁶These believers heard them speaking in different [languages](#) and praising God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷“Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as

we did!”⁴⁸ So Peter ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Peter Returns to Jerusalem

The apostles and the believers in Judea heard that some who were not Jewish had accepted God's teaching too.² But when Peter came to Jerusalem, some people argued with him.³ They said, "You went into the homes of people who are not circumcised and ate with them!"

⁴So Peter explained the whole story to them.⁵ He said, "I was in the city of Joppa, and while I was praying, I had a vision. I saw something that looked like a big sheet being lowered from heaven by its four corners. It came very close to me.⁶ I looked inside it and saw animals, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds.⁷ I heard a voice say to me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'⁸ But I said, 'No, Lord! I have never eaten anything that is unholy or unclean.'⁹ But the voice from heaven spoke again, 'God has made these things clean, so don't call them unholy.'¹⁰ This happened three times. Then the whole thing was taken back to heaven.¹¹ Right then three men who were sent to me from Caesarea came to the house where I was staying.¹² The Spirit told me to go with them without doubting. These six believers here also went with me, and we entered the house of Cornelius.¹³ He told us about the angel he saw standing in his house. The angel said to him, 'Send some men to Joppa and invite Simon Peter to come.'¹⁴ By the words he will say to you, you and all your family will be saved.'¹⁵ When I began my speech, the Holy Spirit came on them just as he came on us at the beginning.¹⁶ Then I remembered the words of the Lord. He said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with

the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷Since God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I stop the work of God?”

¹⁸When the believers heard this, they stopped arguing. They praised God and said, “So God is allowing even other nations to turn to him and live.”

The Good News Comes to Antioch

¹⁹Many of the believers were scattered when they were persecuted after Stephen was killed. Some of them went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch telling the message to others, but only to Jews. ²⁰Some of these believers were people from Cyprus and Cyrene. When they came to Antioch, they spoke also to Greeks, telling them the Good News about the Lord Jesus. ²¹The Lord was helping the believers, and a large group of people believed and turned to the Lord.

²²The church in Jerusalem heard about all of this, so they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ^{23–24}Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and full of faith. When he reached Antioch and saw how God had blessed the people, he was glad. He encouraged all the believers in Antioch always to obey the Lord with all their hearts, and many people became followers of the Lord.

²⁵Then Barnabas went to the city of Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶and when he found Saul, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year Saul and Barnabas met with the church and taught many people there. In Antioch the followers were called Christians for the first time.

²⁷About that time some prophets came from Jerusalem to

Antioch. ²⁸One of them, named Agabus, stood up and spoke with the help of the Holy Spirit. He said, “A very hard time is coming to the whole world. There will be no food to eat.” (This happened when Claudius ruled.) ²⁹The believers all decided to help the followers who lived in Judea, as much as each one could. ³⁰They gathered the money and gave it to Barnabas and Saul, who brought it to the elders in Judea.

Life Lessons

Acts 12:1-25

Situation

The Romans appointed Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, to rule much of Palestine during this time. He persecuted Christians, killed James, and planned to kill Peter.

Observation

God can rescue believers, like Peter, from the most difficult Situations.

Inspiration

On God's anvil. Perhaps you've been there.

Melted down. Formless. Undone.

I know. I've been on it. It's rough. It's a spiritual slump, a famine. The fire goes out. Although the fire may flame for a moment, it soon disappears. We drift downward. Downward into the foggy valley of question, the misty lowland of discouragement....

Passion? It slips out the door.

Enthusiasm? Are you kidding?

Anvil time....

Pound, pound, pound.

I hope you're not on the anvil. (Unless you need to be, and, if so, I hope you are.) Anvil time is not to be avoided; it's to be experienced... . To escape it could be to escape God.

God sees our life from beginning to end. He may lead us through a storm at age thirty so we can endure a hurricane at age sixty. An instrument is

useful only if it's in the right shape. A dull ax or a bent screwdriver needs attention, and so do we. A good blacksmith keeps his tools in shape. So does God.

Should God place you on his anvil, be thankful. It means he thinks you're still worth reshaping. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

As a result of your faith, relatives may give you a hard time or friends might write you off. Remember that you are following Jesus' footsteps. Pray for the joy that overcomes troubles, given by God, just for you.

Exploration

Attitudes During Trouble—[Matthew 5:10–12; 10:22](#); [Romans 8:17](#); [2 Corinthians 4:8–9, 16–17](#); [Hebrews 10:32–34](#); [James 5:10](#); [1 Peter 2:20–21; 4:12–13](#); [5:10](#).

Herod Agrippa Hurts the Church

During that same time King Herod began to mistreat some who belonged to the church.²He ordered James, the brother of John, to be killed by the sword.³Herod saw that some of the people liked this, so he decided to arrest Peter, too. (This happened during the time of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.)

⁴After Herod arrested Peter, he put him in jail and handed him over to be guarded by sixteen soldiers. Herod planned to bring Peter before the people for trial after the Passover Feast.⁵So Peter was kept in jail, but the church prayed earnestly to God for him.

Peter Leaves the Jail

⁶The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains. Other soldiers were guarding the door of the jail.⁷Suddenly, an angel of the Lord stood there, and a light shined in the cell. The angel struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Hurry! Get up!” the angel said. And the chains fell off Peter’s hands.⁸Then the angel told him, “Get dressed and put on your sandals.” And Peter did. Then the angel said, “Put on your coat and follow me.”⁹So Peter followed him out, but he did not know if what the angel was doing was real; he thought he might be seeing a

vision. ¹⁰They went past the first and second guards and came to the iron gate that separated them from the city. The gate opened by itself for them, and they went through it. When they had walked down one street, the angel suddenly left him.

¹¹Then Peter realized what had happened. He thought, “Now I know that the Lord really sent his angel to me. He rescued me from Herod and from all the things the people thought would happen.”

¹²When he considered this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Many people were gathered there, praying. ¹³Peter knocked on the outside door, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer it. ¹⁴When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so happy she forgot to open the door. Instead, she ran inside and told the group, “Peter is at the door!”

¹⁵They said to her, “You are crazy!” But she kept on saying it was true, so they said, “It must be Peter’s angel.”

¹⁶Peter continued to knock, and when they opened the door, they saw him and were amazed. ¹⁷Peter made a sign with his hand to tell them to be quiet. He explained how the Lord led him out of the jail, and he said, “Tell James and the other believers what happened.” Then he left to go to another place.

¹⁸The next day the soldiers were very upset and wondered what had happened to Peter. ¹⁹Herod looked everywhere for him but could not find him. So he questioned the guards and ordered that they be killed.

The Death of Herod Agrippa

Later Herod moved from Judea and went to the city of

Caesarea, where he stayed.²⁰ Herod was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, but the people of those cities all came in a group to him. After convincing Blastus, the king's personal servant, to be on their side, they asked Herod for peace, because their country got its food from his country.

²¹On a chosen day Herod put on his royal robes, sat on his throne, and made a speech to the people.²²They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not a human!"²³Because Herod did not give the glory to God, an angel of the Lord immediately caused him to become sick, and he was eaten by worms and died.

²⁴God's message continued to spread and reach people.

²⁵After Barnabas and Saul finished their task in Jerusalem, they returned to Antioch, taking John Mark with them.

Life Lessons

Acts 13:1–52

Situation

Luke shifts the focus of his book to Paul's ministry and the worldwide spread of the church. Paul stopped at key population and cultural centers, and spoke to both Jews and Gentiles.

Observation

God desires that the church will reach new people with the message of Jesus' hope. The preaching of the gospel will always draw new converts, in spite of difficulties and opposition.

Inspiration

The priority of spiritual awakening was so important that the Holy Spirit breathed on Luke to record His dealings with the early church. That first church was initiated and sustained by a prayer movement. The glory of God covered that early church.

Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father. The first call upon the New Testament church was prayer. Intense praying resulted in the powerful proclamation of Christ. In [Acts 1:14](#) the church is found seeking the face of God: "These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer." In [Acts 2:4–41](#) the church is empowered to proclaim the resurrection of Christ. Three thousand people were converted in this mighty visitation of God.

This incited the church to move forward in prayer. [Acts 2:42](#) says, “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” The results were phenomenal. People came to know Christ daily. Peter and John are on their way to a prayer meeting in [Acts 3](#), and five thousand are converted before they even arrive. The church continues to pray in [Acts 4](#), which results in an even more powerful proclamation of the gospel. In [Acts 5:14](#) they stop counting those who are being saved, simply stating, “All the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number.”

This should be ample evidence of the relationship between prayer and the phenomenal growth of the New Testament church. But we should also look at the apostle Paul. Paul’s ministry grew out of a prayer meeting. All of Europe and North America should be grateful for five humble men of prayer. The history of both continents would never be the same because of that prayer meeting, where a ministry was born that would ultimately shape much of Western civilization. The early church’s motto was “pray and proclaim.” It was said of them that they were “men who have upset the world” ([Acts 17:6](#)). (From *The Prayer Factor* by Sammy Tippet)

Application

Imagine that you are a missionary in a far off country. Imagine that you have seen no one from your culture in months. How excited would you be to

receive a letter from someone back in your own country? Help encourage a missionary by writing a letter. Your letter might arrive at an opportune time.

Exploration

Universality of Gospel—[Isaiah 53:12](#); [Matthew 28:18–20](#); [Acts 1:8](#); [16:9–10](#); [2 Corinthians 10:15–16](#); [1 Timothy 2:3–6](#).

Barnabas and Saul Are Chosen

In the church at Antioch there were these prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon (also called Niger), Lucius (from the city of Cyrene), Manaen (who had grown up with Herod, the ruler), and Saul. ²They were all worshiping the Lord and giving up eating for a certain time. During this time the Holy Spirit said to them, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul to do a special work for which I have chosen them.”

³So after they gave up eating and prayed, they laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them out.

Barnabas and Saul in Cyprus

⁴Barnabas and Saul, sent out by the Holy Spirit, went to the city of Seleucia. From there they sailed to the island of Cyprus.

⁵When they came to Salamis, they preached the Good News of God in the synagogues. John Mark was with them to help.

⁶They went across the whole island to Paphos where they met a magician named Bar-Jesus. He was a false prophet ⁷who always stayed close to Sergius Paulus, the governor and a smart man. He asked Barnabas and Saul to come to him, because he wanted to hear the message of God. ⁸But Elymas, the magician, was against them. (Elymas is the name for Bar-Jesus in the Greek language.) He tried to stop the governor

from believing in Jesus.⁹ But Saul, who was also called Paul, was filled with the Holy Spirit. He looked straight at Elymas¹⁰ and said, “You son of the devil! You are an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of evil tricks and lies, always trying to change the Lord’s truths into lies. ¹¹Now the Lord will touch you, and you will be blind. For a time you will not be able to see anything—not even the light from the sun.”

Then everything became dark for Elymas, and he walked around, trying to find someone to lead him by the hand. ¹²When the governor saw this, he believed because he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

Paul and Barnabas Leave Cyprus

¹³Paul and those with him sailed from Paphos and came to Perga, in Pamphylia. There John Mark left them to return to Jerusalem. ¹⁴They continued their trip from Perga and went to Antioch, a city in Pisidia. On the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵After the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets were read, the leaders of the synagogue sent a message to Paul and Barnabas: “Brothers, if you have any message that will encourage the people, please speak.”

¹⁶Paul stood up, raised his hand, and said, “You Israelites and you who worship God, please listen! ¹⁷The God of the Israelites chose our ancestors. He made the people great during the time they lived in Egypt, and he brought them out of that country with great power. ¹⁸And he was patient with them for forty years in the desert. ¹⁹God destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan and gave the land to his people. ²⁰All this

happened in about four hundred fifty years.

“After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. ²¹Then the people asked for a king, so God gave them Saul son of Kish. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin and was king for forty years. ²²After God took him away, God made David their king. God said about him: ‘I have found in David son of Jesse the kind of man I want. He will do all I want him to do.’ ²³So God has brought Jesus, one of David’s descendants, to Israel to be its Savior, as he promised. ²⁴Before Jesus came, [John](#) preached to all the people of Israel about a baptism of changed hearts and lives. ²⁵When he was finishing his work, he said, ‘Who do you think I am? I am not the Christ. He is coming later, and I am not worthy to untie his sandals.’

²⁶“Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and others who worship God, listen! The news about this salvation has been sent to us. ²⁷Those who live in Jerusalem and their leaders did not realize that Jesus was the Savior. They did not understand the words that the prophets wrote, which are read every Sabbath day. But they made them come true when they said Jesus was guilty. ²⁸They could not find any real reason for Jesus to be put to death, but they asked Pilate to have him killed. ²⁹When they had done to him all that the Scriptures had said, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. ³⁰But God raised him up from the dead! ³¹After this, for many days, those who had gone with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem saw him. They are now his witnesses to the people. ³²We tell you the Good News about the promise God made to our ancestors. ³³God has made this promise come true for us, his children, by raising Jesus from the dead. We read about this also in [Psalm 2](#):

‘You are my Son.
Today I have become your Father.’

[Psalm 2:7](#)

³⁴God raised Jesus from the dead, and he will never go back to the grave and become dust. So God said:

‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings
that I promised to David.’

[Isaiah 55:3](#)

³⁵But in another place God says:

‘You will not let your Holy One rot.’

[Psalm 16:10](#)

³⁶David did God’s will during his lifetime. Then he died and was buried beside his ancestors, and his body did rot in the grave. ³⁷But the One God raised from the dead did not rot in the grave. ^{38–39}Brothers, understand what we are telling you: You can have forgiveness of your sins through Jesus. The law of Moses could not free you from your sins. But through Jesus everyone who believes is free from all sins. ⁴⁰Be careful! Don’t let what the prophets said happen to you:

⁴¹‘Listen, you people who doubt!
You can wonder, and then die.
I will do something in your lifetime
that you won’t believe even when you are told about
it!’”

[Habakkuk 1:5](#)

⁴²While Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people asked them to tell them more about these things on the next Sabbath. ⁴³When the meeting was over, many people with those who had changed to worship God followed Paul and Barnabas from that place. Paul and Barnabas were persuading them to continue trusting in God's grace.

⁴⁴On the next Sabbath day, almost everyone in the city came to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵Seeing the crowd, the Jewish people became very jealous and said insulting things and argued against what Paul said. ⁴⁶But Paul and Barnabas spoke very boldly, saying, "We must speak the message of God to you first. But you refuse to listen. You are judging yourselves not worthy of having eternal life! So we will now go to the people of other nations. ⁴⁷This is what the Lord told us to do, saying:

‘I have made you a light for the nations;
you will show people all over the world the way to be saved.’”

[Isaiah 49:6](#)

⁴⁸When those who were not Jewish heard Paul say this, they were happy and gave honor to the message of the Lord. And the people who were chosen to have life forever believed the message.

⁴⁹So the message of the Lord was spreading through the whole country. ⁵⁰But the Jewish people stirred up some of the important religious women and the leaders of the city. They started trouble against Paul and Barnabas and forced them out

of their area. ⁵¹So Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet and went to Iconium. ⁵²But the followers were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

Life Lessons

Acts 14:1–28

Situation

After being expelled from Antioch, Paul and Barnabas continued to preach the gospel. They ventured into Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe performing great miracles and winning over great multitudes for Christ. Their adversaries, however, continued to oppose them in every city.

Observation

Their higher calling would not let Paul and Barnabas quit. They even went into hostile regions to deliver God's message of salvation.

Inspiration

I fear our generation has come dangerously near the “I’m-getting-tired-so-let’s-quit” mentality. And not just in the spiritual realm. Dieting is a discipline, so we stay fat. Finishing school is a hassle, so we bail out. Cultivating a close relationship is painful, so we back off. Getting a book written is demanding, so we stop short. Working through conflicts in marriage is a tiring struggle, so we walk away. Sticking with an occupation is tough, so we start looking elsewhere...

Ignace Jan Paderewski, the famous composer-pianist, was scheduled to perform at a great concert hall in America. It was an evening to remember—black tuxedos and long evening dresses, a high society extravaganza. Present in the audience that

evening was a mother with her fidgety nine-year-old son. Weary of waiting, he squirmed constantly in his seat. His mother was in hopes that her boy would be encouraged to practice the piano if he could just hear the immortal Paderewski at the keyboard. So—against his wishes—he had come.

As she turned to talk with friends, her son could stay seated no longer. He slipped away from her side, strangely drawn to the ebony concert grand Steinway and its leather tufted stool, staring wide-eyed at the black and white keys. He placed his small, trembling fingers in the right location and began to play “chopsticks.” The roar of the crowd was hushed as hundreds of frowning faces turned in his direction. Irritated and embarrassed, they began to shout:

“Get that boy away from there!”

“Who’d bring a kid that young in here?”

“Where’s his mother?”

“Somebody stop him!”

Backstage, the master overheard the sounds out front and quickly put together in his mind what was happening. Hurriedly, he grabbed his coat and rushed toward the stage. Without one word of announcement he stooped over behind the boy, reached around both sides, and began to improvise a counter melody to harmonize and enhance “chopsticks.” As the two of them played together, Paderewski kept whispering in the boy’s ear:

Keep going. Don’t quit, son. Keep on playing ... don’t stop ... don’t quit.

And so it is with us. We hammer away on our

project, which seems about as significant as “chopsticks” in a concert hall. And about the time we are ready to give up, along comes the Master, who leans over and whispers:

Now keep going; don’t quit. Keep on ... don’t stop; don’t quit. (From *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Is there a project in your life that you’ve given up on because of discouragement? No matter how great the task, God promises to help us through if we are obedient to him. Today, get back on track with your project and hold fast to the promise that God will see you through it.

Exploration

Perseverance—[1 Corinthians 15:58](#); [Galatians 6:9](#); [Philippians 3:12–14](#); [2 Timothy 3:11–14](#); [Hebrews 3:6](#); [1 Peter 5:8](#), [10](#).

Paul and Barnabas in Iconium

In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went as usual to the synagogue. They spoke so well that a great many Jews and Greeks believed.² But some people who did not believe excited the others and turned them against the believers.³ Paul and Barnabas stayed in Iconium a long time and spoke bravely for the Lord. He showed that their message about his grace was true by giving them the power to work miracles and signs.⁴ But the city was divided. Some of the people agreed with the Jews, and others believed the apostles.

⁵Some who were not Jews, some Jews, and some of their rulers wanted to mistreat Paul and Barnabas and to stone them to death.⁶ When Paul and Barnabas learned about this, they ran away to Lystra and Derbe, cities in Lycaonia, and to the areas around those cities.⁷ They announced the Good News there, too.

Paul in Lystra and Derbe

⁸In Lystra there sat a man who had been born crippled; he had never walked.⁹ As this man was listening to Paul speak, Paul looked straight at him and saw that he believed God could heal him.¹⁰ So he cried out, "Stand up on your feet!" The man jumped up and began walking around.¹¹ When the crowds saw

what Paul did, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have become like humans and have come down to us!”

¹²Then the people began to call Barnabas [“Zeus”](#) and Paul [“Hermes,”](#) because he was the main speaker. ¹³The priest in the temple of Zeus, which was near the city, brought some bulls and flowers to the city gates. He and the people wanted to offer a sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. ¹⁴But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard about it, they tore their clothes. They ran in among the people, shouting, ¹⁵“Friends, why are you doing these things? We are only human beings like you. We are bringing you the Good News and are telling you to turn away from these worthless things and turn to the living God. He is the One who made the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. ¹⁶In the past, God let all the nations do what they wanted. ¹⁷Yet he proved he is real by showing kindness, by giving you rain from heaven and crops at the right times, by giving you food and filling your hearts with joy.” ¹⁸Even with these words, they were barely able to keep the crowd from offering sacrifices to them.

¹⁹Then some evil people came from Antioch and Iconium and persuaded the people to turn against Paul. So they threw stones at him and dragged him out of town, thinking they had killed him. ²⁰But the followers gathered around him, and he got up and went back into the town. The next day he and Barnabas left and went to the city of Derbe.

The Return to Antioch in Syria

²¹Paul and Barnabas told the Good News in Derbe, and many became followers. Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra,

Iconium, and Antioch, ²²making the followers of Jesus stronger and helping them stay in the faith. They said, “We must suffer many things to enter God’s kingdom.” ²³They chose elders for each church, by praying and giving up eating for a certain time. These elders had trusted the Lord, so Paul and Barnabas put them in the Lord’s care.

²⁴Then they went through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. ²⁵When they had preached the message in Perga, they went down to Attalia. ²⁶And from there they sailed away to Antioch where the believers had put them into God’s care and had sent them out to do this work. Now they had finished.

²⁷When they arrived in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas gathered the church together. They told the church all about what God had done with them and how God had made it possible for those who were not Jewish to believe. ²⁸And they stayed there a long time with the followers.

Life Lessons

Acts 15:1–41

Situation

Many Jewish Christians insisted that Gentile Christians had to follow Jewish traditions in order to become true Christians. The Jerusalem Council decided that only God's grace and individual faith in Jesus were necessary for salvation.

Observation

The Law can never save you. God saves only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Inspiration

What exactly is grace? And is it limited to Jesus' life and ministry? You may be surprised to know that Jesus never used the word itself. He just taught it and, equally important, lived it. Furthermore, the Bible never gives us a one-statement definition, though grace appears throughout its pages ... not only the word itself but numerous demonstrations of it. Understanding what grace means requires our going back to an old Hebrew term that meant "to bend, to stoop." By and by, it came to include the idea of "condescending favor."

If you have traveled to London, you have perhaps seen royalty. If so, you must have noticed sophistication, aloofness, distance. On occasion, royalty in England will make the news because someone in the ranks of nobility will stop, kneel down and touch or bless a commoner. That is grace. There

is nothing in the commoner that deserves being noticed or touched or blessed by the royal family. But because of grace in the heart of the queen, there is the desire at that moment to pause, to stoop, to touch, even to bless.

The late pastor and Bible scholar Donald Barnhouse perhaps said it best: "Love that goes upward is worship; love that goes outward is affection; love that stoops is grace."

To show grace is to extend favor or kindness to one who doesn't deserve it and can never earn it. Receiving God's acceptance by grace always stands in sharp contrast to earning it on the basis of works. Every time the thought of grace appears, there is the idea of its being undeserved. In no way is the recipient getting what he or she deserves. Favor is being extended simply out of the goodness of the heart of the giver....

One more thing should be emphasized about grace: It is absolutely and totally free. You will never be asked to pay it back. You couldn't even if you tried. Most of us have trouble with that thought, because we work for everything we get. The old saying goes, "There ain't no free lunch." But in this case, grace comes to us free and clear, no strings attached. We should not even try to repay it; to do so is insulting....

And now that Christ has come and died and thereby satisfied the Father's demands on sin, all we need to do is claim His grace by accepting the free gift of eternal life. Period. He smiles on us because of

His Son's death and resurrection. It's grace, my friend, amazing grace. That is enough to give anybody a "Yes" face! (From *The Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

How do you react to Christians whose worship style is different from your own? Remember God's gift of eternal life is free and for everybody, whatever the color, race, or worship preference. Have the same gracious attitude toward others that Jesus had.

Exploration

Grace—[Romans 3:24](#); [Galatians 2:16](#); [Ephesians 2:5–8](#).

The Meeting at Jerusalem

Then some people came to Antioch from Judea and began teaching the non-Jewish believers: "You cannot be saved if you are not circumcised as Moses taught us."² Paul and Barnabas were against this teaching and argued with them about it. So the church decided to send Paul, Barnabas, and some others to Jerusalem where they could talk more about this with the apostles and elders.

³The church helped them leave on the trip, and they went through the countries of Phoenicia and Samaria, telling all about how the other nations had turned to God. This made all the believers very happy.⁴ When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the apostles, the elders, and the church. Paul, Barnabas, and the others told about everything God had done with them.⁵ But some of the believers who belonged to the Pharisee group came forward and said, "The non-Jewish believers must be circumcised. They must be told to obey the law of Moses."

⁶The apostles and the elders gathered to consider this problem.⁷ After a long debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God chose me from among you to preach the Good News to the nations. They heard the Good News from me, and they believed."⁸ God, who knows the thoughts of everyone, accepted them. He showed this to us by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us.

⁹To God, those people are not different from us. When they believed, he made their hearts pure. ¹⁰So now why are you testing God by putting a heavy load around the necks of the non-Jewish believers? It is a load that neither we nor our ancestors were able to carry. ¹¹But we believe that we and they too will be saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus.”

¹²Then the whole group became quiet. They listened to Paul and Barnabas tell about all the miracles and signs that God did through them among the people. ¹³After they finished speaking, James said, “Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴Simon has told us how God showed his love for those people. For the first time he is accepting from among them a people to be his own. ¹⁵The words of the prophets agree with this too:

¹⁶“After these things I will return.
The kingdom of David is like a fallen tent.
But I will rebuild its ruins,
and I will set it up.

¹⁷Then those people who are left alive may ask the Lord for help,
and the other nations that belong to me,
says the Lord,
who will make it happen.

¹⁸And these things have been known for a long time.’

[Amos 9:11–12](#)

¹⁹“So I think we should not bother the other people who are turning to God. ²⁰Instead, we should write a letter to them telling them these things: Stay away from food that has been offered to idols (which makes it unclean), any kind of sexual

sin, eating animals that have been strangled, and blood. ²¹They should do these things, because for a long time in every city the law of Moses has been taught. And it is still read in the synagogue every Sabbath day.”

Letter to Non-Jewish Believers

²²The apostles, the elders, and the whole church decided to send some of their men with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch. They chose Judas Barsabbas and Silas, who were respected by the believers. ²³They sent the following letter with them:

From the apostles and elders, your brothers.

To all the non-Jewish believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:

Greetings!

²⁴We have heard that some of our group have come to you and said things that trouble and upset you. But we did not tell them to do this. ²⁵We have all agreed to choose some messengers and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—²⁶people who have given their lives to serve our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷So we are sending Judas and Silas, who will tell you the same things. ²⁸It has pleased the Holy Spirit that you should not have a heavy load to carry, and we agree. You need to do only these things: ²⁹Stay away from any food that has been offered to idols, eating any animals that have been strangled, and blood, and any kind of sexual sin. If you stay away from these things, you will do well.

Goodbye.

³⁰So they left Jerusalem and went to Antioch where

they gathered the church and gave them the letter. ³¹When they read it, they were very happy because of the encouraging message. ³²Judas and Silas, who were also prophets, said many things to encourage the believers and make them stronger. ³³After some time Judas and Silas were sent off in peace by the believers, and they went back to those who had sent them. ³⁴[n](#)

³⁵But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch and, along with many others, preached the Good News and taught the people the message of the Lord.

Paul and Barnabas Separate

³⁶After some time, Paul said to Barnabas, “We should go back to all those towns where we preached the message of the Lord. Let’s visit the believers and see how they are doing.”

³⁷Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them, ³⁸but he had left them at Pamphylia; he did not continue with them in the work. So Paul did not think it was a good idea to take him. ³⁹Paul and Barnabas had such a serious argument about this that they separated and went different ways. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus, ⁴⁰but Paul chose Silas and left. The believers in Antioch put Paul into the Lord’s care, ⁴¹and he went through Syria and Cilicia, giving strength to the churches.

Life Lessons

Acts 16:1-40

Situation

During his second missionary journey, Paul visited and encouraged churches established during his first journey. Despite persecution, Paul boldly shared the gospel wherever he went.

Observation

Even when we are persecuted for the sake of the gospel, God can make us a powerful testimony. His Holy Spirit will work through us as we reach out to those around us.

Inspiration

Prayer Of Saint Patrick

I establish myself today in:

The power of God to guide me,

The might of God to uphold me,

The wisdom of God to teach me,

The eye of God to watch over me,

The ear of God to hear me,

The word of God to speak to me,

The hand of God to protect me,

The way of God to lie before me,

The shield of God to shelter me,

The hosts of God to defend me

Christ with me, Christ before me,

Christ behind me, Christ within me,

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,

Christ at my right, Christ at my left,

Christ in breadth, Christ in length,
Christ in height, Christ in the heart
of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man
who speaks to me,
Christ in the ear of every man who hears me.
Confident in Christ.

(From *My Sacrifice, His Fire* by Anne Ortlund)

Application

Where can you witness for Christ today: your home, church, school, community? Put your trust in him. Say a word for Jesus.

Exploration

Trust—[Psalm 9:10](#); [22:4](#); [37:5](#); [125:1](#); [Proverbs 28:25](#); [29:25](#); [Isaiah 28:16](#); [Nahum 1:7](#); [1 Corinthians 4:2](#).

Timothy Goes with Paul

Paul came to Derbe and Lystra, where a follower named Timothy lived. Timothy's mother was Jewish and a believer, but his father was a Greek.

²The believers in Lystra and Iconium respected Timothy and said good things about him. ³Paul wanted Timothy to travel with him, but all the people living in that area knew that Timothy's father was Greek. So Paul circumcised Timothy to please his mother's people. ⁴Paul and those with him traveled from town to town and gave the decisions made by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵So the churches became stronger in the faith and grew larger every day.

Paul Is Called Out of Asia

⁶Paul and those with him went through the areas of Phrygia and Galatia since the Holy Spirit did not let them preach the Good News in the country of Asia. ⁷When they came near the country of Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not let them. ⁸So they passed by Mysia and went to Troas. ⁹That night Paul saw in a vision a man from Macedonia. The man stood and begged, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰After Paul had seen the vision, we

immediately prepared to leave for Macedonia, understanding that God had called us to tell the Good News to those people.

Lydia Becomes a Christian

¹¹We left Troas and sailed straight to the island of Samothrace. The next day we sailed to [Neapolis](#). ¹²Then we went by land to Philippi, a [Roman colony](#) and the leading city in that part of Macedonia. We stayed there for several days.

¹³On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate to the river where we thought we would find a special place for prayer. Some women had gathered there, so we sat down and talked with them. ¹⁴One of the listeners was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira whose job was selling purple cloth. She worshiped God, and he opened her mind to pay attention to what Paul was saying. ¹⁵She and all the people in her house were baptized. Then she invited us to her home, saying, "If you think I am truly a believer in the Lord, then come stay in my house." And she persuaded us to stay with her.

Paul and Silas in Jail

¹⁶Once, while we were going to the place for prayer, a servant girl met us. She had a special [spirit](#) in her, and she earned a lot of money for her owners by telling fortunes. ¹⁷This girl followed Paul and us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God. They are telling you how you can be saved."

¹⁸She kept this up for many days. This bothered Paul, so he turned and said to the spirit, "By the power of Jesus Christ, I

command you to come out of her!” Immediately, the spirit came out.

¹⁹When the owners of the servant girl saw this, they knew that now they could not use her to make money. So they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the city rulers in the marketplace. ²⁰They brought Paul and Silas to the Roman rulers and said, “These men are Jews and are making trouble in our city. ²¹They are teaching things that are not right for us as Romans to do.”

²²The crowd joined the attack against them. The Roman officers tore the clothes of Paul and Silas and had them beaten with rods. ²³Then Paul and Silas were thrown into jail, and the jailer was ordered to guard them carefully. ²⁴When he heard this order, he put them far inside the jail and pinned their feet down between large blocks of wood.

²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing songs to God as the other prisoners listened. ²⁶Suddenly, there was a strong earthquake that shook the foundation of the jail. Then all the doors of the jail broke open, and all the prisoners were freed from their chains. ²⁷The jailer woke up and saw that the jail doors were open. Thinking that the prisoners had already escaped, he got his sword and was about to [kill himself](#). ²⁸But Paul shouted, “Don’t hurt yourself! We are all here.”

²⁹The jailer told someone to bring a light. Then he ran inside and, shaking with fear, fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰He brought them outside and said, “Men, what must I do to be saved?”

³¹They said to him, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved—you and all the people in your house.” ³²So Paul

and Silas told the message of the Lord to the jailer and all the people in his house.³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took Paul and Silas and washed their wounds. Then he and all his people were baptized immediately.³⁴ After this the jailer took Paul and Silas home and gave them food. He and his family were very happy because they now believed in God.

³⁵The next morning, the Roman officers sent the police to tell the jailer, "Let these men go free."

³⁶The jailer said to Paul, "The officers have sent an order to let you go free. You can leave now. Go in peace."

³⁷But Paul said to the police, "They beat us in public without a trial, even though we are [Roman citizens](#). And they threw us in jail. Now they want to make us go away quietly. No! Let them come themselves and bring us out."

³⁸The police told the Roman officers what Paul said. When the officers heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were afraid.³⁹ So they came and told Paul and Silas they were sorry and took them out of jail and asked them to leave the city.

⁴⁰So when they came out of the jail, they went to Lydia's house where they saw some of the believers and encouraged them. Then they left.

Life Lessons

Acts 17:1–34

Situation

Banished from Philippi, Paul and his companions visited the cities of Thessalonica and Athens. In both places Paul boldly testified to the saving grace of God.

Observation

When we speak about Jesus, we should understand our audience well.

Inspiration

The prevailing world-view denies the existence of absolute truth. So when the Christian message, which is essentially historical and propositional, is proclaimed, modern listeners hear what they interpret as simply one person's preference—another autonomous human choice of lifestyle or belief...

What does this tell us? ... To evangelize today we must address the human condition at its point of felt need—conscience, guilt, dealing with others, finding a purpose for staying alive...

So we must be familiar enough with the prevailing world-view to look for points of contact and discern points of disagreement.

It is no different then if you or I were talking with a Hindu, for example, about issues of life and religion. We wouldn't assume that he or she was coming from a Judeo-Christian perspective. We would start from the Hindu presuppositions about the world, probe

their world-view, find the points of contact and concern, and then begin to challenge or question those presuppositions. Only then could we begin to present our case effectively....

Our handy prepackaged God-talk won't do. Before we tell them what the Bible says, we may have to tell them why they should believe the Bible (there is a great case to be made). And we need a Christian apologetic that doesn't just make the case for us; it must touch the chords within our unbelieving friends and neighbors and begin to alter their view of reality. (From *The Body* by Charles Colson)

Application

When you were introduced to the faith, what kind of testimony intrigued you? Is there someone in your life who may be in the same Situation you were in? How can you share with them what you have found? If there is no one, find a circle of friends where you can share what Christ has done for you.

Exploration

God Communicates—[Isaiah 1:1](#); [Daniel 5:5–28](#); [Matthew 1:20](#); [2:12–13](#); [3:13–17](#); [Luke 1:13, 30](#); [2:10](#); [Acts 18:9](#); [Hebrews 1:1–2](#).

Paul and Silas in Thessalonica

Paul and Silas traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue.² Paul went into the synagogue as he always did, and on each Sabbath day for three weeks, he talked with his fellow Jews about the Scriptures.³ He explained and proved that the Christ must die and then rise from the dead. He said, “This Jesus I am telling you about is the Christ.”⁴ Some of them were convinced and joined Paul and Silas, along with many of the Greeks who worshiped God and many of the important women.

⁵But some others became jealous. So they got some evil men from the marketplace, formed a mob, and started a riot. They ran to Jason’s house, looking for Paul and Silas, wanting to bring them out to the people.⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers to the leaders of the city. The people were yelling, “These people have made trouble everywhere in the world, and now they have come here too! ⁷Jason is keeping them in his house. All of them do things against the laws of Caesar, saying there is another king, called Jesus.”

⁸When the people and the leaders of the city heard these things, they became very upset.⁹ They made Jason and the others put up a sum of money. Then they let the believers go free.

Paul and Silas Go to Berea

¹⁰That same night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea where they went to the synagogue. ¹¹These people were more willing to listen than the people in Thessalonica. The Bereans were eager to hear what Paul and Silas said and studied the Scriptures every day to find out if these things were true. ¹²So, many of them believed, as well as many important Greek women and men. ¹³But the people in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God in Berea, too. So they came there, upsetting the people and making trouble. ¹⁴The believers quickly sent Paul away to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. ¹⁵The people leading Paul went with him to Athens. Then they carried a message from Paul back to Silas and Timothy for them to come to him as soon as they could.

Paul Preaches in Athens

¹⁶While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy in Athens, he was troubled because he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷In the synagogue, he talked with the Jews and the Greeks who worshiped God. He also talked every day with people in the marketplace.

NewLife in Christ

“Some of the Jews were convinced and joined Paul and Silas ...”—[Acts 17:4](#)

Influencing Others for the Kingdom

It's been about six months since Paul left

Thessalonica. He, Timothy, and Silas spent three fruitful weeks in the city. The result of their stay was a nucleus of believers. Luke provides a one-sentence profile of the church when he writes: “Some of the Jews were convinced and joined Paul and Silas, along with many of the Greeks who worshiped God and many of the important women” ([Acts 17:4](#)).

An eclectic group attended the first church service: Some were Jews, some were Greeks, some were influential females, but all were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. And in a short time, all paid a price for their belief. Literally. The young believers were dragged into the presence of the city leaders and forced to post bond for their own release. That night they helped Paul, Timothy, and Silas sneak out of the city.

Paul moves on, but part of his heart is still in Thessalonica. The little church is so young, so fragile, but oh-so-special. Just the thought of them makes him proud. He longs to see them again. “We always thank God for all of you and mention you when we pray” ([1 Thessalonians 1:2](#)). He dreams of the day he might see them again and, even more, dreams of the day they see Christ together.

Note what he says to them: “You are our hope, our joy, and the crown we will take pride in when our Lord Jesus Christ comes” ([1 Thessalonians 2:19](#))... . In this case Paul will meet with the Thessalonians. He will search the sea of faces for his friends. They will find him, and he will find them. And, in the presence of Christ, they will enjoy an eternal reunion.

Try to imagine doing the same. Think about the day Christ comes. There you are in the great circle of the redeemed. Your body has been made new—no more pain or problems. Your mind has been made new—what you once understood in part, you now understand clearly. You feel no fear, no danger, no sorrow. Though you are one of a throng, it's as if you and Jesus are all alone.

And he asks you this question. I'm speculating now, but I wonder if Christ might say these words to you: "I'm so proud that you let me use you. Because of you, others are here today. Would you like to meet them?"

Chances are you'd be surprised at such a statement. It's one thing for the Apostle Paul to hear such words. He was an apostle. We can imagine a foreign missionary or famous evangelist hearing these words—but us? (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

Question: What steps can you take this next year to influence others for the kingdom?

For more on ["New Life in Christ."](#)

¹⁸Some of the [Epicurean and Stoic philosophers](#) argued with him, saying, “This man doesn’t know what he is talking about. What is he trying to say?” Others said, “He seems to be telling us about some other gods,” because Paul was telling them about Jesus and his rising from the dead. ¹⁹They got Paul and took him to a meeting of the [Areopagus](#), where they said, “Please explain to us this new idea you have been teaching. ²⁰The things you are saying are new to us, and we want to know what this teaching means.” ²¹(All the people of Athens and those from other countries who lived there always used their time to talk about the newest ideas.) ²²Then Paul stood before the meeting of the Areopagus and said, “People of Athens, I can see you are very religious in all things. ²³As I was going through your city, I saw the objects you worship. I found an altar that had these words written on it: TO A GOD WHO IS NOT KNOWN. You worship a god that you don’t know, and this is the God I am telling you about! ²⁴The God who made the whole world and everything in it is the Lord of the land and the sky. He does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵This God is the One who gives life, breath, and everything else to people. He does not need any help from them; he has everything he needs. ²⁶God began by making one person, and from him came all the different people who live everywhere in the world. God decided exactly when and where they must live. ²⁷God wanted them to look for him and perhaps search all around for him and find him, though he is not far from any of us: ²⁸‘We live in him. We walk in him. We are in him.’ Some of your own poets have said: ‘For we are his children.’ ²⁹Since we are God’s children, you must not think that God is like

something that people imagine or make from gold, silver, or rock.³⁰In the past, people did not understand God, and he ignored this. But now, God tells all people in the world to change their hearts and lives.³¹God has set a day that he will judge all the world with fairness, by the man he chose long ago. And God has proved this to everyone by raising that man from the dead!”

³²When the people heard about Jesus being raised from the dead, some of them laughed. But others said, “We will hear more about this from you later.”³³So Paul went away from them.³⁴But some of the people believed Paul and joined him. Among those who believed was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, a woman named Damaris, and some others.

Life Lessons

Acts 18:1–28

Situation

Corinth, the commercial center of Greece, was a haven of corruption. It also held great ministry opportunities.

Observation

We must rejoice in the victories Jesus gives us and remain positive during persecution and suffering.

Inspiration

Today's world is joyless, full of shadows, disillusionment, and fear. Freedom is rapidly disappearing from the face of the earth. Along with the loss of freedom, a great many of the superficial joys and pleasures of life are also disappearing, but God, by His Spirit, directs His joy to our bleak, problem-riddled lives, making it possible for us to be filled with joy regardless of our circumstances....

I once visited Dohnavur in South India where Amy Carmichael had lived for fifty years, caring for hundreds of girls originally dedicated to temple service. She was bedridden for the last twenty years of her life, during which time she wrote books that have blessed millions. Joy filled her sick room so that everyone who visited her came away praising God....

Even after her death, when I visited the room where she had served the Lord for twenty years, writing from her bed, I was asked by her former nurse to lead in prayer. I began, but was so overwhelmed by

a sense of God's presence I broke down (a thing I seldom ever do)... As I left that room, I sensed the joy of the Lord in my own heart. Many times I have visited sick people to encourage them. Some suffered from terminal illnesses. Strangely enough, I have come away blessed in my own soul by their contagious joy.

(From *The Holy Spirit* by Billy Graham)

Application

It's not generated in your own mind or heart; it's not bought at a store. True joy is God's gift.

Exploration

Joy—[Nehemiah 8:10](#); [Psalms 94:19](#); [Proverbs 10:28](#); [Isaiah 35:10](#); [Habakkuk 3:17-19](#); [John 15:11](#); [1 Thessalonians 1:6](#).

Paul in Corinth

Later Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²Here he met a Jew named Aquila who had been born in the country of Pontus. But Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, had recently moved to Corinth from Italy, because [Claudius](#) commanded that all Jews must leave Rome. Paul went to visit Aquila and Priscilla. ³Because they were tentmakers, just as he was, he stayed with them and worked with them. ⁴Every Sabbath day he talked with the Jews and Greeks in the synagogue, trying to persuade them to believe in Jesus.

⁵Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia and joined Paul in Corinth. After this, Paul spent all his time telling people the Good News, showing them that Jesus is the Christ. ⁶But they would not accept Paul's teaching and said some evil things. So he [shook off the dust from his clothes](#) and said to them, "If you are not saved, it will be your own fault! I have done all I can do! After this, I will go only to other nations." ⁷Paul left the synagogue and moved into the home of Titius Justus, next to the synagogue. This man worshiped God. ⁸Crispus was the leader of that synagogue, and he and all the people living in his house believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth also listened to Paul and believed and were baptized.

⁹During the night, the Lord told Paul in a vision: "Don't be afraid. Continue talking to people and don't be quiet. ¹⁰I am with you, and no one will hurt you because many of my people

are in this city.” ¹¹Paul stayed there for a year and a half, teaching God’s word to the people.

Paul Is Brought Before Gallio

¹²When Gallio was the governor of the country of Southern Greece, some people came together against Paul and took him to the court. ¹³They said, “This man is teaching people to worship God in a way that is against our law.”

¹⁴Paul was about to say something, but Gallio spoke, saying, “I would listen to you if you were complaining about a crime or some wrong. ¹⁵But the things you are saying are only questions about words and names—arguments about your own law. So you must solve this problem yourselves. I don’t want to be a judge of these things.” ¹⁶And Gallio made them leave the court.

¹⁷Then they all grabbed Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him there before the court. But this did not bother Gallio.

Paul Returns to Antioch

¹⁸Paul stayed with the believers for many more days. Then he left and sailed for Syria, with Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchrea Paul cut off his hair, because he had made a promise to God.

¹⁹Then they went to Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. While Paul was there, he went into the synagogue and talked with the people. ²⁰When they asked him to stay with them longer, he refused. ²¹But as he left, he said, “I will come

back to you again if God wants me to.” And so he sailed away from Ephesus.

²²When Paul landed at Caesarea, he went and gave greetings to the church in Jerusalem. After that, Paul went to Antioch. ²³He stayed there for a while and then left and went through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia. He traveled from town to town in these regions, giving strength to all the followers.

Apollos in Ephesus and Corinth

²⁴A Jew named Apollos came to Ephesus. He was born in the city of Alexandria and was a good speaker who knew the Scriptures well. ²⁵He had been taught about the way of the Lord and was always very excited when he spoke and taught the truth about Jesus. But the only baptism Apollos knew about was the baptism that [John](#) taught. ²⁶Apollos began to speak very boldly in the synagogue, and when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him to their home and helped him better understand the way of God. ²⁷Now Apollos wanted to go to the country of Southern Greece. So the believers helped him and wrote a letter to the followers there, asking them to accept him. These followers had believed in Jesus because of God’s grace, and when Apollos arrived, he helped them very much. ²⁸He argued very strongly with the Jews before all the people, clearly proving with the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

Life Lessons

Acts 19:1–41

Situation

On Paul's third missionary journey he corrected doctrinal misunderstandings that had been creeping into the churches.

Observation

The power to change comes from God. Magical formulas and magic words cannot secure this power. Christ conquered evil.

Inspiration

At the center of the occult, either openly or disguised as an “angel of light,” is Satan. Peter exhorts believers concerning our chief foe when he writes, “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” ([1 Peter 5:8](#), NASB).

Christians often have the tendency to “blame it all on the devil,” when in fact it was their own carelessness or fleshly nature which led to the sin or error. It can also be said, however, that even when it is our fleshly nature or the world which draws us from the Lord—and not the devil directly—it is nevertheless true that Satan and his army of demons desire that we be drawn to the world's standards.

Satan is the one who ultimately desires that we pursue the lusts of the flesh, and it is he who sits as the “god of this world” ([Ephesians 2:1–10](#)). Though not always directly involved, Satan's prime objective

is the defeat of God, and for us that means our defeat....

As you study the Old Testament, you see that men and women were in a constant struggle with Satan, fighting many spiritual battles. As you study the life of Christ, and Paul, and the other Apostles, you see a constant spiritual struggle. Christians today face many spiritual battles.

I'm so glad I learned the authority of the believer before I went to South America. The authority of the believer is a possession that belongs to every true child of God. And it gives so much authority over the enemy that Satan has tried to blind most believers to the authority they have.

During Easter week at Balboa, I first learned of the authority of the believer. About 50,000 high school and college students came down for Easter. With Andre Kole, the illusionist, we packed out a big ballroom several nights in a row—for two or three meetings a night. So many people were coming to our meetings, in fact, that many of the bars were empty. It really irritated some of the people. The second night, one of the men from a night club came over to break up our meeting. They figured if they broke up one of them, that would finish it for us.

As Andre was performing, this guy pulled up with his Dodge Dart all souped up. With a deafening sound, he popped the clutch and went roaring down the street. Everyone inside, of course, turned around and looked out to see the commotion. Finally, Andre got them settled down.

Then the guy went around the block again. As he stopped out front, he revved it up again and roared down the street. By this time everyone was whispering and wondering what was going on. Some stood up, trying to look out the window.

When the guy went back around the block again, I knew that if he repeated his performance one more time, it would break up the meeting. Turning to Gene Huntsman, one of our staff members, I said, “I think Satan is trying to break up this meeting. Let’s step out in the doorway and exercise the authority of the believer.” So we stepped out and prayed a very simple prayer.

When the guy came back, he started to rev it up again, and as he popped the clutch—pow! The rear end of his car blew all over the street. By that time, we just thanked the Lord and went over and pushed him off the street. As I shared the *Four Spiritual Laws* with him, it reminded me that Jesus said all authority is given to the believer in heaven and in earth.

(From *Understanding the Occult* by Josh McDowell and Don Stewart)

Application

Occult practice is loathsome to God. By delving in the occult, people deny the victory God has over the powers of evil. Let the power of the resurrected Christ give you freedom from any and all forms of occultism.

Exploration

Occult—[Leviticus 19:31](#); [20:6](#), [27](#); [Deuteronomy 18:10–12](#).

Paul in Ephesus

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul was visiting some places on the way to Ephesus. There he found some followers ²and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

They said, “We have never even heard of a Holy Spirit.”

³So he asked, “What kind of baptism did you have?”

They said, “It was the baptism that John taught.”

⁴Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of changed hearts and lives. He told people to believe in the one who would come after him, and that one is Jesus.”

⁵When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶Then Paul [laid his hands on them](#), and the Holy Spirit came upon them. They began speaking different [languages](#) and prophesying. ⁷There were about twelve people in this group.

⁸Paul went into the synagogue and spoke out boldly for three months. He talked with the people and persuaded them to accept the things he said about the kingdom of God. ⁹But some of them became stubborn. They refused to believe and said evil things about the Way of Jesus before all the people. So Paul left them, and taking the followers with him, he went to the school of a man named Tyrannus. There Paul talked with people every day ¹⁰for two years. Because of his work, every Jew and Greek in the country of Asia heard the word of the

Lord.

The Sons of Sceva

¹¹God used Paul to do some very special miracles. ¹²Some people took handkerchiefs and clothes that Paul had used and put them on the sick. When they did this, the sick were healed and evil spirits left them.

¹³But some people also were traveling around and making evil spirits go out of people. They tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus to force the evil spirits out. They would say, “By the same Jesus that Paul talks about, I order you to come out!”

¹⁴Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this.

¹⁵But one time an evil spirit said to them, “I know Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?”

¹⁶Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them. Because he was so much stronger than all of them, they ran away from the house naked and hurt. ¹⁷All the people in Ephesus—Jews and Greeks—learned about this and were filled with fear and gave great honor to the Lord Jesus. ¹⁸Many of the believers began to confess openly and tell all the evil things they had done. ¹⁹Some of them who had used magic brought their magic books and burned them before everyone. Those books were worth about [fifty thousand silver coins](#).

²⁰So in a powerful way the word of the Lord kept spreading and growing.

²¹After these things, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, planning to go through the countries of Macedonia and Southern Greece and then on to Jerusalem. He said, “After I have been to Jerusalem, I must also visit Rome.” ²²Paul sent

Timothy and Erastus, two of his helpers, ahead to Macedonia, but he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

Trouble in Ephesus

²³And during that time, there was some serious trouble in Ephesus about the Way of Jesus. ²⁴A man named Demetrius, who worked with silver, made little silver models that looked like the temple of the goddess [Artemis](#). Those who did this work made much money. ²⁵Demetrius had a meeting with them and some others who did the same kind of work. He told them, “Men, you know that we make a lot of money from our business.” ²⁶But look at what this man Paul is doing. He has convinced and turned away many people in Ephesus and in almost all of Asia! He says the gods made by human hands are not real. ²⁷There is a danger that our business will lose its good name, but there is also another danger: People will begin to think that the temple of the great goddess Artemis is not important. Her greatness will be destroyed, and Artemis is the goddess that everyone in Asia and the whole world worships.”

²⁸When the others heard this, they became very angry and shouted, “Artemis, the goddess of Ephesus, is great!” ²⁹The whole city became confused. The people grabbed Gaius and Aristarchus, who were from Macedonia and were traveling with Paul, and ran to the theater. ³⁰Paul wanted to go in and talk to the crowd, but the followers did not let him. ³¹Also, some leaders of Asia who were friends of Paul sent him a message, begging him not to go into the theater. ³²Some people were shouting one thing, and some were shouting another. The meeting was completely confused; most of them did not know

why they had come together.³³ They put a man named Alexander in front of the people, and some of them told him what to do. Alexander waved his hand so he could explain things to the people.³⁴ But when they saw that Alexander was a Jew, they all shouted the same thing for two hours: "Great is Artemis of Ephesus!"

³⁵ Then the city clerk made the crowd be quiet. He said, "People of Ephesus, everyone knows that Ephesus is the city that keeps the temple of the great goddess Artemis and her [holy stone](#) that fell from heaven.³⁶ Since no one can say this is not true, you should be quiet. Stop and think before you do anything.³⁷ You brought these men here, but they have not said anything evil against our goddess or stolen anything from her temple.³⁸ If Demetrius and those who work with him have a charge against anyone they should go to the courts and judges where they can argue with each other.³⁹ If there is something else you want to talk about, it can be decided at the regular town meeting of the people.⁴⁰ I say this because some people might see this trouble today and say that we are rioting. We could not explain this, because there is no real reason for this meeting."⁴¹ After the city clerk said these things, he told the people to go home.

Life Lessons

Acts 20:1–38

Situation

Paul strengthened and encouraged those who were Believers. He traveled to several recently planted churches and spent time with Christians there. Paul, knowing that he would never be back at Ephesus again, was careful to explain that his sacrificial love for the Ephesians was like Jesus' love for the church.

Observation

True Christianity is more than just going to church on Sundays. It's a genuine love for other people—a sacrificial love.

Inspiration

Take a trip to downtown Los Angeles. During the week it is a matrix of towering buildings and grand, paved canyons humming with people busily making money; on the weekends it is an empty glass-and-steel hive whose workers have buzzed home to the suburbs. Just a few blocks from the center of the hive, however, the neighborhoods start to change. Drive south, under the Santa Monica freeway, and you'll soon be in another world. Clusters of low-rise buildings scrawled with graffiti, razor-wire looped over parking lot fences, littered streets crowded with life.

And death. For this is where the gangs rule, and where drugs provide both an income and a way out.

Many of the young men in this primarily Hispanic area are in prison, on drugs, or in the cemetery.

In the middle of it all stands a white building that winds its way around the corner of a horseshoe-shaped street off Grand Avenue. “VICTORY OUTREACH” reads the bold sign.

Since [men] come here as addicts, those helped by Victory Outreach must first go through a cold-turkey detoxification. During that period Christians hold their hands and pray them through the violent agony as the drugs exit their systems. Most come to Christ during this time. They then enter a nine-month rehabilitation period, tightly structured with Bible studies, worship, classes, work, and prayer. And after that comes a nine-month reentry program, during which they are trained in skills and deeper Christian discipleship, equipping them to reenter society as whole, contributing individuals.

Photos on the walls of an upstairs conference room tell the story, smiling shots of Sylvia and Jose, for example. She was a member of the Playboys, and he was part of the inner circle of one of Los Angeles’s largest gangs, the Eighteenth Street Gang, which has about six thousand members. Then they met Christ, dried out, were disciplined, got married, and now they run the Victory Outreach women’s home several blocks away. (From *The Body* by Charles Colson)

Application

Do inventory on your care-giving, locally and globally. Who gets your help? What does it take for

you to agree to meet someone's need? Ask God to help you do more. Give something extra today—there are many unmet needs around you.

Exploration

Caring—[2 Kings 4:32–36](#); [Nahum 1:7](#); [John 11:33–38](#); [Galatians 4:13–14](#).

Paul in Macedonia and Greece

When the trouble stopped, Paul sent for the followers to come to him. After he encouraged them and then told them goodbye, he left and went to the country of Macedonia.²He said many things to strengthen the followers in the different places on his way through Macedonia. Then he went to Greece,³where he stayed for three months. He was ready to sail for Syria, but some evil people were planning something against him. So Paul decided to go back through Macedonia to Syria.⁴The men who went with him were Sopater son of Pyrrhus, from the city of Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus, from the city of Thessalonica; Gaius, from Derbe; Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus, two men from the country of Asia.⁵These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas.⁶We sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Five days later we met them in Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

Paul's Last Visit to Troas

⁷On the first day of the week, we all met together to break bread, and Paul spoke to the group. Because he was planning to leave the next day, he kept on talking until midnight.⁸We were all together in a room upstairs, and there were many lamps in the room.⁹A young man named Eutychus was sitting in the

window. As Paul continued talking, Eutychus was falling into a deep sleep. Finally, he went sound asleep and fell to the ground from the third floor. When they picked him up, he was dead. ¹⁰Paul went down to Eutychus, knelt down, and put his arms around him. He said, “Don’t worry. He is alive now.” ¹¹Then Paul went upstairs again, broke bread, and ate. He spoke to them a long time, until it was early morning, and then he left. ¹²They took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

The Trip from Troas to Miletus

¹³We went on ahead of Paul and sailed for the city of Assos, where he wanted to join us on the ship. Paul planned it this way because he wanted to go to Assos by land. ¹⁴When he met us there, we took him aboard and went to Mitylene. ¹⁵We sailed from Mitylene and the next day came to a place near Kios. The following day we sailed to Samos, and the next day we reached Miletus. ¹⁶Paul had already decided not to stop at Ephesus, because he did not want to stay too long in the country of Asia. He was hurrying to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, if that were possible.

The Elders from Ephesus

¹⁷Now from Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. ¹⁸When they came to him, he said, “You know about my life from the first day I came to Asia. You know the way I lived all the time I was with you. ¹⁹The evil people made plans against me, which troubled me very much. But you

know I always served the Lord unselfishly, and I often cried.
²⁰You know I preached to you and did not hold back anything that would help you. You know that I taught you in public and in your homes. ²¹I warned both Jews and Greeks to change their lives and turn to God and believe in our Lord Jesus. ²²But now I must obey the Holy Spirit and go to Jerusalem. I don't know what will happen to me there. ²³I know only that in every city the Holy Spirit tells me that troubles and even jail wait for me. ²⁴I don't care about my own life. The most important thing is that I complete my mission, the work that the Lord Jesus gave me—to tell people the Good News about God's grace.

²⁵“And now, I know that none of you among whom I was preaching the kingdom of God will ever see me again. ²⁶So today I tell you that if any of you should be lost, I am not responsible, ²⁷because I have told you everything God wants you to know. ²⁸Be careful for yourselves and for all the people the Holy Spirit has given to you to care for. You must be like shepherds to the church [of God](#), which he bought with the death of his own son. ²⁹I know that after I leave, some people will come like wild wolves and try to destroy the flock. ³⁰Also, some from your own group will rise up and twist the truth and will lead away followers after them. ³¹So be careful! Always remember that for three years, day and night, I never stopped warning each of you, and I often cried over you.

³²“Now I am putting you in the care of God and the message about his grace. It is able to give you strength, and it will give you the blessings God has for all his holy people. ³³When I was with you, I never wanted anyone's money or fine clothes. ³⁴You know I always worked to take care of my own needs and the needs of those who were with me. ³⁵I showed

you in all things that you should work as I did and help the weak. I taught you to remember the words Jesus said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

³⁶When Paul had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. ³⁷⁻³⁸And they all cried because Paul had said they would never see him again. They put their arms around him and kissed him. Then they went with him to the ship.

Life Lessons

Acts 21:1–40

Situation

After an emotional goodbye, Paul continued to visit many other churches throughout the region. When he was warned that he would be captured by the Jews and imprisoned, Paul assured the people that he was ready to die for the sake of the gospel.

Observation

Paul met hardships with the confidence that God's will would be accomplished.

Inspiration

In Poland, ... Father Jerzy felt a call to lay down his own life for his brothers.

Soon after the birth of Solidarity, Father Jerzy preached among the striking workers in Warsaw's huge steel works. He showed them how alcohol contributed to their oppression: If their drinking caused absenteeism or mistakes at work, it could be used to blackmail them. After that, alcoholism dropped dramatically.

... Not long after martial law was imposed and his foray into the night with Christmas peace for the soldiers, Father Jerzy instituted a monthly "Mass for the Homeland," dedicated to all victims of the repressive regime. Eventually thousands, then tens of thousands, attended these services at St. Stanislaw Kostka, with Father Jerzy ministering from a balcony and the people fanned out in the courtyard and

streets below.

... Father Jerzy's influence did not escape the notice of the authorities. He was far too popular, far too independent, far too threatening to the regime's control. He must be silenced.

The secret police followed Father Jerzy everywhere. He received unsigned, threatening letters. On the first anniversary of martial law, a pipe bomb sailed through the front window of his small flat, exploding in his sitting room.

Then, on October 19, 1984, while driving back to Warsaw from Bydgoszcz where he had celebrated a special mass and delivered a homily called "Overcome Evil with Good," Father Jerzy disappeared.

On the last Sunday of October, as fifty thousand people filled St. Stanislaw Kostka in an emotional Mass for the Homeland and listened in tears to a tape of Father Jerzy's final sermon, Father Antoni Lewek, one of the thirty priests at the altar, received word: "Just a moment ago it was announced on the television that Father Jerzy's body has been found in the Vistula River."

Months later Father Lewek recalled the scene as he told the people the dreaded news.

"I shall never forget what happened," he said. "In a second, people went down on their knees, crying and shouting; what they had feared the most had happened ...

"And then something very moving happened. This crying crowd managed to show that they could forgive. Three times they repeated after the priest:

‘And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.’ It was a Christian answer to the unchristian deed of the murders.”

... On November 2, the day after Father Jerzy’s funeral, people marched the streets past the secret police headquarters bearing banners reading, “We forgive.”

Regardless of their expertise in murdering the body, the executioners could not kill the soul. Father Jerzy had taught his people well.

(From *The Body* by Charles Colson)

Application

How bold are you to share your faith? Have you known people for years but have never shared Christ with them? Do your neighbors know you are a Christian? Look for an opportunity to share with someone new.

Exploration

Persecution—[Matthew 10:22](#); [John 7:7](#); [15:18–21](#); [Acts 9:16](#); [20:23–24](#).

Paul Goes to Jerusalem

After we all said goodbye to them, we sailed straight to the island of Cos. The next day we reached Rhodes, and from there we went to Patara.²There we found a ship going to Phoenicia, so we went aboard and sailed away.³We sailed near the island of Cyprus, seeing it to the north, but we sailed on to Syria. We stopped at Tyre because the ship needed to unload its cargo there.⁴We found some followers in Tyre and stayed with them for seven days. Through the Holy Spirit they warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem.⁵When we finished our visit, we left and continued our trip. All the followers, even the women and children, came outside the city with us. After we all knelt on the beach and prayed,⁶we said goodbye and got on the ship, and the followers went back home.

⁷We continued our trip from Tyre and arrived at Ptolemais, where we greeted the believers and stayed with them for a day.⁸The next day we left Ptolemais and went to the city of Caesarea. There we went into the home of Philip the preacher, one of the seven [helpers](#), and stayed with him.⁹He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophesying.¹⁰After we had been there for some time, a prophet named Agabus arrived from Judea.¹¹He came to us and borrowed Paul's belt and used it to tie his own hands and feet. He said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'This is how evil people in Jerusalem will tie up the man who wears this belt. Then they will give him to the older

leaders.’”

¹²When we all heard this, we and the people there begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. ¹³But he said, “Why are you crying and making me so sad? I am not only ready to be tied up in Jerusalem, I am ready to die for the Lord Jesus!”

¹⁴We could not persuade him to stay away from Jerusalem. So we stopped begging him and said, “We pray that what the Lord wants will be done.”

¹⁵After this, we got ready and started on our way to Jerusalem. ¹⁶Some of the followers from Caesarea went with us and took us to the home of Mnason, where we would stay. He was from Cyprus and was one of the first followers.

Paul Visits James

¹⁷In Jerusalem the believers were glad to see us. ¹⁸The next day Paul went with us to visit James, and all the elders were there.

¹⁹Paul greeted them and told them everything God had done among the other nations through him. ²⁰When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul, “Brother, you can see that many thousands of our people have become believers. And they think it is very important to obey the law of Moses.

²¹They have heard about your teaching, that you tell our people who live among the nations to leave the law of Moses. They have heard that you tell them not to circumcise their children and not to obey customs. ²²What should we do? They will learn that you have come. ²³So we will tell you what to do: Four of our men have made a promise to God. ²⁴Take these men with you and share in their [cleansing ceremony](#). Pay their expenses so they can [shave their heads](#). Then it will prove to

everyone that what they have heard about you is not true and that you follow the law of Moses in your own life.²⁵ We have already sent a letter to the non-Jewish believers. The letter said: ‘Do not eat food that has been offered to idols, or blood, or animals that have been strangled. Do not take part in sexual sin.’”

²⁶The next day Paul took the four men and shared in the cleansing ceremony with them. Then he went to the Temple and announced the time when the days of the cleansing ceremony would be finished. On the last day an offering would be given for each of the men.

²⁷When the seven days were almost over, some of his people from Asia saw Paul at the Temple. They caused all the people to be upset and grabbed Paul.²⁸ They shouted, “People of Israel, help us! This is the man who goes everywhere teaching against the law of Moses, against our people, and against this Temple. Now he has brought some Greeks into the Temple and has made this holy place unclean!”²⁹ (They said this because they had seen Trophimus, a man from Ephesus, with Paul in Jerusalem. They thought that Paul had brought him into the Temple.)³⁰ All the people in Jerusalem became upset. Together they ran, took Paul, and dragged him out of the Temple. The Temple doors were closed immediately.

³¹While they were trying to kill Paul, the commander of the Roman army in Jerusalem learned that there was trouble in the whole city.³² Immediately he took some officers and soldiers and ran to the place where the crowd was gathered. When the people saw them, they stopped beating Paul.³³ The commander went to Paul and arrested him. He told his soldiers to tie Paul with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had

done wrong.³⁴ Some in the crowd were yelling one thing, and some were yelling another. Because of all this confusion and shouting, the commander could not learn what had happened. So he ordered the soldiers to take Paul to the army building.³⁵ When Paul came to the steps, the soldiers had to carry him because the people were ready to hurt him.³⁶ The whole mob was following them, shouting, “Kill him!”

³⁷As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the army building, he spoke to the commander, “May I say something to you?”

The commander said, “Do you speak Greek?”³⁸ I thought you were the Egyptian who started some trouble against the government not long ago and led four thousand killers out to the desert.”

³⁹Paul said, “No, I am a Jew from Tarsus in the country of Cilicia. I am a citizen of that important city. Please, let me speak to the people.”

⁴⁰The commander gave permission, so Paul stood on the steps and waved his hand to quiet the people. When there was silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language.

Life Lessons

Acts 22:1–29

Situation

Paul was saved from the angry mob in Jerusalem by the Roman garrison commander. Then he was placed in prison.

Observation

God can work in unconventional or unusual ways to accomplish his will.

Inspiration

The sword of God's Holy Spirit is the Bible, the Word of God. When the Holy Spirit goes into action in your life, more than dust flies! Your bad thoughts come under control, your bad actions wither and decline, and all the good things within you flourish and blossom. Good intentions that were never put into effect can now become a way of life. Bad habits you couldn't conquer come under the knife of the Master Surgeon.

All this from Bible reading? Yes, but there is one vital factor I haven't mentioned: Read to discover what God wants you to do, and do it. Those who read the Bible as interesting literature will not find it very exciting; those who read it as God's guidebook for their lives will find it to be a fascinating adventure....

The Bible is "the sword of the Spirit" that cuts deep into our lives, opening the festering spiritual sores so that the healing of the Spirit can occur. Thus new life grows and flourishes. (From *Next Steps for*

New Christians by Kenneth Taylor)

Application

Have you ever found refuge or support in an unexpected place? Have problems resolved themselves in ways you didn't expect? Ask God today to make you the unexpected solution to someone else's problem—God's miracle channel.

Exploration

God's Will—[2 Chronicles 18:28–33](#); Esther [4:13–14](#); [Acts 16:6](#).

Paul Speaks to the People

Paul said, “Friends, fellow Jews, listen to my defense to you.”

²When they heard him speaking the [Hebrew language](#), they became very quiet. Paul said, ³“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in the country of Cilicia, but I grew up in this city. I was a student of [Gamaliel](#), who carefully taught me everything about the law of our ancestors. I was very serious about serving God, just as are all of you here today. ⁴I persecuted the people who followed the Way of Jesus, and some of them were even killed. I arrested men and women and put them in jail. ⁵The high priest and the whole council of older leaders can tell you this is true. They gave me letters to the brothers in Damascus. So I was going there to arrest these people and bring them back to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶“About noon when I came near Damascus, a bright light from heaven suddenly flashed all around me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ ⁸I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The voice said, ‘I am Jesus from Nazareth whom you are persecuting.’ ⁹Those who were with me did not hear the voice, but they saw the light. ¹⁰I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ The Lord answered, ‘Get up and go to Damascus. There you will be told about all the things I have planned for you to do.’ ¹¹I could not see, because the bright light had made me blind. So my companions led me into Damascus.

¹²“There a man named Ananias came to me. He was a religious man; he obeyed the law of Moses, and all the Jews who lived there respected him. ¹³He stood by me and said, ‘Brother Saul, see again!’ Immediately I was able to see him. ¹⁴He said, ‘The God of our ancestors chose you long ago to know his plan, to see the Righteous One, and to hear words from him. ¹⁵You will be his witness to all people, telling them about what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶Now, why wait any longer? Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, trusting in him to save you.’

¹⁷“Later, when I returned to Jerusalem, I was praying in the Temple, and I saw a vision. ¹⁸I saw the Lord saying to me, ‘Hurry! Leave Jerusalem now! The people here will not accept the truth about me.’ ¹⁹But I said, ‘Lord, they know that in every synagogue I put the believers in jail and beat them. ²⁰They also know I was there when Stephen, your witness, was killed. I stood there agreeing and holding the coats of those who were killing him!’ ²¹But the Lord said to me, ‘Leave now. I will send you far away to the other nations.’”

²²The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they began shouting, “Kill him! Get him out of the world! He should not be allowed to live!” ²³They shouted, [threw off their coats](#), and [threw dust into the air](#).

²⁴Then the commander ordered the soldiers to take Paul into the army building and beat him. He wanted to make Paul tell why the people were shouting against him like this. ²⁵But as the soldiers were tying him up, preparing to beat him, Paul said to an officer nearby, “Do you have the right to beat a [Roman citizen](#) who has not been proven guilty?”

²⁶When the officer heard this, he went to the commander

and reported it. The officer said, “Do you know what you are doing? This man is a Roman citizen.”

²⁷The commander came to Paul and said, “Tell me, are you really a Roman citizen?”

He answered, “Yes.”

²⁸The commander said, “I paid a lot of money to become a Roman citizen.”

But Paul said, “I was born a citizen.”

²⁹The men who were preparing to question Paul moved away from him immediately. The commander was frightened because he had already tied Paul, and Paul was a Roman citizen.

Life Lessons

Acts 22:30–23:35

Situation

In Jerusalem, Paul escaped a flogging by asserting his Roman citizenship. Claudius Lysias, the commander who stopped the riot and was about to flog him, brought Paul before the Sanhedrin (Jewish council) to further investigate the incident.

Observation

Even if the civil rights of a Believer are abused, God still holds the Situation in his hand.

Inspiration

Among presidents, Abraham Lincoln stands head and shoulders above the rest.... [He said] “I desire to so conduct the affairs of this administration that if, at the end, when I come to lay down the reins of power, I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least

have one friend left, and that friend shall be deep down inside me... I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to the light I have... Let us have the faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it....

Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him, who has never forsaken this favored land, are still competent to adjust, in the best way, our present difficulties....”

The “present difficulties” of Lincoln’s day were hard but no harder than the present difficulties of our day. The power that Lincoln knew a faithful God could supply is still available. But Christians also have the same responsibility that Lincoln had—to stand for the right. It is a lonely, risky position, but as we stand for the right, God will supply the might. (From *Plus Living* by Vicki Huffman)

Application

Set your mind on a course to become more dedicated to God. Don’t let excuses, a new crisis, or a busy day make you put your time with God on hold. Find something else to skip before you skip your time in prayer or reading from the Bible.

Exploration

Determination—[Philippians 3:12–14](#). Faithfulness—[2 Samuel 22:26](#). Steadfastness—[Psalms 51:10](#).

Paul Speaks to Leaders

³⁰The next day the commander decided to learn why the Jews were accusing Paul. So he ordered the leading priests and the council to meet. The commander took Paul's chains off. Then he brought Paul out and stood him before their meeting.

Paul looked at the council and said, “Brothers, I have lived my life without guilt feelings before God up to this day.” ²[Ananias](#), the high priest, heard this and told the men who were standing near Paul to hit him on the mouth. ³Paul said to Ananias, “God will hit you, too! You are like a wall that has been painted white. You sit there and judge me, using the law of Moses, but you are telling them to hit me, and that is against the law.”

⁴The men standing near Paul said to him, “You cannot insult God’s high priest like that!”

⁵Paul said, “Brothers, I did not know this man was the high priest. It is written in the Scriptures, [‘You must not curse a leader of your people.’](#)”

⁶Some of the men in the meeting were Sadducees, and others were Pharisees. Knowing this, Paul shouted to them, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, and my father was a Pharisee. I am on trial here because I believe that people will rise from the dead.”

⁷When Paul said this, there was an argument between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the group was divided. ⁸(The Sadducees do not believe in angels or spirits or that people will rise from the dead. But the Pharisees believe in them all.) ⁹So there was a great uproar. Some of the teachers of the law, who were Pharisees, stood up and argued, “We find nothing wrong with this man. Maybe an angel or a spirit did speak to him.”

¹⁰The argument was beginning to turn into such a fight that the commander was afraid some evil people would tear Paul to pieces. So he told the soldiers to go down and take Paul away and put him in the army building.

¹¹The next night the Lord came and stood by Paul. He said,

“Be brave! You have told people in Jerusalem about me. You must do the same in Rome.”

¹²In the morning some evil people made a plan to kill Paul, and they took an oath not to eat or drink anything until they had killed him. ¹³There were more than forty men who made this plan. ¹⁴They went to the leading priests and the older leaders and said, “We have taken an oath not to eat or drink until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵So this is what we want you to do: Send a message to the commander to bring Paul out to you as though you want to ask him more questions. We will be waiting to kill him while he is on the way here.”

¹⁶But Paul’s nephew heard about this plan and went to the army building and told Paul. ¹⁷Then Paul called one of the officers and said, “Take this young man to the commander. He has a message for him.”

¹⁸So the officer brought Paul’s nephew to the commander and said, “The prisoner, Paul, asked me to bring this young man to you. He wants to tell you something.”

¹⁹The commander took the young man’s hand and led him to a place where they could be alone. He asked, “What do you want to tell me?”

²⁰The young man said, “The Jews have decided to ask you to bring Paul down to their council meeting tomorrow. They want you to think they are going to ask him more questions. ²¹But don’t believe them! More than forty men are hiding and waiting to kill Paul. They have all taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. Now they are waiting for you to agree.”

²²The commander sent the young man away, ordering him, “Don’t tell anyone that you have told me about their plan.”

Paul Is Sent to Caesarea

²³Then the commander called two officers and said, “I need some men to go to Caesarea. Get two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred men with spears ready to leave at nine o’clock tonight. ²⁴Get some horses for Paul to ride so he can be taken to Governor Felix safely.” ²⁵And he wrote a letter that said:

²⁶From Claudius Lysias.

To the Most Excellent Governor Felix:
Greetings.

²⁷Some of the Jews had taken this man and planned to kill him. But I learned that he is a Roman citizen, so I went with my soldiers and saved him. ²⁸I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him before their council meeting. ²⁹I learned that these people said Paul did some things that were wrong by their own laws, but no charge was worthy of jail or death. ³⁰When I was told that some of them were planning to kill Paul, I sent him to you at once. I also told them to tell you what they have against him.

³¹So the soldiers did what they were told and took Paul and brought him to the city of Antipatris that night. ³²The next day the horsemen went with Paul to Caesarea, but the other soldiers went back to the army building in Jerusalem. ³³When the horsemen came to Caesarea and gave the letter to the governor, they turned Paul over to him. ³⁴The governor read the letter and asked Paul, “What area are you from?” When he learned that Paul was from Cilicia, ³⁵he said, “I will hear your case when those who are

against you come here, too.” Then the governor gave orders for Paul to be kept under guard in Herod’s palace.

Life Lessons

Acts 24:1-27

Situation

Foiled in their attempts to kill Paul, the priests hoped to manipulate the law against him before the Roman governor. Paul became Christ's mouthpiece; he defended himself and his faith against their accusations. Paul's powerful arguments thwarted the priests and won new converts at the governor's court, although some remained hesitant to receive God's Word.

Observation

Although God's wisdom is wiser than any other type of wisdom, some non-Christians will never accept it.

Inspiration

Most people I know look forward to payday. You do too, right? For a week, or perhaps a two-week period, you give time and effort to your job. When payday arrives, you receive a hard-earned, well-deserved paycheck....

But with God the economy is altogether different. There is no wage relationship with God. Spiritually speaking, you and I haven't earned anything but death....

Everyone who hopes to be eternally justified must come to God the same way: on the basis of grace; it is a gift. And that gift comes to us absolutely free. Any other view of salvation is heresy, plain and simple....

We being justified by faith, not works, get the one thing we've longed for—peace with God. Is it through our merits? Not at all. The verse states we've been justified by faith. It is through Jesus Christ our Lord who paid the absolute, final payment for sin when He died in our place at the Cross. Sin against God required the payment of death. And Jesus Christ, the perfect Substitute, made the ultimate, once-and-for-all payment on our behalf. It cost Him His life. As a result, God gives the free gift of salvation to all who believe in His Son....

Wonderful! Marvelous reassurance!

"You're telling me, Chuck, that by simply believing in Jesus Christ I can have eternal life with God, my sins forgiven, a destiny secure in heaven, all of this and much more without my working for that?" Yes, that is precisely what Scripture teaches. I remind you, it is called grace.

(From *The Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

You've probably met people who attend church regularly but are unmoved by the preaching of God's Word. Their attendance seems more of a social obligation than a means for sharing and being enriched with God's Word. Is that how life is for you or your family? Think about your relationship with Christ. Does it have a true and real meaning? Make your goal next Sunday to worship God through active participation and listening.

Exploration

Acceptance—[Judges 11:3](#); [Luke 4:24](#); [9:1–6](#).

Paul Is Accused

Five days later Ananias, the high priest, went to the city of Caesarea with some of the older leaders and a lawyer named Tertullus. They had come to make charges against Paul before the governor. ²Paul was called into the meeting, and Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, “Most Excellent Felix! Our people enjoy much peace because of you, and many wrong things in our country are being made right through your wise help. ³We accept these things always and in every place, and we are thankful for them. ⁴But not wanting to take any more of your time, I beg you to be kind and listen to our few words. ⁵We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up his people everywhere in the world. He is a leader of the Nazarene group. ⁶Also, he was trying to make the Temple unclean, but we stopped him.” ⁷By asking him questions yourself, you can decide if all these things are true.” ⁸The others agreed and said that all of this was true.

⁹When the governor made a sign for Paul to speak, Paul said, “Governor Felix, I know you have been a judge over this nation for a long time. So I am happy to defend myself before you. ¹⁰You can learn for yourself that I went to worship in Jerusalem only twelve days ago. ¹¹Those who are accusing me did not find me arguing with anyone in the Temple or stirring up the people in the synagogues or in the city. ¹²They cannot

prove the things they are saying against me now. ¹⁴But I will tell you this: I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way of Jesus. The others say that the Way of Jesus is not the right way. But I believe everything that is taught in the law of Moses and that is written in the books of the Prophets. ¹⁵I have the same hope in God that they have—the hope that all people, good and bad, will surely be raised from the dead. ¹⁶This is why I always try to do what I believe is right before God and people.

¹⁷“After being away from Jerusalem for several years, I went back to bring money to my people and to offer sacrifices. ¹⁸I was doing this when they found me in the Temple. I had finished the cleansing ceremony and had not made any trouble; no people were gathering around me. ¹⁹But there were some people from the country of Asia who should be here, standing before you. If I have really done anything wrong, they are the ones who should accuse me. ²⁰Or ask these people here if they found any wrong in me when I stood before the council in Jerusalem. ²¹But I did shout one thing when I stood before them: ‘You are judging me today because I believe that people will rise from the dead!’”

²²Felix already understood much about the Way of Jesus. He stopped the trial and said, “When commander Lysias comes here, I will decide your case.” ²³Felix told the officer to keep Paul guarded but to give him some freedom and to let his friends bring what he needed.

Paul Speaks to Felix and His Wife

²⁴After some days Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was

Jewish, and asked for Paul to be brought to him. He listened to Paul talk about believing in Christ Jesus.²⁵ But Felix became afraid when Paul spoke about living right, self-control, and the time when God will judge the world. He said, “Go away now. When I have more time, I will call for you.”²⁶ At the same time Felix hoped that Paul would give him some money, so he often sent for Paul and talked with him.

²⁷ But after two years, Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus as governor. But Felix had left Paul in prison to please the Jews.

Life Lessons

Acts 25:1–27

Situation

After two years in prison, Paul awaited a new trial before the Romans and the Jews. He hoped his appeal to be heard by Caesar would fulfill part of his task to spread the gospel.

Observation

Paul never lost hope or vision and made the most of his Situation to obtain safe passage to Rome to await trial. While preaching to everyone he came in touch with, Paul developed a positive and respected reputation among those he met.

Inspiration

Earl Palmer, in a fine little book entitled *The Enormous Exception*, tells the story of a pre-med student at the University of California, Berkeley “who became a Christian after a long journey through doubts and questions.” When Palmer asked the young man why he had chosen Jesus Christ, he answered that what had “tipped the scales” in his spiritual journey were the actions of a classmate who happened to be a Christian.

During the previous term the pre-med student had been very ill with the flu and, as a result, had missed ten days of school. “Without any fanfare or complaints,” his Christian classmate carefully collected all his class assignments and took time away from his own studies to help him catch up.

The pre-med student told Palmer, “You know, this kind of thing just isn’t done. I wanted to know what made this guy act the way he did. I even found myself asking if I could go to church with him.”

(From *Simple Faith* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Perhaps you have been in a discouraging rut that caused you to lose your Christian witness. Did you stop being a good Christian because you had a bad day? Make the most of every Situation, even the bad times. Your dark cloud may have a surprise silver lining.

Exploration

Opportunities—[Exodus 2:7–8](#); [2 Corinthians 4:17](#); [Philippians 1:12–14](#).

Paul Asks to See Caesar

Three days after Festus became governor, he went from Caesarea to Jerusalem.² There the leading priests and the important leaders made charges against Paul before Festus.³ They asked Festus to do them a favor. They wanted him to send Paul back to Jerusalem, because they had a plan to kill him on the way.⁴ But Festus answered that Paul would be kept in Caesarea and that he himself was returning there soon.⁵ He said, "Some of your leaders should go with me. They can accuse the man there in Caesarea, if he has really done something wrong."

⁶Festus stayed in Jerusalem another eight or ten days and then went back to Caesarea. The next day he told the soldiers to bring Paul before him. Festus was seated on the judge's seat⁷ when Paul came into the room. The people who had come from Jerusalem stood around him, making serious charges against him, which they could not prove.⁸ This is what Paul said to defend himself: "I have done nothing wrong against the law, against the Temple, or against Caesar."

⁹But Festus wanted to please the people. So he asked Paul, "Do you want to go to Jerusalem for me to judge you there on these charges?"

¹⁰Paul said, "I am standing at Caesar's judgment seat now, where I should be judged. I have done nothing wrong to them; you know this is true.¹¹ If I have done something wrong and

the law says I must die, I do not ask to be saved from death. But if these charges are not true, then no one can give me to them. I want Caesar to hear my case!”

¹²Festus talked about this with his advisers. Then he said, “You have asked to see Caesar, so you will go to Caesar!”

Paul Before King Agrippa

¹³A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to visit Festus. ¹⁴They stayed there for some time, and Festus told the king about Paul’s case. Festus said, “There is a man that Felix left in prison. ¹⁵When I went to Jerusalem, the leading priests and the older leaders there made charges against him, asking me to sentence him to death. ¹⁶But I answered, ‘When a man is accused of a crime, Romans do not hand him over until he has been allowed to face his accusers and defend himself against their charges.’ ¹⁷So when these people came here to Caesarea for the trial, I did not waste time. The next day I sat on the judge’s seat and commanded that the man be brought in. ¹⁸They stood up and accused him, but not of any serious crime as I thought they would. ¹⁹The things they said were about their own religion and about a man named Jesus who died. But Paul said that he is still alive. ²⁰Not knowing how to find out about these questions, I asked Paul, ‘Do you want to go to Jerusalem and be judged there?’ ²¹But he asked to be kept in Caesarea. He wants a decision from the [emperor](#). So I ordered that he be held until I could send him to Caesar.”

²²Agrippa said to Festus, “I would also like to hear this man myself.”

Festus said, “Tomorrow you will hear him.”

²³The next day Agrippa and Bernice appeared with great show, acting like very important people. They went into the judgment room with the army leaders and the important men of Caesarea. Then Festus ordered the soldiers to bring Paul in. ²⁴Festus said, “King Agrippa and all who are gathered here with us, you see this man. All the people, here and in Jerusalem, have complained to me about him, shouting that he should not live any longer. ²⁵When I judged him, I found no reason to order his death. But since he asked to be judged by Caesar, I decided to send him. ²⁶But I have nothing definite to write the emperor about him. So I have brought him before all of you—especially you, King Agrippa. I hope you can question him and give me something to write. ²⁷I think it is foolish to send a prisoner to Caesar without telling what charges are against him.”

Life Lessons

Acts 26:1–32

Situation

Festus asked Agrippa for advice on Paul's case. When Agrippa asked to hear Paul's case, Paul recounted how Jesus had changed his life.

Observation

Christ fills a Believer's new life with joy, hope, love, and peace. People still in the "old life" can see the difference but do not always understand it.

Inspiration

It is possible for God's people to live in moderation, wisdom, and exuberant joy. We can so conduct ourselves amid a corrupt society and sick culture that we are a credit to our Master....

My walk with God need not in any sense be a spectacular display of special dedication. It need not have any carnival atmosphere about it to be convincing. I don't have to indulge in theatrics to impress either Him or other human beings.

What He desires most is that I walk with Him humbly, quietly, and obediently. The communion between shepherd and sheep is sweet and secure because He knows me and I know Him! (From *A Shepherd Looks at the Good Shepherd and His Sheep* by Phillip Keller)

Application

Do you just say, "I believe"? Or, do your actions prove it? Consider volunteering to meet one of your

church's needs.

Exploration

Witnessing—[Acts 1:8, 21–22](#); [1 Corinthians 1:18–31](#).

Paul Defends Himself

Agrippa said to Paul, “You may now speak to defend yourself.”

Then Paul raised his hand and began to speak.²He said, “King Agrippa, I am very happy to stand before you and will answer all the charges the evil people make against me.³You know so much about all the customs and the things they argue about, so please listen to me patiently.

⁴“All my people know about my whole life, how I lived from the beginning in my own country and later in Jerusalem.⁵They have known me for a long time. If they want to, they can tell you that I was a good Pharisee. And the Pharisees obey the laws of my tradition more carefully than any other group.⁶Now I am on trial because I hope for the promise that God made to our ancestors.⁷This is the promise that the twelve tribes of our people hope to receive as they serve God day and night. My king, they have accused me because I hope for this same promise!⁸Why do any of you people think it is impossible for God to raise people from the dead?

⁹“I, too, thought I ought to do many things against Jesus from Nazareth.¹⁰And that is what I did in Jerusalem. The leading priests gave me the power to put many of God’s people in jail, and when they were being killed, I agreed it was a good thing.¹¹In every synagogue, I often punished them and tried to make them speak against Jesus. I was so angry against them I

even went to other cities to find them and punish them.

¹²“One time the leading priests gave me permission and the power to go to Damascus. ¹³On the way there, at noon, I saw a light from heaven. It was brighter than the sun and flashed all around me and those who were traveling with me. ¹⁴We all fell to the ground. Then I heard a voice speaking to me in the [Hebrew language](#), saying, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? You are only hurting yourself by fighting me.’ ¹⁵I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. ¹⁶Stand up! I have chosen you to be my servant and my witness—you will tell people the things that you have seen and the things that I will show you. This is why I have come to you today. ¹⁷I will keep you safe from your own people and also from the others. I am sending you to them ¹⁸to open their eyes so that they may turn away from darkness to the light, away from the power of Satan and to God. Then their sins can be forgiven, and they can have a place with those people who have been made holy by believing in me.’

¹⁹“King Agrippa, after I had this vision from heaven, I obeyed it. ²⁰I began telling people that they should change their hearts and lives and turn to God and do things to show they really had changed. I told this first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and in every part of Judea, and also to the other people. ²¹This is why the Jews took me and were trying to kill me in the Temple. ²²But God has helped me, and so I stand here today, telling all people, small and great, what I have seen. But I am saying only what Moses and the prophets said would happen— ²³that the Christ would die, and as the first to rise from the dead, he would bring light to all people.”

Paul Tries to Persuade Agrippa

²⁴While Paul was saying these things to defend himself, Festus said loudly, “Paul, you are out of your mind! Too much study has driven you crazy!”

²⁵Paul said, “Most excellent Festus, I am not crazy. My words are true and sensible. ²⁶King Agrippa knows about these things, and I can speak freely to him. I know he has heard about all of these things, because they did not happen off in a corner. ²⁷King Agrippa, do you believe what the prophets wrote? I know you believe.”

²⁸King Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian in such a short time?”

²⁹Paul said, “Whether it is a short or a long time, I pray to God that not only you but every person listening to me today would be saved and be like me—except for these chains I have.”

³⁰Then King Agrippa, Governor Festus, Bernice, and all the people sitting with them stood up ³¹and left the room. Talking to each other, they said, “There is no reason why this man should die or be put in jail.” ³²And Agrippa said to Festus, “We could let this man go free, but he has asked Caesar to hear his case.”

Life Lessons

Acts 27:1–44

Situation

Paul proved to be a calming presence on board the ship as he was taken to Rome. His faith and confidence remained like a rock when trouble engulfed the ship.

Observation

Trust in God to fulfill his promises. He provides hope when there seems to be no way out.

Inspiration

The love of God is a subject that can never be exhausted. No human mind will ever be able to fathom it....

Think of all the hymns and poems that have been composed in praise of the love of God, the books that have been written, the messages that have been preached. And yet that is not enough. God's will is that His love be manifested in our lives! The world today is dying for lack of love, and only Christians can really fill the need.

We should never lose a sense of wonder that God's love for us is so undeserved.

We should love Him with a love that is undivided, obedient, and worshipful, allowing no rival to share the throne with Him.

We should love our brothers and sisters in Christ without regard to denominations or religious labels. John insists that if we do not love our brothers whom

we have seen we cannot love God whom we have not seen.

When this is our spiritual craving, we are getting close to Calvary love. (From *Alone in Majesty* by William MacDonald)

Application

Imagine yourself on a plane flying through rough weather with engine trouble. Would you be bold enough to provide hope to the person next to you? Would you quickly share Christ with that person? Anyone you know could be close to death. An unfortunate accident could claim the lives of a couple of your friends. What keeps you from sharing Christ with them?

Exploration

God's Love—[Psalm 136](#); [Jeremiah 31:3](#); [John 3:16; 11:33–38](#); [1 John 3:1](#); [Revelation 3:20](#).

Paul Sails for Rome

It was decided that we would sail for Italy. An officer named Julius, who served in the [emperor's](#) army, guarded Paul and some other prisoners. ²We got on a ship that was from the city of Adramyttium and was about to sail to different ports in the country of Asia. Aristarchus, a man from the city of Thessalonica in Macedonia, went with us. ³The next day we came to Sidon. Julius was very good to Paul and gave him freedom to go visit his friends, who took care of his needs. ⁴We left Sidon and sailed close to the island of Cyprus, because the wind was blowing against us. ⁵We went across the sea by Cilicia and Pamphylia and landed at the city of Myra, in Lycia. ⁶There the officer found a ship from Alexandria that was going to Italy, so he put us on it.

⁷We sailed slowly for many days. We had a hard time reaching Cnidus because the wind was blowing against us, and we could not go any farther. So we sailed by the south side of the island of Crete near Salmone. ⁸Sailing past it was hard. Then we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.

⁹We had lost much time, and it was now dangerous to sail, because it was already after the [Day of Cleansing](#). So Paul warned them, ¹⁰“Men, I can see there will be a lot of trouble on this trip. The ship, the cargo, and even our lives may be lost.”

¹¹But the captain and the owner of the ship did not agree with

Paul, and the officer believed what the captain and owner of the ship said.¹² Since that harbor was not a good place for the ship to stay for the winter, most of the men decided that the ship should leave. They hoped we could go to Phoenix and stay there for the winter. Phoenix, a city on the island of Crete, had a harbor which faced southwest and northwest.

The Storm

¹³When a good wind began to blow from the south, the men on the ship thought, “This is the wind we wanted, and now we have it.” So they pulled up the anchor, and we sailed very close to the island of Crete.¹⁴ But then a very strong wind named the “northeaster” came from the island.¹⁵ The ship was caught in it and could not sail against it. So we stopped trying and let the wind carry us.¹⁶ When we went below a small island named Cauda, we were barely able to bring in the lifeboat.¹⁷ After the men took the lifeboat in, they tied ropes around the ship to hold it together. The men were afraid that the ship would hit the sandbanks of [Syrtis](#), so they lowered the sail and let the wind carry the ship.¹⁸ The next day the storm was blowing us so hard that the men threw out some of the cargo.¹⁹ A day later with their own hands they threw out the ship’s equipment.²⁰ When we could not see the sun or the stars for many days, and the storm was very bad, we lost all hope of being saved.

²¹After the men had gone without food for a long time, Paul stood up before them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me. You should not have sailed from Crete. Then you would not have all this trouble and loss.”²² But now I tell

you to cheer up because none of you will die. Only the ship will be lost.²³ Last night an angel came to me from the God I belong to and worship.²⁴ The angel said, 'Paul, do not be afraid. You must stand before Caesar. And God has promised you that he will save the lives of everyone sailing with you.'²⁵ So men, have courage. I trust in God that everything will happen as his angel told me.²⁶ But we will crash on an island."

²⁷ On the fourteenth night we were still being carried around in the [Adriatic Sea](#). About midnight the sailors thought we were close to land,²⁸ so they lowered a rope with a weight on the end of it into the water. They found that the water was one hundred twenty feet deep. They went a little farther and lowered the rope again. It was ninety feet deep.²⁹ The sailors were afraid that we would hit the rocks, so they threw four anchors into the water and prayed for daylight to come.³⁰ Some of the sailors wanted to leave the ship, and they lowered the lifeboat, pretending they were throwing more anchors from the front of the ship.³¹ But Paul told the officer and the other soldiers, "If these men do not stay in the ship, your lives cannot be saved."³² So the soldiers cut the ropes and let the lifeboat fall into the water.

³³ Just before dawn Paul began persuading all the people to eat something. He said, "For the past fourteen days you have been waiting and watching and not eating."³⁴ Now I beg you to eat something. You need it to stay alive. None of you will lose even one hair off your heads."³⁵ After he said this, Paul took some bread and thanked God for it before all of them. He broke off a piece and began eating.³⁶ They all felt better and started eating, too.³⁷ There were two hundred seventy-six people on the ship.³⁸ When they had eaten all they wanted, they began

making the ship lighter by throwing the grain into the sea.

The Ship Is Destroyed

³⁹When daylight came, the sailors saw land. They did not know what land it was, but they saw a bay with a beach and wanted to sail the ship to the beach if they could. ⁴⁰So they cut the ropes to the anchors and left the anchors in the sea. At the same time, they untied the ropes that were holding the rudders. Then they raised the front sail into the wind and sailed toward the beach. ⁴¹But the ship hit a sandbank. The front of the ship stuck there and could not move, but the back of the ship began to break up from the big waves.

⁴²The soldiers decided to kill the prisoners so none of them could swim away and escape. ⁴³But Julius, the officer, wanted to let Paul live and did not allow the soldiers to kill the prisoners. Instead he ordered everyone who could swim to jump into the water first and swim to land. ⁴⁴The rest were to follow using wooden boards or pieces of the ship. And this is how all the people made it safely to land.

Life Lessons

Acts 28:1–31

Situation

Paul, Luke, and the others survived the crash. Paul arrived in Rome and attempted to bring the message of Jesus to the Jewish community in Rome, but they rejected the message.

Observation

The message of God is meant for all people. It cannot be limited by race or culture.

Inspiration

There, then, is the watchword of those men of the New Testament and the secret of their amazing, indomitable vitality—never “We are able,” but always “He is able.” God is able! Christ is able! Able to succour the tempted, able to save to the uttermost, able to support and keep you from failing, able to subdue all things to Himself, able to secure you in death’s decisive hour, able to surpass your dreams of immortality. All this is yours and mine, if we are Christ’s.... Why should we not believe it and confide in it, and lift up our hearts to its splendour? ... come, and let us walk in the light of the Lord! (From *The Wind of the Spirit* by James Stewart)

Application

Give thanks to God for the sacrifice of the early Christians who spread the Good News from Judea. Learn a little bit more this month about someone who helped pass on the gospel throughout the centuries

—Augustine, Luther, Wesley, Carey, or Zinzendorf for starters.

Exploration

Good News for Everyone—[Isaiah 40:28](#); [John 3:31–35](#); [Philippians 2:5–11](#); [Titus 2:11–12](#); [Revelation 14:6](#).

Paul on the Island of Malta

When we were safe on land, we learned that the island was called Malta.²The people who lived there were very good to us. Because it was raining and very cold, they made a fire and welcomed all of us.³Paul gathered a pile of sticks and was putting them on the fire when a poisonous snake came out because of the heat and bit him on the hand.⁴The people living on the island saw the snake hanging from Paul's hand and said to each other, "This man must be a murderer! He did not die in the sea, but Justice does not want him to live."⁵But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and was not hurt.⁶The people thought that Paul would swell up or fall down dead. They waited and watched him for a long time, but nothing bad happened to him. So they changed their minds and said, "He is a god!"

⁷There were some fields around there owned by Publius, an important man on the island. He welcomed us into his home and was very good to us for three days.⁸Publius' father was sick with a fever and dysentery. Paul went to him, prayed, and put his hands on the man and healed him.⁹After this, all the other sick people on the island came to Paul, and he healed them, too.¹⁰⁻¹¹The people on the island gave us many honors. When we were ready to leave, three months later, they gave us the things we needed.

Paul Goes to Rome

We got on a ship from Alexandria that had stayed on the island during the winter. On the front of the ship was the sign of the [twin gods](#). ¹²We stopped at Syracuse for three days. ¹³From there we sailed to Rhegium. The next day a wind began to blow from the south, and a day later we came to Puteoli. ¹⁴We found some believers there who asked us to stay with them for a week. Finally, we came to Rome. ¹⁵The believers in Rome heard that we were there and came out as far as the [Market of Appius](#) and the [Three Inns](#) to meet us. When Paul saw them, he was encouraged and thanked God.

Paul in Rome

¹⁶When we arrived at Rome, Paul was allowed to live alone, with the soldier who guarded him.

¹⁷Three days later Paul sent for the leaders there. When they came together, he said, “Brothers, I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors. But I was arrested in Jerusalem and given to the Romans. ¹⁸After they asked me many questions, they could find no reason why I should be killed. They wanted to let me go free, ¹⁹but the evil people there argued against that. So I had to ask to come to Rome to have my trial before Caesar. But I have no charge to bring against my own people. ²⁰That is why I wanted to see you and talk with you. I am bound with this chain because I believe in the hope of Israel.”

²¹They answered Paul, “We have received no letters from Judea about you. None of our Jewish brothers who have come

from there brought news or told us anything bad about you.
²²But we want to hear your ideas, because we know that people everywhere are speaking against this religious group.”

²³Paul and the people chose a day for a meeting and on that day many more of the Jews met with Paul at the place he was staying. He spoke to them all day long. Using the law of Moses and the prophets’ writings, he explained the kingdom of God, and he tried to persuade them to believe these things about Jesus. ²⁴Some believed what Paul said, but others did not. ²⁵So they argued and began leaving after Paul said one more thing to them: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors through Isaiah the prophet, saying,

²⁶“Go to this people and say:
You will listen and listen, but you will not understand.
You will look and look, but you will not learn,
²⁷because these people have become stubborn.
They don’t hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise, they might really understand
what they see with their eyes
and hear with their ears.
They might really understand in their minds
and come back to me and be healed.”

[Isaiah 6:9–10](#)

²⁸“I want you to know that God has also sent his salvation to all nations, and they will listen!” ²⁹[n](#)

³⁰Paul stayed two full years in his own rented house and welcomed all people who came to visit him. ³¹He boldly

preached about the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ, and no one tried to stop him.

Brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “Brothers” here and throughout this book, the words of the speakers were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

languages This can also be translated “tongues.”

God ... was See [2 Samuel 7:13](#); [Psalm 132:11](#).

until ... control Literally, “until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

breaking bread This may mean a meal as in verse [46](#), or the Lord’s Supper, the special meal Jesus told his followers to eat to remember him ([Luke 22:14–20](#)).

murderer Barabbas, the man the crowd asked Pilate to set free instead of Jesus ([Luke 23:18](#)).

‘The Lord ... people.’ Quotation from [Deuteronomy 18:15](#), [19](#).

‘Through ... blessed.’ Quotation from [Genesis 22:18](#); [26:4](#).

stone A symbol meaning Jesus.

registration Census. A counting of all the people and the things they own.

Philip Not the apostle named Philip.

laid their hands The laying on of hands had many purposes, including the giving of a blessing, power, or authority.

Free Men Jewish people who had been slaves or whose fathers had been slaves, but were now free.

‘Leave ... you.’ Quotation from [Genesis 12:1](#).

‘Your descendants ... place.’ Quotation from [Genesis 15:13–14](#) and [Exodus 3:12](#).

twelve ancestors Important ancestors of the people of Israel; the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel.

‘Who ... yesterday?’ Quotation from [Exodus 2:14](#).

'I am ... Jacob.' Quotation from [Exodus 3:6](#).

'Take ... Egypt.' Quotation from [Exodus 3:5–10](#).

'Who ... judge?' Quotation from [Exodus 2:14](#).

'God ... people.' Quotation from [Deuteronomy 18:15](#).

'Make... him.' Quotation from [Exodus 32:1](#).

Verse 37 Some late copies of Acts add verse [37](#): “Philip answered, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you can.’ The officer said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”

Judas This is not either of the apostles named Judas.

roof In Bible times houses were built with flat roofs. The roof was used for drying things such as flax and fruit. And it was used as an extra room, as a place for worship, and as a cool place to sleep in the summer.

John John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ’s coming ([Luke 3](#)).

languages This can also be translated “tongues.”

giving up ... time This is called “fasting.” The people would give up eating for a special time of prayer and worship to God. It was also done sometimes to show sadness and disappointment.

laid their hands on The laying on of hands had many purposes, including the giving of a blessing, power, or authority.

John John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ’s coming ([Luke 3](#)).

shook ... feet A warning. It showed that they had rejected these people.

“Zeus” The Greeks believed in many false gods, of whom Zeus was most important.

“Hermes” The Greeks believed he was a messenger for the other gods.

giving ... time This is called “fasting.” The people would give up eating for a special time of prayer and worship to God. It was also done sometimes to show sadness and disappointment.

Verse 34 Some Greek copies add verse **34**: “... but Silas decided to remain there.”

Neapolis City in Macedonia. It was the first city Paul visited on the continent of Europe.

Roman colony A town begun by Romans with Roman laws, customs, and privileges.

spirit This was a spirit from the devil, which caused her to say she had special knowledge.

kill himself He thought the leaders would kill him for letting the prisoners escape.

Roman citizens Roman law said that Roman citizens must not be beaten before they had a trial.

Epicurean and Stoic philosophers Philosophers were those who searched for truth. Epicureans believed that pleasure, especially pleasures of the mind, were the goal of life. Stoics believed that life should be without feelings of joy or grief.

Areopagus A council or group of important leaders in Athens. They were like judges.

Claudius The emperor (ruler) of Rome, A.D. 41–54.

shook ... clothes This was a warning to show that Paul was finished talking to the people in that city.

cut ... hair Jews did this to show that the time of a special promise to God was finished.

John John the Baptist, who preached to people about Christ’s coming (**Luke 3**).

laid his hands on them The laying on of hands had many purposes, including the giving of a blessing, power, or

authority.

languages This can also be translated “tongues.”

fifty thousand silver coins Probably drachmas. One coin was enough to pay a worker for one day’s labor.

Artemis A Greek goddess that the people of Asia Minor worshiped.

holy stone Probably a meteorite or stone that the people thought looked like Artemis.

first day of the week Sunday, which for Jews began at sunset on our Saturday. But if in this part of Asia a different system of time was used, then the meeting was on our Sunday night.

break bread Probably the Lord’s Supper, the special meal that Jesus told his followers to eat to remember him (Luke 22:14–20).

of God Some Greek copies say, “of the Lord.”

helpers The seven men chosen for a special work described in Acts 6:1–6. Sometimes they are called “deacons.”

cleansing ceremony The special things Jews did to end the Nazirite promise.

shave their heads Jews did this to show that their promise was finished.

Hebrew language Or Aramaic, the languages of many people in this region in the first century.

Gamaliel A very important teacher of the Pharisees, a Jewish religious group (Acts 5:34).

threw off their coats This showed that the people were very angry with Paul.

threw dust into the air This showed even greater anger.

Roman citizen Roman law said that Roman citizens must not be beaten before they had a trial.

Ananias This is not the same man named Ananias in **Acts 22:12**.

'You ... people.' Quotation from **Exodus 22:28**.

Verse 6 Some Greek copies add **6b–8a**: “And we wanted to judge him by our own law. ⁷But the officer Lysias came and used much force to take him from us. ⁸And Lysias commanded those who wanted to accuse Paul to come to you.”

emperor The ruler of the Roman Empire, which was almost all the known world.

Hebrew language Hebrew or Aramaic, the languages of many people in this region in the first century.

emperor The ruler of the Roman Empire, which was almost all the known world.

Day of Cleansing An important Jewish holy day in the fall of the year. This was the time of year that bad storms arose on the sea.

Syrtis Shallow area in the sea near the Libyan coast.

Adriatic Sea The sea between Greece and Italy, including the central Mediterranean.

Justice The people thought there was a god named Justice who would punish bad people.

dysentery A sickness like diarrhea.

twin gods Statues of Castor and Pollux, gods in old Greek tales.

Market of Appius A town about twenty-seven miles from Rome.

Three Inns A town about thirty miles from Rome.

Verse 29 Some late Greek copies add verse **29**: “After Paul said this, the Jews left. They were arguing very much with each other.”

The Book of Romans

Introduction

At the moment I don't feel too smart. I just got off the wrong plane that took me to the wrong city and left me at the wrong airport. I went east instead of west and ended up in Houston instead of Denver.

It didn't look like the wrong plane, but it was. I walked through the wrong gate, dozed off on the wrong flight, and ended up in the wrong place.

Paul says we've all done the same thing. Not with airplanes and airports, but with our lives and God. He tells the Roman readers,

There is no one who always does what is right, not even one ([3:10](#)).

All have sinned and are not good enough for God's glory ... ([3:23](#)).

We are all on the wrong plane, he says. All of us. Gentile and Jew. Every person has taken the wrong turn. And we need help.

In this profound Epistle, Paul explores all the wrong options and takes us to the only correct one. The wrong solutions are pleasure and pride (chs. [1](#) and [2](#)); the correct solution is Christ Jesus ([3:21–26](#)). According to Paul, we are saved by grace, (undeserved, unearned favor) through faith (complete trust) in Jesus and his work.

The letter concludes with practical instruction for a growing church, including thoughts on spiritual gifts ([12:3–8](#)); genuine love ([12:9–21](#)); good citizenship (ch. [13](#)). The final chapters provide brilliant instruction for dealing with everything from church division to difficult brethren.

Romans is a life-changing letter for people who are willing to admit they are sinners. For those who admit they are on the wrong plane, the letter provides the correct itinerary.

Read it and take note. That flight home is one you don't want to miss.

About This Book

Author:

Paul

Date Written:

C. A.D. 57

Key Themes:

-
- All people are in need of a relationship with God.
- God has prepared for that relationship through his own sacrifice.
- Faith is the requirement of that relationship.
- Forgiveness is available from God for anyone.

Key Verse:

“But God shows his great love for us in this way: Christ died for us while we were still sinners” ([Romans 5:8](#)).

Contents:

1. The Bad News—The Nature of Humanity [1:1–3:20](#)
2. The Good News [3:21–5:21](#)

3. The Ongoing Problem of Sin [6:1–8:39](#)
4. Israel's Place in God's Plan [9:1–11:36](#)
5. Christian Living [12:1–16:27](#)

Life Lessons

Romans 1:1–32

Situation

Paul wrote this letter to teach the Christian faith to the first Believers in Rome. He taught that no one deserves God's love.

Observation

Sin paints an ugly picture in people and in a culture. Without God's intervention, we have no way to deal with sin.

Inspiration

What does it mean to be righteous? ...

Righteousness has nothing to do with doing good works, though good works are a byproduct of being righteous. Jesus spoke of God as the only one who is truly good. The word "good" is a synonym for righteous, so it follows that to be righteous is to be like God. But how can anyone be like God, who is holy and perfect?

... Righteousness, meaning to be right or just, begins with believing God. It sounds so simple, but how many times do we disbelieve God? God's formulas are so simple that we ignore them because we think there must be more to it than that.

All sin is rooted in unbelief. All righteousness is rooted in belief. Believe God for all His promises and He will count it unto you as righteousness. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, God's ultimate standard and incarnation of righteousness, and be saved. Believe

in Jesus Christ to deliver you in your day of trouble and learn what the righteousness of Christ can do in and through you. (From *Unto the Hills* by Billy Graham)

Application

How does the bleak side of life reflect your experience? Is that where you were? Is that where you are? If it is, switch sides—join God's side. If you already have, then thank him throughout the day for his mercy.

Exploration

Righteousness—[1 Samuel 26:23](#); [1 Kings 10:9](#); [Psalms 111:3](#); [Habakkuk 2:4](#); [Zephaniah 2:3](#); [Malachi 4:2](#); [Romans 3:21](#); [8:10](#); [Galatians 3:11](#); [2 Timothy 3:16](#).

From Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus. God called me to be an apostle and chose me to tell the Good News.

²God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets, as it is written in the Holy Scriptures. ³⁻⁴The Good News is about God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. As a man, he was born from the family of David. But through the Spirit of holiness he was appointed to be God's Son with great power by rising from the dead. ⁵Through Christ, God gave me the special work of an apostle, which was to lead people of all nations to believe and obey. I do this work for him. ⁶And you who are in Rome are also called to belong to Jesus Christ.

⁷To all of you in Rome whom God loves and has called to be his holy people:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Prayer of Thanks

⁸First I want to say that I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because people everywhere in the world are talking about your faith. ⁹God, whom I serve with my whole heart by telling the Good News about his Son, knows that I always mention you ¹⁰every time I pray. I pray that I will be allowed to come to you, and this will happen if God wants it. ¹¹I want very much to see you, to give you some spiritual gift to make you strong. ¹²I mean that I want us to help each other

with the faith we have. Your faith will help me, and my faith will help you. ¹³[Brothers and sisters](#), I want you to know that I planned many times to come to you, but this has not been possible. I wanted to come so that I could help you grow spiritually as I have helped the other non-Jewish people.

¹⁴I have a duty to all people—Greeks and those who are not Greeks, the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵That is why I want so much to preach the Good News to you in Rome.

¹⁶I am proud of the Good News, because it is the power God uses to save everyone who believes—to save the Jews first, and also to save those who are not Jews. ¹⁷The Good News shows how God makes people right with himself—that it begins and ends with faith. As the Scripture says, [“But those who are right with God will live by trusting in him.”](#)

All People Have Done Wrong

¹⁸God’s anger is shown from heaven against all the evil and wrong things people do. By their own evil lives they hide the truth. ¹⁹God shows his anger because some knowledge of him has been made clear to them. Yes, God has shown himself to them. ²⁰There are things about him that people cannot see—his eternal power and all the things that make him God. But since the beginning of the world those things have been easy to understand by what God has made. So people have no excuse for the bad things they do. ²¹They knew God, but they did not give glory to God or thank him. Their thinking became useless. Their foolish minds were filled with darkness. ²²They said they were wise, but they became fools. ²³They traded the glory of God who lives forever for the worship of idols made to look like

earthly people, birds, animals, and snakes.

²⁴Because they did these things, God left them and let them go their sinful way, wanting only to do evil. As a result, they became full of sexual sin, using their bodies wrongly with each other. ²⁵They traded the truth of God for a lie. They worshiped and served what had been created instead of the God who created those things, who should be praised forever. Amen.

²⁶Because people did those things, God left them and let them do the shameful things they wanted to do. Women stopped having natural sex and started having sex with other women. ²⁷In the same way, men stopped having natural sex and began wanting each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and in their bodies they received the punishment for those wrongs.

²⁸People did not think it was important to have a true knowledge of God. So God left them and allowed them to have their own worthless thinking and to do things they should not do. ²⁹They are filled with every kind of sin, evil, selfishness, and hatred. They are full of jealousy, murder, fighting, lying, and thinking the worst about each other. They gossip ³⁰and say evil things about each other. They hate God. They are rude and conceited and brag about themselves. They invent ways of doing evil. They do not obey their parents. ³¹They are foolish, they do not keep their promises, and they show no kindness or mercy to others. ³²They know God's law says that those who live like this should die. But they themselves not only continue to do these evil things, they applaud others who do them.

Life Lessons

Romans 2:1–3:8

Situation

Paul encouraged the church in Rome to be set apart from the world. God made a right relationship with him available to all people.

Observation

God hates sin and desires all to follow him in word and action.

Inspiration

I've wondered, at times, what kind of man this Judas was. What he looked like, how he acted, who his friends were....

But for all the things we don't know about Judas, there is one thing we know for sure: he had no relationship with the Master. He had seen Jesus, but he did not know him. He had heard Jesus, but he did not understand him. He had religion, but no relationship.

As Satan worked his way around the table in the Upper Room, he needed a special kind of man to betray our Lord. He needed a man who had seen Jesus, but did not know him. He needed a man who knew the actions of Jesus, but had missed out on the mission of Jesus. Judas was this man. He knew the empire but had never known the Man.

We learn this timeless lesson from the betrayer. Satan's best tools of destruction are not from outside the church, they are from within the church. A church

will never die from the immorality in Hollywood or the corruption in Washington. But it will die from corrosion within—from those who bear the name of Jesus but have never met him, and from those who have religion, but no relationship.

Judas bore the cloak of religion, but he never knew the heart of Christ. Let's make it our goal to know ... deeply.

(From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

Spend uninterrupted time with Christ today. Tell him your thoughts, dreams, worries, sins.

Exploration

Relationship with Christ—[Matthew 12:50](#); [John 1:12](#); [15:5](#); [Romans 8:15–17](#); [2 Corinthians 5:17](#); [6:18](#); [Philippians 3:8](#).

You People Also Are Sinful

If you think you can judge others, you are wrong. When you judge them, you are really judging yourself guilty, because you do the same things they do. ²God judges those who do wrong things, and we know that his judging is right. ³You judge those who do wrong, but you do wrong yourselves. Do you think you will be able to escape the judgment of God? ⁴He has been very kind and patient, waiting for you to change, but you think nothing of his kindness. Perhaps you do not understand that God is kind to you so you will change your hearts and lives. ⁵But you are stubborn and refuse to change, so you are making your own punishment even greater on the day he shows his anger. On that day everyone will see God's right judgments. ⁶God will reward or punish every person for what that person has done. ⁷Some people, by always continuing to do good, live for God's glory, for honor, and for life that has no end. God will give them life forever. ⁸But other people are selfish. They refuse to follow truth and, instead, follow evil. God will give them his punishment and anger. ⁹He will give trouble and suffering to everyone who does evil—to the Jews first and also to those who are not Jews. ¹⁰But he will give glory, honor, and peace to everyone who does good—to the Jews first and also to those who are not Jews. ¹¹For God judges all people in the same way.

¹²People who do not have the law and who are sinners will be lost, although they do not have the law. And, in the same way, those who have the law and are sinners will be judged by the law. ¹³Hearing the law does not make people right with God. It is those who obey the law who will be right with him. ¹⁴(Those who are not Jews do not have the law, but when they freely do what the law commands, they are the law for themselves. This is true even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵They show that in their hearts they know what is right and wrong, just as the law commands. And they show this by their consciences. Sometimes their thoughts tell them they did wrong, and sometimes their thoughts tell them they did right.) ¹⁶All these things will happen on the day when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge people's secret thoughts. The Good News that I preach says this.

The Jews and the Law

¹⁷What about you? You call yourself a Jew. You trust in the law of Moses and brag that you are close to God. ¹⁸You know what he wants you to do and what is important, because you have learned the law. ¹⁹You think you are a guide for the blind and a light for those who are in darkness. ²⁰You think you can show foolish people what is right and teach those who know nothing. You have the law; so you think you know everything and have all truth. ²¹You teach others, so why don't you teach yourself? You tell others not to steal, but you steal. ²²You say that others must not take part in adultery, but you are guilty of that sin. You hate idols, but you steal from temples. ²³You brag about having God's law, but you bring shame to God by

breaking his law, ²⁴just as the Scriptures say: “Those who are not Jews speak against God’s name because of you.”

²⁵If you follow the law, your circumcision has meaning. But if you break the law, it is as if you were never circumcised. ²⁶People who are not Jews are not circumcised, but if they do what the law says, it is as if they were circumcised. ²⁷You Jews have the written law and circumcision, but you break the law. So those who are not circumcised in their bodies, but still obey the law, will show that you are guilty. ²⁸They can do this because a person is not a true Jew if he is only a Jew in his physical body; true circumcision is not only on the outside of the body. ²⁹A person is a Jew only if he is a Jew inside; true circumcision is done in the heart by the Spirit, not by the written law. Such a person gets praise from God rather than from people.

So, do Jews have anything that other people do not have? Is there anything special about being circumcised? ²Yes, of course, there is in every way. The most important thing is this: God trusted the Jews with his teachings. ³If some Jews were not faithful to him, will that stop God from doing what he promised? ⁴No! God will continue to be true even when every person is false. As the Scriptures say:

“So you will be shown to be right when you speak, and you will win your case.”

[Psalm 51:4](#)

⁵When we do wrong, that shows more clearly that God is right. So can we say that God is wrong to punish us? (I am talking as people might talk.) ⁶No! If God could not punish us, he could not judge the world.

⁷A person might say, “When I lie, it really gives him glory, because my lie shows God’s truth. So why am I judged a sinner?” ⁸It would be the same to say, “We should do evil so that good will come.” Some people find fault with us and say we teach this, but they are wrong and deserve the punishment they will receive.

Life Lessons

[Romans 3:9–31](#)

Situation

Paul showed that no one can claim innocence. Everyone has sinned. But through Christ’s death on the cross God has redeemed us.

Observation

Willing and ready, God will forgive us if we come to him in faith.

Inspiration

Salvation is free! God puts no price tag on the Gift of gifts—it's free! Preachers are not salesmen for they have nothing to sell. They are bearers of Good News, the good tidings that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." Money can't buy it. Man's righteousness can't earn it. Social prestige can't help you acquire it. Morality can't purchase it. It is, as Isaiah said, "without money and without price." God is not a bargaining God. You cannot barter with Him. You must do business with Him on His own terms. He holds in His omnipotent hand the priceless, precious, eternal gift of salvation, and He bids you to take it without money and without price. The best things in life are free, are they not? The air we breathe is not sold by the cubic foot. The water which flows crystal clear from the mountain stream is free for the taking. Love is free, faith is free, hope is free. (From Day by Day with Billy Graham by Joan W. Brown)

Application

Have you accepted the free gift of God, forgiveness and eternal life, won for you by Christ? Submit to Christ's rule in your life and kneel to his lordship. Don't wait.

Exploration

Faith—[Acts 13:38–39](#); [Romans 4:25](#); [5:16](#), [18](#); [10:10](#); [Galatians 2:16](#); [Titus 3:7](#).

All People Are Guilty

⁹So are we Jews better than others? No! We have already said that Jews and those who are not Jews are all guilty of sin. ¹⁰As the Scriptures say:

“There is no one who always does what is right,
not even one.

¹¹There is no one who understands.
There is no one who looks to God for help.

¹²All have turned away.
Together, everyone has become useless.
There is no one who does anything good;
there is not even one.”

[Psalm 14:1–3](#)

¹³“Their throats are like open graves;
they use their tongues for telling lies.”

[Psalm 5:9](#)

“Their words are like snake poison.”

[Psalm 140:3](#)

¹⁴“Their mouths are full of cursing and hate.”

[Psalm 10:7](#)

¹⁵“They are always ready to kill people.

¹⁶Everywhere they go they cause ruin and misery.

¹⁷They don’t know how to live in peace.”

[Isaiah 59:7–8](#)

¹⁸“They have no fear of God.”

Psalm 36:1

¹⁹We know that the law's commands are for those who have the law. This stops all excuses and brings the whole world under God's judgment, ²⁰because no one can be made right with God by following the law. The law only shows us our sin.

How God Makes People Right

²¹But God has a way to make people right with him without the law, and he has now shown us that way which the law and the prophets told us about. ²²God makes people right with himself through their faith in Jesus Christ. This is true for all who believe in Christ, because all people are the same: ²³All have sinned and are not good enough for God's glory, ²⁴and all need to be made right with God by his grace, which is a free gift. They need to be made free from sin through Jesus Christ. ²⁵God gave him as a way to forgive sin through faith in the blood of Jesus' death. This showed that God always does what is right and fair, as in the past when he was patient and did not punish people for their sins. ²⁶And God gave Jesus to show today that he does what is right. God did this so he could judge rightly and so he could make right any person who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷So do we have a reason to brag about ourselves? No! And why not? It is the way of faith that stops all bragging, not the way of trying to obey the law. ²⁸A person is made right with God through faith, not through obeying the law. ²⁹Is God only the God of the Jews? Is he not also the God of those who are

not Jews? ³⁰Of course he is, because there is only one God. He will make Jews right with him by their faith, and he will also make those who are not Jews right with him through their faith. ³¹So do we destroy the law by following the way of faith? No! Faith causes us to be what the law truly wants.

Life Lessons

Romans 4:1–25

Situation

Paul showed that Abraham's leadership in God's family was due to faith.

Observation

We accept God's gift by faith; we cannot earn it by good works.

Inspiration

Henry Drummond [writes:] "You will find, if you think for a moment, that the people who influence you are people who believe in you. In an atmosphere of suspicion men shrivel up; but in that atmosphere they expand and find encouragement and educative fellowship. It is a wonderful thing that here and there in this hard uncharitable world there should still be left a few rare souls who think no evil. This is the great unworldliness. Love sees the bright side, puts the best construction on every action. What a delightful state of mind to live in! What a stimulus and benediction even to meet with it for a day! To be trusted is to be saved. And if we try to influence or elevate others, we shall soon see that success is in proportion to their belief of our belief in them. For the respect of another is the first restoration of the self-respect a man has lost; our ideal of what he is becomes to him the hope and pattern of what he may become."

This faith moves mountains of inertia in other

people. It pulverizes prejudices and impossibilities. This faith is the fruit of God's Gracious Spirit that sweetens a sour world. It replaces suspicion and distrust with friendship and hope and good cheer. It makes our friends, family, and casual acquaintances stand tall. (From *A Gardener Looks at the Fruits of the Spirit* by Phillip Keller)

Application

Picture yourself at a department store. On the shelf you see something you've wanted for years, but the price is still too high. How would you feel if a caring friend or relative bought the item, wrapped it, and gave it to you? Thank God for giving you a gift you could never afford.

Exploration

Faith—[Genesis 15:6](#); [2 Chronicles 20:20](#); [Psalms 32:1-2](#); [Isaiah 7:9](#); [Habakkuk 2:4](#); [Matthew 9:29](#); [Acts 15:9](#); [Romans 4:16](#); [5:1](#); [10:17](#).

The Example of Abraham

So what can we say that [Abraham](#), the father of our people, learned about faith? ²If Abraham was made right by the things he did, he had a reason to brag. But this is not God's view, ³because the Scripture says, [“Abraham believed God, and God accepted Abraham's faith, and that faith made him right with God.”](#)

⁴When people work, their pay is not given as a gift, but as something earned. ⁵But people cannot do any work that will make them right with God. So they must trust in him, who makes even evil people right in his sight. Then God accepts their faith, and that makes them right with him. ⁶David said the same thing. He said that people are truly blessed when God, without paying attention to good deeds, makes people right with himself.

⁷“Happy are they
whose sins are forgiven,
whose wrongs are pardoned.

⁸Happy is the person
whom the Lord does not consider guilty.”

[Psalm 32:1–2](#)

⁹Is this blessing only for those who are circumcised or also for those who are not circumcised? We have already said that

God accepted Abraham's faith and that faith made him right with God.¹⁰ So how did this happen? Did God accept Abraham before or after he was circumcised? It was before his circumcision.¹¹ Abraham was circumcised to show that he was right with God through faith before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the father of all those who believe but are not circumcised; he is the father of all believers who are accepted as being right with God.¹² And Abraham is also the father of those who have been circumcised and who live following the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

God Keeps His Promise

¹³[Abraham](#) and his descendants received the promise that they would get the whole world. He did not receive that promise through the law, but through being right with God by his faith.¹⁴ If people could receive what God promised by following the law, then faith is worthless. And God's promise to Abraham is worthless,¹⁵ because the law can only bring God's anger. But if there is no law, there is nothing to disobey.

¹⁶ So people receive God's promise by having faith. This happens so the promise can be a free gift. Then all of Abraham's children can have that promise. It is not only for those who live under the law of Moses but for anyone who lives with faith like that of Abraham, who is the father of us all.¹⁷ As it is written in the Scriptures: "[I am making you a father of many nations.](#)" This is true before God, the God Abraham believed, the God who gives life to the dead and who creates something out of nothing.

¹⁸ There was no hope that Abraham would have children.

But Abraham believed God and continued hoping, and so he became the father of many nations. As God told him, [“Your descendants also will be too many to count.”](#)¹⁹ Abraham was almost a hundred years old, much past the age for having children, and Sarah could not have children. Abraham thought about all this, but his faith in God did not become weak.²⁰ He never doubted that God would keep his promise, and he never stopped believing. He grew stronger in his faith and gave praise to God.²¹ Abraham felt sure that God was able to do what he had promised.²² So, [“God accepted Abraham’s faith, and that faith made him right with God.”](#)²³ Those words (“God accepted Abraham’s faith”) were written not only for Abraham²⁴ but also for us. God will accept us also because we believe in the One who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.²⁵ Jesus was given to die for our sins, and he was raised from the dead to make us right with God.

Life Lessons

Romans 5:1–21

Situation

Paul described the experience of salvation for Christians. He outlined the magnitude of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ.

Observation

God proved his love by giving his Son to die on the cross on our behalf while we were still sinners. Christians now have peace with God because they have been forgiven. They rejoice because they are assured of their salvation.

Inspiration

Notwithstanding all that has already been preached and published about God's love, it must be examined here. It is the first and foremost of the fruits of God's Spirit. It is much, much more than merely "one of the fruits." In reality it is the very basic, essential life of the living Christ which expresses itself in all the nine fruits enumerated both in [Galatians 5:22, 23](#) and [1 Corinthians 13:1–7](#).

The love of God is the very life of God....

It must be emphasized here that I have the love of God only to the extent that I have God Himself. God does not dispense the fruits of His Spirit apart from Himself!

The more I have Christ the more I have His love.

The more I have God the more I have His goodness....

To begin with it is imperative to point out here that the “love of God” referred to so freely, especially in the New Testament, is selflessness: It is self-giving. It is self-sharing. It is self-sacrificing. It is self-losing. It is self-abandonment. It is self-serving others.

This kind of love found its supreme and most sublime expression in the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the visible expression to our humanity of the invisible God. He was the love of God demonstrated indelibly in the perfect doing and perfect dying of deity. His transcendent life revealed the true nature of God. There simply was no greater means by which He could manifest His own character.

The love of God was shown to be one with the life of God. In no way could the one be separated from the other. They are one and the same. (From *A Gardener Looks at the Fruits of the Spirit* by Phillip Keller)

Application

When God’s love impacts our lives, it completely changes us so that selfishness turns to generosity. How would you describe your life before and after becoming a Christian? What major changes have you experienced since becoming a Christian? Write your story down and read it when you feel discouraged.

Exploration

Love—[Exodus 15:13](#); [Numbers 14:18](#);
[Deuteronomy 7:12](#); [Psalm 33:5](#); [Isaiah 63:9](#); [Joel 2:13](#);
[Matthew 5:43–48](#); [John 13:34](#); [Romans 13:10](#); [1 Corinthians 13](#).

Right with God

Since we have been made right with God by our faith, we have peace with God. This happened through our Lord Jesus Christ,² who has brought us into that blessing of God's grace that we now enjoy. And we are happy because of the hope we have of sharing God's glory.³ We also have joy with our troubles, because we know that these troubles produce patience.⁴ And patience produces character, and character produces hope.⁵ And this hope will never disappoint us, because God has poured out his love to fill our hearts. He gave us his love through the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to us.

⁶When we were unable to help ourselves, at the moment of our need, Christ died for us, although we were living against God.⁷ Very few people will die to save the life of someone else. Although perhaps for a good person someone might possibly die.⁸ But God shows his great love for us in this way: Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

⁹So through Christ we will surely be saved from God's anger, because we have been made right with God by the blood of Christ's death.¹⁰ While we were God's enemies, he made friends with us through the death of his Son. Surely, now that we are his friends, he will save us through his Son's life.¹¹ And not only that, but now we are also very happy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we are now God's friends again.

Adam and Christ Compared

¹²Sin came into the world because of what one man did, and with sin came death. This is why everyone must die—because everyone sinned. ¹³Sin was in the world before the law of Moses, but sin is not counted against us as breaking a command when there is no law. ¹⁴But from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, everyone had to die, even those who had not sinned by breaking a command, as Adam had.

Adam was like the One who was coming in the future. ¹⁵But God's free gift is not like Adam's sin. Many people died because of the sin of that one man. But the grace from God was much greater; many people received God's gift of life by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ. ¹⁶After Adam sinned once, he was judged guilty. But the gift of God is different. God's free gift came after many sins, and it makes people right with God. ¹⁷One man sinned, and so death ruled all people because of that one man. But now those people who accept God's full grace and the great gift of being made right with him will surely have true life and rule through the one man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸So as one sin of Adam brought the punishment of death to all people, one good act that Christ did makes all people right with God. And that brings true life for all. ¹⁹One man disobeyed God, and many became sinners. In the same way, one man obeyed God, and many will be made right. ²⁰The law came to make sin worse. But when sin grew worse, God's grace increased. ²¹Sin once used death to rule us, but God gave people more of his grace so that grace could rule by making people right with him. And this brings life forever through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Life Lessons

Romans 6:1–23

Situation

Since Christ's righteousness brought us into a favored relationship with God, we should live by God's standards.

Observation

Christians are not slaves to sin but can overcome by the power of God.

Inspiration

Think of it this way. Sin put you in prison. Sin locked you behind the bars of guilt and shame and deception and fear. Sin did nothing but shackle you to the wall of misery. Then Jesus came and paid your bail. He served your time; he satisfied the penalty and set you free. Christ died, and when you cast your lot with him, your old self died too.

The only way to be set free from the prison of sin is to serve its penalty. In this case the penalty is death. Someone has to die, either you or a heavensent substitute. You cannot leave prison unless there is a death. But that death has occurred at Calvary. And when Jesus died, you died to sin's claim on your life. You are free....

Christ has taken your place. There is no need for you to remain in the cell. Ever heard of a discharged prisoner who wanted to stay? Nor have I. When the doors open, prisoners leave. The thought of a person preferring jail over freedom doesn't compute. Once

the penalty is paid, why live under bondage? You are discharged from the penitentiary of sin. Why, in heaven's name, would you ever want to set foot in that prison again?

Paul reminds us: "Our old life died with Christ on the cross so that our sinful selves would have no power over us and we would not be slaves to sin. Anyone who has died is made free from sin's control" ([Romans 6:6-7](#)).

He is not saying that it is impossible for believers to sin; he's saying it is stupid for believers to sin. "It's not the literal impossibility ... but the moral incongruity" of the saved returning to sin.

What does the prison have that you desire? Do you miss the guilt? Are you homesick for dishonesty? Do you have fond memories of being lied to and forgotten? Was life better when you were dejected and rejected? Do you have a longing to once again see a sinner in the mirror?

It makes no sense to go back to prison. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Application

Select a habit that you'd like to kick, a habit that hurts your life. Pray for help. Write down three steps you can take to remove that habit from your life. Do it today—enjoy your new life.

Exploration

Freedom—[Psalm 68:19-21](#); [John 8:32](#); [1 Corinthians 8:9-13](#); [Galatians 5:1](#).

Dead to Sin but Alive in Christ

So do you think we should continue sinning so that God will give us even more grace? ²No! We died to our old sinful lives, so how can we continue living with sin? ³Did you forget that all of us became part of Christ when we were baptized? We shared his death in our baptism. ⁴When we were baptized, we were buried with Christ and shared his death. So, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the wonderful power of the Father, we also can live a new life.

⁵Christ died, and we have been joined with him by dying too. So we will also be joined with him by rising from the dead as he did. ⁶We know that our old life died with Christ on the cross so that our sinful selves would have no power over us and we would not be slaves to sin. ⁷Anyone who has died is made free from sin's control.

⁸If we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. ⁹Christ was raised from the dead, and we know that he cannot die again. Death has no power over him now. ¹⁰Yes, when Christ died, he died to defeat the power of sin one time—enough for all time. He now has a new life, and his new life is with God. ¹¹In the same way, you should see yourselves as being dead to the power of sin and alive with God through Christ Jesus.

¹²So, do not let sin control your life here on earth so that

you do what your sinful self wants to do. ¹³Do not offer the parts of your body to serve sin, as things to be used in doing evil. Instead, offer yourselves to God as people who have died and now live. Offer the parts of your body to God to be used in doing good. ¹⁴Sin will not be your master, because you are not under law but under God's grace.

Be Slaves of Righteousness

¹⁵So what should we do? Should we sin because we are under grace and not under law? No! ¹⁶Surely you know that when you give yourselves like slaves to obey someone, then you are really slaves of that person. The person you obey is your master. You can follow sin, which brings spiritual death, or you can obey God, which makes you right with him. ¹⁷In the past you were slaves to sin—sin controlled you. But thank God, you fully obeyed the things that you were taught. ¹⁸You were made free from sin, and now you are slaves to goodness. ¹⁹I use this example because this is hard for you to understand. In the past you offered the parts of your body to be slaves to sin and evil; you lived only for evil. In the same way now you must give yourselves to be slaves of goodness. Then you will live only for God.

²⁰In the past you were slaves to sin, and goodness did not control you. ²¹You did evil things, and now you are ashamed of them. Those things only bring death. ²²But now you are free from sin and have become slaves of God. This brings you a life that is only for God, and this gives you life forever. ²³When people sin, they earn what sin pays—death. But God gives us a free gift—life forever in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Life Lessons

Romans 7:1–25

Situation

Paul taught the Romans that the Law could never guarantee eternal life. He proved again that Jesus Christ could save.

Observation

The Bible teaches us how sinful we have become, but Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit provide the power to overcome sin.

Inspiration

Our country imprisons more people per capita than any other nation except the Soviet Union and South Africa; yet we have the highest crime rate in the world. If that's law and order, spare us any more.

Baffling? Yes, but nothing new. Eighteenth-century British officials tried to cut crime by promoting large crowds to witness the hanging of pickpockets. There was a problem, however. Other thieves had a field day stealing the wallets of those gathered to watch the execution of their fellow pickpockets.

The paradox makes no sense to the secular mind—but the Christian should understand. For where is the anguish of the human soul more poignantly expressed than in Paul's letter to the Romans. "The good I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish." He never wanted to covet, Paul explains in Chapter [7](#), until the law said "thou shalt

not covet.” Then he found himself filled with covetousness of every kind.

Why? The sin within us uses the law itself to produce the very offense the law is intended to prevent. But in the next chapter the apostle answers the dilemma: though the law alone could not restrain sin, through Christ we are set free, rescued from the sin which controls us. (From *Who Speaks for God* by Charles Colson)

Application

What sin do you struggle to avoid? Thank God that he will one day rescue you from the struggle. Until then, let a prayer for strength be a reflex reaction to temptations.

Exploration

Victory over Sin—[Genesis 4:7](#); [Psalm 119:133](#); [1 John 3:4–6](#).

An Example from Marriage

Brothers and sisters, all of you understand the law of Moses. So surely you know that the law rules over people only while they are alive.²For example, a woman must stay married to her husband as long as he is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from the law of marriage.³But if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, the law says she is guilty of adultery. But if her husband dies, she is free from the law of marriage. Then if she marries another man, she is not guilty of adultery.

⁴In the same way, my brothers and sisters, your old selves died, and you became free from the law through the body of Christ. This happened so that you might belong to someone else—the One who was raised from the dead—and so that we might be used in service to God.⁵In the past, we were ruled by our sinful selves. The law made us want to do sinful things that controlled our bodies, so the things we did were bringing us death.⁶In the past, the law held us like prisoners, but our old selves died, and we were made free from the law. So now we serve God in a new way with the Spirit, and not in the old way with written rules.

Our Fight Against Sin

⁷You might think I am saying that sin and the law are the same thing. That is not true. But the law was the only way I could learn what sin meant. I would never have known what it means to want to take something belonging to someone else if the law had not said, [“You must not want to take your neighbor’s things.”](#) ⁸And sin found a way to use that command and cause me to want all kinds of things I should not want. But without the law, sin has no power. ⁹I was alive before I knew the law. But when the law’s command came to me, then sin began to live, ¹⁰and I died. The command was meant to bring life, but for me it brought death. ¹¹Sin found a way to fool me by using the command to make me die.

¹²So the law is holy, and the command is holy and right and good. ¹³Does this mean that something that is good brought death to me? No! Sin used something that is good to bring death to me. This happened so that I could see what sin is really like; the command was used to show that sin is very evil.

The War Within Us

¹⁴We know that the law is spiritual, but I am not spiritual since sin rules me as if I were its slave. ¹⁵I do not understand the things I do. I do not do what I want to do, and I do the things I hate. ¹⁶And if I do not want to do the hated things I do, that means I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷But I am not really the one who is doing these hated things; it is sin living in me that does them. ¹⁸Yes, I know that nothing good lives in me—I mean nothing good lives in the part of me that is earthly and sinful. I want to do the things that are good, but I do not do them. ¹⁹I do not do the good things I want to do, but I do the bad things

I do not want to do. ²⁰So if I do things I do not want to do, then I am not the one doing them. It is sin living in me that does those things.

²¹So I have learned this rule: When I want to do good, evil is there with me. ²²In my mind, I am happy with God's law. ²³But I see another law working in my body, which makes war against the law that my mind accepts. That other law working in my body is the law of sin, and it makes me its prisoner. ²⁴What a miserable man I am! Who will save me from this body that brings me death? ²⁵I thank God for saving me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So in my mind I am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful self I am a slave to the law of sin.

Life Lessons

Romans 8:1–39

Situation

Although Christians still struggle with sin, the threat of judgment for their sin was removed at the Cross.

Observation

This great chapter begins with no condemnation and ends with no separation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Inspiration

Why does a mother love her newborn? Because the baby is hers? Even more. Because the baby is her. Her blood. Her flesh. Her sinew and spine. Her hope. Her legacy. It bothers her not that the baby gives nothing. She knows a newborn is helpless, weak. She knows babies don't ask to come into this world.

And God knows we didn't either.

We are his idea. We are his. His face. His eyes. His hands. His touch. We are him. Look deeply into the face of every human being on earth, and you will see his likeness. Though some appear to be distant relatives, they are not. God has no cousins, only children.

We are, incredibly, the body of Christ. And though we may not act like our Father, there is no greater truth than this: We are his. Unalterably. He loves us. Undyingly. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (see [Romans 8:38–39](#)).

Had God not said those words, I would be a fool to write them. But since he did, I'm a fool not to believe them. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ ... but how difficult it is for some to embrace this truth.

You think you've committed an act that places you outside his love. A treason. A betrayal. An aborted promise. You think he would love you more if you hadn't done it, right? You think he would love you more if you did more, right? You think if you were better his love would be deeper, right?

Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.

God's love is not human. His love is not normal. His love sees your sin and loves you still. Does he approve of your error? No. Do you need to repent? Yes. But do you repent for his sake or yours? Yours. His ego needs no apology. His love needs no bolstering.

And he could not love you more than he does right now.

(From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you sometimes feel that God can't really love you? If so, look at this chapter and commit it to memory. God is there whether you walk away from him or not. Thank God for his acceptance of you because it's based on the finished work of Christ and not on your own merit.

Exploration

No Separation—[John 10:27-29](#); [17:1-3](#); [Romans 5:8-9](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17](#).

Be Ruled by the Spirit

So now, those who are in Christ Jesus are not judged guilty. ²Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit that brings life made me free from the law that brings sin and death. ³The law was without power, because the law was made weak by our sinful selves. But God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son to earth with the same human life that others use for sin. By sending his Son to be an offering for sin, God used a human life to destroy sin. ⁴He did this so that we could be the kind of people the law correctly wants us to be. Now we do not live following our sinful selves, but we live following the Spirit.

⁵Those who live following their sinful selves think only about things that their sinful selves want. But those who live following the Spirit are thinking about the things the Spirit wants them to do. ⁶If people's thinking is controlled by the sinful self, there is death. But if their thinking is controlled by the Spirit, there is life and peace. ⁷When people's thinking is controlled by the sinful self, they are against God, because they refuse to obey God's law and really are not even able to obey God's law. ⁸Those people who are ruled by their sinful selves cannot please God.

⁹But you are not ruled by your sinful selves. You are ruled by the Spirit, if that Spirit of God really lives in you. But the person who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰Your body will always be dead because of sin. But

if Christ is in you, then the Spirit gives you life, because Christ made you right with God. ¹¹God raised Jesus from the dead, and if God's Spirit is living in you, he will also give life to your bodies that die. God is the One who raised Christ from the dead, and he will give life through his Spirit that lives in you.

¹²So, my brothers and sisters, we must not be ruled by our sinful selves or live the way our sinful selves want. ¹³If you use your lives to do the wrong things your sinful selves want, you will die spiritually. But if you use the Spirit's help to stop doing the wrong things you do with your body, you will have true life.

¹⁴The true children of God are those who let God's Spirit lead them. ¹⁵The Spirit we received does not make us slaves again to fear; it makes us children of God. With that Spirit we cry out, "[Father.](#)" ¹⁶And the Spirit himself joins with our spirits to say we are God's children. ¹⁷If we are God's children, we will receive blessings from God together with Christ. But we must suffer as Christ suffered so that we will have glory as Christ has glory.

Our Future Glory

¹⁸The sufferings we have now are nothing compared to the great glory that will be shown to us. ¹⁹Everything God made is waiting with excitement for God to show his children's glory completely. ²⁰Everything God made was changed to become useless, not by its own wish but because God wanted it and because all along there was this hope: ²¹that everything God made would be set free from ruin to have the freedom and glory that belong to God's children.

²²We know that everything God made has been waiting until now in pain, like a woman ready to give birth. ²³Not only the world, but we also have been waiting with pain inside us. We have the Spirit as the first part of God's promise. So we are waiting for God to finish making us his own children, which means our bodies will be made free. ²⁴We were saved, and we have this hope. If we see what we are waiting for, that is not really hope. People do not hope for something they already have. ²⁵But we are hoping for something we do not have yet, and we are waiting for it patiently.

NewLife in Christ

The Spirit we received ... makes us children of God. With that Spirit we cry out, "Father."—[Romans 8:15](#)

God Has Adopted Us

When we come to Christ, God not only forgives us, he also adopts us. Through a dramatic series of events, we go from condemned orphans with no hope to adopted children with no fear. Here is how it happens. You come before the judgment seat of God full of rebellion and mistakes. Because of his justice he cannot dismiss your sin, but because of his love he cannot dismiss you. So, in an act which stunned the heavens, he punished himself on the cross for your sins. God's justice and love are equally honored. And you, God's creation, are forgiven. But the story doesn't end with God's forgiveness....

It would be enough if God just cleansed your name, but he does more. He gives you *his* name. It

would be enough if God just set you free, but he does more. He takes you home. He takes you home to the Great House of God.

Adoptive parents understand this more than anyone. I certainly don't mean to offend any biological parents—I'm one myself. We biological parents know well the earnest longing to have a child. But in many cases our cribs were filled easily. We decided to have a child and a child came. In fact, sometimes the child came with no decision. I've heard of unplanned pregnancies, but I've never heard of an unplanned adoption.

That's why adoptive parents understand God's passion to adopt us. They know what it means to feel an empty space inside. They know what it means to hunt, to set out on a mission, and take responsibility for a child with a spotted past and a dubious future. If anybody understands God's ardor for his children, it's someone who has rescued an orphan from despair, for that is what God has done for us.

God has adopted you. God sought you, found you, signed the papers and took you home. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Question: Knowing that God has adopted you, how should that change the way you approach him?

For more on ["New Life in Christ."](#)

²⁶Also, the Spirit helps us with our weakness. We do not know how to pray as we should. But the Spirit himself speaks to God for us, even begs God for us with deep feelings that words cannot explain. ²⁷God can see what is in people's hearts. And he knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit speaks to God for his people in the way God wants.

²⁸We know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him. They are the people he called, because that was his plan. ²⁹God knew them before he made the world, and he decided that they would be like his Son so that Jesus would be the [firstborn](#) of many brothers. ³⁰God planned for them to be like his Son; and those he planned to be like his Son, he also called; and those he called, he also made right with him; and those he made right, he also glorified.

God's Love in Christ Jesus

³¹So what should we say about this? If God is with us, no one can defeat us. ³²He did not spare his own Son but gave him for us all. So with Jesus, God will surely give us all things. ³³Who can accuse the people God has chosen? No one, because God is the One who makes them right. ³⁴Who can say God's people are guilty? No one, because Christ Jesus died, but he was also raised from the dead, and now he is on God's right side, begging God for us. ³⁵Can anything separate us from the love Christ has for us? Can troubles or problems or sufferings or hunger or nakedness or danger or violent death? ³⁶As it is written in the Scriptures:

“For you we are in danger of death all the time.

People think we are worth no more than sheep to be killed.”

[Psalm 44:22](#)

³⁷But in all these things we have full victory through God who showed his love for us. ³⁸Yes, I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor ruling spirits, nothing now, nothing in the future, no powers, ³⁹nothing above us, nothing below us, nor anything else in the whole world will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Life Lessons

Romans 9:1–33

Situation

Paul reminded the Romans that no good work could bring salvation. Rather, God saves his people through his love.

Observation

The sovereign God told Moses that he would show mercy where he wants to show mercy, although no one deserves or can earn his mercy.

Inspiration

Mercy is the deepest gesture of kindness. Paul equates the two. “Be kind and loving to each other, and forgive each other just as God forgave you in Christ” ([Ephesians 4:32](#)). Jesus said:

“Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you... . If you love only the people who love you, what praise should you get? ... [L]ove your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without hoping to get anything back. Then you will have a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High God, because he is kind even to people who are ungrateful and full of sin. Show mercy, just as your Father shows mercy ([Luke 6:27–28, 32, 35–36](#)).

Kindness at home. Kindness in public. Kindness at church and kindness with your enemies. Pretty well covers the gamut, don’t you think? Almost. Someone else needs your kindness. Who could that be? You.

Don't we tend to be tough on ourselves? And rightly so. Like the young couple at the wedding, we don't always plan ahead. Like Zacchaeus, we've cheated our share of friends. We've been self-serving. And like the woman with the illness, our world sometimes seems out of control.

But did Jesus scold the couple? No. Did he punish Zacchaeus? No. Was he hard on the woman? No. He is kind to the forgetful. He is kind to the greedy. He is kind to the sick.

And he is kind to us. And since he is so kind to us, can't we be a little kinder to ourselves? *Oh, but you don't know me, Max. You don't know my faults and my thoughts. You don't know the gripes I grumble and the complaints I mumble.* No, I don't, but he does. He knows everything about you, yet he doesn't hold back his kindness toward you. Has he, knowing all your secrets, retracted one promise or reclaimed one gift?

No, he is kind to you. Why don't you be kind to yourself? He forgives your faults. Why don't you do the same? He thinks tomorrow is worth living. Why don't you agree? He believes in you enough to call you his ambassador, his follower, even his child. Why not take his cue and believe in yourself?

In the book entitled *Sweet Thursday*, John Steinbeck introduces us to Madam Fauna. She runs a brothel and takes a liking to a prostitute by the name of Suzy. Madam Fauna sets Suzy up on a real date with a man, not a client. She buys Suzy a nice dress and helps her get ready for the evening. As Suzy is

leaving, she, moved by Madam Fauna's kindness, asks her, "You have done so much for me. Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes," the older woman replies, "you can say, 'I'm Suzy and no one else.'"

Suzy does. Then Madam Fauna requests, "Now say, 'I'm Suzy, and I'm a good thing.'"

And so Suzy tries. "I'm Suzy, and I'm a good ..."
And Suzy begins to cry.

Wouldn't God want you to say the same words? In his book you are a *good thing*. Be kind to yourself. God thinks you're worth his kindness. And he's a good judge of character. (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

Application

Since the Father has shown you mercy, you should show mercy to others. Make a list of those to whom it is hard for you to show mercy. What could you do to soften your heart toward them? Act on what you know to be true.

Exploration

God's Mercy to People—[Exodus 34:6](#);
[Deuteronomy 4:31](#); [Luke 1:50](#); [Ephesians 2:4](#).

God and the Jewish People

I am in Christ, and I am telling you the truth; I do not lie. My conscience is ruled by the Holy Spirit, and it tells me I am not lying.² I have great sorrow and always feel much sadness.³ I wish I could help my Jewish brothers and sisters, my people. I would even wish that I were cursed and cut off from Christ if that would help them.⁴ They are the people of Israel, God's chosen children. They have seen the glory of God, and they have the agreements that God made between himself and his people. God gave them the law of Moses and the right way of worship and his promises.⁵ They are the descendants of our great ancestors, and they are the earthly family into which Christ was [born, who is God over all. Praise him forever!](#) Amen.

⁶It is not that God failed to keep his promise to them. But only some of the people of Israel are truly [God's people](#),⁷ and only some of [Abraham's](#) descendants are true children of Abraham. But God said to Abraham: ["The descendants I promised you will be from Isaac."](#)⁸ This means that not all of Abraham's descendants are God's true children. Abraham's true children are those who become God's children because of the promise God made to Abraham.⁹ God's promise to Abraham was this: ["At the right time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."](#)¹⁰ And that is not all. Rebekah's sons had the same father, our father Isaac.¹¹⁻¹² But before the two boys were born, God told Rebekah, ["The older will serve the younger."](#) This was

before the boys had done anything good or bad. God said this so that the one chosen would be chosen because of God's own plan. He was chosen because he was the one God wanted to call, not because of anything he did. ¹³As the Scripture says, ["I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau."](#)

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: A God of Everlasting Love

Can anything separate us from the love Christ has for us? ...

Stepping from the throne, he removed his robe of light and wrapped himself in skin: pigmented, human skin. The light of the universe entered a dark, wet womb. He who angels worship nestled himself in the placenta of a peasant, was birthed into the cold night, and then slept on cow's hay.

Mary didn't know whether to give him milk or give him praise, but she gave him both since he was, as near as she could figure, hungry and holy.

Joseph didn't know whether to call him Junior or Father. But in the end called him Jesus, since that's what the angel said and since he didn't have the faintest idea what to name a God he could cradle in his arms.

... [D]on't you think their heads tilted and their minds wondered, "What in the world are you doing, God?" Or, better phrased, "God, what are you doing in the world?"

"Can anything make me stop loving you?" God asks. "Watch me speak your language, sleep on your

earth, and feel your hurts. Behold the maker of sight and sound as he sneezes, coughs, and blows his nose. You wonder if I understand how you feel? Look into the dancing eyes of the kid in Nazareth; that's God walking to school. Ponder the toddler at Mary's table; that's God spilling his milk.

"You wonder how long my love will last? Find your answer on a splintered cross, on a craggy hill. That's me you see up there, your maker, your God, nail-stabbed and bleeding. Covered in spit and sin-soaked. That's your sin I'm feeling. That's your death I'm dying. That's your resurrection I'm living. That's how much I love you."

"Can anything come between you and me?" asks the firstborn Son.

Hear the answer and stake your future on the triumphant words of Paul: "I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor ruling spirits, nothing now, nothing in the future, no powers, nothing above us, nothing below us, nor anything else in the whole world will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" ([Romans 8:38–39](#)). (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

¹⁴So what should we say about this? Is God unfair? In no way. ¹⁵God said to Moses, [“I will show kindness to anyone to whom I want to show kindness, and I will show mercy to anyone to whom I want to show mercy.”](#) ¹⁶So God will choose the one to whom he decides to show mercy; his choice does not depend on what people want or try to do. ¹⁷The Scripture says to the king of Egypt: [“I made you king for this reason: to show my power in you so that my name will be talked about in all the earth.”](#) ¹⁸So God shows mercy where he wants to show mercy, and he makes stubborn the people he wants to make stubborn.

¹⁹So one of you will ask me: “Then why does God blame us for our sins? Who can fight his will?” ²⁰You are only human, and human beings have no right to question God. An object should not ask the person who made it, “Why did you make me like this?” ²¹The potter can make anything he wants to make. He can use the same clay to make one thing for special use and another thing for daily use.

²²It is the same way with God. He wanted to show his anger and to let people see his power. But he patiently stayed with those people he was angry with—people who were made ready to be destroyed. ²³He waited with patience so that he could make known his rich glory to the people who receive his mercy. He has prepared these people to have his glory, ²⁴and we are those people whom God called. He called us not from the Jews only but also from those who are not Jews. ²⁵As the Scripture says in Hosea:

“I will say, ‘You are my people’

to those I had called ‘not my people.’
And I will show my love
to those people I did not love.”

[Hosea 2:1, 23](#)

²⁶“They were called,
‘You are not my people,’
but later they will be called
‘children of the living God.’”

[Hosea 1:10](#)

²⁷And Isaiah cries out about Israel:
“The people of Israel are many,
like the grains of sand by the sea.
But only a few of them will be saved,
²⁸because the Lord will quickly and completely punish
the people on the earth.”

[Isaiah 10:22–23](#)

²⁹It is as Isaiah said:

“The Lord All-Powerful
allowed a few of our descendants to live.
Otherwise we would have been completely destroyed
like the cities of [Sodom and Gomorrah](#).”

[Isaiah 1:9](#)

³⁰So what does all this mean? Those who are not Jews were not trying to make themselves right with God, but they were made right with God because of their faith. ³¹The people of Israel tried to follow a law to make themselves right with God.

But they did not succeed,³² because they tried to make themselves right by the things they did instead of trusting in God to make them right. They stumbled over the stone that causes people to stumble.³³ As it is written in the Scripture:

“I will put in Jerusalem a stone that causes people to stumble,
a rock that makes them fall.
Anyone who trusts in him will never be disappointed.”

[Isaiah 8:14; 28:16](#)

Life Lessons

Romans 10:1-21

Situation

Though the Old Testament emphasized God's mercy and pointed to God's salvation by faith, many first-century Jews preferred to count on their own righteousness to make them acceptable to God. Paul admires their zeal but is heart-broken that they have failed to understand God's plan for salvation.

Observation

God offers salvation to every individual, regardless of ethnic background. Salvation comes through believing in Jesus—no amount of good works can ever be sufficient to win God's approval.

Inspiration

Remember when your mother caught you disobeying one of her orders? You were guilty, caught red-handed, and you knew it. And you had to accept your punishment.

Over the years, the Situations have changed drastically, but the results are the same—disobedience and guilt. The reality is that the deserved punishment for our sins is death—eternal death, separation from God forever. But this passage says we have been ... declared “not guilty.” No matter what we have done, we have been acquitted and forgiven because of Jesus. Thus we have “peace with God” and stand in a place of highest privilege. Not only has God declared us “not guilty,” he has

drawn us close to himself. Instead of being his enemies, we have become his friends—in fact, his very own children.

Being freed from the shackles of sin and the burden of guilt, we are now free to serve our loving Lord. Thank you, Jesus. (From *On Eagle's Wings* by Dave Veerman)

Application

Have you understood God's plan for salvation? God welcomes you with open arms when you come to him in faith. Trust God's mercy, because it brings the joy of a relationship with God.

Exploration

Salvation Through Faith—[Genesis 15:6](#); [John 3:16](#); [5:24](#); [20:31](#); [Galatians 2:16](#); [Ephesians 2:8–9](#); [Philippians 3:9](#).

Brothers and sisters, the thing I want most is for all the Jews to be saved. That is my prayer to God. ²I can say this about them: They really try to follow God, but they do not know the right way. ³Because they did not know the way that God makes people right with him, they tried to make themselves right in their own way. So they did not accept God's way of making people right. ⁴Christ ended the law so that everyone who believes in him may be right with God.

⁵Moses writes about being made right by following the law. He says, [“A person who obeys these things will live because of them.”](#) ⁶But this is what the Scripture says about being made right through faith: “Don’t say to yourself, ‘Who will go up into heaven?’” (That means, “Who will go up to heaven and bring Christ down to earth?”) ⁷“And do not say, ‘Who will go down into the world below?’” (That means, “Who will go down and bring Christ up from the dead?”) ⁸This is what the Scripture says: “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart.” [n](#) That is the teaching of faith that we are telling. ⁹If you use your mouth to say, “Jesus is Lord,” and if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰We believe with our hearts, and so we are made right with God. And we use our mouths to say that we believe, and so we are saved. ¹¹As the Scripture says, [“Anyone who trusts in him will never be disappointed.”](#) ¹²That Scripture says “anyone” because there is no difference between those who are Jews and those who are not. The same Lord is the Lord of

all and gives many blessings to all who trust in him,¹³ as the Scripture says, [“Anyone who calls on the Lord will be saved.”](#)

¹⁴But before people can ask the Lord for help, they must believe in him; and before they can believe in him, they must hear about him; and for them to hear about the Lord, someone must tell them; ¹⁵and before someone can go and tell them, that person must be sent. It is written, [“How beautiful is the person who comes to bring good news.”](#) ¹⁶But not all the Jews accepted the good news. Isaiah said, [“Lord, who believed what we told them?”](#) ¹⁷So faith comes from hearing the Good News, and people hear the Good News when someone tells them about Christ.

¹⁸But I ask: Didn't people hear the Good News? Yes, they heard—as the Scripture says:

“Their message went out through all the world;
their words go everywhere on earth.”

[Psalm 19:4](#)

¹⁹Again I ask: Didn't the people of Israel understand? Yes, they did understand. First, Moses says:

“I will use those who are not a nation to make you jealous.

I will use a nation that does not understand to make you angry.”

[Deuteronomy 32:21](#)

²⁰Then Isaiah is bold enough to say:

“I was found by those who were not asking me for

help.

I made myself known to people who were not looking for me.”

[Isaiah 65:1](#)

²¹But about Israel God says,

“All day long I stood ready to accept people who disobey and are stubborn.”

[Isaiah 65:2](#)

Life Lessons

Romans 11:1–36

Situation

Were the Jews still God's chosen people? What role did the non-Jewish people have? Paul set out to answer these questions.

Observation

Christians often feel superior to other groups—as if we had done something great to earn our acceptance before God. Instead, God's gift of salvation should make us humble and grateful.

Inspiration

The fact that God has chosen some to be saved does not mean that He has chosen the rest to be lost. The world is already lost and dead in sins. If left to ourselves, all of us would be condemned eternally. The question is, Does God have a right to stoop down, take a handful of already doomed clay, and fashion a vessel of beauty out of it? Of course He does. C. R. Erdman put it in right perspective when he said, “God's sovereignty is never exercised in condemning men who ought to be saved, but rather it has resulted in the salvation of men who ought to be lost.”

The only way people can know if they are among the elect is by trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior ([1 Thessalonians 1:4–7](#)). God holds people responsible to accept the Savior by an act of the will. In reproving those Jews who did not believe, Jesus

placed the blame on their will. He did *not* say, “You cannot come to Me because you are not chosen.” Rather, He *did* say, “You *are not willing* to come to Me that you may have life” ([John 5:40](#), emphasis added).

The real question of a believer is not, Does the sovereign God have the right to choose people to be saved? Rather, it is, Why did He choose *me*? This should make a person a worshiper for all eternity. (From *Alone in Majesty* by William MacDonald)

Application

Though we have a responsibility to follow Christ, we need to recognize we could only achieve it by God’s Spirit.

Exploration

God’s Choice in Salvation—[Deuteronomy 9:4–5](#); [Romans 2:4](#); [8:28–29](#); [Ephesians 1:4–5](#), [11](#); [2:8–9](#); [1 Timothy 2:3–4](#); [Titus 3:5](#).

God Shows Mercy to All People

So I ask: Did God throw out his people? No! I myself am an Israelite from the family of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.

²God chose the Israelites to be his people before they were born, and he has not thrown his people out. Surely you know what the Scripture says about Elijah, how he prayed to God against the people of Israel. ³“Lord,” he said, “they have killed your prophets, and they have destroyed your altars. I am the only prophet left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.” ⁴But what answer did God give Elijah? He said, “But I have left seven thousand people in Israel who have never bowed down before Baal.” ⁵It is the same now. There are a few people that God has chosen by his grace. ⁶And if he chose them by grace, it is not for the things they have done. If they could be made God’s people by what they did, God’s gift of grace would not really be a gift.

⁷So this is what has happened: Although the Israelites tried to be right with God, they did not succeed, but the ones God chose did become right with him. The others were made stubborn and refused to listen to God. ⁸As it is written in the Scriptures:

“God gave the people a dull mind so they could not understand.”

[Isaiah 29:10](#)

“He closed their eyes so they could not see
and their ears so they could not hear.
This continues until today.”

[Deuteronomy 29:4](#)

⁹And David says:

“Let their own feasts trap them and cause their ruin;
let their feasts cause them to stumble and be paid back.
¹⁰Let their eyes be closed so they cannot see
and their backs be forever weak from troubles.”

[Psalm 69:22–23](#)

¹¹So I ask: When the Jews fell, did that fall destroy them? No! But their mistake brought salvation to those who are not Jews, in order to make the Jews jealous. ¹²The Jews’ mistake brought rich blessings for the world, and the Jews’ loss brought rich blessings for the non-Jewish people. So surely the world will receive much richer blessings when enough Jews become the kind of people God wants.

¹³Now I am speaking to you who are not Jews. I am an apostle to those who are not Jews, and since I have that work, I will make the most of it. ¹⁴I hope I can make my own people jealous and, in that way, help some of them to be saved. ¹⁵When God turned away from the Jews, he became friends with other people in the world. So when God accepts the Jews, surely that will bring them life after death.

¹⁶If the first piece of bread is offered to God, then the whole loaf is made holy. If the roots of a tree are holy, then the tree’s branches are holy too.

¹⁷It is as if some of the branches from an olive tree have been broken off. You non-Jewish people are like the branch of a wild olive tree that has been joined to that first tree. You now share the strength and life of the first tree, the Jews. ¹⁸So do not brag about those branches that were broken off. If you brag, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹You will say, "Branches were broken off so that I could be joined to their tree." ²⁰That is true. But those branches were broken off because they did not believe, and you continue to be part of the tree only because you believe. Do not be proud, but be afraid. ²¹If God did not let the natural branches of that tree stay, then he will not let you stay if you don't believe.

²²So you see that God is kind and also very strict. He punishes those who stop following him. But God is kind to you, if you continue following in his kindness. If you do not, you will be cut off from the tree. ²³And if the Jews will believe in God again, he will accept them back. God is able to put them back where they were. ²⁴It is not natural for a wild branch to be part of a good tree. And you who are not Jews are like a branch cut from a wild olive tree and joined to a good olive tree. But since those Jews are like a branch that grew from the good tree, surely they can be joined to their own tree again.

²⁵I want you to understand this secret, brothers and sisters, so you will understand that you do not know everything: Part of Israel has been made stubborn, but that will change when many who are not Jews have come to God. ²⁶And that is how all Israel will be saved. It is written in the Scriptures:

"The Savior will come from Jerusalem;

he will take away all evil from the family of [Jacob](#).

²⁷And I will make this agreement with those people when I take away their sins.”

[Isaiah 59:20–21; 27:9](#)

²⁸The Jews refuse to accept the Good News, so they are God’s enemies. This has happened to help you who are not Jews. But the Jews are still God’s chosen people, and he loves them very much because of the promises he made to their ancestors. ²⁹God never changes his mind about the people he calls and the things he gives them. ³⁰At one time you refused to obey God. But now you have received mercy, because those people refused to obey. ³¹And now the Jews refuse to obey, because God showed mercy to you. But this happened so that they also can receive mercy from him. ³²God has given all people over to their stubborn ways so that he can show mercy to all.

Praise to God

³³Yes, God’s riches are very great, and his wisdom and knowledge have no end! No one can explain the things God decides or understand his ways. ³⁴As the Scripture says,

“Who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been able to give him advice?”

[Isaiah 40:13](#)

³⁵“No one has ever given God anything
that he must pay back.”

[Job 41:11](#)

³⁶Yes, God made all things, and everything continues through him and for him. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Life Lessons

Romans 12:1-21

Situation

Paul told the Roman Christians how to live so that their behavior would be worshipful to God.

Observation

God desires you to surrender every part of your life to him.

Inspiration

Would you buy a house if you were only allowed to see one of its rooms? Would you purchase a car if you were permitted to see only its tires and a taillight? Would you pass judgment on a book after reading only one paragraph?

Nor would I.

Good judgment requires a broad picture. Not only is that true in purchasing houses, cars, and books, it's true in evaluating life. One failure doesn't make a person a failure; one achievement doesn't make a person a success.

"The end of the matter is better than its beginning," penned the sage.

"Be patient when trouble comes ...," echoed the apostle Paul....

We only have a fragment. Life's mishaps and horrors are only a page out of a grand book. We must be slow about drawing conclusions. We must reserve judgment on life's storms until we know the whole story....

“Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.”

He should know. He is the Author of our story. And he has already written the final chapter. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

What particular sin stalks you? When does it seize you with temptation? As a safeguard, memorize [Romans 12:1–2](#). Whenever you feel tempted, repeat these verses in your mind and by God’s power plan not to sin.

Exploration

Honoring God—[Matthew 16:24–25](#); [1 Corinthians 6:20](#); [2 Corinthians 5:15](#); [Galatians 1:10](#)

Give Your Lives to God

So brothers and sisters, since God has shown us great mercy, I beg you to offer your lives as a living sacrifice to him. Your offering must be only for God and pleasing to him, which is the spiritual way for you to worship. ²Do not change yourselves to be like the people of this world, but be changed within by a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to decide what God wants for you; you will know what is good and pleasing to him and what is perfect. ³Because God has given me a special gift, I have something to say to everyone among you. Do not think you are better than you are. You must decide what you really are by the amount of faith God has given you. ⁴Each one of us has a body with many parts, and these parts all have different uses. ⁵In the same way, we are many, but in Christ we are all one body. Each one is a part of that body, and each part belongs to all the other parts. ⁶We all have different gifts, each of which came because of the grace God gave us. The person who has the gift of prophecy should use that gift in agreement with the faith. ⁷Anyone who has the gift of serving should serve. Anyone who has the gift of teaching should teach. ⁸Whoever has the gift of encouraging others should encourage. Whoever has the gift of giving to others should give freely. Anyone who has the gift of being a leader should try hard when he leads. Whoever has the gift of showing mercy to others should do so with joy.

⁹Your love must be real. Hate what is evil, and hold on to what is good. ¹⁰Love each other like brothers and sisters. Give each other more honor than you want for yourselves. ¹¹Do not be lazy but work hard, serving the Lord with all your heart. ¹²Be joyful because you have hope. Be patient when trouble comes, and pray at all times. ¹³Share with God's people who need help. Bring strangers in need into your homes.

¹⁴Wish good for those who harm you; wish them well and do not curse them. ¹⁵Be happy with those who are happy, and be sad with those who are sad. ¹⁶Live in peace with each other. Do not be proud, but make friends with those who seem unimportant. Do not think how smart you are.

¹⁷If someone does wrong to you, do not pay him back by doing wrong to him. Try to do what everyone thinks is right. ¹⁸Do your best to live in peace with everyone. ¹⁹My friends, do not try to punish others when they wrong you, but wait for God to punish them with his anger. It is written: ["I will punish those who do wrong; I will repay them."](#) says the Lord. ²⁰But you should do this:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him a drink.

Doing this will be like pouring burning coals on his head.”

[Proverbs 25:21–22](#)

²¹Do not let evil defeat you, but defeat evil by doing good.

Life Lessons

Romans 13:1-14

Situation

Paul encouraged Christians to obey the government even though submitting to a pagan government would be difficult. He also encouraged Christians to love each other.

Observation

Christians should be well known in their communities for their obedience to government and their love for each other.

Inspiration

Let us pray for each other so that we grow in tender love, that we allow God to love us, and that we allow God to love others through us.

Where does that showing of love begin? At home; so let us bring that love to the sick, to the old, to the lonely, to the unwanted. For people do not hunger only for bread; they hunger for love, they hunger to be somebody to somebody.

I will never forget that I once met a man in the street who looked very lonely and miserable. So I walked right up to him, and I shook his hand. My hands are always very warm; and he looked up, gave me a beautiful smile, and he said, "Oh, it has been such a long, long time since I felt the warmth of a human hand!" How very wonderful and very beautiful that our simple actions can show love in that way.

And let us remember to bring that kind of love into our family. We can do this through prayer; for where there is prayer, there is love. And where there is love, there is the complete oneness that Jesus was talking about when he said, “Be one, as the Father and I are one. And love one another as I love you. As the Father loved me, I have loved you.” (From *Who Is for Life?* by Mother Theresa)

Application

Have you received love in an unusual way from someone? Look for a new way to show love to those who normally hear you say, “I love you.”

Exploration

Love—[1 Corinthians 13](#); [1 John 3:16](#); [4:7–8](#).

Christians Should Obey the Law

All of you must yield to the government rulers. No one rules unless God has given him the power to rule, and no one rules now without that power from God.² So those who are against the government are really against what God has commanded. And they will bring punishment on themselves.³ Those who do right do not have to fear the rulers; only those who do wrong fear them. Do you want to be unafraid of the rulers? Then do what is right, and they will praise you.⁴ The ruler is God's servant to help you. But if you do wrong, then be afraid. He has the power to punish; he is God's servant to punish those who do wrong.⁵ So you must yield to the government, not only because you might be punished, but because you know it is right.

⁶This is also why you pay taxes. Rulers are working for God and give their time to their work.⁷ Pay everyone, then, what you owe. If you owe any kind of tax, pay it. Show respect and honor to them all.

Loving Others

⁸Do not owe people anything, except always owe love to each other, because the person who loves others has obeyed all the law.⁹ The law says, "You must not be guilty of adultery. You

must not murder anyone. You must not steal. You must not want to take your neighbor's things." All these commands and all others are really only one rule: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." ¹⁰Love never hurts a neighbor, so loving is obeying all the law.

¹¹Do this because we live in an important time. It is now time for you to wake up from your sleep, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹²The "night" is almost finished, and the "day" is almost here. So we should stop doing things that belong to darkness and take up the weapons used for fighting in the light. ¹³Let us live in a right way, like people who belong to the day. We should not have wild parties or get drunk. There should be no sexual sins of any kind, no fighting or jealousy. ¹⁴But clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and forget about satisfying your sinful self.

Life Lessons

Romans 14:1–15:13

Situation

Paul continued to call Christians to unity and love, particularly between those who were weak or strong in their faith and walk with God. Paul addressed the habit of holy days and the eating of meat sacrificed to idols.

Observation

The church should be marked by how we love each other rather than how we judge each other.

Inspiration

Accepting others is basic to letting them be. Those who didn't eat [meat] (called here "weak in the faith") were exhorted to accept and not judge those who ate. And those who ate were exhorted to accept and not regard with contempt those who did not eat. The secret lies in accepting one another. All of this is fairly easy to read so long as I stay on the issue of eating meat. That one is safe because it isn't a current taboo. It's easy to accept those folks today because they don't exist!

How about those in our life who may disagree with us on issues that are taboos in evangelical Christian circles today? ... Going to movies ... Playing cards ... Not having a "quiet time" every morning ... Going to a restaurant that sells liquor ... Listening to certain music ... Dancing ... Drinking coffee ...

There are a dozen other things I could list, some of which would make you smile. But believe me, in various areas of our country or the world some or all of these things may be taboo... . [D]on't assume that all areas are identical when it comes to taboos... . (Remember, our goal is acceptance, the basis of a grace state of mind.) (From *Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Examine your own taboos and look for some that may be unnecessary points of contention with other Christians.

Exploration

Personal Responsibilities—[Deuteronomy 24:16](#); [Job 19:4](#); [Proverbs 9:12](#); [Jeremiah 31:30](#); [Ezekiel 18:20](#).

Do Not Criticize Other People

Accept into your group someone who is weak in faith, and do not argue about opinions.²One person believes it is right to eat [all kinds of food](#). But another, who is weak, believes it is right to eat only vegetables.³The one who knows that it is right to eat any kind of food must not reject the one who eats only vegetables. And the person who eats only vegetables must not think that the one who eats all foods is wrong, because God has accepted that person.⁴You cannot judge another person's servant. The master decides if the servant is doing well or not. And the Lord's servant will do well because the Lord helps him do well.

⁵Some think that one day is more important than another, and others think that every day is the same. Let all be sure in their own mind.⁶Those who think one day is more important than other days are doing that for the Lord. And those who eat all kinds of food are doing that for the Lord, and they give thanks to God. Others who refuse to eat some foods do that for the Lord, and they give thanks to God.⁷We do not live or die for ourselves.⁸If we live, we are living for the Lord, and if we die, we are dying for the Lord. So living or dying, we belong to the Lord.

⁹The reason Christ died and rose from the dead to live again was so he would be Lord over both the dead and the living.

¹⁰So why do you judge your brothers or sisters in Christ? And

why do you think you are better than they are? We will all stand before God to be judged,¹¹ because it is written in the Scriptures:

“ ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord,
‘Everyone will bow before me;
everyone will say that I am God.’ ”

[Isaiah 45:23](#)

¹²So each of us will have to answer to God.

Do Not Cause Others to Sin

¹³For that reason we should stop judging each other. We must make up our minds not to do anything that will make another Christian sin. ¹⁴I am in the Lord Jesus, and I know that there is no food that is wrong to eat. But if a person believes something is wrong, that thing is wrong for him. ¹⁵If you hurt your brother's or sister's faith because of something you eat, you are not really following the way of love. Do not destroy someone's faith by eating food he thinks is wrong, because Christ died for him. ¹⁶Do not allow what you think is good to become what others say is evil. ¹⁷In the kingdom of God, eating and drinking are not important. The important things are living right with God, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸Anyone who serves Christ by living this way is pleasing God and will be accepted by other people.

¹⁹So let us try to do what makes peace and helps one another. ²⁰Do not let the eating of food destroy the work of God. All foods are all right to eat, but it is wrong to eat food

that causes someone else to sin. ²¹It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that will cause your brother or sister to sin.

²²Your beliefs about these things should be kept secret between you and God. People are happy if they can do what they think is right without feeling guilty. ²³But those who eat something without being sure it is right are wrong because they did not believe it was right. Anything that is done without believing it is right is a sin.

We who are strong in faith should help the weak with their weaknesses, and not please only ourselves.²Let each of us please our neighbors for their good, to help them be stronger in faith.³Even Christ did not live to please himself. It was as the Scriptures said: [“When people insult you, it hurts me.”](#)⁴Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us. The Scriptures give us patience and encouragement so that we can have hope.⁵Patience and encouragement come from God. And I pray that God will help you all agree with each other the way Christ Jesus wants.⁶Then you will all be joined together, and you will give glory to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷Christ accepted you, so you should accept each other, which will bring glory to God.⁸I tell you that Christ became a servant of the Jews to show that God’s promises to the Jewish ancestors are true.⁹And he also did this so that those who are not Jews could give glory to God for the mercy he gives to them. It is written in the Scriptures:

“So I will praise you among the non-Jewish people.
I will sing praises to your name.”

[Psalm 18:49](#)

¹⁰The Scripture also says,

“Be happy, you who are not Jews, together with his people.”

[Deuteronomy 32:43](#)

¹¹Again the Scripture says,

“All you who are not Jews, praise the Lord.

All you people, sing praises to him.”

[Psalm 117:1](#)

¹²And Isaiah says,

“A new king will come from the family of [Jesse](#).
He will come to rule over the non-Jewish people,
and they will have hope because of him.”

[Isaiah 11:10](#)

¹³I pray that the God who gives hope will fill you with much joy and peace while you trust in him. Then your hope will overflow by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Life Lessons

[Romans 15:14–33](#)

Situation

Having concluded his presentation of the gospel and its impact on those who believe, Paul turned his focus to his ministry.

Observation

Paul expressed his passion for the unsaved and his love for Christians.

Inspiration

A few nights ago a peculiar thing happened.

An electrical storm caused a blackout in our neighborhood. When the lights went out, I felt my way through the darkness into the storage closet where we keep the candles for nights like this... . I

took my match and lit four of them. . . .

I was turning to leave with the large candle in my hand when I heard a voice, "Now, hold it right there."

"Who said that?"

"I did." The voice was near my hand.

"Who are you? What are you?"

"I'm a candle."

I lifted up the candle to take a closer look. You won't believe what I saw. There was a tiny face in the wax ... a moving, functioning, fleshlike face full of expression and life.

"Don't take me out of here!"

"What?"

"I said, Don't take me out of this room."

"What do you mean? I have to take you out. You're a candle. Your job is to give light. It's dark out there."

"But you can't take me out. I'm not ready," the candle explained with pleading eyes. "I need more preparation."

I couldn't believe my ears. "More preparation?"

"Yeah, I've decided I need to research this job of light-giving so I won't go out and make a bunch of mistakes. You'd be surprised how distorted the glow of an untrained candle can be. . . ."

"All right then, " I said. "You're not the only candle on the shelf. I'll blow you out and take the others!"

But just as I got my cheeks full of air, I heard other voices.

"We aren't going either!"

... I turned around and looked at the three other candles... . “You are candles and your job is to light dark places!”

“Well, that may be what you think,” said the candle on the far left... . “You may think we have to go, but I’m busy.... I’m meditating on the importance of light. It’s really enlightening.” ...

“And you other two,” I asked, “are you going to stay in here as well?”

A short, fat, purple candle with plump cheeks that reminded me of Santa Claus spoke up. “I’m waiting to get my life together. I’m not stable enough.”

The last candle had a female voice, very pleasant to the ear. “I’d like to help,” she explained, “but lighting the darkness is not my gift... . I’m a singer. I sing to other candles to encourage them to burn more brightly.”

... She began a rendition of “This Little Light of Mine.”... The other three joined in, filling the storage room with singing... . I took a step back and considered the absurdity of it all. Four perfectly healthy candles singing to each other about light but refusing to come out of the closet. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

When was the last time you presented the gospel to someone? Are you scared to be the light-giver that God has created you to be? Pray today that God would bring you opportunities to share your faith and give you the courage to take them. Now step out in faith and keep your eyes open!

Exploration

Evangelism—[Matthew 5:13–16](#); [28:18–20](#); [Acts 1:8](#); [2 Corinthians 2:14–17](#); [1 Thessalonians 2:8](#); [1 Peter 3:15–16](#).

Paul Talks About His Work

¹⁴My brothers and sisters, I am sure that you are full of goodness. I know that you have all the knowledge you need and that you are able to teach each other. ¹⁵But I have written to you very openly about some things I wanted you to remember. I did this because God gave me this special gift: ¹⁶to be a minister of Christ Jesus to those who are not Jews. I served God by teaching his Good News, so that the non-Jewish people could be an offering that God would accept—an offering made holy by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷So I am proud of what I have done for God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁸I will not talk about anything except what Christ has done through me in leading those who are not Jews to obey God. They have obeyed God because of what I have said and done, ¹⁹because of the power of miracles and the great things they saw, and because of the power of the Holy Spirit. I preached the Good News from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, and so I have finished that part of my work. ²⁰I always want to preach the Good News in places where people have never heard of Christ, because I do not want to build on the work someone else has already started. ²¹But it is written in the Scriptures:

“Those who were not told about him will see,
and those who have not heard about him will
understand.”

Paul's Plan to Visit Rome

²²This is the reason I was stopped many times from coming to you. ²³Now I have finished my work here. Since for many years I have wanted to come to you, ²⁴I hope to visit you on my way to Spain. After I enjoy being with you for a while, I hope you can help me on my trip. ²⁵Now I am going to Jerusalem to help God's people. ²⁶The believers in Macedonia and Southern Greece were happy to give their money to help the poor among God's people at Jerusalem. ²⁷They were happy to do this, and really they owe it to them. These who are not Jews have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, so they should use their material possessions to help the Jews. ²⁸After I am sure the poor in Jerusalem get the money that has been given for them, I will leave for Spain and stop and visit you. ²⁹I know that when I come to you I will bring Christ's full blessing.

³⁰Brothers and sisters, I beg you to help me in my work by praying to God for me. Do this because of our Lord Jesus and the love that the Holy Spirit gives us. ³¹Pray that I will be saved from the nonbelievers in Judea and that this help I bring to Jerusalem will please God's people there. ³²Then, if God wants me to, I will come to you with joy, and together you and I will have a time of rest. ³³The God who gives peace be with you all. Amen.

Life Lessons

Romans 16:1-27

Situation

Paul sent his warmest greetings to his fellow workers in the kingdom of God.

Observation

Though often overlooked, the behind-the-scenes service of faithful Christians forms a vital part of any ministry. Paul expressed his thanks to a wide variety of people, most of whom are noted for simple, everyday acts of service.

Inspiration

For an extraordinary pitcher he performed few extraordinary feats. Though a veteran of twenty-one seasons, in only one did he win more than twenty games. He never pitched a no-hitter and only once did he lead the league in any category....

Yet on June 21, 1986, Don Sutton rubbed pitching elbows with the true legends of baseball by becoming the thirtieth pitcher to win 300 games.

His analysis of his success is worth noting.

“A grinder and a mechanic” is what he calls himself. “I never considered myself flamboyant or exceptional. But all my life I’ve found a way to get the job done.”

... He has been called the “family sedan” of baseball’s men on the mound. The connotation is accurate. He certainly boasted none of the Ferrari style of a Denny McClane nor the Mercedes sparkle

of a Sandy Koufax, but after they and their types were parked in museums or garages, Don Sutton was still there.

He reminds us of a quality that is a common denominator in any form of greatness—reliability.

It's the bread and butter characteristic of achievement. It's the shared ingredient behind retirement pens, Hall of Fame awards, and golden anniversaries. It is the quality that produces not momentary heroics but monumental lives.

The Bible has its share of family sedans. Consistent and predictable, these saints were spurred by a gut-level conviction that they had been called by no one less than God himself. As a result, their work wasn't affected by moods, cloudy days, or rocky trails. Their performance graph didn't rise and fall with roller-coaster irregularity. They weren't addicted to accolades or applause nor deterred by grumpy bosses or empty wallets. Rather than strive to be spectacular, they aspired to be accountable and dependable. And since their loyalty was not determined by their comfort, they were just as faithful in dark prisons as they were in spotlighted pulpits.

Reliable servants. They're the binding of the Bible. Their acts are rarely recited and their names are seldom mentioned. Yet were it not for their loyal devotion to God, many great events never would have occurred. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

Are you a sports car—flashy, fun, nice to look at,

but expensive to keep up and not very practical for most of the daily jobs of life? Or are you a family sedan—maybe not always noticed at first, but reliable, and a dear friend of the family? Think through the attitudes you need to change to become more faithful and reliable. Start working on one attitude this week.

Exploration

Faithfulness—[Galatians 5:22–23](#); [6:9](#); [Philippians 2:19–30](#); [Revelation 13:10](#).

Greetings to the Christians

I recommend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a [helper](#) in the church in Cenchrea. ²I ask you to accept her in the Lord in the way God's people should. Help her with anything she needs, because she has helped me and many other people also.

³Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, who work together with me in Christ Jesus ⁴and who risked their own lives to save my life. I am thankful to them, and all the non-Jewish churches are thankful as well. ⁵Also, greet for me the church that meets at their house.

Greetings to my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first person in the country of Asia to follow Christ. ⁶Greetings to Mary, who worked very hard for you. ⁷Greetings to Andronicus and Junia, my relatives, who were in prison with me. They are very important apostles. They were believers in Christ before I was. ⁸Greetings to Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord. ⁹Greetings to Urbanus, a worker together with me for Christ. And greetings to my dear friend Stachys. ¹⁰Greetings to Apelles, who was tested and proved that he truly loves Christ. Greetings to all those who are in the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹Greetings to Herodion, my fellow citizen. Greetings to all those in the family of Narcissus who belong to the Lord. ¹²Greetings to Tryphena and Tryphosa, women who work very hard for the Lord. Greetings to my dear friend Persis, who also

has worked very hard for the Lord. ¹³Greetings to Rufus, who is a special person in the Lord, and to his mother, who has been like a mother to me also. ¹⁴Greetings to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and all the brothers who are with them. ¹⁵Greetings to Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and to all God's people with them. ¹⁶Greet each other with a holy kiss. All of Christ's churches send greetings to you.

¹⁷Brothers and sisters, I ask you to look out for those who cause people to be against each other and who upset other people's faith. They are against the true teaching you learned, so stay away from them. ¹⁸Such people are not serving our Lord Christ but are only doing what pleases themselves. They use fancy talk and fine words to fool the minds of those who do not know about evil. ¹⁹All the believers have heard that you obey, so I am very happy because of you. But I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.

²⁰The God who brings peace will soon defeat Satan and give you power over him.

The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

²¹Timothy, a worker together with me, sends greetings, as well as Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my relatives.

²²I am Tertius, and I am writing this letter from Paul. I send greetings to you in the Lord.

²³Gaius is letting me and the whole church here use his home. He also sends greetings to you, as do Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus. ²⁴[n](#)

²⁵Glory to God who can make you strong in faith by the Good News that I tell people and by the message about Jesus Christ. The message about Christ is the secret that was hidden

for long ages past but is now made known. ²⁶It has been made clear through the writings of the prophets. And by the command of the eternal God it is made known to all nations that they might believe and obey.

²⁷To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “Brothers” here and throughout this book, Paul’s words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

“But those ... him.” Quotation from [Habakkuk 2:4](#).

“Those ... you.” Quotation from [Isaiah 52:5](#); [Ezekiel 36:20](#).

Abraham Most respected ancestor of the Jews. Every Jew hoped to see Abraham.

“Abraham ... God.” Quotation from [Genesis 15:6](#).

Abraham Most respected ancestor of the Jews. Every Jew hoped to see Abraham.

“I ... nations.” Quotation from [Genesis 17:5](#).

“Your ... count.” Quotation from [Genesis 15:5](#).

“God ... God.” Quotation from [Genesis 15:6](#).

“You ... things.” Quotation from [Exodus 20:17](#).

“Father” Literally, “Abba, Father.” Jewish children called their fathers “Abba.”

firstborn Here this probably means that Christ was the first in God’s family to share God’s glory.

born ... forever! This can also mean “born. May God, who rules over all things, be praised forever!”

God’s people Literally, “Israel,” the people God chose to bring his blessings to the world.

Abraham Most respected ancestor of the Jews. Every Jew hoped to see Abraham.

“The descendants ... Isaac.” Quotation from [Genesis 21:12](#).

“At ... son.” Quotation from [Genesis 18:10](#), [14](#).

“The older ... younger.” Quotation from [Genesis 25:23](#).

“I ... Esau.” Quotation from [Malachi 1:2–3](#).

“I ... mercy.” Quotation from [Exodus 33:19](#).

“I ... earth.” Quotation from [Exodus 9:16](#).

Sodom and Gomorrah Two cities that God destroyed

because the people were so evil.

“A person ... them.” Quotation from [Leviticus 18:5](#).

Verses 6–8 Quotations from [Deuteronomy 9:4](#); [30:12–14](#); [Psalm 107:26](#).

“Anyone ... disappointed.” Quotation from [Isaiah 28:16](#).

“Anyone ... saved.” Quotation from [Joel 2:32](#).

“How ... news.” Quotation from [Isaiah 52:7](#).

“Lord, ... them?” Quotation from [Isaiah 53:1](#).

“They ... too.” Quotation from [1 Kings 19:10](#), [14](#).

“But ... Baal.” Quotation from [1 Kings 19:18](#).

Jacob Father of the twelve family groups of Israel, the people God chose to be his people.

“I ... them” Quotation from [Deuteronomy 32:35](#).

“You ... things.” Quotation from [Exodus 20:13–15](#), [17](#).

“Love ... yourself.” Quotation from [Leviticus 19:18](#).

“night” This is used as a symbol of the sinful world we live in. This world will soon end.

“day” This is used as a symbol of the good time that is coming, when we will be with God.

all ... food The Jewish law said there were some foods Jews should not eat. When Jews became Christians, some of them did not understand they could now eat all foods.

“When ... me.” Quotation from [Psalm 69:9](#).

Jesse Jesse was the father of David, king of Israel. Jesus was from their family.

helper Literally, “deaconess.” This might mean the same as one of the special women helpers in [1 Timothy 3:11](#).

Verse 24 Some Greek copies add verse [24](#): “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. Amen.”

The Book of 1 Corinthians

Introduction

An Indian was walking up a mountain when he heard a voice.

“Carry me with you,” it requested.

The Indian turned and saw a snake. He refused. “If I carry you up the mountain, you will bite me.”

“I wouldn’t do that,” the snake assured. “All I need is some help. I am slow and you are fast; please be kind and carry me to the top of the mountain.”

It was against his better judgment, but the Indian agreed. He picked up the snake, put him in his shirt, and resumed the journey. When they reached the top, he reached in his shirt to remove the snake and got bit.

He fell to the ground, and the snake slithered away.

“You lied!” the Indian cried, “You said you wouldn’t bite me.”

The snake stopped and looked back, “I didn’t lie. You knew who I was when you picked me up.”

We hear the legend and shake our heads. He should have known better, we bemoan. And we are right. He should have.

And so should we. But don’t we do the same? Don’t we believe the lies of the snake? Don’t we pick up what we should leave alone?

The Corinthian Christians did. One snake after another had hissed his lies in their ears, and they had believed it. How many lies did they believe?

How much time do you have?

The list is long and ugly: sectarianism, disunity, sexual immorality. And that is only the first six chapters.

But 1 Corinthians is more than a list of sins; it is an epistle

of patience. Paul initiates the letter by calling these Christians “brothers and sisters” [see NCV textual footnote]. He could have called them heretics or hypocrites (and in so many words he does), but not before he calls them brothers and sisters.

He patiently teaches them about worship, unity, the role of women, and the Lord’s Supper. He writes as if he can see them face-to-face. He is disturbed but not despondent. Angry but not desperate. His driving passion is love. And his treatise on love in chapter [13](#) remains the greatest essay ever penned.

The letter, however personal, is not just for Corinth. It is for all who have heard the whisper and felt the fangs.

We, like the Indian, should have known better. We, like the Corinthians, sometimes need a second chance.

About This Book

Author:

Paul

Date Written:

C. A.D. 55

Key Themes:

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- The church, as the body of Christ, should be unified in the same way a physical body is.
- God calls his people to sexual purity.
- We must honor God within our human relationships.
- Love is the greatest of all gifts.

Key Verse:

“I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal” ([1 Corinthians 13:1](#)).

Contents:

1. Divisions Among the Church [1:1–4:21](#)
2. Sexual Purity [5:1–6:20](#)
3. Answers to Questions [7:1–14:40](#)
4. Jesus’ Resurrection and Paul’s Closing [15:1–16:24](#)

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 1:1–31

Situation

In a constructive manner, Paul admonished Christians in Corinth for being divisive. Paul reminded them about the limits of human wisdom.

Observation

Christians must focus on Christ to understand God's will. Human wisdom won't do it.

Inspiration

Throughout the expanse of creation God has hidden things for humankind to discover, to enjoy, and with which to perceive the nature of the Creator Himself...

The work of the first man and woman was to discover and identify things God had made. Because of their disobedience against God's laws, some of the opportunity for that kind of marvelous work was forfeited. They now had to worry more about surviving in a hostile world than continuing to discover what was in it. The nature of work abruptly changed. I have a conviction that the heavenly life will in some way recover that original form of work.

But the principle and privilege of discovery still prevails in part...

And much of the Exploration of creation is done purely within the mind. We dig, as it were, and uncover ideas and truths; then we turn around to express them artistically, worshipfully, and

inventively.

Thinking is a great work. It is best done with a mind that has trained and is in shape just as competitive running is done with a body that has trained and is in shape. The best kind of thinking is accomplished when it is done in the context of reverence for God's kingly reign over all creation. (From *Ordering Your Private World* by Gordon MacDonald)

Application

Human wisdom tells us to get as much as we can, believe only what we can see, enjoy pleasure, and avoid pain. God's wisdom tells us to give all we can, believe what we can't see, enjoy service, and expect persecution. See that your life reflects the difference.

Exploration

Wisdom—[Job 28:13](#); [Proverbs 1:7](#); [9:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:1](#).

From Paul. God called me to be an apostle of Christ Jesus because that is what God wanted. Also from Sosthenes, our brother in Christ.

²To the church of God in Corinth, to you who have been made holy in Christ Jesus. You were called to be God's holy people with all people everywhere who pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

³Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul Gives Thanks to God

⁴I always thank my God for you because of the grace God has given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵I thank God because in Christ you have been made rich in every way, in all your speaking and in all your knowledge. ⁶Just as our witness about Christ has been guaranteed to you, ⁷so you have every gift from God while you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to come again. ⁸Jesus will keep you strong until the end so that there will be no wrong in you on the day our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. ⁹God, who has called you to share everything with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

Problems in the Church

¹⁰I beg you, [brothers and sisters](#), by the name of our Lord

Jesus Christ that all of you agree with each other and not be split into groups. I beg that you be completely joined together by having the same kind of thinking and the same purpose.¹¹ My brothers and sisters, some people from Chloe's family have told me quite plainly that there are quarrels among you.¹² This is what I mean: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another says, "I follow Apollos"; another says, "I follow Peter"; and another says, "I follow Christ."¹³ Christ has been divided up into different groups! Did Paul die on the cross for you? No! Were you baptized in the name of Paul? No! ¹⁴I thank God I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius ¹⁵so that now no one can say you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶(I also baptized the family of Stephanas, but I do not remember that I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷Christ did not send me to baptize people but to preach the Good News. And he sent me to preach the Good News without using words of human wisdom so that the [cross](#) of Christ would not lose its power.

Christ Is God's Power and Wisdom

¹⁸The teaching about the cross is foolishness to those who are being lost, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹It is written in the Scriptures:

"I will cause the wise men to lose their wisdom;
I will make the wise men unable to understand."

[Isaiah 29:14](#)

²⁰Where is the wise person? Where is the educated person? Where is the skilled talker of this world? God has made the

wisdom of the world foolish. ²¹In the wisdom of God the world did not know God through its own wisdom. So God chose to use the message that sounds foolish to save those who believe. ²²The Jews ask for miracles, and the Greeks want wisdom. ²³But we preach a crucified Christ. This is a big problem to the Jews, and it is foolishness to those who are not Jews. ²⁴But Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God to those people God has called—Jews and Greeks. ²⁵Even the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

²⁶Brothers and sisters, look at what you were when God called you. Not many of you were wise in the way the world judges wisdom. Not many of you had great influence. Not many of you came from important families. ²⁷But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and he chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸He chose what the world thinks is unimportant and what the world looks down on and thinks is nothing in order to destroy what the world thinks is important. ²⁹God did this so that no one can brag in his presence. ³⁰Because of God you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God. In Christ we are put right with God, and have been made holy, and have been set free from sin. ³¹So, as the Scripture says, [“If someone wants to brag, he should brag only about the Lord.”](#)

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

Situation

The world cannot understand God's wisdom, nor can it comprehend that God's Son had to die to bring sinners back to God.

Observation

God reveals the mystery of the gospel to us when the Holy Spirit opens our spiritual eyes.

Inspiration

Men are always seeking for greater wisdom, but they usually bypass the Ultimate Source of wisdom. The Scriptures clearly point this direction. They reveal, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" ([Proverbs 9:10](#)). But what has man done with this tremendous resource at his fingertips? Ignored it! "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools" ([Romans 1:21-22](#)).

Since God's wisdom resides in His Word, it is imperative to know what He has revealed, but even many Christians ignore a regular time reading and studying the Scriptures. Therefore, many of their decisions are foolish, because they've not consulted the Ultimate Source of wisdom. (From *Finding Time* by Rick Yohn)

Application

Do you read God's Word faithfully? Create a notebook of Observations. Keep track of new discoveries and old truths. Let them strengthen your faith and share them in your conversations.

Exploration

Renew Your Mind—[Proverbs 15:14](#); [Romans 12:2](#); [Philippians 4:8](#).

The Message of Christ's Death

Dear brothers and sisters, when I came to you, I did not come preaching God's secret with fancy words or a show of human wisdom.² I decided that while I was with you I would forget about everything except Jesus Christ and his death on the cross.³ So when I came to you, I was weak and fearful and trembling.⁴ My teaching and preaching were not with words of human wisdom that persuade people but with proof of the power that the Spirit gives.⁵ This was so that your faith would be in God's power and not in human wisdom.

God's Wisdom

⁶However, I speak a wisdom to those who are mature. But this wisdom is not from this world or from the rulers of this world, who are losing their power.⁷ I speak God's secret wisdom, which he has kept hidden. Before the world began, God planned this wisdom for our glory.⁸ None of the rulers of this world understood it. If they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.⁹ But as it is written in the Scriptures:

“No one has ever seen this,
and no one has ever heard about it.
No one has ever imagined
what God has prepared for those

who love him.”

[Isaiah 64:4](#)

¹⁰But God has shown us these things through the Spirit.

The Spirit searches out all things, even the deep secrets of God. ¹¹Who knows the thoughts that another person has? Only a person’s spirit that lives within him knows his thoughts. It is the same with God. No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we did not receive the spirit of the world, but we received the Spirit that is from God so that we can know all that God has given us. ¹³And we speak about these things, not with words taught us by human wisdom but with words taught us by the Spirit. And so we explain spiritual truths to spiritual people. ¹⁴A person who does not have the Spirit does not accept the truths that come from the Spirit of God. That person thinks they are foolish and cannot understand them, because they can only be judged to be true by the Spirit. ¹⁵The spiritual person is able to judge all things, but no one can judge him. The Scripture says:

¹⁶“Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Who has been able to teach him?”

[Isaiah 40:13](#)

But we have the mind of Christ.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 3:1-23

Situation

Paul wrote to a church that was young and immature. He corrected some misunderstandings in the Corinthian church and outlined how the people should act, live, and relate.

Observation

This chapter contains the most information on the subject of rewards.

Inspiration

Let's talk for a moment about rewards. Salvation is the result of grace. Without exception, no man or woman has ever done one work to enhance the finished work of the cross. Our service does not earn our salvation. Our service does, however, impact our rewards. As one writer stated, "We are accepted into heaven on the basis of faith alone, but we are adorned in heaven on the basis of the fruits of our faith."

If this strikes you as strange, you aren't alone. Scripture offers just enough teaching to convince us of rewards, but not enough to answer our questions about them. In what form do they come? How are they dispensed? We aren't told. We are simply assured they exist. In addition to the crowns of life, righteousness, and glory, Scripture indicates that there are other rewards.

Some of the clearest writing on the topic is found

i n [1 Corinthians 3:10–15](#). In these verses, Paul envisions two lives. Both are built on the foundation of Christ; that is to say, both are saved. One, however, adds to that foundation with valuable works of gold, silver, and jewels. The other is content to take the cheap route and makes no substantive contribution to the kingdom. His work is comprised of flammable wood, grass, and straw.

On the day of judgment, the nature of each work will be revealed. Paul writes: “That Day will appear with fire, and the fire will test everyone’s work to show what sort of work it was. If the building that has been put on the foundation still stands, the builder will get a reward. But if the building is burned up, the builder will suffer loss. The builder will be saved, but it will be as one who escaped from a fire” ([1 Corinthians 3:13–15](#)).

Please note: Both builders will be saved, but only one will be rewarded. And that reward will be on the basis of works. Exactly what forms the rewards will take, we do not know. I was once counseled to maintain a “reverent agnosticism” on the question. Translated: be peacefully ignorant.

My feeling is that the rewards will come in the form of added responsibility, not added privilege. Such is the indication from [Matthew 25:21](#): “You did well. You are a good and loyal servant. Because you were loyal with small things, I will let you care for much greater things. Come and share my joy with me.” The worker appears to be given more duty rather than more relaxation. But again, we don’t know for

sure.

What we do know is this: We are saved by grace, and we are rewarded according to deeds. Anything beyond that is speculation. In fact, any speculation beyond that is dangerous lest we grow competitive. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

Application

If the nature of your works is going to be revealed, how should that affect your daily behavior? Ask God to help you live a life that is pleasing to him. Then thank him that you are saved by grace alone.

Exploration

Rewards in Heaven—[Matthew 5:12](#); [16:27](#); [2 Timothy 4:8](#).

Following People Is Wrong

Brothers and sisters, in the past I could not talk to you as I talk to spiritual people. I had to talk to you as I would to people without the Spirit—babies in Christ. ²The teaching I gave you was like milk, not solid food, because you were not able to take solid food. And even now you are not ready. ³You are still not spiritual, because there is jealousy and quarreling among you, and this shows that you are not spiritual. You are acting like people of the world. ⁴One of you says, “I belong to Paul,” and another says, “I belong to Apollos.” When you say things like this, you are acting like people of the world.

⁵Is Apollos important? No! Is Paul important? No! We are only servants of God who helped you believe. Each one of us did the work God gave us to do. ⁶I planted the seed, and Apollos watered it. But God is the One who made it grow. ⁷So the one who plants is not important, and the one who waters is not important. Only God, who makes things grow, is important. ⁸The one who plants and the one who waters have the same purpose, and each will be rewarded for his own work. ⁹We are God’s workers, working together; you are like God’s farm, God’s house.

¹⁰Using the gift God gave me, I laid the foundation of that house like an expert builder. Others are building on that foundation, but all people should be careful how they build on it. ¹¹The foundation that has already been laid is Jesus Christ,

and no one can lay down any other foundation. ¹²But if people build on that foundation, using gold, silver, jewels, wood, grass, or straw, ¹³their work will be clearly seen, because the [Day of Judgment](#) will make it visible. That Day will appear with fire, and the fire will test everyone's work to show what sort of work it was. ¹⁴If the building that has been put on the foundation still stands, the builder will get a reward. ¹⁵But if the building is burned up, the builder will suffer loss. The builder will be saved, but it will be as one who escaped from a fire.

¹⁶Don't you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person, because God's temple is holy and you are that temple.

¹⁸Do not fool yourselves. If you think you are wise in this world, you should become a fool so that you can become truly wise, ¹⁹because the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. It is written in the Scriptures, "[He catches those who are wise in their own clever traps.](#)" ²⁰It is also written in the Scriptures, "[The Lord knows what wise people think. He knows their thoughts are just a puff of wind.](#)" ²¹So you should not brag about human leaders. All things belong to you: ²²Paul, Apollos, and Peter; the world, life, death, the present, and the future—all these belong to you. ²³And you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 4:1–21

Situation

Paul hoped church leaders in Corinth would regard him and other apostles as fellow servants of God. Paul sought to correct the church, not abandon or demean it.

Observation

Paul said that ministers were servants accountable to God. Their faithful service would bring praise from God.

Inspiration

The last thing you should worry about is being a nuisance to God. All you need to concentrate on is doing what he tells you to do. Note the sequence of events in [these verses from [John 2](#)]: “Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill the jars with water.’ So they filled the jars to the top. Then he said to them, ‘Now take some out and give it to the master of the feast.’ So they took the water to the master. When he tasted it, the water had become wine” (vv. [7–9](#)).

Did you see the sequence? First the jars were filled with water. Then Jesus instructed the servants to take the water (not the wine) to the master.

Now, if I’m a servant, I don’t want to do that. How is that going to solve the problem? And what is the master going to say when I give him a cup of water? But these servants either had enough naiveté or trust to do what Jesus said, and so the problem was

solved. Note, the water became wine after they had obeyed, not before.

What if the servants had refused? What if they had said, “No way”? Or, to bring the point closer to home, what if *you* refuse? What if you identify the problem, take it to Jesus, and then refuse to do what he says?

That’s possible. After all, God is asking you to take some pretty gutsy steps. Money is tight, but he still asks you to give. You’ve been offended, but he asks you to forgive your offender. Someone else blew the assignment, but he still asks you to be patient. You can’t see God’s face, but he still asks you to pray.

Not commands for the faint of faith. But then again, he wouldn’t ask you to do it if he thought you couldn’t. So go ahead. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

Evaluate your service for God. Are you a faithful steward? Are you using your spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ? God’s first call to you, no matter what you do, is to display faithfulness and obedience to him.

Exploration

Servants of God—[Matthew 20:25–27](#); [Luke 12:41–48](#); [16:1–13](#); [James 1:22–25](#).

Apostles Are Servants of Christ

People should think of us as servants of Christ, the ones God has trusted with his secrets.² Now in this way those who are trusted with something valuable must show they are worthy of that trust.³ As for myself, I do not care if I am judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself.⁴ I know of no wrong I have done, but this does not make me right before the Lord. The Lord is the One who judges me.⁵ So do not judge before the right time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light things that are now hidden in darkness, and will make known the secret purposes of people's hearts. Then God will praise each one of them.

⁶Brothers and sisters, I have used Apollos and myself as examples so you could learn through us the meaning of the saying, "Follow only what is written in the Scriptures." Then you will not be more proud of one person than another.⁷ Who says you are better than others? What do you have that was not given to you? And if it was given to you, why do you brag as if you did not receive it as a gift?

⁸You think you already have everything you need. You think you are rich. You think you have become kings without us. I wish you really were kings so we could be kings together with you.⁹ But it seems to me that God has put us apostles in last place, like those sentenced to die. We are like a show for the whole world to see—angels and people.¹⁰ We are fools for

Christ's sake, but you are very wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You receive honor, but we are shamed. ¹¹Even to this very hour we do not have enough to eat or drink or to wear. We are often beaten, and we have no homes in which to live. ¹²We work hard with our own hands for our food. When people curse us, we bless them. When they hurt us, we put up with it. ¹³When they tell evil lies about us, we speak nice words about them. Even today, we are treated as though we were the garbage of the world—the filth of the earth.

¹⁴I am not trying to make you feel ashamed. I am writing this to give you a warning as my own dear children. ¹⁵For though you may have ten thousand teachers in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Through the Good News I became your father in Christ Jesus, ¹⁶so I beg you, please follow my example. ¹⁷That is why I am sending to you Timothy, my son in the Lord. I love Timothy, and he is faithful. He will help you remember my way of life in Christ Jesus, just as I teach it in all the churches everywhere.

¹⁸Some of you have become proud, thinking that I will not come to you again. ¹⁹But I will come to you very soon if the Lord wishes. Then I will know what the proud ones do, not what they say, ²⁰because the kingdom of God is present not in talk but in power. ²¹Which do you want: that I come to you with punishment or with love and gentleness?

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 5:1–6:20

Situation

Paul never permitted sexually immoral behavior in the church. Yet he remained compassionate when dealing with people.

Observation

Immoral behavior in the church must be handled firmly but sensitively.

Inspiration

So, do not look to prompt lust. Do not touch to stimulate lust. In today's terms, do not undress a man or woman in your mind as you stare at the physical appearance. Do not linger at the magazine rack or rent X-rated videos or watch films that stir your sensual desires. And, ladies, you can cooperate by refusing to wear seductive attire. By saying no to such things, you "tear out your eye" and you "cut off your hand." One of the best ways I have found to obey Jesus' instruction is simply to replace sensual thoughts with wholesome ones ... to occupy my mind with things that are pure, lovely, healthy, and positive rather than lurid, provocative and questionable. Scripture memory works wonders, frankly. I find it impossible to simultaneously lust and repeat verses on moral purity. (From *Simple Faith* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Sexual desire must be directed and disciplined if we are to live as God intended. What is your strategy

for curbing and controlling sexual appetite? Develop a strategy and stick to it. What is the cost of failure to control? Behave as Christ would on this sensitive subject.

Exploration

Immorality—[Judges 3:5–7](#); [18:31](#); [Job 31:1](#); [1 Corinthians 6:9–11](#); [Revelation 9:20–21](#).

Wickedness in the Church

It is actually being said that there is sexual sin among you. And it is a kind that does not happen even among people who do not know God. A man there has his father's wife. ²And you are proud! You should have been filled with sadness so that the man who did this should be put out of your group. ³I am not there with you in person, but I am with you in spirit. And I have already judged the man who did that sin as if I were really there. ⁴When you meet together in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I meet with you in spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵then hand this man over to Satan. So his [sinful self](#) will be destroyed, and his spirit will be saved on the day of the Lord.

⁶Your bragging is not good. You know the saying, "Just a little yeast makes the whole batch of dough rise." ⁷Take out all the old yeast so that you will be a new batch of dough without yeast, which you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸So let us celebrate this feast, but not with the bread that has the old yeast—the yeast of sin and wickedness. Let us celebrate this feast with the bread that has no yeast—the bread of goodness and truth.

⁹I wrote you in my earlier letter not to associate with those who sin sexually. ¹⁰But I did not mean you should not associate with those of this world who sin sexually, or with the greedy, or robbers, or those who worship idols. To get away from them you would have to leave this world. ¹¹I am writing to

tell you that you must not associate with those who call themselves believers in Christ but who sin sexually, or are greedy, or worship idols, or abuse others with words, or get drunk, or cheat people. Do not even eat with people like that.

¹²⁻¹³It is not my business to judge those who are not part of the church. God will judge them. But you must judge the people who are part of the church. The Scripture says, [“You must get rid of the evil person among you.”](#)

Judging Problems Among Christians

When you have something against another Christian, how can you bring yourself to go before judges who are not right with God? Why do you not let God's people decide who is right?

²Surely you know that God's people will judge the world. So if you are to judge the world, are you not able to judge small cases as well? ³You know that in the future we will judge angels, so surely we can judge the ordinary things of this life.

⁴If you have ordinary cases that must be judged, are you going to appoint people as judges who mean nothing to the church?

⁵I say this to shame you. Surely there is someone among you wise enough to judge a complaint between believers. ⁶But now one believer goes to court against another believer—and you do this in front of unbelievers!

⁷The fact that you have lawsuits against each other shows that you are already defeated. Why not let yourselves be wronged? Why not let yourselves be cheated? ⁸But you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do this to other believers!

^{9–10}Surely you know that the people who do wrong will not inherit God's kingdom. Do not be fooled. Those who sin sexually, worship idols, take part in adultery, those who are male prostitutes, or men who have sexual relations with other men, those who steal, are greedy, get drunk, lie about others, or rob—these people will not inherit God's kingdom. ¹¹In the past, some of you were like that, but you were washed clean. You were made holy, and you were made right with God in the name

of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Use Your Bodies for God's Glory

¹²“I am allowed to do all things,” but all things are not good for me to do. “I am allowed to do all things,” but I will not let anything make me its slave. ¹³“Food is for the stomach, and the stomach for food,” but God will destroy them both. The body is not for sexual sin but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. ¹⁴By his power God has raised the Lord from the dead and will also raise us from the dead. ¹⁵Surely you know that your bodies are parts of Christ himself. So I must never take the parts of Christ and join them to a prostitute! ¹⁶It is written in the Scriptures, “The two will become one body.” So you should know that anyone who joins with a prostitute becomes one body with the prostitute. ¹⁷But the one who joins with the Lord is one spirit with the Lord.

¹⁸So run away from sexual sin. Every other sin people do is outside their bodies, but those who sin sexually sin against their own bodies. ¹⁹You should know that your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit who is in you. You have received the Holy Spirit from God. So you do not belong to yourselves, ²⁰because you were bought by God for a price. So honor God with your bodies.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 7:1–40

Situation

Since the residents of Corinth were renowned for godlessness, Paul explained how to honor God in Christian relationships, specifically sexual relations. Paul's teaching contrasted with the majority opinion in Corinth.

Observation

Whether single or married, we must live devoted to the Lord. God's design for marriage will glorify him, but Paul also points out advantages of being unmarried.

Inspiration

Marriage is like a ship going out to sea. Anyone setting sail knows buffeting will come, sometimes externally and other times internally....

When we exchange marriage vows, we vow a lifetime of mutual commitment. Nowhere else on earth is there an agreement quite like marriage vows. These vows are binding, and that is why they are so serious....

An ideal marriage is, of all things, a love triangle. In one corner is the wife; in the other, her husband. At the apex of the triangle is God Himself. The closer our communion which is expressed in loving and abiding with God, the closer our communion with each other. Many marriages are already a triangle. God is not at the apex, however. Instead, the third

party may be money. Or career(s). Or golf. Or another person.

Does this mean that every marital problem has a spiritual solution? Human relationships are not quite that simplistic.

It does mean, however, that if you and your mate allow lifestyle worship to permeate your marriage, you will save yourselves a lot of grief and anxiety and give yourselves a lot of joy and peace. And God will be glorified in you. (From *Lifestyle Worship* by John Garmo)

Application

To honor God in all of our relationships, we must know what the Bible teaches and then obey. Are you familiar with the Bible's teachings on marriage, singleness, and sexuality? How can you take a step closer to God in this vulnerable area? Begin with the verses below and then do a thorough study.

Exploration

Marriage and Singleness—[Genesis 2:24](#); [Matthew 19:3–12](#); [Romans 12:10](#); [1 Corinthians 6:9–10, 18–20](#); [Ephesians 5:21–31](#); [Colossians 3:12–13](#); [1 Timothy 5:5–6](#); [Hebrews 13:4](#); [1 Peter 3:1, 7](#).

About Marriage

Now I will discuss the things you wrote me about. It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.²But because sexual sin is a danger, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband.³The husband should give his wife all that he owes her as his wife. And the wife should give her husband all that she owes him as her husband.⁴The wife does not have full rights over her own body; her husband shares them. And the husband does not have full rights over his own body; his wife shares them.⁵Do not refuse to give your bodies to each other, unless you both agree to stay away from sexual relations for a time so you can give your time to prayer. Then come together again so Satan cannot tempt you because of a lack of self-control.⁶I say this to give you permission to stay away from sexual relations for a time. It is not a command to do so.⁷I wish that everyone were like me, but each person has his own gift from God. One has one gift, another has another gift.

⁸Now for those who are not married and for the widows I say this: It is good for them to stay unmarried as I am.⁹But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry. It is better to marry than to burn with sexual desire.

¹⁰Now I give this command for the married people. (The command is not from me; it is from the Lord.) A wife should not leave her husband.¹¹But if she does leave, she must not marry

again, or she should make up with her husband. Also the husband should not divorce his wife.

¹²For all the others I say this (I am saying this, not the Lord): If a Christian man has a wife who is not a believer, and she is happy to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³And if a Christian woman has a husband who is not a believer, and he is happy to live with her, she must not divorce him. ¹⁴The husband who is not a believer is made holy through his believing wife. And the wife who is not a believer is made holy through her believing husband. If this were not true, your children would not be clean, but now your children are holy.

¹⁵But if those who are not believers decide to leave, let them leave. When this happens, the Christian man or woman is free. But God called us to live in peace. ¹⁶Wife, you don't know; maybe you will save your husband. And husband, you don't know; maybe you will save your wife.

Live as God Called You

¹⁷But in any case each one of you should continue to live the way God has given you to live—the way you were when God called you. This is a rule I make in all the churches. ¹⁸If a man was already circumcised when he was called, he should not undo his circumcision. If a man was without circumcision when he was called, he should not be circumcised. ¹⁹It is not important if a man is circumcised or not. The important thing is obeying God's commands. ²⁰Each one of you should stay the way you were when God called you. ²¹If you were a slave when God called you, do not let that bother you. But if you can be free, then make good use of your freedom. ²²Those who were

slaves when the Lord called them are free persons who belong to the Lord. In the same way, those who were free when they were called are now Christ's slaves. ²³You all were bought at a great price, so do not become slaves of people. ²⁴Brothers and sisters, each of you should stay as you were when you were called, and stay there with God.

Questions About Getting Married

²⁵Now I write about people who are not married. I have no command from the Lord about this; I give my opinion. But I can be trusted, because the Lord has shown me mercy. ²⁶The present time is a time of trouble, so I think it is good for you to stay the way you are. ²⁷If you have a wife, do not try to become free from her. If you are not married, do not try to find a wife. ²⁸But if you decide to marry, you have not sinned. And if a girl who has never married decides to marry, she has not sinned. But those who marry will have trouble in this life, and I want you to be free from trouble.

²⁹Brothers and sisters, this is what I mean: We do not have much time left. So starting now, those who have wives should live as if they had no wives. ³⁰Those who are crying should live as if they were not crying. Those who are happy should live as if they were not happy. Those who buy things should live as if they own nothing. ³¹Those who use the things of the world should live as if they were not using them, because this world in its present form will soon be gone.

³²I want you to be free from worry. A man who is not married is busy with the Lord's work, trying to please the Lord. ³³But a man who is married is busy with things of the world,

trying to please his wife. ³⁴He must think about two things—pleasing his wife and pleasing the Lord. A woman who is not married or a girl who has never married is busy with the Lord's work. She wants to be holy in body and spirit. But a married woman is busy with things of the world, as to how she can please her husband. ³⁵I am saying this to help you, not to limit you. But I want you to live in the right way, to give yourselves fully to the Lord without concern for other things.

³⁶If a man thinks he is not doing the right thing with the girl he is engaged to, if she is almost past the best age to marry and he feels he should marry her, he should do what he wants. They should get married. It is no sin. ³⁷But if a man is sure in his mind that there is no need for marriage, and has his own desires under control, and has decided not to marry the one to whom he is engaged, he is doing the right thing. ³⁸So the man who marries his girl does right, but the man who does not marry will do better.

³⁹A woman must stay with her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry any man she wants, but she must marry in the Lord. ⁴⁰The woman is happier if she does not marry again. This is my opinion, but I believe I also have God's Spirit.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 8:1–9:27

Situation

Some Believers questioned Paul's rights as an apostle. Paul responded by pointing out that the rights apostles claimed were very reasonable, yet he himself didn't claim them. To Paul, nothing was more important than spreading the gospel, so giving up his rights was a worthwhile sacrifice.

Observation

One of our top priorities should be enabling others to understand the gospel. Though God has given us many blessings and rights, we should be willing to give them up if it would help someone to know Christ.

Inspiration

I could see the blond head of "Big Daddy," England's most famous wrestler. He was taking his daily constitutional in the deep, choppy waters of the Mediterranean when suddenly I heard him shout to his daughter, "Jan! Jan! A jellyfish just got me. Help!"

Rolling over in the water, I watched to see how tiny Jan could help her enormous daddy.

"He got me again!" his voice boomed.

Suddenly I was struck. It was as if my right arm touched a high-voltage wire. Spinning violently, my leg caught in a viselike cramp, I glimpsed the tiny blue jellyfish swimming away. Grateful for the safety rope beside me, I hung on, weak with shock and the

incredible stinging, my right calf painfully knotted. It seemed an eternity before I was able to make it back the short distance to the beach, petrified that there might be a second close encounter of the first kind. It wasn't long before ugly welts rose around my right forearm and a livid red line crossed my back. By dinner time the pain had subsided to a bone-deep ache; the swelling lasted six weeks; the scars will last my lifetime.

Later, as "Big Daddy" and I compared stings, he inquired solicitously, "I hope you won't let this keep you from going into the water, will you?" His voice was both compassionate and concerned, and his granite face, with its blue eyes, was friendly and kind. I hadn't the heart to tell him I'd lost all taste for the sea, all trust of its "critters."

But two painful days later, assured by the beachboys and bathers that the sea was clear, I ventured another swim. Suddenly a familiar voice boomed, "Good for you! Didn't let that jellyfish put you off, did you?"

It was "Big Daddy" out for his hourly workout in the deep water, shouting encouragement to this one timid swimmer. "Good girl!" he responded to my wave. "Keep it up!" Here was a professional athlete, a giant of a man, an experienced swimmer, looking out for one of the poorest, least enthusiastic swimmers in the sea.

Life is a lot like the sea: full of unseen hazards and venomous creatures that attack without warning. I kept thinking of baby Christians who, after that first

painful encounter, lose heart. Hurting and fearful, they call it quits unless some more experienced, stronger Christian offers a word of sympathetic advice, a shout of encouragement, and a note of praise.

Long after I'd forgotten the jellyfish attack and its painful aftermath, I remembered those words, "You won't let it keep you from going into the water, will you?" And later, "Good for you! Keep it up!"

Has anybody around you been stung lately? (From *Legacy of a Pack Rat* by Ruth Bell Graham)

Application

Our culture encourages us to stand up for ourselves and demand our rights, even at the expense of others. Yet Jesus and the New Testament writers repeatedly point to the joy we receive from humility and self-sacrifice. Why not give up your right for free time or watching a movie and use the time to share with a new Christian a lesson you have learned recently.

Exploration

Self-Sacrifice—[Micah 6:8](#); [Matthew 16:24–25](#); [18:4](#); [Mark 10:28](#); [Luke 14:33](#); [1 Corinthians 10:24, 33](#); [2 Corinthians 8:9](#); [Philippians 2:4–8](#); [3:8](#).

About Food Offered to Idols

Now I will write about meat that is sacrificed to idols. We know that “we all have knowledge.” Knowledge puffs you up with pride, but love builds up. ²If you think you know something, you do not yet know anything as you should. ³But if any person loves God, that person is known by God.

⁴So this is what I say about eating meat sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is really nothing in the world, and we know there is only one God. ⁵Even though there are things called gods, in heaven or on earth (and there are many “gods” and “lords”), ⁶for us there is only one God—our Father. All things came from him, and we live for him. And there is only one Lord—Jesus Christ. All things were made through him, and we also were made through him.

⁷But not all people know this. Some people are still so used to idols that when they eat meat, they still think of it as being sacrificed to an idol. Because their conscience is weak, when they eat it, they feel guilty. ⁸But food will not bring us closer to God. Refusing to eat does not make us less pleasing to God, and eating does not make us better in God’s sight.

⁹But be careful that your freedom does not cause those who are weak in faith to fall into sin. ¹⁰You have “knowledge,” so you eat in an [idol’s temple](#). But someone who is weak in faith might see you eating there and be encouraged to eat meat sacrificed to idols while thinking it is wrong to do so. ¹¹This

weak believer for whom Christ died is ruined because of your “knowledge.”¹² When you sin against your brothers and sisters in Christ like this and cause them to do what they feel is wrong, you are also sinning against Christ.¹³ So if the food I eat causes them to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again so that I will not cause any of them to sin.

Paul Is like the Other Apostles

I am a free man. I am an apostle. I have seen Jesus our Lord. You people are all an example of my work in the Lord. ²If others do not accept me as an apostle, surely you do, because you are proof that I am an apostle in the Lord.

³This is the answer I give people who want to judge me: ⁴Do we not have the right to eat and drink? ⁵Do we not have the right to bring a believing wife with us when we travel as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Peter? ⁶Are Barnabas and I the only ones who must work to earn our living? ⁷No soldier ever serves in the army and pays his own salary. No one ever plants a vineyard without eating some of the grapes. No person takes care of a flock without drinking some of the milk.

⁸I do not say this by human authority; God's law also says the same thing. ⁹It is written in the law of Moses: ["When an ox is working in the grain, do not cover its mouth to keep it from eating."](#) When God said this, was he thinking only about oxen? No. ¹⁰He was really talking about us. Yes, that Scripture was written for us, because it goes on to say: "The one who plows and the one who works in the grain should hope to get some of the grain for their work." ¹¹Since we planted spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we should harvest from you some things for this life? ¹²If others have the right to get something from you, surely we have this right, too. But we do not use it. No, we put up with everything ourselves so that we will not keep anyone from believing the Good News of Christ. ¹³Surely

you know that those who work at the Temple get their food from the Temple, and those who serve at the altar get part of what is offered at the altar. ¹⁴In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who tell the Good News should get their living from this work.

¹⁵But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this now to get anything from you. I would rather die than to have my reason for bragging taken away. ¹⁶Telling the Good News does not give me any reason for bragging. Telling the Good News is my duty—something I must do. And how terrible it will be for me if I do not tell the Good News. ¹⁷If I preach because it is my own choice, I have a reward. But if I preach and it is not my choice to do so, I am only doing the duty that was given to me. ¹⁸So what reward do I get? This is my reward: that when I tell the Good News I can offer it freely. I do not use my full rights in my work of preaching the Good News.

¹⁹I am free and belong to no one. But I make myself a slave to all people to win as many as I can. ²⁰To the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews. I myself am not ruled by the law. But to those who are ruled by the law I became like a person who is ruled by the law. I did this to win those who are ruled by the law. ²¹To those who are without the law I became like a person who is without the law. I did this to win those people who are without the law. (But really, I am not without God's law—I am ruled by Christ's law.) ²²To those who are weak, I became weak so I could win the weak. I have become all things to all people so I could save some of them in any way possible. ²³I do all this because of the Good News and so I can share in its blessings.

²⁴You know that in a race all the runners run, but only one

gets the prize. So run to win! ²⁵All those who compete in the games use self-control so they can win a crown. That crown is an earthly thing that lasts only a short time, but our crown will never be destroyed. ²⁶So I do not run without a goal. I fight like a boxer who is hitting something—not just the air. ²⁷I treat my body hard and make it my slave so that I myself will not be disqualified after I have preached to others.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 10:1–11:1

Situation

Paul taught the Corinthians about the dangers of idol worship and petty arguments using lessons from history and faith.

Observation

In everything that we do, whether we relate to each other or worship, we ought to give glory to God. Though mindful not to offend other Christians, we should be focused on bringing praise to God.

Inspiration

Loving others requires us to express our liberty wisely. In other words, love must rule. I'm not my own, I'm bought with a price. My goal is not to please me, it is to please my Lord Jesus, my God. It is not to please you, it is to please my Lord. The same is true for you. So the bottom line is this: I don't adapt my life according to what you may say, I adapt my life according to the basis of my love for you because I answer to Christ. And so do you.

... Even if you personally would not do what another is doing, let it be. And you who feel the freedom to do so, don't flaunt it or mock those who disagree. We are in the construction business, not destruction. And let's all remember that God's big-picture kingdom plan is not being shaped by small things like what one person prefers over another, but by large things, like righteousness and peace and joy.

(From *Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

What is your motivation for your daily tasks? Who gets the glory—you or God? Even the smallest decisions and the briefest interpersonal encounters should be done so that God receives glory.

Exploration

Bringing Glory to God—[Psalm 22:23](#); [Matthew 5:16](#); [John 15:8](#); [Romans 15:6](#); [1 Corinthians 6:20](#).

Warnings from Israel's Past

Brothers and sisters, I want you to know what happened to our ancestors who followed Moses. They were all under the cloud and all went through the sea.²They were all baptized as followers of Moses in the cloud and in the sea.³They all ate the same spiritual food,⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.⁵But God was not pleased with most of them, so they died in the desert.

⁶And these things happened as examples for us, to stop us from wanting evil things as those people did. ⁷Do not worship idols, as some of them did. Just as it is written in the Scriptures: [“They sat down to eat and drink, and then they got up and sinned sexually.”](#) ⁸We must not take part in sexual sins, as some of them did. In one day twenty-three thousand of them died because of their sins. ⁹We must not test Christ as some of them did; they were killed by snakes. ¹⁰Do not complain as some of them did; they were killed by the angel that destroys.

¹¹The things that happened to those people are examples. They were written down to teach us, because we live in a time when all these things of the past have reached their goal. ¹²If you think you are strong, you should be careful not to fall. ¹³The only temptation that has come to you is that which everyone has. But you can trust God, who will not permit you

to be tempted more than you can stand. But when you are tempted, he will also give you a way to escape so that you will be able to stand it.

¹⁴So, my dear friends, run away from the worship of idols.

¹⁵I am speaking to you as to intelligent people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶We give thanks for the [cup of blessing](#), which is a sharing in the blood of Christ. And the bread that we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

¹⁷Because there is one loaf of bread, we who are many are one body, because we all share that one loaf.

¹⁸Think about the Israelites: Do not those who eat the sacrifices share in the altar? ¹⁹I do not mean that the food sacrificed to an idol is important. I do not mean that an idol is anything at all. ²⁰But I say that what is sacrificed to idols is offered to demons, not to God. And I do not want you to share anything with demons. ²¹You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons also. You cannot share in the Lord's table and the table of demons. ²²Are we trying to make the Lord jealous? We are not stronger than he is, are we?

How to Use Christian Freedom

²³“We are allowed to do all things,” but all things are not good for us to do. “We are allowed to do all things,” but not all things help others grow stronger. ²⁴Do not look out only for yourselves. Look out for the good of others also.

²⁵Eat any meat that is sold in the meat market. Do not ask questions to see if it is meat you think is wrong to eat. ²⁶You may eat it, [“because the earth belongs to the Lord, and everything in it.”](#)

²⁷Those who are not believers may invite you to eat with them. If you want to go, eat anything that is put before you. Do not ask questions to see if you think it might be wrong to eat. ²⁸But if anyone says to you, “That food was offered to idols,” do not eat it. Do not eat it because of that person who told you and because eating it might be thought to be wrong. ²⁹I don’t mean you think it is wrong, but the other person might. But why, you ask, should my freedom be judged by someone else’s conscience? ³⁰If I eat the meal with thankfulness, why am I criticized because of something for which I thank God?

³¹The answer is, if you eat or drink, or if you do anything, do it all for the glory of God. ³²Never do anything that might hurt others—Jews, Greeks, or God’s church—³³just as I, also, try to please everybody in every way. I am not trying to do what is good for me but what is good for most people so they can be saved.

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 11:2-34

Situation

The Corinthians allowed some parts of their worship services to become times of selfishness and bickering. Lack of respect and concern for others undermined their gathering for worship.

Observation

The Lord's Supper was to be a celebration marked by unity, not dissension.

Inspiration

God gave Martha a bass drum of service. God gave Mary a flute for praise. And God gave Lazarus a trumpet. And he stood on center stage and played it.

God still gives trumpets. God still calls people from the pits. God still gives pinch-me-I'm-dreaming, too-good-to-be-true testimonies. But not everyone has a dramatic testimony. Who wants a band full of trumpets?

Some convert the lost. Some encourage the saved. And some keep the movement in step. All are needed.

If God has called you to be a Martha, then serve! Remind the rest of us that there is evangelism in feeding the poor and there is worship in nursing the sick.

If God has called you to be a Mary, then worship! Remind the rest of us that we don't have to be busy to be holy. Urge us with your example to put down

our clipboards and megaphones and be quiet in worship.

If God has called you to be a Lazarus, then testify. Remind the rest of us that we, too, have a story to tell. We, too, have neighbors who are lost. We, too, have died and been resurrected.

Each of us has our place at the table.

Except one. There was one at Martha's house who didn't find his place. Though he had been near Jesus longer than any of the others, he was furthest in his faith. His name was Judas. He was a thief. When Mary poured the perfume he feigned spirituality. "The perfume could have been sold and given to the poor," he said. But Jesus knew Judas's heart, and Jesus defended Mary's worship. Years later, John, too, knew Judas's heart, and John explained that Judas was a thief ([John 12:6](#)). And all these years he had been dipping his hand in the treasury. The reason he wanted the perfume to be sold and the money put in the treasury was so that he could get his hands on it.

What a sad ending to a beautiful story. But what an appropriate ending. For in every church there are those like Martha who take time to serve. There are those like Mary who take time to worship. There are those like Lazarus who take time to testify.

And there are those like Judas who take, take, take, and never give in return. Are you a Judas? I ask the question carefully, yet honestly. Are you near Christ but far from his heart? Are you at the dinner with a sour soul? Are you always criticizing the gifts

of others yet seldom, if ever, giving your own? Are you benefiting from the church while never giving to it? Do others give sacrificially while you give miserly? Are you a Judas?

Do you take, take, take, and never give? If so, you are the Judas in this story.

If you are a Martha, be strengthened. God sees your service.

If you are a Mary, be encouraged. God receives your worship.

If you are a Lazarus, be strong. God honors your conviction.

But if you are a Judas, be warned. God sees your selfishness. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

God knows what you are bringing to the table. You can't fool him. Ask the leaders of your local church how you can increase your service. Worship the Lord in spirit and truth. Don't let a difference in worship styles keep you from worshipping the Lord with all your heart, soul, and spirit.

Exploration

Worship—[Exodus 34:14](#); [Luke 4:8](#); [John 4:20–24](#); [Philippians 3:3](#).

Being Under Authority

²I praise you because you remember me in everything, and you follow closely the teachings just as I gave them to you. ³But I want you to understand this: The head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is [the man](#), and the head of Christ is God. ⁴Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered brings shame to his head. ⁵But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered brings shame to her head. She is the same as a woman who has her head shaved. ⁶If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off. But since it is shameful for a woman to cut off her hair or to shave her head, she should cover her head. ⁷But a man should not cover his head, because he is the likeness and glory of God. But woman is man's glory. ⁸Man did not come from woman, but woman came from man. ⁹And man was not made for woman, but woman was made for man. ¹⁰So that is why a woman should have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

¹¹But in the Lord women are not independent of men, and men are not independent of women. ¹²This is true because woman came from man, but also man is born from woman. But everything comes from God. ¹³Decide this for yourselves: Is it right for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴Even nature itself teaches you that wearing long hair is shameful for a man. ¹⁵But long hair is a woman's glory. Long hair is given to her as a covering. ¹⁶Some people may still want

to argue about this, but I would add that neither we nor the churches of God have any other practice.

The Lord's Supper

¹⁷In the things I tell you now I do not praise you, because when you come together you do more harm than good. ¹⁸First, I hear that when you meet together as a church you are divided, and I believe some of this. ¹⁹(It is necessary to have differences among you so that it may be clear which of you really have God's approval.) ²⁰When you come together, you are not really eating the [Lord's Supper](#). ²¹This is because when you eat, each person eats without waiting for the others. Some people do not get enough to eat, while others have too much to drink. ²²You can eat and drink in your own homes! You seem to think God's church is not important, and you embarrass those who are poor. What should I tell you? Should I praise you? I do not praise you for doing this.

²³The teaching I gave you is the same teaching I received from the Lord: On the night when the Lord Jesus was handed over to be killed, he took bread ²⁴and gave thanks for it. Then he broke the bread and said, "This is my body; it is for you. Do this to remember me." ²⁵In the same way, after they ate, Jesus took the cup. He said, "This cup is the new agreement that is sealed with the blood of my death. When you drink this, do it to remember me." ²⁶Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup you are telling others about the Lord's death until he comes.

²⁷So a person who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in a way that is not worthy of it will be guilty of sinning

against the body and the blood of the Lord. ²⁸Look into your own hearts before you eat the bread and drink the cup, ²⁹because all who eat the bread and drink the cup without recognizing the body eat and drink judgment against themselves. ³⁰That is why many in your group are sick and weak, and many have died. ³¹But if we judged ourselves in the right way, God would not judge us. ³²But when the Lord judges us, he punishes us so that we will not be destroyed along with the world.

³³So my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. ³⁴Anyone who is too hungry should eat at home so that in meeting together you will not bring God's judgment on yourselves. I will tell you what to do about the other things when I come.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 12:1–31a

Situation

The Corinthians struggled with petty disagreements and offenses. Once again, Paul emphasized the need for unity in the church.

Observation

Though the church is a universal body, the gifts and skills of each Christian are unique. We can achieve unity by appreciating different abilities in others and empathizing with each other's joys and sorrows.

Inspiration

Abraham Lincoln once said, characteristically: "I am sorry for the man who can't feel the whip when it is laid on the other man's back...."

Jesus wept tears of compassion at the graveside of a friend. He mourned over Jerusalem because as a city it had lost its appreciation of the things of the spirit. His great heart was sensitive to the needs of others....

Tears shed for self are tears of weakness, but tears of love shed for others are a sign of strength. I am not as sensitive as I ought to be until I am able to "weep o'er the erring one and lift up the fallen." And until I have learned the value of compassionately sharing others' sorrow, distress, and misfortune, I cannot know real happiness.

(From *The Secret of Happiness* by Billy Graham)

Application

Are there fellow Believers around you who need someone to share in their sorrow or joy? Do you have trouble being happy with some, or sad with others? Look for challenging opportunities to share the emotions of other people's lives.

Exploration

Sympathy for Others—[Isaiah 58:7](#); [Acts 20:35](#); [Romans 15:1](#); [Galatians 6:2](#); [Hebrews 13:3](#); [James 1:27](#).

Gifts from the Holy Spirit

Now, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand about spiritual gifts. ²You know the way you lived before you were believers. You let yourselves be influenced and led away to worship idols—things that could not speak. ³So I want you to understand that no one who is speaking with the help of God's Spirit says, "Jesus be cursed." And no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," without the help of the Holy Spirit.

⁴There are different kinds of gifts, but they are all from the same Spirit. ⁵There are different ways to serve but the same Lord to serve. ⁶And there are different ways that God works through people but the same God. God works in all of us in everything we do. ⁷Something from the Spirit can be seen in each person, for the common good. ⁸The Spirit gives one person the ability to speak with wisdom, and the same Spirit gives another the ability to speak with knowledge. ⁹The same Spirit gives faith to one person. And, to another, that one Spirit gives gifts of healing. ¹⁰The Spirit gives to another person the power to do miracles, to another the ability to prophesy. And he gives to another the ability to know the difference between good and evil spirits. The Spirit gives one person the ability to speak in different kinds of [languages](#) and to another the ability to interpret those languages. ¹¹One Spirit, the same Spirit, does all these things, and the Spirit decides what to give each person.

Christ Through the Bible

We Are One in Christ

There was some dice-throwing that went on at the foot of the cross... I've wondered what that scene must have looked like to Jesus. As he looked downward past his bloody feet at the circle of gamblers, what did he think? What emotions did he feel? He must have been amazed. Here are common soldiers witnessing the world's most uncommon event and they don't know it. As far as they're concerned, it's just another Friday morning and he is just another criminal. "Come on, hurry up; it's my turn!"

"All right, all right—this throw is for the sandals."

Casting lots for the possessions of Christ. Heads ducked. Eyes downward. Cross forgotten.

The symbolism is striking. Do you see it?

It makes me think of us. The religious. Those who claim heritage at the cross. I'm thinking of all of us. Every believer in the land. The stuffy. The loose. The strict. The simple. Upper church. Lower church. "Spirit-filled." Millennialists. Evangelical. Political. Mystical. Literal. Cynical. Robes. Collars. Three-piece suits. Born-againers. Ameners.

I'm thinking of us.

I'm thinking that we aren't so unlike those soldiers. (I'm sorry to say.)

We, too, play games at the foot of the cross. We compete for members. We scramble for status. We

deal out judgments and condemnations. Competition. Selfishness. Personal gain. It's all there. We don't like what the other did so we take the sandal we won and walk away in a huff.

So close to the timbers yet so far from the blood.

We are so close to the world's most uncommon event, but we act like common crapshooters huddled in bickering groups and fighting over silly opinions.

How many pulpit hours have been wasted on preaching the trivial? How many churches have tumbled at the throes of minuscuity? How many leaders have saddled their pet peeves, drawn their swords of bitterness and launched into battle against brethren over issues that are not worth discussing?

So close to the cross but so far from the Christ.

We specialize in "I am right" rallies. We write books about what the other does wrong. We major in finding gossip and become experts in unveiling weaknesses. We split into little huddles and then, God forbid, we split again....

Are our differences that divisive? Are our opinions that obtrusive? Are our walls that wide? Is it *that* impossible to find a common cause?

"May they all be one," Jesus prayed.

One. Not one in groups of two thousand. But one in One. *One* church. *One* faith. *One* Lord. Not Baptist, not Methodist, not Adventist. Just Christian. No denominations. No hierarchies. No traditions. Just Christ. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

The Body of Christ Works Together

¹²A person's body is only one thing, but it has many parts. Though there are many parts to a body, all those parts make only one body. Christ is like that also. ¹³Some of us are Jews, and some are Greeks. Some of us are slaves, and some are free. But we were all baptized into one body through one Spirit. And we were all made to share in the one Spirit.

¹⁴The human body has many parts. ¹⁵The foot might say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not part of the body." But saying this would not stop the foot from being a part of the body. ¹⁶The ear might say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not part of the body." But saying this would not stop the ear from being a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, it would not be able to hear. If the whole body were an ear, it would not be able to smell. ¹⁸⁻¹⁹If each part of the body were the same part, there would be no body. But truly God put all the parts, each one of them, in the body as he wanted them. ²⁰So then there are many parts, but only one body.

²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the foot, "I don't need you!" ²²No! Those parts of the body that seem to be the weaker are really necessary. ²³And the parts of the body we think are less deserving are the parts to which we give the most honor. We give special respect to the parts we want to hide. ²⁴The more respectable parts of our body need no special care. But God put the body together and gave more honor to the parts that

need it ²⁵so our body would not be divided. God wanted the different parts to care the same for each other. ²⁶If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it. Or if one part of our body is honored, all the other parts share its honor.

²⁷Together you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of that body. ²⁸In the church God has given a place first to apostles, second to prophets, and third to teachers. Then God has given a place to those who do miracles, those who have gifts of healing, those who can help others, those who are able to govern, and those who can speak in different [languages](#). ²⁹Not all are apostles. Not all are prophets. Not all are teachers. Not all do miracles. ³⁰Not all have gifts of healing. Not all speak in different languages. Not all interpret those languages. ³¹But you should truly want to have the greater gifts.

Love Is the Greatest Gift

And now I will show you the best way of all.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13

Situation

The Corinthians compared spiritual gifts and ministries. They rated a person's value to the church by that person's gifts.

Observation

All spiritual gifts are equally valuable to the church. But love is even greater than all of them combined.

Inspiration

Paul used the metaphor of the body to illustrate the interdependence of individual Christians ([1 Corinthians 12:12-13](#)). When one part of our physical body suffers, the other parts suffer; when one part accomplishes its duty, it is always a cooperative effort....

This interdependence results in a cooperative concern for the various parts of the body... . Similarly, we as Christians are connected in Christ. When one Christian fails, we share his failure and care for his needs. When he is restored to fellowship, we rejoice with him.

We can't afford to believe that it doesn't matter whether we are actively involved in the struggles against the world or whether we are drifting aimlessly with the tide. When we lose our passion for the church (Christ's Body) and are preoccupied with our own concerns, our witness will be submerged. We

will drown in the icy waters of indifference....

The same is true in the local church. A church preoccupied with its own differences or torn by schism is a good candidate for ultimate oblivion....

Differences must be held without bitterness, self-righteousness, and pride. In this way, a church can work out its differences and exercise discipline without diminishing its impact on the world. (From *How in the World Can I Be Holy?* by Erwin W. Lutzer)

Application

Teamwork is important, whether on the job or in a ministry. How are you doing as a team player? Are you using your spiritual gifts as well as you can? (If you're not sure about your gift, ask the Lord what contribution you can make.)

Exploration

Harmony of Believers—[Leviticus 19:18](#); [Psalms 133:1](#); [Romans 15:5–7](#); [1 Corinthians 1:10](#); [Philippians 2:1–2](#); [1 Peter 3:8](#).

I may speak in different [languages](#) of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal. ²I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing. ³I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned.[n](#) But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

NewLife in Christ

Love does not count up wrongs that have been done.—[1 Corinthians 13:5](#)

Don't Keep a List of Wrongs

Do you remember the story about the man who was bitten by the dog? When he learned the dog had rabies, he began making a list. The doctor told him there was no need to make a will, that rabies could be cured. “Oh, I’m not making a will,” he replied. “I’m making a list of all the people I want to bite.”

Couldn't we all make such a list? You've already learned, haven't you, that friends aren't always friendly? Neighbors aren't always neighborly? Some workers never work, and some bosses are always bossy?

You've already learned, haven't you, that a

promise made is not always a promise kept? Just because someone is called your dad, that doesn't mean he will act like your dad. Even though they said "yes" on the altar, they may say "no" in the marriage.

You've already learned, haven't you, that we tend to fight back? To bite back? To keep lists and snarl lips and growl at people we don't like?

God wants your list. He inspired one servant to write, "Love does not count up wrongs that have been done"([1 Corinthians 13:5](#)). He wants us to leave the list at the cross.

Not easy.

"Just look what they did to me!" we defy and point to our hurts.

"Just look what I did for you," he reminds and points to the cross.

Paul said it this way: "If someone does wrong to you, forgive that person because the Lord forgave you" ([Colossians 3:13](#)).

You and I are commanded—not urged, *commanded*—to keep no list of wrongs.

Besides, do you really want to keep one? Do you really want to catalog all your mistreatments? Do you really want to growl and snap your way through life? God doesn't want you to either. Give up your sins before they infect you and your bitterness before it incites you, and give God your anxiety before it inhibits you. Give God your anxious moments. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Question: Who do you need to forgive before bitterness consumes you?

For more on [“New Life in Christ.”](#)

⁴Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous, it does not brag, and it is not proud. ⁵Love is not rude, is not selfish, and does not get upset with others. Love does not count up wrongs that have been done. ⁶Love is not happy with evil but is happy with the truth. ⁷Love patiently accepts all things. It always trusts, always hopes, and always remains strong.

⁸Love never ends. There are gifts of prophecy, but they will be ended. There are gifts of speaking in different languages, but those gifts will stop. There is the gift of knowledge, but it will come to an end. ⁹The reason is that our knowledge and our ability to prophesy are not perfect. ¹⁰But when perfection comes, the things that are not perfect will end. ¹¹When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I stopped those childish ways. ¹²It is the same with us. Now we see a dim reflection, as if we were looking into a mirror, but then we shall see clearly. Now I know only a part, but then I will know fully, as God has known me. ¹³So these three things continue forever: faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 14:1-40

Situation

The Corinthian Believers were so impressed by the glitz and wonder of spiritual gifts that they lost their perspective and forgot the purpose of these gifts.

Observation

Spiritual gifts glorify God and build up the Body of Christ. Gifts should never be misused, envied, or cause division.

Inspiration

The mark of Spirit-filled men and women is the fruit they bear. Fruit is the standard by which our walk with God can be measured. The Bible is crystal clear at this point. Yet it never ceases to amaze me how prone believers are to substitute other measuring devices or standards....

The two most popular substitutes for fruit are (1) spiritual gifts and (2) natural talent....

It's not hard to figure out why gifts and talents are so readily substituted for fruit. It's easier to exercise a gift than to walk in the Spirit. Not only that, certain gifts and talents have a high entertainment value. When exploited in the right way, gifts and talents can be real crowd pleasers... . But none of these things are indications that a man or woman is under the control of the Holy Spirit....

Giftedness does not determine greatness in God's

book. Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruits.” Not by how anointed they may appear to be. Not by the miracles they perform. Not by the revelation knowledge they claim to have. You will recognize God’s hand of blessing on men and women by the fruit they bear. A man who claims to be doing miracles by the power of the Spirit but who exhibits no fruit of the Spirit in his life is either lying or confused... . (From *The Wonderful Spirit-Filled Life* by Charles Stanley)

Application

What is your priority: becoming like Christ or getting a chance to use your gifts? Your gifts, talents, and abilities should build up other Believers and bring unity in the church. If they’re not quite doing that, check your attitudes.

Exploration

Spiritual Gifts and Unity—[Romans 12:3–8; 14:19; 15:1–6; 2 Corinthians 12:19–20; Galatians 5:22–26; Ephesians 4:3–7, 11–16.](#)

Desire Spiritual Gifts

You should seek after love, and you should truly want to have the spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. ²I will explain why. Those who have the gift of speaking in different [languages](#) are not speaking to people; they are speaking to God. No one understands them; they are speaking secret things through the Spirit. ³But those who prophesy are speaking to people to give them strength, encouragement, and comfort. ⁴The ones who speak in different languages are helping only themselves, but those who prophesy are helping the whole church. ⁵I wish all of you had the gift of speaking in different kinds of languages, but more, I wish you would prophesy. Those who prophesy are greater than those who can only speak in different languages—unless someone is there who can explain what is said so that the whole church can be helped.

⁶Brothers and sisters, will it help you if I come to you speaking in different languages? No! It will help you only if I bring you a new truth or some new knowledge, or prophecy, or teaching. ⁷It is the same as with lifeless things that make sounds—like a flute or a harp. If they do not make clear musical notes, you will not know what is being played. ⁸And in a war, if the trumpet does not give a clear sound, who will prepare for battle? ⁹It is the same with you. Unless you speak clearly with your tongue, no one can understand what you are saying. You

will be talking into the air! ¹⁰It may be true that there are all kinds of sounds in the world, and none is without meaning.

¹¹But unless I understand the meaning of what someone says to me, I will be a foreigner to him, and he will be a foreigner to me. ¹²It is the same with you. Since you want spiritual gifts very much, seek most of all to have the gifts that help the church grow stronger.

¹³The one who has the gift of speaking in a different language should pray for the gift to interpret what is spoken.

¹⁴If I pray in a different language, my spirit is praying, but my mind does nothing. ¹⁵So what should I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind. I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. ¹⁶If you praise God with your spirit, those persons there without understanding cannot say [amen](#) to your prayer of thanks, because they do not know what you are saying. ¹⁷You may be thanking God in a good way, but the other person is not helped.

¹⁸I thank God that I speak in different kinds of languages more than all of you. ¹⁹But in the church meetings I would rather speak five words I understand in order to teach others than thousands of words in a different language.

²⁰Brothers and sisters, do not think like children. In evil things be like babies, but in your thinking you should be like adults. ²¹It is written in the Scriptures:

“With people who use strange words and foreign languages

I will speak to these people.

But even then they will not listen to me,”

says the Lord.

²²So the gift of speaking in different kinds of languages is a proof for those who do not believe, not for those who do believe. And prophecy is for people who believe, not for those who do not believe. ²³Suppose the whole church meets together and everyone speaks in different languages. If some people come in who do not understand or do not believe, they will say you are crazy. ²⁴But suppose everyone is prophesying and some people come in who do not believe or do not understand. If everyone is prophesying, their sin will be shown to them, and they will be judged by all that they hear. ²⁵The secret things in their hearts will be made known. So they will bow down and worship God saying, “Truly, God is with you.”

Meetings Should Help the Church

²⁶So, brothers and sisters, what should you do? When you meet together, one person has a song, and another has a teaching. Another has a new truth from God. Another speaks in a different [language](#), and another person interprets that language. The purpose of all these things should be to help the church grow strong. ²⁷When you meet together, if anyone speaks in a different language, it should be only two, or not more than three, who speak. They should speak one after the other, and someone else should interpret. ²⁸But if there is no interpreter, then those who speak in a different language should be quiet in the church meeting. They should speak only to themselves and to God.

²⁹Only two or three prophets should speak, and the others

should judge what they say. ³⁰If a message from God comes to another person who is sitting, the first speaker should stop. ³¹You can all prophesy one after the other. In this way all the people can be taught and encouraged. ³²The spirits of prophets are under the control of the prophets themselves. ³³God is not a God of confusion but a God of peace.

As is true in all the churches of God's people, ³⁴women should keep quiet in the church meetings. They are not allowed to speak, but they must yield to this rule as the law says. ³⁵If they want to learn something, they should ask their own husbands at home. It is shameful for a woman to speak in the church meeting. ³⁶Did God's teaching come from you? Or are you the only ones to whom it has come?

³⁷Those who think they are prophets or spiritual persons should understand that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. ³⁸Those who ignore this will be ignored by God.

³⁹So my brothers and sisters, you should truly want to prophesy. But do not stop people from using the gift of speaking in different kinds of languages. ⁴⁰But let everything be done in a right and orderly way.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 15:1-58

Situation

Because of their culture, the Corinthians did not believe in the resurrection. Instead, they thought only the soul would rise from the dead, leaving behind the body.

Observation

Because Jesus rose from the dead, we have hope, salvation, victory, and purpose. We can be confident in faith and diligent in work for him.

Inspiration

A sudden breeze, surprisingly warm, whistles through the leaves scattering dust from the lifeless form. And with the breath of fresh air comes the difference. Winging on the warm wind is his image. Laughter is laid in the sculpted cheeks. A reservoir of tears is stored in the soul. A sprinkling of twinkle for the eyes. Poetry for the spirit. Logic. Loyalty. Like leaves on an autumn breeze, they float and land and are absorbed. His gifts become a part of him.

His Majesty smiles at his image. "It is good."

The eyes open.

Oneness. Creator and created walking on the river bank. Laughter. Purity. Innocent joy. Life unending.

Then the tree.

The struggle. The snake. The lie. The enticement. Heart torn, lured. Soul drawn to pleasure, to independence, to importance. Inner agony. Whose

will?

The choice. Death of innocence. Entrance of death. The fall.

Tearstains mingling with fruit-stains....

[Then,] The Quest.

“Abram, you will father a nation! And Abram—tell the people I love them.”

“Moses, you will deliver my people! And Moses—tell the people I love them.”

“Joshua, you will lead the chosen ones! And Joshua—tell the people I love them.”

“David, you will reign over the people! And David—tell the people I love them.”

“Jeremiah, you will bear tidings of bondage! But Jeremiah, remind my children, remind my children that I love them.” ...

... God watching, never turning, ever loving, ever yearning for the Garden again....

[Finally,] Empty throne. Spirit descending. Hushed angels.

A girl ... a womb ... an egg.

The same Divine Artist again forms a body. This time his own. Fleshly divinity. Skin layered on spirit. Omnipotence with hair. Toenails. Knuckles. Molars. Kneecaps. Once again he walks with man. Yet the Garden is now thorny. Thorns that cut, thorns that poison, thorns that remain lodged, leaving bitter wounds. Disharmony. Sickness. Betrayal. Fear. Guilt....

And once again, a tree.

Once again the struggle. The snake. The

enticement. Heart torn, lured. Once again the question, “Whose will?”

Then the choice. Tearstains mingle with bloodstains. Relationship restored. Bridge erected.

Once again he smiles. “It is good.”

“For just as death came by the means of a man, in the same way the rising from death comes by means of a man. For just as all people die because of their union with Adam, in the same way all will be raised to life because of their union with Christ” ([1 Corinthians 15:21–22](#), TEV). (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

Be confident today in your faith because of what Jesus has done. He broke the power of death so that you might have eternal life with him.

Exploration

Confidence—[John 6:40](#); [11:25](#); [Romans 1:16](#); [Galatians 5:1](#); [6:9](#); [Philippians 1:6](#); [2 Timothy 1:8–10](#); [Hebrews 4:16](#); [11:1](#); [1 John 2:28](#).

The Good News About Christ

Now, brothers and sisters, I want you to remember the Good News I brought to you. You received this Good News and continue strong in it.² And you are being saved by it if you continue believing what I told you. If you do not, then you believed for nothing.

³I passed on to you what I received, of which this was most important: that Christ died for our sins, as the Scriptures say; ⁴that he was buried and was raised to life on the third day as the Scriptures say; ⁵and that he was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. ⁶After that, Jesus was seen by more than five hundred of the believers at the same time. Most of them are still living today, but some have died. ⁷Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. ⁸Last of all he was seen by me—as by a person not born at the normal time. ⁹All the other apostles are greater than I am. I am not even good enough to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But God's grace has made me what I am, and his grace to me was not wasted. I worked harder than all the other apostles. (But it was not I really; it was God's grace that was with me.) ¹¹So if I preached to you or the other apostles preached to you, we all preach the same thing, and this is what you believed.

We Will Be Raised from the Dead

¹²Now since we preached that Christ was raised from the dead, why do some of you say that people will not be raised from the dead? ¹³If no one is ever raised from the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is worth nothing, and your faith is worth nothing. ¹⁵And also, we are guilty of lying about God, because we testified of him that he raised Christ from the dead. But if people are not raised from the dead, then God never raised Christ. ¹⁶If the dead are not raised, Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith has nothing to it; you are still guilty of your sins. ¹⁸And those in Christ who have already died are lost. ¹⁹If our hope in Christ is for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone else in the world.

²⁰But Christ has truly been raised from the dead—the first one and proof that those who sleep in death will also be raised. ²¹Death has come because of what one man did, but the rising from death also comes because of one man. ²²In Adam all of us die. In the same way, in Christ all of us will be made alive again. ²³But everyone will be raised to life in the right order. Christ was first to be raised. When Christ comes again, those who belong to him will be raised to life, ²⁴and then the end will come. At that time Christ will destroy all rulers, authorities, and powers, and he will hand over the kingdom to God the Father. ²⁵Christ must rule until he puts all enemies under his control. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed will be death. ²⁷The Scripture says that [God put all things under his control](#). When it says “all things” are under him, it is clear this does not include God

himself. God is the One who put everything under his control.
²⁸After everything has been put under the Son, then he will put himself under God, who had put all things under him. Then God will be the complete ruler over everything.

²⁹If the dead are never raised, what will people do who are being baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people being baptized for them?

³⁰And what about us? Why do we put ourselves in danger every hour? ³¹I die every day. That is true, brothers and sisters, just as it is true that I brag about you in Christ Jesus our Lord. ³²If I fought wild animals in Ephesus only with human hopes, I have gained nothing. If the dead are not raised, [“Let us eat and drink, because tomorrow we will die.”](#)

³³Do not be fooled: “Bad friends will ruin good habits.” ³⁴Come back to your right way of thinking and stop sinning. Some of you do not know God—I say this to shame you.

What Kind of Body Will We Have?

³⁵But someone may ask, “How are the dead raised? What kind of body will they have?” ³⁶Foolish person! When you sow a seed, it must die in the ground before it can live and grow. ³⁷And when you sow it, it does not have the same “body” it will have later. What you sow is only a bare seed, maybe wheat or something else. ³⁸But God gives it a body that he has planned for it, and God gives each kind of seed its own body. ³⁹All things made of flesh are not the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds have another, and fish have another. ⁴⁰Also there are heavenly bodies and earthly

bodies. But the beauty of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the beauty of the earthly bodies is another. ⁴¹The sun has one kind of beauty, the moon has another beauty, and the stars have another. And each star is different in its beauty.

⁴²It is the same with the dead who are raised to life. The body that is “planted” will ruin and decay, but it is raised to a life that cannot be destroyed. ⁴³When the body is “planted,” it is without honor, but it is raised in glory. When the body is “planted,” it is weak, but when it is raised, it is powerful. ⁴⁴The body that is “planted” is a physical body. When it is raised, it is a spiritual body.

There is a physical body, and there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵It is written in the Scriptures: [“The first man, Adam, became a living person.”](#) But the last Adam became a spirit that gives life. ⁴⁶The spiritual did not come first, but the physical and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man came from the dust of the earth. The second man came from heaven. ⁴⁸People who belong to the earth are like the first man of earth. But those people who belong to heaven are like the man of heaven. ⁴⁹Just as we were made like the man of earth, so we will also be made like the man of heaven.

⁵⁰I tell you this, brothers and sisters: Flesh and blood cannot have a part in the kingdom of God. Something that will ruin cannot have a part in something that never ruins. ⁵¹But look! I tell you this secret: We will not all sleep in death, but we will all be changed. ⁵²It will take only a second—as quickly as an eye blinks—when the last trumpet sounds. The trumpet will sound, and those who have died will be raised to live forever, and we will all be changed. ⁵³This body that can be destroyed must clothe itself with something that can never be destroyed.

And this body that dies must clothe itself with something that can never die. ⁵⁴So this body that can be destroyed will clothe itself with that which can never be destroyed, and this body that dies will clothe itself with that which can never die. When this happens, this Scripture will be made true:

“Death is destroyed forever in victory.”

[Isaiah 25:8](#)

⁵⁵“Death, where is your victory?
Death, where is your pain?”

[Hosea 13:14](#)

⁵⁶Death’s power to hurt is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But we thank God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸So my dear brothers and sisters, stand strong. Do not let anything change you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your work in the Lord is never wasted.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 16:1–24

Situation

Paul arranged for a collection to be taken among churches he had founded for poor Believers in Jerusalem. By telling the Corinthians of this need, Paul gave them opportunity to give willingly.

Observation

Paul encouraged the Corinthians to give joyfully—through finances, hospitality, and helping Believers who diligently work for the Lord. Giving builds up the Body of Christ and refreshes us.

Inspiration

So many people keep their money carefully tucked away, and when they die, they often leave it to people who don't really need it. What a wasted opportunity to do things that would live on. They could make a major difference in many lives.... They could sponsor candidates for the ministry or the mission field. Every year, young people who are desperately needed in mission service drop out of school when a gift of a few thousand dollars could have kept them on track towards a church vocation. People with some extra money could have done things which might have had eternal significance for these missionary candidates...

Some people have contacted me to offer such financial support. In most cases, years after I have arranged for them to help ministerial students or

missionary candidates, I get letters telling me about the fun they have had watching the ministries of the young men and women whose service they made possible. Many times, I have arranged support for the training of students who come to study with me from Third World nations. When these students graduate and return to their homelands to serve their native churches, their benefactors have the fun of visiting the work that is being done and of seeing the blessings their gifts made possible. To tell the truth, I can't think of anything people could do with their money that would give them more pleasure... (From *Who Switched the Price Tags?* by Tony Campolo)

Application

How do you give to help other Believers? Through time, money, hospitality, or physical help? Surprise someone this week with a unique offer of help.

Exploration

Joy in Giving—[Deuteronomy 16:17](#); [Luke 12:33](#); [Acts 11:27–30](#); [2 Corinthians 8:1–15](#); [9:1–7](#); [Galatians 6:10](#); [1 Peter 4:9](#).

The Gift for Other Believers

Now I will write about the collection of money for God's people. Do the same thing I told the Galatian churches to do: ²On the first day of every week, each one of you should put aside money as you have been blessed. Save it up so you will not have to collect money after I come. ³When I arrive, I will send whomever you approve to take your gift to Jerusalem. I will send them with letters of introduction, ⁴and if it seems good for me to go also, they will go along with me.

Paul's Plans

⁵I plan to go through Macedonia, so I will come to you after I go through there. ⁶Perhaps I will stay with you for a time or even all winter. Then you can help me on my trip, wherever I go. ⁷I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to stay a longer time with you if the Lord allows it. ⁸But I will stay at Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹because a good opportunity for a great and growing work has been given to me now. And there are many people working against me.

¹⁰If Timothy comes to you, see to it that he has nothing to fear with you, because he is working for the Lord just as I am.

¹¹So none of you should treat Timothy as unimportant, but help him on his trip in peace so that he can come back to me. I

am expecting him to come with the brothers.

¹²Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly encouraged him to visit you with the other brothers. He did not at all want to come now; he will come when he has the opportunity.

Paul Ends His Letter

¹³Be alert. Continue strong in the faith. Have courage, and be strong. ¹⁴Do everything in love.

¹⁵You know that the family of Stephanas were the first believers in Southern Greece and that they have given themselves to the service of God's people. I ask you, brothers and sisters, ¹⁶to follow the leading of people like these and anyone else who works and serves with them.

¹⁷I am happy that Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus have come. You are not here, but they have filled your place.

¹⁸They have refreshed my spirit and yours. You should recognize the value of people like these.

¹⁹The churches in the country of Asia send greetings to you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you in the Lord, as does the church that meets in their house. ²⁰All the brothers and sisters here send greetings. Give each other a holy kiss when you meet.

²¹I, Paul, am writing this greeting with my own hand.

²²If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be separated from God—lost forever!

Come, O Lord!

²³The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

²⁴My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus.

brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “brothers” here and throughout this book, Paul’s words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

cross Paul uses the cross as a picture of the Good News, the story of Christ’s death and rising from the dead for people’s sins. The cross, or Christ’s death, was God’s way to save people.

“If ... Lord.” Quotation from [Jeremiah 9:24](#).

Day of Judgment The day Christ will come to judge all people and take his people home to live with him.

“He ... traps.” Quotation from [Job 5:13](#).

“The Lord ... wind.” Quotation from [Psalm 94:11](#).

sinful self Literally, “flesh.” This could also mean his body.

“You ... you.” Quotation from [Deuteronomy 17:7](#); [19:19](#); [22:21](#), [24](#); [24:7](#).

“The two ... body.” Quotation from [Genesis 2:24](#).

idol’s temple Building where a god is worshiped.

“When an ox ... eating.” Quotation from [Deuteronomy 25:4](#).

“They ... sexually.” Quotation from [Exodus 32:6](#).

cup of blessing The cup of the fruit of the vine that Christians thank God for and drink at the Lord’s Supper.

“because ... it” Quotation from [Psalms 24:1](#); [50:12](#); [89:11](#).

the man This could also mean “her husband.”

Lord’s Supper The meal Jesus told his followers to eat to remember him ([Luke 22:14–20](#)).

languages This can also be translated “tongues.”

Verse 3 Other Greek copies read: “hand over my body in order that I may brag.”

languages This can also be translated “tongues.”

amen To say amen means to agree with the things that were

said.

language This can also be translated “tongue.”

God put ... control. From Psalm 8:6.

“Let us ... die.” Quotation from Isaiah 22:13; 56:12.

“The first ... person.” Quotation from Genesis 2:7.

The Book of 2 Corinthians

Introduction

Once there was a school in a village. Atop the school was a bell, which was rung every morning to call the children to class. The boys and girls arrived reluctantly and precisely at the hour. Never a minute early. The bell would ring again in the afternoon, liberating the children to their play. The children bolted out the door at the ringing of the bell. Never lingering a minute late. This is how it was with each child.

Except one.

There was a girl who came early. She helped the teacher prepare the room for the day. The same girl would stay late—cleaning the board and dusting the erasers. During class she was attentive. She sat close to the teacher, absorbing the lessons.

One day when the other children were unruly and inattentive, the teacher used the girl as an example. “Why can’t you be like her? She listens. She works. She comes early. She stays late.”

“It isn’t fair to ask us to be like her,” a boy blurted out from the rear of the room.

“Why?” asked the teacher.

The boy was uncomfortable, wishing he hadn’t spoken. “She has an advantage,” he shrugged.

“And what’s that?”

“She is an orphan,” he almost whispered as he sat down.

The boy was right. The girl had an advantage. An advantage of knowing that school, as tedious as it was, was better than the orphanage. Since she knew that, she appreciated what the others took for granted.

We, too, were orphans.

Alone.

No name. No future. No hope.

Were it not for our adoption as his children, we would have no place to belong. We sometimes forget that.

The Corinthians forgot.

They had grown puffy in their achievements and divisive in their fellowship. They argued over the correct leader, the greater gifts. They rebelled against Paul's leadership. They were indifferent to sin and insensitive in worship.

Paul defends his ministry and admonishes the Christians to remember to whom they belong. "Look closely at yourselves," Paul says ([13:5](#)). Paul's words are clear. "If anyone belongs to Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have gone; everything is made new!" ([5:17](#)).

Good reminder.

Not just for them but for us as well. For if we forget, we, too, will be like the students who did just enough to pass the grade and never enough to show their thanks.

About This Book

Author:

Paul

Date Written:

C. A.D. 56

Key Themes:

-
- Faith in Christ brings new life.

- God's people should give of their income to support God's work in the world.
- God can work through us no matter who we are.

Key Verse:

"If anyone belongs to Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have gone; everything is made new!" ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)).

Contents:

1. Paul's Work and Ministry [1:1–7:16](#)
2. Christian Giving and Tithing [8:1–9:15](#)
3. Paul's Defense of His Authority [10:1–13:14](#)

Life Lessons

2 Corinthians 1:1–2:4

Situation

Second Corinthians was written less than a year after 1 Corinthians. Paul wrote because he was delayed in his visit to Corinth. Paul began explaining his actions among the Corinthians by reviewing his relationship with them.

Observation

God's comfort and deliverance are certainties, even in the middle of difficult trials. We can confidently rely upon him as we make our plans.

Inspiration

"Why?" we wonder as we struggle to put the pieces back in a broken relationship.

"Why?" we think as we read of a devastating earthquake halfway around the world.

"Why?" we cry as we stand at the grave of a loved one.

Life is short and sometimes tragic, and each day we are reminded of our finiteness. We don't know the future, we don't know the relationship between events, and we certainly don't know *why*.

But we do know that God is good and all-knowing—nothing catches him by surprise, not the car out of control, the malignant tumor, the hurricane, or the disease. So even as we wonder and question the reason and cause for each event, we can be confident that God knows and that in everything, even the

senseless tragedy, he is working. (From *On Eagle's Wings* by Dave Veerman)

Application

What season of suffering have you known? What helped you move through it? Use the experience to help others whose hearts grieve. Write or call a friend today with encouragement.

Exploration

God's Comfort—[Psalm 23:1–4](#); [119:50, 52](#); [John 14:16–17](#); [2 Corinthians 1:3–5](#); [Philippians 2:1–2](#).

From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am an apostle because that is what God wanted. Also from Timothy our brother in Christ.

To the church of God in Corinth, and to all of God's people everywhere in Southern Greece:

²Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul Gives Thanks to God

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort. ⁴He comforts us every time we have trouble, so when others have trouble, we can comfort them with the same comfort God gives us. ⁵We share in the many sufferings of Christ. In the same way, much comfort comes to us through Christ. ⁶If we have troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation, and if we have comfort, you also have comfort. This helps you to accept patiently the same sufferings we have. ⁷Our hope for you is strong, knowing that you share in our sufferings and also in the comfort we receive.

⁸Brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the trouble we suffered in Asia. We had great burdens there that were beyond our own strength. We even gave up hope of living. ⁹Truly, in our own hearts we believed we would die. But this happened so we would not trust in ourselves but in God, who raises people from the dead. ¹⁰God saved us from these

great dangers of death, and he will continue to save us. We have put our hope in him, and he will save us again. ¹¹And you can help us with your prayers. Then many people will give thanks for us—that God blessed us because of their many prayers.

The Change in Paul's Plans

¹²This is what we are proud of, and I can say it with a clear conscience: In everything we have done in the world, and especially with you, we have had an honest and sincere heart from God. We did this by God's grace, not by the kind of wisdom the world has. ^{13–14}We write to you only what you can read and understand. And I hope that as you have understood some things about us, you may come to know everything about us. Then you can be proud of us, as we will be proud of you on the day our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

¹⁵I was so sure of all this that I made plans to visit you first so you could be blessed twice. ¹⁶I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and again on my way back. I wanted to get help from you for my trip to Judea. ¹⁷Do you think that I made these plans without really meaning it? Or maybe you think I make plans as the world does, so that I say yes, yes and at the same time no, no.

¹⁸But if you can believe God, you can believe that what we tell you is never both yes and no. ¹⁹The Son of God, Jesus Christ, that Silas and Timothy and I preached to you, was not yes and no. In Christ it has always been yes. ²⁰The yes to all of God's promises is in Christ, and through Christ we say yes to the glory of God. ²¹Remember, God is the One who makes you

and us strong in Christ. God made us his chosen people. ²²He put his mark on us to show that we are his, and he put his Spirit in our hearts to be a guarantee for all he has promised.

²³I tell you this, and I ask God to be my witness that this is true: The reason I did not come back to Corinth was to keep you from being punished or hurt. ²⁴We are not trying to control your faith. You are strong in faith. But we are workers with you for your own joy.

So I decided that my next visit to you would not be another one to make you sad.²If I make you sad, who will make me glad? Only you can make me glad—particularly the person whom I made sad.³I wrote you a letter for this reason: that when I came to you I would not be made sad by the people who should make me happy. I felt sure of all of you, that you would share my joy.⁴When I wrote to you before, I was very troubled and unhappy in my heart, and I wrote with many tears. I did not write to make you sad, but to let you know how much I love you.

Life Lessons

[2 Corinthians 2:5–17](#)

Situation

In his previous letter, Paul urged the Corinthians to put a particular unrepentant sinner out of the church ([1 Corinthians 5](#)). Perhaps this man repented and was the individual mentioned in this letter.

Observation

God eagerly forgives a repentant sinner. God puts forgiven sins out of his view.

Inspiration

We all find forgiveness exceedingly difficult. Sometimes forgiveness comes so hard that we can release our grudges only one level at a time. This means forgiveness is often granted only at superficial levels. These are *qualified* forgiveness. A key word is *if*. “I’ll forgive you, *if* you show proper remorse...”

Another key word is *when*. “I’ll forgive you *when* I am able. You’ve got to give me some time to work

through this....”

A second level is *partial* forgiveness. The key word here is *but*. “I’ll forgive you, *but* ... please get out of my life...”

You must *do* forgiveness. We *do* our way into better feelings. We do not feel our way into better doing. If we wait until all that bitterness is swept out of the corners of our feelings before we do right by someone who has hurt us, we might just as well give up. The bad feelings may never completely go away. But if we begin now dealing with that person, as if he had been totally forgiven and as if all the bad feelings were gone, giving him full personhood and affirmation, somehow the bitterness eventually dissipates. Jesus didn’t just *tell* us how to forgive, he *showed* us how on the cross.... (From *Finding the Heart to Go On* by Lynn Anderson)

Application

Are you holding on to a grudge? Pray, then go and make peace.

Exploration

Victory—[John 15:5](#); [1 Corinthians 1:7–8](#); [2 Corinthians 12:9](#); [Galatians 2:20](#); [Ephesians 3:16–17](#).

Forgive the Sinner

⁵Someone there among you has caused sadness, not to me, but to all of you. I mean he caused sadness to all in some way. (I do not want to make it sound worse than it really is.) ⁶The punishment that most of you gave him is enough for him. ⁷But now you should forgive him and comfort him to keep him from having too much sadness and giving up completely. ⁸So I beg you to show that you love him. ⁹I wrote you to test you and to see if you obey in everything. ¹⁰If you forgive someone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if I had anything to forgive—I forgave it for you, as if Christ were with me. ¹¹I did this so that Satan would not win anything from us, because we know very well what Satan's plans are.

Paul's Concern in Troas

¹²When I came to Troas to preach the Good News of Christ, the Lord gave me a good opportunity there. ¹³But I had no peace, because I did not find my brother Titus. So I said goodbye to them at Troas and went to Macedonia.

Victory Through Christ

¹⁴But thanks be to God, who always leads us in victory through Christ. God uses us to spread his knowledge everywhere like a sweet-smelling perfume. ¹⁵Our offering to God is this: We are

the sweet smell of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are being lost. ¹⁶To those who are lost, we are the smell of death that brings death, but to those who are being saved, we are the smell of life that brings life. So who is able to do this work? ¹⁷We do not sell the word of God for a profit as many other people do. But in Christ we speak the truth before God, as messengers of God.

Life Lessons

2 Corinthians 3:1–4:15

Situation

Smooth-talking, slick-operating teachers impressed the Corinthians. Paul contrasted these teachers with humble and honest ones who gave credit to God.

Observation

People who minister in Christ's name must be honest and have a good reputation among believers and nonbelievers. Paul highlighted these qualities that he found in his young follower, Timothy.

Inspiration

A man of God has a good reputation. This quality is listed in both the [first] letter to Timothy ([3:2](#)) and the one to Titus ([1:6–7](#)). In fact, Paul mentions it twice in his letter to Titus. As Paul wrote these letters, he was probably using this characteristic as an overarching one. It was his proposition, his summary idea, as it were, for all the qualities he was about to list. This quality as listed by Paul in this correspondence is not a new idea in the New Testament. In fact, when the church faced its first organizational problem in Jerusalem, the apostles recommended that seven men “of good reputation” be selected to help solve the problem of food distribution ([Acts 6:3](#)).

Later when Paul came to Lystra on his second missionary journey, he heard about Timothy. “He was

well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium” ([Acts 16:2](#)). In other words, he had a *good reputation*.

Notice three things. First, people *were talking about* Timothy. A good reputation creates conversation—positive feedback.

Second, it was more than one person who was doing the talking. A good test of whether or not a person has a good reputation is *how many* people are talking. All of us have one or two prejudiced friends. But what are people in general saying? This is the true test.

And third, people were talking about him in both Lystra and Iconium, that is, in more than one location. Timothy’s reputation was good *both* at home and abroad. When the two are in alignment, you can rest assured that you are getting a much clearer reading on a man’s *inner* qualities. Paul was impressed with Timothy’s reputation ...

It takes time to build a good reputation. But it should be a goal for every Christian, and your goal. In fact, it should happen naturally when a person is growing and maturing in his Christian life. Conversely, the Christian with a poor reputation is no doubt exhibiting traits that are not in harmony with Christian principles, nor are they in harmony with what people naturally expect from mature personalities.

(From *The Measure of a Man* by Gene Getz)

Application

The qualities Paul shared about Timothy are good

goals for every Christian. How do you measure up? What would you say is your reputation among your friends and others? Focus on one area and pray for specific ways you can improve.

Exploration

Leadership—[Numbers 8:14–18](#); [John 13:13–17](#); [1 Timothy 3:1–4:16](#); [2 Timothy 2:1–7](#), [15](#).

Servants of the New Agreement

Are we starting to brag about ourselves again? Do we need letters of introduction to you or from you, like some other people? ²You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. ³You show that you are a letter from Christ sent through us. This letter is not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God. It is not written on [stone tablets](#) but on human hearts.

⁴We can say this, because through Christ we feel certain before God. ⁵We are not saying that we can do this work ourselves. It is God who makes us able to do all that we do. ⁶He made us able to be servants of a new agreement from himself to his people. This new agreement is not a written law, but it is of the Spirit. The written law brings death, but the Spirit gives life.

⁷The law that brought death was written in words on stone. It came with God's glory, which made Moses' face so bright that the Israelites could not continue to look at it. But that glory later disappeared. ⁸So surely the new way that brings the Spirit has even more glory. ⁹If the law that judged people guilty of sin had glory, surely the new way that makes people right with God has much greater glory. ¹⁰That old law had glory, but it really loses its glory when it is compared to the much greater glory of this new way. ¹¹If that law which disappeared came with glory, then this new way which continues forever has much greater glory.

¹²We have this hope, so we are very bold. ¹³We are not like Moses, who put a covering over his face so the Israelites would not see it. The glory was disappearing, and Moses did not want them to see it end. ¹⁴But their minds were closed, and even today that same covering hides the meaning when they read the old agreement. That covering is taken away only through Christ. ¹⁵Even today, when they read the law of Moses, there is a covering over their minds. ¹⁶But when a person changes and follows the Lord, that covering is taken away. ¹⁷The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸Our faces, then, are not covered. We all show the Lord's glory, and we are being changed to be like him. This change in us brings ever greater glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Preaching the Good News

God, with his mercy, gave us this work to do, so we don't give up. ²But we have turned away from secret and shameful ways. We use no trickery, and we do not change the teaching of God. We teach the truth plainly, showing everyone who we are. Then they can know in their hearts what kind of people we are in God's sight. ³If the Good News that we preach is hidden, it is hidden only to those who are lost. ⁴The devil who rules this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe. They cannot see the light of the Good News—the Good News about the glory of Christ, who is exactly like God. ⁵We do not preach about ourselves, but we preach that Jesus Christ is Lord and that we are your servants for Jesus. ⁶God once said, “Let the light shine out of the darkness!” This is the same God who made his light shine in our hearts by letting us know the glory of God that is in the face of Christ.

Spiritual Treasure in Clay Jars

⁷We have this treasure from God, but we are like clay jars that hold the treasure. This shows that the great power is from God, not from us. ⁸We have troubles all around us, but we are not defeated. We do not know what to do, but we do not give up the hope of living. ⁹We are persecuted, but God does not leave us. We are hurt sometimes, but we are not destroyed. ¹⁰We carry the death of Jesus in our own bodies so that the life of Jesus can also be seen in our bodies. ¹¹We are alive, but for

Jesus we are always in danger of death so that the life of Jesus can be seen in our bodies that die. ¹²So death is working in us, but life is working in you.

¹³It is written in the Scriptures, [“I believed, so I spoke.”](#) Our faith is like this, too. We believe, and so we speak. ¹⁴God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, and we know that God will also raise us with Jesus. God will bring us together with you, and we will stand before him. ¹⁵All these things are for you. And so the grace of God that is being given to more and more people will bring increasing thanks to God for his glory.

Life Lessons

[2 Corinthians 4:16–6:13](#)

Situation

Paul stressed that the Corinthians could have confidence in the bodily resurrection and afterlife. This contrasted with contemporary ideas that some Corinthians held—that bodily resurrection would not happen and that the soul was separate from the body.

Observation

Jesus’ followers know that God reserves bodily resurrection and a heavenly dwelling place for them.

Inspiration

It’s not easy for us to see a City we’ve never seen, either, especially when the road is bumpy ... the hour is late ... and companions are wanting to cancel the trip and take up residence in a motel. It’s not easy to fix our eyes on what is unseen. But it is necessary....

For some of you, the journey has been long. Very

long and stormy. In no way do I wish to minimize the difficulties that you have had to face along the way...

And you are tired.

It's hard for you to see the City in the midst of the storms. The desire to pull over to the side of the road and get out entices you. You want to go on, but some days the road seems so long.

Let me encourage you ...*It's worth it.* (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

You may be tempted to throw in the towel and walk away when life gets hard. When this impulse hits you: stop, relax, pray, and take that next step. Discover new faith and hope.

Exploration

Hope of Heaven—[Job 19:25–27](#); [Psalm 73:24–26](#); [John 15:1–4](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:13–18](#); [Revelation 21:27](#); [22:14](#).

Living by Faith

¹⁶So we do not give up. Our physical body is becoming older and weaker, but our spirit inside us is made new every day.

¹⁷We have small troubles for a while now, but they are helping us gain an eternal glory that is much greater than the troubles.

¹⁸We set our eyes not on what we see but on what we cannot see. What we see will last only a short time, but what we cannot see will last forever.

We know that our body—the tent we live in here on earth—will be destroyed. But when that happens, God will have a house for us. It will not be a house made by human hands; instead, it will be a home in heaven that will last forever.² But now we groan in this tent. We want God to give us our heavenly home,³ because it will clothe us so we will not be naked.⁴ While we live in this body, we have burdens, and we groan. We do not want to be naked, but we want to be clothed with our heavenly home. Then this body that dies will be fully covered with life.⁵ This is what God made us for, and he has given us the Spirit to be a guarantee for this new life.

⁶So we always have courage. We know that while we live in this body, we are away from the Lord.⁷ We live by what we believe, not by what we can see.⁸ So I say that we have courage. We really want to be away from this body and be at home with the Lord.⁹ Our only goal is to please God whether we live here or there,¹⁰ because we must all stand before Christ to be judged. Each of us will receive what we should get—good or bad—for the things we did in the earthly body.

Becoming Friends with God

¹¹Since we know what it means to fear the Lord, we try to help people accept the truth about us. God knows what we really are, and I hope that in your hearts you know, too.¹² We are not trying to prove ourselves to you again, but we are telling you about ourselves so you will be proud of us. Then you will have an answer for those who are proud about things that can be seen rather than what is in the heart.¹³ If we are out of our minds, it is for God. If we have our right minds, it is for you.

¹⁴The love of Christ controls us, because we know that One died for all, so all have died. ¹⁵Christ died for all so that those who live would not continue to live for themselves. He died for them and was raised from the dead so that they would live for him.

Christ Through the Bible

Christ Became Our Sin

Why is the cross the symbol of our faith? To find the answer look no farther than the cross itself. Its design couldn't be simpler. One beam horizontal—the other vertical. One reaches out—like God's love. The other reaches up—as does God's holiness. One represents the width of his love; the other reflects the height of his holiness. The cross is the intersection. The cross is where God forgave his children without lowering his standards.

How could he do this? In a sentence: God put our sin on his Son and punished it there.

“God put on him the wrong who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God” ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#), MSG).

Envision the moment. God on his throne. You on the earth. And between you and God, suspended between you and heaven, is Christ on his cross. Your sins have been placed on Jesus. God, who punishes sin, releases his rightful wrath on your mistakes. Jesus receives the blow. Since Christ is between you and God, you don't. The sin is punished, but you are safe—safe in the shadow of the cross.

This is what God did, but why, why would he do it? Moral duty? Heavenly obligation? Paternal requirement? No. God is required to do nothing.

Besides, consider what he did. He gave his Son. His only Son. Would you do that? Would you offer the life of your child for someone else? I wouldn't. There are those for whom I would give my life. But ask me to make a list of those for whom I would kill my daughter? The sheet will be blank. I don't need a pencil. The list has no names.

But God's list contains the name of every person who ever lived. For this is the scope of his love. And this is the reason for the cross. He loves the world...
(From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

¹⁶From this time on we do not think of anyone as the world does. In the past we thought of Christ as the world thinks, but we no longer think of him in that way. ¹⁷If anyone belongs to Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have gone; everything is made new! ¹⁸All this is from God. Through Christ, God made peace between us and himself, and God gave us the work of telling everyone about the peace we can have with him. ¹⁹God was in Christ, making peace between the world and himself. In Christ, God did not hold the world guilty of its sins. And he gave us this message of peace. ²⁰So we have been sent to speak for Christ. It is as if God is calling to you through us. We speak for Christ when we beg you to be at peace with God. ²¹Christ had no sin, but God made him become sin so that in Christ we could become right with God.

We are workers together with God, so we beg you: Do not let the grace that you received from God be for nothing.² God says,

“At the right time I heard your prayers.
On the day of salvation I helped you.”

[Isaiah 49:8](#)

I tell you that the “right time” is now, and the “day of salvation” is now.

³We do not want anyone to find fault with our work, so nothing we do will be a problem for anyone. ⁴But in every way we show we are servants of God: in accepting many hard things, in troubles, in difficulties, and in great problems. ⁵We are beaten and thrown into prison. We meet those who become upset with us and start riots. We work hard, and sometimes we get no sleep or food. ⁶We show we are servants of God by our pure lives, our understanding, patience, and kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by true love, ⁷by speaking the truth, and by God’s power. We use our right living to defend ourselves against everything. ⁸Some people honor us, but others blame us. Some people say evil things about us, but others say good things. Some people say we are liars, but we speak the truth. ⁹We are not known, but we are well known. We seem to be dying, but we continue to live. We are punished, but we are not killed. ¹⁰We have much sadness, but we are always rejoicing. We are poor, but we are making many people rich in faith. We have nothing, but really we have everything.

¹¹We have spoken freely to you in Corinth and have opened our hearts to you. ¹²Our feelings of love for you have

not stopped, but you have stopped your feelings of love for us. ¹³I speak to you as if you were my children. Do to us as we have done—open your hearts to us.

Life Lessons

2 Corinthians 6:14–7:16

Situation

Paul warned Christians that intimate relationships with unbelievers are dangerous. He was glad that the Corinthians would apply his advice.

Observation

Christians should not marry unbelievers. Spiritually incompatible relationships weaken faith.

Inspiration

I love ocean sailing. Not long ago I took five men from my church ... ocean sailing for a week...

The first day out of the harbor was a sailor's dream: twenty-five-knot winds, clear sky, six-to eight-foot seas... . A couple hours out, I was standing at the helm singing at the top of my lungs—laughing, joking, having the time of my life. “Does it get any better than this?” I shouted. “Are we having fun, or what?”

No response. In fact, I noticed that some of the guys were looking a little green... . They both experienced “unplanned protein spills.” ... I tried to maintain my euphoria at sea, but with no one to share it, it faded. So, with a perfect wind still blowing, I headed back toward protected waters.

As much as I love ocean sailing, it is no match for

how I feel about my relationship with Jesus Christ... My wife ... loves Christ with a passion every bit as strong as mine. It would be torture for me not to be able to share the greatest treasure in my life with my wife. And that is nothing unique to me. To have a spouse yawn about that which means more than anything else in life would bring heartache to any true believer. (From *Fit to Be Tied* by Bill and Lynne Hybels)

Application

Are you in a relationship that shifts your loyalty away from God? Do you ever compromise God's desire in order to keep the relationship? What does God expect from you?

Exploration

Spiritually Compatible Relationships—[Hosea 1-3](#); [1 Corinthians 5:9-13](#); [7:12-16](#); [Ephesians 4:2-6](#); [5:3-11](#); [Colossians 3:11-17](#).

Warning About Non-Christians

¹⁴You are not the same as those who do not believe. So do not join yourselves to them. Good and bad do not belong together. Light and darkness cannot share together. ¹⁵How can Christ and Belial, the devil, have any agreement? What can a believer have together with a nonbeliever? ¹⁶The temple of God cannot have any agreement with idols, and we are the temple of the living God. As God said: [“I will live with them and walk with them. And I will be their God, and they will be my people.”](#)

¹⁷“Leave those people,
and be separate, says the Lord.
Touch nothing that is unclean,
and I will accept you.”

[Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 20:34, 41](#)

¹⁸“I will be your father,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty.”

[2 Samuel 7:14](#)

Dear friends, we have these promises from God, so we should make ourselves pure—free from anything that makes body or soul unclean. We should try to become holy in the way we live, because we respect God.

Paul's Joy

²Open your hearts to us. We have not done wrong to anyone, we have not ruined the faith of anyone, and we have not cheated anyone. ³I do not say this to blame you. I told you before that we love you so much we would live or die with you. ⁴I feel very sure of you and am very proud of you. You give me much comfort, and in all of our troubles I have great joy.

⁵When we came into Macedonia, we had no rest. We found trouble all around us. We had fighting on the outside and fear on the inside. ⁶But God, who comforts those who are troubled, comforted us when Titus came. ⁷We were comforted, not only by his coming but also by the comfort you gave him. Titus told us about your wish to see me and that you are very sorry for what you did. He also told me about your great care for me, and when I heard this, I was much happier.

⁸Even if my letter made you sad, I am not sorry I wrote it. At first I was sorry, because it made you sad, but you were sad only for a short time. ⁹Now I am happy, not because you were made sad, but because your sorrow made you change your lives. You became sad in the way God wanted you to, so you were not hurt by us in any way. ¹⁰The kind of sorrow God wants makes people change their hearts and lives. This leads to salvation, and you cannot be sorry for that. But the kind of sorrow the world has brings death. ¹¹See what this sorrow—the

sorrow God wanted you to have—has done to you: It has made you very serious. It made you want to prove you were not wrong. It made you angry and afraid. It made you want to see me. It made you care. It made you want the right thing to be done. You proved you were innocent in the problem. ¹²I wrote that letter, not because of the one who did the wrong or because of the person who was hurt. I wrote the letter so you could see, before God, the great care you have for us. ¹³That is why we were comforted.

Not only were we very comforted, we were even happier to see that Titus was so happy. All of you made him feel much better. ¹⁴I bragged to Titus about you, and you showed that I was right. Everything we said to you was true, and you have proved that what we bragged about to Titus is true. ¹⁵And his love for you is stronger when he remembers that you were all ready to obey. You welcomed him with respect and fear. ¹⁶I am very happy that I can trust you fully.

Life Lessons

2 Corinthians 8:1–9:15

Situation

Paul expressed confidence in the Corinthian church. He asked them to complete their collection for the Jerusalem church, which they had promised a year before.

Observation

Paul gave the Corinthians two examples of generous giving: the Macedonian churches and Christ. We should give according to our abilities, voluntarily and generously. God gives to us so that we can share with others.

Inspiration

Do you have eyesight? It's a gift. Do you have a good mind? It's a gift. Do you have leadership abilities that cause others to follow? A good education? These are all gifts. Has God given you a family? Has He given you sufficient clothes? ... These are all gifts from God's hand. Reflect on His numerous gifts to you. It will increase your joy....

Then remind yourself of God's promises regarding generosity. God promises if you sow bountifully, you will reap bountifully. So give! Give abundantly! Even extravagant giving is honored by God. I've never known anyone who went bad because he or she was too generous. Remind yourself of His promises regarding generosity and start giving!

Don't be afraid of outgiving God. It is absolutely

impossible to do that. (From *Wisdom for the Way* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Do you plan giving so that you can give regularly? Is it spontaneous enough so you can respond to needs right away or generous enough to show something of God's self-sacrifice? Today, make your gratitude to God tangible with a gift to your church or another trustworthy ministry.

Exploration

Giving—[Deuteronomy 15:10–11](#); [Isaiah 1:13](#); [Malachi 3:8](#); [Matthew 10:8](#); [Luke 6:38](#); [Acts 20:35](#); [Romans 12:8](#).

Christian Giving

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace God gave the churches in Macedonia. ²They have been tested by great troubles, and they are very poor. But they gave much because of their great joy. ³I can tell you that they gave as much as they were able and even more than they could afford. No one told them to do it. ⁴But they begged and pleaded with us to let them share in this service for God's people. ⁵And they gave in a way we did not expect: They first gave themselves to the Lord and to us. This is what God wants. ⁶So we asked Titus to help you finish this special work of grace since he is the one who started it. ⁷You are rich in everything—in faith, in speaking, in knowledge, in truly wanting to help, and in the love you learned from us. In the same way, be strong also in the grace of giving.

⁸I am not commanding you to give. But I want to see if your love is true by comparing you with others that really want to help. ⁹You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. You know that Christ was rich, but for you he became poor so that by his becoming poor you might become rich.

¹⁰This is what I think you should do: Last year you were the first to want to give, and you were the first who gave. ¹¹So now finish the work you started. Then your “doing” will be equal to your “wanting to do.” Give from what you have. ¹²If you want

to give, your gift will be accepted. It will be judged by what you have, not by what you do not have.¹³We do not want you to have troubles while other people are at ease, but we want everything to be equal.¹⁴At this time you have plenty. What you have can help others who are in need. Then later, when they have plenty, they can help you when you are in need, and all will be equal.¹⁵As it is written in the Scriptures, [“The person who gathered more did not have too much, nor did the person who gathered less have too little.”](#)

Titus and His Companions Help

¹⁶I thank God because he gave Titus the same love for you that I have.¹⁷Titus accepted what we asked him to do. He wanted very much to go to you, and this was his own idea.¹⁸We are sending with him the brother who is praised by all the churches because of his service in preaching the Good News.¹⁹Also, this brother was chosen by the churches to go with us when we deliver this gift of money. We are doing this service to bring glory to the Lord and to show that we really want to help.

²⁰We are being careful so that no one will criticize us for the way we are handling this large gift.²¹We are trying hard to do what the Lord accepts as right and also what people think is right.

²²Also, we are sending with them our brother, who is always ready to help. He has proved this to us in many ways, and he wants to help even more now, because he has much faith in you.

²³Now about Titus—he is my partner who is working with me to help you. And about the other brothers—they are sent

from the churches, and they bring glory to Christ.²⁴ So show these men the proof of your love and the reason we are proud of you. Then all the churches can see it.

Help for Fellow Christians

I really do not need to write you about this help for God's people. ²I know you want to help. I have been bragging about this to the people in Macedonia, telling them that you in Southern Greece have been ready to give since last year. And your desire to give has made most of them ready to give also. ³But I am sending the brothers to you so that our bragging about you in this will not be empty words. I want you to be ready, as I said you would be. ⁴If any of the people from Macedonia come with me and find that you are not ready, we will be ashamed that we were so sure of you. (And you will be ashamed, too!) ⁵So I thought I should ask these brothers to go to you before we do. They will finish getting in order the generous gift you promised so it will be ready when we come. And it will be a generous gift—not one that you did not want to give.

⁶Remember this: The person who plants a little will have a small harvest, but the person who plants a lot will have a big harvest. ⁷Each one should give as you have decided in your heart to give. You should not be sad when you give, and you should not give because you feel forced to give. God loves the person who gives happily. ⁸And God can give you more blessings than you need. Then you will always have plenty of everything—enough to give to every good work. ⁹It is written in the Scriptures:

“He gives freely to the poor.

The things he does are right and will continue

forever.”

[Psalm 112:9](#)

¹⁰God is the One who gives seed to the farmer and bread for food. He will give you all the seed you need and make it grow so there will be a great harvest from your goodness. ¹¹He will make you rich in every way so that you can always give freely. And your giving through us will cause many to give thanks to God. ¹²This service you do not only helps the needs of God’s people, it also brings many more thanks to God. ¹³It is a proof of your faith. Many people will praise God because you obey the Good News of Christ—the gospel you say you believe—and because you freely share with them and with all others. ¹⁴And when they pray, they will wish they could be with you because of the great grace that God has given you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his gift that is too wonderful for words.

Life Lessons

2 Corinthians 10:1–11:15

Situation

Paul learned that certain rival preachers had succeeded in their attempt to discredit him before a few Corinthian Christians. Paul responded to the charges and accusations raised by them; he warned that he would exercise strict discipline, if that became necessary.

Observation

God gives spiritual leaders to provide order and direction. Be sure to uphold and respect these leaders.

Inspiration

We sometimes think that power comes only through aggressive self-promotion, but Jesus made it clear that this was not so. He explained to his disciples very bluntly that power and authority in his kingdom is based on servanthood.

Dee Jepson, who served as an assistant to her husband, a U. S. senator, quickly became aware of the power-hungry atmosphere of Washington, D.C. Political wheeling and dealing was the name of the game—always with an eye on gaining influence with high-ranking officials. Jesus' message of servanthood seemed entirely out of place, until one day when Dee observed an honored guest's visit to the city.

"The unimportance of sophistication was brought home to me," she writes, "at a Capitol Hill luncheon

for Mother Teresa... . In came this tiny woman, even smaller than I had expected, wearing that familiar blue and white habit, over it a gray sweater that had seen many better days, which she wore again to the White House the next day. As that little woman walked into the room, her bare feet in worn sandals, I saw some of the most powerful leaders in this country stand to their feet with tears in their eyes just to be in her presence.”

“As I listened that afternoon, I thought, ‘Don’t forget this, Dee. Here in this little woman who doesn’t want a thing, never asked for anything for herself; never demanded anything, or shook her fist in anger, here’s real power.’ It was a paradox. She has reached down into the gutter and loved and given. She has loved those the world sees as unlovable—the desolate, the dying—because they are created in the image of the God she serves. Ironically, seeking nothing for herself, she has been raised to the pinnacle of world recognition, received the Nobel Peace Prize, and is a figure known to most people, at least in the Western world, and revered by many. She has nothing, yet in a strange way, she has everything.”

(From *Stories of Faith* by Ruth A. Tucker)

Application

Participate in conversations that encourage and build up leaders rather than criticize or demean them. If you have a legitimate complaint, go directly to the leader before you complain to others.

Exploration

Authority—[Genesis 1:26–27](#); [Romans 13:1](#); [2 Corinthians 13:10](#).

Paul Defends His Ministry

I, Paul, am begging you with the gentleness and the kindness of Christ. Some people say that I am easy on you when I am with you and bold when I am away. ²They think we live in a worldly way, and I plan to be very bold with them when I come. I beg you that when I come I will not need to use that same boldness with you. ³We do live in the world, but we do not fight in the same way the world fights. ⁴We fight with weapons that are different from those the world uses. Our weapons have power from God that can destroy the enemy's strong places. We destroy people's arguments ⁵and every proud thing that raises itself against the knowledge of God. We capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ. ⁶We are ready to punish anyone there who does not obey, but first we want you to obey fully.

⁷You must look at the facts before you. If you feel sure that you belong to Christ, you must remember that we belong to Christ just as you do. ⁸It is true that we brag freely about the authority the Lord gave us. But this authority is to build you up, not to tear you down. So I will not be ashamed. ⁹I do not want you to think I am trying to scare you with my letters. ¹⁰Some people say, "Paul's letters are powerful and sound important, but when he is with us, he is weak. And his speaking is nothing." ¹¹They should know this: We are not there with you now, so we say these things in letters. But when

we are there with you, we will show the same authority that we show in our letters.

¹²We do not dare to compare ourselves with those who think they are very important. They use themselves to measure themselves, and they judge themselves by what they themselves are. This shows that they know nothing. ¹³But we will not brag about things outside the work that was given us to do. We will limit our bragging to the work that God gave us, and this includes our work with you. ¹⁴We are not bragging too much, as we would be if we had not already come to you. But we have come to you with the Good News of Christ. ¹⁵We limit our bragging to the work that is ours, not what others have done. We hope that as your faith continues to grow, you will help our work to grow much larger. ¹⁶We want to tell the Good News in the areas beyond your city. We do not want to brag about work that has already been done in another person's area. ¹⁷But, ["If someone wants to brag, he should brag only about the Lord."](#) ¹⁸It is not those who say they are good who are accepted but those who the Lord thinks are good.

NewLife in Christ

"We capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ."—[2 Corinthians 10:5](#)

Your Thoughts Run Your Life

To listen to our vocabulary you'd think we are the victims of our thoughts. "Don't talk to me," we say. "I'm in a bad mood." As if a mood were a place to which we were assigned ("I can't call you. I'm in Bosnia.") rather than an emotion we permit.

Or we say, “Don’t mess with her. She has a bad disposition.” Is a disposition something we “have”? Like a cold or the flu? Are we the victims of the emotional bacteria of the season? Or do we have a choice?

Paul says we do: “We capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ” ([2 Corinthians 10:5](#)).

Do you hear some battlefield jargon in that passage—“capture every thought,” “make it give up” and “obey Christ”? You get the impression that we are the soldiers and the thoughts are the enemies. Our assignment is to protect the boat and refuse entrance to trashy thoughts. The minute they appear on the dock we go into action. “This heart belongs to God,” we declare, “and you aren’t getting on board until you change your allegiance.”

Selfishness, step back! Envy, get lost! Find another boat, Anger! You aren’t allowed on this ship. Capturing thoughts is serious business.

It was for Jesus. Remember the thoughts that came his way courtesy of the mouth of Peter? Jesus had just prophesied his death, burial, and resurrection, but Peter couldn’t bear the thought of it. “Peter took Jesus aside and told him not to talk like that... Jesus said to Peter, ‘Go away from me, Satan! You are not helping me! You don’t care about the things of God, but only about the things people think are important’” ([Matthew 16:22–23](#)).

See the decisiveness of Jesus? A trashy thought comes his way. He is tempted to entertain it. A cross-less life would be nice. But what does he do? He

stands at the gangplank of the dock and says, “Get away from me.” As if to say, “You are not allowed to enter my mind.”

What if you did that? What if you took every thought captive? What if you refused to let any trash enter your mind? What if you took the counsel of Solomon: “Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life” ([Proverbs 4:23](#)). (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

Question: If you were to take every thought captive to Christ, how would that change your life?

For more on [“New Life in Christ.”](#)

Paul and the False Apostles

I wish you would be patient with me even when I am a little foolish, but you are already doing that.² I am jealous over you with a jealousy that comes from God. I promised to give you to Christ, as your only husband. I want to give you as his pure bride.³ But I am afraid that your minds will be led away from your true and pure following of Christ just as Eve was tricked by the snake with his evil ways.⁴ You are very patient with anyone who comes to you and preaches a different Jesus from the one we preached. You are very willing to accept a spirit or gospel that is different from the Spirit and Good News you received from us.

⁵I do not think that those “great apostles” are any better than I am. ⁶I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have shown this to you clearly in every way.

⁷I preached God’s Good News to you without pay. I made myself unimportant to make you important. Do you think that was wrong? ⁸I accepted pay from other churches, taking their money so I could serve you. ⁹If I needed something when I was with you, I did not trouble any of you. The brothers who came from Macedonia gave me all that I needed. I did not allow myself to depend on you in any way, and I will never depend on you. ¹⁰No one in Southern Greece will stop me from bragging about that. I say this with the truth of Christ in me. ¹¹And why do I not depend on you? Do you think it is because I do not love you? God knows that I love you.

¹²And I will continue doing what I am doing now, because I

want to stop those people from having a reason to brag. They would like to say that the work they brag about is the same as ours. ¹³Such men are not true apostles but are workers who lie. They change themselves to look like apostles of Christ. ¹⁴This does not surprise us. Even Satan changes himself to look like a n [angel of light](#). ¹⁵So it does not surprise us if Satan's servants also make themselves look like servants who work for what is right. But in the end they will be punished for what they do.

Life Lessons

2 Corinthians 11:16–12:21

Situation

Paul promised to come to the Corinthians with the love of a father, but he feared that he might have to deal with troublemakers harshly.

Observation

God does not spare us trials, but he helps us overcome them. God works in our weakness, because when we are weak his strength accomplishes the task.

Inspiration

They aren't exactly what you'd call a list of "Who's Who in Purity and Sainthood." In fact, some of their antics and attitudes would make you think of the Saturday night crowd at the county jail. What few halos there are among this befuddled bunch could probably use a bit of straightening and polish. Yet, strange as it may seem, it is this very humanness that makes these people refreshing. They are so refreshing that should you ever need a reminder of God's

tolerance, you'd find it in these people. If you ever wonder how in the world God could use you to change the world, look at these people....

What people? The people God used to change history. A ragbag of ne'er-do-wells and has-beens who found hope, not in their performance, but in God's proverbially open arms.

What can you say about a fellow whose lust got so lusty that he got a woman pregnant, tried to blame it on her husband, had her husband killed, and then went on living like nothing ever happened? Well, you could say he was a man after God's own heart. David's track record left little to be desired, but his repentant spirit was unquestionable.

Then comes Jonah. God's ambassador to Nineveh. Jonah, however, had other ideas. He had no desire to go to that heathen city. So he hopped on another boat while God wasn't looking (or at least that's what Jonah thought). God put him in a whale's belly to bring him back to his senses. But even the whale couldn't stomach this missionary for too long. A good burp and Jonah went flying over the surf and landed big-eyed and repentant on the beach. (Which just goes to show that you can't keep a good man down.)

And on and on the stories go: Elijah, the prophet who pouted; Solomon, the king who knew too much; Jacob, the wheeler-dealer; Gomer, the prostitute; Sarah, the woman who giggled at God. One story after another of God using man's best and overcoming man's worst.

Even the genealogy of Jesus is salted with a dubious character or two—Tamar the adulteress, Rahab the harlot, and Bathsheba ...

The reassuring lesson is clear. God used (and uses!) people to change the world. People! Not saints or superhumans or geniuses, but people. Crooks, creeps, lovers, and liars—he uses them all. And what they may lack in perfection, God makes up for in love. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

Application

When your weakness surfaces, remember that God still uses you. Volunteer for a form of service that requires you to depend on God's strength. Depend on him every step of the way.

Exploration

Strength in Weakness—[Psalm 82:3](#); [Romans 8:26](#); [1 Corinthians 1:25–31](#); [9:22](#); [15:43](#); [2 Corinthians 12:9–10](#); [13:4](#); [Hebrews 5:2](#); [11:34](#).

Paul Tells About His Sufferings

¹⁶I tell you again: No one should think I am a fool. But if you think so, accept me as you would accept a fool. Then I can brag a little, too. ¹⁷When I brag because I feel sure of myself, I am not talking as the Lord would talk but as a fool. ¹⁸Many people are bragging about their lives in the world. So I will brag too. ¹⁹You are wise, so you will gladly be patient with fools! ²⁰You are even patient with those who order you around, or use you, or trick you, or think they are better than you, or hit you in the face. ²¹It is shameful to me to say this, but we were too “weak” to do those things to you!

But if anyone else is brave enough to brag, then I also will be brave and brag. (I am talking as a fool.) ²²Are they [Hebrews](#)? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they from Abraham’s family? So am I. ²³Are they serving Christ? I am serving him more. (I am crazy to talk like this.) I have worked much harder than they. I have been in prison more often. I have been hurt more in beatings. I have been near death many times. ²⁴Five times the Jews have given me their punishment of thirty-nine lashes with a whip. ²⁵Three different times I was beaten with rods. One time I was almost stoned to death. Three times I was in ships that wrecked, and one of those times I spent a night and a day in the sea. ²⁶I have gone on many travels and have been in danger from rivers, thieves, my own people, the Jews, and those who are not Jews. I have been in danger in cities, in places where no one lives, and on the sea. And I have been in

danger with false Christians.²⁷I have done hard and tiring work, and many times I did not sleep. I have been hungry and thirsty, and many times I have been without food. I have been cold and without clothes.²⁸Besides all this, there is on me every day the load of my concern for all the churches.²⁹I feel weak every time someone is weak, and I feel upset every time someone is led into sin.

³⁰If I must brag, I will brag about the things that show I am weak. ³¹God knows I am not lying. He is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he is to be praised forever. ³²When I was in Damascus, the governor under King Aretas wanted to arrest me, so he put guards around the city. ³³But my friends lowered me in a basket through a hole in the city wall. So I escaped from the governor.

A Special Blessing in Paul's Life

I must continue to brag. It will do no good, but I will talk now about visions and [revelations](#) from the Lord. ²I know a man in Christ who was taken up to the third heaven fourteen years ago. I do not know whether the man was in his body or out of his body, but God knows. ³⁻⁴And I know that this man was taken up to [paradise](#). I don't know if he was in his body or away from his body, but God knows. He heard things he is not able to explain, things that no human is allowed to tell. ⁵I will brag about a man like that, but I will not brag about myself, except about my weaknesses. ⁶But if I wanted to brag about myself, I would not be a fool, because I would be telling the truth. But I will not brag about myself. I do not want people to think more of me than what they see me do or hear me say.

⁷So that I would not become too proud of the wonderful things that were shown to me, a [painful physical problem](#) was given to me. This problem was a messenger from Satan, sent to beat me and keep me from being too proud. ⁸I begged the Lord three times to take this problem away from me. ⁹But he said to me, "My grace is enough for you. When you are weak, my power is made perfect in you." So I am very happy to brag about my weaknesses. Then Christ's power can live in me. ¹⁰For this reason I am happy when I have weaknesses, insults, hard times, sufferings, and all kinds of troubles for Christ. Because when I am weak, then I am truly strong.

Paul's Love for the Christians

¹¹I have been talking like a fool, but you made me do it. You are the ones who should say good things about me. I am worth nothing, but those “great apostles” are not worth any more than I am!

¹²When I was with you, I patiently did the things that prove I am an apostle—signs, wonders, and miracles. ¹³So you received everything that the other churches have received. Only one thing was different: I was not a burden to you. Forgive me for this!

¹⁴I am now ready to visit you the third time, and I will not be a burden to you. I want nothing from you, except you. Children should not have to save up to give to their parents. Parents should save to give to their children. ¹⁵So I am happy to give everything I have for you, even myself. If I love you more, will you love me less?

¹⁶It is clear I was not a burden to you, but you think I was tricky and lied to catch you. ¹⁷Did I cheat you by using any of the messengers I sent to you? No, you know I did not. ¹⁸I asked Titus to go to you, and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not cheat you, did he? No, you know that Titus and I did the same thing and with the same spirit.

¹⁹Do you think we have been defending ourselves to you all this time? We have been speaking in Christ and before God. You are our dear friends, and everything we do is to make you stronger. ²⁰I am afraid that when I come, you will not be what I want you to be, and I will not be what you want me to be. I am afraid that among you there may be arguing, jealousy, anger, selfish fighting, evil talk, gossip, pride, and confusion. ²¹I am afraid that when I come to you again, my God will make me ashamed before you. I may be saddened by many of those who

have sinned because they have not changed their hearts or turned from their sexual sins and the shameful things they have done.

Life Lessons

2 Corinthians 13:1-14

Situation

In closing, Paul asked the Corinthians to examine themselves to see if they were growing in Christian understanding. Since gross sin or sin that affects the whole congregation cannot be tolerated in the church, members who refuse to give up their sinful ways should leave.

Observation

We should examine our lives regularly to see if there are sins we need to discard or practices we need to strengthen.

Inspiration

Temptation comes in various forms: obvious enticements to break the law, cheat, or forsake a commitment; subtle pressure to flirt with wrong, bend the rules, or delay doing right; nearly invisible urgings to gratify self, shift values, or take the easy way. Through the constant pull of our sinful nature and the consistent attacks of our enemy, Satan, we find ourselves tempted all day, daily. Facing such powerful and continual influences, we may consider giving up and giving in.

But God is more powerful ... and he is “faithful,” promising to keep temptation from overwhelming us and to provide an alternative course of action, a way of escape, a “way out.”

So when you are tempted, thank God for trusting

you that much—he knows you can bear it. Then ask him what you should do next—look for his way out and take it. (From *On Eagle's Wings* by Dave Veerman)

Application

It is easy to yield to temptations if you're not careful. Are you indulging in minor temptations to perk up your lifestyle? Review your relationship with Christ and identify any vices. Get rid of them! Be excited about how much Jesus offers you.

Exploration

Lifestyle—[Judges 1:1](#); [17:6](#); [Proverbs 4:23](#); [Daniel 1:8–19](#); [Matthew 11:16–19](#); [1 Corinthians 9:24–27](#).

Final Warnings and Greetings

I will come to you for the third time. “Every case must be proved by two or three witnesses.”² When I was with you the second time, I gave a warning to those who had sinned. Now I am away from you, and I give a warning to all the others. When I come to you again, I will not be easy with them.³ You want proof that Christ is speaking through me. My proof is that he is not weak among you, but he is powerful.⁴ It is true that he was weak when he was killed on the cross, but he lives now by God’s power. It is true that we are weak in Christ, but for you we will be alive in Christ by God’s power.

⁵Look closely at yourselves. Test yourselves to see if you are living in the faith. You know that Jesus Christ is in you—unless you fail the test.⁶ But I hope you will see that we ourselves have not failed the test.⁷ We pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. It is not important to see that we have passed the test, but it is important that you do what is right, even if it seems we have failed.⁸ We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.⁹ We are happy to be weak, if you are strong, and we pray that you will become complete.¹⁰ I am writing this while I am away from you so that when I come I will not have to be harsh in my use of authority. The Lord gave me this authority to build you up, not to tear you down.

¹¹Now, brothers and sisters, I say goodbye. Try to be

complete. Do what I have asked you to do. Agree with each other, and live in peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.

¹²Greet each other with a holy kiss. ¹³All of God's holy people send greetings to you.

¹⁴The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “Brothers” here and throughout this book, Paul’s words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

stone tablets Meaning the Law of Moses that was written on stone tablets ([Exodus 24:12](#); [25:16](#)).

“I... spoke.” Quotation from [Psalm 116:10](#).

“I... people.” Quotation from [Leviticus 26:11–12](#); [Jeremiah 32:38](#); [Ezekiel 37:27](#).

“The person ... little.” Quotation from [Exodus 16:18](#).

“If ... Lord.” Quotation from [Jeremiah 9:24](#).

angel of light Messenger from God. The devil fools people so that they think he is from God.

Hebrews A name for the Jews that some Jews were very proud of.

revelations Revelation is making known a truth that was hidden.

paradise Another word for heaven.

painful physical problem Literally, “thorn in the flesh.”

“Every ... witnesses.” Quotation from [Deuteronomy 19:15](#).

The Book of Galatians

Introduction

The Emancipation Proclamation was ready to be signed. The papers were complete. All that was lacking was the signature of the president. But Abraham Lincoln was not ready. He had spent the morning at a reception and his hand was swollen from greeting visitors.

“Let me wait until my hand is better,” he reportedly requested. “I don’t want my signature to be shaky. I want people to know I set the slaves free in confidence.”

Galatians states that Christ did the same for us. “He set the slaves free in confidence.” No hesitation. No reservation. No reluctance. No exceptions.

The Book of Galatians is the Emancipation Proclamation for the church. Written by the confident hand of one who had known slavery, it declares and defines Christian liberty. Paul wrote it to combat those in the church who were insisting that it was necessary to follow a law or code in order to be saved.

Many of the early Christians were Jewish Christians who were accustomed to following a law. Though they had accepted the gift of grace offered by Christ on the cross, some were falling away—substituting God’s gift for man’s works. Paul recognized this for what it was—legalism.

Legalism is not unique to the Galatians. Any time the gospel has been preached, there have been those who contend it is too good to be true. It’s not enough to be saved by faith, argues the legalist, we must earn God’s approval. Some teach that we earn God’s favor by what we know (intellectualism). Others insist we are saved by what we do (moralism). Still others claim that salvation is determined by what we feel

(emotionalism).

However you package it, Paul contests, legalism is heresy. Any gospel other than the pure gospel is *anathema*. Salvation comes only through the cross—no additions, no alterations.

We are free in Christ. “We have freedom now, because Christ made us free. So stand strong. Do not change and go back into the slavery of the law” ([5:1](#)). Galatians is a document of freedom. As you read, note the confidence of the writer. His hand doesn’t shake, his conviction doesn’t waver, his belief doesn’t falter.

And so neither should ours.

About This Book

Author:

Paul

Date Written:

C. A.D. 50

Key Themes:

-
- Salvation comes by grace, not works.
- We should bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- We will reap in life what we have sown in life.

Key Verse:

“You began your life in Christ by the Spirit. Now are you trying to make it complete by your own power? That is foolish” ([Galatians 3:3](#)).

Contents:

1. The Gospel of Grace [1:1–2:21](#)
2. What to Believe About Grace [3:1–4:31](#)
3. How to Live in Grace [5:1–6:18](#)

Life Lessons

Galatians 1:1-24

Situation

Paul and Barnabas established churches in several cities in the Roman province of Galatia (in the south-central part of modern Turkey). These churches began to grow but needed to be reminded of certain lessons.

Observation

Paul formed his thinking not by consulting with others but by spending time alone with the Lord. Paul spent three years in Arabia in personal study and meditation.

Inspiration

Some of the most profound ministries of the Spirit of God are not public or loud or large. Sometimes His most meaningful touch on our lives comes when we are all alone.

I urge you to include in your schedule time to be alone with God... You do have places where you can get away for a long walk, don't you? I hope it's in a wooded area. The gentle breeze blowing through the forest is therapeutic. Sometimes just being alone out in God's marvelous creation is all that's needed for the scales to be removed from your eyes and for you to silence the harassment and the noise of your day and begin to hear from God. (From *Wisdom for the Way* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

If you have not done so, set apart a time and place to enjoy time alone with the Lord. Make that time special. Start a journal. Let God know what you're doing and feeling. Let Jesus be your example.

Exploration

Jesus' Solitude—[Matthew 12:15](#); [Mark 1:35](#); [Luke 4:42](#); [5:16](#); [6:12](#).

From Paul, an apostle. I was not chosen to be an apostle by human beings, nor was I sent from human beings. I was made an apostle through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. ²This letter is also from all [those of God's family](#) who are with me.

To the churches in [Galatia](#):

³Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴Jesus gave himself for our sins to free us from this evil world we live in, as God the Father planned. ⁵The glory belongs to God forever and ever. Amen.

The Only Good News

⁶God, by his grace through Christ, called you to become his people. So I am amazed that you are turning away so quickly and believing something different than the Good News. ⁷Really, there is no other Good News. But some people are confusing you; they want to change the Good News of Christ. ⁸We preached to you the Good News. So if we ourselves, or even an angel from heaven, should preach to you something different, we should be judged guilty! ⁹I said this before, and now I say it again: You have already accepted the Good News. If anyone is preaching something different to you, he should be judged guilty!

¹⁰Do you think I am trying to make people accept me? No, God is the One I am trying to please. Am I trying to please

people? If I still wanted to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Paul's Authority Is from God

¹¹[Brothers and sisters](#), I want you to know that the Good News I preached to you was not made up by human beings. ¹²I did not get it from humans, nor did anyone teach it to me, but Jesus Christ showed it to me.

¹³You have heard about my past life in the Jewish religion. I attacked the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴I was becoming a leader in the Jewish religion, doing better than most other Jews of my age. I tried harder than anyone else to follow the teachings handed down by our ancestors.

¹⁵But God had special plans for me and set me apart for his work even before I was born. He called me through his grace ¹⁶and showed his son to me so that I might tell the Good News about him to those who are not Jewish. When God called me, I did not get advice or help from any person. ¹⁷I did not go to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was. But, without waiting, I went away to Arabia and later went back to Damascus.

¹⁸After three years I went to Jerusalem to meet Peter and stayed with him for fifteen days. ¹⁹I met no other apostles, except James, the brother of the Lord. ²⁰God knows that these things I write are not lies. ²¹Later, I went to the areas of Syria and Cilicia.

²²In Judea the churches in Christ had never met me. ²³They had only heard it said, "This man who was attacking us is now preaching the same faith that he once tried to destroy." ²⁴And

these believers praised God because of me.

Life Lessons

Galatians 2:1–21

Situation

When Paul visited Jerusalem he explained that God saves Gentiles, too. Later, when Peter showed favoritism to Jews, Paul corrected him.

Observation

Keeping thousands of laws does not save us. Because of this, God sent Jesus. Jesus paid the price that our actions never could.

Inspiration

There is a great deal of difference between law and grace... . There is no peace until we see the finished work of Jesus Christ—until we can look back and see the cross of Christ between us and our sins...

Then there is glory for the time to come. A great many people seem to forget that the best is before us... . The kingdom we are going to inherit is glorious: our crown is to be a “crown of glory”; the city we are going to inhabit is the city of the glorified; the songs we are to sing are the songs of the glorified; we are to wear garments of “glory and beauty.” ...

Many are always looking on the backward path and mourning over the troubles through which they have passed. They keep lugging up the cares and anxieties they have been called on to bear and are forever looking at them. Why should we go reeling

and staggering under the burdens and cares of life when we have such prospects before us?

If there is nothing but glory beyond, our faces ought to shine brightly all the time.

(From “Peace, Grace, and Glory” by D. L. Moody in *They Walked with God*)

Application

Do you wonder if God approves of you? If Jesus reigns in your life, then God looks on you with favor. Rejoice! But, if you are trying to call the shots in your life, then you have disregarded his claim on your life. Surrender the remaining areas in your life to God.

Exploration

Grace—[Psalm 130:3](#); [Romans 3:19–24](#); [Ephesians 1:3–14](#).

Other Apostles Accepted Paul

After fourteen years I went to Jerusalem again, this time with Barnabas. I also took Titus with me.²I went because God showed me I should go. I met with the believers there, and in private I told their leaders the Good News that I preach to the non-Jewish people. I did not want my past work and the work I am now doing to be wasted.³Titus was with me, but he was not forced to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek.⁴We talked about this problem because some false believers had come into our group secretly. They came in like spies to overturn the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. They wanted to make us slaves.⁵But we did not give in to those false believers for a minute. We wanted the truth of the Good News to continue for you.

⁶Those leaders who seemed to be important did not change the Good News that I preach. (It doesn't matter to me if they were "important" or not. To God everyone is the same.)⁷But these leaders saw that I had been given the work of telling the Good News to those who are not Jewish, just as Peter had the work of telling the Jews.⁸God gave Peter the power to work as an apostle for the Jewish people. But he also gave me the power to work as an apostle for those who are not Jews.⁹James, Peter, and John, who seemed to be the leaders, understood that God had given me this special grace, so they accepted Barnabas and me. They agreed that they would go to

the Jewish people and that we should go to those who are not Jewish.¹⁰ The only thing they asked us was to remember to help the poor—something I really wanted to do.

Paul Shows that Peter Was Wrong

¹¹When Peter came to Antioch, I challenged him to his face, because he was wrong. ¹²Peter ate with the non-Jewish people until some Jewish people sent from James came to Antioch. When they arrived, Peter stopped eating with those who weren't Jewish, and he separated himself from them. He was afraid of the Jews. ¹³So Peter was a hypocrite, as were the other Jewish believers who joined with him. Even Barnabas was influenced by what these Jewish believers did. ¹⁴When I saw they were not following the truth of the Good News, I spoke to Peter in front of them all. I said, "Peter, you are a Jew, but you are not living like a Jew. You are living like those who are not Jewish. So why do you now try to force those who are not Jewish to live like Jews?"

¹⁵We were not born as non-Jewish "sinners," but as Jews. ¹⁶Yet we know that a person is made right with God not by following the law, but by trusting in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus, that we might be made right with God because we trusted in Christ. It is not because we followed the law, because no one can be made right with God by following the law.

¹⁷We Jews came to Christ, trying to be made right with God, and it became clear that we are sinners, too. Does this mean that Christ encourages sin? No! ¹⁸But I would really be wrong to begin teaching again those things that I gave up. ¹⁹It was

the law that put me to death, and I died to the law so that I can now live for God. ²⁰I was put to death on the cross with Christ, and I do not live anymore—it is Christ who lives in me. I still live in my body, but I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself to save me. ²¹By saying these things I am not going against God's grace. Just the opposite, if the law could make us right with God, then Christ's death would be useless.

Life Lessons

Galatians 3:1–4:7

Situation

Some Galatian Believers were in Jerusalem on Pentecost ([Acts 2](#)). They already knew that God freely gave the Holy Spirit.

Observation

Paul used Abraham's example ([Genesis 15](#)) to prove that Old Testament Believers were also saved by faith.

Inspiration

I have often been asked by young Christians: "Why is it that I fail so? I did so solemnly vow with my whole heart, and did desire to serve God; why have I failed?" To such I always give the one answer: "My dear friend, you are trying to do in your own strength what Christ alone can do in you." And when they tell me: "I am sure I knew Christ alone could do it, I was not trusting in myself," my answer always is: "You were trusting in yourself or you could not have failed. If you had trusted Christ, He could not have failed." Oh, this perfecting in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit runs far deeper through us than we knew. Let us ask God to reveal to us that it is only when we are brought to utter shame and emptiness that we shall be prepared to receive the blessing that comes from on high... . I ask it of every member of Christ's church and of every believer: Are you living a life under the power of the Holy Spirit day by day,

or are you attempting to live without that? Remember you cannot. Are you consecrated, given up to the Spirit to work and live in you? Oh, come and confess every failure of temper, every failure of the tongue however small, every failure owing to the absence of the Holy Spirit and the presence of the power of self.

(From “Having Begun in the Spirit” by Andrew Murray in *They Walked with God*)

Application

Paul warned: Don’t be tricked. Don’t let anyone think that you must win God’s approval. Rejoice that if you are God’s child his love toward you is endless.

Exploration

Law’s Inferiority—[Romans 3:19–20](#); [4:13–25](#); [8:3](#); [Galatians 5:4–6](#); [Hebrews 3:1–6](#); [8:7–13](#).

Blessing Comes Through Faith

You people in Galatia were told very clearly about the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. But you were foolish; you let someone trick you.²Tell me this one thing: How did you receive the Holy Spirit? Did you receive the Spirit by following the law? No, you received the Spirit because you heard the Good News and believed it.³You began your life in Christ by the Spirit. Now are you trying to make it complete by your own power? That is foolish.⁴Were all your experiences wasted? I hope not!⁵Does God give you the Spirit and work miracles among you because you follow the law? No, he does these things because you heard the Good News and believed it.

⁶The Scriptures say the same thing about Abraham: “Abraham believed God, and God accepted Abraham’s faith, and that faith made him right with God.”⁷So you should know that the true children of Abraham are those who have faith.⁸The Scriptures, telling what would happen in the future, said that God would make the non-Jewish people right through their faith. This Good News was told to Abraham beforehand, as the Scripture says: “All nations will be blessed through you.”⁹So all who believe as Abraham believed are blessed just as Abraham was.¹⁰But those who depend on following the law to make them right are under a curse, because the Scriptures say, “Anyone will be cursed who does not always obey what is written in the Book of the Law.”¹¹Now it is clear that no one

can be made right with God by the law, because the Scriptures say, “Those who are right with God will live by trusting in him.”¹² The law is not based on faith. It says, “A person who obeys these things will live because of them.”¹³ Christ took away the curse the law put on us. He changed places with us and put himself under that curse. It is written in the Scriptures, “Anyone whose body is displayed on a tree is cursed.”¹⁴ Christ did this so that God’s blessing promised to Abraham might come through Jesus Christ to those who are not Jews. Jesus died so that by our believing we could receive the Spirit that God promised.

The Law and the Promise

¹⁵Brothers and sisters, let us think in human terms: Even an agreement made between two persons is firm. After that agreement is accepted by both people, no one can stop it or add anything to it.¹⁶ God made promises both to Abraham and to his descendant. God did not say, “and to your descendants.” That would mean many people. But God said, “and to your descendant.” That means only one person; that person is Christ.¹⁷ This is what I mean: God had an agreement with Abraham and promised to keep it. The law, which came four hundred thirty years later, cannot change that agreement and so destroy God’s promise to Abraham.¹⁸ If the law could give us Abraham’s blessing, then the promise would not be necessary. But that is not possible, because God freely gave his blessings to Abraham through the promise he had made.

¹⁹So what was the law for? It was given to show that the wrong things people do are against God’s will. And it

continued until the special descendant, who had been promised, came. The law was given through angels who used Moses for a [mediator](#) to give the law to people.²⁰ But a mediator is not needed when there is only one side, and God is only one.

The Purpose of the Law of Moses

²¹Does this mean that the law is against God's promises? Never! That would be true only if the law could make us right. But God did not give a law that can bring life.²² Instead, the Scriptures showed that the whole world is bound by sin. This was so the promise would be given through faith to people who believe in Jesus Christ.

²³Before this faith came, we were all held prisoners by the law. We had no freedom until God showed us the way of faith that was coming.²⁴ In other words, the law was our guardian leading us to Christ so that we could be made right with God through faith.²⁵ Now the way of faith has come, and we no longer live under a guardian.

²⁶⁻²⁷You were all baptized into Christ, and so you were all clothed with Christ. This means that you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.²⁸ In Christ, there is no difference between Jew and Greek, slave and free person, male and female. You are all the same in Christ Jesus.²⁹ You belong to Christ, so you are Abraham's descendants. You will inherit all of God's blessings because of the promise God made to Abraham.

I want to tell you this: While those who will inherit their fathers' property are still children, they are no different from slaves. It does not matter that the children own everything.² While they are children, they must obey those who are chosen to care for them. But when the children reach the age set by their fathers, they are free.³ It is the same for us. We were once like children, slaves to the useless rules of this world.⁴ But when the right time came, God sent his Son who was born of a woman and lived under the law.⁵ God did this so he could buy freedom for those who were under the law and so we could become his children.

⁶Since you are God's children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, and the Spirit cries out, "[Father.](#)"⁷ So now you are not a slave; you are God's child, and God will give you the blessing he promised, because you are his child.

Life Lessons

Galatians 4:8–31

Situation

Judaizers taught that Gentile Believers had to obey Jewish laws in order to be saved. Paul wrote to correct this false teaching.

Observation

As a result of God's promise, Christians are children of God. As adopted children, Believers can enjoy all the benefits of being in God's family.

Inspiration

As a minister I have had the privilege of witnessing—up close—the emotion of adoption. On

one occasion a lady in another state who had heard me speak called and asked if I knew any prospective adoptive parents. Her pregnant daughter was seeking a home for her unborn child. I put her in touch with a family from our congregation and took a front row seat as the drama unfolded.

I saw the joy at the possibility and the heartbreak at the roadblocks. I watched the resolve in the eyes of the father and the determination in the eyes of the mother. They would travel as far as it took and spend every penny they had. They wanted to adopt that child. And they did. Only moments after his birth, the infant was placed in their arms. And this is no exaggeration: They smiled for a month after they brought their son home. I'd see them in the church hallway; they'd be smiling. I'd see them in the parking lot, smiling. From the pulpit I could see them in the congregation, cradling the baby and smiling. I think if I'd preached a sermon on the agony of hell, they would have smiled through every sentence. Why? Because the child they had longed for had come into their home.

Let me ask you, why did this couple adopt that child? They had a happy marriage. They were financially secure and gainfully employed. What did they hope to gain? Did they adopt the baby so they might have a little extra cash or sleep? You know better. Their supply of both diminished the minute they brought the child home. Then why? Why do people adopt children? As you are thinking, let me tell you why God does....

God adopted you simply because he wanted to. You were in his good will and pleasure. Knowing full well the trouble you would be and the price he would pay, he signed his name next to yours and changed your name to his and took you home. Your *Abba* adopted you and became your Father. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you see yourself from God's perspective? Ask God to reveal to you all the benefits of adoption. If you know young or struggling believers, go out of your way to help them see their benefits in Christ.

Exploration

Adoption—[Romans 8:15–25](#); [9:8–9](#); [Ephesians 1:5–6](#); [2:13–19](#).

Paul's Love for the Christians

⁸In the past you did not know God. You were slaves to gods that were not real. ⁹But now you know the true God. Really, it is God who knows you. So why do you turn back to those weak and useless rules you followed before? Do you want to be slaves to those things again? ¹⁰You still follow teachings about special days, months, seasons, and years. ¹¹I am afraid for you, that my work for you has been wasted.

¹²Brothers and sisters, I became like you, so I beg you to become like me. You were very good to me before. ¹³You remember that it was because of an illness that I came to you the first time, preaching the Good News. ¹⁴Though my sickness was a trouble for you, you did not hate me or make me leave. But you welcomed me as an angel from God, as if I were Jesus Christ himself! ¹⁵You were very happy then, but where is that joy now? I am ready to testify that you would have taken out your eyes and given them to me if that were possible. ¹⁶Now am I your enemy because I tell you the truth?

¹⁷[Those people](#) are working hard to persuade you, but this is not good for you. They want to persuade you to turn against us and follow only them. ¹⁸It is good for people to show interest in you, but only if their purpose is good. This is always true, not just when I am with you. ¹⁹My little children, again I feel the pain of childbirth for you until you truly become like Christ. ²⁰I wish I could be with you now and could change the way I am talking to you, because I do not know what to think

about you.

Christ Through the Bible **Jesus Came at the Right Time**

Imagine the change [Jesus] had to make, the distance he had to travel. What would it be like to become flesh?

This question surfaced as I was golfing recently. Waiting my turn to putt, I squatted down to clean my ball and noticed a mountain of ants beside it. Must have been dozens of them, all over each other. A pyramid of motion at least half an inch tall.

I don't know what you think when you see ants on a green as you are waiting to putt. But here is what I thought: *Why are you guys all bunched up? You have the whole green. Why, the entire golf course is yours to spread out in.* Then it occurred to me. These ants are nervous. Who could blame them? They live under a constant meteor shower. Every few minutes a dimpled orb comes crashing into their world. *Bam! Bam! Bam!* Just when the bombing stops, the mallet-swinging giants arrive. If you survive their feet and sticks, they roll a meteor at you. A golf green is no place for an ant.

So I tried to help them. Leaning down where they could hear me, I invited, "Come on, follow me. We'll find a nice spot in the rough. I know it well." Not one looked in my direction. "Hey, ants!" Still no reply. Then I realized, *I don't speak their language.* I don't speak Ant. Pretty fluent in the idiom of Uncle, but I

don't speak Ant.

So what could I do to reach them? Only one thing. I needed to become an ant. Go from six feet two inches to teeny-weeny. From 200-plus pounds to tenths of an ounce. Swap my big world for their tiny one. Give up burgers and start eating grass. "No thanks," I said.

Love goes the distance ... and Christ traveled from limitless eternity to be confined by time in order to become one of us... . (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

The Example of Hagar and Sarah

²¹Some of you still want to be under the law. Tell me, do you know what the law says? ²²The Scriptures say that Abraham had two sons. The mother of one son was a slave woman, and the mother of the other son was a free woman. ²³Abraham's son from the slave woman was born in the normal human way. But the son from the free woman was born because of the promise God made to Abraham.

²⁴This story teaches something else: The two women are like the two agreements between God and his people. One agreement is the law that God made on [Mount Sinai](#), and the people who are under this agreement are like slaves. The mother named Hagar is like that agreement. ²⁵She is like Mount Sinai in Arabia and is a picture of the earthly Jewish city of Jerusalem. This city and its people, the Jews, are slaves to the law. ²⁶But the heavenly Jerusalem, which is above, is like the free woman. She is our mother. ²⁷It is written in the Scriptures:

“Be happy, Jerusalem.

You are like a woman who never gave birth to children.
Start singing and shout for joy.

You never felt the pain of giving birth,
but you will have more children
than the woman who has a husband.”

[Isaiah 54:1](#)

²⁸My brothers and sisters, you are God's children because of his promise, as Isaac was then. ²⁹The son who was born in the normal way treated the other son badly. It is the same today. ³⁰But what does the Scripture say? [“Throw out the slave woman and her son. The son of the slave woman should not inherit anything. The son of the free woman should receive it all.”](#) ³¹So, my brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

Life Lessons

Galatians 5:1–26

Situation

Christians in Galatia faced a problem. Should they embrace the Jewish Law? Paul emphasized the importance of faith and warned about the danger of emphasizing law above faith.

Observation

Paul taught that if you begin to keep the Law, you are obligated to keep all of it. Instead, Christians ought to trust Jesus who makes them righteous.

Inspiration

The way we live, the things we say, the attitudes we entertain, the lifestyle we adopt, the enterprises in which we engage are all continuously producing either positive or negative results in society. Far too many people assume they can adopt a neutral stance. They feel they can be noncommittal. They try to remain detached, uninvolved with the trauma, turmoil and tension of their times.

Again and again Jesus pointed out that this was impossible. “Either you are for me, or against me,” He said. “You cannot serve two masters at once. Either you hate one and love the other or vice-versa...”

We live in an atmosphere of antagonism, an environment of enmity. Yet amid such adversity Christ calls us to produce peace.

This peace is love quietly, strongly, persistently meeting every onslaught against it with good will. It

is that inner attitude of tranquility and tolerance in the face of angry attacks. It is the willingness to accept the assaults of others even at the price of personal humiliation. It implies that even though my enemies and detractors may be at war with me, I can be at peace with them. (From *Salt for Society* by Phillip Keller)

Application

How do you exhibit your faith? Do you hurry out the door after church on Sundays? Or, do you take the time to greet and listen to the concerns of others? Next Sunday, stay and listen. Remember that listening begins to help those in need.

Exploration

Faith—[Romans 8](#); [1 Corinthians 13:2](#); [James 2:14](#).

Keep Your Freedom

We have freedom now, because Christ made us free. So stand strong. Do not change and go back into the slavery of the law. ²Listen, I Paul tell you that if you go back to the law by being circumcised, Christ does you no good. ³Again, I warn every man: If you allow yourselves to be circumcised, you must follow all the law. ⁴If you try to be made right with God through the law, your life with Christ is over—you have left God's grace. ⁵But we have the true hope that comes from being made right with God, and by the Spirit we wait eagerly for this hope. ⁶When we are in Christ Jesus, it is not important if we are circumcised or not. The important thing is faith—the kind of faith that works through love.

⁷You were running a good race. Who stopped you from following the true way? ⁸This change did not come from the One who chose you. ⁹Be careful! “Just a little yeast makes the whole batch of dough rise.” ¹⁰But I trust in the Lord that you will not believe those different ideas. Whoever is confusing you with such ideas will be punished.

¹¹My brothers and sisters, I do not teach that a man must be circumcised. If I teach circumcision, why am I still being attacked? If I still taught circumcision, my preaching about the cross would not be a problem. ¹²I wish the people who are bothering you would castrate themselves!

¹³My brothers and sisters, God called you to be free, but do not use your freedom as an excuse to do what pleases your sinful self. Serve each other with love. ¹⁴The whole law is made complete in this one command: [“Love your neighbor as you love yourself.”](#) ¹⁵If you go on hurting each other and tearing each other apart, be careful, or you will completely destroy each other.

The Spirit and Human Nature

¹⁶So I tell you: Live by following the Spirit. Then you will not do what your sinful selves want. ¹⁷Our sinful selves want what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit wants what is against our sinful selves. The two are against each other, so you cannot do just what you please. ¹⁸But if the Spirit is leading you, you are not under the law.

¹⁹The wrong things the sinful self does are clear: being sexually unfaithful, not being pure, taking part in sexual sins, ²⁰worshipping gods, doing witchcraft, hating, making trouble, being jealous, being angry, being selfish, making people angry with each other, causing divisions among people, ²¹feeling envy, being drunk, having wild and wasteful parties, and doing other things like these. I warn you now as I warned you before: Those who do these things will not inherit God’s kingdom. ²²But the Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control. There is no law that says these things are wrong. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their own sinful selves. They have given up their old selfish feelings and the evil things they wanted to do. ²⁵We get our new life from the Spirit,

so we should follow the Spirit.²⁶ We must not be proud or make trouble with each other or be jealous of each other.

Life Lessons

Galatians 6:1-18

Situation

Paul warned the Galatians not to compare themselves with others. Rather, they had to be concerned with their own responsibility before God.

Observation

God transformed you into a new person. Live like it!

Inspiration

The Bible reveals that God has a plan for every life, and that if we live in constant fellowship with Him, He will direct and lead us in the fulfillment of this plan.

Many of us have God's second or third best. However, if you have substituted the good for the best, do not despair. Wherever you are at this moment, yield your life unconditionally to God, and He can still make it a thing of beauty and an honor to His name.

You cannot know the will of God for your life unless you first come to the cross and confess that you are a sinner and receive Christ as Lord and Savior. If you want the perfect plan that God has for your life, you will have to go by way of Calvary to get it. It is only through Christ that we can be on speaking terms with God and know God's plan for our lives. (From *Unto the Hills* by Billy Graham)

Application

Both legalism and sin end in frustration. But your freedom from sin and your desire to please God frees you to do your best before him. You can help others. You can do good.

Exploration

Paul's Suffering—[Acts 14:19](#); [16:22](#); [2 Corinthians 11:23–29](#); [12:7](#); [Galatians 4:13–14](#).

Help Each Other

Brothers and sisters, if someone in your group does something wrong, you who are spiritual should go to that person and gently help make him right again. But be careful, because you might be tempted to sin, too. ²By helping each other with your troubles, you truly obey the law of Christ. ³If anyone thinks he is important when he really is not, he is only fooling himself. ⁴Each person should judge his own actions and not compare himself with others. Then he can be proud for what he himself has done. ⁵Each person must be responsible for himself.

⁶Anyone who is learning the teaching of God should share all the good things he has with his teacher.

Life Is like Planting a Field

⁷Do not be fooled: You cannot cheat God. People harvest only what they plant. ⁸If they plant to satisfy their sinful selves, their sinful selves will bring them ruin. But if they plant to please the Spirit, they will receive eternal life from the Spirit.

⁹We must not become tired of doing good. We will receive our harvest of eternal life at the right time if we do not give up.

¹⁰When we have the opportunity to help anyone, we should do it. But we should give special attention to those who are in the family of believers.

Paul Ends His Letter

¹¹See what large letters I use to write this myself. ¹²Some people are trying to force you to be circumcised so the Jews will accept them. They are afraid they will be attacked if they follow only the [cross of Christ](#). ¹³Those who are circumcised do not obey the law themselves, but they want you to be circumcised so they can brag about what they forced you to do. ¹⁴I hope I will never brag about things like that. The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is my only reason for bragging. Through the cross of Jesus my world was crucified, and I died to the world. ¹⁵It is not important if a man is circumcised or uncircumcised. The important thing is being the new people God has made. ¹⁶Peace and mercy to those who follow this rule—and to all of God's people.

¹⁷So do not give me any more trouble. I have scars on my body [that show](#) I belong to Christ Jesus.

¹⁸My brothers and sisters, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

those ... family The Greek text says “brothers.”

Galatia Probably the same country where Paul preached and began churches on his first missionary trip. Read the Book of Acts, chapters [13](#) and [14](#).

Brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “Brothers” here and throughout this book, Paul’s words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

“Abraham ... God.” Quotation from [Genesis 15:6](#).

“All ... you.” Quotation from [Genesis 12:3](#) and [18:18](#).

“Anyone ... Law.” Quotation from [Deuteronomy 27:26](#).

“Those ... him.” Quotation from [Habakkuk 2:4](#).

“A person ... them.” Quotation from [Leviticus 18:5](#).

displayed on a tree [Deuteronomy 21:22–23](#) says that when a person was killed for doing wrong, the body was hung on a tree to show shame. Paul means that the cross of Jesus was like that.

mediator A person who helps one person talk to or give something to another person.

“Father” Literally, “Abba, Father.” Jewish children called their fathers “Abba.”

Those people They are the false teachers who were bothering the believers in Galatia ([Galatians 1:7](#)).

Mount Sinai Mountain in Arabia where God gave his Law to Moses ([Exodus 19](#) and [20](#)).

“Throw ... all.” Quotation from [Genesis 21:10](#).

castrate To cut off part of the male sex organ. Paul uses this word because it is similar to “circumcision.” Paul wanted to show that he is very upset with the false teachers.

“Love ... yourself.” Quotation from [Leviticus 19:18](#).

cross of Christ Paul uses the cross as a picture of the Good News, the story of Christ’s death and rising from the dead to

pay for our sins. The cross, or Christ's death, was God's way to save us.

that show Many times Paul was beaten and whipped by people who were against him because he was teaching about Christ. The scars were from these beatings.

The Book of Ephesians

Introduction

I just witnessed a beautiful wedding. The most beautiful I've ever seen. That says a lot since I've seen a lot. Ministers see many weddings. It's a perk of the profession.

Is there anything more elegant than a wedding? Candles bathe a chapel in gold. Families fill the pews in love. Groomsmen and bridesmaids descend the aisles with bouquets of newness and rings of promise. What an occasion.

And nothing quite compares with that moment when the bride stands at the top of the aisle. Arm entwined with her father's, she takes those final steps with him and steps toward a new life with *him*.

Ahhh, the glory of a wedding. So to say I just saw the most beautiful one is no small thing. What made these nuptials so unforgettable? The groom. Usually the groom is not the star of the wedding. The fellow is typically upstaged by the girl. But this wedding was made special by the groom.

It was enhanced by something he did.

And who he was made what he did even more startling. You see, he's a cowboy: a stocky fellow who went to college on a rodeo scholarship. But what stood by me was not a macho calf roper, but a pinch-me-I'm-dreaming boy who'd never seen a bride so gorgeous.

He was composed as he walked down the aisle. He was fine as he took his place at the altar.

But when he saw the bride, he wept.

It was the moment he'd dreamed of. It was as if he'd been given life's greatest gift—a bride in all her beauty. By the way, those are the very words Paul uses to describe the church: a

bride in all her beauty.

“He [Jesus] died so he could give the church to himself like a bride in all her beauty. He died so that the church could be pure and without fault, with no evil or sin or any other wrong thing in it” (5:27).

Ponder that verse. Jesus died for a bride. He died so he could be married. This passage anticipates the day when the groom will see his bride—when Christ will receive his church. Jesus’ fondest longing will be fulfilled. His bride will arrive.

The letter to the Ephesians celebrates the beauty of the church—the Bride of Christ. From our perspective, the church isn’t so pretty. We see the backbiting, the squabbling, the divisions. Heaven sees that, as well. But heaven sees more. Heaven sees the church as cleansed and made holy by Christ.

Heaven sees the church ascending to heaven. Heaven sees the Bride wearing the spotless gown of Jesus Christ.

It’s enough to make one weep.

About This Book

Author:

Paul

Date Written:

c. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

-
- We have many spiritual blessings through Christ.
- Each believer is gifted through the Spirit of God.
- Our faith should work its way into all of our

relationships.

- Our spiritual strength comes from God through his Word and our faith.

Key Verse:

“I mean that you have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God” ([Ephesians 2:8](#)).

Contents:

1. Spiritual Blessings [1:1–3:21](#)
2. Unity and the Christian Lifestyle [4:1–6:24](#)

Life Lessons

Ephesians 1:1–23

Situation

In a city with many sinful distractions, Paul wrote so that Christians would know what God thought of his people.

Observation

God cherishes us. The more we know him, the more we will understand his love toward us.

Inspiration

We all desire relationships in which we are accepted, valued, and wanted. We desperately long for this esteem from our peers, but seldom experience the “real thing.”

Countless stories are written about teenagers who accept life-threatening dares in the hopes of being accepted by their peers, or business people who compromise their integrity and ethics to join an elite, inner circle. We read of men and women who are driven to succeed because they believe the lie that says their value is determined by the quality and level of their performance. Or how about the teenager or lonely single who sacrifices his virginity for the chance to experience closeness and the feeling of being wanted.

For the Christian, none of this futile struggle is necessary because we have been chosen by God before time ever began. We belong, we matter, we have been accepted. No longer outcasts or second-

class citizens, we are part of his family. (From *A Dad's Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent)

Application

Tell someone what you've learned about who you are in Christ. Write a note, make a phone call, go to lunch, or share together on a walk.

Exploration

Adopted by God—[Isaiah 43:6](#); [63:8](#); [John 1:12](#); [Romans 8:15](#); [2 Corinthians 6:16–18](#); [Galatians 3:26–27](#); [4:6](#); [Ephesians 2:19](#); [5:1](#); [Hebrews 12:9](#).

From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am an apostle because that is what God wanted.

To God's holy people living in Ephesus, believers in Christ Jesus:

²Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world. ⁴That is, in Christ, he chose us before the world was made so that we would be his holy people—people without blame before him. ⁵Because of his love, God had already decided to make us his own children through Jesus Christ. That was what he wanted and what pleased him, ⁶and it brings praise to God because of his wonderful grace. God gave that grace to us freely, in Christ, the One he loves. ⁷In Christ we are set free by the blood of his death, and so we have forgiveness of sins. How rich is God's grace, ⁸which he has given to us so fully and freely. God, with full wisdom and understanding, ⁹let us know his secret purpose. This was what God wanted, and he planned to do it through Christ. ¹⁰His goal was to carry out his plan, when the right time came, that all things in heaven and on earth would be joined together in Christ as the head.

¹¹In Christ we were chosen to be God's people, because from the very beginning God had decided this in keeping with his plan. And he is the One who makes everything agree with what he decides and wants. ¹²We are the first people who hoped in Christ, and we were chosen so that we would bring praise to God's glory. ¹³So it is with you. When you heard the true teaching—the Good News about your salvation—you believed in Christ. And in Christ, God put his special mark of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit that he had promised. ¹⁴That Holy Spirit is the guarantee that we will receive what God promised for his people until God gives full freedom to those who are his—to bring praise to God's glory.

Paul's Prayer

¹⁵That is why since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶I have not stopped giving thanks to God for you. I always remember you in my prayers, ¹⁷asking the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you will know him better. ¹⁸I pray also that you will have greater understanding in your heart so you will know the hope to which he has called us and that you will know how rich and glorious are the blessings God has promised his holy people. ¹⁹And you will know that God's power is very great for us who believe. That power is the same as the great strength ²⁰God used to raise Christ from the dead and put him at his right side in the heavenly world. ²¹God has put Christ over all rulers, authorities, powers, and kings, not only in this world but also in the next. ²²God put everything under his power and made

him the head over everything for the church,²³ which is Christ's body. The church is filled with Christ, and Christ fills everything in every way.

Life Lessons

[Ephesians 2:1-22](#)

Situation

The Ephesians forgot what God did to save them and to make them a part of his Body.

Observation

God's mercy plucks us from the destruction of our countless sins and places us in Jesus Christ's righteousness.

Inspiration

When I read a verse like [Ephesians 2:4](#), I feel I have discovered God's roadblock on one's way to hell—[But God's mercy is great.] He is so rich in mercy that none need perish, but individuals must come to God in his appointed way. I adore the mercy that had lovingkindness, pity and compassion on me....

Let me give you a modern illustration of mercy in action. One day, a Christian named Paul went into a coffee shop, sat on a stool, and ordered his lunch. When he began speaking to the man next to him, he realized that Fred was in deep spiritual need. After sharing the gospel with him, Paul arranged to meet him again. It was at the second meeting that Fred was converted. Then Paul began to disciple him on a one-on-one basis, and Fred grew in grace and in knowledge of the Lord Jesus. But it wasn't long before Fred learned that he had a life-threatening disease. He had to go to a convalescent hospital that

was sadly substandard. Paul visited him regularly, bathed him, changed the sheets, and did other chores that the staff should have been doing. The night Fred died, Paul was holding him in his arms, whispering verses of Scripture in his ear. That's mercy. It's a wonderful thing to see that Godlike quality in a human life. (From *Alone in Majesty* by William MacDonald)

Application

Are there some people around you who slip through the cracks unnoticed? Is there a lonely widow? An insecure junior-high student? A struggling single mother? Pay these people a visit—bring flowers or another gift; invest some time in their lives.

Exploration

Mercy—[Matthew 5:7](#); [Luke 6:36](#); [2 Peter 3:9](#).

We Now Have Life

In the past you were spiritually dead because of your sins and the things you did against God.²Yes, in the past you lived the way the world lives, following the ruler of the evil powers that are above the earth. That same spirit is now working in those who refuse to obey God.³In the past all of us lived like them, trying to please our sinful selves and doing all the things our bodies and minds wanted. We should have suffered God's anger because of the way we were. We were the same as all other people.

⁴But God's mercy is great, and he loved us very much.⁵Though we were spiritually dead because of the things we did against God, he gave us new life with Christ. You have been saved by God's grace.⁶And he raised us up with Christ and gave us a seat with him in the heavens. He did this for those in Christ Jesus⁷ so that for all future time he could show the very great riches of his grace by being kind to us in Christ Jesus.⁸I mean that you have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God.⁹It was not the result of your own efforts, so you cannot brag about it.¹⁰God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing.

One in Christ

¹¹You were not born Jewish. You are the people the Jews call “[uncircumcised](#).” Those who call you “uncircumcised” call themselves “circumcised.” (Their circumcision is only something they themselves do on their bodies.) ¹²Remember that in the past you were without Christ. You were not citizens of Israel, and you had no part in the [agreements](#) with the promise that God made to his people. You had no hope, and you did not know God. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away from God are brought near through the blood of Christ’s death. ¹⁴Christ himself is our peace. He made both Jewish people and those who are not Jews one people. They were separated as if there were a wall between them, but Christ broke down that wall of hate by giving his own body. ¹⁵The Jewish law had many commands and rules, but Christ ended that law. His purpose was to make the two groups of people become one new people in him and in this way make peace. ¹⁶It was also Christ’s purpose to end the hatred between the two groups, to make them into one body, and to bring them back to God. Christ did all this with his death on the cross. ¹⁷Christ came and preached peace to you who were far away from God, and to those who were near to God. ¹⁸Yes, it is through Christ we all have the right to come to the Father in one Spirit.

¹⁹Now you who are not Jewish are not foreigners or strangers any longer, but are citizens together with God’s holy people. You belong to God’s family. ²⁰You are like a building that was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself is the [most important stone](#) in that building, ²¹and that whole building is joined together in Christ.

He makes it grow and become a holy temple in the Lord.²² And in Christ you, too, are being built together with the Jews into a place where God lives through the Spirit.

Life Lessons

Ephesians 3:1–21

Situation

Paul told the Ephesians his goals for them. He shared his prayer for their growth in insight and strength.

Observation

Although God's love for us cannot be measured by any comprehensible standards, God wants us to know this ocean of love.

Inspiration

The promises of God's love and forgiveness are as real, as sure, as positive as human words can make them. But like describing the ocean, its total beauty cannot be understood until it is actually seen. It is the same with God's love. Until you actually accept it, until you actually experience it, until you actually possess true peace with God, no one can describe its wonders to you.

It is not something that you can do with your mind. Your finite mind is not capable of dealing with anything as great as the love of God. Your mind might have difficulty explaining how a black cow can eat green grass and give white milk—but you drink the milk and are nourished by it. Your mind can't reason through all the intricate processes that take place when you plant a small flat seed that produces a huge vine bearing luscious red and green watermelons—but you eat them and enjoy them! You can't

understand radio, but you listen. Your mind can't explain the electricity that may be creating the light by which you are reading at this very moment—but you know that it's there and that it is making it possible for you to read!

(From *Peace with God* by Billy Graham)

Application

Learn to see God's love for you in the details of daily life. Read 1 John and get a firmer grasp on understanding God's love.

Exploration

God's Love—[Psalm 6:4](#); [John 3:16](#); [15:12](#); [Romans 5:8](#); [8:35–37](#); [1 John 3:1](#).

Paul's Work in Telling the Good News

So I, Paul, am a prisoner of Christ Jesus for you who are not Jews.² Surely you have heard that God gave me this work through his grace to help you.³ He let me know his secret by showing it to me. I have already written a little about this.⁴ If you read what I wrote then, you can see that I truly understand the secret about the Christ.⁵ People who lived in other times were not told that secret. But now, through the Spirit, God has shown that secret to his holy apostles and prophets.⁶ This is that secret: that through the Good News those who are not Jews will share with the Jews in God's blessing. They belong to the same body, and they share together in the promise that God made in Christ Jesus.

⁷By God's special gift of grace given to me through his power, I became a servant to tell that Good News.⁸ I am the least important of all God's people, but God gave me this gift—to tell those who are not Jews the Good News about the riches of Christ, which are too great to understand fully.⁹ And God gave me the work of telling all people about the plan for his secret, which has been hidden in him since the beginning of time. He is the One who created everything.¹⁰ His purpose was that through the church all the rulers and powers in the heavenly world will now know God's wisdom, which has so many forms.¹¹ This agrees with the purpose God had since the beginning of time, and he carried out his plan through Christ

Jesus our Lord. ¹²In Christ we can come before God with freedom and without fear. We can do this through faith in Christ. ¹³So I ask you not to become discouraged because of the sufferings I am having for you. My sufferings are for your glory.

The Love of Christ

¹⁴So I bow in prayer before the Father ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth gets its true name. ¹⁶I ask the Father in his great glory to give you the power to be strong inwardly through his Spirit. ¹⁷I pray that Christ will live in your hearts by faith and that your life will be strong in love and be built on love. ¹⁸And I pray that you and all God's holy people will have the power to understand the greatness of Christ's love—how wide and how long and how high and how deep that love is. ¹⁹Christ's love is greater than anyone can ever know, but I pray that you will be able to know that love. Then you can be filled with the fullness of God.

²⁰With God's power working in us, God can do much, much more than anything we can ask or imagine. ²¹To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all time, forever and ever. Amen.

Life Lessons

Ephesians 4:1-5:20

Situation

Paul labored to bring unity between Gentiles and Jews. He urgently defended the need for a unified and God-honoring lifestyle.

Observation

Attitudes of humility, gentleness, and patience should characterize Christians. We are told to accept each other in love.

Inspiration

Let's take inventory of our hearts. Am I living in the overflow of God's love? How well do I love the people in my life? Does the way I treat people reflect the way God has treated me?

Loving people isn't always easy. In fact, this book has been a challenging one for some of you. You've been forced to think again about some of the people in your life whom you find hard to love. This is serious business. It's not easy to love those who have been the source of heartache, abuse, rejection, or loneliness. Some of you wonder how you could ever love the people who have caused you such pain. So what can you do?

Conventional wisdom says that a lack of love implies a lack of effort, so we try harder, dig deeper, strain more.

But could a lack of love imply something else? Could we be skipping a step? An essential step?

Could it be that we are trying to give what we don't have? Are we forgetting to receive first?

The woman in Capernaum didn't forget. [Read [Luke 7:36-50](#).] Remember how she lavished love on Christ? Bathing his feet with tears. Drying his feet with her hair. If love were a waterfall, she'd be a Niagara.

And Simon, well, Simon was a Sahara. Dry. Parched. Hard. His arid heart surprises us. He was the churchgoer, the pastor, the seminarian. She, on the other hand, was the town slut. He'd forgotten more Bible than she ever knew. But she'd discovered one truth Simon had somehow missed: God's love has no limits.

God's love meets the standard of our final passage. "Love," Paul says, "never fails" ([1 Corinthians 13:8](#), NIV).

*How could God have a love like this? No one has unfailing love. No person can love with perfection. You're right. No person can. But God is not a person. Unlike our love, his never fails. His love is immensely different from ours. (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)*

Application

Is your attitude toward other believers marked by love, humility, patience, and gentleness? Paul encouraged us to display unity in the body of Christ and accept one another in love. If you're not doing that, check your attitudes. Your spiritual gifts and talents should help bring the body of Christ together.

Exploration

Unity—[John 17:11, 20–23](#); [Romans 12:9–21](#);
[Philippians 2:1–2](#).

The Unity of the Body

I am in prison because I belong to the Lord. God chose you to be his people, so I urge you now to live the life to which God called you.² Always be humble, gentle, and patient, accepting each other in love.³ You are joined together with peace through the Spirit, so make every effort to continue together in this way.⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, and God called you to have one hope.⁵ There is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.⁶ There is one God and Father of everything. He rules everything and is everywhere and is in everything.

⁷Christ gave each one of us the special gift of grace, showing how generous he is.⁸ That is why it says in the Scriptures,

“When he went up to the heights,
he led a parade of captives,
and he gave gifts to people.”

[Psalm 68:18](#)

⁹When it says, “He went up,” what does it mean? It means that he first came down to the earth.¹⁰ So Jesus came down, and he is the same One who went up above all the heaven. Christ did that to fill everything with his presence.¹¹ And Christ gave gifts to people—he made some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to go and tell the Good News, and some to

have the work of caring for and teaching God's people. ¹²Christ gave those gifts to prepare God's holy people for the work of serving, to make the body of Christ stronger. ¹³This work must continue until we are all joined together in the same faith and in the same knowledge of the Son of God. We must become like a mature person, growing until we become like Christ and have his perfection.

¹⁴Then we will no longer be babies. We will not be tossed about like a ship that the waves carry one way and then another. We will not be influenced by every new teaching we hear from people who are trying to fool us. They make plans and try any kind of trick to fool people into following the wrong path. ¹⁵No! Speaking the truth with love, we will grow up in every way into Christ, who is the head. ¹⁶The whole body depends on Christ, and all the parts of the body are joined and held together. Each part does its own work to make the whole body grow and be strong with love.

The Way You Should Live

¹⁷In the Lord's name, I tell you this. Do not continue living like those who do not believe. Their thoughts are worth nothing. ¹⁸They do not understand, and they know nothing, because they refuse to listen. So they cannot have the life that God gives. ¹⁹They have lost all feeling of shame, and they use their lives for doing evil. They continually want to do all kinds of evil. ²⁰But what you learned in Christ was not like this. ²¹I know that you heard about him, and you are in him, so you were taught the truth that is in Jesus. ²²You were taught to leave your old self—to stop living the evil way you lived before.

That old self becomes worse, because people are fooled by the evil things they want to do.²³ But you were taught to be made new in your hearts,²⁴ to become a new person. That new person is made to be like God—made to be truly good and holy.

²⁵So you must stop telling lies. Tell each other the truth, because we all belong to each other in the same body.²⁶ When you are angry, do not sin, and be sure to stop being angry before the end of the day.²⁷ Do not give the devil a way to defeat you.²⁸ Those who are stealing must stop stealing and start working. They should earn an honest living for themselves. Then they will have something to share with those who are poor.

²⁹When you talk, do not say harmful things, but say what people need—words that will help others become stronger. Then what you say will do good to those who listen to you.³⁰ And do not make the Holy Spirit sad. The Spirit is God's proof that you belong to him. God gave you the Spirit to show that God will make you free when the final day comes.³¹ Do not be bitter or angry or mad. Never shout angrily or say things to hurt others. Never do anything evil.³² Be kind and loving to each other, and forgive each other just as God forgave you in Christ.

Living in the Light

You are God's children whom he loves, so try to be like him. ²Live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us as a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice to God.

³But there must be no sexual sin among you, or any kind of evil or greed. Those things are not right for God's holy people. ⁴Also, there must be no evil talk among you, and you must not speak foolishly or tell evil jokes. These things are not right for you. Instead, you should be giving thanks to God. ⁵You can be sure of this: No one will have a place in the kingdom of Christ and of God who sins sexually, or does evil things, or is greedy. Anyone who is greedy is serving a false god.

⁶Do not let anyone fool you by telling you things that are not true, because these things will bring God's anger on those who do not obey him. ⁷So have nothing to do with them. ⁸In the past you were full of darkness, but now you are full of light in the Lord. So live like children who belong to the light. ⁹Light brings every kind of goodness, right living, and truth. ¹⁰Try to learn what pleases the Lord. ¹¹Have nothing to do with the things done in darkness, which are not worth anything. But show that they are wrong. ¹²It is shameful even to talk about what those people do in secret. ¹³But the light makes all things easy to see, ¹⁴and everything that is made easy to see can become light. This is why it is said:

“Wake up, sleeper!
Rise from death,

and Christ will shine on you.”

¹⁵So be very careful how you live. Do not live like those who are not wise, but live wisely. ¹⁶Use every chance you have for doing good, because these are evil times. ¹⁷So do not be foolish but learn what the Lord wants you to do. ¹⁸Do not be drunk with wine, which will ruin you, but be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹Speak to each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord. ²⁰Always give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Life Lessons

Ephesians 5:21–6:24

Situation

To fight effectively in their spiritual battle, the Ephesians must know Christ, obey his standards, and be prepared to fight.

Observation

Each Christian has a responsibility to love, honor, and respect. If faithful to these duties, Christians will find themselves united against the spiritual power of evil.

Inspiration

What does it mean to honor your parents? We can see that if we will look at the word “honor” in the Scriptures. In Hebrew, the word for “honor” is *kabed*. This word literally means, “to be heavy, weighty, to honor.” Even today, we still link the idea of being heavy with honoring a person.

When the President of the United States or some other important person speaks, people often say that his words “carry a lot of weight.” Someone whose words are weighty is someone worthy of honor and respect. However, we can learn even more about what it means to honor someone by looking at its opposite in Scriptures.

... [T]he literal meaning of the word “curse” (*qalal*) was “to make light, of little weight, to dishonor.” If we go back to our example above, if we dishonor a person we would say, “Their words carry little weight.” The contrast is striking!

When Paul tells us to honor our parents, he is telling us that they are worthy of high value and respect. In modern-day terms, we could call them a heavyweight in our lives! Just the opposite is true if we choose to dishonor our parents.

Some people treat their parents as if they are a layer of dust on a table. Dust weighs almost nothing and can be swept away with a brush of the hand. Dust is a nuisance and an eyesore that clouds any real beauty the table might have. Paul tells us that such an attitude should not be a part of how any child views his or her parents, and for good reason. If we fail to honor our parents, we not only do what is wrong and dishonor God, but we also literally drain ourselves of life! (From *The Gift of the Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent)

Application

In what ways do you honor your boss, parents, children, or employees? How have you dishonored

them? Pinpoint areas in which you need to improve. Honor others not only with your actions but with your thoughts, too.

Exploration

Obedience to Parents—[Proverbs 1:8; 6:20; Colossians 3:20](#). Parental Duties—[Deuteronomy 6:7; Proverbs 22:6; 2 Corinthians 12:14; 1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 2:4–5](#).

Wives and Husbands

²¹Yield to obey each other because you respect Christ.

²²Wives, yield to your husbands, as you do to the Lord, ²³because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. And he is the Savior of the body, which is the church. ²⁴As the church yields to Christ, so you wives should yield to your husbands in everything.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it ²⁶to make it belong to God. Christ used the word to make the church clean by washing it with water. ²⁷He died so that he could give the church to himself like a bride in all her beauty. He died so that the church could be pure and without fault, with no evil or sin or any other wrong thing in it. ²⁸In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they love their own bodies. The man who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹No one ever hates his own body, but feeds and takes care of it. And that is what Christ does for the church, ³⁰because we are parts of his body. ³¹The Scripture says, [“So a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one body.”](#) ³²That secret is very important—I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³But each one of you must love his wife as he loves himself, and a wife must respect her husband.

Children and Parents

Children, obey your parents as the Lord wants, because this is the right thing to do.²The command says, “Honor your father and mother.” This is the first command that has a promise with it—³“Then everything will be well with you, and you will have a long life on the earth.”

⁴Fathers, do not make your children angry, but raise them with the training and teaching of the Lord.

Slaves and Masters

⁵Slaves, obey your masters here on earth with fear and respect and from a sincere heart, just as you obey Christ.⁶You must do this not only while they are watching you, to please them. With all your heart you must do what God wants as people who are obeying Christ.⁷Do your work with enthusiasm. Work as if you were serving the Lord, not as if you were serving only men and women.⁸Remember that the Lord will give a reward to everyone, slave or free, for doing good.

⁹Masters, in the same way, be good to your slaves. Do not threaten them. Remember that the One who is your Master and their Master is in heaven, and he treats everyone alike.

Wear the Full Armor of God

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his great power.¹¹Put on the full armor of God so that you can fight against the devil's

evil tricks. ¹²Our fight is not against people on earth but against the rulers and authorities and the powers of this world's darkness, against the spiritual powers of evil in the heavenly world. ¹³That is why you need to put on God's full armor. Then on the day of evil you will be able to stand strong. And when you have finished the whole fight, you will still be standing. ¹⁴So stand strong, with the belt of truth tied around your waist and the protection of right living on your chest. ¹⁵On your feet wear the Good News of peace to help you stand strong. ¹⁶And also use the shield of faith with which you can stop all the burning arrows of the Evil One. ¹⁷Accept God's salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸Pray in the Spirit at all times with all kinds of prayers, asking for everything you need. To do this you must always be ready and never give up. Always pray for all God's people.

¹⁹Also pray for me that when I speak, God will give me words so that I can tell the secret of the Good News without fear. ²⁰I have been sent to preach this Good News, and I am doing that now, here in prison. Pray that when I preach the Good News I will speak without fear, as I should.

Final Greetings

²¹I am sending to you Tychicus, our brother whom we love and a faithful servant of the Lord's work. He will tell you everything that is happening with me. Then you will know how I am and what I am doing. ²²I am sending him to you for this reason—so that you will know how we are, and he can encourage you.

²³Peace and love with faith to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Grace to all of you who love our Lord

Jesus Christ with love that never ends.

uncircumcised People not having the mark of circumcision as the Jews had.

agreements The agreements that God gave to his people in the Old Testament.

most important stone Literally, “cornerstone.” The first and most important stone in a building.

Tell ... body. Quotation from [Zechariah 8:16](#).

“So ... body.” Quotation from [Genesis 2:24](#).

“Honor ... mother.” Quotation from [Exodus 20:12](#); [Deuteronomy 5:16](#).

“Then ... earth.” Quotation from [Exodus 20:12](#); [Deuteronomy 5:16](#).

[The Book of Philippians](#)

Introduction

Perhaps the symbol of this generation is the exercise bike.

It represents what most have—excess weight.

It represents what most want—to be different.

It represents what most people spend most their time doing—pedaling furiously and getting nowhere. High activity but low achievement. Car pools, diapers, bills, time clocks. Office walls painted gray with routine. Houses framed with wooden humdrum. For many, life is lived on the exercise bicycle. Day after day in the same seat, doing the same thing but seeing the same scenery. Is there any end to this tunnel of grayness?

There is.

Go with me back in history a couple of thousand years. Let's go to the city of Rome. The thrilling metropolis of gladiators, chariots, and empires. But don't stop at the coliseum or palace. Go rather to a drab little room, surrounded by high walls. Let's imagine that we can peek into the room and look. Inside we see a man seated on the floor. He's an older fellow, shoulders stooped and balding. Chains are on his hands and feet. And chained to him is a guard from the Roman army.

It is the apostle Paul. The apostle who has traveled all over the world. The apostle who has liberated people in every port. The apostle who was bound only by the will of God is now in chains—stuck in a dingy house—attached to a Roman officer.

Here is a fellow who has every reason to be in a slump!

He is restricted by walls. He is afflicted by friends ([1:15](#)). He is conflicted by danger ([1:21](#)).

He is writing a letter. No doubt it is a complaint letter to

God. No doubt it is a list of grievances. No doubt he is writing the New Testament version of Lamentations. He has every reason to be bitter and complain. But he doesn't. Instead, he writes a letter that two thousand years later is still known as the treatise on joy.

Sound interesting? Of course it does. Who couldn't use a guide to joy in this world? Why don't you spend some time with it? Dismount the bicycle to nowhere and follow Paul as he guides you down the trail to peace.

About This Book

Author:

Paul

Date Written:

C. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

-
- By faith we have Christ in us because of the Spirit of God.
- Only Christ can bring salvation.
- Christian unity encourages our faith.

Key Verses:

“In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus. Christ himself was like God in everything. But he did not think that being equal with God was something to be used for his own benefit” ([Philippians 2:5-6](#)).

Contents:

1. Paul's Circumstances [1:1–30](#)
2. Christ's Example [2:1–30](#)
3. Living for Christ [3:1–4:23](#)

Life Lessons

Philippians 1:1–2:30

Situation

Paul pointed to Jesus as the ultimate example of servanthood and selflessness.

Observation

Imitate Jesus Christ, the humble servant of God. Jesus gave up his rights so that we could be saved.

Inspiration

Jesus deliberately stripped Himself of everything—His divine rights and privileges—and crossed the unthinkable chasm between God and man.

Try to imagine the span of that chasm... . The unlimited God became limited man... . Jesus Christ is God.

... From the world's viewpoint, Jesus had descended as low as a man—to say nothing of God—could go.

But there was one more downward step, in heaven's eyes the deepest descent of all: from sinless to sin stained... . Truly, He could go no lower.

... He knowingly and actively embraced a life of giving, serving, losing, and dying.

What was, and is, really hard for Jesus' followers to swallow is that we are called to do the same. To make ourselves nothing... . We must believe that as painful as it sometimes feels, descending is the only way to greatness... . Jesus obeyed for the sake of love.

And we, His followers and the recipients of His love, are called to do the same. When asked about the two greatest commands, Jesus replied: to love God and to love others. That is what motivated Jesus, and that is what is to motivate us. (From *Descending into Greatness* by Bill Hybels)

Application

God views service and humility as strengths, not weaknesses. What steps in your relationships can you take to show greater humility? How can you expand your service to others?

Exploration

Humility of Jesus—[Zechariah 9:9](#); [Matthew 11:29](#); [John 13:5](#); [2 Corinthians 8:9](#).

From Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus.

To all of God's holy people in Christ Jesus who live in Philippi, including your elders and deacons:

²Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's Prayer

³I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴always praying with joy for all of you. ⁵I thank God for the help you gave me while I preached the Good News—help you gave from the first day you believed until now. ⁶God began doing a good work in you, and I am sure he will continue it until it is finished when Jesus Christ comes again.

⁷And I know that I am right to think like this about all of you, because I have you in my heart. All of you share in God's grace with me while I am in prison and while I am defending and proving the truth of the Good News. ⁸God knows that I want to see you very much, because I love all of you with the love of Christ Jesus.

⁹This is my prayer for you: that your love will grow more and more; that you will have knowledge and understanding with your love; ¹⁰that you will see the difference between good and bad and will choose the good; that you will be pure and without wrong for the coming of Christ; ¹¹that you will do many good things with the help of Christ to bring glory and praise to

God.

Paul's Troubles Help the Work

¹²I want you [brothers and sisters](#) to know that what has happened to me has helped to spread the Good News. ¹³All the palace guards and everyone else knows that I am in prison because I am a believer in Christ. ¹⁴Because I am in prison, most of the believers have become more bold in Christ and are not afraid to speak the word of God.

¹⁵It is true that some preach about Christ because they are jealous and ambitious, but others preach about Christ because they want to help. ¹⁶They preach because they have love, and they know that God gave me the work of defending the Good News. ¹⁷But the others preach about Christ for selfish and wrong reasons, wanting to make trouble for me in prison.

¹⁸But it doesn't matter. The important thing is that in every way, whether for right or wrong reasons, they are preaching about Christ. So I am happy, and I will continue to be happy. ¹⁹Because you are praying for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ is helping me, I know this trouble will bring my freedom. ²⁰I expect and hope that I will not fail Christ in anything but that I will have the courage now, as always, to show the greatness of Christ in my life here on earth, whether I live or die. ²¹To me the only important thing about living is Christ, and dying would be profit for me. ²²If I continue living in my body, I will be able to work for the Lord. I do not know what to choose—living or dying. ²³It is hard to choose between the two. I want to leave this life and be with Christ, which is much better, ²⁴but you need me here in my body. ²⁵Since I am sure of this, I know I will

stay with you to help you grow and have joy in your faith.
²⁶You will be very happy in Christ Jesus when I am with you again.

²⁷Only one thing concerns me: Be sure that you live in a way that brings honor to the Good News of Christ. Then whether I come and visit you or am away from you, I will hear that you are standing strong with one purpose, that you work together as one for the faith of the Good News,²⁸ and that you are not afraid of those who are against you. All of this is proof that your enemies will be destroyed but that you will be saved by God.²⁹God gave you the honor not only of believing in Christ but also of suffering for him, both of which bring glory to Christ.³⁰When I was with you, you saw the struggles I had, and you hear about the struggles I am having now. You yourselves are having the same kind of struggles.

Does your life in Christ give you strength? Does his love comfort you? Do we share together in the spirit? Do you have mercy and kindness? ²If so, make me very happy by having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and having one mind and purpose. ³When you do things, do not let selfishness or pride be your guide. Instead, be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves. ⁴Do not be interested only in your own life, but be interested in the lives of others.

Be Unselfish Like Christ

⁵In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus.

⁶Christ himself was like God in everything.

But he did not think that being equal with God was something to be used for his own benefit.

⁷But he gave up his place with God and made himself nothing.

He was born to be a man
and became like a servant.

⁸And when he was living as a man,
he humbled himself and was fully obedient to God,
even when that caused his death—death on a cross.

⁹So God raised him to the highest place.

God made his name greater than every other name

¹⁰so that every knee will bow to the name of Jesus—
everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.

¹¹And everyone will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord
and bring glory to God the Father.

Be the People God Wants You to Be

¹²My dear friends, you have always obeyed God when I was with you. It is even more important that you obey now while I am away from you. Keep on working to complete your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³because God is working in you to help you want to do and be able to do what pleases him.

¹⁴Do everything without complaining or arguing. ¹⁵Then you will be innocent and without any wrong. You will be God's children without fault. But you are living with crooked and mean people all around you, among whom you shine like stars in the dark world. ¹⁶You offer the teaching that gives life. So when Christ comes again, I can be happy because my work was not wasted. I ran the race and won.

¹⁷Your faith makes you offer your lives as a sacrifice in serving God. If I have to offer my own blood with your sacrifice, I will be happy and full of joy with all of you. ¹⁸You also should be happy and full of joy with me.

Timothy and Epaphroditus

¹⁹I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon. I will be happy to learn how you are. ²⁰I have no one else like Timothy, who truly cares for you. ²¹Other people are interested only in their own lives, not in the work of Jesus Christ. ²²You know the kind of person Timothy is. You know he has served with me in telling the Good News, as a son serves his father. ²³I plan to send him to you quickly when I know what will happen to me. ²⁴I am sure that the Lord will help me to come to you soon.

²⁵Epaphroditus, my brother in Christ, works and serves with me in the army of Christ. When I needed help, you sent him to me. I think now that I must send him back to you, ²⁶because he wants very much to see all of you. He is worried because you heard that he was sick. ²⁷Yes, he was sick, and nearly died, but God had mercy on him and me too so that I would not have more sadness. ²⁸I want very much to send him to you so that when you see him you can be happy, and I can stop worrying about you. ²⁹Welcome him in the Lord with much joy. Give honor to people like him, ³⁰because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to give me the help you could not give in your service to me.

Life Lessons

Philippians 3:1–21

Situation

Paul reminded the Philippians that Christ guaranteed their position through faith alone.

Observation

As we know Christ more, we discover the insignificance of worldly treasures. Our true goal should be to know Christ and his power.

Inspiration

I was glad to see the plastic ball pit... It's a large, covered, shady, cool, soothing pavilion... But rather than being filled with water, it is loaded with balls—thousands and thousands of plastic, colorful, lightweight balls.

Three-year-old Andrea, however, had a few difficulties. As soon as she took one step into the pit, she filled her arms with balls...

Andrea took a step and fell... She began to cry. I walked over to the edge of the pit. “Andrea,” I said gently, “let go of the balls, and you can walk.”

“No!” she screamed, wiggling and submerging herself beneath the balls. I reached in and pulled her up. She was still clutching her armful of treasures...

Andrea's determination to hold those balls is nothing compared to the vise-grips we put on life... Try prying our fingers away from our earthly treasures... The way we clutch our possessions and our pennies, you'd think we couldn't live without

them.

Ouch.

Jesus' promise is comprehensive: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" [[Matthew 5:6](#), NKJV]...

Blessed are those, then, who hold their earthly possessions in open palms... Blessed are those who are totally dependent upon Jesus for their joy. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you find yourself taking pride in your friends, career, talents, abilities, or position? Tell God today that you treasure him most of all.

Exploration

Treasures on Earth—[Matthew 6:21](#); [13:44](#); [Luke 14:33](#); [2 Corinthians 4:18](#).

The Importance of Christ

My brothers and sisters, be full of joy in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it will help you to be more ready. ²Watch out for those who do evil, who are like dogs, who demand to [cut](#) the body. ³We are the ones who are truly circumcised. We worship God through his Spirit, and our pride is in Christ Jesus. We do not put trust in ourselves or anything we can do, ⁴although I might be able to put trust in myself. If anyone thinks he has a reason to trust in himself, he should know that I have greater reason for trusting in myself. ⁵I was circumcised eight days after my birth. I am from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin. I am a Hebrew, and my parents were Hebrews. I had a strict view of the law, which is why I became a Pharisee. ⁶I was so enthusiastic I tried to hurt the church. No one could find fault with the way I obeyed the law of Moses. ⁷Those things were important to me, but now I think they are worth nothing because of Christ. ⁸Not only those things, but I think that all things are worth nothing compared with the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him, I have lost all those things, and now I know they are worthless trash. This allows me to have Christ ⁹and to belong to him. Now I am right with God, not because I followed the law, but because I believed in Christ. God uses my faith to make me right with him. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power that raised him from the

dead. I want to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death. ¹¹Then I have hope that I myself will be raised from the dead.

Continuing Toward Our Goal

¹²I do not mean that I am already as God wants me to be. I have not yet reached that goal, but I continue trying to reach it and to make it mine. Christ wants me to do that, which is the reason he made me his. ¹³Brothers and sisters, I know that I have not yet reached that goal, but there is one thing I always do. Forgetting the past and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I keep trying to reach the goal and get the prize for which God called me through Christ to the life above.

¹⁵All of us who are spiritually mature should think this way, too. And if there are things you do not agree with, God will make them clear to you. ¹⁶But we should continue following the truth we already have.

¹⁷Brothers and sisters, all of you should try to follow my example and to copy those who live the way we showed you. ¹⁸Many people live like enemies of the cross of Christ. I have often told you about them, and it makes me cry to tell you about them now. ¹⁹In the end, they will be destroyed. They do whatever their bodies want, they are proud of their shameful acts, and they think only about earthly things. ²⁰But our homeland is in heaven, and we are waiting for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. ²¹By his power to rule all things, he will change our simple bodies and make them like his own glorious body.

Life Lessons

Philippians 4:1-23

Situation

Paul expressed joy and thanked the Philippians for their support. In addition to earlier gifts, they willingly sent financial support with Epaphroditus for Paul during his imprisonment.

Observation

God knows our needs and promises to provide for them. We are to trust him with an attitude of thanksgiving and find contentment in what we are given.

Inspiration

There are times when the one thing you want is the one thing you never get. You're not being picky or demanding; you're only obeying his command to "ask God for everything you need" ([Philippians 4:6](#)). All you want is an open door or an extra day or an answered prayer, for which you will be thankful.

And so you pray and wait.

No answer.

You pray and wait.

No answer.

You pray and wait.

May I ask a very important question? What if God says no?

What if the request is delayed or even denied? When God says no to you, how will you respond? If God says, "I've given you my grace, and that is

enough,” will you be content?

Content. That’s the word. A state of heart in which you would be at peace if God gave you nothing more than he already has. Test yourself with this question: What if God’s only gift to you were his grace to save you? Would you be content? You beg him to save the life of your child. You plead with him to keep your business afloat. You implore him to remove the cancer from your body. What if his answer is, “My grace is enough”? Would you be content?

You see, from heaven’s perspective, grace is enough. If God did nothing more than save us from hell, could anyone complain? If God saved our souls and then left us to spend our lives leprosy-struck on a deserted island, would he be unjust? Having been given eternal life, dare we grumble at an aching body? Having been given heavenly riches, dare we bemoan earthly poverty?

Let me be quick to add, God has not left you with “just salvation.” If you have eyes to read these words, hands to hold this book, the means to own this volume, he has already given you grace upon grace. The vast majority of us have been saved and then blessed even more!

But there are those times when God, having given us his grace, hears our appeals and says, “My grace is sufficient for you.” Is he being unfair?

In *God Came Near* I’ve told how our oldest daughter fell into a swimming pool when she was two years old. A friend saw her and pulled her to safety.

What I didn't tell was what happened the next morning in my prayer time. I made a special effort to record my gratitude in my journal. I told God how wonderful he was for saving her. As clearly as if God himself were speaking, this question came to mind: *Would I be less wonderful had I let her drown? Would I be any less a good God for calling her home? Would I still be receiving your praise this morning had I not saved her?*

Is God still a good God when he says no? (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Application

Make a mental list of how God has provided for you in the past. Use that as the basis for recognizing how he will provide for your needs in the future. Instead of complaining or worrying, take your requests directly to the Lord.

Exploration

Contentment—[Psalm 23:1](#); [Matthew 6:25–34](#); [1 Timothy 6:6–8](#).

What the Christians Are to Do

My dear brothers and sisters, I love you and want to see you. You bring me joy and make me proud of you, so stand strong in the Lord as I have told you.

²I ask Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³And I ask you, my faithful friend, to help these women. They served with me in telling the Good News, together with Clement and others who worked with me, whose names are written in the [book of life](#).

⁴Be full of joy in the Lord always. I will say again, be full of joy.

⁵Let everyone see that you are gentle and kind. The Lord is coming soon. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but pray and ask God for everything you need, always giving thanks. ⁷And God's peace, which is so great we cannot understand it, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Brothers and sisters, think about the things that are good and worthy of praise. Think about the things that are true and honorable and right and pure and beautiful and respected. ⁹Do what you learned and received from me, what I told you, and what you saw me do. And the God who gives peace will be with you.

Paul Thanks the Christians

¹⁰I am very happy in the Lord that you have shown your care for me again. You continued to care about me, but there was no way for you to show it. ¹¹I am not telling you this because I need anything. I have learned to be satisfied with the things I have and with everything that happens. ¹²I know how to live when I am poor, and I know how to live when I have plenty. I have learned the secret of being happy at any time in everything that happens, when I have enough to eat and when I go hungry, when I have more than I need and when I do not have enough. ¹³I can do all things through Christ, because he gives me strength.

¹⁴But it was good that you helped me when I needed it. ¹⁵You Philippians remember when I first preached the Good News there. When I left Macedonia, you were the only church that gave me help. ¹⁶Several times you sent me things I needed when I was in Thessalonica. ¹⁷Really, it is not that I want to receive gifts from you, but I want you to have the good that comes from giving. ¹⁸And now I have everything, and more. I have all I need, because Epaphroditus brought your gift to me. It is like a sweet-smelling sacrifice offered to God, who accepts that sacrifice and is pleased with it. ¹⁹My God will use his wonderful riches in Christ Jesus to give you everything you need. ²⁰Glory to our God and Father forever and ever! Amen.

²¹Greet each of God's people in Christ. Those who are with me send greetings to you. ²²All of God's people greet you, particularly those from the palace of Caesar.

²³The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “brothers” here and throughout this book, Paul’s words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

cut The word in Greek is like the word “circumcise,” but it means “to cut completely off.”

book of life God’s book that has the names of all God’s chosen people (Revelation 3:5; 21:27).

The Book of Colossians

Introduction

To qualify for welfare, you have to admit you're poor.

To qualify for bankruptcy, you have to admit you are broke.

To be admitted to a hospital, you have to admit you're sick.

And to go to heaven, you have to admit you are hellbound.

We're willing to do the first three, but the fourth? That's a tough one. That's enough to trip up a fellow. Not easy for a decent guy to admit he's a sinner. Hard for a pretty good girl to confess spiritual destitution.

Oh, it isn't at first. When we first meet Christ. When life is a mess and the future is bleak. When we don't have anything to lose because we've lost it all. It's not hard to admit it at first.

But then, by God's grace, things get better. Bills get paid. The dog comes home. The pantry gets full. The face we see in the morning mirror has a smile on it. And with time, the person in the mirror grows a bit proud. A bit puffy. A bit, shall we say ... cocky?

We forget where we were. We forget what God gave. We gradually begin to think that God is lucky to have us on his side. We begin to see salvation not as a toss of the life preserver to the sinking but as a journey in a rowboat: God's grace handling one oar and our good deeds handling the other. It's not that Jesus isn't necessary, it's just that Jesus isn't enough.

Slowly, deftly, we begin believing in the doctrine of *salvation by Jesus plus*. Jesus plus good deeds. Jesus plus the right doctrine. Jesus plus the right Bible translation. Jesus plus the right charitable activities.

Or in the case of the church in Colossae, Jesus plus the

right religious feast, New Moon Festival, and Sabbath Day. To the Christians in Colossae, the right ritual was just as important as the right Savior.

Paul would have none of this. He denounced the philosophy as heretical and stated in no uncertain terms that if we are saved it is because God rescued us and not because we learned to swim. God is the verb and we are the noun. God does the saving and we do the receiving.

All we do is accept it. We might as well admit it.

About This Book

Author:

Paul

Date Written:

C. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

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- Faith, love, and hope are key to following Christ.
- In Christ Jesus, we have been offered freedom.
- Because of Jesus, Christians can be as in touch with the next world as this one.

Key Verse:

“Since you were raised from the dead with Christ, aim at what is in heaven, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God” ([Colossians 3:1](#)).

Contents:

1. Christ Is Superior [1:1–2:3](#)
2. Freedom in Christ [2:4–23](#)
3. Lifestyle of Faith [3:1–4:6](#)
4. Closing Greetings [4:7–18](#)

Life Lessons

Colossians 1:1–2:5

Situation

Paul's letter gave tribute to the power and glory of Christ. While commending the Colossians for their actions, he reminded them that Christ's power comes not from what we know, but who we know—Jesus Christ.

Observation

God provides salvation for anyone who will take it. God doesn't require that we know hidden secrets or certain inside information to accept Christ's message and enjoy eternal life.

Inspiration

When God chose to reveal himself, he did so (surprise of surprises) through a human body. The tongue that called forth the dead was a human one. The hand that touched the leper had dirt under its nails. The feet upon which the woman wept were calloused and dusty. And his tears ... oh, don't miss the tears ... they came from a heart as broken as yours or mine ever has been.

So, people came to him. My, how they came to him! They came at night; they touched him as he walked down the street; they followed him around the sea; they invited him into their homes and placed their children at his feet. Why? Because he refused to be a statue in a cathedral or a priest in an elevated pulpit. He chose instead to be Jesus.

... There were those who revered him. But there was not one person who considered him too holy, too divine, or too celestial to touch. There was not one person who was reluctant to approach him for fear of being rejected.

Remember. It is man who creates the distance. It is Jesus who builds the bridge.

(From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

Pray this week that God will spark new love for him in your heart. Don't let this next week pass without finding a way of telling someone else about the Good News of God's love.

Exploration

Love—[John 3:16](#); [13:34](#); [Ephesians 3:15–18](#); [1 John 4:9–10](#).

From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am an apostle because that is what God wanted. Also from Timothy, our brother.

²To the holy and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ that live in Colossae:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

³In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴because we have heard about the faith you have in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all of God's people. ⁵You have this faith and love because of your hope, and what you hope for is kept safe for you in heaven. You learned about this hope when you heard the message about the truth, the Good News ⁶that was told to you. Everywhere in the world that Good News is bringing blessings and is growing. This has happened with you, too, since you heard the Good News and understood the truth about the grace of God. ⁷You learned about God's grace from Epaphras, whom we love. He works together with us and is a faithful servant of Christ for us. ⁸He also told us about the love you have from the Holy Spirit.

⁹Because of this, since the day we heard about you, we have continued praying for you, asking God that you will know fully what he wants. We pray that you will also have great wisdom and understanding in spiritual things ¹⁰so that you will live the kind of life that honors and pleases the Lord in every way. You will produce fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God. ¹¹God will strengthen you with his own

great power so that you will not give up when troubles come, but you will be patient. ¹²And you will joyfully give thanks to the Father who has made you able to have a share in all that he has prepared for his people in the kingdom of light. ¹³God has freed us from the power of darkness, and he brought us into the kingdom of his dear Son. ¹⁴The Son paid for our sins, and in him we have forgiveness.

The Importance of Christ

¹⁵No one can see God, but Jesus Christ is exactly like him. He ranks higher than everything that has been made. ¹⁶Through his power all things were made—things in heaven and on earth, things seen and unseen, all powers, authorities, lords, and rulers. All things were made through Christ and for Christ. ¹⁷He was there before anything was made, and all things continue because of him. ¹⁸He is the head of the body, which is the church. Everything comes from him. He is the first one who was raised from the dead. So in all things Jesus has first place. ¹⁹God was pleased for all of himself to live in Christ. ²⁰And through Christ, God has brought all things back to himself again—things on earth and things in heaven. God made peace through the blood of Christ's death on the cross.

²¹At one time you were separated from God. You were his enemies in your minds, and the evil things you did were against God. ²²But now God has made you his friends again. He did this through Christ's death in the body so that he might bring you into God's presence as people who are holy, with no wrong, and with nothing of which God can judge you guilty. ²³This will happen if you continue strong and sure in your

faith. You must not be moved away from the hope brought to you by the Good News that you heard. That same Good News has been told to everyone in the world, and I, Paul, help in preaching that Good News.

Paul's Work for the Church

²⁴I am happy in my sufferings for you. There are things that Christ must still suffer through his body, the church. I am accepting, in my body, my part of these things that must be suffered. ²⁵I became a servant of the church because God gave me a special work to do that helps you, and that work is to tell fully the message of God. ²⁶This message is the secret that was hidden from everyone since the beginning of time, but now it is made known to God's holy people. ²⁷God decided to let his people know this rich and glorious secret which he has for all people. This secret is Christ himself, who is in you. He is our only hope for glory. ²⁸So we continue to preach Christ to each person, using all wisdom to warn and to teach everyone, in order to bring each one into God's presence as a mature person in Christ. ²⁹To do this, I work and struggle, using Christ's great strength that works so powerfully in me.

I want you to know how hard I work for you, those in Laodicea, and others who have never seen me.² I want them to be strengthened and joined together with love so that they may be rich in their understanding. This leads to their knowing fully God's secret, that is, Christ himself.³ In him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are safely kept.

⁴I say this so that no one can fool you by arguments that seem good, but are false.⁵ Though I am absent from you in my body, my heart is with you, and I am happy to see your good lives and your strong faith in Christ.

Life Lessons

Colossians 2:6–23

Situation

Many distractions surround us, even religious ones or church-centered activities. The center of our faith, however, should always be Jesus Christ.

Observation

Followers of Christ do not become sidetracked by the insights of religious cults or modern philosophies. Only one person warrants our allegiance and trust—Jesus.

Inspiration

When you are not sure that something is from the Spirit, tread softly. Back off. Use the Scriptures as your guide. If they are of the Lord, those unidentified inner promptings won't contradict anything biblically. Peace will remain your companion. The Lord doesn't lead against His own revealed Word. So don't get on a hobbyhorse over something that is questionable or

clearly unbiblical.

... *When you are confident that it's of God, stand firm, even against other people's doubts.* Be strong and resolute. That's a part of walking by faith. There are times when other people will say, "There is no way in the world God could be in this"; yet you know absolutely in your heart that He is. At times like that, simply stand firm. You won't be able to convince them, but that's all right. God is still doing unusual things. BUT don't get weird. You can be confident in God without becoming spooky or seeing lots of things no one else can see.

(From *Flying Closer to the Flame* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

If unusual religious rituals have made you feel uneasy, or scholars have put your mind in a maze, don't be troubled. Keep your focus on Christ through prayer, Bible reading, and Christian fellowship.

Exploration

Obedience—[Luke 17:7–10](#); [1 John 2:6](#).

Continue to Live in Christ

⁶As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so continue to live in him. ⁷Keep your roots deep in him and have your lives built on him. Be strong in the faith, just as you were taught, and always be thankful.

⁸Be sure that no one leads you away with false and empty teaching that is only human, which comes from the ruling spirits of this world, and not from Christ. ⁹All of God lives in Christ fully (even when Christ was on earth), ¹⁰and you have a full and true life in Christ, who is ruler over all rulers and powers.

¹¹Also in Christ you had a different kind of circumcision, a circumcision not done by hands. It was through Christ's circumcision, that is, his death, that you were made free from the power of your sinful self. ¹²When you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and you were raised up with him through your faith in God's power that was shown when he raised Christ from the dead. ¹³When you were spiritually dead because of your sins and because you were not free from the power of your sinful self, God made you alive with Christ, and he forgave all our sins. ¹⁴He canceled the debt, which listed all the rules we failed to follow. He took away that record with its rules and nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵God stripped the spiritual rulers and powers of their authority. With the cross, he won the victory and showed the world that they were powerless.

Don't Follow People's Rules

¹⁶So do not let anyone make rules for you about eating and drinking or about a religious feast, a New Moon Festival, or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷These things were like a shadow of what was to come. But what is true and real has come and is found in Christ.

¹⁸Do not let anyone disqualify you by making you humiliate yourself and worship angels. Such people enter into visions, which fill them with foolish pride because of their human way of thinking. ¹⁹They do not hold tightly to Christ, the head. It is from him that all the parts of the body are cared for and held together. So it grows in the way God wants it to grow.

²⁰Since you died with Christ and were made free from the ruling spirits of the world, why do you act as if you still belong to this world by following rules like these: ²¹“Don't eat this,” “Don't taste that,” “Don't even touch that thing”? ²²These rules refer to earthly things that are gone as soon as they are used. They are only man-made commands and teachings. ²³They seem to be wise, but they are only part of a man-made religion. They make people pretend not to be proud and make them punish their bodies, but they do not really control the evil desires of the sinful self.

Life Lessons

Colossians 3:1–4:1

Situation

Paul provided the Colossian church with guidelines for proper conduct. Paul needed to remind the Colossians whom they served.

Observation

A deep personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ will transform every area of our lives.

Inspiration

If people love you at 6:30 in the morning, one thing is sure: They love *you*. They don't love your title. They don't love your style. They don't love your accomplishments. They just love you....

Sounds like God's love.

"He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy," wrote another [[Hebrews 10:14](#)].

Underline the word "perfect." Note that the word is not "better." Not "improving." Not "on the upswing." God doesn't improve; he perfects. He doesn't enhance; he completes. What does the perfect person lack?

Now I realize that there's a sense in which we're imperfect. We still err. We still stumble. We still do exactly what we don't want to do. And that part of us is, according to the verse, "being made holy."

But when it comes to our position before God, we're perfect. When he sees each of us, he sees one who has been made perfect through the One who is

perfect—Jesus Christ....

You are absolute perfection. Flawless. Without defects or mistakes. Unsullied. Unrivaled. Unmarred. Peerless. Virgin pure. Undeserved yet unreserved perfection.

No wonder heaven applauds when you wake up. A masterpiece has stirred. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

Is your relationship with Jesus noticeable by your words? Ask God for a vocabulary that reflects love for others without any bitterness or hate.

Exploration

Becoming Like Christ—[Acts 3:19](#); [Romans 5:1–5](#); [1 Corinthians 6:9–11](#); [2 Corinthians 1:21–22](#); [1 Peter 3:8](#).

Your New Life in Christ

Since you were raised from the dead with Christ, aim at what is in heaven, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. ²Think only about the things in heaven, not the things on earth. ³Your old sinful self has died, and your new life is kept with Christ in God. ⁴Christ is our life, and when he comes again, you will share in his glory.

⁵So put all evil things out of your life: sexual sinning, doing evil, letting evil thoughts control you, wanting things that are evil, and greed. This is really serving a false god. [⁶These things make God angry.](#) ⁷In your past, evil life you also did these things.

⁸But now also put these things out of your life: anger, bad temper, doing or saying things to hurt others, and using evil words when you talk. ⁹Do not lie to each other. You have left your old sinful life and the things you did before. ¹⁰You have begun to live the new life, in which you are being made new and are becoming like the One who made you. This new life brings you the true knowledge of God. ¹¹In the new life there is no difference between Greeks and Jews, those who are circumcised and those who are not circumcised, or people who are foreigners, or [Scythians](#). There is no difference between slaves and free people. But Christ is in all believers, and Christ is all that is important.

¹²God has chosen you and made you his holy people. He loves you. So always do these things: Show mercy to others, be kind, humble, gentle, and patient. ¹³Get along with each other, and forgive each other. If someone does wrong to you, forgive that person because the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴Do all these things; but most important, love each other. Love is what holds you all together in perfect unity. ¹⁵Let the peace that Christ gives control your thinking, because you were all called together in one body to have peace. Always be thankful. ¹⁶Let the teaching of Christ live in you richly. Use all wisdom to teach and instruct each other by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷Everything you do or say should be done to obey Jesus your Lord. And in all you do, give thanks to God the Father through Jesus.

Your New Life with Other People

¹⁸Wives, yield to the authority of your husbands, because this is the right thing to do in the Lord.

¹⁹Husbands, love your wives and be gentle with them.

²⁰Children, obey your parents in all things, because this pleases the Lord.

²¹Fathers, do not nag your children. If you are too hard to please, they may want to stop trying.

²²Slaves, obey your masters in all things. Do not obey just when they are watching you, to gain their favor, but serve them honestly, because you respect the Lord. ²³In all the work you are doing, work the best you can. Work as if you were doing it for the Lord, not for people. ²⁴Remember that you will receive

your reward from the Lord, which he promised to his people. You are serving the Lord Christ.²⁵ But remember that anyone who does wrong will be punished for that wrong, and the Lord treats everyone the same.

Masters, give what is good and fair to your slaves. Remember that you have a Master in heaven.

Life Lessons

Colossians 4:2–18

Situation

Paul concluded his letter with some final practical advice and greetings.

Observation

Christians who desire to share their faith must pray and watch for opportunities.

Inspiration

Disciplined thought and planning should go into evangelism... . We must think about evangelism whenever we talk with outsiders—wisely making the most of every opportunity....

Whether with someone you're around frequently or with someone you've met for the first time, the best way I've found to turn the conversation toward spiritual matters is to ask the person how you can pray for him or her. Although it's almost routine to the Christian, most non-Christians don't know of anyone who is praying for them. I've discovered that unbelievers are often deeply moved by this unusual expression of concern....

But the point in all these possibilities is that you will have to discipline yourself to bring them about. They won't just happen. You'll have to discipline yourself to ask your neighbors how you can pray for them or when you can share a meal with them. You'll

have to discipline yourself to get with your coworkers during off-hours. Many such opportunities for evangelism will never take place if you wait for them to occur spontaneously. The world, the flesh, and the Devil will do their best to see to that. You, however, backed by the invincible power of the Holy Spirit, can make sure that these enemies of the gospel do not win. (From *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney)

Application

Do you share the message of the Lord Jesus with others? Pray and ask God to give you opportunities to tell others about Jesus, especially those you encounter regularly. Be sure that nothing in your daily conversation contradicts the message you proclaim. Be set apart from non-Christians by what you say.

Exploration

Making the Most of Opportunity—[John 9:4](#); [Acts 21:37–22:1](#); [Ephesians 5:15–16](#).

What the Christians Are to Do

²Continue praying, keeping alert, and always thanking God.

³Also pray for us that God will give us an opportunity to tell people his message. Pray that we can preach the secret that God has made known about Christ. This is why I am in prison.

⁴Pray that I can speak in a way that will make it clear, as I should.

⁵Be wise in the way you act with people who are not believers, making the most of every opportunity. ⁶When you talk, you should always be kind and pleasant so you will be able to answer everyone in the way you should.

News About the People with Paul

⁷Tychicus is my dear brother in Christ and a faithful minister and servant with me in the Lord. He will tell you all the things that are happening to me. ⁸This is why I am sending him: so you may know how we are and he may encourage you. ⁹I send him with Onesimus, a faithful and dear brother in Christ, and one of your group. They will tell you all that has happened here.

¹⁰Aristarchus, a prisoner with me, and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, greet you. (I have already told you what to do about Mark. If he comes, welcome him.) ¹¹Jesus, who is called Justus, also greets you. These are the only Jewish believers who work with me for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort

to me.

¹²Epaphras, a servant of Jesus Christ, from your group, also greets you. He always prays for you that you will grow to be spiritually mature and have everything God wants for you. ¹³I know he has worked hard for you and the people in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. ¹⁴Demas and our dear friend Luke, the doctor, greet you.

¹⁵Greet the brothers in Laodicea. And greet Nympha and the church that meets in her house. ¹⁶After this letter is read to you, be sure it is also read to the church in Laodicea. And you read the letter that I wrote to Laodicea. ¹⁷Tell Archippus, “Be sure to finish the work the Lord gave you.”

¹⁸I, Paul, greet you and write this with my own hand. Remember me in prison. Grace be with you.

brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “brothers” here and throughout this book, Paul’s words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

These ... angry Some Greek copies add: “against the people who do not obey God.”

Scythians The Scythians were known as very wild and cruel people.

body The spiritual body of Christ, meaning the church or his people.

The Book of 1 Thessalonians

Introduction

In the third century, St. Cyprian wrote to a friend named Donatus:

This seems a cheerful world, Donatus, when I view it from this fair garden under the shadow of these vines. But if I climbed some great mountain and looked out over the wide lands, you know very well what I would see; brigands on the high road, pirates on the seas, in the amphitheaters men murdered to please the applauding crowds, under all roofs misery and selfishness. It really is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world.

Yet, in the midst of it, I have found a quiet and holy people. They have discovered a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of this sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are Christians ... and I am one of them (Gordon MacDonald, Forging a Realworld Faith).

What a compliment! *A quiet and holy people.* Is there any phrase that captures the essence of the faith any better? *A quiet and holy people.*

Quiet.

Not obnoxious. Not boastful. Not demanding. Just quiet. Contagiously quiet.

Holy.

Set apart. Pure. Decent. Honest. Wholesome. Holy. A quiet and holy people.

Paul urges the same from us.

“Do all you can to live a peaceful life. Take care of your own business, and do your own work as we have already told

you. If you do, then people who are not believers will respect you, and you will not have to depend on others for what you need” ([4:11–12](#)).

A quiet and holy people. That describes the church in Thessalonica. May that describe the church today.

About This Book

Author:

Paul

Date Written:

C. A.D. 50

Key Themes:

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- We should live in preparation for Christ’s return.
- God wants holy and pure worship.
- The time of Christ’s return will be unpredictable.
- How we live our everyday lives, matters.

Key Verses:

“Always be joyful. Pray continually, and give thanks whatever happens. That is what God wants for you in Christ Jesus” ([1 Thessalonians 5:16–18](#)).

Contents:

1. Paul’s Reflections [1:1–3:13](#)
2. Paul’s Instructions [4:1–5:28](#)

Life Lessons

1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

Situation

Paul and Silas preached in Thessalonica and helped many new Christians. They left quickly because of persecution from the Jews ([Acts 17](#)) and could not return. The church in Thessalonica faced persecution. Paul wrote with encouragement and instructions for proper living.

Observation

The Thessalonians were commended for their faith and good works. They became an example of faith and love to all Believers.

Inspiration

I have found that the casual Christian has little or no influence upon others. I am finding that it is only the Christian who refuses to compromise in matters of honesty, integrity and morality who is bearing an effective witness for Christ. The worldly Christian is prepared to do as the world does and will condone practices which are dishonest and unethical because he is afraid of the world's displeasure. Only by a life of obedience to the voice of the Spirit, by daily dying to self, by a full dedication to Christ and constant fellowship with Him, are we able to live a godly life and have a positive influence in this present ungodly world. (From *Unto the Hills* by Billy Graham)

Application

Are you an example of faith and love to the people

around you? Do you have a reputation for being faithful? What attitudes are typical of people whose faith you respect?

Exploration

Being an Example—[Acts 17:1–9](#); [1 Corinthians 11:1](#); [2 Corinthians 2:14–17](#); [4:1–3](#); [1 Timothy 4:12](#).

From Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

To the church in Thessalonica, the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace to you.

The Faith of the Thessalonians

²We always thank God for all of you and mention you when we pray. ³We continually recall before God our Father the things you have done because of your faith and the work you have done because of your love. And we thank him that you continue to be strong because of your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴[Brothers and sisters](#), God loves you, and we know he has chosen you, ⁵because the Good News we brought to you came not only with words, but with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with sure knowledge that it is true. Also you know how we lived when we were with you in order to help you. ⁶And you became like us and like the Lord. You suffered much, but still you accepted the teaching with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. ⁷So you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Southern Greece. ⁸And the Lord's teaching spread from you not only into Macedonia and Southern Greece, but now your faith in God has become known everywhere. So we do not need to say anything about it. ⁹People everywhere are telling about the way you accepted us

when we were there with you. They tell how you stopped worshiping idols and began serving the living and true God.

¹⁰And you wait for God's Son, whom God raised from the dead, to come from heaven. He is Jesus, who saves us from God's angry judgment that is sure to come.

Life Lessons

1 Thessalonians 2:1–3:13

Situation

Paul encouraged Believers to be dedicated to God despite trying circumstances.

Observation

Dedicate your life to God. Speak with empathy, give with generosity, treat others gently.

Inspiration

Each of us should lead a life stirring enough to start a movement. We should yearn to change the world. We should love unquenchably, dream unfalteringly, and work unceasingly.

We should close our ears to the manifold voices of compromise and perch ourselves on the branch of truth. We should champion the value of people, proclaim the forgiveness of God, and claim the promise of heaven.

Will we see a movement occur? Perhaps and perhaps not. Movements never run their course in one generation. The great revivals and reformations that dot the history of humanity were never the work of just one person. Every movement is the sum of visionaries who have gone before, generations of uncompromised lives and non-negotiated truths. Let's live lives stirring and forceful enough to cause a movement. A true mark of a visionary is his willingness to lay down his life for those whom he'll never see. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

What gets you excited: your team winning the World Series? Your country winning the Olympic gold? Getting elected to the PTA presidency? Do you get as excited about seeing others take steps in their Christian journey? Pray that God would direct your natural passions to rejoice in his successes.

Exploration

Right Living—[Colossians 2:6–7](#); [3:2](#); [1 Timothy 4:12](#); [Titus 3:8](#).

Paul's Work in Thessalonica

Brothers and sisters, you know our visit to you was not a failure. ²Before we came to you, we suffered in Philippi. People there insulted us, as you know, and many people were against us. But our God helped us to be brave and to tell you his Good News. ³Our appeal does not come from lies or wrong reasons, nor were we trying to trick you. ⁴But we speak the Good News because God tested us and trusted us to do it. When we speak, we are not trying to please people, but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵You know that we never tried to influence you by saying nice things about you. We were not trying to get your money; we had no selfishness to hide from you. God knows that this is true. ⁶We were not looking for human praise, from you or anyone else, ⁷even though as apostles of Christ we could have used our authority over you.

But we were very gentle with you, like a mother caring for her little children. ⁸Because we loved you, we were happy to share not only God's Good News with you, but even our own lives. You had become so dear to us! ⁹Brothers and sisters, I know you remember our hard work and difficulties. We worked night and day so we would not burden any of you while we preached God's Good News to you.

¹⁰When we were with you, we lived in a holy and honest way, without fault. You know this is true, and so does God.

¹¹You know that we treated each of you as a father treats his

own children. ¹²We encouraged you, we urged you, and we insisted that you live good lives for God, who calls you to his glorious kingdom.

¹³Also, we always thank God because when you heard his message from us, you accepted it as the word of God, not the words of humans. And it really is God's message which works in you who believe. ¹⁴Brothers and sisters, your experiences have been like those of God's churches in Christ that are in [Judea](#). You suffered from the people of your own country, as they suffered from the Jews, ¹⁵who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and forced us to leave that country. They do not please God and are against all people. ¹⁶They try to stop us from teaching those who are not Jews so they may be saved. By doing this, they are increasing their sins to the limit. The anger of God has come to them at last.

Paul Wants to Visit Them Again

¹⁷Brothers and sisters, though we were separated from you for a short time, our thoughts were still with you. We wanted very much to see you and tried hard to do so. ¹⁸We wanted to come to you. I, Paul, tried to come more than once, but Satan stopped us. ¹⁹You are our hope, our joy, and the crown we will take pride in when our Lord Jesus Christ comes. ²⁰Truly you are our glory and our joy.

When we could not wait any longer, we decided it was best to stay in Athens alone ²and send Timothy to you. Timothy, our brother, works with us for God and helps us tell people the Good News about Christ. We sent him to strengthen and encourage you in your faith ³so none of you would be upset by these troubles. You yourselves know that we must face these troubles. ⁴Even when we were with you, we told you we all would have to suffer, and you know it has happened. ⁵Because of this, when I could wait no longer, I sent Timothy to you so I could learn about your faith. I was afraid the devil had tempted you, and then our hard work would have been wasted.

⁶But Timothy now has come back to us from you and has brought us good news about your faith and love. He told us that you always remember us in a good way and that you want to see us just as much as we want to see you. ⁷So, brothers and sisters, while we have much trouble and suffering, we are encouraged about you because of your faith. ⁸Our life is really full if you stand strong in the Lord. ⁹We have so much joy before our God because of you. We cannot thank him enough for all the joy we feel. ¹⁰Night and day we continue praying with all our heart that we can see you again and give you all the things you need to make your faith strong.

¹¹Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus prepare the way for us to come to you. ¹²May the Lord make your love grow more and multiply for each other and for all people so that you will love others as we love you. ¹³May your hearts be made strong so that you will be holy and without fault before our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Life Lessons

1 Thessalonians 4:1–5:28

Situation

Paul expressed to the Thessalonians that their lives should remain pure as they watched for the second coming of Jesus.

Observation

Be pure in all that you do. We are commanded to keep ourselves busy. By doing this, we can keep ourselves from evil.

Inspiration

An intriguing verse is found in [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#), “The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command.”

Have you ever wondered what that command will be? It will be the inaugural word of heaven. It will be the first audible message most have heard from God. It will be the word which closes one age and opens a new one.

I think I know what the command will be. I could very well be wrong, but I think the command which puts an end to the pains of the earth and initiates the joys of heaven will be two words:

“No more.”

The King of kings will raise his pierced hand and proclaim, “No more.”

The angels will stand and the Father will speak, “No more.”

Every person who lives and who ever lived will

turn toward the sky and hear God announce, “No more.”

No more loneliness. No more tears. No more death. No more sadness. No more crying. No more pain.

As John sat on the Island of Patmos surrounded by sea and separated from friends he dreamt of the day when God would say, “No more.”

This same disciple who had heard Jesus speak these words of assurance over a half a century before now knew what they meant. I wonder if he could hear the voice of Jesus in his memory.

“The end will come.”

For those who live for this world, that’s bad news. But for those who live for the world to come, it’s an encouraging promise.

You’re on a land mine, my friend, and it’s only a matter of time: “For in this world you will have trouble... .” Next time you are tossed into a river as you ride the rapids of life, remember his words of assurance.

Those who endure will be saved. The gospel will be preached. The end will come.

You can count on it. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

Application

What are the extras in your life? A little extra money? A little extra time? Please God by using your money to help further his kingdom. Spend your extra time building lasting friendships that honor him.

Exploration

Flee Sin—[1 Corinthians 6:18](#). Strength
—[Ephesians 4:28](#); [1 Thessalonians 3:12](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:10–12](#).

A Life that Pleases God

Brothers and sisters, we taught you how to live in a way that will please God, and you are living that way. Now we ask and encourage you in the Lord Jesus to live that way even more. ²You know what we told you to do by the authority of the Lord Jesus. ³God wants you to be holy and to stay away from sexual sins. ⁴He wants each of you to [learn to control your own body](#) in a way that is holy and honorable. ⁵Don't use your body for sexual sin like the people who do not know God. ⁶Also, do not wrong or cheat another Christian in this way. The Lord will punish people who do those things as we have already told you and warned you. ⁷God called us to be holy and does not want us to live in sin. ⁸So the person who refuses to obey this teaching is disobeying God, not simply a human teaching. And God is the One who gives us his Holy Spirit.

⁹We do not need to write you about having love for your Christian family, because God has already taught you to love each other. ¹⁰And truly you do love the Christians in all of Macedonia. Brothers and sisters, now we encourage you to love them even more.

¹¹Do all you can to live a peaceful life. Take care of your own business, and do your own work as we have already told you. ¹²If you do, then people who are not believers will respect you, and you will not have to depend on others for what you

need.

The Lord's Coming

¹³Brothers and sisters, we want you to know about those Christians who have died so you will not be sad, as others who have no hope. ¹⁴We believe that Jesus died and that he rose again. So, because of him, God will raise with Jesus those who have died. ¹⁵What we tell you now is the Lord's own message. We who are living when the Lord comes again will not go before those who have already died. ¹⁶The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the [archangel](#), and with the trumpet call of God. And those who have died believing in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive will be gathered up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸So encourage each other with these words.

Be Ready for the Lord's Coming

Now, brothers and sisters, we do not need to write you about times and dates.²You know very well that the day the Lord comes again will be a surprise, like a thief that comes in the night.³While people are saying, "We have peace and we are safe," they will be destroyed quickly. It is like pains that come quickly to a woman having a baby. Those people will not escape.⁴But you, brothers and sisters, are not living in darkness, and so that day will not surprise you like a thief.⁵You are all people who belong to the light and to the day. We do not belong to the night or to darkness.⁶So we should not be like other people who are sleeping, but we should be alert and have self-control.⁷Those who sleep, sleep at night. Those who get drunk, get drunk at night.⁸But we belong to the day, so we should control ourselves. We should wear faith and love to protect us, and the hope of salvation should be our helmet.⁹God did not choose us to suffer his anger but to have salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰Jesus died for us so that we can live together with him, whether we are alive or dead when he comes.¹¹So encourage each other and give each other strength, just as you are doing now.

Final Instructions and Greetings

¹²Now, brothers and sisters, we ask you to appreciate those who work hard among you, who lead you in the Lord and teach you.¹³Respect them with a very special love because of the

work they do.

Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴We ask you, brothers and sisters, to warn those who do not work. Encourage the people who are afraid. Help those who are weak. Be patient with everyone. ¹⁵Be sure that no one pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to do what is good for each other and for all people.

¹⁶Always be joyful. ¹⁷Pray continually, ¹⁸and give thanks whatever happens. That is what God wants for you in Christ Jesus.

¹⁹Do not hold back the work of the Holy Spirit. ²⁰Do not treat prophecy as if it were unimportant. ²¹But test everything. Keep what is good, ²²and stay away from everything that is evil.

²³Now may God himself, the God of peace, make you pure, belonging only to him. May your whole self—spirit, soul, and body—be kept safe and without fault when our Lord Jesus Christ comes. ²⁴You can trust the One who calls you to do that for you.

²⁵Brothers and sisters, pray for us.

²⁶Give each other a holy kiss when you meet. ²⁷I tell you by the authority of the Lord to read this letter to all the believers.

²⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “Brothers” here and throughout this book, Paul’s words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

Judea The Jewish land where Jesus lived and taught and where the church first began.

learn ... body This might also mean “learn to live with your own wife.”

archangel The leader among God’s angels or messengers.

The Book of 2 Thessalonians

Introduction

I'm seated on an airplane. A grounded airplane.

I'm surrounded by kids. Restless kids.

The kids are mine. The plane is not. The plane is late, however, and my kids are restless. I took them with me on a trip so we'd have a bit of time together. This is more than I had in mind.

They ask the questions you'd expect of a five-and eight-year-old. "Are they bringing drinks yet?"

"When are we going to leave?"

"How much more time?"

"Are we nearly home?"

"Why is it taking so long?"

Questions. Lots of questions. The kind of questions that were circulating through the church at Thessalonica. They, too, were restless. Somewhere they got the idea that Jesus was returning tomorrow so they got ready. Some were selling their homes, others were quitting their work, and all were twiddling their thumbs while awaiting the return of Christ.

Paul gets wind of their assumption and writes them this letter. He urges them not to buy into the reports that the final days have already begun ([2:1-2](#)). Several things still need to occur first ([2:3-12](#)); and until they do, their task is to be patient and alert.

No easy task. Human nature tends to one or the other. We tend to be so patient we aren't alert, or so alert we aren't patient. The church becomes a hybrid of the restless and the resting. The result can be squabbling kids. Just like mine. They've done their best to be patient, but after a while a

person can only take so much.

“Hang in there,” I say.

“We’ll be home soon,” I urge.

“Try to get along,” I exhort.

(I’m starting to sound a lot like Paul.)

About This Book

Author:

Paul

Date Written:

C. A.D. 51

Key Themes:

-
- With Jesus’ return will come accountability.
- We should stay busy with obedient lives until Christ returns.
- We must keep our beliefs, our doctrines, pure.

Key Verse:

“Brothers and sisters, whom the Lord loves, God chose you from the beginning to be saved. So we must always thank God for you. You are saved by the Spirit that makes you holy and by your faith in the truth” ([2 Thessalonians 2:13](#)).

Contents:

1. Encouragement in Persecution [1:1–12](#)
2. Jesus’ Return [2:1–17](#)

3. Living in Light of Jesus' Return [3:1–18](#)

Life Lessons

2 Thessalonians 1:1–12

Situation

Paul wrote a second letter to the Thessalonians less than a year after the first. The Thessalonians continued to grow in their new faith, but Paul needed to correct misunderstandings that resulted from his teaching on Christ's second coming.

Observation

Paul thanked God for the Thessalonians' spiritual growth, and he also urged them to persevere through persecution while they awaited Jesus' return.

Inspiration

All of us need encouragement—somebody to believe in us. To reassure and reinforce us. To help us pick up the pieces and go on. To provide us with increased determination in spite of the odds.

When you stop to analyze the concept, “encourage” takes on new meaning. It's the act of inspiring others with renewed courage, spirit, hope. When we encourage others we spur them on, we stimulate and affirm them. . . .

Most of us need massive doses of it as we slug it out in the trenches. But we are usually too proud to admit it. Unfortunately, this pride is as prevalent among members of God's family as it is on the streets of the world. . . .

The beautiful part about encouragement is this: *Anybody* can do it. You don't need a lot of money to

carry it out. You don't even need to be a certain age. In fact, some of the most encouraging actions or words I've received have come from my own children at a time when my heart was heavy. They saw the need and moved right in... . They "came alongside and helped."

(From *Strengthening Your Grip* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

How would you feel if someone sent a letter to you thanking God for you, boasting of you, and telling you that they were praying for you? We could all use this kind of mail. Write a letter of encouragement to someone this week.

Exploration

Encouragement—[Ezra 5:1-2](#); [Acts 11:23-24](#); [14:21-22](#); [1 Corinthians 14:3](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:9-11](#).

From Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

To the church in Thessalonica in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

²Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul Talks About God's Judgment

³We must always thank God for you, [brothers and sisters](#). This is only right, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love that every one of you has for each other is increasing.

⁴So we brag about you to the other churches of God. We tell them about the way you continue to be strong and have faith even though you are being treated badly and are suffering many troubles.

⁵This is proof that God is right in his judgment. He wants you to be counted worthy of his kingdom for which you are suffering. ⁶God will do what is right. He will give trouble to those who trouble you. ⁷And he will give rest to you who are troubled and to us also when the Lord Jesus appears with burning fire from heaven with his powerful angels. ⁸Then he will punish those who do not know God and who do not obey the Good News about our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹Those people will be punished with a destruction that continues forever. They will be kept away from the Lord and from his great power.

¹⁰This will happen on the day when the Lord Jesus comes to

receive glory because of his holy people. And all the people who have believed will be amazed at Jesus. You will be in that group, because you believed what we told you.

¹¹That is why we always pray for you, asking our God to help you live the kind of life he called you to live. We pray that with his power God will help you do the good things you want and perform the works that come from your faith. ¹²We pray all this so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will have glory in you, and you will have glory in him. That glory comes from the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Life Lessons

2 Thessalonians 2:1–3:18

Situation

The term “day of the Lord” means the future, final judgment day. False teachers had told the Thessalonians that this day had already come. Many, therefore, had quit their jobs and were waiting for God to rescue them from suffering and persecution.

Observation

Paul asked God to encourage and strengthen the Thessalonians. God also gives us hope for the future, and that hope is good and beneficial.

Inspiration

How could he [Jesus] get by with such words [[John 11:25–27](#)]? Who was he to make such a claim? What qualified him to offer grace to one woman and a promise of resurrection to another? Simple. He had done what the dove did. He’d crossed the shoreline of the future land and journeyed among the trees. And from the grove of grace he plucked a leaf for the woman. And from the tree of life he pulled a sprig for Martha.

And from both he brings leaves to you. Grace and life. Forgiveness of sin. The defeat of death. This is the hope he gives. This is the hope we need.

In his book *The Grand Essentials*, Ben Patterson tells of an S-4 submarine that sank off the coast of Massachusetts. The entire crew was trapped. Every effort was made to rescue the sailors, but every effort

failed. Near the end of the ordeal, a deep-sea diver heard tapping on the steel wall of the sunken sub. As he placed his helmet against the vessel, he realized he was hearing a sailor tap out this question in Morse code: "Is there any hope?"

To the guilty that ask that question, Jesus says, "Yes!"

To the death-struck that ask that question, Jesus answers, "Yes!"

To all the Noahs of the world, to all who search the horizon for a fleck of hope, he proclaims, "Yes!" And he comes. He comes as a dove. He comes bearing fruit from a distant land, from our future home. He comes with a leaf of hope.

Have you received yours? Don't think your ark is too isolated. Don't think your flood is too wide. Your toughest challenge is nothing more than bobby pins and rubber bands to God. *Bobby pins and rubber bands?*

My older sister used to give them to me when I was a child. I would ride my tricycle up and down the sidewalk, pretending that the bobby pins were keys and my trike was a truck. But one day I lost the "keys." Crisis! What was I going to do? My search yielded nothing but tears and fear. But when I confessed my mistake to my sister, she just smiled. Being a decade older, she had a better perspective.

God has a better perspective as well. With all due respect, our severest struggles are, in his view, nothing worse than lost bobby pins and rubber bands. He is not confounded, confused, or

discouraged.

Receive his hope, won't you? Receive it because you need it. Receive it so you can share it.

What do you suppose Noah did with his? What do you think he did with the leaf? Did he throw it overboard and forget about it? Do you suppose he stuck it in his pocket and saved it for a scrapbook? Or do you think he let out a whoop and assembled the troops and passed it around like the Hope Diamond it was?

Certainly he whooped. That's what you do with hope. What do you do with olive leaves? You pass them around. You don't stick them in your pocket. You give them to the ones you love. Love always hopes. "Love ... bears all things, believes all things, *hopes* all things, endures all things" ([1 Corinthians 13:4-7](#), NKJV, emphasis mine).

Love has hope in you. (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you ever find yourself losing hope in this life? Recognize that your hope is based on what God has done for you in Christ. The world provides no hope. Reach out in love and compassion to the lost and let them know of your future hope.

Exploration

Hope—[Romans 5:3-5](#); [8:24-25](#); [Colossians 1:5](#); [Hebrews 6:18](#); [1 Peter 1:13](#).

Evil Things Will Happen

Brothers and sisters, we have something to say about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the time when we will meet together with him.²Do not become easily upset in your thinking or afraid if you hear that the day of the Lord has already come. Someone may say this in a prophecy or in a message or in a letter as if it came from us.³Do not let anyone fool you in any way. That day of the Lord will not come until the [turning away](#) from God happens and the Man of Evil, who is on his way to hell, appears.⁴He will be against and put himself above anything called God or anything that people worship. And that Man of Evil will even go into God's Temple and sit there and say that he is God.

⁵I told you when I was with you that all this would happen. Do you not remember?⁶And now you know what is stopping that Man of Evil so he will appear at the right time.⁷The secret power of evil is already working in the world, but there is one who is stopping that power. And he will continue to stop it until he is taken out of the way.⁸Then that Man of Evil will appear, and the Lord Jesus will kill him with the breath that comes from his mouth and will destroy him with the glory of his coming.⁹The Man of Evil will come by the power of Satan. He will have great power, and he will do many different false miracles, signs, and wonders.¹⁰He will use every kind of evil to trick those who are lost. They will die, because they refused to

love the truth. (If they loved the truth, they would be saved.)
¹¹For this reason God sends them something powerful that leads them away from the truth so they will believe a lie. ¹²So all those will be judged guilty who did not believe the truth, but enjoyed doing evil.

You Are Chosen for Salvation

¹³Brothers and sisters, whom the Lord loves, God chose you from the beginning to be saved. So we must always thank God for you. You are saved by the Spirit that makes you holy and by your faith in the truth. ¹⁴God used the Good News that we preached to call you to be saved so you can share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵So, brothers and sisters, stand strong and continue to believe the teachings we gave you in our speaking and in our letter.

¹⁶⁻¹⁷May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father encourage you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say. God loved us, and through his grace he gave us a good hope and encouragement that continues forever.

Pray for Us

And now, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the Lord's teaching will continue to spread quickly and that people will give honor to that teaching, just as happened with you.² And pray that we will be protected from stubborn and evil people, because not all people believe.

³But the Lord is faithful and will give you strength and will protect you from the Evil One.⁴The Lord makes us feel sure that you are doing and will continue to do the things we told you.⁵May the Lord lead your hearts into God's love and Christ's patience.

The Duty to Work

⁶Brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ we command you to stay away from any believer who refuses to work and does not follow the teaching we gave you.⁷You yourselves know that you should live as we live. We were not lazy when we were with you.⁸And when we ate another person's food, we always paid for it. We worked very hard night and day so we would not be an expense to any of you.⁹We had the right to ask you to help us, but we worked to take care of ourselves so we would be an example for you to follow.¹⁰When we were with you, we gave you this rule: "Anyone who refuses to work should not eat."

¹¹We hear that some people in your group refuse to work. They do nothing but busy themselves in other people's lives.

¹²We command those people and beg them in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and earn their own food. ¹³But you, brothers and sisters, never become tired of doing good.

¹⁴If some people do not obey what we tell you in this letter, then take note of them. Have nothing to do with them so they will feel ashamed. ¹⁵But do not treat them as enemies. Warn them as fellow believers.

Final Words

¹⁶Now may the Lord of peace give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.

¹⁷I, Paul, end this letter now in my own handwriting. All my letters have this to show they are from me. This is the way I write.

¹⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “brothers” here and throughout this book, Paul’s words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

turning away Or “the rebellion.”

The Book of 1 Timothy

Introduction

Watch a small boy follow his dad through the snow. He stretches to step where his dad stepped. Not an easy task. His small legs extend as far as they can so his feet can fall in his father's prints.

The father, seeing what the son is doing, smiles and begins taking shorter steps, so the son can follow.

It's a picture of discipleship.

In our faith we follow in someone's steps. A parent, a teacher, a hero—none of us are the first to walk the trail. All of us have someone we follow.

In our faith we leave footprints to guide others. A child, a friend, a recent convert. None should be left to walk the trail alone.

It's the principle of discipleship.

Timothy didn't walk the trail alone. He followed in the steps of Paul, his father in the faith. Paul knew he was following. He also knew the snow was getting deep. So he slowed his pace to help. He penned a letter to Timothy, giving him practical advice on how to lead a church.

As a young minister, Timothy was faced with all sorts of challenges. Step by step, Paul patiently instructs him, and in doing so, he instructs us.

A few questions to consider as you read. Who are you following? When you get where you are going, will it be where you intended? Also, what kind of trail are you leaving? If someone follows your steps, will they arrive at the right place?

The message of 1 Timothy urges you: Watch your step.

About This Book

Author:

Paul

Date Written:

C. A.D. 62

Key Themes:

-
- Jesus Christ is the center of the gospel.
- The faith held by the church should be manifested in the behavior of the church.
- Church leaders are expected to live above reproach.
- There is accountability among the church body.

Key Verse:

“Fight the good fight of faith, grabbing hold of the life that continues forever. You were called to have that life when you confessed the good confession before many witnesses” ([1 Timothy 6:12](#)).

Contents:

1. Instructions on Right Belief [1:1–20](#)
2. Instructions on Public Worship [2:1–3:16](#)
3. Instructions for Church Leaders [4:1–6:21](#)

Life Lessons

1 Timothy 1:1–2:15

Situation

Paul laid down guidelines for proper worship. He emphasized the importance of prayer and orderly worship.

Observation

Prayer is an important part of public worship.

Inspiration

We live in a society that is reasonably organized. Put a letter in the box, and it usually ends up where you want it to go. Order an item from a catalog, and it usually comes to you in the right size, color, and model. Ask someone to provide you a service, and it is reasonable to expect that it will work out that way. In other words, we are used to results in response to our arrangements. That is why prayer can be discouraging for some of us. How can we predict the result? We are tempted to abandon prayer as a viable exercise and try getting the results ourselves.

But the fact is that my prayer life cannot be directly tied to the results I expect or demand. I have had many opportunities by now to see that the things I want God to do in response to my prayers can be unhealthy for me. I have begun to see that *worship and intercession are far more the business of aligning myself with God's purposes than asking Him to align with mine.*

Henri Nouwen says it best when he writes:

“Prayer is a radical conversion of all our mental processes because in prayer we move away from ourselves, our worries, preoccupation, and self-gratification—and direct all that we recognize as ours to God in the simple trust that through His love all will be made new.” (From *Ordering Your Private World* by Gordon MacDonald)

Application

Worship God today and join with other Christians this Sunday in public prayer, singing, and Bible teaching. Let corporate worship become a first priority to you.

Exploration

Worship—[1 Chronicles 16:29](#); [Nehemiah 9:2–3](#); [Psalm 100:2](#); [Jeremiah 7:2–3](#); [John 4:24](#).

From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the command of God our Savior and Christ Jesus our hope.

²To Timothy, a true child to me because you believe:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Warning Against False Teaching

³I asked you to stay longer in Ephesus when I went into Macedonia so you could command some people there to stop teaching false things. ⁴Tell them not to spend their time on stories that are not true and on long lists of names in family histories. These things only bring arguments; they do not help God's work, which is done in faith. ⁵The purpose of this command is for people to have love, a love that comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a true faith. ⁶Some people have missed these things and turned to useless talk. ⁷They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not understand either what they are talking about or what they are sure about.

⁸But we know that the law is good if someone uses it lawfully. ⁹We also know that the law is not made for good people but for those who are against the law and for those who refuse to follow it. It is for people who are against God and are sinful, who are not holy and have no religion, who kill their fathers and mothers, who murder, ¹⁰who take part in sexual

sins, who have sexual relations with people of the same sex, who sell slaves, who tell lies, who speak falsely, and who do anything against the true teaching of God.¹¹ That teaching is part of the Good News of the blessed God that he gave me to tell.

Thanks for God's Mercy

¹²I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who gave me strength, because he trusted me and gave me this work of serving him.¹³ In the past I spoke against Christ and persecuted him and did all kinds of things to hurt him. But God showed me mercy, because I did not know what I was doing. I did not believe.¹⁴ But the grace of our Lord was fully given to me, and with that grace came the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵What I say is true, and you should fully accept it: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.¹⁶ But I was given mercy so that in me, the worst of all sinners, Christ Jesus could show that he has patience without limit. His patience with me made me an example for those who would believe in him and have life forever.¹⁷ To the King that rules forever, who will never die, who cannot be seen, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

¹⁸Timothy, my child, I am giving you a command that agrees with the prophecies that were given about you in the past. I tell you this so you can follow them and fight the good fight.

¹⁹Continue to have faith and do what you know is right. Some people have rejected this, and their faith has been shipwrecked.

²⁰Hymenaeus and Alexander have done that, and I have given them to Satan so they will learn not to speak against God.

Some Rules for Men and Women

First, I tell you to pray for all people, asking God for what they need and being thankful to him. ²Pray for rulers and for all who have authority so that we can have quiet and peaceful lives full of worship and respect for God. ³This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, ⁴who wants all people to be saved and to know the truth. ⁵There is one God and one way human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus, who is himself human. ⁶He gave himself as a payment to free all people. He is proof that came at the right time. ⁷That is why I was chosen to tell the Good News and to be an apostle. (I am telling the truth; I am not lying.) I was chosen to teach those who are not Jews to believe and to know the truth.

⁸So, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up their hands in a holy manner, without anger and arguments.

⁹Also, women should wear proper clothes that show respect and self-control, not using braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes. ¹⁰Instead, they should do good deeds, which is right for women who say they worship God.

¹¹Let a woman learn by listening quietly and being ready to cooperate in everything. ¹²But I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to listen quietly, ¹³because Adam was formed first and then Eve. ¹⁴And Adam was not tricked, but the woman was tricked and became a sinner. ¹⁵But she will be saved through having children if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

Life Lessons

1 Timothy 3:1–16

Situation

Paul laid down certain qualifications for selecting leaders in the church. These qualifications would help the church weed out undeserving candidates, develop Christian maturity, and bring glory and honor to God.

Observation

Leaders must know God's Word and have a mature Christian lifestyle. Every Christian ought to pursue these characteristics. Leaders must already have them.

Inspiration

How do we tear down the pedestals? How do we vigorously assert the biblical mindset of servant leadership, so radically at odds with the celebrity-crazed culture in which we live? Like everything else, it begins with each of us coming under the conviction of God's truth. All of us—pastors and lay leaders and parishioners—need to take a hard look at ourselves.

First, we must reassess our objectives...

The church, as a witness to the kingdom of God, is to be a community that worships God and equips men and women to be disciples, growing in holiness and service. How can the church fulfill these functions if it is not a servant church—from pulpit to pew? And this being the case, the principal job of the pastor is to equip others to serve...

Our second task is to consciously strive to avoid the snares. This is not easy. Temptations surround us every day—both our natural inclinations and the world’s style of authoritarian leadership. But there are ways to protect ourselves....

William Booth, founder and first general of the Salvation Army, sent a command to all of his missionaries in India: “Go to the Indian as a brother, which indeed you are, and show the love which none can doubt you feel ... eat and drink and dress and live by his side. Speak his language, share his sorrow.” ...

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it: “The church is herself only when she exists for humanity... . She must take her part in the social life of the world, not lording it over men, but helping and serving them. She must tell men, whatever their calling, what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others.”

If the church can only be the church when it exists for others, then the Christian can only be truly Christian when he or she is willing to be emptied out for others. There are no harder words in all of Scripture than Jesus’ commandment that we love one another as He loved us—which means love that lays down its life for another. (From *The Body* by Charles Colson)

Application

Make a list of all the qualifications Paul gave Timothy for Christian leadership. Rate yourself on each item. What three need your attention most? What steps can you take toward maturity? Pray that your family and friends would notice a difference in

the next weeks as you sharpen your character.

Exploration

Leadership—[Exodus 15:13](#); [Numbers 27:15–17](#);
[Deuteronomy 1:9–18](#); [Luke 22:24–27](#); [Titus 1:5–9](#);
[Hebrews 13:17–19](#).

Elders in the Church

What I say is true: Anyone wanting to become an elder desires a good work.² An elder must not give people a reason to criticize him, and he must have only one wife. He must be self-controlled, wise, respected by others, ready to welcome guests, and able to teach.³ He must not drink too much wine or like to fight, but rather be gentle and peaceable, not loving money.⁴ He must be a good family leader, having children who cooperate with full respect.⁵ (If someone does not know how to lead the family, how can that person take care of God's church?)⁶ But an elder must not be a new believer, or he might be too proud of himself and be judged guilty just as the devil was.⁷ An elder must also have the respect of people who are not in the church so he will not be criticized by others and caught in the devil's trap.

Deacons in the Church

⁸In the same way, deacons must be respected by others, not saying things they do not mean. They must not drink too much wine or try to get rich by cheating others.⁹ With a clear conscience they must follow the secret of the faith that God made known to us.¹⁰ Test them first. Then let them serve as deacons if you find nothing wrong in them.¹¹ In the same way,

[women](#) must be respected by others. They must not speak evil of others. They must be self-controlled and trustworthy in everything. ¹²Deacons must have only one wife and be good leaders of their children and their own families. ¹³Those who serve well as deacons are making an honorable place for themselves, and they will be very bold in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The Final Payment

“With one sacrifice, Jesus made perfect forever those who are being made holy” ([Hebrews 10:14](#)). No more sacrifice needs to be made. No more deposits are necessary. So complete was the payment that Jesus used a banking term to proclaim your salvation. “It is finished” ([John 19:30](#)). *Tetelestai* was a financial term used to announce the final installment, the ultimate payment.

Now, if the task is finished, is anything else required of you? Of course not. If the account is full, what more could you add? Even saying the phrase “forgive our debts” does not earn grace. We repeat the words to remind us of the forgiveness we have, not to attain a forgiveness we need....

For some of you these thoughts about bounced checks and God’s grace aren’t new, but aren’t they precious? Honestly, have you ever been given a gift which compares to God’s grace? Finding this treasure of mercy makes the poorest beggar a prince. Missing this gift makes the wealthiest man a pauper.

Again, many of you knew that. I pray the reminder encourages you.

But for others, this is more than good news ... it is *new* news. You never knew there was a roof of grace. And what a grand roof it is. The tiles are thick and the beams are sturdy. Under it you are shielded from the storms of guilt and shame. Beneath the covering of Christ, no accuser can touch you and no act can condemn you.

Isn't it good to know you don't have to stand outside in the storm anymore?

"But is it big enough for me?" you ask. Well, it was big enough for one who denied Christ (Peter). One who mocked Christ (the thief on the cross). One who persecuted Christ (Paul). Yes, it's big enough for you. Though you've spent a lifetime writing insufficient checks, God has stamped these words on your statement: MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU.

Picture, if you will, a blank check. The amount of the check is "sufficient grace." The signer of the check is Jesus. The only blank line is for the payee. That part is for you. May I urge you to spend a few moments with your Savior receiving this check? Reflect on the work of his grace. Look toward the roof. Its beams are from Calvary and the nails once held a Savior to the cross. His sacrifice was for you.

Express your thanks for his grace. Whether for the first time or the thousandth, let him hear you whisper, "Forgive us our debts." And let him answer your prayer as you imagine writing your name on the

check.

Perhaps I best slip out now and leave the two of you to talk. I'll be waiting in the hallway of the Great House of God. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

The Secret of Our Life

¹⁴Although I hope I can come to you soon, I am writing these things to you now. ¹⁵Then, even if I am delayed, you will know how to live in the family of God. That family is the church of the living God, the support and foundation of the truth.

¹⁶Without doubt, the secret of our life of worship is great:

He was shown to us in a human body,
proved right in spirit,
and seen by angels.
He was preached to those who are not Jews,
believed in by the world,
and taken up in glory.

Life Lessons

1 Timothy 4:1–6:21

Situation

False teachers have always blemished the church. The false teachers in the Ephesian church did not believe Jesus was really human. They contradicted Scripture while appearing to be self-disciplined and morally righteous.

Observation

Christian leaders must be disciplined. They must guard their motives, be faithful to God and his Word, and live commendable lives. A false teacher can easily be detected if the teacher's message differs from the Bible's truth.

Inspiration

For you to rest—that is, to live in total acceptance of God's way—demands quiet....

To rest in God permanently means to hand over each activity, each situation of your life, to Him and to learn the habit of trusting Him to work for you.

We don't naturally rest. Naturally we are stewers, tinkerers, and fussers....

Have you too much to do? Are you pushed, rushed, harried?

Said George Fox long ago, "Come out of the bustlings you that are bustling."

To guard your inner life, you must guard your outer life. How's your pace? Are you too busy? ...

Does your pace allow you to keep in touch with

yourself—with your inner needs and feelings and longings? Does it allow you time to think, plan, make changes? Does it allow you time to observe carefully the dear ones around you and care for their needs—physical and emotional? Do you have time to really live? ...

Asian theologian Kosuke Koyama says that in human affairs God moves at something like three miles an hour, the pace at which a person walks, not runs! Are you synchronized to your world, maybe even to your Christian world, but out of sync with God? ...

You will change when your inner life changes. But I just said your inner life is affected by your outer life! Then is the whole thing a vicious circle that can't be stopped?

No, the change begins with a decision. Your heart is your headquarters. Even as you read this chapter, make the decision, by a conscious act of your will, that you will learn to rest in God both in your inner life and your outer life. Once the decision is made—and you implement it as God opens your eyes to ways to implement it—gradually, gradually over the weeks or years, the changes will come. Your heart will start listening to a different pulse deep within you, and with joy you'll begin to match your steps to that lovely, restful beat. (From *Disciplines of the Heart* by Anne Ortlund)

Application

Are you satisfied with God's plans for you? Are you discontent because you are too young or too

old? Impatient because you are not advancing as high as you would like? Frustrated with your restrictions? Be content where God has placed you. Live your life as an example to others. Speak boldly of what Christ has done for you and what he can do for others.

Exploration

Discipline—[Proverbs 3:11–12](#); [12:1](#); [1 Corinthians 5](#); [2 Corinthians 2:5–11](#); [Hebrews 12:5–11](#); [Revelation 3:19](#).

A Warning About False Teachers

Now the Holy Spirit clearly says that in the later times some people will stop believing the faith. They will follow spirits that lie and teachings of demons.²Such teachings come from the false words of liars whose consciences are destroyed as if by a hot iron.³They forbid people to marry and tell them not to eat certain foods which God created to be eaten with thanks by people who believe and know the truth.⁴Everything God made is good, and nothing should be refused if it is accepted with thanks,⁵because it is made holy by what God has said and by prayer.

Be a Good Servant of Christ

⁶By telling these things to the [brothers and sisters](#), you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus. You will be made strong by the words of the faith and the good teaching which you have been following.⁷But do not follow foolish stories that disagree with God's truth, but train yourself to serve God.⁸Training your body helps you in some ways, but serving God helps you in every way by bringing you blessings in this life and in the future life, too.⁹What I say is true, and you should fully accept it.¹⁰This is why we work and struggle: We hope in the living God who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who

believe.

¹¹Command and teach these things. ¹²Do not let anyone treat you as if you are unimportant because you are young. Instead, be an example to the believers with your words, your actions, your love, your faith, and your pure life. ¹³Until I come, continue to read the Scriptures to the people, strengthen them, and teach them. ¹⁴Use the gift you have, which was given to you through prophecy when the group of elders [laid their hands on](#) you. ¹⁵Continue to do those things; give your life to doing them so your progress may be seen by everyone. ¹⁶Be careful in your life and in your teaching. If you continue to live and teach rightly, you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.

Rules for Living with Others

Do not speak angrily to an older man, but plead with him as if he were your father. Treat younger men like brothers,² older women like mothers, and younger women like sisters. Always treat them in a pure way.

³Take care of widows who are truly widows. ⁴But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to do their duty to their own family and to repay their parents or grandparents. That pleases God. ⁵The true widow, who is all alone, puts her hope in God and continues to pray night and day for God's help. ⁶But the widow who uses her life to please herself is really dead while she is alive. ⁷Tell the believers to do these things so that no one can criticize them. ⁸Whoever does not care for his own relatives, especially his own family members, has turned against the faith and is worse than someone who does not believe in God.

⁹To be on the list of widows, a woman must be at least sixty years old. She must have been faithful to her husband. ¹⁰She must be known for her good works—works such as raising her children, welcoming strangers, washing the feet of God's people, helping those in trouble, and giving her life to do all kinds of good deeds.

¹¹But do not put younger widows on that list. After they give themselves to Christ, they are pulled away from him by their physical needs, and then they want to marry again. ¹²They will be judged for not doing what they first promised to do.

¹³Besides that, they learn to waste their time, going from house

to house. And they not only waste their time but also begin to gossip and busy themselves with other people's lives, saying things they should not say. ¹⁴So I want the younger widows to marry, have children, and manage their homes. Then no enemy will have any reason to criticize them. ¹⁵But some have already turned away to follow Satan.

¹⁶If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should care for them herself. The church should not have to care for them. Then it will be able to take care of those who are truly widows.

¹⁷The elders who lead the church well should receive double honor, especially those who work hard by speaking and teaching, ¹⁸because the Scripture says: "When an ox is working in the grain, do not cover its mouth to keep it from eating," and "A worker should be given his pay."

¹⁹Do not listen to someone who accuses an elder, without two or three witnesses. ²⁰Tell those who continue sinning that they are wrong. Do this in front of the whole church so that the others will have a warning.

²¹Before God and Christ Jesus and the chosen angels, I command you to do these things without showing favor of any kind to anyone.

²²Think carefully before you lay your hands on anyone, and don't share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

²³Stop drinking only water, but drink a little wine to help your stomach and your frequent sicknesses.

²⁴The sins of some people are easy to see even before they are judged, but the sins of others are seen only later. ²⁵So also good deeds are easy to see, but even those that are not easily seen cannot stay hidden.

All who are slaves under a yoke should show full respect to their masters so no one will speak against God's name and our teaching. ²The slaves whose masters are believers should not show their masters any less respect because they are believers. They should serve their masters even better, because they are helping believers they love.

You must teach and preach these things.

False Teaching and True Riches

³Anyone who has a different teaching does not agree with the true teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that shows the true way to serve God. ⁴This person is full of pride and understands nothing, but is sick with a love for arguing and fighting about words. This brings jealousy, fighting, speaking against others, evil mistrust, ⁵and constant quarrels from those who have evil minds and have lost the truth. They think that serving God is a way to get rich.

⁶Serving God does make us very rich, if we are satisfied with what we have. ⁷We brought nothing into the world, so we can take nothing out. ⁸But, if we have food and clothes, we will be satisfied with that. ⁹Those who want to become rich bring temptation to themselves and are caught in a trap. They want many foolish and harmful things that ruin and destroy people. ¹⁰The love of money causes all kinds of evil. Some people have left the faith, because they wanted to get more money, but they have caused themselves much sorrow.

Some Things to Remember

¹¹But you, man of God, run away from all those things. Instead, live in the right way, serve God, have faith, love, patience, and gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of faith, grabbing hold of the life that continues forever. You were called to have that life when you confessed the good confession before many witnesses. ¹³In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, I give you a command. Christ Jesus made the good confession when he stood before Pontius Pilate. ¹⁴Do what you were commanded to do without wrong or blame until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. ¹⁵God will make that happen at the right time. He is the blessed and only Ruler, the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords. ¹⁶He is the only One who never dies. He lives in light so bright no one can go near it. No one has ever seen God, or can see him. May honor and power belong to God forever. Amen.

¹⁷Command those who are rich with things of this world not to be proud. Tell them to hope in God, not in their uncertain riches. God richly gives us everything to enjoy. ¹⁸Tell the rich people to do good, to be rich in doing good deeds, to be generous and ready to share. ¹⁹By doing that, they will be saving a treasure for themselves as a strong foundation for the future. Then they will be able to have the life that is true life.

²⁰Timothy, guard what God has trusted to you. Stay away from foolish, useless talk and from the arguments of what is falsely called “knowledge.” ²¹By saying they have that “knowledge,” some have missed the true faith.

Grace be with you.

women This might mean the wives of the deacons, or it might mean women who serve in the same way as deacons.

brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “brothers” here and throughout this book, Paul’s words refer to the entire church, including men and women.

laid their hands on The laying on of hands had many purposes, including the giving of a blessing, power, or authority.

“When ... eating,” Quotation from [Deuteronomy 25:4](#).

“A worker ... pay.” Quotation from [Luke 10:7](#).

lay your hands on The laying on of hands had many purposes, including the giving of a blessing, power, or authority.

[The Book of 2 Timothy](#)

Introduction

I have kept the faith.

They have taken everything else. They have taken his freedom—he's locked in a Roman prison. They have taken his possessions—he hasn't even a shawl to keep him warm. They have taken his churches—he will not see them again. They have taken his future—he is sentenced to die.

What do you have left, Paul? What do you have left to show for your life? Had you stayed a Jew in Jerusalem, you'd have a seat of status and a house of retirement. Had you been more compromising, you might have gone unnoticed by the Romans. Had you been less passionate, you might have pastored a church and stayed in one city. But you were too convinced to compromise—too convicted to stay home.

And now, with the end in sight, with the verdict rendered and the end in sight, what do you have left?

The old apostle leans forward with eyes twinkling and says, *I have kept the faith.*

That was the heart of the apostle. And that is the heart of this Epistle. As far as we know, this is the last one he ever wrote. Paul picks up his pen one final time. He knows the end is near, "*My life is being given as an offering to God,*" he tells Timothy, his son in the faith.

But he has no regrets, only counsel—practical, inspirational counsel for young Timothy, who has been left to lead the church in Ephesus. His tenderness for the young minister peeks out from behind every word. "Make every effort," he urges, "to give yourself to God as the kind of person he will accept. Be a worker who is not ashamed and who uses

the true teaching in the right way” ([2:15](#)).

Timothy never had another teacher like Paul. The world has never had another teacher like Paul. He was convinced of two facts—he was once lost but then saved. He spent a lifetime telling every person who would listen.

In the end it cost him everything. For in the end, all he had was his faith. But in the end, his faith was all he needed.

About This Book

Author:

Paul

Date Written:

C. A.D. 67

Key Themes:

-
- The gospel of Christ is worthy of our full commitment.
- The Christian life and ministry will be difficult at times—persevere.
- The Word of God is unique and powerful.
- The life of faith we live will find its rewards in the kingdom of God beyond this life.

Key Verse:

“All Scripture is given by God and is useful for teaching, for showing people what is wrong in their lives, for correcting faults, and for teaching how to live right” ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)).

Contents:

1. Persistence in Present Testing [1:1-2:26](#)
2. Endurance in Future Testing [3:1-4:22](#)

Life Lessons

2 Timothy 1:1–18

Situation

Paul gave hope and encouragement to Timothy. Christians came under increasing persecution from Romans throughout the empire. The pressure to abandon the faith was strong.

Observation

We must seek strength from the Lord to deal with daily stresses and the pressure to abandon our faith.

Inspiration

In our house we call 5:0 P.M. the piranha hour. That's the time of day when everyone wants a piece of Mom. Sara, the baby, is hungry. Andrea wants Mom to read her a book. Jenna wants help with her homework. And I—the ever-loving, ever-sensitive husband—want Denalyn to drop everything and talk to me about my day.

When is your piranha hour? When do people in your world demand much and offer little?

Every boss has had a day in which the requests outnumber the results. There's not a businessperson alive who hasn't groaned as an armada of assignments docks at his or her desk. For the teacher, the piranha hour often begins when the first student enters and ends when the last student leaves.

Piranha hours: parents have them, bosses endure them, secretaries dread them, teachers are besieged by them, and Jesus taught us how to live through

them successfully.

When hands extended and voices demanded, Jesus responded with love. He did so because the code within him disarmed the alarm. The code is worth noting: “People are precious.” (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do daily stresses cause you to doubt the power of God? Guard your heart against the external influences that attack your faith. Turn to the Lord for wisdom and strength to counter these challenges.

Exploration

Pressure—[Genesis 25:32–33](#); [Judges 6:25–30](#); [Proverbs 4:23](#); [Matthew 4:1](#); [James 1:2–4](#).

From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. God sent me to tell about the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.

²To Timothy, a dear child to me:

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Encouragement for Timothy

³I thank God as I always mention you in my prayers, day and night. I serve him, doing what I know is right as my ancestors did. ⁴Remembering that you cried for me, I want very much to see you so I can be filled with joy. ⁵I remember your true faith. That faith first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and I know you now have that same faith. ⁶This is why I remind you to keep using the gift God gave you when I [laid my hands on](#) you. Now let it grow, as a small flame grows into a fire. ⁷God did not give us a spirit that makes us afraid but a spirit of power and love and self-control.

⁸So do not be ashamed to tell people about our Lord Jesus, and do not be ashamed of me, in prison for the Lord. But suffer with me for the Good News. God, who gives us the strength to do that, ⁹saved us and made us his holy people. That was not because of anything we did ourselves but because of God's purpose and grace. That grace was given to us through Christ Jesus before time began, ¹⁰but it is now shown to us by the coming of our Savior Christ Jesus. He destroyed death, and

through the Good News he showed us the way to have life that cannot be destroyed. ¹¹I was chosen to tell that Good News and to be an apostle and a teacher. ¹²I am suffering now because I tell the Good News, but I am not ashamed, because I know Jesus, the One in whom I have believed. And I am sure he is able to protect what he has trusted me with until that [day](#). ¹³Follow the pattern of true teachings that you heard from me in faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴Protect the truth that you were given; protect it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

¹⁵You know that everyone in the country of Asia has left me, even Phygelus and Hermogenes. ¹⁶May the Lord show mercy to the family of Onesiphorus, who has often helped me and was not ashamed that I was in prison. ¹⁷When he came to Rome, he looked eagerly for me until he found me. ¹⁸May the Lord allow him to find mercy from the Lord on that day. You know how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

Life Lessons

2 Timothy 2:1-26

Situation

Believers in Timothy's church had lost their focus on Christ. Paul knew that concentrating on Christ and ignoring personal annoyances would help Timothy's problems.

Observation

Christians, even those enduring suffering, must focus on Jesus the Savior and avoid being distracted by worldly problems.

Inspiration

In the shop of a blacksmith, there are three types of tools.

There are tools on the junkpile: outdated, broken, dull, rusty....

There are tools on the anvil: melted down, molten hot, moldable, changeable....

There are tools of usefulness: sharpened, primed, defined, mobile. They lie ready in the blacksmith's toolchest, available to their master, fulfilling their calling....

We are all somewhere in the blacksmith's shop. We are either on the scrap pile, on the anvil, in the Master's hands, or in the toolchest. (Some of us have been in all three.) ...

From the shelves to the workbench, from the water to the fire....

I'm sure that somewhere you'll see yourself....

The rubbish pile of broken tools, the anvil of recasting, the hands of the Master—it's a simultaneously joyful and painful voyage.

And for you who make the journey—who leave the heap and enter the fire, dare to be pounded on God's anvil, and doggedly seek to discover your own purpose—take courage, for you await the privilege of being called “God's chosen instruments.”

(From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

Is your walk with the Lord obscured by day-to-day annoyances? Remember the priority of your relationship with the Lord and get back on track through prayer, Bible study, and worship.

Exploration

Focus—[Judges 15:18](#); [Nehemiah 13:25–29](#); [2 Corinthians 11:3](#).

A Loyal Soldier of Christ Jesus

You then, Timothy, my child, be strong in the grace we have in Christ Jesus. ²You should teach people whom you can trust the things you and many others have heard me say. Then they will be able to teach others. ³Share in the troubles we have like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴A soldier wants to please the enlisting officer, so no one serving in the army wastes time with everyday matters. ⁵Also an athlete who takes part in a contest must obey all the rules in order to win. ⁶The farmer who works hard should be the first person to get some of the food that was grown. ⁷Think about what I am saying, because the Lord will give you the ability to understand everything.

Christ Through the Bible

Christ the Savior

Picture the scene. Peter, John, James. They came back. Banking on some zany possibility that the well of forgiveness still had a few drops, they came back. Daring to dream that the master had left them some word, some plan, some direction, they came back.

But little did they know, their wildest dream wasn't wild enough. Just as someone mumbles, "It's no use," they hear a noise. They hear a voice.

"Peace be with you."

Every head lifted. Every eye turned. Every mouth dropped open. Someone looked at the door.

It was still locked.

It was a moment the apostles would never forget, a story they would never cease to tell. The stone of the tomb was not enough to keep him *in*. The walls of the room were not enough to keep him *out*.

The one betrayed sought his betrayers. What did he say to them? Not “What a bunch of flops!” Not “I told you so.” No “Where-were-you-when-I-needed-you?” speeches. But simply one phrase, “Peace be with you.” The very thing they didn’t have was the very thing he offered: peace.

It was too good to be true! So amazing was the appearance that some were saying, “Pinch me, I’m dreaming” even at the ascension. No wonder they returned to Jerusalem with great joy! No wonder they were always in the temple praising God!

A transformed group stood beside a transformed Peter as he announced some weeks later: “So, all the people of Israel should know this truly: God has made Jesus—the man you nailed to the cross—both Lord and Christ” ([Acts 2:36](#)).

No timidity in his words. No reluctance. About three thousand people believed his message.

The apostles sparked a movement. The people became followers of the death-conqueror. They couldn’t hear enough or say enough about him... Christ was their model, their message. They preached “Jesus Christ and him crucified,” not for the lack of another topic, but because they couldn’t exhaust this

one.

What unlocked the doors of the apostles' hearts?

Simple. They saw Jesus. They encountered the Christ. Their sins collided with their Savior and their Savior won! ... (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

⁸Remember Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead, who is from the family of David. This is the Good News I preach, ⁹and I am suffering because of it to the point of being bound with chains like a criminal. But God's teaching is not in chains. ¹⁰So I patiently accept all these troubles so that those whom God has chosen can have the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. With that salvation comes glory that never ends.

¹¹This teaching is true:

If we died with him, we will also live with him.

¹²If we accept suffering, we will also rule with him.

If we refuse to accept him, he will refuse to accept us.

¹³If we are not faithful, he will still be faithful, because he cannot be false to himself.

A Worker Pleasing to God

¹⁴Continue teaching these things, warning people in God's presence not to argue about words. It does not help anyone, and it ruins those who listen. ¹⁵Make every effort to give yourself to God as the kind of person he will accept. Be a worker who is not ashamed and who uses the true teaching in the right way. ¹⁶Stay away from foolish, useless talk, because that will lead people further away from God. ¹⁷Their evil teaching will spread like a sickness inside the body. Hymenaeus and Philetus are like that. ¹⁸They have left the true teaching, saying that the rising from the dead has already taken place, and so they are destroying the faith of some people.

¹⁹But God's strong foundation continues to stand. These words are written on the seal: "The Lord knows those who belong to him." and "Everyone who wants to belong to the Lord must stop doing wrong."

²⁰In a large house there are not only things made of gold and silver, but also things made of wood and clay. Some things are used for special purposes, and others are made for ordinary jobs. ²¹All who make themselves clean from evil will be used for special purposes. They will be made holy, useful to the Master, ready to do any good work.

²²But run away from the evil young people like to do. Try hard to live right and to have faith, love, and peace, together with those who trust in the Lord from pure hearts. ²³Stay away from foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they grow into quarrels. ²⁴And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, a good teacher, and patient. ²⁵The Lord's servant must gently teach those who disagree. Then maybe God will let them change their minds so they can accept the truth. ²⁶And they may wake up and escape from the trap of the devil, who catches them to do what he wants.

Life Lessons

2 Timothy 3:1–4:22

Situation

Paul warned that godlessness and evil schemes would increase as the end of history approached. People would follow false teachers who would tell them what they wanted to hear. Paul's words warned and encouraged Timothy to teach the Scriptures soundly.

Observation

Christians must guard against deceit by knowing what Scripture teaches.

Inspiration

The apostle Paul warned that many will follow the false teachers, not knowing that in feeding upon what these people say they are taking the devil's poison into their own lives. Thousands of people in every walk of life are being deceived today. False teachers use high-sounding words that seem like the height of logic, scholarship, and sophistication. They are intellectually clever and crafty in their sophistry. They are adept at beguiling men and women whose spiritual foundations are weak.

These false teachers have departed from the faith of God revealed in the Scripture...

Writing to Timothy, the apostle Paul warned, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking

lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.”

Paul later wrote to Timothy, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” Doesn’t this sound familiar today? ...

God’s plan is not abstract or unclear. It is not a secret. He says very clearly, “I love you!” He has called tens of thousands all over the world to proclaim His love to the world and to call every man, woman, and child to His loving arms. To exemplify the army of God that is going forth at this moment into the world I can think of no better example than the thousands of “barefoot preachers” and other itinerant evangelists we helped train in Amsterdam during the past decade....

Preachers, teachers, students, and mission helpers came from all over the world. Thousands came from Africa... . They came from all over Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe, and they went out into the streets of Amsterdam to see and learn and share the love of Jesus Christ with others.

Today that mighty army of traveling preachers from every corner of the world is traveling from village to village and house to house preaching the good news of God’s love. Why do they do it? For the money? No, they receive almost no support for what they do. Many are lucky if they have a bicycle, a

Bible, and a change of clothes. Do they do it for fame and fortune? There is none. In most cases only God knows what good works these humble, sincere pastors have done.

They do it because Jesus Christ is alive! He is living in their hearts, and that good news is something worthy to share with the world. They are compelled by the life that is in them to tell everyone that Jesus is Lord. If Jesus Christ is *not* the son of God, nothing matters. But if He is, *nothing else matters!* (From *Storm Warning* by Billy Graham)

Application

False religious teachers today still deceive people with twisted versions of “truth” that hurt people and sidetrack lives. Keep such people away from your family and church. You will find strength in the true gospel, not in phony substitutes.

Exploration

False Teachers—[Deuteronomy 13:1–3](#); [Matthew 7:15](#); [24:11](#); [Mark 13:22–23](#); [2 Corinthians 11:3–4](#); [1 Timothy 4:1–2](#); [1 John 4:1–6](#).

The Last Days

Remember this! In the last days there will be many troubles, ²because people will love themselves, love money, brag, and be proud. They will say evil things against others and will not obey their parents or be thankful or be the kind of people God wants. ³They will not love others, will refuse to forgive, will gossip, and will not control themselves. They will be cruel, will hate what is good, ⁴will turn against their friends, and will do foolish things without thinking. They will be conceited, will love pleasure instead of God, ⁵and will act as if they serve God but will not have his power. Stay away from those people. ⁶Some of them go into homes and get control of silly women who are full of sin and are led by many evil desires. ⁷These women are always learning new teachings, but they are never able to understand the truth fully. ⁸Just as Jannes and Jambres were against Moses, these people are against the truth. Their thinking has been ruined, and they have failed in trying to follow the faith. ⁹But they will not be successful in what they do, because as with Jannes and Jambres, everyone will see that they are foolish.

Obey the Teachings

¹⁰But you have followed what I teach, the way I live, my goal,

faith, patience, and love. You know I never give up. ¹¹You know how I have been hurt and have suffered, as in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. I have suffered, but the Lord saved me from all those troubles. ¹²Everyone who wants to live as God desires, in Christ Jesus, will be hurt. ¹³But people who are evil and cheat others will go from bad to worse. They will fool others, but they will also be fooling themselves.

¹⁴But you should continue following the teachings you learned. You know they are true, because you trust those who taught you. ¹⁵Since you were a child you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise. And that wisdom leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is given by God and is useful for teaching, for showing people what is wrong in their lives, for correcting faults, and for teaching how to live right. ¹⁷Using the Scriptures, the person who serves God will be capable, having all that is needed to do every good work.

I give you a command in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, the One who will judge the living and the dead, and by his coming and his kingdom: ²Preach the Good News. Be ready at all times, and tell people what they need to do. Tell them when they are wrong. Encourage them with great patience and careful teaching, ³because the time will come when people will not listen to the true teaching but will find many more teachers who please them by saying the things they want to hear. ⁴They will stop listening to the truth and will begin to follow false stories. ⁵But you should control yourself at all times, accept troubles, do the work of telling the Good News, and complete all the duties of a servant of God.

⁶My life is being given as an offering to God, and the time has come for me to leave this life. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Now, a crown is being held for me—a crown for being right with God. The Lord, the judge who judges rightly, will give the crown to me on that [day](#)—not only to me but to all those who have waited with love for him to come again.

Personal Words

⁹Do your best to come to me as soon as you can, ¹⁰because Demas, who loved this world, left me and went to Thessalonica. Crescens went to Galatia, and Titus went to Dalmatia. ¹¹Luke is the only one still with me. Get Mark and bring him with you when you come, because he can help me in my work here. ¹²I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. ¹³When I was in Troas, I left my coat there with Carpus. So when you come, bring it to me, along with my books, particularly the ones

written on [parchment](#). ¹⁴Alexander the metalworker did many harmful things against me. The Lord will punish him for what he did. ¹⁵You also should be careful that he does not hurt you, because he fought strongly against our teaching.

¹⁶The first time I defended myself, no one helped me; everyone left me. May they be forgiven. ¹⁷But the Lord stayed with me and gave me strength so I could fully tell the Good News to all those who are not Jews. So I was saved from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will save me when anyone tries to hurt me, and he will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. Glory forever and ever be the Lord's. Amen.

Final Greetings

¹⁹Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the family of Onesiphorus. ²⁰Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. ²¹Try as hard as you can to come to me before winter.

Eubulus sends greetings to you. Also Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers and sisters in Christ greet you.

²²The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

laid my hands on The laying on of hands had many purposes, including the giving of a blessing, power, or authority.

day The day Christ will come to judge all people and take his people to live with him.

“The Lord... him” Quotation from Numbers 16:5.

day The day Christ will come to judge all people and take his people to live with him.

parchment A writing paper made from the skins of sheep.

The Book of Titus

Introduction

The letter to Titus was the result of a storm of relativism, which left the Cretans with little values.

“Cretans are always liars, evil animals, and lazy people who do nothing but eat.” The words didn’t originate with Paul but might as well have. He used them to summarize the state of affairs on the island ([1:12](#)).

He had reason to lament. By the time of Paul the society had a despicable reputation. Greed was god. Schemers were admired. Cheating was wrong only if you got caught. Right and wrong were determined by the situation, and rape was not a crime.

The economy was so bad that boys were sold as mercenaries as young as the age of twelve. Hence, the people were left with few male role models and fewer abiding beliefs.

Paul established the church in the society and sent Titus to “finish doing the things that still needed to be done ...” ([1:5](#)). Since Paul had definite ideas as to what still needed to be done, we are given definite principles of a healthy church. Strong leadership is the first item. Titus is instructed to select elders and to do so carefully ([1:4–16](#)).

Strong character is the next. Judging from the style of life in Crete, it would have been easy for the Cretan Christians to compromise their convictions. Paul urges them not to.

Judging from the style of life in our world, we could do with the same reminder.

By the way, don’t miss Paul’s eloquent paragraph on grace ([2:11–14](#)). We’re familiar with grace which saves, but grace does much more. It trains us, “to live now in a wise and right

way ...”

Something told Paul the Cretans needed such instruction. Something tells me, we do, too.

About This Book

Author:

Paul

Date Written:

c. A.D. 63

Key Themes:

-
- The leadership of the church should live lives of honor.
- The older members of the church should train the younger members.
- Good works do not earn our salvation, but they are a product of it.

Key Verse:

“In every way be an example of doing good deeds. When you teach, do it with honesty and seriousness” ([Titus 2:7](#)).

Contents:

1. Church Leaders [1:1–16](#)
2. Church Organization [2:1–3:15](#)

Life Lessons

Titus 1:1–2:15

Situation

The Christians in Titus's church needed role models. Imitating those who lived a God-honoring life would help them be morally distinct from their culture.

Observation

As we grow to become more like Christ, our behavior grows more distinctive from the world. Believers should be known for their eagerness to do good and help others.

Inspiration

Get it straight: Someone who sees grace as permission to sin has missed grace entirely. Mercy understood is holiness desired. “[Jesus] gave himself for us so he might pay the price to free us from all evil and to make us pure people who belong only to him —*people who are always wanting to do good deeds*” (Titus 2:14, italics mine).

Note that last phrase: “people who are always wanting to do good deeds.” Grace fosters an eagerness for good. Grace doesn’t spawn a desire to sin. If one has truly embraced God’s gift, he will not mock it. In fact, if a person uses God’s mercy as liberty to sin, one might wonder whether the person ever knew God’s mercy at all.

When my father gave me his [credit] card, he didn’t attach a list of regulations. There was no contract for me to sign or rules for me to read. He

didn't tell me to place my hand on the Bible and pledge to reimburse him for any expenses. In fact, he didn't ask for any payment at all. As things turned out, I went a few weeks into the semester without using it. Why? Because he gave me more than a card; he gave me his trust. And where I might break his rules, I wasn't about to abuse his trust.

God's trust makes us eager to do right. Such is the genius of grace. The law can show us where we do wrong, but it can't make us eager to do right. Grace can. Or as Paul answers, "Faith causes us to be what the law truly wants" ([Romans 3:31](#)). (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you truly love Christ? Do you look forward to his return? If you truly understand grace and mercy, you will desire godly living and will be eager to do "good deeds." What good deeds can you do today to serve and love others?

Exploration

Good Works—[Philippians 1:11](#); [Colossians 1:10](#); [2 Timothy 2:14-26](#); [Hebrews 6:10](#); [James 3:17](#).

From Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. I was sent to help the faith of God's chosen people and to help them know the truth that shows people how to serve God.²That faith and that knowledge come from the hope for life forever, which God promised to us before time began. And God cannot lie.³At the right time God let the world know about that life through preaching. He trusted me with that work, and I preached by the command of God our Savior.

⁴To Titus, my true child in the faith we share:

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus Is Truth

Dishonesty is absolutely contrary to the character of God. According to [Hebrews 6:18](#), it is impossible for God to lie. It's not that God will not lie or that he has chosen not to lie—he cannot lie. For God to lie is for a dog to fly and a bird to bark. It simply cannot happen. The Book of Titus echoes the same three words as the Book of Hebrews: “God cannot lie” ([Titus 1:2](#)).

God always speaks truth. When he makes a covenant, he keeps it. When he makes a statement, he means it. And when he proclaims the truth, we can believe it. What he says is true. Even “if we are not

faithful, [God] will still be faithful, because he cannot be false to himself” ([2 Timothy 2:13](#)).

Satan, on the other hand, finds it impossible to tell the truth. According to Jesus, the devil is “the father of lies” ([John 8:44](#)). If you’ll remember, deceit was the first tool out of the devil’s bag. In the Garden of Eden, Satan didn’t discourage Eve. He didn’t seduce her. He didn’t sneak up on her. He just lied to her. “God says you’ll die if you eat the fruit? You will not die” (see [Genesis 3:1–4](#)).

Big Fat Liar. But Eve was suckered, and the fruit was plucked, and it’s not more than a few paragraphs before husband and son are following suit and the honesty of Eden seems a distant memory.

It still does. Daniel Webster was right when he observed, “There is nothing as powerful as the truth and often nothing as strange.” (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

Titus' Work in Crete

⁵I left you in Crete so you could finish doing the things that still needed to be done and so you could appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. ⁶An elder must not be guilty of doing wrong, must have only one wife, and must have believing children. They must not be known as children who are wild and do not cooperate. ⁷As God's manager, an elder must not be guilty of doing wrong, being selfish, or becoming angry quickly. He must not drink too much wine, like to fight, or try to get rich by cheating others. ⁸An elder must be ready to welcome guests, love what is good, be wise, live right, and be holy and self-controlled. ⁹By holding on to the trustworthy word just as we teach it, an elder can help people by using true teaching, and he can show those who are against the true teaching that they are wrong.

¹⁰There are many people who refuse to cooperate, who talk about worthless things and lead others into the wrong way—mainly those who say all who are not Jews must be circumcised. ¹¹These people must be stopped, because they are upsetting whole families by teaching things they should not teach, which they do to get rich by cheating people. ¹²Even one of their own prophets said, “Cretans are always liars, evil animals, and lazy people who do nothing but eat.” ¹³The words that prophet said are true. So firmly tell those people they are wrong so they may become strong in the faith, ¹⁴not accepting Jewish false stories and the commands of people who reject the

truth. ¹⁵To those who are pure, all things are pure, but to those who are full of sin and do not believe, nothing is pure. Both their minds and their consciences have been ruined. ¹⁶They say they know God, but their actions show they do not accept him. They are hateful people, they refuse to obey, and they are useless for doing anything good.

Following the True Teaching

But you must tell everyone what to do to follow the true teaching. ²Teach older men to be self-controlled, serious, wise, strong in faith, in love, and in patience.

³In the same way, teach older women to be holy in their behavior, not speaking against others or enslaved to too much wine, but teaching what is good. ⁴Then they can teach the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵to be wise and pure, to be good workers at home, to be kind, and to yield to their husbands. Then no one will be able to criticize the teaching God gave us.

⁶In the same way, encourage young men to be wise. ⁷In every way be an example of doing good deeds. When you teach, do it with honesty and seriousness. ⁸Speak the truth so that you cannot be criticized. Then those who are against you will be ashamed because there is nothing bad to say about us.

⁹Slaves should yield to their own masters at all times, trying to please them and not arguing with them. ¹⁰They should not steal from them but should show their masters they can be fully trusted so that in everything they do they will make the teaching of God our Savior attractive.

¹¹That is the way we should live, because God's grace that can save everyone has come. ¹²It teaches us not to live against God nor to do the evil things the world wants to do. Instead, that grace teaches us to live now in a wise and right way and in a way that shows we serve God. ¹³We should live like that while we wait for our great hope and the coming of the glory of

our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. ¹⁴He gave himself for us so he might pay the price to free us from all evil and to make us pure people who belong only to him—people who are always wanting to do good deeds.

¹⁵Say these things and encourage the people and tell them what is wrong in their lives, with all authority. Do not let anyone treat you as if you were unimportant.

Life Lessons

Titus 3:1–15

Situation

Paul reminded Christians that Christ saved them from sin and death. Paul's teaching opposed false teachers who tried to win converts.

Observation

Christians need to be reminded of God's great forgiveness.

Inspiration

What's the toughest stain to remove? grape juice? coffee? mud? After soaking, scrubbing, and soaking some more, we often give up in frustration. It just won't come out, and the shirt is ruined!

The effects of sin run profoundly deeper than juice-soiled clothing, affecting all of life and staining the soul, with real guilt and painful estrangement from God. And this sin-stain resists every human effort to remove it. No matter how hard we work or hope, or even pray, the contaminating stain remains.

The truth is that only God can cleanse us and make us truly clean. And he promises to do just that ... through faith, faith in the Son.

Are you struggling with guilt from transgressions and omissions—the whole spectrum of God-ignoring or God-defying attitudes and acts? You can be forgiven, released, and set on the path of righteousness. For a new start and a new life, confess your sins to God and trust in Christ. His stain-

remover works! (From *On Eagle's Wings* by Dave Veerman)

Application

Good works are a sign that we are grateful to God and that we love him. What service project in your community or church could you join? Ask the Lord to guide you to service that pleases him.

Exploration

Service—[Joshua 24:14–15](#); [Matthew 25:35–45](#); [1 Corinthians 15:58](#); [Colossians 3:23](#); [1 Timothy 1:12](#); [1 Peter 4:10–11](#).

The Right Way to Live

Remind the believers to yield to the authority of rulers and government leaders, to obey them, to be ready to do good,² to speak no evil about anyone, to live in peace, and to be gentle and polite to all people.

³In the past we also were foolish. We did not obey, we were wrong, and we were slaves to many things our bodies wanted and enjoyed. We spent our lives doing evil and being jealous. People hated us, and we hated each other. ⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior was shown, ⁵he saved us because of his mercy. It was not because of good deeds we did to be right with him. He saved us through the washing that made us new people through the Holy Spirit. ⁶God poured out richly upon us that Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ our Savior. ⁷Being made right with God by his grace, we could have the hope of receiving the life that never ends.

⁸This teaching is true, and I want you to be sure the people understand these things. Then those who believe in God will be careful to use their lives for doing good. These things are good and will help everyone.

⁹But stay away from those who have foolish arguments and talk about useless family histories and argue and quarrel about the law. Those things are worth nothing and will not help anyone. ¹⁰After a first and second warning, avoid someone who causes arguments. ¹¹You can know that such people are

evil and sinful; their own sins prove them wrong.

Some Things to Remember

¹²When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to stay there this winter. ¹³Do all you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey so that they have everything they need. ¹⁴Our people must learn to use their lives for doing good deeds to provide what is necessary so that their lives will not be useless.

¹⁵All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith.

Grace be with you all.

[The Book of Philemon](#)

Introduction

Philemon had every reason to be angry. His slave, Onesimus, had stolen from him and run away. He had escaped to Rome, where he met Paul and became a Believer.

Now Onesimus is returning to Philemon. Under normal circumstances, Philemon has the right to exact revenge. But these are not normal circumstances, Paul explains. Onesimus fled as a slave, he returns as a believer.

Paul doesn't ask Philemon to free Onesimus from slavery, but to free him from anger. He urges Philemon to offer grace rather than demand justice.

Does this short letter have any application for your life? It does if there is an Onesimus in your world. It does if someone has betrayed you or offended you or turned away from you. What they did wasn't right. And to demand justice is only natural, which is precisely the problem. Getting even is natural; it's not spiritual.

As you consider how to respond, consider a higher law. A law which sets all men, slave or nonslave, free.

About This Book

Author:

Paul

Date Written:

C. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

-
- Salvation is not determined or affected by a person's station in life.
- The love God expects from us goes beyond the standards of this world.

Key Verses:

“Maybe Onesimus was separated from you for a short time so you could have him back forever—no longer a slave, but better than a slave, as a loved brother....”(Philemon 15–16).

Contents:

1. Greetings [1–7](#)
2. Appeal for Onesimus [8–21](#)
3. Farewell [22–25](#)

Life Lessons

Philemon 1-25

Situation

Both Christians and non-Christians owned slaves in the Roman Empire. Onesimus, a slave from Colossae, stole from his owner, Philemon. After stealing, Onesimus ran away to Rome where Paul met him. Paul led Onesimus to Jesus.

Observation

Paul asked Philemon to forgive and accept his runaway slave back without punishment.

Inspiration

Among the most wonderful gifts in the forgiveness of sins is this one, that God permits us poor children of the earth to become coworkers in His Kingdom. We are to help spread the knowledge of the availability of this forgiveness to our neighbor next door and in faraway places... . We are to speak a word for Him to those who need His comfort and courage... . We are to help promote understanding and goodwill. We are to help build the Kingdom of kindness. We are to live redeemed. (From *Trustful Living* by Carla Holtermann)

Application

Remember that time someone took advantage of you, misled you, or even cheated you? Ask God to help you put the offense out of your mind. Next time you interact with that person, treat the person with love and show that you don't hold a grudge.

Exploration

Respect—[Job 31:13–15](#); [Proverbs 22:2](#); [Micah 6:8](#);
[Romans 13:7](#); [Galatians 3:28](#); [1 Peter 2:17](#).

¹From Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and from Timothy, our brother.

To Philemon, our dear friend and worker with us; ²to Apphia, our sister; to Archippus, a worker with us; and to the church that meets in your home:

³Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philemon's Love and Faith

⁴I always thank my God when I mention you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear about the love you have for all God's holy people and the faith you have in the Lord Jesus. ⁶I pray that the faith you share may make you understand every blessing we have in Christ. ⁷I have great joy and comfort, my brother, because the love you have shown to God's people has refreshed them.

Accept Onesimus as a Brother

⁸So, in Christ, I could be bold and order you to do what is right. ⁹But because I love you, I am pleading with you instead. I, Paul, an old man now and also a prisoner for Christ Jesus, ¹⁰am pleading with you for my child Onesimus, who became my child while I was in prison. ¹¹In the past he was useless to you, but now he has become useful for both you and me.

¹²I am sending him back to you, and with him I am sending my own heart. ¹³I wanted to keep him with me so that in your place he might help me while I am in prison for the Good News. ¹⁴But I did not want to do anything without asking you first so that any good you do for me will be because you want to do it, not because I forced you. ¹⁵Maybe Onesimus was separated from you for a short time so you could have him back forever—¹⁶no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a loved brother. I love him very much, but you will love him even more, both as a person and as a believer in the Lord.

¹⁷So if you consider me your partner, welcome Onesimus as you would welcome me. ¹⁸If he has done anything wrong to you or if he owes you anything, charge that to me. ¹⁹I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back, and I will say nothing about what you owe me for your own life. ²⁰So, my brother, I ask that you do this for me in the Lord: Refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹I write this letter, knowing that you will do what I ask you and even more.

²²One more thing—prepare a room for me in which to stay, because I hope God will answer your prayers and I will be able to come to you.

Final Greetings

²³Epaphras, a prisoner with me for Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you. ²⁴And also Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, workers together with me, send greetings.

²⁵The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

The Book of Hebrews

Introduction

The best just got better—it's a favorite slogan with advertisers.

It's not that our previous product was poor. It's just that the current one is superior.

The Book of Hebrews might well use the same slogan. The best just got better.

There was nothing inferior about the Jewish religion. It was given by God and designed by God. Every principle, rule, and ritual had a wealth of meaning. The Old Testament served as a faithful guide for thousands of people over thousands of years. It was the best offered to man.

But when Christ came, the best got better.

Hebrews was written for Jewish believers who were torn between their new faith and their old ways. The temptation was to slip back into familiar routines and rituals, settling for second best.

The author skillfully makes a case against such a digression. He argues that Jesus is better than every form of the old faith—better than the angels ([1:4–2:18](#)), better than their leaders ([3:1–4:13](#)), and better than their priests ([4:14–7:28](#)). When it comes to comparing the two, there is simply no comparison. Christianity has a better covenant ([8:1–13](#)), a better sanctuary, ([9:1–10](#)), and a better sacrifice for sins ([9:11–10:18](#)).

It's not that the old law was bad, it's just that the new law—salvation by faith in Christ—is better. Once you've known the best, why settle for second rate?

It's doubtful that you will ever be tempted to exchange

your faith for an ancient system of priests and sacrifices. But you will be tempted to exchange it for something inferior.

If you are reading Hebrews, be reminded: Once you've known the best, why settle for anything less? (Hmmm, there's another catchy slogan.)

About This Book

Author:

Unknown

Date Written:

Before A.D. 70

Key Themes:

-
- Jesus Christ brought about a whole new way of connecting with and following God.
- Jesus is our compassionate high priest.
- Faith is the connector between this life and the next.

Key Verse:

“Let us look only to Jesus, the One who began our faith and who makes it perfect. He suffered death on the cross. But he accepted the shame as if it were nothing because of the joy that God put before him...” ([Hebrews 12:2](#)).

Contents:

1. Christ Above All [1:1–4:13](#)

2. Christ's Priesthood [4:14–10:18](#)
3. Faith in Christ [10:19–13:25](#)

Life Lessons

Hebrews 1:1-14

Situation

The recipients of this letter thought highly of angels. This writer began by telling them that Jesus was greater than any other spiritual force.

Observation

Jesus reveals all we need to know about God. Jesus' power is like none other, and he holds the highest position over anyone else.

Inspiration

When I was working on my third book, *Choices ... Changes*, there was one episode I especially enjoyed writing. You guessed it. It was the last episode, about my husband.

It was great fun to sit at the computer with my friend and describe Ken Tada. How he looked the first time I saw him ... how he talked ... how he smiled ... how he carried himself ... how he moved when he played racquetball. The words about our dating days flowed effortlessly. Writing about our wedding day and marriage was pure joy. Obviously, I didn't need a Thesaurus to think of adjectives. I wanted to go on and on.

And sometimes I did! My friend would have to say, "Uh, Joni, don't you think you've talked enough about Ken's muscles? Or, "Joni, that's the fourth time in this chapter you've told us how handsome Ken is."

Isn't that funny? I just couldn't say enough good

stuff about my husband.

I'll bet it's the same way with those you love, too. You want others to know how special that person is—whether it's your mate, your friend, your child, your niece, your nephew, or your grandchild. The best part is finding someone genuinely interested in *listening* to your glowing descriptions. It actually multiplies your pleasure.

Listen in as the author of Hebrews talks about his best Friend, Jesus. It's as if someone had approached him and said, "You seem to put great deal of stock in this Person, Jesus Christ. Just who is He, anyway? Why are you so excited about Him? Can you describe Him?"

Could he ever! Finding a listening ear, the writer can't say enough....

With the ink flowing fast on his parchment, the writer goes on and on. Chapter one, chapter two, chapter three, chapter four ... Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

How is it with you? Are you looking for listening ears, anxious to go on and on about the Lord Jesus and what He means to you?

If you find you don't have enough adjectives to describe Him, I'd like to introduce you to the author of Hebrews. Sorry I can't give you his name, but he got so excited about his Subject he forgot to introduce himself. Maybe the two of you can get away together for a few minutes today.

There's nothing that excited writer would love more than a listening ear. (From *Secret Strength for*

Those Who Search by Joni Eareckson Tada)

Application

The author of Hebrews does not ask what you think about Christianity. He tells you about Jesus, God's Son, superior to the prophets of old, superior to the angels. Learn more about what Jesus reveals to us about God through church, friends, prayer, and Bible study. Is there any opinion you value more highly than his?

Exploration

Jesus Is God—[John 1:1–18](#); [Philippians 2:5–11](#).

God Spoke Through His Son

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets many times and in many different ways.² But now in these last days God has spoken to us through his Son. God has chosen his Son to own all things, and through him he made the world.³ The Son reflects the glory of God and shows exactly what God is like. He holds everything together with his powerful word. When the Son made people clean from their sins, he sat down at the right side of God, the Great One in heaven.⁴ The Son became much greater than the angels, and God gave him a name that is much greater than theirs.

⁵This is because God never said to any of the angels,

“You are my Son.
Today I have become your Father.”

[Psalm 2:7](#)

Nor did God say of any angel,

“I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son.”

[2 Samuel 7:14](#)

⁶And when God brings his firstborn Son into the world, he says,

[“Let all God’s angels worship him.”](#)

[Psalm 97:7](#)

⁷This is what God said about the angels:

“God makes his angels become like winds.
He makes his servants become like flames of fire.”

[Psalm 104:4](#)

⁸But God said this about his Son:

“God, your throne will last forever and ever.
You will rule your kingdom with fairness.
⁹You love right and hate evil,
so God has chosen you from among your friends;
he has set you apart with much joy.”

[Psalm 45:6–7](#)

¹⁰God also says,

“Lord, in the beginning you made the earth,
and your hands made the skies.
¹¹They will be destroyed, but you will remain.
They will all wear out like clothes.
¹²You will fold them like a coat.
And, like clothes, you will change them.
But you never change,
and your life will never end.”

[Psalm 102:25–27](#)

¹³And God never said this to an angel:

“Sit by me at my right side
[until I put your enemies under your control.](#)”

[Psalm 110:1](#)

¹⁴All the angels are spirits who serve God and are sent to help those who will receive salvation.

Life Lessons

Hebrews 2:1–3:19

Situation

As God's Son, Jesus' authority surpassed any prophet or angel. He is God, yet he became man.

Observation

Because Jesus became man, we know he understands our human frustrations.

Inspiration

It is an undeniable fact that usually it is those who have suffered most who are best able to comfort others who are passing through suffering. I know of pastors whose ministries have been enriched by suffering. Through their trials they have learned to “live through” the difficulties of the people in their parish. They are able to empathize as well as sympathize with the afflictions of others because of what they have experienced in their own lives.

Our sufferings may be rough and hard to bear, but they teach us lessons which in turn equip and enable us to help others. Our attitude toward suffering should not be, “Grit your teeth and bear it,” hoping it will pass as quickly as possible. Rather, our goal should be to learn all we can from what we are called upon to endure, so that we can fulfill a ministry of comfort—as Jesus did. “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” ([Hebrews 2:18](#), NIV). The sufferer becomes the comforter or helper in the service of the

Lord.

By the way, by “enduring” suffering, God led me to my wonderful wife, Ruth, who was His intended one for me. (From *Unto the Hills* by Billy Graham)

Application

Jesus knows all about life on earth. Tell him what will be your biggest temptations and struggles today. Ask him to provide you with strength and encouragement. He knows how you feel.

Exploration

Christ's Victory over Sin and Death—[Romans 6:5–11](#).

Our Salvation Is Great

So we must be more careful to follow what we were taught. Then we will not stray away from the truth. ²The teaching God spoke through angels was shown to be true, and anyone who did not follow it or obey it received the punishment that was earned. ³So surely we also will be punished if we ignore this great salvation. The Lord himself first told about this salvation, and it was proven true to us by those who heard him. ⁴God also proved it by using wonders, great signs, many kinds of miracles, and by giving people gifts through the Holy Spirit, just as he wanted.

Christ Became like Humans

⁵God did not choose angels to be the rulers of the new world that was coming, which is what we have been talking about. ⁶It is written in the Scriptures,

“Why are people important to you?
Why do you take care of human beings?
⁷You made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.
⁸You put all things under their control.”

[Psalm 8:4-6](#)

When God put everything under their control, there was nothing left that they did not rule. Still, we do not yet see them ruling over everything. ⁹But we see Jesus, who for a short time was made lower than the angels. And now he is wearing a crown of glory and honor because he suffered and died. And by God's grace, he died for everyone.

¹⁰God is the One who made all things, and all things are for his glory. He wanted to have many children share his glory, so he made the One who leads people to salvation perfect through suffering.

¹¹Jesus, who makes people holy, and those who are made holy are from the same family. So he is not ashamed to call them his [brothers and sisters](#). ¹²He says,

“Then, I will tell my fellow Israelites about you;
I will praise you in the public meeting.”

[Psalm 22:22](#)

¹³He also says,

“I will trust in God.”

[Isaiah 8:17](#)

And he also says,

“I am here, and with me are the children God has given me.”

[Isaiah 8:18](#)

¹⁴Since these children are people with physical bodies, Jesus himself became like them. He did this so that, by dying,

he could destroy the one who has the power of death—the devil—¹⁵and free those who were like slaves all their lives because of their fear of death. ¹⁶Clearly, it is not angels that Jesus helps, but the people who are from [Abraham](#). ¹⁷For this reason Jesus had to be made like his brothers in every way so he could be their merciful and faithful high priest in service to God. Then Jesus could bring forgiveness for their sins. ¹⁸And now he can help those who are tempted, because he himself suffered and was tempted.

Jesus Is Greater than Moses

So all of you holy brothers and sisters, who were called by God, think about Jesus, who was sent to us and is the high priest of our faith. ²Jesus was faithful to God as Moses was in God's family. ³Jesus has more honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ⁴Every house is built by someone, but the builder of everything is God himself. ⁵Moses was faithful in God's family as a servant, and he told what God would say in the future. ⁶But Christ is faithful as a Son over God's house. And we are God's house if we keep on being very sure about our great hope.

We Must Continue to Follow God

⁷So it is as the Holy Spirit says:

“Today listen to what he says.

⁸Do not be stubborn as in the past
when you turned against God,
when you tested God in the desert.

⁹There your ancestors tried me and tested me
and saw the things I did for forty years.

¹⁰I was angry with them.

I said, ‘They are not loyal to me
and have not understood my ways.’

¹¹I was angry and made a promise,
‘They will never enter my [rest](#).’”

[Psalm 95:7-11](#)

¹²So brothers and sisters, be careful that none of you has an evil, unbelieving heart that will turn you away from the living God. ¹³But encourage each other every day while it is [“today.”](#) Help each other so none of you will become hardened because sin has tricked you. ¹⁴We all share in Christ if we keep till the end the sure faith we had in the beginning. ¹⁵This is what the Scripture says:

“Today listen to what he says.
Do not be stubborn as in the past
when you turned against God.”

[Psalm 95:7-8](#)

¹⁶Who heard God’s voice and was against him? It was all those people Moses led out of Egypt. ¹⁷And with whom was God angry for forty years? He was angry with those who sinned, who died in the desert. ¹⁸And to whom was God talking when he promised that they would never enter his rest? He was talking to those who did not obey him. ¹⁹So we see they were not allowed to enter and have God’s rest, because they did not believe.

Life Lessons

Hebrews 4:1–5:10

Situation

Just as Jesus surpassed Moses, he also surpassed Aaron, God's high priest. The author of Hebrews continued presenting the reasons for Jesus' superiority.

Observation

Jesus intercedes for us before God.

Inspiration

Life is difficult ... really very little more than an endless series of problems. Do we want to moan and groan about them or face them? Do we want to teach the next generation the disciplines involved in accepting and solving them or encourage them to run and hide from them? ...

The tragedy, of course, is that the substitute itself ultimately becomes more painful than the "legitimate suffering" it was trying to avoid. And, adding insult to injury, the avoidance of legitimate suffering means we also avoid the *growth* that problems demand of us. Our determination to push pain away instead of meeting it head on creates a vicious circle.

Could this explain why God's wisest saints are often people who endure pain rather than escape it? Like their Savior, they are men and women "acquainted with grief." I recall that Jesus "learned obedience *from* the things which he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8), not in *spite* of those things.

Do you have a problem? You're smiling back at me. "A problem? Would you believe *several dozen* problems?" If you listen to the voices around you, you'll search for a substitute—an escape route. You'll miss the fact that each one of those problems is a God-appointed instructor ready to stretch you and challenge you and deepen your walk with Him. Growth and wisdom await you at the solution of each one, the pain and mess notwithstanding. (From *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Because of Jesus, you can ask God to meet your needs.

Exploration

Aaron—[Leviticus 8](#); [Numbers 12](#). Melchizedek—[Genesis 14](#); [Hebrews 7](#).

Now, since God has left us the promise that we may enter his rest, let us be very careful so none of you will fail to enter. ²The Good News was preached to us just as it was to them. But the teaching they heard did not help them, because they heard it but did not accept it with faith. ³We who have believed are able to enter and have God's rest. As God has said,

“I was angry and made a promise,
‘They will never enter my rest.’”

[Psalm 95:11](#)

But God's work was finished from the time he made the world. ⁴In the Scriptures he talked about the seventh day of the week: [“And on the seventh day God rested from all his works.”](#) ⁵And again in the Scripture God said, “They will never enter my rest.”

⁶It is still true that some people will enter God's rest, but those who first heard the way to be saved did not enter, because they did not obey. ⁷So God planned another day, called “today.” He spoke about that day through David a long time later in the same Scripture used before:

“Today listen to what he says.
Do not be stubborn.”

[Psalm 95:7-8](#)

⁸We know that [Joshua](#) did not lead the people into that

rest, because God spoke later about another day. ⁹This shows that the [rest](#) for God's people is still coming. ¹⁰Anyone who enters God's rest will rest from his work as God did. ¹¹Let us try as hard as we can to enter God's rest so that no one will fail by following the example of those who refused to obey.

¹²God's word is alive and working and is sharper than a double-edged sword. It cuts all the way into us, where the soul and the spirit are joined, to the center of our joints and bones. And it judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts. ¹³Nothing in all the world can be hidden from God. Everything is clear and lies open before him, and to him we must explain the way we have lived.

Jesus Is Our High Priest

¹⁴Since we have a great high priest, Jesus the Son of God, who has gone into heaven, let us hold on to the faith we have. ¹⁵For our high priest is able to understand our weaknesses. When he lived on earth, he was tempted in every way that we are, but he did not sin. ¹⁶Let us, then, feel very sure that we can come before God's throne where there is grace. There we can receive mercy and grace to help us when we need it.

Every high priest is chosen from among other people. He is given the work of going before God for them to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.²Since he himself is weak, he is able to be gentle with those who do not understand and who are doing wrong things.³Because he is weak, the high priest must offer sacrifices for his own sins and also for the sins of the people.

⁴To be a high priest is an honor, but no one chooses himself for this work. He must be called by God as [Aaron](#) was.⁵So also Christ did not choose himself to have the honor of being a high priest, but God chose him. God said to him,

“You are my Son.
Today I have become your Father.”

[Psalm 2:7](#)

⁶And in another Scripture God says,

“You are a priest forever,
a priest like [Melchizedek](#).”

[Psalm 110:4](#)

⁷While Jesus lived on earth, he prayed to God and asked God for help. He prayed with loud cries and tears to the One who could save him from death, and his prayer was heard because he trusted God.⁸Even though Jesus was the Son of God, he learned obedience by what he suffered.⁹And because his obedience was perfect, he was able to give eternal salvation to all who obey him.¹⁰In this way God made Jesus a high priest, a priest like Melchizedek.

Life Lessons

Hebrews 5:11–7:28

Situation

Melchizedek, king of Salem, was greater than Abraham. Abraham, the father of all Jews, offered sacrifices to God through Melchizedek. Yet Jesus even surpassed Melchizedek's service.

Observation

Jesus is our perfect high priest. Only through Christ's perfect sacrifice are we able to find forgiveness for our sins. Jesus offered this sacrifice once for all.

Inspiration

What is the fruit of sin? Step into the briar patch of humanity and feel a few thistles. Shame. Fear. Disgrace. Discouragement. Anxiety. Haven't our hearts been caught in these brambles?

The heart of Jesus, however, had not. He had never been cut by the thorns of sin. What you and I face daily, he never knew. Anxiety? He never worried! Guilt? He was never guilty! Fear? He never left the presence of God! Jesus never knew the fruits of sin ... until he became sin for us.

And when he did, all the emotions of sin tumbled in on him like shadows in a forest. He felt anxious, guilty, and alone. Can't you hear the emotion in his prayer? "My God, my God, why have you rejected me?" ([Matthew 27:46](#)). These are not the words of a saint. This is the cry of a sinner.

And this prayer is one of the most remarkable parts of his coming. But I can think of something

even greater. Want to know what it is? Want to know the coolest thing about the coming?

Not that the One who played marbles with the stars gave it up to play marbles with marbles. Or that the One who hung the galaxies gave it up to hang doorjambs to the displeasure of a cranky client who wanted everything yesterday but couldn't pay for anything until tomorrow.

Not that he, in an instant, went from needing nothing to needing air, food, a tub of hot water and salts for his tired feet, and, more than anything, needing somebody—anybody—who was more concerned about where he would spend eternity than where he would spend Friday's paycheck.

Or that he resisted the urge to fry the two-bit, self-appointed hall monitors of holiness who dared suggest that he was doing the work of the devil.

Not that he kept his cool while the dozen best friends he ever had felt the heat and got out of the kitchen. Or that he gave no command to the angels who begged, "Just give the nod, Lord. One word and these demons will be deviled eggs."

Not that he refused to defend himself when blamed for every sin of every slut and sailor since Adam. Or that he stood silent as a million guilty verdicts echoed in the tribunal of heaven and the giver of light was left in the chill of a sinner's night.

Not even that after three days in a dark hole he stepped into the Easter sunrise with a smile and a swagger and a question for lowly Lucifer—"Is that your best punch?"

That was cool, incredibly cool.

But want to know the coolest thing about the One who gave up the crown of heaven for a crown of thorns?

He did it for you. Just for you. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Application

What does the significance of Christ's death specifically *for* you mean *to* you? If you find that his death has lost meaning, or your heart has hardened toward the event, spend time meditating on the most incredible act of love ever accomplished.

Exploration

Purpose of His Death—[Romans 5:6](#); [14:9](#); [Hebrews 9:28](#); [1 Peter 3:18](#).

Warning Against Falling Away

¹¹We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are so slow to understand. ¹²By now you should be teachers, but you need someone to teach you again the first lessons of God's message. You still need the teaching that is like milk. You are not ready for solid food. ¹³Anyone who lives on milk is still a baby and knows nothing about right teaching. ¹⁴But solid food is for those who are grown up. They have practiced in order to know the difference between good and evil.

So let us go on to grownup teaching. Let us not go back over the beginning lessons we learned about Christ. We should not again start teaching about faith in God and about turning away from those acts that lead to death. ²We should not return to the teaching about [baptisms](#), about [laying on of hands](#), about the raising of the dead and eternal judgment. ³And we will go on to grownup teaching if God allows.

⁴Some people cannot be brought back again to a changed life. They were once in God's light, and enjoyed heaven's gift, and shared in the Holy Spirit. ⁵They found out how good God's word is, and they received the powers of his new world. ⁶But they fell away from Christ. It is impossible to bring them back to a changed life again, because they are nailing the Son of God to a cross again and are shaming him in front of others.

⁷Some people are like land that gets plenty of rain. The land produces a good crop for those who work it, and it receives God's blessings. ⁸Other people are like land that grows thorns and weeds and is worthless. It is in danger of being cursed by God and will be destroyed by fire.

⁹Dear friends, we are saying this to you, but we really expect better things from you that will lead to your salvation.

¹⁰God is fair; he will not forget the work you did and the love you showed for him by helping his people. And he will remember that you are still helping them. ¹¹We want each of you to go on with the same hard work all your lives so you will surely get what you hope for. ¹²We do not want you to become lazy. Be like those who through faith and patience will receive what God has promised.

¹³God made a promise to Abraham. And as there is no one greater than God, he used himself when he swore to Abraham,

¹⁴saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.” ¹⁵Abraham waited patiently for this to happen, and he received what God promised.

¹⁶People always use the name of someone greater than themselves when they swear. The oath proves that what they say is true, and this ends all arguing. ¹⁷God wanted to prove that his promise was true to those who would get what he promised. And he wanted them to understand clearly that his purposes never change, so he made an oath. ¹⁸These two things cannot change: God cannot lie when he makes a promise, and he cannot lie when he makes an oath. These things encourage us who came to God for safety. They give us strength to hold on to the hope we have been given. ¹⁹We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, sure and strong. It enters behind the curtain in the Most Holy Place in heaven, ²⁰where Jesus has gone ahead of us and for us. He has become the high priest forever, a priest like Melchizedek.

The Priest Melchizedek

[Melchizedek](#) was the king of Salem and a priest for God Most High. He met Abraham when Abraham was coming back after defeating the kings. When they met, Melchizedek blessed Abraham,² and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything he had brought back from the battle. First, Melchizedek's name means "king of goodness," and he is king of Salem, which means "king of peace."³ [No one knows who Melchizedek's father or mother was](#), where he came from, when he was born, or when he died. Melchizedek is like the Son of God; he continues being a priest forever.

⁴You can see how great Melchizedek was. Abraham, the great father, gave him a tenth of everything that he won in battle.⁵ Now the law says that those in the tribe of Levi who become priests must collect a tenth from the people—their own people—even though the priests and the people are from the family of Abraham.⁶ Melchizedek was not from the tribe of Levi, but he collected a tenth from Abraham. And he blessed Abraham, the man who had God's promises.⁷ Now everyone knows that the more important person blesses the less important person.⁸ Priests receive a tenth, even though they are only men who live and then die. But Melchizedek, who received a tenth from Abraham, continues living, as the Scripture says.⁹ We might even say that Levi, who receives a tenth, also paid it when Abraham paid Melchizedek a tenth.¹⁰ Levi was not yet born, but he was in the body of his ancestor when Melchizedek met Abraham.

¹¹[The people were given the law](#) based on a system of priests from the tribe of Levi, but they could not be made perfect through that system. So there was a need for another priest to come, a priest like Melchizedek, not Aaron. ¹²And when a different kind of priest comes, the law must be changed, too. ¹³We are saying these things about Christ, who belonged to a different tribe. No one from that tribe ever served as a priest at the altar. ¹⁴It is clear that our Lord came from the tribe of Judah, and Moses said nothing about priests belonging to that tribe.

Jesus Is like Melchizedek

¹⁵And this becomes even more clear when we see that another priest comes who is like [Melchizedek](#). ¹⁶He was not made a priest by human rules and laws but through the power of his life, which continues forever. ¹⁷It is said about him,

“You are a priest forever,
a priest like Melchizedek.”

[Psalm 110:4](#)

¹⁸The old rule is now set aside, because it was weak and useless. ¹⁹The law of Moses could not make anything perfect. But now a better hope has been given to us, and with this hope we can come near to God. ²⁰It is important that God did this with an oath. Others became priests without an oath, ²¹but Christ became a priest with God's oath. God said:

“The Lord has made a promise

and will not change his mind.
“You are a priest forever.””

[Psalm 110:4](#)

²²This means that Jesus is the guarantee of a better [agreement](#) from God to his people.

²³When one of the other priests died, he could not continue being a priest. So there were many priests. ²⁴But because Jesus lives forever, he will never stop serving as priest. ²⁵So he is able always to save those who come to God through him because he always lives, asking God to help them.

²⁶Jesus is the kind of high priest we need. He is holy, sinless, pure, not influenced by sinners, and he is raised above the heavens. ²⁷He is not like the other priests who had to offer sacrifices every day, first for their own sins, and then for the sins of the people. Christ offered his sacrifice only once and for all time when he offered himself. ²⁸The law chooses high priests who are people with weaknesses, but the word of God's oath came later than the law. It made God's Son to be the high priest, and that Son has been made perfect forever.

Life Lessons

Hebrews 8:1-13

Situation

Jewish Christians struggled to understand the relationship between God's free salvation and the Mosaic Law. The author explained that Jesus Christ was superior to the Law of Moses.

Observation

God does not keep a record of our sins in order to use them against us. Rather, he forgives and loves us even as we suffer through the consequences of our sins.

Inspiration

I was thanking the Father today for his mercy. I began listing the sins he'd forgiven. One by one I thanked God for forgiving my stumbles and tumbles. My motives were pure and my heart was thankful, but my understanding of God was wrong. It was when I used the word "remember" that it hit me...

God doesn't just forgive, he forgets. He erases the board. He destroys the evidence. He burns the microfilm. He clears the computer...

No, he doesn't remember. But I do, you do. You still remember. You're like me. You still remember what you did before you changed. In the cellar of your heart lurk the ghosts of yesterday's sins. Sins you've confessed; errors of which you've repented; damage you've done your best to repair.

And though you're a different person, the ghosts

still linger. Though you've locked the basement door, they still haunt you. They float to meet you, spooking your soul and robbing your joy. With wordless whispers they remind you of moments when you forgot whose child you were....

Poltergeists from yesterday's pitfalls. Spiteful specters that slyly suggest, "Are you really forgiven? Sure God forgets most of our mistakes, but do you think he could actually forget the time you ..."

... Was [God] exaggerating when he said he would cast our sins as far as the east is from the west? Do you actually believe he would make a statement like "I will not hold their iniquities against them" and then rub our noses in them whenever we ask for help? ...

You see, God is either the God of perfect grace ... or he is not God. Grace forgets. Period. He who is perfect love cannot hold grudges. If he does, then he isn't perfect love. And if he isn't perfect love, you might as well put this book down and go fishing, because both of us are chasing fairy tales.

But I believe in his loving forgetfulness. And I believe he has a graciously terrible memory. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

Because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice, God forgets our sins. Jesus paid the penalty for sins. We must no longer feel guilty for sins that God forgave.

Exploration

Promised Pardon of God—[Isaiah 43:25](#); [44:22](#); [55:7](#); [Micah 7:18](#); [1 John 1:9](#).

Jesus Is Our High Priest

Here is the point of what we are saying: We have a high priest who sits on the right side of God's throne in heaven. ²Our high priest serves in the Most Holy Place, the true place of worship that was made by God, not by humans.

³Every high priest has the work of offering gifts and sacrifices to God. So our high priest must also offer something to God. ⁴If our high priest were now living on earth, he would not be a priest, because there are already priests here who follow the law by offering gifts to God. ⁵The work they do as priests is only a copy and a shadow of what is in heaven. This is why God warned Moses when he was ready to build the Holy Tent: [“Be very careful to make everything by the plan I showed you on the mountain.”](#) ⁶But the priestly work that has been given to Jesus is much greater than the work that was given to the other priests. In the same way, the new agreement that Jesus brought from God to his people is much greater than the old one. And the new agreement is based on promises of better things.

⁷If there had been nothing wrong with the [first agreement](#), there would have been no need for a second agreement. ⁸But God found something wrong with his people. He says:

“Look, the time is coming, says the Lord,
when I will make a new agreement

with the people of Israel
and the people of Judah.

⁹It will not be like the agreement
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to bring them out of Egypt.
But they broke that agreement,
and I turned away from them, says the Lord.

¹⁰This is the agreement I will make
with the people of Israel at that time, says the Lord.
I will put my teachings in their minds
and write them on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

¹¹People will no longer have to teach their neighbors
and relatives
to know the Lord,
because all people will know me,
from the least to the most important.

¹²I will forgive them for the wicked things they did,
and I will not remember their sins anymore.”

[Jeremiah 31:31–34](#)

¹³God called this a new agreement, so he has made the first agreement old. And anything that is old and worn out is ready to disappear.

Life Lessons

Hebrews 9:1–22

Situation

The writer of Hebrews emphasized that Christ's sacrifice surpassed the sacrifices of the Old Testament. There will never be a greater sacrifice.

Observation

Christ's perfect sacrifice should affect the way believers serve God.

Inspiration

Our safety in Christ results from “the answer of a good conscience toward God” ([1 Peter 3:21](#)). The Greek word for “answer” refers to a pledge, in this case agreeing to meet certain conditions required by God before being placed into the ark of safety (Christ).

Unregenerate men and women have consciences that condemn them. One who appeals to God for a good conscience is sick of his sin and desires to be delivered from the load of guilt he bears. He has a crushing and intimidating fear of coming judgment and knows only God can deliver him. He desires the cleansing that comes through the blood of Christ (cf. [Hebrews 10:22](#)). So he repents of his sin and pleads for forgiveness.

When Christ suffered on the cross, hell threw all its fury at Him, and wicked men vented their hatred on Him. Yet through that suffering, He served as an ark of safety for the redeemed of all ages. And because

He triumphantly provided salvation through His suffering, we are safe in Him.

(From *Truth for Today* by John MacArthur)

Application

True repentance is not just confession of sin but a sincere willingness to not do that sin again. If your conscience is not clear toward God in even one area of your life, repent and ask God to cleanse you because of his shed blood.

Exploration

A Good Conscience—[Acts 23:1](#); [1 Timothy 1:18–19](#); [3:8–9](#); [Titus 1:15](#).

The Old Agreement

The [first agreement](#) had rules for worship and a man-made place for worship. ²The Holy Tent was set up for this. The first area in the Tent was called the Holy Place. In it were the lamp and the table with the bread that was made holy for God. ³Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place. ⁴In it was a golden altar for burning incense and the Ark covered with gold that held the old agreement. Inside this Ark was a golden jar of manna, Aaron's rod that once grew leaves, and the stone tablets of the old agreement. ⁵Above the Ark were the creatures that showed God's glory, whose wings reached over the lid. But we cannot tell everything about these things now.

⁶When everything in the Tent was made ready in this way, the priests went into the first room every day to worship. ⁷But only the high priest could go into the second room, and he did that only once a year. He could never enter the inner room without taking blood with him, which he offered to God for himself and for sins the people did without knowing they did them. ⁸The Holy Spirit uses this to show that the way into the Most Holy Place was not open while the system of the old Holy Tent was still being used. ⁹This is an example for the present time. It shows that the gifts and sacrifices offered cannot make the conscience of the worshiper perfect. ¹⁰These gifts and sacrifices were only about food and drink and special

washings. They were rules for the body, to be followed until the time of God's new way.

The New Agreement

¹¹But when Christ came as the high priest of the good things we now have, he entered the greater and more perfect tent. It is not made by humans and does not belong to this world. ¹²Christ entered the Most Holy Place only once—and for all time. He did not take with him the blood of goats and calves. His sacrifice was his own blood, and by it he set us free from sin forever. ¹³The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a cow are sprinkled on the people who are unclean, and this makes their bodies clean again. ¹⁴How much more is done by the blood of Christ. He offered himself through the eternal [Spirit](#) as a perfect sacrifice to God. His blood will make our consciences pure from useless acts so we may serve the living God.

¹⁵For this reason Christ brings a new agreement from God to his people. Those who are called by God can now receive the blessings he has promised, blessings that will last forever. They can have those things because Christ died so that the people who lived under the first agreement could be set free from sin.

¹⁶When there is a [will](#), it must be proven that the one who wrote that will is dead. ¹⁷A will means nothing while the person is alive; it can be used only after the person dies. ¹⁸This is why even the first agreement could not begin without blood to show death. ¹⁹First, Moses told all the people every command in the law. Next he took the blood of calves and mixed it with

water. Then he used red wool and a branch of the hyssop plant to sprinkle it on the book of the law and on all the people.²⁰ He said, [“This is the blood that begins the Agreement that God commanded you to obey.”](#)²¹ In the same way, Moses sprinkled the blood on the Holy Tent and over all the things used in worship.²² The law says that almost everything must be made clean by blood, and sins cannot be forgiven without blood to show death.

Life Lessons

[Hebrews 9:23–10:39](#)

Situation

Once the author told that Jesus’ death surpassed any earthly sacrifice, he encouraged the Hebrew Christians to have confidence.

Observation

Jesus’ death not only provides salvation, but also great confidence for Christians. We can step boldly before the Lord in prayer, and boldly into the world in service and witness. Jesus has already won the battle!

Inspiration

Picture it this way. Imagine that you are an ice skater in competition. You are in first place with one more round to go. If you perform well, the trophy is yours. You are nervous, anxious, and frightened.

Then, only minutes before your performance, your trainer rushes to you with the thrilling news: “You’ve already won! The judges tabulated the scores, and the person in second place can’t catch you. You are

too far ahead.”

Upon hearing that news, how will you feel? Exhilarated!

And how will you skate? Timidly? Cautiously? Of course not. How about courageously and confidently? You bet you will. You will do your best because the prize is yours. You will skate like a champion because that is what you are! You will hear the applause of victory....

The point is clear: the truth will triumph. The father of truth will win, and the followers of truth will be saved.

(From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

If you are a child of God, claim your victory over sin! Be confident. Nothing can ever take you out of God's hand. No one can ever take away your salvation. No matter what happens, you are *always* his.

Exploration

Spiritual Boldness—[Ephesians 3:12](#); [1 Timothy 3:13](#); [Hebrews 4:16](#); [1 John 4:17](#).

Christ's Death Takes Away Sins

²³So the copies of the real things in heaven had to be made clean by animal sacrifices. But the real things in heaven need much better sacrifices. ²⁴Christ did not go into the Most Holy Place made by humans, which is only a copy of the real one. He went into heaven itself and is there now before God to help us. ²⁵The high priest enters the Most Holy Place once every year with blood that is not his own. But Christ did not offer himself many times. ²⁶Then he would have had to suffer many times since the world was made. But Christ came only once and for all time at just the right time to take away all sin by sacrificing himself. ²⁷Just as everyone must die once and be judged, ²⁸so Christ was offered as a sacrifice one time to take away the sins of many people. And he will come a second time, not to offer himself for sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

The law is only an unclear picture of the good things coming in the future; it is not the real thing. The people under the law offer the same sacrifices every year, but these sacrifices can never make perfect those who come near to worship God.² If the law could make them perfect, the sacrifices would have already stopped. The worshipers would be made clean, and they would no longer have a sense of sin.³ But these sacrifices remind them of their sins every year,⁴ because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

⁵So when Christ came into the world, he said:

“You do not want sacrifices and offerings,
but you have prepared a body for me.

⁶You do not ask for burnt offerings
and offerings to take away sins.

⁷Then I said, ‘Look, I have come.

It is written about me in the book.

God, I have come to do what you want.”

[Psalm 40:6–8](#)

⁸In this Scripture he first said, “You do not want sacrifices and offerings. You do not ask for burnt offerings and offerings to take away sins.” (These are all sacrifices that the law commands.)⁹ Then he said, “Look, I have come to do what you want.” God ends the first system of sacrifices so he can set up the new system.¹⁰ And because of this, we are made holy through the sacrifice Christ made in his body once and for all time.

¹¹Every day the priests stand and do their religious service, often offering the same sacrifices. Those sacrifices can never

take away sins. ¹²But after Christ offered one sacrifice for sins, forever, he sat down at the right side of God. ¹³And now Christ waits there for his enemies to be put under his power. ¹⁴With one sacrifice he made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

¹⁵The Holy Spirit also tells us about this. First he says:

¹⁶“This is the [agreement](#) I will make with them at that time, says the Lord. I will put my teachings in their hearts and write them on their minds.”

[Jeremiah 31:33](#)

¹⁷Then he says:
“Their sins and the evil things they do—
I will not remember anymore.”

[Jeremiah 31:34](#)

¹⁸Now when these have been forgiven, there is no more need for a sacrifice for sins.

Continue to Trust God

¹⁹So, brothers and sisters, we are completely free to enter the Most Holy Place without fear because of the blood of Jesus' death. ²⁰We can enter through a new and living way that Jesus opened for us. It leads through the curtain —Christ's body. ²¹And since we have a great priest over God's house, ²²let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith, because we have been made free from a guilty conscience, and our

bodies have been washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold firmly to the hope that we have confessed, because we can trust God to do what he promised.

²⁴Let us think about each other and help each other to show love and do good deeds. ²⁵You should not stay away from the church meetings, as some are doing, but you should meet together and encourage each other. Do this even more as you see the [day](#) coming.

²⁶If we decide to go on sinning after we have learned the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice for sins. ²⁷There is nothing but fear in waiting for the judgment and the terrible fire that will destroy all those who live against God. ²⁸Anyone who refused to obey the law of Moses was found guilty from the proof given by two or three witnesses. He was put to death without mercy. ²⁹So what do you think should be done to those who do not respect the Son of God, who look at the blood of the agreement that made them holy as no different from others' blood, who insult the Spirit of God's grace? Surely they should have a much worse punishment. ³⁰We know that God said, ["I will punish those who do wrong; I will repay them."](#) And he also said, ["The Lord will judge his people."](#) ³¹It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

³²Remember those days in the past when you first learned the truth. You had a hard struggle with many sufferings, but you continued strong. ³³Sometimes you were hurt and attacked before crowds of people, and sometimes you shared with those who were being treated that way. ³⁴You helped the prisoners. You even had joy when all that you owned was taken from you, because you knew you had something better and more lasting.

³⁵So do not lose the courage you had in the past, which has a great reward. ³⁶You must hold on, so you can do what God wants and receive what he has promised. ³⁷For in a very short time,

“The One who is coming will come
and will not be delayed.

³⁸The person who is right with me
will live by trusting in me.
But if he turns back with fear,
I will not be pleased with him.”

[Habakkuk 2:3–4](#)

³⁹But we are not those who turn back and are lost. We are people who have faith and are saved.

Life Lessons

Hebrews 11:1–40

Situation

Old Testament heroes provided examples of faith and obedience to God.

Observation

Faith is more than a belief in God. It is also a way of life. Heroes of faith, although imperfect, trusted God and gave their lives to him.

Inspiration

Faith is the belief that God is real and that God is good... . It is a choice to believe that the one who made it all hasn't left it all and that he still sends light into the shadows and responds to gestures of faith...

Faith is the belief that God will do what is right.

“Blessed are the dirt-poor, nothing-to-give, trapped-in-a-corner, destitute, diseased,” Jesus said, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” ([Matthew 5:3](#), my translation)...

God says that the more hopeless your circumstances, the more likely your salvation. The greater your cares, the more genuine your prayers. The darker the room, the greater the need for light...

God's help is near and always available, but it is only given to those who seek it. Nothing results from apathy....

Compared to God's part, our part is minuscule but necessary... . Write a letter. Ask forgiveness. Call a

counselor. Confess. Call Mom. Visit a doctor. Be baptized. Feed a hungry person. Pray. Teach. Go.

Do something that demonstrates faith. For faith with no effort is no faith at all. *God will respond*. He has never rejected a genuine gesture of faith. Never. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

[Hebrews 11](#) can encourage you by telling about people's faith in the Old Testament. These examples encourage you. What are you doing to encourage others? Who will you tell?

Exploration

Remembering the Faithful—[Proverbs 10:7](#); [Matthew 26:13](#); [2 Timothy 1:5](#).

What Is Faith?

Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it.² Faith is the reason we remember great people who lived in the past.

³It is by faith we understand that the whole world was made by God's command so what we see was made by something that cannot be seen.

⁴It was by faith that Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. God said he was pleased with the gifts Abel offered and called Abel a good man because of his faith. Abel died, but through his faith he is still speaking.

⁵It was by faith that Enoch was taken to heaven so he would not die. He could not be found, because God had taken him away. Before he was taken, the Scripture says that he was a man who truly pleased God.⁶ Without faith no one can please God. Anyone who comes to God must believe that he is real and that he rewards those who truly want to find him.

⁷It was by faith that Noah heard God's warnings about things he could not yet see. He obeyed God and built a large boat to save his family. By his faith, Noah showed that the world was wrong, and he became one of those who are made right with God through faith.

⁸It was by faith Abraham obeyed God's call to go to another place God promised to give him. He left his own

country, not knowing where he was to go. ⁹It was by faith that he lived like a foreigner in the country God promised to give him. He lived in tents with Isaac and Jacob, who had received that same promise from God. ¹⁰Abraham was waiting for the [city](#) that has real foundations—the city planned and built by God.

¹¹He was too old to have children, and Sarah could not have children. It was by faith that Abraham was made able to become a father, because he trusted God to do what he had promised. ¹²This man was so old he was almost dead, but from him came as many descendants as there are stars in the sky. Like the sand on the seashore, they could not be counted.

¹³All these great people died in faith. They did not get the things that God promised his people, but they saw them coming far in the future and were glad. They said they were like visitors and strangers on earth. ¹⁴When people say such things, they show they are looking for a country that will be their own. ¹⁵If they had been thinking about the country they had left, they could have gone back. ¹⁶But they were waiting for a better country—a heavenly country. So God is not ashamed to be called their God, because he has prepared a city for them.

¹⁷It was by faith that Abraham, when God tested him, offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice. God made the promises to Abraham, but Abraham was ready to offer his own son as a sacrifice. ¹⁸God had said, [“The descendants I promised you will be from Isaac.”](#) ¹⁹Abraham believed that God could raise the dead, and really, it was as if Abraham got Isaac back from death.

²⁰It was by faith that Isaac blessed the future of Jacob and

Esau. ²¹It was by faith that Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each one of Joseph's sons. Then he worshiped as he leaned on the top of his walking stick.

²²It was by faith that Joseph, while he was dying, spoke about the Israelites leaving Egypt and gave instructions about what to do with his body.

²³It was by faith that Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born. They saw that Moses was a beautiful baby, and they were not afraid to disobey the king's order.

²⁴It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of the king of Egypt's daughter. ²⁵He chose to suffer with God's people instead of enjoying sin for a short time. ²⁶He thought it was better to suffer for the Christ than to have all the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking for God's reward. ²⁷It was by faith that Moses left Egypt and was not afraid of the king's anger. Moses continued strong as if he could see the God that no one can see. ²⁸It was by faith that Moses prepared the Passover and spread the blood on the doors so the one who brings death would not kill the firstborn sons of Israel.

²⁹It was by faith that the people crossed the Red Sea as if it were dry land. But when the Egyptians tried it, they were drowned.

³⁰It was by faith that the walls of Jericho fell after the people had marched around them for seven days.

³¹It was by faith that Rahab, the prostitute, welcomed the spies and was not killed with those who refused to obey God.

³²Do I need to give more examples? I do not have time to tell you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel,

and the prophets.³³Through their faith they defeated kingdoms. They did what was right, received God's promises, and shut the mouths of lions.³⁴They stopped great fires and were saved from being killed with swords. They were weak, and yet were made strong. They were powerful in battle and defeated other armies.³⁵Women received their dead relatives raised back to life. Others were tortured and refused to accept their freedom so they could be raised from the dead to a better life.³⁶Some were laughed at and beaten. Others were put in chains and thrown into prison.³⁷They were stoned to death, they were cut in half, and they were killed with swords. Some wore the skins of sheep and goats. They were poor, abused, and treated badly.³⁸The world was not good enough for them! They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and holes in the earth.

³⁹All these people are known for their faith, but none of them received what God had promised.⁴⁰God planned to give us something better so that they would be made perfect, but only together with us.

Life Lessons

Hebrews 12:1–13:25

Situation

The Hebrew readers of this book needed encouragement to face persecution. They were called to follow the perfect example of Jesus, who overcame difficult circumstances.

Observation

Jesus, the perfect model of faith, obeyed God to the point of death. He looked beyond his immediate, painful circumstances and knew that his sacrifice would bring life to others.

Inspiration

He looked around the carpentry shop. He stood for a moment in the refuge of the little room that housed so many sweet memories. He balanced the hammer in his hand. He ran his fingers across the sharp teeth of the saw. He stroked the smoothly worn wood of the sawhorse. He had come to say goodbye.

It was time for him to leave. He had heard something that made him know it was time to go. So he came one last time to smell the sawdust and lumber.

Life was peaceful here. Life was so ... safe....

I wonder if he wanted to stay... . I wonder because I know he had already read the last chapter. He knew that the feet that would step out of the safe shadow of the carpentry shop would not rest until they'd been pierced and placed on a Roman cross.

... If there was any hesitation on the part of his humanity, it was overcome by the compassion of his divinity. His divinity heard the voices....

And his divinity saw the faces... . From the face of Adam to the face of the infant born somewhere in the world as you read these words, he saw them all.

And you can be sure of one thing. Among the voices that found their way into that carpentry shop in Nazareth was your voice....

And not only did he hear you, he saw you. He saw your face aglow the hour you first knew him. He saw your face in shame the hour you first fell. The same face that looked back at you from this morning's mirror, looked at him. And it was enough to kill him.

He left because of you.

He laid his security down with his hammer. He hung tranquility on the peg with his nail apron. He closed the window shutters on the sunshine of his youth and locked the door on the comfort and ease of anonymity.

Since he could bear your sins more easily than he could bear the thought of your hopelessness, he chose to leave.

It wasn't easy. Leaving the carpentry shop never has been. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Application

Look for joy in difficult times. How can others benefit from your struggle? Look beyond the pain and find God's purpose for your struggle.

Exploration

Joy in Troubled Times—[Psalm 126:2](#); [Luke 15:5](#);

[John 15:11.](#)

In a world rocky with human failure, there is a land lush with divine mercy. Your Shepherd invites you there. He wants you to lie down. Nestle deeply until you are hidden, buried, in the tall shoots of his love, and there you will find rest. —Max Lucado (*Traveling Light*)

Follow Jesus' Example

We have around us many people whose lives tell us what faith means. So let us run the race that is before us and never give up. We should remove from our lives anything that would get in the way and the sin that so easily holds us back.² Let us look only to Jesus, the One who began our faith and who makes it perfect. He suffered death on the cross. But he accepted the shame as if it were nothing because of the joy that God put before him. And now he is sitting at the right side of God's throne.³ Think about Jesus' example. He held on while wicked people were doing evil things to him. So do not get tired and stop trying.

God Is like a Father

⁴You are struggling against sin, but your struggles have not yet caused you to be killed.⁵ You have forgotten the encouraging words that call you his children:

“My child, don't think the Lord's discipline is worth

nothing,
and don't stop trying when he corrects you.
6The Lord disciplines those he loves,
and he punishes everyone he accepts as his child."

[Proverbs 3:11-12](#)

7So hold on through your sufferings, because they are like a father's discipline. God is treating you as children. All children are disciplined by their fathers. 8If you are never disciplined (and every child must be disciplined), you are not true children. 9We have all had fathers here on earth who disciplined us, and we respected them. So it is even more important that we accept discipline from the Father of our spirits so we will have life. 10Our fathers on earth disciplined us for a short time in the way they thought was best. But God disciplines us to help us, so we can become holy as he is. 11We do not enjoy being disciplined. It is painful, but later, after we have learned from it, we have peace, because we start living in the right way.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The One Who Endured

Consider this admonition from the author of Hebrews: "Let us run the race that is before us and never give up" ([Hebrews 12:1](#)).

Had golf existed in the New Testament era, I'm sure the writers would have spoken of mulligans and foot wedges, but it didn't, so they wrote about running. The word *race* is from the Greek *agon*, from

which we get the word *agony*. The Christian's race is not a jog but rather a demanding and grueling, sometimes agonizing race. It takes a massive effort to finish strong.

Likely you've noticed that many don't? Surely you've observed there are many on the side of the trail? They used to be running. There was a time when they kept the pace. But then weariness set in. They didn't think the run would be this tough. Or they were discouraged by a bump and daunted by a fellow runner. Whatever the reason, they don't run anymore. They may be Christians. They may come to church. They may put a buck in the plate and warm a pew, but their hearts aren't in the race. They retired before their time. Unless something changes, their best work will have been their first work, and they will finish with a whimper.

By contrast, Jesus' best work was his final work, and his strongest step was his last step. Our Master is the classic example of one who endured. The writer of Hebrews goes on to say that Jesus "held on while wicked people were doing evil things to him" (v. [3](#)). The Bible says Jesus "held on," implying that Jesus could have "let go." The runner could have given up, sat down, gone home. He could have quit the race. But he didn't. "He held on while wicked people were doing evil things to him." (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

Be Careful How You Live

¹²You have become weak, so make yourselves strong again.

¹³Live in the right way so that you will be saved and your weakness will not cause you to be lost.

¹⁴Try to live in peace with all people, and try to live free from sin. Anyone whose life is not holy will never see the Lord.

¹⁵Be careful that no one fails to receive God's grace and begins to cause trouble among you. A person like that can ruin many of you. ¹⁶Be careful that no one takes part in sexual sin or is like Esau and never thinks about God. As the oldest son, Esau would have received everything from his father, but he sold all that for a single meal. ¹⁷You remember that after Esau did this, he wanted to get his father's blessing, but his father refused. Esau could find no way to change what he had done, even though he wanted the blessing so much that he cried.

¹⁸You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire. You have not come to darkness, sadness, and storms. ¹⁹You have not come to the noise of a trumpet or to the sound of a voice like the one the people of Israel heard and begged not to hear another word. ²⁰They did not want to hear the command: "If anything, even an animal touches the mountain, it must be put to death with stones."

²¹What they saw was so terrible that Moses said, "I am shaking with fear."

²²But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to

thousands of angels gathered together with joy. ²³You have come to the meeting of God's firstborn children whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all people, and to the spirits of good people who have been made perfect. ²⁴You have come to Jesus, the One who brought the new agreement from God to his people, and you have come to the sprinkled blood that has a better message than the blood of Abel.

²⁵So be careful and do not refuse to listen when God speaks. Others refused to listen to him when he warned them on earth, and they did not escape. So it will be worse for us if we refuse to listen to God who warns us from heaven. ²⁶When he spoke before, his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once again I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷The words "once again" clearly show us that everything that was made—things that can be shaken—will be destroyed. Only the things that cannot be shaken will remain.

²⁸So let us be thankful, because we have a kingdom that cannot be shaken. We should worship God in a way that pleases him with respect and fear, ²⁹because our God is like a fire that burns things up.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: Our Great Shepherd

Are you hoping that a change in circumstances will bring a change in your attitude? If so, you are in prison, and you need to learn a secret of traveling light. What you have in your Shepherd is greater than what you don't have in life.

May I meddle for a moment? What is the one thing separating you from joy? How do you fill in this blank: "I will be happy when _____"? When I am healed. When I am promoted. When I am married. When I am single. When I am rich. How would you finish that statement?

Now, with your answer firmly in mind, answer this. If your ship never comes in, if your dream never comes true, if the situation never changes, could you be happy? If not, then you are sleeping in the cold cell of discontent. You are in prison. And you need to know what you have in your Shepherd.

You have a God who hears you, the power of love behind you, the Holy Spirit within you, and all of heaven ahead of you. If you have the Shepherd, you have grace for every sin, direction for every turn, a candle for every corner, and an anchor for every storm. You have everything you need.

And who can take it from you? Can leukemia infect your salvation? Can bankruptcy impoverish your prayers? A tornado might take your earthly house, but will it touch your heavenly home?

And look at your position. Why clamor for prestige and power? Are you not already privileged to be part of the greatest work in history? ...

Try saying it slowly. "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need."

Again, "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need."

Again, "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need."

Shhhhhhh. Did you hear something? I think I did.
I'm not sure ... but I think I heard the opening of a jail
door. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters.²Remember to welcome strangers, because some who have done this have welcomed angels without knowing it.³Remember those who are in prison as if you were in prison with them. Remember those who are suffering as if you were suffering with them.

⁴Marriage should be honored by everyone, and husband and wife should keep their marriage pure. God will judge as guilty those who take part in sexual sins.⁵Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be satisfied with what you have. God has said,

“I will never leave you;
I will never forget you.”

[Deuteronomy 31:6](#)

⁶So we can be sure when we say,

“I will not be afraid, because the Lord is my helper.
People can’t do anything to me.”

[Psalms 118:6](#)

⁷Remember your leaders who taught God’s message to you. Remember how they lived and died, and copy their faith.⁸Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

⁹Do not let all kinds of strange teachings lead you into the wrong way. Your hearts should be strengthened by God’s grace, not by obeying rules about foods, which do not help those who obey them.

¹⁰We have a sacrifice, but the priests who serve in the Holy Tent cannot eat from it.¹¹The high priest carries the blood of

animals into the Most Holy Place where he offers this blood for sins. But the bodies of the animals are burned outside the camp.¹² So Jesus also suffered outside the city to make his people holy with his own blood.¹³ So let us go to Jesus outside the camp, holding on as he did when we are abused.

¹⁴Here on earth we do not have a city that lasts forever, but we are looking for the city that we will have in the future.¹⁵ So through Jesus let us always offer to God our sacrifice of praise, coming from lips that speak his name.¹⁶ Do not forget to do good to others, and share with them, because such sacrifices please God.

¹⁷Obey your leaders and act under their authority. They are watching over you, because they are responsible for your souls. Obey them so that they will do this work with joy, not sadness. It will not help you to make their work hard.

¹⁸Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience, because we always want to do the right thing.¹⁹ I especially beg you to pray so that God will send me back to you soon.

²⁰⁻²¹I pray that the God of peace will give you every good thing you need so you can do what he wants. God raised from the dead our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, because of the blood of his death. His blood began the eternal agreement that God made with his people. I pray that God will do in us what pleases him, through Jesus Christ, and to him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

²²My brothers and sisters, I beg you to listen patiently to this message I have written to encourage you, because it is not very long.²³ I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been let out of prison. If he arrives soon, we will both come to see you.

²⁴Greet all your leaders and all of God's people. Those from Italy send greetings to you.

²⁵Grace be with you all.

“Let ... him.” These words are found in [Deuteronomy 32:43](#) in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, and in a Hebrew copy among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

until ... control Literally, “until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “brothers” here and throughout this book, the writer’s words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

Abraham Most respected ancestor of the Jews. Every Jew hoped to see Abraham.

rest A place of rest God promised to give his people.

“today” This word is taken from verse [7](#). It means that it is important to do these things now.

“And ... works.” Quotation from [Genesis 2:2](#).

Joshua After Moses died, Joshua became leader of the Jewish people and led them into the land that God promised to give them.

rest Literally, “sabbath rest,” meaning a sharing in the rest that God began after he created the world.

Aaron Aaron was Moses’ brother and the first Jewish high priest.

Melchizedek A priest and king who lived in the time of Abraham (Read [Genesis 14:17–24](#).)

baptisms The word here may refer to Christian baptism, or it may refer to the Jewish ceremonial washings.

laying on of hands The laying on of hands had many purposes, including the giving of a blessing, power, or authority.

“I ... descendants.” Quotation from [Genesis 22:17](#).

Melchizedek A priest and king who lived in the time of Abraham. (Read [Genesis 14:17–24](#).)

No ... was Literally, “Melchizedek was without father, without mother, without genealogy.”

The ... law This refers to the people of Israel who were given the Law of Moses.

Melchizedek A priest and king who lived in the time of Abraham. (Read [Genesis 14:17–24.](#))

agreement God gives a contract or agreement to his people. For the Jews, this agreement was the Law of Moses. But now God has given a better agreement to his people through Christ.

“Be ... mountain.” Quotation from [Exodus 25:40.](#)

first agreement The contract God gave the Jewish people when he gave them the Law of Moses.

first agreement The contract God gave the Jewish people when he gave them the Law of Moses.

Spirit This refers to the Holy Spirit, to Christ’s own spirit, or to the spiritual and eternal nature of his sacrifice.

will A legal document that shows how a person’s money and property are to be distributed at the time of death. This is the same word in Greek as “agreement” in verse [15.](#)

“This ... obey.” Quotation from [Exodus 24:8.](#)

agreement God gives a contract or agreement to his people. For the Jews, this agreement was the Law of Moses. But now God has given a better agreement to his people through Christ.

day The day Christ will come to judge all people and take his people to live with him.

“I ... them.” Quotation from [Deuteronomy 32:35.](#)

“The Lord ... people.” Quotation from [Deuteronomy 32:36;](#)
[Psalm 135:14.](#)

city The spiritual “city” where God’s people live with him. Also called “the heavenly Jerusalem.” (See [Hebrews 12:22.](#))

“The descendants ... Isaac.” Quotation from [Genesis 21:12.](#)

“If ... stones.” Quotation from [Exodus 19:12–13](#).

“I ... fear.” Quotation from [Deuteronomy 9:19](#).

Mount Zion Another name for Jerusalem, here meaning the spiritual city of God’s people.

firstborn The first son born in a Jewish family was given the most important place in the family and received special blessings. All of God’s children are like that.

sprinkled blood The blood of Jesus’ death.

Abel The son of Adam and Eve, who was killed by his brother Cain ([Genesis 4:8](#)).

“Once ... heavens.” Quotation from [Haggai 2:6, 21](#).

The Book of James

Introduction

Here is a story James would have liked.

Francis of Assisi once invited an apprentice to go with him to a nearby village to preach. The young monk quickly agreed, seizing an opportunity to hear his teacher speak. When they arrived in the village, St. Francis began to visit with the people.

First he stopped in on the butcher. Next a visit with the cobbler. Then a short walk to the home of a woman who'd recently buried her husband. After that a stop at the school to chat with the teacher. This continued throughout the morning. After some time, Francis told his disciple that it was time to return to the abbey.

The student didn't understand. "But we came to preach," he reminded. "We haven't preached a sermon."

"Haven't we?" questioned the elder. "People have watched us, listened to us, responded to us. Every word we have spoken, every deed we have done has been a sermon. We have preached all morning."

James would have liked that. As far as he was concerned, Christianity was more action on Monday than worship on Sunday. "My brothers and sisters, if people say they have faith, but do nothing, their faith is worth nothing. Can faith like that save them?" ([2:14](#)).

His message is bare-knuckled; his style is bare-boned. Talk is cheap, he argues. Service is invaluable.

It's not that works save the Christian, but that works mark the Christian. In James's book of logic, it only makes sense that we who have been given much should give much. Not just with words. But with our lives.

Or as St. Francis is noted as saying, “Preach without ceasing. If you must, use words.”

James would have liked that, too.

About This Book

Author:

James

Date Written:

c. A.D. 50

Key Themes:

-
- God gives us true wisdom.
- Satan tempts to break us; God tests to strengthen us.
- The words we use are powerful and influential.
- Faith and good deeds go hand in hand.

Key Verse:

“Just as a person’s body that does not have a spirit is dead, so faith that does nothing is dead!”
([James 2:26](#)).

Contents:

1. Faith and Temptations [1:1–27](#)
2. Faith at Work [2:1–5:6](#)
3. Faith’s Rewards [5:7–20](#)

Life Lessons

James 1:1-27

Situation

James knew that Christians scattered all over the world would face challenges to their faith. If they were to remain faithful, their beliefs needed to be not only intellectual, but also very practical. He urged his readers to put their faith into action.

Observation

God allows tough situations in our lives in order to refine us and bring us closer to him. We should approach these times with a right attitude and seek wisdom from God.

Inspiration

When a potter bakes a pot, he checks its solidity by pulling it out of the oven and thumping it. If it “sings” it’s ready. If it “thuds,” it’s placed back in the oven. The character of a person is also checked by thumping.

Been thumped lately?

Late-night phone calls. Grouchy teacher. Grumpy moms. Burnt Meals. Flat tires. “You’ve got to be kidding” deadlines. Those are thumps. Thumps are those irritating inconveniences that trigger the worst in us. They catch us off guard. Flat footed. They aren’t big enough to be crises, but if you get enough of them, watch out! Traffic jams. Long lines. Empty mailboxes. Dirty clothes on the floor ... Thump. Thump. Thump. How do I respond? Do I sing? Or do

I thud? Jesus said that out of the nature of the heart a man speaks ([Luke 6:45](#)). There's nothing like a good thump to reveal the nature of a heart. The true character of a person is seen not in momentary heroics, but in the thump-packed humdrum of day-to-day living. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

How do you respond when you are “thumped” by people at work, school, family, or people at the grocery store? Your initial reaction during these times reflects who you are. What responses need to change? Make the changes today.

Exploration

Perseverance—[Romans 2:7](#); [8:24–25](#); [2 Corinthians 6:3–7](#).

From James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To all of God's people who are scattered everywhere in the world:

Greetings.

Faith and Wisdom

²My [brothers and sisters](#), when you have many kinds of troubles, you should be full of joy, ³because you know that these troubles test your faith, and this will give you patience. ⁴Let your patience show itself perfectly in what you do. Then you will be perfect and complete and will have everything you need. ⁵But if any of you needs wisdom, you should ask God for it. He is generous and enjoys giving to all people, so he will give you wisdom. ⁶But when you ask God, you must believe and not doubt. Anyone who doubts is like a wave in the sea, blown up and down by the wind. ⁷⁻⁸Such doubters are thinking two different things at the same time, and they cannot decide about anything they do. They should not think they will receive anything from the Lord.

True Riches

⁹Believers who are poor should be proud, because God has made them spiritually rich. ¹⁰Those who are rich should be proud, because God has shown them that they are spiritually

poor. The rich will die like a wild flower in the grass. ¹¹The sun rises with burning heat and dries up the plants. The flower falls off, and its beauty is gone. In the same way the rich will die while they are still taking care of business.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: One Who Understands Us

Jesus ... has been where you are and can relate to how you feel. And if his life on earth doesn't convince you, his death on the cross should. He understands what you are going through. Our Lord does not patronize us or scoff at our needs. He "... is generous and enjoys giving to all people, so he will give you wisdom"([James 1:5](#)). How can he do this? No one penned it more clearly than did the author of Hebrews [[Hebrews 4:15-16](#)] ...

Why did the throat of heaven grow raw? So we would know that he understands; so all who struggle would hear his invitation: "You can trust me...."

Why, in his final moments, was Jesus determined to fulfill prophecy? He knew we would doubt. He knew we would question. And since he did not want our heads to keep his love from our hearts, he used his final moments to offer proof that he was the Messiah. He systematically fulfilled centuries-old prophecies. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

For more on ["Christ Through the Bible."](#)

Temptation Is Not from God

¹²When people are tempted and still continue strong, they should be happy. After they have proved their faith, God will reward them with life forever. God promised this to all those who love him. ¹³When people are tempted, they should not say, "God is tempting me." Evil cannot tempt God, and God himself does not tempt anyone. ¹⁴But people are tempted when their own evil desire leads them away and traps them. ¹⁵This desire leads to sin, and then the sin grows and brings death.

¹⁶My dear brothers and sisters, do not be fooled about this. ¹⁷Every good action and every perfect gift is from God. These good gifts come down from the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars, who does not change like their shifting shadows. ¹⁸God decided to give us life through the word of truth so we might be the most important of all the things he made.

Listening and Obeying

¹⁹My dear brothers and sisters, always be willing to listen and slow to speak. Do not become angry easily, ²⁰because anger will not help you live the right kind of life God wants. ²¹So put out of your life every evil thing and every kind of wrong. Then in gentleness accept God's teaching that is planted in your hearts, which can save you.

²²Do what God's teaching says; when you only listen and do nothing, you are fooling yourselves. ²³Those who hear

God's teaching and do nothing are like people who look at themselves in a mirror. ²⁴They see their faces and then go away and quickly forget what they looked like. ²⁵But the truly happy people are those who carefully study God's perfect law that makes people free, and they continue to study it. They do not forget what they heard, but they obey what God's teaching says. Those who do this will be made happy.

The True Way to Worship God

²⁶People who think they are religious but say things they should not say are just fooling themselves. Their "religion" is worth nothing. ²⁷Religion that God accepts as pure and without fault is this: caring for orphans or widows who need help, and keeping yourself free from the world's evil influence.

Life Lessons

James 2:1-26

Situation

These Christians drew social lines among themselves. Certain cliques were more popular and more important in the church.

Observation

Christians should avoid forming cliques. God sees no difference between the social elite and the lowest class. All are called to serve and worship side-by-side.

Inspiration

Grant's church was beginning a ministry to people suffering from AIDS. At the initial planning session, an expert on this type of ministry was going to be present to speak to the group about the *Dos* and *Don'ts* of such a task. The catch was that the person who was coming had AIDS.

As he drove to the meeting, Grant struggled with what his response would be. "How should I address this individual? Would I shake hands with this person? Would I sit next to him? Would I pry into his lifestyle, demanding to know how he contracted the disease? How would I react if he volunteered that information? Is this a ministry that I should be involved in personally?" These questions and countless others were swirling through his mind.

As he pondered these issues, he was reminded of [James 2:1](#) and the fact that favoritism is sin. The issue

is not whether the distinction is made over economic, social, educational, physical, spiritual, or health concerns or differences. The issue is that our motives for making the distinction are immediately called into question because favoritism is sin. (From *A Dad's Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent)

Application

Do you attend a church regularly? Are you involved enough to see which people are on the “outside”? If not, become more involved; then help break down walls by bringing people on the fringe into your circle.

Exploration

Unity—[Psalm 133:1](#); [John 10:16](#); [17:23](#); [Acts 4:32](#); [Romans 12:4–5](#); [15:5](#); [1 Corinthians 1:10](#); [10:17](#); [Ephesians 2:14–20](#); [Philippians 2:1–2](#).

Love All People

My dear brothers and sisters, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, never think some people are more important than others.² Suppose someone comes into your church meeting wearing nice clothes and a gold ring. At the same time a poor person comes in wearing old, dirty clothes.³ You show special attention to the one wearing nice clothes and say, "Please, sit here in this good seat." But you say to the poor person, "Stand over there," or, "Sit on the floor by my feet."⁴ What are you doing? You are making some people more important than others, and with evil thoughts you are deciding that one person is better.

⁵Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! God chose the poor in the world to be rich with faith and to receive the kingdom God promised to those who love him.⁶ But you show no respect to the poor. The rich are always trying to control your lives. They are the ones who take you to court.⁷ And they are the ones who speak against Jesus, who owns you.

⁸This royal law is found in the Scriptures: "[Love your neighbor as you love yourself.](#)" If you obey this law, you are doing right.⁹ But if you treat one person as being more important than another, you are sinning. You are guilty of breaking God's law.¹⁰ A person who follows all of God's law but fails to obey even one command is guilty of breaking all the commands in that law.¹¹ The same God who said, "[You must](#)

not be guilty of adultery.” also said, “You must not murder anyone.” So if you do not take part in adultery but you murder someone, you are guilty of breaking all of God’s law. ¹²In everything you say and do, remember that you will be judged by the law that makes people free. ¹³So you must show mercy to others, or God will not show mercy to you when he judges you. But the person who shows mercy can stand without fear at the judgment.

Faith and Good Works

¹⁴My brothers and sisters, if people say they have faith, but do nothing, their faith is worth nothing. Can faith like that save them? ¹⁵A brother or sister in Christ might need clothes or food. ¹⁶If you say to that person, “God be with you! I hope you stay warm and get plenty to eat,” but you do not give what that person needs, your words are worth nothing. ¹⁷In the same way, faith that is alone—that does nothing—is dead.

¹⁸Someone might say, “You have faith, but I have deeds.” Show me your faith without doing anything, and I will show you my faith by what I do. ¹⁹You believe there is one God. Good! But the demons believe that, too, and they tremble with fear.

²⁰You foolish person! Must you be shown that faith that does nothing is worth nothing? ²¹Abraham, our ancestor, was made right with God by what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. ²²So you see that Abraham’s faith and the things he did worked together. His faith was made perfect by what he did. ²³This shows the full meaning of the Scripture that says: “Abraham believed God, and God accepted Abraham’s

faith, and that faith made him right with God.” And Abraham was called God’s friend.²⁴ So you see that people are made right with God by what they do, not by faith only.

²⁵ Another example is Rahab, a prostitute, who was made right with God by something she did. She welcomed the spies into her home and helped them escape by a different road.

²⁶ Just as a person’s body that does not have a spirit is dead, so faith that does nothing is dead!

Life Lessons

James 3:1–18

Situation

James described how faith works in everyday life. Everyday speech and actions should correspond with inward faith.

Observation

The tongue can build others up or tear them down. It needs to be controlled.

Inspiration

Each of us has a tongue and a voice. These instruments of speech can be used destructively or employed constructively. I can use my tongue to slander, to gripe, to scold, to nag, and to quarrel; or I can bring it under the control of God's Spirit and make it an instrument of blessing and praise... Only God can control it, as we yield it to Him.

The twentieth-century version of [James 3:3](#) says, "When we put bits into the horses' mouths to make them obey us, we control the rest of their bodies also." Just so, when we submit to the claims of Christ upon our lives, our untamed natures are brought under His control. We become meek, tamed, and "fit for the Master's service." (From *The Secret of Happiness* by Billy Graham)

Application

Today, use your tongue to bring joy, peace, and happiness into the lives of others. Thank others for their friendship. Encourage those who are struggling.

Tell others of your love for them. Most of all, use your words to praise God throughout today.

Exploration

Restraining the Tongue—[Psalm 34:13](#); [Proverbs 13:3](#); [21:23](#); [Titus 3:2](#); [James 1:26](#); [1 Peter 3:10](#).

Controlling the Things We Say

My brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ²We all make many mistakes. If people never said anything wrong, they would be perfect and able to control their entire selves, too. ³When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can control their whole bodies. ⁴Also a ship is very big, and it is pushed by strong winds. But a very small rudder controls that big ship, making it go wherever the pilot wants. ⁵It is the same with the tongue. It is a small part of the body, but it brags about great things.

A big forest fire can be started with only a little flame. ⁶And the tongue is like a fire. It is a whole world of evil among the parts of our bodies. The tongue spreads its evil through the whole body. The tongue is set on fire by hell, and it starts a fire that influences all of life. ⁷People can tame every kind of wild animal, bird, reptile, and fish, and they have tamed them, ⁸but no one can tame the tongue. It is wild and evil and full of deadly poison. ⁹We use our tongues to praise our Lord and Father, but then we curse people, whom God made like himself. ¹⁰Praises and curses come from the same mouth! My brothers and sisters, this should not happen. ¹¹Do good and bad water flow from the same spring? ¹²My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree make olives, or can a grapevine make figs? No! And a well

full of salty water cannot give good water.

True Wisdom

¹³Are there those among you who are truly wise and understanding? Then they should show it by living right and doing good things with a gentleness that comes from wisdom.

¹⁴But if you are selfish and have bitter jealousy in your hearts, do not brag. Your bragging is a lie that hides the truth. ¹⁵That kind of “wisdom” does not come from God but from the world.

It is not spiritual; it is from the devil. ¹⁶Where jealousy and selfishness are, there will be confusion and every kind of evil.

¹⁷But the wisdom that comes from God is first of all pure, then peaceful, gentle, and easy to please. This wisdom is always ready to help those who are troubled and to do good for others. It is always fair and honest. ¹⁸People who work for peace in a peaceful way plant a good crop of right-living.

Life Lessons

James 4:1-17

Situation

God planned for his people to be distinct by their peaceful and humble attitudes. Both words and actions mark these qualities.

Observation

People who are self-sufficient must recognize that their plans and their lives are not their own but could change in a moment.

Inspiration

There are certain mountains only God can climb. The names of these mountains? You'll see them as you look from the window of the chapel in the Great House of God. "Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever." A trio of peaks mantled by the clouds. Admire them, applaud them, but don't climb them.

It's not that you aren't welcome to try, it's just that you aren't able. The pronoun is "thine," not "mine"; "thine" is the kingdom, not "mine" is the kingdom. If the word "Savior" is in your job description, it's because you put it there. Your role is to help the world, not save it. Mount Messiah is one mountain you weren't made to climb.

Nor is Mount Self-Sufficient. You aren't able to run the world, nor are you able to sustain it. Some of you think you can. You are self-made. You don't bow your knees, you just roll up your sleeves and put in

another twelve-hour day ... which may be enough when it comes to making a living or building a business. But when you face your own grave or your own guilt, your power will not do the trick.

You were not made to run a kingdom, nor are you expected to be all-powerful. And you certainly can't handle all the glory. Mount Applause is the most seductive of the three peaks. The higher you climb the more people applaud, but the thinner the air becomes. More than one person has stood at the top and shouted, "Mine is the glory!" only to lose their balance and fall.

"Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." What protection this final phrase affords. As you confess that God is in charge, you admit that you aren't. As you proclaim that God has power, you admit that you don't. And as you give God all the applause, there is none left to dizzy your brain. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)]

Application

List five experiences that make you proud. Pray that real service would begin as God humbles you. Ask God to help you realize that you can't make life work on your own.

Exploration

Submission—[Luke 14:27](#); [John 14:23](#); [1 Corinthians 11:3](#); [1 Peter 3:5](#)

Give Yourselves to God

Do you know where your fights and arguments come from? They come from the selfish desires that war within you. ²You want things, but you do not have them. So you are ready to kill and are jealous of other people, but you still cannot get what you want. So you argue and fight. You do not get what you want, because you do not ask God. ³Or when you ask, you do not receive because the reason you ask is wrong. You want things so you can use them for your own pleasures.

⁴So, you are not loyal to God! You should know that loving the world is the same as hating God. Anyone who wants to be a friend of the world becomes God's enemy. ⁵Do you think the Scripture means nothing that says, "[The Spirit that God made to live in us wants us for himself alone?](#)" ⁶But God gives us even more grace, as the Scripture says,

“God is against the proud,
but he gives grace to the humble.”

[Proverbs 3:34](#)

⁷So give yourselves completely to God. Stand against the devil, and the devil will run from you. ⁸Come near to God, and God will come near to you. You sinners, clean sin out of your lives. You who are trying to follow God and the world at the same time, make your thinking pure. ⁹Be sad, cry, and weep!

Change your laughter into crying and your joy into sadness.
¹⁰Don't be too proud in the Lord's presence, and he will make you great.

You Are Not the Judge

¹¹Brothers and sisters, do not tell evil lies about each other. If you speak against your fellow believers or judge them, you are judging and speaking against the law they follow. And when you are judging the law, you are no longer a follower of the law. You have become a judge. ¹²God is the only Lawmaker and Judge. He is the only One who can save and destroy. So it is not right for you to judge your neighbor.

Let God Plan Your Life

¹³Some of you say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to some city. We will stay there a year, do business, and make money."
¹⁴But you do not know what will happen tomorrow! Your life is like a mist. You can see it for a short time, but then it goes away. ¹⁵So you should say, "If the Lord wants, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶But now you are proud and you brag. All of this bragging is wrong. ¹⁷Anyone who knows the right thing to do, but does not do it, is sinning.

Life Lessons

James 5:1–20

Situation

Wealth can lead some into false security. Jesus and the Old Testament prophets defended the poor. James explained that instead of hoarding, exploiting, and self-indulging, Believers should share with those in need.

Observation

A Christian should be more concerned with sharing and meeting the needs of others than with accumulating earthly treasures.

Inspiration

We live at one of the great turning points in history. The present division of the World's resources dare not continue. And it will not. Either courageous pioneers will persuade reluctant nations to share the good earth's bounty, or we will enter an era of catastrophic conflict... .

Do Christians today have that kind of faith and courage? Will we pioneer new models of sharing for our interdependent world? Will we dare to become the vanguard in the struggle for structural change? ...

I am not pessimistic. God regularly accomplishes his will through faithful remnants. Even in affluent nations, there are millions of Christians who love their Lord Jesus more than houses and lands... .

If at this moment in history a few million Christians in affluent nations dare to join hands with

the poor around the world, we will decisively influence the course of world history. Together we will strive to be a biblical people ready to follow wherever Scripture leads. We must pray for the courage to bear any cross, suffer any loss and joyfully embrace any sacrifice that biblical faith requires in an Age of Hunger. (From *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* by Ronald Sider)

Application

Are you free to lend your possessions? Is money set aside for giving? Develop a plan today, keep it for six months, and evaluate the results.

Exploration

Sharing—[Acts 2:44](#); [4:32–35](#);

A Warning to the Rich

You rich people, listen! Cry and be very sad because of the troubles that are coming to you.²Your riches have rotted, and your clothes have been eaten by moths.³Your gold and silver have rusted, and that rust will be a proof that you were wrong. It will eat your bodies like fire. You saved your treasure for the last days.⁴The pay you did not give the workers who mowed your fields cries out against you, and the cries of the workers have been heard by the Lord All-Powerful.⁵Your life on earth was full of rich living and pleasing yourselves with everything you wanted. You made yourselves fat, like an animal ready to be killed.⁶You have judged guilty and then murdered innocent people, who were not against you.

Be Patient

⁷Brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord comes again. A farmer patiently waits for his valuable crop to grow from the earth and for it to receive the autumn and spring rains.⁸You, too, must be patient. Do not give up hope, because the Lord is coming soon.⁹Brothers and sisters, do not complain against each other or you will be judged guilty. And the Judge is ready to come!¹⁰Brothers and sisters, follow the example of the prophets who spoke for the Lord. They suffered many hard

things, but they were patient.¹¹We say they are happy because they did not give up. You have heard about Job's patience, and you know the Lord's purpose for him in the end. You know the Lord is full of mercy and is kind.

Be Careful What You Say

¹²My brothers and sisters, above all, do not use an oath when you make a promise. Don't use the name of heaven, earth, or anything else to prove what you say. When you mean yes, say only yes, and when you mean no, say only no so you will not be judged guilty.

The Power of Prayer

¹³Anyone who is having troubles should pray. Anyone who is happy should sing praises. ¹⁴Anyone who is sick should call the church's elders. They should pray for and [pour oil on the person](#) in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And the prayer that is said with faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will heal that person. And if the person has sinned, the sins will be forgiven. ¹⁶Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so God can heal you. When a believing person prays, great things happen. ¹⁷Elijah was a human being just like us. He prayed that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years! ¹⁸Then Elijah prayed again, and the rain came down from the sky, and the land produced crops again.

Saving a Soul

¹⁹My brothers and sisters, if one of you wanders away from the truth, and someone helps that person come back, ²⁰remember this: Anyone who brings a sinner back from the wrong way will save that sinner's soul from death and will cause many sins to be forgiven.

brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “brothers” here and throughout this book, James’s words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

“Love ... yourself.” Quotation from [Leviticus 19:18](#).

“You ... adultery.” Quotation from [Exodus 20:14](#) and [Deuteronomy 5:18](#).

“You ... anyone.” Quotation from [Exodus 20:13](#) and [Deuteronomy 5:17](#).

“Abraham ... God.” Quotation from [Genesis 15:6](#).

God’s friend These words about Abraham are found in [2 Chronicles 20:7](#) and [Isaiah 41:8](#).

“The Spirit ... alone?” These words may be from [Exodus 20:5](#).

pour oil on the person Oil was used in the name of the Lord as a sign that the person was now set apart for God’s special attention and care.

[The Book of 1 Peter](#)

Introduction

The science teacher makes a derisive statement about God creating the world. You raise your hand and state your convictions. Your teacher rolls her eyes. The students behind you chuckle.

It's not easy being the only one in your family who goes to church. It's bad enough that they don't go. It's worse that they make fun of you for going.

If you would pad your expense account, so could the other salesmen. But if you don't, they can't. "Come on," they urge you, "just hedge a little." You refuse. The next day someone has spilled paint on your car.

Persecution. Not by firing squad. Not by death threats. Not by the government. But it's persecution nonetheless. A more subtle persecution. Persecution from friends, family, and peers. They won't take your life ... but they will take your peace ... and they'd like to take your faith, if you'd let them.

How do you respond? Begin with Peter's survival manual. He understood persecution. Beaten and jailed. Threatened and punished. He knew the sting of the false word and the angry whip. No doubt he'd seen some Christians stand and others fall. He'd seen enough to know what it takes to stay strong in tough times.

His counsel may surprise you.

His counsel may sustain you. It may be just what you need so that "the purity of your faith will bring you praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is shown to you" ([1:7](#)).

About This Book

Author:

Peter

Date Written:

C. A.D. 64

Key Themes:

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- Our richest inheritance is not in this world—it waits in heaven.
- It is up to each Christian to remain pure.
- It is an honor to suffer for Christ.
- Satan fights against the growth and victory of believers.

Key Verse:

“But respect Christ as the holy Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to answer everyone who asks you to explain about the hope you have” ([1 Peter 3:15](#)).

Contents:

1. Holy Living [1:1–2:12](#)
2. Submission to Authorities [2:13–3:12](#)
3. The Believer and Suffering [3:13–5:14](#)

Life Lessons

1 Peter 1:1–25

Situation

Peter reminded Christians who were scattered all over the world that they were guaranteed an inheritance. They were to base their confidence on the indestructible truth of God's Word.

Observation

God promises us an inheritance that will never pass away.

Inspiration

Hollywood, California—many people come there from around the world frantically seeking success, fame, and fortune. For most, however, the quest is a futile one.

Only a few have actually “made it” to the sidewalk along Hollywood Boulevard, where embedded bronze symbols bear the names and faces of the famous. It appears that these men and women, in worldly terms, have mastered their destinies. And yet, upon passing this way and looking at these small monuments more carefully, one cannot help but be touched with a sense of irony. The same sidewalk in which the coveted star has been firmly laid is cluttered with debris, splattered with mud, and ground over in places with patches of gum.

In stark contrast, the promise of God to His people says “I lay ... a sure foundation.” ...

The reward of walking this “established” path is

only found in God's Word. There is no bronze star waiting to be laid in concrete by the hands of man and tarnished by the passage of time. Rather, the redeemed of the Lord—those whose lives are built upon the sure foundation by God—shall shine forever. (From *Living and Praying in Jesus' Name* by Dick Eastman and Jack Hayford)

Application

How many times during the last week have you praised God because of the inheritance he has promised you?

Exploration

Security—[Psalm 9:10](#); [Zephaniah 2:3–7](#); [Romans 6:6–11](#); [2 Corinthians 4:14](#); [1 John 5:13](#).

From Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

To God's chosen people who are away from their homes and are scattered all around the countries of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. ²God planned long ago to choose you by making you his holy people, which is the Spirit's work. God wanted you to obey him and to be made clean by the blood of the death of Jesus Christ.

Grace and peace be yours more and more.

We Have a Living Hope

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In God's great mercy he has caused us to be born again into a living hope, because Jesus Christ rose from the dead. ⁴Now we hope for the blessings God has for his children. These blessings, which cannot be destroyed or be spoiled or lose their beauty, are kept in heaven for you. ⁵God's power protects you through your faith until salvation is shown to you at the end of time. ⁶This makes you very happy, even though now for a short time different kinds of troubles may make you sad. ⁷These troubles come to prove that your faith is pure. This purity of faith is worth more than gold, which can be proved to be pure by fire but will ruin. But the purity of your faith will bring you praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is shown to you. ⁸You have not seen Christ, but still you love him. You cannot see him now, but you believe in him. So you

are filled with a joy that cannot be explained, a joy full of glory.
⁹And you are receiving the goal of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

¹⁰The prophets searched carefully and tried to learn about this salvation. They prophesied about the grace that was coming to you. ¹¹The Spirit of Christ was in the prophets, telling in advance about the sufferings of Christ and about the glory that would follow those sufferings. The prophets tried to learn about what the Spirit was showing them, when those things would happen, and what the world would be like at that time. ¹²It was shown them that their service was not for themselves but for you, when they told about the truths you have now heard. Those who preached the Good News to you told you those things with the help of the Holy Spirit who was sent from heaven—things into which angels desire to look.

A Call to Holy Living

¹³So prepare your minds for service and have self-control. All your hope should be for the gift of grace that will be yours when Jesus Christ is shown to you. ¹⁴Now that you are obedient children of God do not live as you did in the past. You did not understand, so you did the evil things you wanted. ¹⁵But be holy in all you do, just as God, the One who called you, is holy. ¹⁶It is written in the Scriptures: [“You must be holy, because I am holy.”](#)

¹⁷You pray to God and call him Father, and he judges each person’s work equally. So while you are here on earth, you should live with respect for God. ¹⁸You know that in the past you were living in a worthless way, a way passed down from

the people who lived before you. But you were saved from that useless life. You were bought, not with something that ruins like gold or silver, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, who was like a pure and perfect lamb. ²⁰Christ was chosen before the world was made, but he was shown to the world in these last times for your sake. ²¹Through Christ you believe in God, who raised Christ from the dead and gave him glory. So your faith and your hope are in God.

²²Now that you have made your souls pure by obeying the truth, you can have true love for your Christian [brothers and sisters](#). So love each other deeply with all your heart. ²³You have been born again, and this new life did not come from something that dies, but from something that cannot die. You were born again through God's living message that continues forever. ²⁴The Scripture says,

“All people are like the grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.
The grass dies and the flowers fall,
²⁵but the word of the Lord will live forever.”

[Isaiah 40:6–8](#)

And this is the word that was preached to you.

Life Lessons

1 Peter 2:1–25

Situation

Peter knew that loyal Christians suffered from the abuse of cruel Roman practices. He told them to expect suffering. Suffering might be endured so that others could see the Lord's power to help Christians endure.

Observation

Christians can encourage others who are suffering by showing mercy, humility, and kindness to them.

Inspiration

Is there anything more frail than a bruised reed? Look at the bruised reed at the water's edge. A once slender and tall stalk of sturdy river grass, it is now bowed and bent.

Are you a bruised reed? Was it so long ago that you stood so tall, so proud? ...

Then something happened. You were bruised ...

by harsh words

by a friend's anger

by a spouse's betrayal

by your own failure

by religion's rigidity.

... Your hollow reed, once erect, now stooped, and hidden in the bulrush.

And the smoldering wick on the candle... . Once aflame, now flickering and failing... . Was it that long ago you blazed with faith? Remember how you

illuminated the path? ...

Painted on canvas after canvas is the tender touch of a Creator who has a special place for the bruised and weary of the world. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Application

Find a story of a Christian who showed grace under pressure. Read it. Pray that you, too, will endure when and if the heat in your life is turned up.

Exploration

Suffering—[Matthew 24:9–13](#); [Mark 8:31–33](#); [Romans 8:17](#); [Philippians 1:12–14](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:4](#); [1 Peter 4:12–16](#).

Jesus Is the Living Stone

So then, rid yourselves of all evil, all lying, hypocrisy, jealousy, and evil speech.²As newborn babies want milk, you should want the pure and simple teaching. By it you can grow up and be saved,³because you have already examined and seen how good the Lord is.

⁴Come to the Lord Jesus, the [“stone”](#) that lives. The people of the world did not want this stone, but he was the stone God chose, and he was precious. ⁵You also are like living stones, so let yourselves be used to build a spiritual temple—to be holy priests who offer spiritual sacrifices to God. He will accept those sacrifices through Jesus Christ. ⁶The Scripture says:

“I will put a stone in the ground in Jerusalem.

Everything will be built on this important and precious rock.

Anyone who trusts in him
will never be disappointed.”

[Isaiah 28:16](#)

⁷This stone is worth much to you who believe. But to the people who do not believe,

“the stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.”

⁸Also, he is

“a stone that causes people to stumble,
a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they do not obey what God says, which is what God planned to happen to them.

⁹But you are a chosen people, royal priests, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession. You were chosen to tell about the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰At one time you were not a people, but now you are God’s people. In the past you had never received mercy, but now you have received God’s mercy.

Live for God

¹¹Dear friends, you are like foreigners and strangers in this world. I beg you to avoid the evil things your bodies want to do that fight against your soul. ¹²People who do not believe are living all around you and might say that you are doing wrong. Live such good lives that they will see the good things you do and will give glory to God on the day when Christ comes again.

Yield to Every Human Authority

¹³For the Lord’s sake, yield to the people who have authority in this world: the king, who is the highest authority, ¹⁴and the

leaders who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. ¹⁵It is God's desire that by doing good you should stop foolish people from saying stupid things about you. ¹⁶Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. Live as servants of God. ¹⁷Show respect for all people: Love the brothers and sisters of God's family, respect God, honor the king.

Follow Christ's Example

¹⁸Slaves, yield to the authority of your masters with all respect, not only those who are good and kind, but also those who are dishonest. ¹⁹A person might have to suffer even when it is unfair, but if he thinks of God and stands the pain, God is pleased. ²⁰If you are beaten for doing wrong, there is no reason to praise you for being patient in your punishment. But if you suffer for doing good, and you are patient, then God is pleased. ²¹This is what you were called to do, because Christ suffered for you and gave you an example to follow. So you should do as he did.

²²“He had never sinned,
and he had never lied.”

[Isaiah 53:9](#)

²³People insulted Christ, but he did not insult them in return. Christ suffered, but he did not threaten. He let God, the One who judges rightly, take care of him. ²⁴Christ carried our sins in his body on the cross so we would stop living for sin and start living for what is right. And you are healed because

of his wounds. ²⁵You were like sheep that wandered away, but now you have come back to the Shepherd and Protector of your souls.

Life Lessons

1 Peter 3:1–22

Situation

In Peter's day, women had little status. Peter encouraged wives and husbands to recognize each other's needs and respect them.

Observation

Submission does not indicate weakness or inferiority. Rather, one married partner demonstrates love for the other by yielding to the other.

Inspiration

A husband is to love his wife with the same sacrificial self-abandonment that Christ adopted toward each of us. When a man considers hardship in marriage, he needs to look at the life of Jesus. Jesus said, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve" ([Matthew 20:28](#)). Jesus is presented in Scripture as both Head and Servant. He is the "head over everything for the church" ([Ephesians 1:22](#)) who took "the very nature of a servant" ([Philippians 2:7](#)). And Jesus instructed us, "The greatest among you will be your servant" ([Matthew 23:11](#)).

As believers, we are all called to servanthood as an expression of our new life in Christ. However, when it comes to marriage, modeling this attribute of God's Son is a calling extended to husbands. A husband expresses love to his wife by regarding her as a completely equal partner in everything that concerns their life together. He asserts his headship

to see that this equal partnership works. Loving headship affirms and defers; it encourages and stimulates. Loving headship delights to delegate without demanding. (From *Quiet Times for Couples* by H. Norman Wright)

Application

Today, do something new to show your spouse how much you care, how happy you are together, how much God encourages you through your marriage. Do the dishes, give a flower, take a walk, or write a note. If you are unmarried, develop your character to match the one discussed by Peter. Put more attention on the beauty that comes from within than on physical appearance.

Exploration

Submission—[Luke 14:27](#); [John 14:23](#); [1 Corinthians 11:3](#), [9–12](#); [Ephesians 5:21–24](#).

Wives and Husbands

In the same way, you wives should yield to your husbands. Then, if some husbands do not obey God's teaching, they will be persuaded to believe without anyone's saying a word to them. They will be persuaded by the way their wives live. ²Your husbands will see the pure lives you live with your respect for God. ³It is not fancy hair, gold jewelry, or fine clothes that should make you beautiful. ⁴No, your beauty should come from within you—the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit that will never be destroyed and is very precious to God. ⁵In this same way the holy women who lived long ago and followed God made themselves beautiful, yielding to their own husbands. ⁶Sarah obeyed Abraham, her husband, and called him her master. And you women are true children of Sarah if you always do what is right and are not afraid.

⁷In the same way, you husbands should live with your wives in an understanding way, since they are weaker than you. But show them respect, because God gives them the same blessing he gives you—the grace that gives true life. Do this so that nothing will stop your prayers.

Suffering for Doing Right

⁸Finally, all of you should be in agreement, understanding each

other, loving each other as family, being kind and humble. ⁹Do not do wrong to repay a wrong, and do not insult to repay an insult. But repay with a blessing, because you yourselves were called to do this so that you might receive a blessing. ¹⁰The Scripture says,

“A person must do these things
to enjoy life and have many happy days.
He must not say evil things,
and he must not tell lies.

¹¹He must stop doing evil and do good.
He must look for peace and work for it.

¹²The Lord sees the good people
and listens to their prayers.
But the Lord is against
those who do evil.”

[Psalm 34:12–16](#)

¹³If you are trying hard to do good, no one can really hurt you. ¹⁴But even if you suffer for doing right, you are blessed.

“Don’t be afraid of what they fear;
do not dread those things.”

[Isaiah 8:12–13](#)

¹⁵But respect Christ as the holy Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to answer everyone who asks you to explain about the hope you have, ¹⁶but answer in a gentle way and with respect. Keep a clear conscience so that those who speak evil of your good life in Christ will be made ashamed. ¹⁷It is better to

suffer for doing good than for doing wrong if that is what God wants.¹⁸ Christ himself suffered for sins once. He was not guilty, but he suffered for those who are guilty to bring you to God. His body was killed, but he was made alive in the spirit.¹⁹ And in the spirit he went and preached to the spirits in prison²⁰ who refused to obey God long ago in the time of Noah. God was waiting patiently for them while Noah was building the boat. Only a few people—eight in all—were saved by water.²¹ And that water is like baptism that now saves you—not the washing of dirt from the body, but the promise made to God from a good conscience. And this is because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.²² Now Jesus has gone into heaven and is at God's right side ruling over angels, authorities, and powers.

Life Lessons

1 Peter 4:1-19

Situation

Christians have shed an old set of rules and adopted a new set full of love and God's power. Following God's standards helps Christians face the difficult trials ahead.

Observation

Peter said that each believer has been given at least one gift to use to serve others. We are told to be good servants of those gifts.

Inspiration

Want to know God's will for your life? Then answer this question: What ignites your heart? Forgotten orphans? Untouched nations? The inner city? The outer limits?

Heed the fire within!

Do you have a passion to sing? Then sing!

Are you stirred to manage? Then manage!

Do you ache for the ill? Then treat them!

Do you hurt for the lost? Then teach them!

As a young man I felt the call to preach. Unsure if I was correct in my reading of God's will for me, I sought the counsel of a minister I admired. His counsel still rings true. "Don't preach," he said, "unless you have to."

As I pondered his words I found my answer: "I *have* to. If I don't, the fire will consume me."

What is the fire that consumes you?

Mark it down: Jesus comes to set you on fire! He walks as a torch from heart to heart, warming the cold and thawing the chilled and stirring the ashes. He is at once a Galilean wildfire and a welcome candle. He comes to purge infection and illuminate your direction.

The fire of your heart is the light of your path. Disregard it at your own expense. Fan it at your own delight. Blow it. Stir it. Nourish it. Cynics will doubt it. Those without it will mock it. But those who know it—those who know *him*—will understand it.

To meet the Savior is to be set aflame.

To discover the flame is to discover his will.

And to discover his will is to access a world like none you've ever seen. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Application

You have been given spiritual gifts. Have you identified them? If not, consider taking a spiritual inventory test (your local church can help you). Or ask friends and family to help you discover and use your gifts. Then pray about ways you can use your gifts to build up the body of believers and share the good news of salvation.

Exploration

Spiritual Gifts—[Romans 12:4–8](#); [1 Corinthians 12:12–31](#); [Ephesians 4:11–16](#).

Change Your Lives

Since Christ suffered while he was in his body, strengthen yourselves with the same way of thinking Christ had. The person who has suffered in the body is finished with sin.²Strengthen yourselves so that you will live here on earth doing what God wants, not the evil things people want.³In the past you wasted too much time doing what nonbelievers enjoy. You were guilty of sexual sins, evil desires, drunkenness, wild and drunken parties, and hateful idol worship.⁴Nonbelievers think it is strange that you do not do the many wild and wasteful things they do, so they insult you.⁵But they will have to explain this to God, who is ready to judge the living and the dead.⁶For this reason the Good News was preached to those who are now dead. Even though they were judged like all people, the Good News was preached to them so they could live in the spirit as God lives.

Use God's Gifts Wisely

⁷The time is near when all things will end. So think clearly and control yourselves so you will be able to pray.⁸Most importantly, love each other deeply, because love will cause many sins to be forgiven.⁹Open your homes to each other, without complaining.¹⁰Each of you has received a gift to use to

serve others. Be good servants of God's various gifts of grace.
¹¹Anyone who speaks should speak words from God. Anyone who serves should serve with the strength God gives so that in everything God will be praised through Jesus Christ. Power and glory belong to him forever and ever. Amen.

Suffering as a Christian

¹²My friends, do not be surprised at the terrible trouble which now comes to test you. Do not think that something strange is happening to you. ¹³But be happy that you are sharing in Christ's sufferings so that you will be happy and full of joy when Christ comes again in glory. ¹⁴When people insult you because you follow Christ, you are blessed, because the glorious Spirit, the Spirit of God, is with you. ¹⁵Do not suffer for murder, theft, or any other crime, nor because you trouble other people. ¹⁶But if you suffer because you are a Christian, do not be ashamed. Praise God because you wear that name. ¹⁷It is time for judgment to begin with God's family. And if that judging begins with us, what will happen to those people who do not obey the Good News of God?

¹⁸[“If it is very hard for a good person to be saved, the wicked person and the sinner will surely be lost!”](#)

¹⁹So those who suffer as God wants should trust their souls to the faithful Creator as they continue to do what is right.

Life Lessons

1 Peter 5:1-14

Situation

Peter challenged the elders to be good shepherds of their churches, just as Christ was a good shepherd with his disciples. He urged elders to look out for struggling Christians as shepherds would for lost sheep.

Observation

Elders and leaders play a vital role in leading and protecting young Christians. Because elders face temptation, too, God will hold them accountable for their actions.

Inspiration

The attitude Christ modeled for us is one that should typify every Christian, whether in pulpit or pew, whether leader of a vast organization or solitary prayer warrior. Not puffed up with self-importance, but poured out for others...

That doesn't mean we shrink from responsibility. God calls each of us to a particular task. But when the temptation of pride comes knocking ... as it will ... we must lock the door against it—whatever that takes.

But the toughest question is, How do we know? Because usually the knock is very faint, and we don't listen for it. The best protection I have discovered is accountability. Since we all have blind spots, we must, as we mentioned earlier, submit ourselves to those who can see the logs floating in our eyes.

How often does your church governing body review [1 Peter 5:2](#)? ... Or Paul's first letter to Timothy? We must constantly check each other on how well we are measuring up to the clear biblical requirements of leadership.

(From *The Body* by Charles Colson)

Application

Christians who are younger in their faith need close fellowship with those further along in their Christian life. Do you have someone who helps refine, confront, disciple, and encourage you? Do you serve in that role for someone else? Pray that God would raise up someone to help you, as you help someone else.

Exploration

Church Leaders—[1 Timothy 3:8–13](#); [Titus 1:5–9](#); [Revelation 4:4](#).

The Flock of God

Now I have something to say to the elders in your group. I also am an elder. I have seen Christ's sufferings, and I will share in the glory that will be shown to us. I beg you to ²shepherd God's flock, for whom you are responsible. Watch over them because you want to, not because you are forced. That is how God wants it. Do it because you are happy to serve, not because you want money. ³Do not be like a ruler over people you are responsible for, but be good examples to them. ⁴Then when Christ, the Chief Shepherd, comes, you will get a glorious crown that will never lose its beauty.

⁵In the same way, younger people should be willing to be under older people. And all of you should be very humble with each other.

“God is against the proud,
but he gives grace to the humble.”

[Proverbs 3:34](#)

⁶Be humble under God's powerful hand so he will lift you up when the right time comes. ⁷Give all your worries to him, because he cares about you.

⁸Control yourselves and be careful! The devil, your enemy, goes around like a roaring lion looking for someone to eat. ⁹Refuse to give in to him, by standing strong in your faith. You

know that your Christian family all over the world is having the same kinds of suffering.

¹⁰And after you suffer for a short time, God, who gives all grace, will make everything right. He will make you strong and support you and keep you from falling. He called you to share in his glory in Christ, a glory that will continue forever. ¹¹All power is his forever and ever. Amen.

Final Greetings

¹²I wrote this short letter with the help of Silas, who I know is a faithful brother in Christ. I wrote to encourage you and to tell you that this is the true grace of God. Stand strong in that grace.

¹³The church in Babylon, who was chosen like you, sends you greetings. Mark, my son in Christ, also greets you. ¹⁴Give each other a kiss of Christian love when you meet.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

“You must be ... holy.” Quotation from [Leviticus 11:45; 19:2; 20:7.](#)

brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “brothers” here and throughout this book, Peter’s words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

“stone” The most important stone in God’s spiritual temple or house (his people).

“If ... lost!” Quotation from [Proverbs 11:31](#) in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament.

2 Peter

Introduction

If a friend warns you, it's one thing. If a doctor warns you, you listen. But if your friend is your doctor, you lean forward and take note.

My friend is my doctor. My doctor is my friend. Most of my physical exams are salted with friendly chatter and jokes. There have been occasions, however, when his tone gets solemn and his voice urgent.

“We’re going to have to watch this, Max.”

“You haven’t been exercising, have you ...”

“With your family’s history, you have to watch your diet.”

When it’s a warning from a friend, you listen.

The second letter from Peter is a warning from a friend. His first letter was a warning about trials from without (persecution). His second caution is a warning about trials from within (heresy).

In this the last letter we have from him, he urges Christians to be careful. Avoid shortsightedness ([1:2–11](#)). Be on guard for false teachers ([2:1–22](#)). And, most importantly, be vigilant against personal complacency which will lead to a lazy faith.

The doctor’s task is to detect concerns from within and urge you to take caution. Peter’s task is the same. Heed his counsel.

About This Book

Author:

Peter

Date Written:

C. A.D. 67

Key Themes:

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- The Scriptures were divinely inspired.
- There will be a great accountability in the final days when Jesus returns and God judges.
- It is utterly important to teach God's truth, purely and without addition.

Key Verse:

“The Lord is not slow in doing what he promised—the way some people understand slowness. But God is being patient with you. He does not want anyone to be lost, but he wants all people to change their hearts and lives” ([2 Peter 3:9](#)).

Contents:

1. Living Like Christ [1:1–21](#)
2. False Teachers [2:1–22](#)
3. The Last Days [3:1–18](#)

Life Lessons

2 Peter 1:1–21

Situation

The Believers had weathered persecution from the outside. Now Peter encouraged them to withstand attacks from within the church.

Observation

Continue to grow in your faith and knowledge of Jesus.

Inspiration

“Add to your faith”: Supplement it, flesh it out. Being a Christian doesn’t mean believing and then just sitting around. Now that you have faith in God’s part, make every effort—that’s your part.

That’s disciplines.

That’s regular “holy habits.”

That’s pacing yourself for the cross-country run to your future.

Says Henri Nouwen, “A spiritual life without discipline is impossible.” Tighten your belt. Get tough on yourself. GO FOR IT.

A woman once said to the great Paderewski, “Sir, you are truly a genius.”

“Well,” he answered, “before I was a genius, I was a drudge!”

To get there, to win—your life needs discipline, order, and arrangement.

“If one examines the secret behind a championship football team, a magnificent orchestra,

or a successful business, the principle ingredient is invariably discipline” (James Dobson, *Disciplines of the Home*).

You will only discover excellence on the other side of hard work. (From *My Sacrifice His Fire* by Anne Ortlund)

Application

Write down on an index card the characteristics listed in verses [5–7](#). Put it in a strategic position, such as on your bedroom mirror, for two weeks. Whenever you pass by, take a moment and read through the list. Which are you adding to your life? Which need more effort?

Exploration

Perseverance—[Nehemiah 4:6](#); [Matthew 24:13](#); [Mark 13:13](#); [Hebrews 3:6](#); [12:1–3](#).

From Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.

To you who have received a faith as valuable as ours, because our God and Savior Jesus Christ does what is right.

²Grace and peace be given to you more and more, because you truly know God and Jesus our Lord.

God Has Given Us Blessings

³Jesus has the power of God, by which he has given us everything we need to live and to serve God. We have these things because we know him. Jesus called us by his glory and goodness.⁴Through these he gave us the very great and precious promises. With these gifts you can share in being like God, and the world will not ruin you with its evil desires.

⁵Because you have these blessings, do your best to add these things to your lives: to your faith, add goodness; and to your goodness, add knowledge; ⁶and to your knowledge, add self-control; and to your self-control, add patience; and to your patience, add service for God; ⁷and to your service for God, add kindness for your brothers and sisters in Christ; and to this kindness, add love. ⁸If all these things are in you and are growing, they will help you to be useful and productive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹But anyone who does not have these things cannot see clearly. He is blind and has forgotten that he was made clean from his past sins.

¹⁰My [brothers and sisters](#), try hard to be certain that you

really are called and chosen by God. If you do all these things, you will never fall.¹¹ And you will be given a very great welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

¹²You know these things, and you are very strong in the truth, but I will always help you remember them. ¹³I think it is right for me to help you remember as long as I am in this body.

¹⁴I know I must soon leave this body, as our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me. ¹⁵I will try my best so that you may be able to remember these things even after I am gone.

We Saw Christ's Glory

¹⁶When we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, we were not telling just smart stories that someone invented. But we saw the greatness of Jesus with our own eyes. ¹⁷Jesus heard the voice of God, the Greatest Glory, when he received honor and glory from God the Father. The voice said, "This is my Son, whom I love, and I am very pleased with him." ¹⁸We heard that voice from heaven while we were with Jesus on the holy mountain.

¹⁹This makes us more sure about the message the prophets gave. It is good for you to follow closely what they said as you would follow a light shining in a dark place, until the day begins and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰Most of all, you must understand this: No prophecy in the Scriptures ever comes from the prophet's own interpretation. ²¹No prophecy ever came from what a person wanted to say, but people led by the Holy Spirit spoke words from God.

Life Lessons

2 Peter 2:1-22

Situation

Some teachers in this church were teaching ideas that did not agree with God's Word. Peter harshly opposed them.

Observation

Beware of false teachers. God will punish them severely.

Inspiration

Jesus was warning the people of His day to be on the lookout for gifted leaders who would take advantage of them and lead them astray. They would be men who looked good on the outside but were corrupt on the inside. They would perform well...

To put it bluntly, great preachers are not necessarily great Christians. The same goes for famous gospel singers and best-selling Christian writers...

The best picture of what a Spirit-filled man looks like is Christ. His life was characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, and so on in the midst of a world characterized by just the opposite of those things. He was certainly no wimp. He stood up to His detractors when it was appropriate. But He knew when to be silent as well. He had the courage and wit to take on the intellectuals of His day on their turf according to their terms. He spoke with authority. People, especially children, were attracted to Him. Even

sinner loved to be with Him. He was a very secure man. There was nothing pretentious or intimidating about Him. He didn't need those props. And at the end of His life He tackled the toughest account of all—death. And He won! (From *The Wonderful Spirit-Filled Life* by Charles Stanley)

Application

Do you listen to preachers passively? Do you find yourself assuming the preacher is correct? Listen actively. No matter how good the message seems, compare it with the Bible. Find out what God says on the topic.

Exploration

Dangers of False Teachers—[Isaiah 56:10–12](#); [Jeremiah 23:1–2](#); [50:6](#); [Ezekiel 34:2–3](#); [Matthew 7:15–23](#); [John 10:12](#); [Philippians 1:15](#); [1 Timothy 6:3–5](#).

False Teachers

There used to be false prophets among God's people, just as you will have some false teachers in your group. They will secretly teach things that are wrong—teachings that will cause people to be lost. They will even refuse to accept the Master, Jesus, who bought their freedom. So they will bring quick ruin on themselves. ²Many will follow their evil ways and say evil things about the way of truth. ³Those false teachers only want your money, so they will use you by telling you lies. Their judgment spoken against them long ago is still coming, and their ruin is certain.

⁴When angels sinned, God did not let them go free without punishment. He sent them to hell and put them in caves of darkness where they are being held for judgment. ⁵And God punished the world long ago when he brought a flood to the world that was full of people who were against him. But God saved Noah, who preached about being right with God, and seven other people with him. ⁶And God also destroyed the evil cities of [Sodom and Gomorrah](#) by burning them until they were ashes. He made those cities an example of what will happen to those who are against God. ⁷But he saved Lot from those cities. Lot, a good man, was troubled because of the filthy lives of evil people. ⁸(Lot was a good man, but because he lived with evil people every day, his good heart was hurt by the evil things he saw and heard.) ⁹So the Lord knows how to save those who

serve him when troubles come. He will hold evil people and punish them, while waiting for the Judgment Day. ¹⁰That punishment is especially for those who live by doing the evil things their sinful selves want and who hate authority.

These false teachers are bold and do anything they want. They are not afraid to speak against the angels. ¹¹But even the angels, who are much stronger and more powerful than false teachers, do not accuse them with insults before the Lord. ¹²But these people speak against things they do not understand. They are like animals that act without thinking, animals born to be caught and killed. And, like animals, these false teachers will be destroyed. ¹³They have caused many people to suffer, so they themselves will suffer. That is their pay for what they have done. They take pleasure in openly doing evil, so they are like dirty spots and stains among you. They delight in trickery while eating meals with you. ¹⁴Every time they look at a woman they want her, and their desire for sin is never satisfied. They lead weak people into the trap of sin, and they have taught their hearts to be greedy. God will punish them! ¹⁵These false teachers left the right road and lost their way, following the way Balaam went. Balaam was the son of Beor, who loved being paid for doing wrong. ¹⁶But a donkey, which cannot talk, told Balaam he was sinning. It spoke with a man's voice and stopped the prophet's crazy thinking.

¹⁷Those false teachers are like springs without water and clouds blown by a storm. A place in the blackest darkness has been kept for them. ¹⁸They brag with words that mean nothing. By their evil desires they lead people into the trap of sin—people who are just beginning to escape from others who live in error. ¹⁹They promise them freedom, but they themselves are

not free. They are slaves of things that will be destroyed. For people are slaves of anything that controls them.²⁰ They were made free from the evil in the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But if they return to evil things and those things control them, then it is worse for them than it was before.²¹ Yes, it would be better for them to have never known the right way than to know it and to turn away from the holy teaching that was given to them.²² What they did is like this true saying: [“A dog goes back to what it has thrown up.”](#) and, “After a pig is washed, it goes back and rolls in the mud.”

Life Lessons

2 Peter 3:1–18

Situation

Peter reminded his readers that God would faithfully keep every promise.

Observation

Christ's coming should motivate all Believers to live in anticipation of his arrival.

Inspiration

The late Francis Schaeffer asked the right question, "How Should We Then Live?" What ought to occupy our time? What do we do between now and when He returns? ...

Let me interject a telltale sign of heresy: a ministry that emphasizes the Lord's return but does not, with equal gusto, emphasize a godly life. Mark it down. Whoever highlights the coming of Christ is also responsible to teach the importance of a pure life. Why not? They mesh together, like teeth in gears. If indeed He is coming again, there is one thing we want to have in place—personal purity....

"At the appointed time, the end shall be." One of these days will be "the appointed time." You are ready, aren't you? (From *Growing Deep in the Christian Life* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Do you look forward to Christ's return? Choose actions you would want him to see and words you would want him to hear. Make decisions he would

approve.

Exploration

Christ's Second Coming—[Matthew 24:27](#); [26:64](#);
[Luke 12:40](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:2](#), [23](#); [Hebrews 9:28](#);
[James 5:8](#); [1 John 2:28](#); [Revelation 16:15](#).

Jesus Will Come Again

My friends, this is the second letter I have written you to help your honest minds remember. ²I want you to think about the words the holy prophets spoke in the past, and remember the command our Lord and Savior gave us through your apostles. ³It is most important for you to understand what will happen in the last days. People will laugh at you. They will live doing the evil things they want to do. ⁴They will say, “Jesus promised to come again. Where is he? Our fathers have died, but the world continues the way it has been since it was made.” ⁵But they do not want to remember what happened long ago. By the word of God heaven was made, and the earth was made from water and with water. ⁶Then the world was flooded and destroyed with water. ⁷And that same word of God is keeping heaven and earth that we now have in order to be destroyed by fire. They are being kept for the Judgment Day and the destruction of all who are against God.

⁸But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: To the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow in doing what he promised—the way some people understand slowness. But God is being patient with you. He does not want anyone to be lost, but he wants all people to change their hearts and lives.

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The skies will disappear with a loud noise. Everything in them will be

destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be burned up.¹¹ In that way everything will be destroyed. So what kind of people should you be? You should live holy lives and serve God,¹² as you wait for and look forward to the coming of the day of God. When that day comes, the skies will be destroyed with fire, and everything in them will melt with heat.¹³ But God made a promise to us, and we are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth where goodness lives.

¹⁴Dear friends, since you are waiting for this to happen, do your best to be without sin and without fault. Try to be at peace with God.¹⁵ Remember that we are saved because our Lord is patient. Our dear brother Paul told you the same thing when he wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him.¹⁶ He writes about this in all his letters. Some things in Paul's letters are hard to understand, and people who are ignorant and weak in faith explain these things falsely. They also falsely explain the other Scriptures, but they are destroying themselves by doing this.

¹⁷Dear friends, since you already know about this, be careful. Do not let those evil people lead you away by the wrong they do. Be careful so you will not fall from your strong faith.¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Glory be to him now and forever! Amen.

brothers and sisters Although the Greek text reads “brothers” here and throughout this book, Peter’s words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

Sodom and Gomorrah Two cities God destroyed because the people were so evil.

“A dog ... up” Quotation from Proverbs 26:11.

will be burned up Many Greek copies say, “will be found.” One copy says, “will disappear.”

1 John

Introduction

Tolerance. A prized virtue today. The ability to be understanding of those with whom you differ is a sign of sophistication. Jesus, too, was a champion of tolerance:

- Tolerant of the disciples when they doubted
- Tolerant of the crowds when they misunderstood
- Tolerant of us when we fall

But there is one area where Jesus was intolerant. There was one area where he was unindulgent and dogmatic. Were he to share his opinion today, he would be accused of being narrow, biased, one-sided, even bigoted.

But as far as he was concerned, when it comes to salvation, there aren't several roads ... there is only one road. There aren't several ways ... there is only one way ... there aren't several paths ... there is only one path. And that path is Jesus himself.

That is why it is so hard for people to believe in Jesus. It's much easier to consider him one of several options rather than *the* option. But such a philosophy is no option. Jesus closed that door. Jesus positioned himself as the peerless Savior of the world. In defining who he is, Jesus is bold and unapologetic.

His disciple John was equally firm.

First John was written to dispel doubts about Jesus. False teachers had entered the church, denying the incarnation of Christ. John steps up to the bench and makes his defense. John knew him, walked with him, lived with him. He saw him heal. He heard his words. John had been to the empty tomb and he knew ... Jesus is not one of many options. He is the

only option or nothing at all.

There are times to be tolerant. And there are times to take a stand for truth. In this letter, John takes a stand.

About This Book

Author:

John

Date Written:

c. A.D. 90

Key Themes:

-
- Our obedience in faith keeps us in fellowship with God.
- God will forgive our sins.
- We can measure any truth by where it places Jesus in relation to God.
- God's love and Christ's victory are the Christian's inheritance.

Key Verse:

“We announce to you what we have seen and heard, because we want you also to have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with God the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” ([1 John 1:3](#)).

Contents:

1. Fellowship with God [1:1–2:14](#)
2. Beware of Enemies [2:15–3:10](#)

3. The Command to Love [3:11–4:21](#)
4. Victory in Jesus [5:1–21](#)

Life Lessons

1 John 1:1–10

Situation

Because John was Jesus' friend, he could speak with authority about maintaining true fellowship with God—and what hinders it!

Observation

Living in fellowship with God means that we will have joy. Yet, our pride causes us to forfeit that joy when we hide our own sin. We cannot be in a right relationship with God unless we live humbly, honestly, and dependently on him.

Inspiration

“If we confess our sins ...” The biggest word in Scriptures just might be that two letter one, *if*. For confessing sins—admitting failure—is exactly what prisoners of pride refuse to do.

“Well, I may not be perfect, but I’m better than Hitler and certainly kinder than Idi Amin!”

“Me a sinner? Oh, sure, I get rowdy every so often, but I’m a pretty good ol’ boy.”

“Listen, I’m just as good as the next guy. I pay my taxes. I coach the Little League team. I even make donations to Red Cross. Why, God’s probably proud to have someone like me on his team.”

Justification. Rationalization. Comparison. These are the tools of the jailbird. They sound good. They sound familiar. They even sound American. But in the kingdom, they sound hollow....

When you get to the point of sorrow for your sins, when you admit that you have no other option but to cast all your cares on him, and when there is truly no other one that you can call, then cast all your cares on him, for he is waiting. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

What activities in your life need forgiveness? Confess them. Then remove every sinful activity from your life.

Exploration

Confessing Sin—[2 Chronicles 7:14](#); [Psalm 32:5](#); [Mark 1:5](#).

We write you now about what has always existed, which we have heard, we have seen with our own eyes, we have looked at, and we have touched with our hands. We write to you about the [Word](#) that gives life.²He who gives life was shown to us. We saw him and can give proof about it. And now we announce to you that he has life that continues forever. He was with God the Father and was shown to us.³We announce to you what we have seen and heard, because we want you also to have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with God the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.⁴We write this to you so you can be full of joy with us.

God Forgives Our Sins

⁵Here is the message we have heard from Christ and now announce to you: God is [light](#), and in him there is no darkness at all.⁶So if we say we have fellowship with God, but we continue living in darkness, we are liars and do not follow the truth.⁷But if we live in the light, as God is in the light, we can share fellowship with each other. Then the blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from every sin.

⁸If we say we have no sin, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth is not in us.⁹But if we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins, because we can trust God to do what is right. He will cleanse us from all the wrongs we have done.¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and we do not accept

God's teaching.

Life Lessons

1 John 2:1-29

Situation

John advised that Christians should have integrity. Obedience and repentance are the marks of those who love God.

Observation

Christians avoid the temptation to compromise their standards. If we fail, however, Jesus stands ready to forgive.

Inspiration

Adam Clarke was an assistant in a dry goods store, selling silks and satins to a cultured clientele. One day, his employer suggested to him that he try stretching the silk as he measured it out; this would increase sales and profits, and also increase Adam's value to the company. Young Clarke straightened up from his work, faced his boss courageously, and said, "Sir, your silk may stretch, but my conscience won't."

Unfortunately, some of us are not so honest. The book *The Day America Told the Truth* reported the following: 91 percent of those surveyed admitted to lying about something on a regular basis; 50 percent procrastinate, in effect doing nothing, one full day out of every five; and 74 percent steal from those who will not miss it. Examples of such stealing include taking office supplies from work, long lunches, extravagant meals, accepting gifts from customers, ignoring copyright laws, claiming improper

deductions, *etc.* But the man of integrity avoids all such temptations. He is ethically righteous. (From *A Dad's Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent)

Application

Is there a situation in which you have not been completely honest? Admit to God that you have sinned and ask for his forgiveness. Then seek the forgiveness of the person you have deceived and take steps to make things right. Pray that God would keep you honest.

Exploration

Honesty—[Psalm 51:6](#); [Proverbs 12:22](#); [Romans 9:1](#); [Colossians 3:9](#).

Jesus Is Our Helper

My dear children, I write this letter to you so you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have a helper in the presence of the Father—Jesus Christ, the One who does what is right.²He is the way our sins are taken away, and not only our sins but the sins of all people.

³We can be sure that we know God if we obey his commands.⁴Anyone who says, “I know God,” but does not obey God’s commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.⁵But if someone obeys God’s teaching, then in that person God’s love has truly reached its goal. This is how we can be sure we are living in God:⁶Whoever says that he lives in God must live as Jesus lived.

The Command to Love Others

⁷My dear friends, I am not writing a new command to you but an old command you have had from the beginning. It is the teaching you have already heard.⁸But also I am writing a new command to you, and you can see its truth in Jesus and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

⁹Anyone who says, “I am in the [light](#),” but hates a [brother or sister](#), is still in the darkness.¹⁰Whoever loves a brother or

sister lives in the light and will not cause anyone to stumble in his faith. ¹¹But whoever hates a brother or sister is in darkness, lives in darkness, and does not know where to go, because the darkness has made that person blind.

¹²I write to you, dear children,
because your sins are forgiven through Christ.

¹³I write to you, parents,
because you know the One who existed from the beginning.

I write to you, young people,
because you have defeated the Evil One.

¹⁴I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.

I write to you, parents,
because you know the One who existed from the beginning.

I write to you, young people,
because you are strong;
the teaching of God lives in you,
and you have defeated the Evil One.

¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you. ¹⁶These are the ways of the world: wanting to please our sinful selves, wanting the sinful things we see, and being too proud of what we have. None of these come from the Father, but all of them come from the world. ¹⁷The world and everything that people want in it are passing away, but the person who does what God wants lives forever.

Reject the Enemies of Christ

¹⁸My dear children, these are the last days. You have heard that the enemy of Christ is coming, and now many enemies of Christ are already here. This is how we know that these are the last days. ¹⁹These enemies of Christ were in our fellowship, but they left us. They never really belonged to us; if they had been a part of us, they would have stayed with us. But they left, and this shows that none of them really belonged to us.

²⁰You have the [gift](#) that the Holy One gave you, so you all know the truth. ²¹I do not write to you because you do not know the truth but because you do know the truth. And you know that no lie comes from the truth.

²²Who is the liar? It is the person who does not accept Jesus as the Christ. This is the enemy of Christ: the person who does not accept the Father and his Son. ²³Whoever does not accept the Son does not have the Father. But whoever confesses the Son has the Father, too.

²⁴Be sure you continue to follow the teaching you heard from the beginning. If you continue to follow what you heard from the beginning, you will stay in the Son and in the Father.

²⁵And this is what the Son promised to us—life forever.

²⁶I am writing this letter about those people who are trying to lead you the wrong way. ²⁷Christ gave you a special gift that is still in you, so you do not need any other teacher. His gift teaches you about everything, and it is true, not false. So continue to live in Christ, as his gift taught you.

²⁸Yes, my dear children, live in him so that when Christ comes back, we can be without fear and not be ashamed in his presence. ²⁹If you know that Christ is all that is right, you know

that all who do right are God's children.

Life Lessons

1 John 3:1–24

Situation

John wrote that Christians should become more like Jesus. Their actions should prove that they unite in love as the church of God.

Observation

Believers' future transformation will take place when we see him as he is.

Inspiration

Why do Jesus and his angels rejoice over one repenting sinner? Can they see something we can't? Do they know something we don't? Absolutely. They know what heaven holds. They've seen the table, and they've heard the music, and they can't wait to see your face when you arrive. Better still, they can't wait to see you.

When you arrive and enter the party, something wonderful will happen. A final transformation will occur. You will be just like Jesus. Drink deeply from [1 John 3:2](#): “We have not yet been shown what we will be in the future. But we know that when Christ comes again, *we will be like him*” (italics mine).

Of all the blessings of heaven, one of the greatest will be you! You will be God's magnum opus, his work of art. The angels will gasp. God's work will be completed. At last, you will have a heart like his.

You will love with a perfect love.

You will worship with a radiant face.

You'll hear each word God speaks.

Your heart will be pure, your words will be like jewels, your thoughts will be like treasures.

You will be just like Jesus. You will, at long last, have a heart like his. Envision the heart of Jesus and you'll be envisioning your own. Guiltless. Fearless. Thrilled and joyous. Tirelessly worshiping. Flawlessly discerning. As the mountain stream is pristine and endless, so will be your heart. You will be like him.

And if that were not enough, everyone else will be like him as well. "Heaven is the perfect place for people made perfect." Heaven is populated by those who let God change them. Arguments will cease, for jealousy won't exist. Suspicions won't surface, for there will be no secrets. Every sin is gone. Every insecurity is forgotten. Every fear is past. Pure wheat. No weeds. Pure gold. No alloy. Pure love. No lust. Pure hope. No fear. No wonder the angels rejoice when one sinner repents; they know another work of art will soon grace the gallery of God. They know what heaven holds. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

Do you really believe that you will be a blessing in heaven? Make your own list of the types of transformations you'll be looking forward to. Thank God that you will be perfect then, and strive to live like it now.

Exploration

Transformation—[Romans 8:18–25](#); [2 Corinthians 3:18](#); [4:16–18](#); [2 Peter 1:3–4](#).

We Are God's Children

The Father has loved us so much that we are called children of God. And we really are his children. The reason the people in the world do not know us is that they have not known him.

²Dear friends, now we are children of God, and we have not yet been shown what we will be in the future. But we know that when Christ comes again, we will be like him, because we will see him as he really is. ³Christ is pure, and all who have this hope in Christ keep themselves pure like Christ.

⁴The person who sins breaks God's law. Yes, sin is living against God's law. ⁵You know that Christ came to take away sins and that there is no sin in Christ. ⁶So anyone who lives in Christ does not go on sinning. Anyone who goes on sinning has never really understood Christ and has never known him.

⁷Dear children, do not let anyone lead you the wrong way. Christ is all that is right. So to be like Christ a person must do what is right. ⁸The devil has been sinning since the beginning, so anyone who continues to sin belongs to the devil. The Son of God came for this purpose: to destroy the devil's work.

⁹Those who are God's children do not continue sinning, because the new life from God remains in them. They are not able to go on sinning, because they have become children of God. ¹⁰So we can see who God's children are and who the devil's children are: Those who do not do what is right are not God's children, and those who do not love their brothers and

sisters are not God's children.

We Must Love Each Other

¹¹This is the teaching you have heard from the beginning: We must love each other. ¹²Do not be like Cain who belonged to the Evil One and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because the things Cain did were evil, and the things his brother did were good.

¹³Brothers and sisters, do not be surprised when the people of the world hate you. ¹⁴We know we have left death and have come into life because we love each other. Whoever does not love is still dead. ¹⁵[Everyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer](#), and you know that no murderers have eternal life in them. ¹⁶This is how we know what real love is: Jesus gave his life for us. So we should give our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷Suppose someone has enough to live and sees a brother or sister in need, but does not help. Then God's love is not living in that person. ¹⁸My children, we should love people not only with words and talk, but by our actions and true caring.

¹⁹⁻²⁰This is the way we know that we belong to the way of truth. When our hearts make us feel guilty, we can still have peace before God. God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹My dear friends, if our hearts do not make us feel guilty, we can come without fear into God's presence. ²²And God gives us what we ask for because we obey God's commands and do what pleases him. ²³This is what God commands: that we believe in his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love each other, just as he commanded. ²⁴The people who

obey God's commands live in God, and God lives in them. We know that God lives in us because of the Spirit God gave us.

Life Lessons

1 John 4:1–5:21

Situation

John reminded Believers to reject the lies of false teachers. He also told them that God illustrates perfect love to us.

Observation

Because of God's self-sacrificing love for us, we should love him and love others.

Inspiration

We aren't always sure ourselves what we mean when we use the term "love." That word has become one of the most widely misused words in our language. We use the word "love" to describe the basest as well as the most exalted of human relationships. We say we "love" to travel, we "love" to eat chocolate cake, we "love" our new car, or the pattern in the wallpaper in our home. Why, we even say we "love" our neighbors—but most of us don't do much more than just say it and let it go at that! No wonder we don't have a very clear idea of what the Bible means when it says: "God is Love."

Don't make the mistake of thinking that because God is Love that everything is going to be sweet, beautiful, and happy and that no one will be punished for his sins. God's holiness demands that all sin be punished, but God's love provides the plan and way of redemption for sinful man. God's love is the cross of Jesus, by which man can have forgiveness and

cleansing. It was the love of God that sent Jesus Christ to the cross!

Never question God's great love, for it is as unchangeable a part of God as His holiness. No matter how terrible your sins, God loves you. Were it not for the love of God, none of us would ever have a chance in the future life. But God is Love and his love for us is everlasting! (From *Peace with God* by Billy Graham)

Application

Who is one person you have difficulty loving? What three steps can you take this week to show love to that person? Pray that God would give you a loving heart; then show your love.

Exploration

Loving Others—[John 15:9–13](#); [Galatians 5:6, 13](#); [Ephesians 5:1](#); [Colossians 3:12](#); [1 Peter 1:22](#); [1 John 3:11–24](#).

Warning Against False Teachers

My dear friends, many false prophets have gone out into the world. So do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God. ²This is how you can know God's Spirit: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ came to earth as a human is from God. ³And every spirit who refuses to say this about Jesus is not from God. It is the spirit of the enemy of Christ, which you have heard is coming, and now he is already in the world.

⁴My dear children, you belong to God and have defeated them; because God's Spirit, who is in you, is greater than the devil, who is in the world. ⁵And they belong to the world, so what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶But we belong to God, and those who know God listen to us. But those who are not from God do not listen to us. That is how we know the Spirit that is true and the spirit that is false.

Love Comes from God

⁷Dear friends, we should love each other, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has become God's child and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹This is how God showed his love to us: He sent his one and only Son into the world so that we could

have life through him. ¹⁰This is what real love is: It is not our love for God; it is God's love for us in sending his Son to be the way to take away our sins.

¹¹Dear friends, if God loved us that much we also should love each other. ¹²No one has ever seen God, but if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is made perfect in us.

¹³We know that we live in God and he lives in us, because he gave us his Spirit. ¹⁴We have seen and can testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God has God living inside, and that person lives in God. ¹⁶And so we know the love that God has for us, and we trust that love.

God is love. Those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. ¹⁷This is how love is made perfect in us: that we can be without fear on the day God judges us, because in this world we are like him. ¹⁸Where God's love is, there is no fear, because God's perfect love drives out fear. It is punishment that makes a person fear, so love is not made perfect in the person who fears.

¹⁹We love because God first loved us. ²⁰If people say, "I love God," but hate their brothers or sisters, they are liars. Those who do not love their brothers and sisters, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have never seen.

²¹And God gave us this command: Those who love God must also love their brothers and sisters.

Faith in the Son of God

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is God's child, and whoever loves the Father also loves the Father's children. ²This is how we know we love God's children: when we love God and obey his commands. ³Loving God means obeying his commands. And God's commands are not too hard for us, ⁴because everyone who is a child of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world—our faith. ⁵So the one who wins against the world is the person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

⁶Jesus Christ is the One who came by [water](#) and [blood](#). He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And the Spirit says that this is true, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷So there are three witnesses that tell us about Jesus: ⁸the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three witnesses agree. ⁹We believe people when they say something is true. But what God says is more important, and he has told us the truth about his own Son. ¹⁰Anyone who believes in the Son of God has the truth that God told us. Anyone who does not believe makes God a liar, because that person does not believe what God told us about his Son. ¹¹This is what God told us: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life, but whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

We Have Eternal Life Now

¹³I write this letter to you who believe in the Son of God so you will know you have eternal life. ¹⁴And this is the boldness we have in God's presence: that if we ask God for anything that agrees with what he wants, he hears us. ¹⁵If we know he hears us every time we ask him, we know we have what we ask from him.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: True God, Our Source

Should a man see only popularity, he becomes a mirror, reflecting whatever needs to be reflected to gain acceptance... . He is everyone and no one.

Should a man see only power, he becomes a wolf—prowling, hunting, and stalking the elusive game. Recognition is his prey and people are his prizes. His quest is endless... . As a result, he who sees only power is degraded to an animal, an insatiable scavenger, controlled not by a will from within, but by luring from without.

Should a man see only pleasure, he becomes a carnival thrill-seeker, alive only in bright lights, wild rides, and titillating entertainment. With lustful fever he races from ride to ride, satisfying his insatiable passion for sensations only long enough to look for another... .

Seekers of popularity, power, and pleasure. The end result is the same: painful unfulfillment.

Only in seeking his Maker does a man truly become man. For in seeing his Creator man catches a glimpse of what he was intended to be. He who would

see his God would then see the reason for death and the purpose of time. Destiny? Tomorrow? Truth? All are questions within the reach of the man who knows his source. . . . (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

¹⁶If anyone sees a brother or sister sinning (sin that does not lead to eternal death), that person should pray, and God will give the sinner life. I am talking about people whose sin does not lead to eternal death. There is sin that leads to death. I do not mean that a person should pray about that sin. ¹⁷Doing wrong is always sin, but there is sin that does not lead to eternal death.

¹⁸We know that those who are God's children do not continue to sin. The Son of God keeps them safe, and the Evil One cannot touch them. ¹⁹We know that we belong to God, but the Evil One controls the whole world. ²⁰We also know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we can know the True One. And our lives are in the True One and in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and the eternal life.

²¹So, dear children, keep yourselves away from gods.

Word The Greek word is “logos,” meaning any kind of communication. Here, it means Christ, who was the way God told people about himself.

light Here, it is used as a symbol of God’s goodness or truth.

brother or sister Although the Greek text says “brother” here and throughout this book, the writer’s words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

gift This might mean the Holy Spirit, or it might mean teaching or truth as in verse [24](#).

Everyone ... murderer If one person hates a brother or sister, then in the heart that person has killed that brother or sister. Jesus taught about this sin to his followers ([Matthew 5:21–26](#)).

water This probably means the water of Jesus’ baptism.

blood This probably means the blood of Jesus’ death.

[The Book of 2 John](#)

Introduction

The single most difficult pursuit is truth and love.

That sentence is grammatically correct. I know every English teacher wanted to pluralize it to read: The most difficult pursuits are those of truth and love. But that's not what I meant to say.

True, love is a difficult pursuit.

Correct, truth is a tough one, too.

But put them together, pursue truth and love at the same time, and hang on, baby, you're in for the ride of your life.

But that's the task of the Christian. Love in truth. Truth in love. Never one at the expense of the other. Never the embrace of love without the torch of truth. Never the heat of truth without the warmth of love.

Never would be easier if we could choose between the two, but we can't. So John, in this second letter, calls for a hybrid.

"I love all of you in the truth, and all those who know the truth love you. We love you because of the truth that lives in us and will be with us forever. Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, will be with us in truth and love" (vv. [2-3](#)).

Truth and love. Love and truth. Never one without the other. To pursue both is our singular task.

About This Book

Author:

John

Date Written:

C. A.D. 90

Key Themes:

-
- Love is an ultimate force, the essence of God and his command to us.
- The truth of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the gospel.
- Those who do not teach the truth do serious harm and should be treated seriously.

Key Verse:

“Anyone who goes beyond Christ’s teaching and does not continue to follow only his teaching does not have God. But whoever continues to follow the teaching of Christ has both the Father and the Son” ([2 John 9](#)).

Contents:

1. Truth and Love [1–6](#)
2. False Teachers [7–13](#)

¹From the [Elder](#).

To the chosen [lady](#) and her children:

I love all of you in the [truth](#), and all those who know the truth love you. ²We love you because of the truth that lives in us and will be with us forever.

³Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, will be with us in truth and love.

⁴I was very happy to learn that some of your children are following the way of truth, as the Father commanded us. ⁵And now, dear lady, this is not a new command but is the same command we have had from the beginning. I ask you that we all love each other. ⁶And love means living the way God commanded us to live. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is this: Live a life of love.

⁷Many false teachers are in the world now who do not confess that Jesus Christ came to earth as a human. Anyone who does not confess this is a false teacher and an enemy of Christ. ⁸Be careful yourselves that you do not lose everything you have worked for, but that you receive your full reward.

⁹Anyone who goes beyond Christ's teaching and does not continue to follow only his teaching does not have God. But whoever continues to follow the teaching of Christ has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If someone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not welcome or accept that person into your house. ¹¹If you welcome such a person, you share in the evil work.

¹²I have many things to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to come to you and talk face to face so we can be full of joy. ¹³The children of your chosen [sister](#) greet you.

Life Lessons

2 John 1–13

Situation

John exhorted Christians to live in a way that pleased God and to be aware of those who did not speak God's truth.

Observation

God's Word and God's Spirit provide what we need to detect false teachers.

Inspiration

The devil is declared by Scriptures to be an enemy of God and of all good men. Because he is a spirit he is able to "walk up and down in the earth" at his pleasure.

While we must not underestimate the strength of our foe, we must at the same time recognize that we need not live in constant fear of him! If he cannot make skeptics of us he will make us devil-conscious and thus throw a permanent shadow across our lives, for there is but a hairline between truth and superstition.

We should learn the truth about the enemy, but we must stand bravely against every superstitious notion he would introduce about himself. The truth will set us free but superstition will enslave us!

... The best way to keep the enemy out is to keep Christ in! The sheep need not be terrified by the wolf; they have but to stay close to the shepherd. The instructed Christian whose faculties have been

developed by the Word and the Spirit will practice the presence of God moment by moment! (From *Renewed Day by Day* by A. W. Tozer)

Application

In order to resist Satan and his false teachers, Christians must know God's Word and depend on the Spirit for discernment. Study the Scriptures daily and become involved in a Bible study with other Christians through your local church.

Exploration

Truth—[Psalm 25:5](#); [51:6](#); [119:160](#); [John 14:6](#); [Colossians 1:5–6](#); [2 Timothy 2:15](#); [2 Peter 1:12](#).

Elder “Elder” means an older person. It can also mean a special leader in the church (as in [Titus 1:5](#)).

lady This might mean a woman, or in this letter it might mean a church. If it is a church, then “her children” would be the people of the church.

truth The truth or “Good News” about Jesus Christ that joins all believers together.

sister Sister of the “lady” in verse [1](#). This might be another woman or another church.

[The Book of 3 John](#)

Introduction

It's like finding a postcard written from one friend to another. The writer is John; the recipient is Gaius.

John we know. We met him when he was a young man in the shadow of John the Baptist. We saw him as he stood in the shadow of the cross. We now read him as he writes as the elder statesman of the church.

He writes to Gaius. Whoever Gaius was, he had a special place in John's heart. John is writing to thank him for his hospitality. Word was out that Gaius kept his door open and pantry stocked for traveling missionaries, and John is writing to commend him.

His words are not so kind, however, for Diotrephes. Apparently, he was the opposite of Gaius. Where Gaius was accepting, Diotrephes was judgmental. Where Gaius was a servant, Diotrephes was demanding.

In a way, it's like reading a postcard that wasn't intended for you. But in another, it's like getting a personal letter from John. By the way, are you more like Gaius or Diotrephes? Or better, do you love people or love the limelight?

If John were writing a note to you, what would he say?

About This Book

Author:

John

Date Written:

c. A.D. 90

Key Themes:

-
- When we help ministers of the gospel we become part of their ministry.
- We need to be generous toward one another.
- Personal pride has no place in ministry.

Key Verse:

“My dear friend, do not follow what is bad; follow what is good. The one who does good belongs to God. But the one who does evil has never known God” ([3 John 11](#)).

Contents:

1. Gaius [1-8](#)
2. Diotrephes [9-14](#)

¹From the [Elder](#).

To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the [truth](#):

²My dear friend, I know your soul is doing fine, and I pray that you are doing well in every way and that your health is good. ³I was very happy when some [brothers and sisters](#) came and told me about the truth in your life and how you are following the way of truth. ⁴Nothing gives me greater joy than to hear that my children are following the way of truth.

⁵My dear friend, it is good that you help the brothers and sisters, even those you do not know. ⁶They told the church about your love. Please help them to continue their trip in a way worthy of God. ⁷They started out in service to Christ, and they have been accepting nothing from nonbelievers. ⁸So we should help such people; when we do, we share in their work for the truth.

⁹I wrote something to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be their leader, will not listen to us. ¹⁰So if I come, I will talk about what Diotrephes is doing, about how he lies and says evil things about us. But more than that, he refuses to accept the other brothers and sisters; he even stops those who do want to accept them and puts them out of the church.

¹¹My dear friend, do not follow what is bad; follow what is good. The one who does good belongs to God. But the one who does evil has never known God.

¹²Everyone says good things about Demetrius, and the truth agrees with what they say. We also speak well of him, and you know what we say is true.

¹³I have many things I want to write you, but I do not want to use pen and ink. ¹⁴I hope to see you soon and talk face to face. ¹⁵Peace to you. The friends here greet you. Please greet

each friend there by name.

Life Lessons

3 John 1–15

Situation

In the early church, Christians showed hospitality to traveling prophets, teachers, and evangelists. Gaius, as a church elder, was exemplary in providing hospitality and walking in truth.

Observation

Believers should live by appropriate standards—be faithful to the truth and show hospitality to fellow Believers, especially teachers. John cites Gaius and Demetrius as good examples and warns against the ways of Diotrephes.

Inspiration

The truth was in Gaius, and Gaius walked in the truth. If the first had not been the case, the second could never have occurred; and if the second could not have been said of him the first would have been a mere pretense. Truth must enter into the soul, penetrate and saturate it, or else it is of no value....

Be it ours today, O gracious Spirit, to be ruled and governed by Thy divine authority, so that nothing false or sinful may reign in our hearts. (From *Morning and Evening* by Charles H. Spurgeon)

Application

How hospitable are you? Do you feel as if you can't entertain much because of poor circumstances? Fellowship with other Christians doesn't require

silver, china, and fine dining. During the next three months, look for ways you can help other Christians, especially those who are traveling.

Exploration

Hospitality—[Mark 9:41](#); [Romans 12:13](#); [16:23](#); [2 Timothy 1:16–18](#); [1 Peter 4:9–11](#); [James 2:15–16](#).

Elder “Elder” means an older person. It can also mean a special leader in the church (as in [Titus 1:5](#)).

truth The truth or “Good News” about Jesus Christ that joins all believers together.

brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “brothers” here and throughout this book, the writer’s words were meant for the entire church, including men and women.

[The Book of Jude](#)

Introduction

A redwood tree fell in a California forest. Four hundred years old.

It wasn't destroyed by lightning. Storms had come and gone, but the tree stood. It wasn't felled by winds. Bent by their force, but never uprooted. The tree didn't fall to fire. It had stood when others collapsed.

What destroyed the redwood?

Insects. Termites devoured it from within. It had stood for four centuries against the elements from without, but collapsed because of an attack within.

Jude warns that the same can happen to the church.

He wanted to write “about the salvation we all share” (v. [3](#)).

But he felt compelled to address a more somber issue—the danger of false teachers.

Apparently, some had entered the church (v. [8](#)). They were not students of the Word but, rather, promoters of sexual sin. They used God's grace as a license for passion (v. [4](#)). The only solution? “Fight hard for the faith that was given the holy people of God once and for all time” (v. [3](#)).

Jude is urgent in his warning. What destroyed the redwood can destroy a church. But he is equally urgent in his encouragement. “God is strong,” Jude concludes, “and can help you not to fall” (v. [24](#)).

Can God really keep you from falling? To answer that, go to another tree on a barren hill. A tree older than time. A tree which covers the mistakes of your past and the problems of your future. Be assured—that tree will never fall.

About This Book

Author:

Jude

Date Written:

C. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

-
- Each Christian should feel a responsibility to defend the truth.
- Stand against false teachers when you recognize them.
- Trust God to give you the strength and awareness to represent him in the world.

Key Verse:

“God is strong and can help you not to fall. He can bring you before his glory without any wrong in you and can give you great joy” ([Jude 24](#)).

Contents:

1. Recognizing False Teachers [1–16](#)
2. Standing Against False Teachers [17–25](#)

Life Lessons

Jude 1–25

Situation

Jude warned Jewish Christians about false teachers and wicked people who found their way into the church. These people taught that because God's grace was free, behavior didn't matter. Jude reminds Believers of the punishment immoral people receive.

Observation

Some people claim to love God but don't obey him. Be careful that disobedience does not create a wedge between you and God.

Inspiration

According to Gallup surveys, confirmed by other polls taken over the past fifteen years, 33 percent of all Americans over age eighteen indicate they are evangelical or "born again" Christians. That translates into 59 million Christians, or one in every three adults, who experienced a turning point in their lives as they made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

This information should grip us with terror. It means that the greatest revival in history has so far been impotent to change society. It's *revival* without *reformation*. It's a revival which left the country floundering in spiritual ignorance. It's a change in *belief* without a corresponding change in *behavior*...

How did the building blocks of the gospel become

glued together with the cement of self-centeredness? The American gospel has evolved into a gospel of addition without subtraction. It is the belief that we can add Christ to our lives, but not subtract sin. It is a change in belief without a change in behavior. It is a spiritual experience without any cultural impact. It is revival without reformation, without repentance....

The *proof* of religious conversion is to demonstrate that we have both added a relationship with Christ and that we have subtracted sin (repentance). And we multiply proof to a weary world by what we do—our deeds, our obedience. What we do must confirm what we say. Our deeds are the proof of our repentance....

A changed life is one that has added Christ and subtracted sin, that attracts a world weary of worn-out words. Obedience is the proof. (From *Walking with Christ in the Details of Life* by Patrick Morley)

Application

You may be great at obeying some commands of God but lax in obeying others. Which biblical teachings do you struggle to obey? Help others who are struggling, and let them help you. Depend on God, who can help you stand firm.

Exploration

Grace and Sin—[Leviticus 19:2](#); [Romans 6](#); [2 Corinthians 7:1](#); [Galatians 5:13, 16–17](#); [6:7–8](#); [Hebrews 12:14](#); [2 Peter 2:1–2, 17–20](#); [3:11, 14, 17](#).

¹From Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James.

To all who have been called by God. God the Father loves you, and you have been kept safe in Jesus Christ:

²Mercy, peace, and love be yours richly.

God Will Punish Sinners

³Dear friends, I wanted very much to write you about the salvation we all share. But I felt the need to write you about something else: I want to encourage you to fight hard for the faith that was given the holy people of God once and for all time. ⁴Some people have secretly entered your group. Long ago the prophets wrote about these people who will be judged guilty. They are against God and have changed the grace of our God into a reason for sexual sin. They also refuse to accept Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord.

⁵I want to remind you of some things you already know: Remember that the Lord saved his people by bringing them out of the land of Egypt. But later he destroyed all those who did not believe. ⁶And remember the angels who did not keep their place of power but left their proper home. The Lord has kept these angels in darkness, bound with everlasting chains, to be judged on the great day. ⁷Also remember the cities of [Sodom and Gomorrah](#) and the other towns around them. In the same way they were full of sexual sin and people who desired sexual relations that God does not allow. They suffer the punishment

of eternal fire, as an example for all to see.

⁸It is the same with these people who have entered your group. They are guided by dreams and make themselves filthy with sin. They reject God's authority and speak against the angels. ⁹Not even the [archangel](#) Michael, when he argued with the devil about who would have the body of Moses, dared to judge the devil guilty. Instead, he said, "The Lord punish you."

¹⁰But these people speak against things they do not understand. And what they do know, by feeling, as dumb animals know things, are the very things that destroy them. ¹¹It will be terrible for them. They have followed the way of Cain, and for money they have given themselves to doing the wrong that Balaam did. They have fought against God as Korah did, and like Korah, they surely will be destroyed. ¹²They are like dirty spots in your special Christian meals you share. They eat with you and have no fear, caring only for themselves. They are clouds without rain, which the wind blows around. They are autumn trees without fruit that are pulled out of the ground. So they are twice dead. ¹³They are like wild waves of the sea, tossing up their own shameful actions like foam. They are like stars that wander in the sky. A place in the blackest darkness has been kept for them forever.

¹⁴Enoch, the seventh descendant from Adam, said about these people: "Look, the Lord is coming with many thousands of his holy angels to ¹⁵judge every person. He is coming to punish all who are against God for all the evil they have done against him. And he will punish the sinners who are against God for all the evil they have said against him."

¹⁶These people complain and blame others, doing the evil things they want to do. They brag about themselves, and they

flatter others to get what they want.

A Warning and Things to Do

¹⁷Dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ said before. ¹⁸They said to you, “In the last times there will be people who laugh about God, following their own evil desires which are against God.” ¹⁹These are the people who divide you, people whose thoughts are only of this world, who do not have the Spirit.

²⁰But dear friends, use your most holy faith to build yourselves up, praying in the Holy Spirit. ²¹Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the Lord Jesus Christ with his mercy to give you life forever.

²²Show mercy to some people who have doubts. ²³Take others out of the fire, and save them. Show mercy mixed with fear to others, hating even their clothes which are dirty from sin.

Praise God

²⁴God is strong and can help you not to fall. He can bring you before his glory without any wrong in you and can give you great joy. ²⁵He is the only God, the One who saves us. To him be glory, greatness, power, and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord for all time past, now, and forever. Amen.

Sodom and Gomorrah Two cities God destroyed because they were so evil.

archangel The leader among God's angels or messengers.

Revelation

Introduction

An ancient legend tells of a general whose army was afraid to fight. The soldiers were frightened. The enemy was too strong. Its fortress was too high and weapons too mighty.

The king, however, was not afraid. He knew his men would win. How could he convince them?

He had an idea. He told his soldiers that he possessed a magical coin. A prophetic coin. A coin which would foretell the outcome of the battle. On one side was an eagle and on the other a bear. He would toss the coin. If it landed eagle-side up, they would win. If it landed with the bear up, they would lose.

The army was silent as the coin flipped in the air. Soldiers circled as it fell to the ground. They held their breath as they looked and shouted when they saw the eagle. The army would win.

Bolstered by the assurance of victory, the men marched against the castle and won.

It was only after the victory that the king showed the men the coin. The two sides were identical.

Though the story is fictional, the truth is reliable: assured victory empowers the army.

That may be the reason God gives us the Book of Revelation. In it he assures victory. We, the soldiers, are privileged a glimpse into the final battlefield. All hell breaks loose as all heaven comes forth. The two collide in the ultimate battle of good and evil. Left standing amidst the smoke and thunder is the Son of God. Jesus, born in a manger—now triumphant over Satan.

Satan is defeated. Christ is triumphant. And we, the

soldiers, are assured of victory.
Let us march.

About This Book

Author:

John

Date Written:

C. A.D. 95

Key Themes:

-
- God has a plan and a future for the world.
- God will be ultimately victorious over evil.
- There will be a final accounting for our faith and our lives.
- There is a better world in store.

Key Verse:

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, sadness, crying, or pain, because all the old ways are gone” ([Revelation 21:4](#)).

Contents:

1. The Seven Churches [1:1–3:22](#)
2. Images of Final Judgment [4:1–19:6](#)
3. Images of a New World [19:7–22:21](#)

Life Lessons

Revelation 1:1–20

Situation

John wrote Revelation to encourage Christians to resist the cult of emperor worship and to stand firm during persecution.

Observation

Jesus, the Mighty One, cares for us and stands with us. No matter what we face, he gives us his love and power.

Inspiration

As the Christian with the Bible in his hand surveys the world scene, he is aware that we do not worship an absentee God. He is aware that God is in the shadows of history and that He has a plan. The Christian is not to be disturbed by the chaos, violence, strife, bloodshed, and threat of war that fill the pages of our daily newspapers. We know that these things are the consequences of sin and greed. Every day we see a thousand evidences of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Every day as I read my newspaper I say: “The Bible is true.”

No matter how foreboding the future, the Christian knows the end of the story. We are heading toward a glorious climax. Every writer of the New Testament believes that “the best is yet to be.”

As John Baillie has said: “The Bible indicates that the future is in God’s hands. If it were in our hands, we would make a mess of it. The future is not in the

devil's hands, for then he would lead us to destruction. The future is not at the mercy of any historical determinism leading us blindly forward, for then life would be without meaning. But the future is in the hands of One who is preparing something better than the eye hath seen, or ear heard, or has entered into the heart of man to conceive." ... (From *Unto the Hills* by Billy Graham)

Application

God has told you he will destroy Satan and his works that oppose you. Do your actions prove that you believe him?

Exploration

Sovereignty—[Job 37:23](#); [Ezekiel 6:14](#); [Daniel 4:25](#); [Jude 4](#); [Revelation 19:16](#).

John Tells About This Book

This is the [revelation](#) of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to show his servants what must soon happen. And Jesus sent his angel to show it to his servant John,² who has told everything he has seen. It is the word of God; it is the message from Jesus Christ.³ Happy is the one who reads the words of God's message, and happy are the people who hear this message and do what is written in it. The time is near when all of this will happen.

Jesus' Message to the Churches

⁴From John.

To the seven churches in the country of Asia:

Grace and peace to you from the One who is and was and is coming, and from the seven spirits before his throne,⁵ and from Jesus Christ. Jesus is the faithful witness, the first among those raised from the dead. He is the ruler of the kings of the earth.

He is the One who loves us, who made us free from our sins with the blood of his death.⁶ He made us to be a kingdom of priests who serve God his Father. To Jesus Christ be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.

⁷Look, Jesus is coming with the clouds, and everyone will see him, even those who stabbed him. And all peoples of the

earth will cry loudly because of him. Yes, this will happen! Amen.

⁸The Lord God says, “I am the [Alpha and the Omega](#). I am the One who is and was and is coming. I am the Almighty.”

⁹I, John, am your brother. All of us share with Christ in suffering, in the kingdom, and in patience to continue. I was on the island of [Patmos](#), because I had preached the word of God and the message about Jesus. ¹⁰On the Lord’s day I was in the Spirit, and I heard a loud voice behind me that sounded like a trumpet. ¹¹The voice said, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.”

¹²I turned to see who was talking to me. When I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands ¹³and someone among the lampstands who was [“like a Son of Man.”](#) He was dressed in a long robe and had a gold band around his chest. ¹⁴His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like flames of fire. ¹⁵His feet were like bronze that glows hot in a furnace, and his voice was like the noise of flooding water. ¹⁶He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp double-edged sword came out of his mouth. He looked like the sun shining at its brightest time.

¹⁷When I saw him, I fell down at his feet like a dead man. He put his right hand on me and said, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸I am the One who lives; I was dead, but look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys to death and to the place of the dead. ¹⁹So write the things you see, what is now and what will happen later. ²⁰Here is the secret of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands: The seven lampstands are the seven

churches, and the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.

Life Lessons

Revelation 2:1–29

Situation

John commended various churches in Asia Minor regarding their faithfulness and fervor for God. He highlights the importance of applying God's Word and avoiding sin.

Observation

Believers remain faithful to the truth of God's Word by keeping their eyes on Jesus. Those who overcome will share in God's glory.

Inspiration

Good things take time before they're good...

Develop an attitude of trust. God can change situations; His name is Deliverer...

One of the most often-repeated commands in the Bible is to "wait on the Lord." Waiting on Him "grows you up"; it keeps your eyes off yourself and on Him; it gives you staying power...

John could have spent his time pacing that barren little beach, feeling bitter about what "they" did to him, and scanning the horizon every minute for a rescuer. But he didn't.

Quieted under the hand of God into a position of trust and receptivity, John received the most fabulous revelation of Jesus Christ and His future that any man has ever received, and as a result he wrote the Spirit-breathed book of Revelation.

Do you feel as if you're on a "Patmos" in your

life? Are you feeling caught and trapped? Settle down. Look up. Let God decide whether He will act according to One, Two, or Three. For you, it will be perfect... . (From *You Don't Have to Quit* by Anne and Ray Ortlund)

Application

Remember your joy and sense of achievement when you had a problem and you continued to work on it until it was solved? God wants to give you that same feeling of joy and fulfillment as you persevere in your Christian faith. Ask God to help you endure.

Exploration

Perseverance—[Romans 5:3–4](#); [Hebrews 12:1](#); [James. 1:3–4, 12](#); [2 Peter 1:5–9](#).

To the Church in Ephesus

“Write this to the angel of the church in Ephesus:

“The One who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands says this: ²I know what you do, how you work hard and never give up. I know you do not put up with the false teachings of evil people. You have tested those who say they are apostles but really are not, and you found they are liars. ³You have patience and have suffered troubles for my name and have not given up.

⁴“But I have this against you: You have left the love you had in the beginning. ⁵So remember where you were before you fell. Change your hearts and do what you did at first. If you do not change, I will come to you and will take away your lampstand from its place. ⁶But there is something you do that is right: You hate what the [Nicolaitans](#) do, as much as I.

⁷“Every person who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To those who win the victory I will give the right to eat the fruit from the tree of life, which is in the garden of God.

To the Church in Smyrna

⁸“Write this to the angel of the church in Smyrna:

“The One who is the First and the Last, who died and came

to life again, says this: ⁹I know your troubles and that you are poor, but really you are rich! I know the bad things some people say about you. They say they are Jews, but they are not true Jews. They are a synagogue that belongs to Satan. ¹⁰Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer for ten days. But be faithful, even if you have to die, and I will give you the crown of life.

¹¹“Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. Those who win the victory will not be hurt by the second death.

To the Church in Pergamum

¹²“Write this to the angel of the church in Pergamum:

“The One who has the sharp, double-edged sword says this: ¹³I know where you live. It is where Satan has his throne. But you are true to me. You did not refuse to tell about your faith in me even during the time of Antipas, my faithful witness who was killed in your city, where Satan lives.

¹⁴“But I have a few things against you: You have some there who follow the teaching of Balaam. He taught Balak how to cause the people of Israel to sin by eating food offered to idols and by taking part in sexual sins. ¹⁵You also have some who follow the teaching of the [Nicolaitans](#). ¹⁶So change your hearts and lives. If you do not, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword that comes out of my mouth.

¹⁷“Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

“I will give some of the hidden manna to everyone who

wins the victory. I will also give to each one who wins the victory a white stone with a new name written on it. No one knows this new name except the one who receives it.

To the Church in Thyatira

¹⁸“Write this to the angel of the church in Thyatira:

“The Son of God, who has eyes that blaze like fire and feet like shining bronze, says this: ¹⁹I know what you do. I know about your love, your faith, your service, and your patience. I know that you are doing more now than you did at first.

²⁰“But I have this against you: You let that woman Jezebel spread false teachings. She says she is a prophetess, but by her teaching she leads my people to take part in sexual sins and to eat food that is offered to idols. ²¹I have given her time to change her heart and turn away from her sin, but she does not want to change. ²²So I will throw her on a bed of suffering. And all those who take part in adultery with her will suffer greatly if they do not turn away from the wrongs she does. ²³I will also kill her followers. Then all the churches will know I am the One who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you for what you have done.

²⁴“But others of you in Thyatira have not followed her teaching and have not learned what some call Satan’s deep secrets. I say to you that I will not put any other load on you.

²⁵Only continue in your loyalty until I come.

²⁶“I will give power over the nations to everyone who wins the victory and continues to be obedient to me until the end.

²⁷“You will rule over them with an iron rod,

as when pottery is broken into pieces.’

[Psalm 2:9](#)

²⁸This is the same power I received from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. ²⁹Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

Life Lessons

Revelation 3:1–22

Situation

God continued to address the spiritual lives of his churches. He encouraged the church in the Asian city of Philadelphia to persevere through difficult times. But the churches in Sardis and Laodicea were told to repent of their sin.

Observation

God does not tolerate a mediocre spiritual life. He wants all Christians to be involved in loving and serving.

Inspiration

Consider the Laodicean church. This church was wealthy and self-sufficient. But the church had a problem—hollow, fruitless faith. “I know what you do,” God spoke to this group, “that you are not hot nor cold. I wish that you were hot or cold! But because you are lukewarm—neither hot, nor cold—I am ready to spit you out of my mouth.”

The literal translation is “to vomit.” Why does the body vomit something? Why does it recoil violently at the presence of certain substances? Because they are incompatible with the body. Vomiting is the body’s way of rejecting anything it cannot handle.

What’s the point? God can’t stomach lukewarm faith. He is angered by a religion that puts on a show but ignores the service. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

Application

If God gave you a report card on your relationship with him, what would it say? Which are the areas you neglect? Continue what you are doing well; aggressively improve an area you have neglected.

Exploration

Hypocrisy—[Job 17:1–9](#); [Psalms 5:9](#); [26:4](#); [Isaiah 29:13](#); [Ezekiel 33:31](#); [Matthew 16:5–12](#); [23](#); [Romans 2:17–24](#); [Titus 1:16](#); [1 Peter 2:1](#).

To the Church in Sardis

“Write this to the angel of the church in Sardis:

“The One who has the seven spirits and the seven stars says this: I know what you do. People say that you are alive, but really you are dead.²Wake up! Make yourselves stronger before what you have left dies completely. I have found that what you are doing is less than what my God wants.³So do not forget what you have received and heard. Obey it, and change your hearts and lives. So you must wake up, or I will come like a thief, and you will not know when I will come to you.⁴But you have a few there in Sardis who have kept their clothes unstained, so they will walk with me and will wear white clothes, because they are worthy.⁵Those who win the victory will be dressed in white clothes like them. And I will not erase their names from the book of life, but I will say they belong to me before my Father and before his angels.⁶Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the Church in Philadelphia

⁷“Write this to the angel of the church in Philadelphia:

“This is what the One who is holy and true, who holds the key of David, says. When he opens a door, no one can close it. And when he closes it, no one can open it.⁸I know what you

do. I have put an open door before you, which no one can close. I know you have a little strength, but you have obeyed my teaching and were not afraid to speak my name.⁹ Those in the synagogue that belongs to Satan say they are Jews, but they are not true Jews; they are liars. I will make them come before you and bow at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you.¹⁰ You have obeyed my teaching about not giving up your faith. So I will keep you from the time of trouble that will come to the whole world to test those who live on earth.

¹¹“I am coming soon. Continue strong in your faith so no one will take away your crown. ¹²I will make those who win the victory pillars in the temple of my God, and they will never have to leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new [Jerusalem](#), that comes down out of heaven from my God. I will also write on them my new name. ¹³Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the Church in Laodicea

¹⁴“Write this to the angel of the church in Laodicea:

“The [Amen](#), the faithful and true witness, the beginning of all God has made, says this: ¹⁵I know what you do, that you are not hot or cold. I wish that you were hot or cold! ¹⁶But because you are lukewarm—neither hot, nor cold—I am ready to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷You say, ‘I am rich, and I have become wealthy and do not need anything.’ But you do not know that you are really miserable, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸I advise you to buy from me gold made pure in fire so you can be truly rich. Buy from me white clothes so you can be clothed

and so you can cover your shameful nakedness. Buy from me medicine to put on your eyes so you can truly see.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: The One Who Stands at the Door

Let me state something important. There is never a time during which Jesus is not speaking. Never. There is never a place in which Jesus is not present. Never. There is never a room so dark ... a lounge so sensual ... an office so sophisticated ... that the ever-present, ever-pursuing, relentlessly tender Friend is not there, tapping gently on the doors of our hearts—waiting to be invited in.

Few hear his voice. Fewer still open the door.

But never interpret our numbness as his absence. For amidst the fleeting promises of pleasure is the timeless promise of his presence...

There is no chorus so loud that the voice of God cannot be heard ... if we will but listen. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

¹⁹“I correct and punish those whom I love. So be eager to do right, and change your hearts and lives. ²⁰Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you will eat with me.

²¹“Those who win the victory will sit with me on my throne in the same way that I won the victory and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²²Everyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Life Lessons

Revelation 4:1–6:17

Situation

John reported that Jesus Christ would initiate the final conflict against Satan. At the end, God would defeat Satan and throw him into hell.

Observation

For Believers, the end will be a time of rejoicing. There will be worship in heaven ([4:9–11](#)).

Inspiration

What is it, then, that God wants us to do? What is the work he seeks? Just believe. Believe the One he sent. “The work God wants you to do is this: Believe the One he sent” ([John 6:29](#)).

Someone is reading this and shaking his or her head and asking, “Are you saying it is possible to go to heaven with no good works?” The answer is no. Good works are a requirement. Someone else is reading and asking, “Are you saying it is possible to go to heaven without good character?” My answer again is no. Good character is also required. In order to enter heaven one must have good works and good character.

But, alas, there is the problem. You have neither.

Oh, you’ve done some nice things in your life. But you do not have enough good works to go to heaven regardless of your sacrifice. No matter how noble your gifts, they are not enough to get you into heaven.

Nor do you have enough character to go to heaven. Please don't be offended. (Then, again, be offended, if necessary.) You're probably a very decent person. But decency isn't enough. Those who see God are not the decent; they are the holy. "Anyone whose life is not holy will never see the Lord" ([Hebrews 12:14](#)).

You may be decent. You may pay taxes and kiss your kids and sleep with a clean conscience. But apart from Christ you aren't holy. So how can you go to heaven?

Only believe.

Accept the work already done, the work of Jesus on the cross.

Only believe.

Accept the goodness of Jesus Christ. Abandon your own works and accept his. Abandon your own decency and accept his. Stand before God in his name, not yours. "Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved, but anyone who does not believe will be punished" ([Mark 16:16](#)).

It's that simple? It's that simple. It's that easy? There was nothing easy at all about it. The cross was heavy, the blood was real, and the price was extravagant. It would have bankrupted you or me, so he paid it for us. Call it simple. Call it a gift. But don't call it easy.

Call it what it is. Call it grace. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Application

Imagine, like John, you are peering into the very

doors of heaven. Why will you be allowed to enter? Jesus' only request is that you believe. Then, like the apostle John, you will be accepted.

Exploration

Heaven as God's Home—[Matthew 5:34](#); [Mark 16:19](#); [John 3:13](#); [Revelation 4](#).

John Sees Heaven

After the vision of these things I looked, and there before me was an open door in heaven. And the same voice that spoke to me before, that sounded like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this.”² Immediately I was in the Spirit, and before me was a throne in heaven, and someone was sitting on it.³ The One who sat on the throne looked like precious stones, like jasper and carnelian. All around the throne was a rainbow the color of an emerald.⁴ Around the throne there were twenty-four other thrones with twenty-four elders sitting on them. They were dressed in white and had golden crowns on their heads.⁵ Lightning flashes and noises and thundering came from the throne. Before the throne seven lamps were burning, which are the seven spirits of God.⁶ Also before the throne there was something that looked like a sea of glass, clear like crystal.

In the center and around the throne were four living creatures with eyes all over them, in front and in back.⁷ The first living creature was like a lion. The second was like a calf. The third had a face like a man. The fourth was like a flying eagle.⁸ Each of these four living creatures had six wings and was covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day and night they never stop saying:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.

He was, he is, and he is coming.”

⁹These living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to the One who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever. ¹⁰Then the twenty-four elders bow down before the One who sits on the throne, and they worship him who lives forever and ever. They put their crowns down before the throne and say:

¹¹“You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
because you made all things.
Everything existed and was made,
because you wanted it.”

Then I saw a scroll in the right hand of the One sitting on the throne. The scroll had writing on both sides and was kept closed with seven seals. ²And I saw a powerful angel calling in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” ³But there was no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth who could open the scroll or look inside it. ⁴I cried hard because there was no one who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. ⁵But one of the elders said to me, “Do not cry! The [Lion](#) from the tribe of Judah, David’s descendant, has won the victory so that he is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

⁶Then I saw a Lamb standing in the center of the throne and in the middle of the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb looked as if he had been killed. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God that were sent into all the world. ⁷The Lamb came and took the scroll from the right hand of the One sitting on the throne. ⁸When he took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders bowed down before the Lamb. Each one of them had a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s holy people. ⁹And they all sang a new song to the Lamb:

“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were killed,
and with the blood of your death you bought people
for God
from every tribe, language, people, and nation.

¹⁰You made them to be a kingdom of priests for our
God,

and they will rule on the earth.”

¹¹Then I looked, and I heard the voices of many angels around the throne, and the four living creatures, and the elders. There were thousands and thousands of angels, ¹²saying in a loud voice:

“The Lamb who was killed is worthy
to receive power, wealth, wisdom, and strength,
honor, glory, and praise!”

¹³Then I heard all creatures in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea saying:

“To the One who sits on the throne
and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power
forever and ever.”

¹⁴The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders bowed down and worshiped.

Then I watched while the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come!” ²I looked, and there before me was a white horse. The rider on the horse held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out, determined to win the victory.

³When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” ⁴Then another horse came out, a red one. Its rider was given power to take away peace from the earth and to make people kill each other, and he was given a big sword.

⁵When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” I looked, and there before me was a black horse, and its rider held a pair of scales in his hand. ⁶Then I heard something that sounded like a voice coming from the middle of the four living creatures. The voice said, “A quart of wheat for a day’s pay, and three quarts of barley for a day’s pay, and do not damage the olive oil and wine!”

⁷When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” ⁸I looked, and there before me was a pale horse. Its rider was named death, and [Hades](#) was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill people by war, by starvation, by disease, and by the wild animals of the earth.

⁹When the Lamb opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been killed because they were faithful to the word of God and to the message they had received. ¹⁰These souls shouted in a loud voice, “Holy and true Lord, how long until you judge the people of the earth and punish them for killing us?” ¹¹Then each one of them was given a white robe and was told to wait a short time longer. There

were still some of their fellow servants and [brothers and sisters](#) in the service of Christ who must be killed as they were. They had to wait until all of this was finished.

¹²Then I watched while the Lamb opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake. The sun became black like rough black cloth, and the whole moon became red like blood. ¹³And the stars in the sky fell to the earth like figs falling from a fig tree when the wind blows. ¹⁴The sky disappeared as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved from its place.

¹⁵Then the kings of the earth, the rulers, the generals, the rich people, the powerful people, the slaves, and the free people hid themselves in caves and in the rocks on the mountains. ¹⁶They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us. Hide us from the face of the One who sits on the throne and from the anger of the Lamb!" ¹⁷The great day for their anger has come, and who can stand against it?"

Life Lessons

Revelation 7:1–17

Situation

John assured his readers that God would not lose track of his faithful people during the judgment of the world. He would rescue them.

Observation

All Believers are important to God. God guarantees his protection to his followers by placing his seal over them. Nothing can remove that seal.

Inspiration

Unlike the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation, our seal is not visible. We have been sealed “in Him.” Our seal is spiritual, not physical. Instead of receiving a mark on our foreheads, we were given the Holy Spirit as a pledge of God’s intent to preserve us: ... The Holy Spirit is a pledge of God’s intentions. He is not finished with us yet. But the presence of the Spirit demonstrates God’s commitment to complete what He has started. If salvation is not permanent, God is simply playing games by sending the Spirit into our hearts. It would be like a man’s giving a woman an engagement ring when he knows he has no intention of marrying her.

We are sealed right up through the “day of redemption.” The day of redemption refers to that day when our salvation will be complete—body and spirit.

There are no exceptions. Everyone who has been sealed in Christ will remain sealed right up through

the end.

Only God can break the seal (see [Revelation 5:1–3](#)). And the Scriptures clearly teach that He has already determined to leave the seal intact until our salvation is complete. (From *Eternal Security* by Charles Stanley)

Application

How have you sensed God's protection? Note three people who may be in jeopardy of God's punishment. Pray for them during the day.

Exploration

Protection—[Psalm 17:8](#); [18:2–3](#); [Proverbs 2:8](#); [2 Thessalonians 3:3](#).

The 144,000 People of Israel

After the vision of these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth. The angels were holding the four winds of the earth to keep them from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. ²Then I saw another angel coming up from the east who had the seal of the living God. And he called out in a loud voice to the four angels to whom God had given power to harm the earth and the sea. ³He said to them, “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we mark with a sign the foreheads of the people who serve our God.” ⁴Then I heard how many people were marked with the sign. There were one hundred forty-four thousand from every tribe of the people of Israel.

⁵From the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were marked with the sign,

from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand,

from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand,

⁶from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand,

from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand,

from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand,

⁷from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand,

from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand,

from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand,

⁸from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand,

from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand,
and from the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were
marked with the sign.

The Great Crowd Worships God

⁹After the vision of these things I looked, and there was a great number of people, so many that no one could count them. They were from every nation, tribe, people, and language of the earth. They were all standing before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰They were shouting in a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

¹¹All the angels were standing around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures. They all bowed down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying, “Amen! Praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power, and strength belong to our God forever and ever. Amen!”

¹³Then one of the elders asked me, “Who are these people dressed in white robes? Where did they come from?”

¹⁴I answered, “You know, sir.”

And the elder said to me, “These are the people who have come out of the great distress. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵Because of this, they are before the throne of God. They worship him day and night in his temple. And the One who sits on the throne will be present with them. ¹⁶Those people will never be hungry again, and they will never be thirsty again. The sun will not hurt them, and no heat will burn them, ¹⁷because the Lamb at

the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of water that give life. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Life Lessons

Revelation 8:1–9:21

Situation

John had a vision of a supernatural battle waged between God's and Satan's forces. Although God disciplined his own people, they refused to repent.

Observation

Sin comes subtly into a person's life. Before we know it, it takes control and alienates us from God. We must repent and turn to God in faith.

Inspiration

John was also a prophet. The prophets often held out hope for the present—hope that God's judgment could be delayed if people would repent and turn to God in faith and obedience. That does not mean that the prophets offered an easy way out of all difficulties, as if somehow all problems would vanish if people would just profess their faith in God. Instead, like Winston Churchill standing amidst the bombed ruins of London, the prophets offered “blood, sweat, and tears” for those who would follow God. It would not be easy to serve God and fight against the evil of this present, dark and sinful world, and yet the prophets knew that God would be victorious in the end and His people would share in that victory.

So John was a prophet, calling his generation—and ours—to repentance and faith and action. He knew that we could never build the kingdom of God

on earth, no matter how hard we might try. Only God can do that—and someday he will, when Christ comes again. But John also knew that God's judgment on this world could be delayed if we would repent and turn to Christ.

To some, John's message of the future may have sounded gloomy and depressing. John knew, however, that the worst thing he could do would be to assure people that everything was all right and that there was no need to be concerned about the evil in the world or God's judgment. But John's message is ultimately a message of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. (From *Storm Warning* by Billy Graham)

Application

What is the really good news in your life right now? Tell someone about it today. What sin needs to be confessed? Pray, telling God you are sorry, and resist the temptation to give in to it again.

Exploration

Repentance—[Deuteronomy 31:27–29](#); [2 Chronicles 7:14](#); [Nehemiah 9:28–31](#); [Isaiah 30:15](#); [Luke 13:3](#); [2 Peter 3:9](#).

The Seventh Seal

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ²And I saw the seven angels who stand before God and to whom were given seven trumpets.

³Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden pan for incense. He was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all God's holy people. The angel put this offering on the golden altar before the throne. ⁴The smoke from the incense went up from the angel's hand to God with the prayers of God's people. ⁵Then the angel filled the incense pan with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were flashes of lightning, thunder and loud noises, and an earthquake.

The Seven Angels and Trumpets

⁶Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

⁷The first angel blew his trumpet, and hail and fire mixed with blood were poured down on the earth. And a third of the earth, and all the green grass, and a third of the trees were burned up.

⁸Then the second angel blew his trumpet, and something

that looked like a big mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea. And a third of the sea became blood, ⁹a third of the living things in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

¹⁰Then the third angel blew his trumpet, and a large star, burning like a torch, fell from the sky. It fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. ¹¹The name of the star is [Wormwood](#). And a third of all the water became bitter, and many people died from drinking the water that was bitter.

¹²Then the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were struck. So a third of them became dark, and a third of the day was without light, and also the night.

¹³While I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying high in the air cry out in a loud voice, “Trouble! Trouble! Trouble for those who live on the earth because of the remaining sounds of the trumpets that the other three angels are about to blow!”

Then the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fall from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the deep hole that leads to the bottomless pit.² Then it opened up the hole that leads to the bottomless pit, and smoke came up from the hole like smoke from a big furnace. Then the sun and sky became dark because of the smoke from the hole.³ Then locusts came down to the earth out of the smoke, and they were given the power to sting like [scorpions](#).⁴ They were told not to harm the grass on the earth or any plant or tree. They could harm only the people who did not have the sign of God on their foreheads.⁵ These locusts were not given the power to kill anyone, but to cause pain to the people for five months. And the pain they felt was like the pain a scorpion gives when it stings someone.⁶ During those days people will look for a way to die, but they will not find it. They will want to die, but death will run away from them.

⁷The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore what looked like crowns of gold, and their faces looked like human faces.⁸ Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth.⁹ Their chests looked like iron breastplates, and the sound of their wings was like the noise of many horses and chariots hurrying into battle.¹⁰ The locusts had tails with stingers like scorpions, and in their tails was their power to hurt people for five months.¹¹ The locusts had a king who was the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in the Hebrew language is [Abaddon](#) and in the Greek language is [Apollyon](#).

¹²The first trouble is past; there are still two other troubles that will come.

¹³Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice

coming from the horns on the golden altar that is before God.

¹⁴The voice said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Free the four angels who are tied at the great river Euphrates.”

¹⁵And they let loose the four angels who had been kept ready for this hour and day and month and year so they could kill a third of all people on the earth. ¹⁶I heard how many troops on horses were in their army—two hundred million.

¹⁷The horses and their riders I saw in the vision looked like this: They had breastplates that were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow like sulfur. The heads of the horses looked like heads of lions, with fire, smoke, and sulfur coming out of their mouths.

¹⁸A third of all the people on earth were killed by these three terrible disasters coming out of the horses’ mouths: the fire, the smoke, and the sulfur. ¹⁹The horses’ power was in their mouths and in their tails; their tails were like snakes with heads, and with them they hurt people.

²⁰The other people who were not killed by these terrible disasters still did not change their hearts and turn away from what they had made with their own hands. They did not stop worshiping demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood—things that cannot see or hear or walk.

²¹These people did not change their hearts and turn away from murder or evil magic, from their sexual sins or stealing.

Life Lessons

Revelation 10:1-11

Situation

A mighty angel appeared with an open book and announced that time would end. The angel announced the final universal judgment.

Observation

The reality of judgment and hell is foreign to our culture, but it is often talked about in the Bible.

Inspiration

One phrase summarizes the horror of hell. “God isn’t there.”

Think for a moment about this question: What if God weren’t here on earth? You think people can be cruel now, imagine us without the presence of God. You think we are brutal to each other now, imagine the world without the Holy Spirit. You think there is loneliness and despair and guilt now, imagine life without the touch of Jesus. No forgiveness. No hope. No acts of kindness. No words of love. No more food given in his name. No more songs sung to his praise. No more deeds done in his honor. If God took away his angels, his grace, his promise of eternity, and his servants, what would the world be like?

In a word, hell. No one to comfort you and no music to soothe you. A world where poets don’t write of love and minstrels don’t sing of hope, for love and hope were passengers on the last ship. The final vessel has departed, and the anthem of hell has only

two words: “if only.”

According to Jesus hell knows only one sound, the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” ([Matthew 22:13](#), NIV). From hell comes a woeful, unending moan as its inhabitants realize the opportunity they have missed. What they would give for one more chance. But that chance is gone ([Hebrews 9:27](#)).

Can you see now why the angels rejoice when one sinner repents? Jesus knows what awaits the saved. He also knows what awaits the condemned. Can you see why we should rejoice as well? How can we? How can our hearts be changed so we rejoice like Jesus rejoices?

Ask God to help you have his eternal view of the world. His view of humanity is starkly simple. From his perspective every person is either:

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- entering through the small gate or the wide gate ([Matthew 7:13–14](#))
- traveling the narrow road or the wide road ([Matthew 7:13–14](#))
- building on rock or sand ([Matthew 7:24–27](#))
- wise or foolish ([Matthew 25:2](#))
- prepared or unprepared ([Matthew 24:45–51](#))
- fruitful or fruitless ([Matthew 25:14–27](#))
- heaven called or hell bound ([Mark 16:15–16](#))
(From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Application

Are you prepared to die? If you are not a believer

in Jesus Christ, you will be separated from God for all eternity. Don't allow that to happen. Repent of your sins and turn to Jesus Christ for salvation today. If you are a believer, make yourself available to share the good news of Jesus.

Exploration

Hell—[Matthew 13:42](#); [Mark 9:47–48](#); [James 3:6](#); [Revelation 14:11](#).

The Angel and the Small Scroll

Then I saw another powerful angel coming down from heaven dressed in a cloud with a rainbow over his head. His face was like the sun, and his legs were like pillars of fire. ²The angel was holding a small scroll open in his hand. He put his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. ³Then he shouted loudly like the roaring of a lion. And when he shouted, the voices of seven thunders spoke. ⁴When the seven thunders spoke, I started to write. But I heard a voice from heaven say, “Keep hidden what the seven thunders said, and do not write them down.”

⁵Then the angel I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven, ⁶and he made a promise by the power of the One who lives forever and ever. He is the One who made the skies and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it. The angel promised, “There will be no more waiting! ⁷In the days when the seventh angel is ready to blow his trumpet, God’s secret will be finished. This secret is the Good News God told to his servants, the prophets.”

⁸Then I heard the same voice from heaven again, saying to me: “Go and take the open scroll that is in the hand of the angel that is standing on the sea and on the land.”

⁹So I went to the angel and told him to give me the small scroll. And he said to me, “Take the scroll and eat it. It will be

sour in your stomach, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.” ¹⁰So I took the small scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. In my mouth it tasted sweet as honey, but after I ate it, it was sour in my stomach. ¹¹Then I was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.”

Life Lessons

Revelation 11:1-19

Situation

God will protect people who are faithful to him, but unbelievers do not enjoy this privilege.

Observation

God will protect the faithful until the end, while preparing to judge evil once and for all.

Inspiration

Why do I not take him seriously when he questions, “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”

Why don't I let my Father do for me what I am more than willing to do for my own children?

I'm learning, though. Being a parent is better than a course on theology. Being a father is teaching me that when I am criticized, injured, or afraid, there is a Father who is ready to comfort me. There is a Father who will hold me until I'm better, help me until I can live with the hurt, and who won't go to sleep when I'm afraid of waking up and seeing the dark. Ever. And that's enough. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

Revelation is a great source of encouragement to Christians that the Lord will protect them from evil. Do you feel the Lord has his sheltering arm around

you? Look for someone today who needs that encouragement and give it.

Exploration

Protection—[Psalm 17:8](#); [18:2–3](#); [Revelation 7:4–8](#).

The Two Witnesses

I was given a measuring stick like a rod, and I was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the people worshiping there.² But do not measure the yard outside the temple. Leave it alone, because it has been given to those who are not God’s people. And they will trample on the holy city for forty-two months.³ And I will give power to my two witnesses to prophesy for one thousand two hundred sixty days, and they will be dressed in rough cloth to show their sadness.”

⁴These two witnesses are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.⁵ And if anyone tries to hurt them, fire comes from their mouths and kills their enemies. And if anyone tries to hurt them in whatever way, in that same way that person will die.⁶ These witnesses have the power to stop the sky from raining during the time they are prophesying. And they have power to make the waters become blood, and they have power to send every kind of trouble to the earth as many times as they want.

⁷When the two witnesses have finished telling their message, the beast that comes up from the bottomless pit will fight a war against them. He will defeat them and kill them.⁸ The bodies of the two witnesses will lie in the street of the great city where the Lord was killed. This city is named [Sodom](#) and Egypt, which has a spiritual meaning.⁹ Those from every race

of people, tribe, language, and nation will look at the bodies of the two witnesses for three and one-half days, and they will refuse to bury them. ¹⁰People who live on the earth will rejoice and be happy because these two are dead. They will send each other gifts, because these two prophets brought much suffering to those who live on the earth.

¹¹But after three and one-half days, God put the breath of life into the two prophets again. They stood on their feet, and everyone who saw them became very afraid. ¹²Then the two prophets heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Come up here!" And they went up into heaven in a cloud as their enemies watched.

¹³In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city was destroyed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and those who did not die were very afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven.

¹⁴The second trouble is finished. Pay attention: The third trouble is coming soon.

The Seventh Trumpet

¹⁵Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet. And there were loud voices in heaven, saying:

"The power to rule the world
now belongs to our Lord and his Christ,
and he will rule forever and ever."

¹⁶Then the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, bowed down on their faces and worshiped God.

¹⁷They said:

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
who is and who was,
because you have used your great power
and have begun to rule!

¹⁸The people of the world were angry,
but your anger has come.

The time has come to judge the dead,
and to reward your servants the prophets
and your holy people,
all who respect you, great and small.

The time has come to destroy those who destroy the
earth!”

¹⁹Then God’s temple in heaven was opened. The Ark that holds the agreement God gave to his people could be seen in his temple. Then there were flashes of lightning, noises, thunder, an earthquake, and a great hailstorm.

Life Lessons

Revelation 12:1-18

Situation

This chapter symbolizes conflict between God and Satan. The woman gave birth to Christ. The dragon, Satan, sought to destroy Christ, but his attempts were futile. A heavenly battle between Satan with his demons and God's angels resulted in Satan's defeat.

Observation

The contest between good and evil is a great, cosmic battle that God will win. We can experience God's victory in our lives through faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Inspiration

Life is so short. The Bible says that we must be prepared to meet God at all times. We never know when we step into our car, walk out the door of our home, or just open our eyes to a new day, what lies ahead. "Since his days are determined, the number of his months is with Thee, and his limits Thou hast set so that he cannot pass" ([Job 14:5](#)).

Millions of people on earth are walking around physically alive, but spiritually dead. When your eyes and ears become attuned to the cries of others, you hear those who say they are empty and lost. They are separated from the source of life and like a lamp which is unattached, they are dark and lifeless. The lamp may be very expensive, may have a beautiful shade which draws attention, but has no light without being

plugged into the source of energy. Jesus said, “I am the life.” (From *How to Be Born Again* by Billy Graham)

Application

Revelation is a beautiful, but often frightening account of the great battle for spiritual supremacy. Be sure not to take your situation for granted. Ask God to keep you aware of Satan’s attacks. Depend on God for your strength and victory.

Exploration

Souls—[Job 32:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:7](#); [Isaiah 26:9](#); [John 10:28–29](#); [2 Corinthians 4:16–17](#).

The Woman and the Dragon

And then a great wonder appeared in heaven: A woman was clothed with the sun, and the moon was under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars was on her head. ²She was pregnant and cried out with pain, because she was about to give birth. ³Then another wonder appeared in heaven: There was a giant red dragon with seven heads and seven crowns on each head. He also had ten horns. ⁴His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and threw them down to the earth. He stood in front of the woman who was ready to give birth so he could eat her baby as soon as it was born. ⁵Then the woman gave birth to a son who will rule all the nations with an iron rod. And her child was taken up to God and to his throne. ⁶The woman ran away into the desert to a place God prepared for her where she would be taken care of for one thousand two hundred sixty days.

⁷Then there was a war in heaven. [Michael](#) and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸But the dragon was not strong enough, and he and his angels lost their place in heaven. ⁹The giant dragon was thrown down out of heaven. (He is that old snake called the devil or Satan, who tricks the whole world.) The dragon with his angels was thrown down to the earth.

¹⁰Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying:

“The salvation and the power and the kingdom of our

God

and the authority of his Christ have now come.
The accuser of our brothers and sisters,
who accused them day and night before our God,
has been thrown down.

¹¹And our brothers and sisters defeated him
by the blood of the Lamb's death
and by the message they preached.
They did not love their lives so much
that they were afraid of death.

¹²So rejoice, you heavens
and all who live there!
But it will be terrible for the earth and the sea,
because the devil has come down to you!
He is filled with anger,
because he knows he does not have much time.”

¹³When the dragon saw he had been thrown down to the earth, he hunted for the woman who had given birth to the son.

¹⁴But the woman was given the two wings of a great eagle so she could fly to the place prepared for her in the desert. There she would be taken care of for three and one-half years, away from the snake. ¹⁵Then the snake poured water out of its mouth like a river toward the woman so the flood would carry her away. ¹⁶But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that came from the mouth of the dragon. ¹⁷Then the dragon was very angry at the woman, and he went off to make war against all her other children—those who obey God's commands and who have the message Jesus taught.

¹⁸And the dragon stood on the seashore.

Life Lessons

Revelation 13:1–18

Situation

Before the final battle, Christians would be challenged. God promised, though, that no spiritual harm could come to Believers, although they might have to endure persecution and pain.

Observation

Christians must discern false prophets who claim to perform miracles and exercise authority from God.

Inspiration

Counterfeit Christians, like counterfeit twenty dollar bills, are not easily detected. It takes a trained, discerning eye.

This is a good moment for me to encourage you to be a careful student of the Scriptures and a watchful follower of spiritual (perhaps a better word would be religious) leaders ... in that order. The better you come to know God's truth, the keener will be your watchfulness. When Jesus spoke of checking the fruit of another's life, He was emphasizing the importance of paying attention to what is being taught—both what is said and what is left unsaid—as well as that which is taught as it is being lived out. In the final analysis, a tree cannot hide what it is. Take a close look. Slowly and carefully taste the fruit (if you can't tell by looking), get a respected second and even third opinion, and stay on the alert. (From *Simple Faith* by Charles Swindoll)

Application

Can you tell the difference between Christian teaching and false doctrine? Such decisions require careful discernment, ensuring that actions and words spoken are consistent with God's wisdom in the Bible. In your Bible reading this week look for ways to distinguish true teaching from false.

Exploration

Discernment—[Matthew 7:6](#); [Philippians 1:10](#); [James 1:5](#).

The Two Beasts

Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, and there was a crown on each horn. A name against God was written on each head. ²This beast looked like a leopard, with feet like a bear's feet and a mouth like a lion's mouth. And the dragon gave the beast all of his power and his throne and great authority. ³One of the heads of the beast looked as if it had been killed by a wound, but this death wound was healed. Then the whole world was amazed and followed the beast. ⁴People worshiped the dragon because he had given his power to the beast. And they also worshiped the beast, asking, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against it?"

⁵The beast was allowed to say proud words and words against God, and it was allowed to use its power for forty-two months. ⁶It used its mouth to speak against God, against God's name, against the place where God lives, and against all those who live in heaven. ⁷It was given power to make war against God's holy people and to defeat them. It was given power over every tribe, people, language, and nation. ⁸And all who live on earth will worship the beast—all the people since the beginning of the world whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life. The Lamb is the One who was killed.

⁹Anyone who has ears should listen:

¹⁰If you are to be a prisoner,
then you will be a prisoner.
If you are to be killed with the sword,
then you will be killed with the sword.

This means that God's holy people must have patience and faith.

¹¹Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. ¹²This beast stands before the first beast and uses the same power the first beast has. By this power it makes everyone living on earth worship the first beast, who had the death wound that was healed. ¹³And the second beast does great miracles so that it even makes fire come down from heaven to earth while people are watching. ¹⁴It fools those who live on earth by the miracles it has been given the power to do. It does these miracles to serve the first beast. The second beast orders people to make an idol to honor the first beast, the one that was wounded by the deadly sword but sprang to life again. ¹⁵The second beast was given power to give life to the idol of the first one so that the idol could speak. And the second beast was given power to command all who will not worship the image of the beast to be killed. ¹⁶The second beast also forced all people, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to have a mark on their right hand or on their forehead. ¹⁷No one could buy or sell without this mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name. ¹⁸This takes wisdom. Let the one who has understanding find the meaning of the number, which is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred sixty-six.

Life Lessons

Revelation 14:1–15:8

Situation

God's judgment arrived. Only those who were cleansed from sin through faith in Christ remained protected from God's anger against sin. This chapter provided assurance and comfort to the faithful.

Observation

God's judgment of evil will not be put off indefinitely. Only by submitting our life to him can we avoid his wrath.

Inspiration

I'll be home soon. My plane is nearing San Antonio. I can feel the nose of the jet dipping downward. I can see the flight attendants getting ready. [My wife], Denalyn, is somewhere in the parking lot, parking the car and hustling the girls toward the terminal.

I'll be home soon. The plane will land. I'll walk down that ramp and hear my name and see their faces. I'll be home soon.

You'll be home soon, too. You may not have noticed it, but you are closer to home than ever before. Each moment is a step taken. Each breath is a page turned. Each day is a mile marked, a mountain climbed. You are closer to home than you've ever been.

Before you know it, your appointed arrival time will come; you'll descend the ramp and enter the City.

You'll see faces that are waiting for you. You'll hear your name spoken by those who love you. And, maybe, just maybe—in the back, behind the crowds—the One who would rather die than live without you will remove his pierced hands from his heavenly robe and ... applaud.

(From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

Have you accepted Christ as your Savior? Have you confessed your sins? If so, you have nothing to fear from God's judgment of the world. The judge is on our side! If you are unsure, pray to receive Christ right now.

Exploration

Judgment—[Deuteronomy 7:2](#); [Matthew 13:30](#); [16:27](#); [Luke 11:29–32](#).

The Song of the Saved

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb standing on [Mount Zion](#). With him were one hundred forty-four thousand people who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.² And I heard a sound from heaven like the noise of flooding water and like the sound of loud thunder. The sound I heard was like people playing harps.³ And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the new song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who had been bought from the earth.⁴ These are the ones who did not do sinful things with women, because they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb every place he goes. These one hundred forty-four thousand were bought from among the people of the earth as people to be offered to God and the Lamb.⁵ They were not guilty of telling lies; they are without fault.

The Three Angels

⁶Then I saw another angel flying high in the air. He had the eternal Good News to preach to those who live on earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people.⁷ He preached in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him praise, because the time has come for God to judge all people. So worship God who

made the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the springs of water.”

⁸Then the second angel followed the first angel and said, “Ruined, ruined is the great city of Babylon! She made all the nations drink the wine of the anger of her adultery.”

⁹Then a third angel followed the first two angels, saying in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and his idol and gets the beast’s mark on the forehead or on the hand, ¹⁰that one also will drink the wine of God’s anger, which is prepared with all its strength in the cup of his anger. And that person will be put in pain with burning sulfur before the holy angels and the Lamb. ¹¹And the smoke from their burning pain will rise forever and ever. There will be no rest, day or night, for those who worship the beast and his idol or who get the mark of his name.” ¹²This means God’s holy people must be patient. They must obey God’s commands and keep their faith in Jesus.

¹³Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Happy are the dead who die from now on in the Lord.”

The Spirit says, “Yes, they will rest from their hard work, and the reward of all they have done stays with them.”

The Earth Is Harvested

¹⁴Then I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and sitting on the white cloud was One who looked like a [Son of Man](#). He had a gold crown on his head and a sharp [sickle](#) in his hand. ¹⁵Then another angel came out of the temple and called out in a loud voice to the One who was sitting on the cloud, “Take your sickle and harvest from the earth, because the time to harvest has come, and the fruit of the earth is ripe.” ¹⁶So the

One who was sitting on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

¹⁷Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. ¹⁸And then another angel, who has power over the fire, came from the altar. This angel called to the angel with the sharp sickle, saying, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the bunches of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." ¹⁹Then the angel swung his sickle over the earth. He gathered the earth's grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's anger. ²⁰They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the winepress as high as horses' bridles for a distance of about one hundred eighty miles.

The Last Troubles

Then I saw another wonder in heaven that was great and amazing. There were seven angels bringing seven disasters. These are the last disasters, because after them, God's anger is finished.

²I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire. All of those who had won the victory over the beast and his idol and over the number of his name were standing by the sea of glass. They had harps that God had given them. ³They sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:

“You do great and wonderful things,

[Psalm 111:2](#)

Lord God Almighty.

[Amos 3:13](#)

Everything the Lord does is right and true,

[Psalm 145:17](#)

King of the nations.

⁴Everyone will respect you, Lord,

[Jeremiah 10:7](#)

and will honor you.

Only you are holy.

All the nations will come

and worship you,

[Psalm 86:9–10](#)

because the right things you have done

are now made known.”

[Deuteronomy 32:4](#)

⁵After this I saw that the temple (the Tent of the Agreement) in heaven was opened. ⁶And the seven angels bringing the seven disasters came out of the temple. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden bands tied around their chests. ⁷Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the anger of God, who lives forever and ever. ⁸The temple was filled with smoke from the glory and the power of God, and no one could enter the temple until the seven disasters of the seven angels were finished.

Life Lessons

Revelation 16:1-21

Situation

The seven terrible plagues are poured out on the earth. Much sorrow and trouble await those who are not protected from God's judgment. Despite the power of the plagues, people will curse God rather than praise him.

Observation

God's terrifying wrath purges the earth of evil.

Inspiration

The Bible says that, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." We don't fear Him as a tyrant but as a loving and just Father who leads us in wisdom and truth to do what is good for us, what will prolong and preserve our lives. But since God is a just Father, we know He will discipline and punish us when we defy Him and break His rules. If we break those rules often enough and carelessly enough, He will take our privileges away completely. That is the risk this world faces even now....

Peace with God, the peace of God, and peace between nations is possible, if we repent of our sins, listen to Him, believe in Him, and follow Him. As servants, followers, brothers, and sisters of the Savior, we are commanded to be His allies in the cause of the true and lasting peace that He can bring....

We are to expect the coming of Christ at any time,

but we are to work as if He were not to come for a thousand years....

In the meantime, we are to work for peace and harmony among the nations of the earth and to love our neighbors even as we love ourselves. (From *Storm Warning* by Billy Graham)

Application

Before the final judgment begins, witness to friends and neighbors about God's offer of eternal life in Christ. Tell them the story of Jesus. Share how God has made a difference in your life.

Exploration

Wrath of God—[Genesis 18:20–33](#); [19:24](#); [Romans 1:24–32](#).

The Bowls of God's Anger

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the seven bowls of God's anger on the earth."

²The first angel left and poured out his bowl on the land. Then ugly and painful sores came upon all those who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his idol.

³The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

⁴The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵Then I heard the angel of the waters saying:

"Holy One, you are the One who is and who was.
You are right to decide to punish these evil people.

⁶They have poured out the blood of your holy people and your prophets.

So now you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."

⁷And I heard a voice coming from the altar saying:

"Yes, Lord God Almighty,
the way you punish evil people is right and fair."

⁸The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and he was given power to burn the people with fire. ⁹They were burned by the great heat, and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these disasters. But the people refused to change their hearts and lives and give glory to God.

¹⁰The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and darkness covered its kingdom. People gnawed their tongues because of the pain. ¹¹They also cursed the God of heaven because of their pain and the sores they had, but they refused to change their hearts and turn away from the evil things they did.

¹²The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates so that the water in the river was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the east to come. ¹³Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴These evil spirits are the spirits of demons, which have power to do miracles. They go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them together for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

¹⁵“Listen! I will come as a thief comes! Happy are those who stay awake and keep their clothes on so that they will not walk around naked and have people see their shame.”

¹⁶Then the evil spirits gathered the kings together to the place that is called Armageddon in the Hebrew language.

¹⁷The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air. Then a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, “It is finished!” ¹⁸Then there were flashes of lightning, noises, thunder, and a big earthquake—the worst earthquake that has ever happened since people have been on earth. ¹⁹The great

city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations were destroyed. And God remembered the sins of Babylon the Great, so he gave that city the cup filled with the wine of his terrible anger.²⁰ Then every island ran away, and mountains disappeared.²¹ Giant hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell from the sky upon people. People cursed God for the disaster of the hail, because this disaster was so terrible.

Life Lessons

Revelation 17:1-18

Situation

The “great prostitute” referred to Babylon. John’s readers probably equated it with the Roman Empire, but it also symbolized any system hostile to God.

Observation

Using symbolic language, John described the destruction of evil and systems energized by Satan. God triumphs over evil.

Inspiration

There is a flip side to the issue of believers who struggle. It is, “Why do I struggle when wicked people seem to be so free of trouble?”

We should not be surprised when the righteous suffer. It conforms us to the image of Christ. It gives us power in witness. It instills the valuable strength of God-sufficiency and reduces the risk in our ministry for God. It refines us to make us capable and usable. It catches the attention of a watching world so that God’s glory may be seen as He becomes credible and visible through our suffering. It may even be used in a sphere far beyond ourselves to glorify God in the universe.

Don’t pity the righteous who suffer. They have a divine edge. Their resource in pain is the reality that God is there and they only experience what He permits. And all that He permits is guaranteed by the kind of God He is. The righteous suffer with the

knowledge that Christ has conquered and gives grace, growth, and glory in the midst of pain. (From *The Upside of Down* by Joseph M. Stowell)

Application

In the middle of struggle, God's promises are vital. Memorize verse [17](#); it shows that God accomplishes his plan by overcoming those who oppose him.

Exploration

Opposition to God—[Genesis 3:1–6](#); [Isaiah 14:13–14](#); [Matthew 13:38–39, 41](#); [Luke 4:5–7](#); [Acts 26:17–18](#); [Ephesians 2:2](#); [Revelation 12:9](#).

The Woman on the Animal

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke to me. He said, “Come, and I will show you the punishment that will be given to the great prostitute, the one sitting over many waters.²The kings of the earth sinned sexually with her, and the people of the earth became drunk from the wine of her sexual sin.”

³Then the angel carried me away by the Spirit to the desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a red beast. It was covered with names against God written on it, and it had seven heads and ten horns.⁴The woman was dressed in purple and red and was shining with the gold, precious jewels, and pearls she was wearing. She had a golden cup in her hand, a cup filled with evil things and the uncleanness of her sexual sin.⁵On her forehead a title was written that was secret. This is what was written: THE GREAT BABYLON

MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES
AND OF THE EVIL THINGS OF THE EARTH

⁶Then I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God’s holy people and with the blood of those who were killed because of their faith in Jesus.

When I saw the woman, I was very amazed.⁷Then the angel said to me, “Why are you amazed? I will tell you the secret of this woman and the beast she rides—the one with seven heads and ten horns.⁸The beast you saw was once alive but is not alive now. But soon it will come up out of the bottomless pit

and go away to be destroyed. There are people who live on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life since the beginning of the world. They will be amazed when they see the beast, because he was once alive, is not alive now, but will come again.

⁹“You need a wise mind to understand this. The seven heads on the beast are seven mountains where the woman sits. ¹⁰And they are seven kings. Five of the kings have already been destroyed, one of the kings lives now, and another has not yet come. When he comes, he must stay a short time. ¹¹The beast that was once alive, but is not alive now, is also an eighth king. He belongs to the first seven kings, and he will go away to be destroyed.

¹²“The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet begun to rule, but they will receive power to rule with the beast for one hour. ¹³All ten of these kings have the same purpose, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will defeat them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. He will defeat them with his called, chosen, and faithful followers.”

¹⁵Then the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, races, nations, and languages. ¹⁶The ten horns and the beast you saw will hate the prostitute. They will take everything she has and leave her naked. They will eat her body and burn her with fire. ¹⁷God made the ten horns want to carry out his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until what God has said comes about. ¹⁸The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”

Life Lessons

Revelation 18:1–24

Situation

John pointed out that although society was built around the economy, only what was built on God would last forever.

Observation

Greed and materialism will be judged and crushed. Christians must derive their security from faith in Christ.

Inspiration

Accepting my role as a servant to properly handle the assets of the Prince brings a real-world meaning to my faith. It causes me to think ecologically about my responsibility for Christ's environment...

It is enjoyable to consider what a greater world under the reign of the Prince would be like, where all things—humanity, living things, the stuff of creation—might exist as they were meant to be in the creative mind of God. Such a dream is not idle fantasy. It answers to something I believe is hidden within each one of us: a memory deep in our spiritual genes that knew of a time when God came down and walked with man, and everything was good. And the dream also answers a hope deep within us—some have called it a healthy homesickness—that one day all things will be restored to their original creative intent by the hand of God.

Believing that this is exactly what will happen

when the Prince returns in glorious triumph, the servant of the kingdom makes a little history each day by claiming hunks of a spoiled creation and establishing Christ's presence in it. It cannot be done permanently (picked-up streets get dirty again, and work done well the first time has to be done over again), but it can be done with the conviction that it makes a statement and brings Christ to places where He might otherwise never have been known. (From *Christ Followers in the Real World* by Gordon MacDonald)

Application

Try listening with greater discernment to commercials on radio and television. Note how their values differ from God's.

Exploration

Results of Evil—[Psalm 5:4–6](#); [Proverbs 10:29–30](#); [Zephaniah 2:13–15](#); [Romans 1:21–32](#); [1 Corinthians 6:9–10](#); [James 4:4](#).

Babylon Is Destroyed

After the vision of these things, I saw another angel coming down from heaven. This angel had great power, and his glory made the earth bright. ²He shouted in a powerful voice:

“Ruined, ruined is the great city of Babylon!
She has become a home for demons
and a prison for every evil spirit,
and a prison for every unclean bird and unclean beast.

³She has been ruined, because all the peoples of the earth

have drunk the wine of the desire of her sexual sin.

She has been ruined also because the kings of the earth

have sinned sexually with her,
and the merchants of the earth
have grown rich from the great wealth of her luxury.”

⁴Then I heard another voice from heaven saying:

“Come out of that city, my people,
so that you will not share in her sins,
so that you will not receive the disasters that will come to her.

⁵Her sins have piled up as high as the sky,
and God has not forgotten the wrongs she has done.

⁶Give that city the same as she gave to others.
Pay her back twice as much as she did.
Prepare wine for her that is twice as strong
as the wine she prepared for others.
⁷She gave herself much glory and rich living.
Give her that much suffering and sadness.
She says to herself, 'I am a queen sitting on my throne.
I am not a widow; I will never be sad.'
⁸So these disasters will come to her in one day:
death, and crying, and great hunger,
and she will be destroyed by fire,
because the Lord God who judges her is powerful."

⁹The kings of the earth who sinned sexually with her and shared her wealth will see the smoke from her burning. Then they will cry and be sad because of her death. ¹⁰They will be afraid of her suffering and stand far away and say:

"Terrible! How terrible for you, great city,
powerful city of Babylon,
because your punishment has come in one hour!"

¹¹And the merchants of the earth will cry and be sad about her, because now there is no one to buy their cargoes—
¹²cargoes of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, red cloth; all kinds of citron wood and all kinds of things made from ivory, expensive wood, bronze, iron, and marble;
¹³cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle, sheep, horses, carriages, slaves, and human lives.

¹⁴The merchants will say,

“Babylon, the good things you wanted are gone from you.

All your rich and fancy things have disappeared.

You will never have them again.”

¹⁵The merchants who became rich from selling to her will be afraid of her suffering and will stand far away. They will cry and be sad ¹⁶and say:

“Terrible! How terrible for the great city!

She was dressed in fine linen, purple and red cloth,

and she was shining with gold, precious jewels, and pearls!

¹⁷All these riches have been destroyed in one hour!”

Every sea captain, every passenger, the sailors, and all those who earn their living from the sea stood far away from Babylon. ¹⁸As they saw the smoke from her burning, they cried out loudly, “There was never a city like this great city!” ¹⁹And they threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and being sad. They said:

“Terrible! How terrible for the great city!

All the people who had ships on the sea

became rich because of her wealth!

But she has been destroyed in one hour!

²⁰Be happy because of this, heaven!

Be happy, God’s holy people and apostles and prophets!

God has punished her because of what she did to you.”

²¹Then a powerful angel picked up a large stone, like one used for grinding grain, and threw it into the sea. He said:

“In the same way, the great city of Babylon will be thrown down,
and it will never be found again.

²²The music of people playing harps and other instruments, flutes, and trumpets,
will never be heard in you again.
No workman doing any job
will ever be found in you again.
The sound of grinding grain
will never be heard in you again.

²³The light of a lamp
will never shine in you again,
and the voices of a bridegroom and bride
will never be heard in you again.
Your merchants were the world’s great people,
and all the nations were tricked by your magic.

²⁴You are guilty of the death of the prophets and God’s holy people
and all who have been killed on earth.”

Life Lessons

Revelation 19:1-21

Situation

The heavenly multitude responded to God's judgment with enthusiasm and praise. Jesus, suffering Servant of the Gospels, became the righteous Judge.

Observation

When Jesus returns, he will complete the work he began. He will gather his people and destroy Satan.

Inspiration

Triumph is a precious thing. We honor the triumphant. The gallant soldier sitting astride his steed. The determined explorer returning from his discovery. The winning athlete holding aloft the triumphant trophy of victory. Yes, we love triumph....

Triumph is fleeting, though. Hardly does one taste victory before it is gone; achieved, yet now history. No one remains champion forever. Time for yet another conquest, another victory. Perhaps this is the absurdity of Paul's claim: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession ... " ([2 Corinthians 2:14](#)).

Here is the big difference between victory in Christ and victory in the world: A victor in the world rejoices over something he did—swimming the English Channel, climbing Everest, making a million. But the believer rejoices over who he is—a child of God, a forgiven sinner, an heir of eternity....

Nothing can separate us from our triumph in Christ. Nothing! Our triumph is not based upon our feelings, but upon God's gift. Our triumph is based not upon our perfection, but upon God's forgiveness. How precious is this triumph! For even though we are pressed on every side, the victory is still ours. Nothing can alter the loyalty of God...

"Triumphant in Christ." It is not something we do. It's something we are. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

Application

Christ has made you triumphant. Throughout the stress of daily living, look to Christ with joy. He has conquered sin, defeated Satan, and will one day take you home with him.

Exploration

Divine Judgment—[Genesis 3](#); [Isaiah 2:12](#); [Amos 5:15](#); [Luke 3:9](#); [Romans 2:16](#); [12:19](#).

People in Heaven Praise God

After this vision and announcement I heard what sounded like a great many people in heaven saying:

“[Hallelujah!](#)”

Salvation, glory, and power belong to our God,
²because his judgments are true and right.
He has punished the prostitute
who made the earth evil with her sexual sin.
He has paid her back for the death of his servants.”

³Again they said:

“Hallelujah!

She is burning, and her smoke will rise forever and ever.”

⁴Then the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures bowed down and worshiped God, who sits on the throne. They said:

“Amen, Hallelujah!”

⁵Then a voice came from the throne, saying:

“Praise our God, all you who serve him
and all you who honor him, both small and great!”

⁶Then I heard what sounded like a great many people, like the noise of flooding water, and like the noise of loud thunder. The people were saying:

“Hallelujah!

Our Lord God, the Almighty, rules.

⁷Let us rejoice and be happy

and give God glory,

because the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and the Lamb’s bride has made herself ready.

⁸Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear.”

(The fine linen means the good things done by God’s holy people.)

⁹And the angel said to me, “Write this: Happy are those who have been invited to the wedding meal of the Lamb!” And the angel said, “These are the true words of God.”

¹⁰Then I bowed down at the angel’s feet to worship him, but he said to me, “Do not worship me! I am a servant like you and your brothers and sisters who have the message of Jesus. Worship God, because the message about Jesus is the spirit that gives all prophecy.”

The Rider on the White Horse

¹¹Then I saw heaven opened, and there before me was a white horse. The rider on the horse is called Faithful and True, and he is right when he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like burning fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him, which no one but himself knows. ¹³He is

dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴The armies of heaven, dressed in fine linen, white and clean, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵Out of the rider's mouth comes a sharp sword that he will use to defeat the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will crush out the wine in the winepress of the terrible anger of God the Almighty. ¹⁶On his robe and on his upper leg was written this name: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Christ Through the Bible

Jesus: King of Kings

You are in your car driving home. Thoughts wander to the game you want to see or meal you want to eat, when suddenly a sound unlike any you've ever heard fills the air. The sound is high above you. A trumpet? A choir? A choir of trumpets? You don't know, but you want to know. So you pull over, get out of your car, and look up. As you do, you see you aren't the only curious one. The roadside has become a parking lot. Car doors are open, and people are staring at the sky. Shoppers are racing out of the grocery store. The Little League baseball game across the street has come to a halt. Players and parents are searching the clouds.

And what they see, and what you see, has never before been seen.

As if the sky were a curtain, the drapes of the atmosphere part. A brilliant light spills onto the earth. There are no shadows. None. From whence came the light begins to tumble a river of color—spiking

crystals of every hue ever seen and a million more never seen. Riding on the flow is an endless fleet of angels. They pass through the curtains one myriad at a time, until they occupy every square inch of the sky. North. South. East. West. Thousands of silvery wings rise and fall in unison, and over the sound of the trumpets, you can hear the cherubim and seraphim chanting, “Holy, holy, holy.”

The final flank of angels is followed by twenty-four silver-bearded elders and a multitude of souls who join the angels in worship. Presently the movement stops and the trumpets are silent, leaving only the triumphant triplet: “Holy, holy, holy.” Between each word is a pause. With each word, a profound reverence. You hear your voice join in the chorus. You don’t know why you say the words, but you know you must.

Suddenly, the heavens are quiet. All is quiet. The angels turn, you turn, the entire world turns—and there he is. Jesus. Through waves of light you see the silhouetted figure of Christ the King. He is atop a great stallion, and the stallion is atop a billowing cloud. He opens his mouth, and you are surrounded by his declaration: “I am the Alpha and the Omega.”

The angels bow their heads. The elders remove their crowns. And before you is a figure so consuming that you know, instantly you know: Nothing else matters. Forget stock markets and school reports. Sales meetings and football games. Nothing is newsworthy. All that mattered, matters no more, for Christ has come... . (From *When Christ*

Comes by Max Lucado)

For more on [“Christ Through the Bible.”](#)

¹⁷Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he called with a loud voice to all the birds flying in the sky: “Come and gather together for the great feast of God ¹⁸so that you can eat the bodies of kings, generals, mighty people, horses and their riders, and the bodies of all people—free, slave, small, and great.”

¹⁹Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth. Their armies were gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. ²⁰But the beast was captured and with him the false prophet who did the miracles for the beast. The false prophet had used these miracles to trick those who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his idol. The false prophet and the beast were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. ²¹And their armies were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds ate the bodies until they were full.

Life Lessons

Revelation 20:1-15

Situation

John described a coming time when Satan would be bound, dead Christians would be resurrected, and Satan and unrepentant sinners would be doomed to eternal destruction.

Observation

Observe the final triumph of God's kingdom over evil.

Inspiration

When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," it is a desire expressed from our hearts for the continued forceful advancement of God's cause on the earth. Included is our request for the change of men's hearts to increase the population of the kingdom. Contained also in the petition is a longing for the supernatural defeat of sin and error with a consequent increase of truth and righteousness in the earth through his people's functioning as salt and light. And we must not exclude an expression of our earnest wish that the Lord would return from heaven with his holy angels to conduct the harvest and usher in the completed phase of his kingdom. (From *God's Righteous Kingdom* by Walter J. Chantry)

Application

Do we pray for the population of God's kingdom to grow? Do we share the wonderful news of Christ's deliverance with those still uninformed? Set a goal to

both pray and speak to this once per week!

Exploration

God's Kingdom—[Psalm 145:13](#); [Matthew 6:10](#);
[John 18:36](#); [2 Timothy 4:18](#); [James 2:5](#).

The Thousand Years

I saw an angel coming down from heaven. He had the key to the bottomless pit and a large chain in his hand.²The angel grabbed the dragon, that old snake who is the devil and Satan, and tied him up for a thousand years.³Then he threw him into the bottomless pit, closed it, and locked it over him. The angel did this so he could not trick the people of the earth anymore until the thousand years were ended. After a thousand years he must be set free for a short time.

⁴Then I saw some thrones and people sitting on them who had been given the power to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been killed because they were faithful to the message of Jesus and the message from God. They had not worshiped the beast or his idol, and they had not received the mark of the beast on their foreheads or on their hands. They came back to life and ruled with Christ for a thousand years.⁵(The others that were dead did not live again until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first raising of the dead.⁶Happy and holy are those who share in this first raising of the dead. The second death has no power over them. They will be priests for God and for Christ and will rule with him for a thousand years.

⁷When the thousand years are over, Satan will be set free from his prison.⁸Then he will go out to trick the nations in all the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. There

are so many people they will be like sand on the seashore. ⁹And Satan's army marched across the earth and gathered around the camp of God's people and the city God loves. But fire came down from heaven and burned them up. ¹⁰And Satan, who tricked them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur with the beast and the false prophet. There they will be punished day and night forever and ever.

People of the World Are Judged

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and the One who was sitting on it. Earth and sky ran away from him and disappeared. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. Then books were opened, and the book of life was opened. The dead were judged by what they had done, which was written in the books. ¹³The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and [Hades](#) gave up the dead who were in them. Each person was judged by what he had done. ¹⁴And Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵And anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Life Lessons

Revelation 21:1–22:21

Situation

John told Christians that in the end, God would triumph. Despite the obstacles Christians face in this life, all who hold Jesus as their Lord will spend eternity in fellowship with God.

Observation

Finally. Sin will be destroyed. Death will die. Tears, anger, and frustrations will be gone.

Inspiration

The most hopeful words of that passage from Revelation are those of God's resolve: "I am making everything new."

It's hard to see things grow old. The town in which I grew up is growing old. I was there recently. Some of the buildings are boarded up. Some of the houses are torn down. Some of my teachers are retired; some are buried. The old movie house where I took my dates has "For Sale" on the marquee, long since outdated by the newer theaters that give you eight choices. The only visitors to the drive-in theater are tumbleweeds and rodents. Memories of first dates and senior proms are weather-worn by the endless rain of years. High school sweethearts are divorced. A cheerleader died of an aneurysm. Our fastest halfback is buried only a few plots from my own father.

I wish I could make it all new again. I wish I could

blow the dust off the streets. I wish I could walk through the familiar neighborhood, and wave at the familiar faces, and pet the familiar dogs, and hit one more home run in the Little League park. I wish I could walk down Main Street and call out to the merchants that have retired and open the doors that have been boarded up. I wish I could make everything new ... but I can't....

I can't. But God can. "He restores my soul," wrote the shepherd. He doesn't reform; he restores. He doesn't camouflage the old; he restores the new. The Master Builder will pull out the original plan and restore it. He will restore the vigor. He will restore the energy. He will restore the hope. He will restore the soul.

When you see how this world grows stooped and weary and then read of a home where everything is made new, tell me, doesn't that make you want to go home?

What would you give in exchange for a home like that? Would you really rather have a few possessions on earth than eternal possessions in heaven? Would you really choose a life of slavery to passion over a life of freedom? Would you honestly give up all of your heavenly mansions for a second-rate sleazy motel on earth?

"Great," Jesus said, "is your reward in heaven." He must have smiled when he said that line. His eyes must have danced, and his hand must have pointed skyward.

For he should know. It was his idea. It was his

home.

(From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Application

Are you looking forward to the day when God removes all evil? Throughout today, worship God and tell him of your love for him. As you encounter others who notice your joy, tell them about the future you have.

Exploration

Eternity—[John 14:2-3](#); [1 Corinthians 2:9](#); [15](#); [1 John 3:2](#).

The New Jerusalem

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared, and there was no sea anymore.² And I saw the holy city, the [new Jerusalem](#), coming down out of heaven from God. It was prepared like a bride dressed for her husband.³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Now God’s presence is with people, and he will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them and will be their God.⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, sadness, crying, or pain, because all the old ways are gone.”

⁵The One who was sitting on the throne said, “Look! I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this, because these words are true and can be trusted.”

⁶The One on the throne said to me, “It is finished. I am the [Alpha and the Omega](#), the Beginning and the End. I will give free water from the spring of the water of life to anyone who is thirsty.⁷ Those who win the victory will receive this, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.⁸ But cowards, those who refuse to believe, who do evil things, who kill, who sin sexually, who do evil magic, who worship idols, and who tell lies—all these will have a place in the lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

⁹Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last troubles came to me, saying, “Come with

me, and I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”¹⁰ And the angel carried me away by the Spirit to a very large and high mountain. He showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.¹¹ It was shining with the glory of God and was bright like a very expensive jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.¹² The city had a great high wall with twelve gates with twelve angels at the gates, and on each gate was written the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel.¹³ There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west.¹⁴ The walls of the city were built on twelve foundation stones, and on the stones were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

¹⁵The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod made of gold to measure the city, its gates, and its wall.¹⁶ The city was built in a square, and its length was equal to its width. The angel measured the city with the rod. The city was twelve thousand [stadia](#) long, twelve thousand stadia wide, and twelve thousand stadia high.¹⁷ The angel also measured the wall. It was one hundred forty-four [cubits](#) high, by human measurements, which the angel was using.¹⁸ The wall was made of jasper, and the city was made of pure gold, as pure as glass.¹⁹ The foundation stones of the city walls were decorated with every kind of jewel. The first foundation was jasper, the second was sapphire, the third was chalcedony, the fourth was emerald,²⁰ the fifth was onyx, the sixth was carnelian, the seventh was chrysolite, the eighth was beryl, the ninth was topaz, the tenth was chrysoprase, the eleventh was jacinth, and the twelfth was amethyst.²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate having been made from a single pearl. And the street of the city was made of pure gold as clear as glass.

²²I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the city's temple. ²³The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory of God is its light, and the Lamb is the city's lamp. ²⁴By its light the people of the world will walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵The city's gates will never be shut on any day, because there is no night there. ²⁶The glory and the honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷Nothing unclean and no one who does shameful things or tells lies will ever go into it. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will enter the city.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life. It was shining like crystal and was flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²down the middle of the street of the city. The tree of life was on each side of the river. It produces fruit twelve times a year, once each month. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of all the nations. ³Nothing that God judges guilty will be in that city. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and God's servants will worship him. ⁴They will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. ⁵There will never be night again. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light. And they will rule as kings forever and ever.

⁶The angel said to me, "These words can be trusted and are true." The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must happen soon.

⁷"Listen! I am coming soon! Happy is the one who obeys the words of prophecy in this book."

⁸I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw them, I bowed down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed these things to me. ⁹But the angel said to me, "Do not worship me! I am a servant like you, your brothers the prophets, and all those who obey the words in this book. Worship God!"

¹⁰Then the angel told me, "Do not keep secret the words of prophecy in this book, because the time is near for all this to happen. ¹¹Let whoever is doing evil continue to do evil. Let whoever is unclean continue to be unclean. Let whoever is doing right continue to do right. Let whoever is holy continue to be holy."

¹²"Listen! I am coming soon! I will bring my reward with me,

and I will repay each one of you for what you have done. ¹³I am the [Alpha and the Omega](#), the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

¹⁴“Happy are those who [wash their robes](#) so that they will receive the right to eat the fruit from the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. ¹⁵Outside the city are the evil people, those who do evil magic, who sin sexually, who murder, who worship idols, and who love lies and tell lies.

¹⁶“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to tell you these things for the churches. I am the descendant from the family of David, and I am the bright morning star.”

¹⁷The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” Let the one who hears this say, “Come!” Let whoever is thirsty come; whoever wishes may have the water of life as a free gift.

¹⁸I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to these words, God will add to that person the disasters written about in this book. ¹⁹And if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away that one’s share of the tree of life and of the holy city, which are written about in this book.

²⁰Jesus, the One who says these things are true, says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

revelation Making known truth that has been hidden.

Alpha and the Omega The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This means “the beginning and the end.”

Patmos A small island in the Aegean Sea, near the coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

“like ... Man” “Son of Man” is a name Jesus called himself.

Nicolaitans This is the name of a religious group that followed false beliefs and ideas.

Jerusalem This name is used to mean the spiritual city God built for his people. See **Revelation 21–22**.

Amen Used here as a name for Jesus; it means to agree fully that something is true.

Lion Here refers to Christ.

Hades The unseen world of the dead.

brothers and sisters Although the Greek text says “brothers” here and throughout this book, both men and women would have been included.

washed their robes This means they believed in Jesus so that their sins could be forgiven by Christ’s blood.

Wormwood Name of a very bitter plant; used here to give the idea of bitter sorrow.

scorpions A scorpion is an insect that stings with a bad poison.

Abaddon, Apollyon Both names mean “Destroyer.”

Sodom City that God destroyed because the people were so evil.

Michael The archangel—leader among God’s angels or messengers (**Jude 9**).

Mount Zion Another name for Jerusalem; here meaning the spiritual city of God’s people.

Son of Man “Son of Man” is a name Jesus called himself.

sickle A farming tool with a curved blade. It was used to harvest grain.

Hallelujah This means “praise God!”

Hades The place of the dead.

new Jerusalem The spiritual city where God’s people live with him.

Alpha and the Omega The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This means “the beginning and the end.”

stadia One stadion was a distance of about two hundred yards; about one-eighth of a Roman mile.

cubits A cubit is about half a yard, the length from the elbow to the tip of the little finger.

Alpha and the Omega The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This means “the beginning and the end.”

wash their robes This means they believed and obeyed Jesus so that their sins could be forgiven by Christ’s blood. The “washing” may refer to baptism (**Acts 22:16**).

More Help for Your Spiritual Growth

He Did This Just for You Verses

God Made You His Own

John 1:12-13

But to all who did accept him and believe in him he gave the right to become children of God. They did not become his children in any human way—by any human parents or human desire. They were born of God.

See also: [Galatians 4:6-7](#) and [1 John 3:2](#)

He Comforts You

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort. He comforts us every time we have trouble, so when others have trouble, we can comfort them with the same comfort God gives us.

See also: [John 14:1](#) and [Nahum 1:7](#)

He Gives You Confidence

1 John 5:14-15

And this is the boldness we have in God's presence: that if we ask God for anything that agrees with what he wants, he hears

us. If we know he hears us every time we ask him, we know we have what we ask from him.

See also: [2 Timothy 1:12](#) and [Hebrews 10:19, 22](#)

He Sets You Free

[John 8:32, 36](#)

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.... So if the Son makes you free, you will be truly free.

See also: [Galatians 5:13](#) and [Romans 8:2](#)

He Takes Your Worries

[Psalms 55:22](#)

Give your worries to the Lord,
and he will take care of you.
He will never let good people down.

See also: [2 Thessalonians 2:16–17](#) and [Zephaniah 3:17](#)

God Gives You Eternal Life

[John 10:28](#)

I give them eternal life, and they will never die, and no one can steal them out of my hand.

See also: [1 Peter 1:3–5](#) and [Philippians 3:20–21](#)

He Forgives You

[Colossians 1:21–22](#)

At one time you were separated from God. You were his enemies in your minds, and the evil things you did were against God. But now God has made you his friends again. He did this through Christ's death in the body so that he might bring you into God's presence as people who are holy, with no wrong, and with nothing of which God can judge you guilty.

See also: [Romans 8:1–2](#) and [1 John 1:9](#)

He Frees You from Sin

[Romans 8:2](#)

Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit that brings life made me free from the law that brings sin and death.

See also: [Galatians 5:1](#) and [John 8:36](#)

He Can Fulfill You

[John 6:35](#)

Then Jesus said, "I am the bread that gives life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

See also: [John 4:13–14](#) and [Psalm 22:26](#)

Jesus Offers You Grace

[2 Corinthians 8:9](#)

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. You know that Christ was rich, but for you he became poor so that by his becoming poor you might become rich.

See also: [John 1:16](#) and [Romans 5:1-2](#)

He Guides You

[Proverbs 3:5-6](#)

Trust the Lord with all your heart,
and don't depend on your own understanding.
Remember the Lord in all you do,
and he will give you success.

See also: [Jeremiah 31:9](#) and [Proverbs 16:9](#)

He Can Heal Your Body and Heart

[Psalm 147:3](#)

He heals the brokenhearted
and bandages their wounds.

See also: [Isaiah 41:10](#) and [Psalm 121:1-2](#)

He Has Created a Place in Heaven for You

[John 14:2](#)

There are many rooms in my Father's house; I would not tell you this if it were not true. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

See also: [Ephesians 2:6-7](#) and [Luke 12:8](#)

He Helps You

[John 14:12-13](#)

I tell you the truth, whoever believes in me will do the same things that I do. Those who believe will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And if you ask for anything in my name, I will do it for you so that the Father's glory will be shown through the Son.

See also: [Luke 10:18-20](#) and [Psalm 72:12](#)

He Sends the Holy Spirit

[John 15:26](#)

I will send you the Helper from the Father; he is the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father. When he comes, he will tell about me.

See also: [John 16:7-8](#) and [John 16:13-15](#)

He Sends Hope

[Matthew 16:27](#)

The Son of Man will come again with his Father's glory and with his angels. At that time, he will reward them for what they have done.

See also: [Psalm 119:49–50](#) and [2 Thessalonians 2:16–17](#)

He Gives You an Identity in Christ

[1 Peter 2:9](#)

But you are a chosen people, royal priests, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. You were chosen to tell about the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

See also: [Isaiah 43:1](#) and [1 Samuel 12:22](#)

He Intercedes for You

[Hebrews 7:25](#)

So he is able always to save those who come to God through him because he always lives, asking God to help them.

See also: [Job 16:20–21](#) and [Ephesians 6:18](#)

You Can Have Joy

[John 16:24](#)

Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy will be the fullest possible joy.

See also: [1 Peter 1:8–9](#) and [Isaiah 61:10](#)

Jesus Died Out of Love for You

[Ephesians 5:2](#)

Live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us as a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice to God.

See also: [1 John 4:19](#) and [John 13:34–35](#)

God Will Follow Through with His Work in You

[Philippians 1:6](#)

God began doing a good work in you, and I am sure he will continue it until it is finished when Jesus Christ comes again.

See also: [Matthew 24:13](#) and [James 1:4–5](#)

He Gives You a Place in God's Family

[Jeremiah 31:3](#)

And from far away the Lord appeared to his people and said,

“I love you people

with a love that will last forever.
That is why I have continued
showing you kindness.”

See also: [Isaiah 43:1](#) and [1 Samuel 12:22](#)

He Gave You a Powerful Spirit

[2 Timothy 1:7](#)

God did not give us a spirit that makes us afraid but a spirit of power and love and self-control.

See also: [Ephesians 6:10–13](#) and [Matthew 17:20](#)

He Provides for You

[Matthew 6:33](#)

The thing you should want most is God’s kingdom and doing what God wants. Then all these other things you need will be given to you.

See also: [Matthew 7:7](#) and [Matthew 7:11](#)

He Allows You to Rest

[Matthew 11:28](#)

Come to me, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads, and I will give you rest.

See also: [John 14:27–28](#) and [Philippians 4:6–7](#)

He Will Keep You Safe

[*Psalm 34:19*](#)

People who do what is right may have many problems,
but the Lord will solve them all.

See also: [Psalm 32:7](#) and [John 16:33](#)

He Offers Salvation

[*Luke 19:10*](#)

The Son of Man came to find lost people and save them.

See also: [1 John 4:14](#) and [Titus 3:5–6](#)

He Values You

[*Isaiah 43:4*](#)

Because you are precious to me,
because I give you honor and love you,
I will give other people in your place;
I will give other nations to save your life.

See also: [Psalm 100:3](#) and [Isaiah 49:15–16](#)

He Gives You Strength

[Psalm 20:1-2](#)

May the Lord answer you in times of trouble.
May the God of Jacob protect you.
May he send you help from his Temple
and support you from Mount Zion.

See also: [Psalm 118:5-9](#) and [Psalm 119:143-144](#)

God Rewards You

[Matthew 5:12](#)

Rejoice and be glad, because you have a great reward waiting for you in heaven. People did the same evil things to the prophets who lived before you.

See also: [Joshua 1:7](#) and [Proverbs 16:3](#)

Spiritual Growth Verses

Authority

Colossians 3:23–24

In all the work you are doing, work the best you can. Work as if you were doing it for the Lord, not for people. Remember that you will receive your reward from the Lord, which he promised to his people. You are serving the Lord Christ.

See also: [Psalm 16:8](#) and [Matthew 28:18–20](#)

Boldness

2 Timothy 2:12

If we accept suffering, we will also rule with him.

If we refuse to accept him, he will refuse to accept us.

See also: [Hebrews 13:6](#) and [Isaiah 41:10](#)

Commitment

1 Kings 8:61

You must fully obey the Lord our God and follow all his laws and commands. Continue to obey in the future as you do now.

See also: [Proverbs 16:3](#) and [Psalm 103:17–18](#)

Contentment

[1 Timothy 6:6-7](#)

Serving God does make us very rich, if we are satisfied with what we have. We brought nothing into the world, so we can take nothing out.

See also: [Philippians 4:11-12](#), [19](#) and [Psalm 23:1-2](#)

Daily Walk

[1 Timothy 6:11-12](#)

But you, man of God, run away from all those things. Instead, live in the right way, serve God, have faith, love, patience, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, grabbing hold of the life that continues forever. You were called to have that life when you confessed the good confession before many witnesses.

See also: [Deuteronomy 5:33](#) and [Colossians 3:23](#)

Discipleship

[John 15:8](#)

You should produce much fruit and show that you are my followers, which brings glory to my Father.

See also: [John 12:26](#) and [2 Timothy 4:1-2](#)

Faith

[1 Peter 1:8](#)

You have not seen Christ, but still you love him. You cannot see him now, but you believe in him. So you are filled with a joy that cannot be explained, a joy full of glory.

See also: [Hebrews 11:1](#) and [Mark 11:24](#)

Finding God's Will

[Jeremiah 6:16](#)

This is what the Lord says:

“Stand where the roads cross and look.
Ask where the old way is,
where the good way is, and walk on it.
If you do, you will find rest for yourselves.
But they have said, ‘We will not walk on the good way.’”

See also: [Jeremiah 29:13](#) and [James 1:5](#)

Forgiveness

[Ephesians 4:32](#)

Be kind and loving to each other, and forgive each other just as God forgave you in Christ.

See also: [Luke 6:37](#) and [Matthew 6:14–15](#)

Friendship

[*Ecclesiastes 4:9–10*](#)

Two people are better than one,
because they get more done by working together.
If one falls down,
the other can help him up.
But it is bad for the person who is alone and falls,
because no one is there to help.

See also: [Galatians 6:2](#) and [Proverbs 13:20](#)

The Future

[*Jeremiah 29:11–13*](#)

“I say this because I know what I am planning for you,” says the Lord. “I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future. Then you will call my name. You will come to me and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will search for me. And when you search for me with all your heart, you will find me!”

See also: [Proverbs 16:3](#) and [1 Corinthians 2:9–10](#)

Giving

[*2 Corinthians 9:7*](#)

Each one should give as you have decided in your heart to give. You should not be sad when you give, and you should not give because you feel forced to give. God loves the person who gives happily.

See also: [Malachi 3:10](#) and [Luke 6:38](#)

Grace

[Ephesians 2:4–5](#)

But God's mercy is great, and he loved us very much. Though we were spiritually dead because of the things we did against God, he gave us new life with Christ. You have been saved by God's grace.

See also: [Acts 20:24](#) and [2 Corinthians 9:8](#)

Heavenly Mindset

[Philippians 3:20–21](#)

But our homeland is in heaven, and we are waiting for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. By his power to rule all things, he will change our simple bodies and make them like his own glorious body.

See also: [2 Peter 3:13](#) and [Revelation 21:1–5](#)

Helping Others

[1 John 3:17-18](#)

Suppose someone has enough to live and sees a brother or sister in need, but does not help. Then God's love is not living in that person. My children, we should love people not only with words and talk, but by our actions and true caring.

See also: [Matthew 5:16](#)

Holiness

[1 Peter 1:15-16](#)

But be holy in all you do, just as God, the One who called you, is holy. It is written in the Scriptures: "You must be holy, because I am holy."

See also: [1 Thessalonians 4:7](#) and [Hebrews 12:14](#)

Hope

[Isaiah 40:31](#)

But the people who trust the Lord will become strong again.

They will rise up as an eagle in the sky;
they will run and not need rest;
they will walk and not become tired.

See also: [Psalm 25:3](#) and [Job 11:7](#), [13](#), [18](#)

Listening to God

[Deuteronomy 30:20](#)

To choose life is to love the Lord your God, obey him, and stay close to him. He is your life, and he will let you live many years in the land, the land he promised to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

See also: [Jeremiah 33:3](#) and [Psalm 85:8](#)

Love

[John 13:35](#)

All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other.

See also: [Romans 12:9](#) and [2 Corinthians 1:3–4](#)

Managing God's Resources

[Proverbs 11:24–28](#)

Some people give much but get back even more.
Others don't give what they should and end up poor.
Whoever gives to others will get richer;
those who help others will themselves be helped.

People curse those who keep all the grain,
but they bless the one who is willing to sell it.

Whoever looks for good will find kindness,

but whoever looks for evil will find trouble.

Those who trust in riches will be ruined,
but a good person will be healthy like a green leaf.

See also: [Matthew 6:19–21](#) and [Proverbs 3:9–10](#)

Patience

[Proverbs 19:11](#)

Smart people are patient;
they will be honored if they ignore insults.

See also: [Psalms 37:7](#) and [Psalms 27:14](#)

Peace

[John 14:27](#)

I leave you peace; my peace I give you. I do not give it to you as the world does. So don't let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

See also: [Isaiah 26:3](#) and [Psalms 4:8](#)

Perseverance

[Hebrews 10:36](#)

You must hold on, so you can do what God wants and receive what he has promised.

See also: [James 5:7–8](#) and [Romans 5:3–4](#)

Prayer

[Philippians 4:6–7](#)

Do not worry about anything, but pray and ask God for everything you need, always giving thanks. And God’s peace, which is so great we cannot understand it, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

See also: [1 Peter 3:12](#) and [2 Chronicles 7:14](#)

Purity

[2 Corinthians 7:1](#)

Dear friends, we have these promises from God, so we should make ourselves pure—free from anything that makes body or soul unclean. We should try to become holy in the way we live, because we respect God.

See also: [1 Chronicles 29:17](#) and [Matthew 5:8](#)

Reconciliation

[Isaiah 43:25](#)

“I, I am the One who forgives all your sins, for my

sake;

I will not remember your sins.”

See also: [Psalm 145:8](#) and [1 John 1:9](#)

Running the Race

[Hebrews 12:1](#)

We have around us many people whose lives tell us what faith means. So let us run the race that is before us and never give up. We should remove from our lives anything that would get in the way and the sin that so easily holds us back.

See also: [1 Corinthians 9:27](#) and [Matthew 24:13](#)

Sharing Your Faith

[1 Peter 3:15](#)

But respect Christ as the holy Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to answer everyone who asks you to explain about the hope you have.

See also: [1 Peter 4:11](#) and [Matthew 5:16](#)

Strength to Resist Temptation

[1 Corinthians 10:13](#)

The only temptation that has come to you is that which

everyone has. But you can trust God, who will not permit you to be tempted more than you can stand. But when you are tempted, he will also give you a way to escape so that you will be able to stand it.

See also: [James 4:7](#) and [1 John 4:4](#)

Worship

[*Psalms 100:2-5*](#)

Serve the Lord with joy;
come before him with singing.
Know that the Lord is God.
He made us, and we belong to him;
we are his people, the sheep he tends.

Come into his city with songs of thanksgiving
and into his courtyards with songs of praise.
Thank him and praise his name.
The Lord is good. His love is forever,
and his loyalty goes on and on.

See also: [Deuteronomy 13:4](#) and [John 4:23-24](#)

[30 Studies for New Believers](#)

Day 1: Jesus Our Savior

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- Why Jesus came to earth?
- If there are any other ways to get to heaven?

Read: [John 10:10](#); [John 14:6](#); [Acts 4:12](#); [1 Timothy 1:15](#)

Many people search for faith like they shop for clothes. They browse the racks of religion, pick an item, and try it on for size. If it doesn't fit, they throw it right back on the rack. If it's comfortable and makes them look good, then they buy it. Besides, it can always be returned.

Some people claim that Christianity is too narrow. Jesus clearly said that there's only one way to heaven and one narrow path that leads to God—and he is the way. He's not the least bit tolerant or accepting of other methods, sincere as they might be.

Why is that so hard to accept? In every other area of life, we accept absolutes. When we bake, we put in the exact ingredients. When we drive somewhere, we follow the directions. When we seek God, he requires only one thing—Christ—and that's the only way to God.

We're not saved by a system of religion. Salvation is

beautifully, incredibly simple. Jesus is the one Savior, and he's free for the taking.

The woman said, "I know that the Messiah is coming." (Messiah is the One called Christ.) "When the Messiah comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus said, "I am he—I, the one talking to you" ([John 4:25–26](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- Do you believe that Jesus is the only way to the Father?

• Why do some people struggle with this concept? _____
For a more in-depth study, read: [Hebrews 5:7–9](#)

"Let us ask our Father humbly, yet confidently in the name of Jesus, to remind us of the empty tomb. Let us see the victorious Jesus: the conqueror of the tomb, the one who defied death. And let us be reminded that we, too, will be granted that same victory!"

—Max Lucado

Day 2: Coming Home to Your Father

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- What it means to be a child of God?
- If you've run too far to come home?

Read: [Romans 8:15–16](#); [Luke 15:11–32](#); [2 Corinthians 6:18](#)

When you hold up your arms to your heavenly Father, he reaches down to scoop you up. These passages remind us that accepting God's gift of salvation is not a formal business deal. It's the picture of a father welcoming home his rebellious child, just like the story of the prodigal son in [Luke 15:11–32](#).

Just like the ungrateful son, we have run far from God. At some point in our lives, we've tried to live on our own, apart from him. We packed a knapsack, bought a bus ticket, and took off for the lights of the city. Somehow, the plan didn't work out as we expected. But God, your Father, was waiting up for you when you came home.

With joy in his eyes, God adopted you as soon as you held up your arms to him. He's your Abba Father. It doesn't matter how far you've run or how long you've been gone. His love doesn't change. You are his child.

But when the right time came, God sent his Son who was born of a woman and lived under the law. God did this so he could buy freedom for those who were under the law and so we could become his children
([Galatians 4:4–5](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- When do you become a child of God? _____
- What does it mean to you that God is your Father? _____
- How can you approach God as his child? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [1 John 3:1–10](#); [Hebrews 12:4–11](#)

“When we come to Christ, God not only forgives us, he also adopts us... . It would be enough if God just cleansed your name, but he does more. He gives you his name. It would be enough if God just set you free, but he does more. He takes you home. He takes you home to the Great House of God.”

—Max Lucado

Day 3: God’s Love

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- Just how much God really loves you?
- If you can fall out of God’s love?
- Why you deserve to be loved so much?

Read: [John 13:1](#); [Ephesians 3:14–19](#); [Romans 8:35–39](#)

God’s Word is the most beautiful expression of love ever written. Shakespeare’s sonnets pale in comparison to the Bible’s descriptions of love. His love transcends every kind of earthly love. His love is stronger than any bond between parent and child or husband and wife. No earthly image can accurately portray God’s love for us.

[Galatians 2:20](#) explains that Jesus loved you enough to die in your place. He chose to accept your punishment so that you could spend eternity with the father. In his death, Christ committed the greatest act of love ever seen by human eyes.

With a love so devoted, so sacrificial, so extreme—nothing can ever interfere. Nothing can squelch or diminish that love. You cannot fall beyond the reach of his love. You can’t lose it. You can’t change it, win it, or control it. His love extends

before and beyond time, and he loved you before you knew him. When you choose to accept his love, you begin the most amazing relationship of your life.

And from far away the Lord appeared to his people and said,

*“I love you people
with a love that will last forever.*

*That is why I have continued
showing you kindness”*

([Jeremiah 31:3](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- Can you ever lose God's love? _____
- Can you trust a loving God with the direction of your life? _____
- How much do you love God in return? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Psalm 145:8](#); [Isaiah 54:10](#)

“Run to Jesus. Jesus wants you to go to him. He wants to become the most important person in your life, the greatest love you'll ever know. He wants you to love him so much that there's no room in your heart and in your life for sin. Invite him to take up residence in your heart.”

—Max Lucado

Day 4: Growing in God

Have you ever wondered ...



- How to grow in your faith?

Read: [2 Peter 3:18](#); [Colossians 1:9–10](#); [1 Peter 2:2](#)

There's more to Paris than the Eiffel Tower. If you walk off the main tourist paths, you'll discover quaint cafés waiting to be enjoyed, fragrant flower shops tucked away, private bed and breakfasts unlisted in the tourist guides.

Ironically, visiting Paris has many similarities to the Christian walk. You can't miss salvation. It looms high above the skyline. It's what really makes your trip. But you'll find even more places you can visit to get to know God in a deeper way.

That's what the Bible reveals. Inside are countless passages of insight for you to consider so that you can learn more about God's personality. As you spend time with other Christians, in the Word, in prayer, and in accountability, you can draw from their strengths and experiences and share yours as well. Search the pages of Scripture to discover new places in God's Word.

Most of all, be willing to take the trip and grow in your relationship with God. You'll be surprised at what awaits you around the next corner!

But the truly happy people are those who carefully study God's perfect law that makes people free, and they continue to study it. They do not forget what they heard, but they obey what God's teaching says. Those who do this will be made happy

([James 1:25](#)).

For a more in-depth study, read: [Philippians 1:6](#); [Psalm 32:8](#)

"Growth is the goal of the Christian. Maturity is mandatory. If a child ceased to develop, the parent would be concerned, right? Doctors would be called. Tests would be run. When a child stops growing, something is wrong."

—Max Lucado

Day 5: The Bible: God's Scrapbook

Have you ever wondered ...



- If God's Word is any more than a bunch of good stories?

Read: [Romans 15:4](#); [Psalm 119:9-18](#)

The Bible comes even more alive when we realize that it's God's scrapbook. Paging through it, you learn more about him with each turn. It overflows with collages of pictures, stories, poems, and letters. You'll discover a piece of music that David wrote for him and a prayer God received from Job. You'll glimpse a snapshot of God's face as he watched his Son die.

What makes the Bible a unique scrapbook is that it doesn't just commemorate the past—it provides guidance for today and hope for tomorrow. You can find your name and face in its pages. Next to each Bible promise is a picture of you. The same hope, the same gifts, and the same salvation recorded in the Bible apply to you. This scrapbook isn't a nostalgic keepsake. It's a living, dynamic, hopeful expectation of God's plans for the future.

All Scripture is given by God and is useful for teaching, for showing people what is wrong in their lives,

for correcting faults, and for teaching how to live right. Using the Scriptures, the person who serves God will be capable, having all that is needed to do every good work ([2 Timothy 3:16–17](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- How can you personalize the message of the Bible?
- Which Bible promises will you claim for yourself today?

For a more in-depth study, read: [2 Peter 1:20–21](#); [Deuteronomy 17:18–20](#)

“Please remember, the goal of these stories is not to help us look back with amazement, but forward with faith. The God who spoke still speaks. The God who forgave still forgives. The God who came still comes. He comes into our world.”

—Max Lucado

Day 6: No Appointment Necessary

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- How to talk to God?
- If God really listens to you?

Read: [Mark 11:20–24](#); [James 5:15](#)

Maybe it seems too good to be true that you have immediate access to the Creator of the universe. No appointment is necessary. You don't need to ask his secretary if he is busy. You can bypass the lobby, phones, and security guards and walk right into his office. His focus is completely on you, and his time is unlimited.

You would expect nothing less from your father, right? God doesn't treat you like a stranger or a business partner. You are his child, dearly loved and cherished. If you believe that God loves you, then you can trust that he will listen to your prayers.

In [Mark 11](#), Jesus told us not to waste our words in prayer if we do not believe that God will answer us. But, if we are confident that he will meet our requests, then be ready! [Ephesians 3:20](#) tells us that God wants to bless us beyond our wildest dreams.

So I tell you to believe that you have received the things you ask for in prayer, and God will give them to you
([Mark 11:24](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- Do your prayers reflect your faith in God's power? _____
- How do you approach God in prayer? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Psalm 66:16–20](#); [Ephesians 6:18](#)

"You can talk to God because God listens. Your voice matters in heaven. He takes you very seriously. When you enter his presence, the attendants turn to you to hear your voice. No need to fear that you

will be ignored. Even if you stammer or stumble, even if what you have to say impresses no one, it impresses God—and he listens."

—Max Lucado

Day 7: The Holy Spirit

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- What the Holy Spirit's role is in your life?
- What the Holy Spirit is like?

Read: [Acts 2:1–4](#); [Romans 8:26–27](#); [John 14:17](#); [1 John 4:13](#)

Before he left earth, Jesus promised to send someone to be with us continually. He promised to send the comforter, one who would bear our burdens, warm our hearts, and urge us to pray. He knows our worries, desires, feelings, and thoughts. At those times when you feel like you can't express your thoughts to God, the Holy Spirit acts as your liaison.

The Holy Spirit is not a ghost that haunts churches. He is God. He is equal to and synonymous with the Father and Son, but he plays a different role. He knows you better than anyone else on earth does. He lives in you, so you are never alone. When you struggle with feelings of pain and depression, the Holy Spirit comforts you. When you're listening hard for God's voice, the Holy Spirit speaks to you. When you're down to your last ounce of strength, the Spirit lifts and carries you.

Jesus didn't leave us to fend for ourselves when he returned to heaven. He left us with the Holy Spirit. He lives in

you, understanding every thought, emotion, and desire that you ever feel. You can't earn his services. As soon as you embrace Christ, the Holy Spirit lives within you.

I ask the Father in his great glory to give you the power to be strong inwardly through his Spirit. I pray that Christ will live in your hearts by faith and that your life will be strong in love and be built on love ([Ephesians 3:16–17](#)).

Some personal applications:

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- Have you sensed the Holy Spirit's presence in your life?

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- How can you rely on him and his strength today? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [1 Corinthians 3:16](#); [12:4–11](#)

"Spiritual life is not a human endeavor. It is rooted in and orchestrated by the Holy Spirit."

—Max Lucado

Day 8: On Your Feet in Praise

Have you ever wondered ...

-

- Why worship is so important?
- How to praise the Creator of the universe?

Read: [Psalm 150](#); [Luke 19:36–40](#)

We shouldn't hesitate to give God a standing ovation. We should always be on our feet, lifting our hearts and our voices to him in praise. [Psalm 150](#) clearly tells us that he deserves all the credit. Creation cannot help praising the Creator. Jesus said that if people did not praise God, then the stones would cry out a hearty "Bravo!" to their God.

We can spend hours in worship of our Lord, but if our praise comes from an insincere heart, our efforts are wasted. God listens attentively, his head resting in his hand, peering into our hearts. He isn't impressed if our lips move without our hearts moving as well. Worship isn't a duty. It's a privilege, an act of obedience, an urge to satisfy a heart that longs to praise God.

God is the focus, the reason, and the joy of our worship. No matter what problems you're facing, don't let them distract you from your focus. Because of his work on the cross—for that reason alone—he deserves an unending stream of praise from our lips forever.

The time is coming when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, and that time is here already. You see, the Father too is actively seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth
([John 4:23–24](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- Believers worship God in a variety of ways. What is

your personal worship style? _____

- Do you spend enough time and energy in praise? _____
- For what are you thankful? _____

"Let me urge you to come to worship prepared to worship. Pray before you come so you will be ready to pray when you arrive. Sleep before you come so you'll stay alert when you arrive. Read the Word before you come so your heart will be soft when you worship. Come hungry. Come willing. Come expecting God to speak."

—Max Lucado

Day 9: Forgiveness

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- How you could forgive an enemy?
- What sins are unforgivable?

Read: [Genesis 45:4–15](#); [Matthew 18:21–35](#)

It goes beyond our human nature to forgive the unforgivable. We hold grudges and harbor resentment. We battle and bicker among ourselves. It is God's nature, however, to forgive anything and everything. The worst crime ever committed? God can forgive that. Your worst mistakes and harshest moments? God can forgive those, too. Even when you feel that God would never accept you as you are, he invites you to come just as you are, and he forgives you completely.

Joseph's brothers did the unforgivable—they sold their little brother into slavery. What an awful thing to do! They did not deserve to be forgiven. As readers, we long for a moment

of vengeance, when Joseph can get back at them for the years of pain and rejection they caused him. But Joseph held off. He could have gloated, mocked, yelled, or punished. Instead, he embraced them. Tears spilled down his cheeks as he forgave them. As Jesus taught in [Matthew 18:35](#), Joseph managed to forgive his brothers from his heart.

Perhaps you can empathize with Joseph's situation. Maybe you're face-to-face with someone who doesn't deserve to be forgiven. Through Jesus' grace, you can forgive. Only when you are bathed in God's forgiveness can you extend that same, rich, ungrudging forgiveness to others.

*But God shows his great love for us in this way:
Christ died for us while we were still sinners
([Romans 5:8](#)).*

Some personal applications:

- - Are you holding back from forgiving someone in your life? _____
 - From whom do you need to ask forgiveness? _____
- For a more in-depth study, read: [Genesis 37](#) and [42](#)

"Forgiveness comes easier with a wide-angle lens. Joseph uses one to get the whole picture. He refuses to focus on the betrayal of his brothers without also seeing the loyalty of his God. It always helps to see the big picture."

—Max Lucado

Day 10: Confession: A Sure Win

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- If God could ever forgive your sin?
- Why you should confess?

Read: [Psalm 32:5](#); [James 5:16](#)

Thirty thousand runners. Twenty-six miles. Thirteen water stations. Two tired feet. The olympic marathon—a colossal challenge that dares runners to attempt its course.

The Christian life is like a marathon. It's a lifelong, often grueling race for which we train, sweat, and persevere. We condition ourselves to prepare for the race. We find ourselves running among countless other runners with the same goal in mind: complete the race.

But not everyone makes it to the finish line. Some runners allow sin to begin piling up on their backs, slowing their strides until they eventually collapse on the curb. The course is difficult enough without having to carry around the heavy burden of unconfessed sin.

Confession is the only way to unload it from your back. God is watching and waiting for you at the finish line. He wants to see you run across it free of injury. There is no sin that he won't forgive. Can you hear him calling your name?

If we say we have no sin, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins, because we can trust God to do what is right. He will cleanse us from all the wrongs we have done

([1 John 1:8-9](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- What's holding you back from confessing the sin in your life? _____
- How will confession relieve your burdens? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Psalm 51](#)

"You know when God knows. You know when he is looking. Your heart tells you. The longer you run, the more complicated life gets. But the sooner you confess, the lighter your load becomes."

—Max Lucado

Day 11: No More Than We Can Bear

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- How to respond when you're tempted?
- What God expects of you?

Read: [1 Corinthians 10:13](#); [Matthew 4:1–11](#)

The question isn't *if* you'll be tempted to sin. It's just a matter of when, what, and how creative Satan will be. First Corinthians describes temptation as something everybody faces. We're vulnerable, and Satan knows it.

Jesus is our lifeline out of temptation. He sees the storm coming. He watches us struggling to stay afloat as wave after wave crashes over us. Just when we are about to drown, Jesus reaches in and offers his hand to pull us to safety. It is our

choice to either take his strong hand or to sink.

God's Word is our harbor from the storm. When we recognize temptation approaching, then we can gear up for it by asking for God's help. He knows our weaknesses. He understands our pressures and temptations. Jesus himself was tempted, and he is strong enough to overcome it all.

And now he can help those who are tempted, because he himself suffered and was tempted... . Let us, then, feel very sure that we can come before God's throne where there is grace. There we can receive mercy and grace to help us when we need it
([Hebrews 2:18](#); [4:16](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- What are some particular areas of temptation with which you struggle? _____
- How can you recognize and respond to temptation when you sense it? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Ephesians 6:10–18](#)

"He placed himself in our position. He suffered our pains and felt our fears. Rejection? He felt it. Temptation? He knew it. Loneliness? He experienced it. Death? He tasted it."

—Max Lucado

Day 12: Too Good to Be True

Have you ever wondered ...

•

- If you can lose your salvation?
- If you have to repent over and over again?

Read: [John 10:27–29](#); [Romans 8:38–39](#)

Some things just seem too good to be true. For you, heaven might be one of those things—unattainable and out of reach. Maybe you feel like you could never be good enough to deserve going there. The Bible, however, tries to erase that insecurity from your mind. These two verses shout, “Don’t worry everybody, God has got you!” Once we yield our lives to him, God holds us with his strong arm. He never lets go of us, no matter what. It’s not our job to keep our souls from slipping outside of heaven’s bounds—it’s God’s! He is the ultimate protector who grips our souls for eternity.

Having surrendered yourself to God, your salvation is a done deal. Your prayer is signed, sealed, and delivered straight to God. [First John 1:9](#) says, “If we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins, because we can trust God to do what is right. He will cleanse us from all the wrongs we have done.” The Bible reassures you that at the moment of your repentance, you became God’s child. Nothing you can do will change God’s mind.

And this is the boldness we have in God’s presence: that if we ask God for anything that agrees with what he wants, he hears us. If we know he hears us every time we ask him, we know we have what we ask from him
[\(1 John 5:14–15\)](#).

Some personal applications:

-

- At some point in your life, have you given your heart to God? _____
- How do you know that no one can take away your place in heaven? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [1 John 1:5–2:5](#)

“Just because you were grumpy at breakfast doesn’t mean you were condemned at breakfast. When you lost your temper yesterday, you didn’t lose your salvation. Your name doesn’t disappear and reappear in the Book of Life according to your moods and actions. Such is the message of grace.”

—Max Lucado

Day 13: A Heavenly Home

Have you ever wondered ...

-

- What happens after you die?
- What heaven is like?

Read: [John 14:1–4](#) and [Revelation 21:1–4](#)

Many people believe in heaven, but what is it really like? Is it somewhere up in the sky? What will eternity feel like?

Actually, heaven is far greater than we can imagine. The Bible doesn’t tell us exactly what heaven will be like, but today’s reading gives us an idea. Heaven is a place where there is no more pain, a place where you’ll never be lonely and you’ll never grow old. Heaven is like nothing that we’ve ever seen or experienced. But best of all, heaven is where Jesus lives, and

we'll be there with him. He is waiting for the perfect time for us all to be there together.

Before Jesus returned to heaven, he promised that he was going to prepare a place for us—in one of his Father's mansions! As a believer, your name is in the Book of Life. Your place will be worshipping God, and you will never grow tired of it. Heaven is a sigh of relief, a warm hug of welcome, the end of the journey ... home.

We know that our body—the tent we live in here on earth—will be destroyed. But when that happens, God will have a house for us. It will not be a house made by human hands; instead, it will be a home in heaven that will last forever. But now we groan in this tent. We want God to give us our heavenly home
([2 Corinthians 5:1–2](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- Based on God's Word, what do Christians know about death? _____
- How would you describe heaven? _____
- In what ways are you preparing for heaven? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [1 Corinthians 15](#)

"You'll be home soon, too. You may not have noticed it, but you are closer to home than ever before. Each moment is a step taken. Each breath is a page turned. Each day is a mile marked, a mountain climbed. You are closer to home than you've ever been."

—Max Lucado

Day 14: The Creator

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- If the story of Creation is true?
- Why God bothered to create you?

Read: [Nehemiah 9:6](#); [Job 26:7–14](#); [Acts 14:15](#)

In the beginning, God breathed life into Adam. God formed each living thing out of nothing. God's color palette is richer than any human artist's. His brush strokes are light and precise. The Bible praises God for his creativity. He left his stamp of craftsmanship on each one of us.

When he created you, he deliberately chose the shape of your face and the color of your eyes. In addition to your physical features, he combined a unique mix of talents and traits. And since that initial moment of creation, he has watched you ever since. Anyone who would labor so much to form you would naturally care enough to lead you the rest of the way through life. You are his child, his artwork.

Perhaps you've wondered why he bothered creating you. What can you possibly give to God that he doesn't already have? Certainly, you can't bring him power, glory, or holiness, but you can bring him one thing that he dearly wants—yourself. You are the masterpiece that the Great Artist treasures.

It is by faith we understand that the whole world was made by God's command so what we see was made by something that cannot be seen
([Hebrews 11:3](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- What does it mean to you that you were created in God's image? _____
- For what can you choose to praise the Creator today?

For a more in-depth study, read: [Psalm 8](#)

"Only in seeking his Maker does a man truly become man. For in seeing his Creator man catches a glimpse of what he was intended to be. He who would see his God would then see the reason for death and the purpose of time. Destiny? Tomorrow? Truth? All are questions within the reach of the man who knows his source. It is in seeing Jesus that man sees his Source."

—Max Lucado

Day 15: Cheering on the Church

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- Why you should go to church?
- What Christ's church is supposed to be like?

Read: [Ephesians 1:22–23](#); [Acts 4:32–35](#)

Joe was tired of the complaints. Every time his crew of little baseball players ran off the field, he was bombarded with grumbling. "Mark keeps dropping the ball!" "Why can't I play pitcher?" "I'm tired of being in the outfield!" "I won't catch if Timmy pitches!" Joe wasn't at all surprised that his team had

yet to win a game.

The church is a team. The success of the church depends on the commitment of the players. The church can only win when its members cheer each other on. Our Captain knows that if his team isn't unified, we will fail. Every time we take the field of life, we can choose to cheer or complain, encourage or criticize, laugh or groan. If we listen carefully to our Coach, we can beat Satan's team in a shutout!

The church team isn't complete without you. God designed it that way. You're the number one draft pick for God's roster. He wants you to be bold and step up to the plate. On God's team, you have the ability to hit a home run.

*It is good and pleasant
when God's people live together in peace!
([Psalm 133:1](#)).*

Some personal applications:

-
- How can you get more involved with your church? _____
- How are you contributing to the overall morale of your church team? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Matthew 16:16–19](#)

"Unity matters to God. The Father does not want his kids to squabble. Disunity disturbs him. Why? Because 'all people will know that you are my followers if you love each other' ([John 13:35](#)). Unity creates belief."

—Max Lucado

Day 16: Freedom to Obey

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- Why God asks you to obey him?
- If obedience will ever become easier and more natural for you?

Read: [James 1:22–25](#); [Romans 6:22](#); [John 8:31–32](#)

Sometimes it seems that rules are posted everywhere to limit our fun. “No running.” “No loitering.” “No diving.” “Shirt and shoes required.” Some people equate Christianity with a list of rules and regulations. They assume that God surrounds his children with rules just as the fun is getting started. These verses clarify that God’s commands aren’t meant to limit you. On the contrary, God’s instructions free you. His motivation is love, and his goal is to enhance your life, not limit it.

When you live within God’s boundaries, you’re free—free to enjoy life without worry, free to approach God without guilt, free to begin relationships without pain. Because of his blessings, obedience becomes fun. You obey not because you have to, but because you want to.

But now you are free from sin and have become slaves of God. This brings you a life that is only for God, and this gives you life forever
([Romans 6:22](#)).

Some personal applications:

-

- Do you view God's commandments as a burden or a privilege?_____

- What motivates you to obey God's Word? _____

- What benefits come from obedience? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Proverbs 3](#)

"That is the unique characteristic of the new kingdom. Its subjects aren't working in order to go to heaven; they work because they are going to heaven. Arrogance and fear are replaced with gratitude and joy."

—Max Lucado

Day 17: Getting Right with God

Have you ever wondered ...

-

- How you can become righteous?

- If following the rules is good enough for God?

Read: [Romans 3:19–26](#); [1 John 2:1–2](#); [Proverbs 2:7–8](#)

Try to think of someone who was righteous, someone who never did anything wrong. Mother Teresa? No. The Apostle Paul? Hardly. The Pope, Joan of Arc, or John the Baptist? None of these characters were righteous of their own accord, and neither are you. There's nothing you can do to make up for your foul behavior.

Sin stinks, and God hates it. Face it: Flowers won't appease him. Gifts and apology cards won't cut it. The grander tributes—an afternoon serving at the city mission, a fat check in the

offering plate—won't make you look any better or any more righteous. We always want to do what is right, but somehow, it just doesn't happen.

God's not surprised. Reading Romans chapter three may help you breathe a little easier. Deeds aren't the way to righteousness—Jesus is. He frees you from your sin when you hand over your life to him. Righteousness is a free gift. Take it. Wear it confidently by obeying God's Word. Then you'll receive all the positive things that God wants to give you along with it.

But the truly happy people are those who carefully study God's perfect law that makes people free, and they continue to study it. They do not forget what they heard, but they obey what God's teaching says. Those who do this will be made happy
([James 1:25](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- Have you been trying to get into heaven by what you do for God? _____
- Have you been living out your righteousness by obeying God's Word? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Matthew 5:6](#); [Hosea 10:12](#)

"The world rams at your door; Jesus taps at your door. The voices scream for your allegiance; Jesus softly and tenderly requests it. The world promises flashy pleasure; Jesus promises a quiet dinner ... with God. 'I will come in and eat.' Which voice do you hear?"

—Max Lucado

Day 18: Becoming Like Jesus

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- What sanctification is?
- How you become sanctified?

Read: [John 17:17–19](#); [1 Corinthians 6:11](#); [1 Peter 1:2](#)

Sanctification is the ongoing process of growing toward holiness. Once you've accepted Christ as your Savior, your salvation is secure, but God isn't finished with you yet. As long as you're alive, he wants you to become more like him. Sanctification is the Holy Spirit's job. Through his leading, you become more and more like Jesus each day.

Sanctification lasts a lifetime. While you're on earth, you'll never be perfect, but you should become *more* perfect with each passing day. God gives you the tools—the handbook (the Bible), the guide (the Holy Spirit), and the companions (the church).

You don't have to do anything to get salvation. You just embrace it. It's a gift, pure and simple. But from that moment on, God does expect something from you. He expects you to abandon your old lifestyle and grow into Christ's likeness. It's your part in God's plan.

You have begun to live the new life, in which you are being made new and are becoming like the One who made you. This new life brings you the true knowledge of God
([Colossians 3:10](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- How are you growing to be more like Jesus in your lifestyle? _____
- Why would God want you to have a part in sanctification? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Matthew 7:24-27](#)

“Positional sanctification comes because of Christ’s work for us.

“Progressive sanctification comes because of Christ’s work in us.

“Both are gifts from God.

“‘With one sacrifice he made perfect forever those who are being made holy’ ([Hebrews 10:14](#)). See the blending of tenses? ‘He made perfect’ (positional sanctification) those who are ‘being made holy’ (progressive sanctification).

“Positional and progressive sanctification. God’s work for us and God’s work in us. Neglect the first, and you grow fearful. Neglect the second, and you grow lazy. Both are essential, and both are seen in the moistened dirt at the base of the cross of Christ.”

—Max Lucado

Day 19: Holy and Clean

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- What it means to be holy?
- How you could ever be considered holy?

Read: [Leviticus 11:45](#); [Ephesians 1:4-6](#); [2 Corinthians 7:1](#)

Holiness is one of those intimidating religious words that we always hear but generally don’t understand. Holiness

means set apart, sinless, and perfect. God is holy; we are not.

God loves us despite our dirty, sin-soiled clothes. He wears his holiness like a dazzling, spotless, white robe. These verses encourage us to purify ourselves so that we can be holy, just as God intended us to be.

See that big black spot on your collar? That's lust. Don't forget that smear on the right sleeve. That's jealousy. There's a spot on your cuff and a streak on your lapel. Those are pride and dishonesty. What an eyesore we are next to God's purity!

But we can wear holiness, too. We don't wear our own; we wear Christ's. We are covered in his holiness. Once we have been cleansed white as snow, we can stand next to God in pure, holy garments.

But be holy in all you do, just as God, the One who called you, is holy. It is written in the Scriptures: "You must be holy, because I am holy"
([1 Peter 1:15–16](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- What sins have stained your soul? _____
- How can you be more holy today, just as God is holy?

For a more in-depth study, read: [2 Timothy 2:21–22](#); [1 Thessalonians 3:12–13](#)

"And what will happen when you see Jesus? You will see unblemished purity and unbending strength. You will feel his unending presence and know his unbridled protection. And—all that he is, you will be, for you will be like Jesus."

—Max Lucado

Day 20: Getting to Know a New Friend

Have you ever wondered ...



- How to get to know God?

Read: [1 Samuel 3:2–10, 19](#); [Proverbs 3:1–4](#)

Making time to get alone with God may seem tough—at times even impossible. Stress, deadlines, relationships, and responsibilities compete for your time. How can you set aside time to pause, open the Bible, study, and listen to God? Those are the meetings that God longs for. He wants to meet with you for your sake, so that you can get to know him and his Word better.

When the prophet Samuel was young, he had never heard God's voice before. Actually hearing God speak was a rare occurrence in those days. The boy had not yet met God in a personal way ([1 Samuel 3:7](#)).

But God was eager for Samuel to meet him, so he called his name. Once Samuel's ears were open, he listened for God's voice. From that moment on, he formed a special friendship with God.

Once you hear God, don't hesitate to invite him in. Just as you would spend time getting to know a new friend, spend that kind of time with your Lord. Ask him to sit and chat. Ask him more about himself, and learn about his past, his family, and his plans. Tell him all about your situation, your goals, and your

struggles. Once you've shared those heart-to-heart conversations, never grow apart. Let him be more than a mere acquaintance.

Do not change yourselves to be like the people of this world, but be changed within by a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to decide what God wants for you; you will know what is good and pleasing to him and what is perfect
([Romans 12:2](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- What times can you set aside to spend alone with God this week? _____
- How can you pause to listen for God's voice today?

For a more in-depth study, read: [Colossians 3:1–17](#)

"In the midst of your daily storms, make it a point to be still and set your sights on him. Let God be God. Let him bathe you in his glory so that both your breath and your troubles are sucked from your soul. Be still. Be quiet. Be open and willing."

—Max Lucado

Day 21: Justification: Your Ticket into Heaven

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- What you have to do to be admitted into heaven?
- How you can have a right relationship with God?

Read: [Romans 4:16–25](#)

As high school students prepare for college, they face four years of late-night study, rounds of admissions tests, and long-term career planning. The stress and strain of their preparation and decisions builds up to a single goal. They anxiously wait, day after day, checking and rechecking the mail box, looking for just one item: the college acceptance letter.

But what if they didn't need a letter? What if getting a spot at the most prestigious school in the country simply required signing up? What if degrees were given away as freely as coupons? This would be a student's dream!

Instant admission into heaven, however, isn't just a dream—it is a reality for all who turn to Jesus. Heaven doesn't require a test or a class. Nothing we do can make us good enough for God and heaven. Jesus does it all. He took the test for us and already filled out our paperwork. The one thing he requires is that we believe that he'll uphold his end of the bargain.

I mean that you have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God
 ([Ephesians 2:8](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- Are you still trying to earn your way into heaven? _____

- Have you acknowledged that only Christ can make you worthy of heaven? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Hebrews 11](#)

"Ponder the achievement of God. He doesn't condone our sin; nor does he compromise his standard. He doesn't ignore our rebellion; nor does he relax his demands. Rather than dismiss our sin he assumes our sin and, incredibly, sentences himself. God's holiness is honored. Our sin is punished. And we are redeemed. God is still God. The wages is still death. And we are made perfect."

—Max Lucado

Day 22: Christian Friendships

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- How to develop friendships with other Christians?
- About the importance of having Christian friendships?

Read: [Acts 14:21–22](#); [Ephesians 2:19](#)

God never intended for us to struggle through life alone. You'll notice a pattern in the Scriptures that God provides friends for our support. During tough times, King David turned to his dear friend Jonathan. When Naomi lost her husband and sons, she leaned on her daughter-in-law Ruth. And even Jesus, when he felt anxious about dying on the cross, asked his three closest friends, Peter, James, and John, to come pray with him.

Friends share our joys and sorrows. Friends pray for us. Friends balance us out. Friends help us see beyond our immediate circumstances to God's grand, sweeping plan. And we can do the same for our friends.

So do we need *Christian* friends? When we truly love Jesus more than anything else, then we want to be able to share what's most important to us with our closest friends. Only other believers can fully understand our passion for Christ.

Let's face it—we need each other. And that's just what God had in mind.

The greatest love a person can show is to die for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. But I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I heard from my Father
([John 15:13–15](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- How have you felt encouragement from other Christians? _____
- Who can you encourage today in their faith? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Proverbs 27:17](#); [Acts 11:23–24](#)

“We know the importance of a friend. All of us need friends, don't we? Whether or not you are friendly could determine whether or not someone hears about Jesus Christ. Your handshake, your warmth, your walk, your friendliness could make the difference in someone's life.”

—Max Lucado

Day 23: Spiritual Gifts

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- What spiritual gifts God has given you?
- How you can use them?

Read: [1 Corinthians 12:4–11](#); [Hebrews 2:4](#)

Since God is the giver, he chooses what gifts to give each person. He selects from his infinite pool of talents and blessings and chooses something appropriate for you. Every gift is good. You can't walk away slighted. It's up to you to discover what gifts he's placed in your heart and to use them.

Perhaps you wonder why God gives special gifts. In a “fair” economy, every person would receive the same gifts, in the same measure, at the same time. But God's economy operates differently. To some, he gives the gift of teaching. To others, he gives the gift of hospitality. These are very different gifts, right? God's family needs *all* of the gifts in order to function smoothly. We are dependent upon each other.

Study [Romans 12:3–8](#) and ask God which gifts he has given you. Ask your family, friends, pastor, and yourself. Consider your talents and your passions, and pray that God would show you how he wants you to serve the family. Then snatch up your prize and use it for God.

We all have different gifts, each of which came because of the grace God gave us
([Romans 12:6A](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- How can you discover your spiritual gifts? _____
- What do you think your spiritual gifts might be? _____
- How can you use your gifts? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [1 Thessalonians 5:19–22](#)

“God loves you just the way you are. If you think his love for you would be stronger if your faith were, you are wrong. If you think his love would be deeper if your thoughts were, wrong again. Don’t confuse God’s love with the love of people. The love of people often increases with performance and decreases with mistakes. Not so with God’s love. He loves you right where you are.”

—Max Lucado

Day 24: Good Stewards

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- What stewardship is?
- What God expects you to do with your possessions?

Read: [1 Peter 4:10–11](#); [Luke 12:41–48](#)

It’s no secret that our society is materialistic. God has a different perspective. When you consider God’s part in creating the world, you’ll realize that everything you “own” is really God’s. Not yours—God’s. While you are here on earth, he is entrusting you with it.

Because all you have is on loan from God, you know not to cling to your possessions. They will only slip through your fingers. When God entrusts you with possessions, he expects

you to honor him with what you have.

The Bible teaches that we are to give God our firstfruits—meaning the first and best of all we have. Is that because God needs your money? You must be kidding. Why, then, is giving so important? When you give, you put your possessions in proper perspective. Giving helps you participate in God's work. Giving helps *you* and your heart condition far more than it helps God.

Good stewardship means that you work and give cheerfully. Take inventory of your gifts, talents, and possessions. Invest them in the world around you so that with a glad heart you can report back to the giver.

Each one should give as you have decided in your heart to give. You should not be sad when you give, and you should not give because you feel forced to give. God loves the person who gives happily
([2 Corinthians 9:7](#)).

Some personal applications:



- Are you abusing what God has entrusted to you? _____
- What gifts can you invest in God's kingdom? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Matthew 25:15–23](#)

"God's foremost rule of finance is this: We own nothing. We are managers, not owners. Stewards, not landlords. Maintenance people, not proprietors. Our money is not ours; it is his."

—Max Lucado

Day 25: Accountable to God

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- Once you're saved, are you accountable to God for your actions?
- What God requires from you?

Read: [Romans 14:10–12](#); [Matthew 5:13–16](#); [1 Corinthians 9:16](#)

Romans reminds us that it doesn't matter much what people on earth think about us. It's God who matters. It's a scary thought to realize that one day each of us will stand alone before the judgment seat of Christ. God sees our hearts. He knows our thoughts. He watches every move we make.

If you know Christ, then you don't have to fear him. Your eternity is secure. But, we are accountable to him for our choices. Someday we will stand before him and answer for our decisions.

Sometimes it's hard to hold ourselves to God's strict standards. Good friends can hold each other accountable. A close friend can ask how you're responding to a particular temptation that always seems to break you. A fellow believer can help you live up to God's standards. Remember, ultimately you're accountable only to him—but in the meantime, we can help each other.

*The Lord knows what is happening in the world of the dead,
so he surely knows the thoughts of the living
([Proverbs 15:11](#)).*

Some personal applications:

-
- For what things do you need someone to hold you accountable? _____
- How can you live in light of the judgment seat of Christ—not in fear, but in wisdom? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Proverbs 15:2–3](#)

“Listen to the Christ rather than to the voices of men. Jesus says you can’t please men and still be a servant of God. Those who listen and follow Christ will be received into heaven by the pierced hands of the one who knows the freedom of giving up what you cannot own in order to receive what no one can take from you—eternal life.”

—Max Lucado

Day 26: Believe and Be Baptized

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- What baptism is?
- If you must be baptized in order to be a Christian?

Read: [Matthew 3:11, 13–17](#); [1 Peter 3:21](#)

John (a man), baptized Jesus (the Savior of humanity). Does that sound a bit ironic to you? It did to John the Baptist—and he told Jesus so. But Jesus wanted to stress the importance of baptism, and he wanted to leave us a model to follow, so he was baptized. Jesus didn’t need forgiveness; he was perfect.

But he followed the will of his Father, which included baptism.

A marriage commitment begins with a ring. The couple publicly commits to each other. At the ceremony, the couple declares, “I’m no longer my own—I’m married!” Baptism announces that you are no longer your former, independent self. You have chosen a relationship, and you take Jesus’ name, “Christian.”

Baptism is a blessing, not a burden; an honor, not a chore; a privilege, not a punishment. By obeying Jesus’ command to be baptized, you symbolically die to sin and are reborn with Christ.

Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of changed hearts and lives. He told people to believe in the one who would come after him, and that one is Jesus”
([Acts 19:4](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- If you have not yet been baptized, when can you follow Christ’s command? _____
- If you have already been baptized, what does your baptism symbolize in your walk with the Lord? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Acts 2:38–39](#)

“Please understand, it is not the act that saves us. But it is the act that symbolizes how we are saved! The invisible work of the Holy Spirit is visibly dramatized in the water... Remove your shoes, bow your head, and bend your knees; this is a holy event. Baptism is not to be taken lightly.”

—Max Lucado

Day 27: Three in One

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- About the Trinity?
- How to relate to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

Read: [Mark 1:10–11](#); [Matthew 28:19](#)

In two thousand years, biblical scholars have yet to explain the Trinity in fewer than five hundred words. The Trinity is one of those beautiful, divine mysteries that we'll never fully understand—not until we stand in heaven and share God's wisdom. We can accept that God doesn't intend for us to understand everything in life. We can be satisfied that God understands, and he has revealed as much as our limited minds can contain.

These verses from Matthew and Mark shed some light on the Trinity. It's astounding to imagine a God who is everywhere all the time, and yet was also crucified on one cross thousands of years ago. This God is not a cold spirit, watching from atop a cloud. He is with you—right here, right now.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all
([2 Corinthians 13:14](#)).

Some personal applications:

-

- When you pray, do you address God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus? _____

- How have you experienced the touch of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [John 14:16–17](#); [Romans 5:5–6](#)

“All the splendor of heaven revealed in a human body. For a period ever so brief, the doors to the throne room were open and God came near. His Majesty was seen. Heaven touched the earth and, as a result, earth can know heaven. In astounding tandem a human body housed divinity. Holiness and earthliness intertwined.”

—Max Lucado

Day 28: Finding Comfort in the Dark

Have you ever wondered ...

-

- Why Christians suffer?

- Where to turn for comfort in tough times?

Read: [Psalm 18:1–6](#); [34:19](#)

Christians are certainly not exempt from trouble, but when we feel as if we are buried in pain, God offers us comfort to carry us through. Life after conversion doesn't suddenly become a smooth, easy ride, but it is different. We have access to God's richest treasures. His comfort is one of them.

In difficult times, he pours comfort on our weary souls. When life seems good, it's easy to call on God. We casually

toss prayers in his direction. We walk with a light step until pain stops us abruptly. Suddenly, God seems far away. We flounder in our pain, struggling to cry out, and all we can muster is a faint whisper.

With compassion, God hears. He sees you, fighting against despair. If we can only lift our eyes to him, we will see him rushing to share his comfort with us. He is our hero, our savior, our peace.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort. He comforts us every time we have trouble, so when others have trouble, we can comfort them with the same comfort God gives us
([2 Corinthians 1:3–4](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- How can you use the difficult times in your past to empathize with others who are struggling? _____
- When do you take advantage of God's comfort? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Habakkuk 3:17–19](#)

“Being a father is teaching me that when I am criticized, injured, or afraid, there is a Father who is ready to comfort me. There is a Father who will hold me until I’m better; help me until I can live with the hurt, and who won’t go to sleep when I’m afraid of waking up and seeing the dark. Ever. And that’s enough.”

—Max Lucado

Day 29: Spreading the Good News

Have you ever wondered ...

-
- How to share the good news of salvation?
- With whom you can share your faith?

Read: [Acts 8:4–40](#); [Colossians 4:5–6](#)

Spill your news. Shout your joy. Spread your announcement. After all, good news is meant to be shared! Why stifle the best message ever known to humanity? So you've met this Jesus Christ? You know him personally? Then tell your friends and family all about your new friend.

When we are enjoying God's goodness, it's natural to want to talk about him. It's refreshing. Just as you'd share your latest announcement—a new car, a baby on the way, a broken relationship restored—the best news ever should always be on the tip of your tongue. Tell others about the person who has changed your life. Don't push away an opportunity to speak.

Jesus' disciples couldn't contain themselves. They heard. They believed. Then they told everybody. Can you identify with their energy and enthusiasm? Have you felt the undeniable urge to tell someone how Jesus changed your life?

“Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.” So the man left and began to tell the people in the Ten Towns about what Jesus had done for him. And everyone was amazed
([Mark 5:19–20](#)).

Some personal applications:



- Can you think of someone who needs to hear the best message ever? _____
- How can you keep your first joy of knowing Jesus fresh and contagious in your life? _____

For a more in-depth study, read: [Matthew 5:13–16](#)

“You’ve heard the voice whispering your name, haven’t you? You’ve felt the nudge to go and sensed the urge to speak. Hasn’t it occurred to you? ... If the Bible were being written today, that might be your name in the eighth chapter of Acts.”

—Max Lucado

Day 30: A Leader Who Serves

Have you ever wondered ...



- What it really means to be a servant?
- How to serve as Jesus did?

Read: [Matthew 20:25–27](#); [Philippians 2:5–11](#)

Jesus doesn’t ask us to serve any differently than he served. He’s been here—on earth, among grumpy, demanding people, feeling tired and worn thin. Paul explains in [Philippians 2:5–11](#) that Jesus was the ultimate servant. Reading those passages may make you feel like Jesus is a tough act to follow. But Jesus made it clear in [Matthew 20:25–27](#) that it is your attitude that matters most.

When you see life through Jesus’ eyes, it’s natural to spot

opportunities to serve. Too often we miss them because we focus on ourselves. We can't see beyond the wall of our own problems and concerns. Only when we look beyond ourselves can we be the servants that Jesus desires us to be.

In [Luke 22:24-27](#), Jesus tells his disciples that the leader among them would be a servant. By setting your heart on serving, you can follow in Jesus' footsteps.

This is what you were called to do, because Christ suffered for you and gave you an example to follow. So you should do as he did
([1 Peter 2:21](#)).

Some personal applications:

-
- Starting in your hometown, how can you serve other people? _____
- How can you model your attitude after Christ's attitude?

For a more in-depth study, read: [Philippians 2:14-17](#); [1 Corinthians 12:5-11](#)

"Reliable servants. They're the binding of the Bible. Their acts are rarely recited and their names are seldom mentioned. Yet were it not for their loyal devotion to God, many great events never would have occurred."

—Max Lucado

The Big Picture

A 30-Day Overview of the New Testament

Matthew 1:18–2:23

Matthew 5:1–16; 6:1–7:12

Matthew 14:13–36

Mark 2:1–17

Luke 10:25–37; 11:1–4

Luke 15:1–32

Luke 19:28–48

Luke 22:1–23

John 3:1–21

John 4:1–42

John 11:1–44

John 14:1–31

John 19:1–20:10

Acts 2:1–47

Acts 8:26–40

Acts 9:1–31

Acts 16:11–40

Romans 8:1–39

Romans 12:1–21

1 Corinthians 13:1–13

1 Corinthians 15:1–58

Ephesians 2:1–22; 6:10–20

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