

# GOING Deeper

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the  
wisdom and knowledge of God!*



UDAY RAO

# New Creation



## JANUARY 1

***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The old has gone, the new is here.***  
*(2 Corinthians 5:17)*

God is not just the God of creation. He is the God of new creation!

Imagine if we were just stuck with who we are and what we have in the natural, just the product of what we have at birth and what we develop into. Imagine if the messes in our life – trauma, abuse, addictions, habits, patterns, failures – and what they did to us, were there to stay. What hopelessness . . . .

The good, great, incredible news is that, with Jesus, there is hope – He is the God of new creation. The Word who was there at creation is actively working in us to bring about something – someone! – new.

But there's a condition, an "if". We have to be *in* Christ – not in a church, not in a religion, not even with theological or biblical knowledge. We are called to be in relationship with Jesus, in communion and intimacy with Him, in step with His Spirit, in alignment with His heart, in fellowship with His people, in partnership with His Kingdom purposes. Today, as a new year begins, resolve one of the following:

1. If you are already in Christ, live with the certainty that the old has gone and the new is here – not by your will or efforts, but by Christ's work of new creation.
2. If you are still stuck in the old, step into relationship with Jesus, and watch Him transform you into a new creation!.

***Decree:***

*I am a new creation. The old has gone, the new is here!*



## JANUARY 2

***Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.***

***See, I am doing a new thing!***

***Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?***

***I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.*** (Isaiah 43:18-19)

God is the God of history; the Bible is full of the remembrance of what God has done. His faithfulness in our past gives us faith for the present and future. We build upon the foundation of what we know and have experienced of Him, as we draw closer to Him and become more like Him.

And yet, often, the past can hold us back – not just the bad things, but also the good. Our successes can trap us in the past, just as surely as our failures; we can be just as enslaved by our comfort zone as by an abusive relationship.

So, God says, “Don’t let the past keep you from the new thing I am doing.” Every new year brings with it, along with the promise of the new, the danger of remaining in the old. The amazing promise is that God is at work in us, right now, doing a new thing! And He exhorts us to open our eyes and ears, minds and hearts, and be aware of what He is doing.

Each of us enters a new season holding on to what we shouldn’t – they may be traditions, habits, patterns, feelings, achievements, hurts, unforgiveness, disappointments, relationships, security . . . . God says, “Let go!” He is promising to make a way where we can’t see a way. He is promising to refresh us with the living water of His Spirit, in the area we need Him the most.

Will you, right now, express your obedience to Him with a physical gesture? Open your hands as your expression of letting go of the former things, and lift up your open hands as an expression of your willingness to receive His new things!

***Decree:***

***God is making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland!***



## JANUARY 3

***A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.***

*(John 13:34-35)*

The disciples' ears must have perked up at the prospect of a new command; they were steeped in a culture of religious commandments that governed all of life – not just the ones God had given, but the many more that the religious elite had prescribed. And not just any ordinary command, but one that would set them apart as Jesus' disciples – maybe a new ritual, or different dress code, or unique tradition . . . .

Jesus' words were so different, so simple, so difficult – “*Love one another.*”

I am reminded of the story of Naaman, who is told by the prophet Elisha to bathe in the river Jordan and be healed of his leprosy, and Naaman is offended because he sees the task as humiliating. His servants come to the rescue, telling him that he would have been willing to do some great exploit if the prophet had asked, so why not do this simple act in obedience? He does, and is healed!

Aren't we often like Naaman? We are ready to show our commitment to God with religious and spiritual acts, but then He asks us to do something that is simple but humbling – “*Love one another.*” Like the Pharisees, we find it easier to “love” God than to love one another; we prefer the structured comfort of religion to the messiness of relationships.

Jesus said that loving one another is a command, not an optional extra; He said it's something we must do; He said it will be a witness to the world. And He even tells us how to love one another – like He has loved us! Each of us has experienced His love – tender, passionate, gracious, merciful, sacrificial, powerful, life-giving, transforming . . . . We just have to love one another from the overflow.

As we move into the new year, let's embrace this new command and look to Jesus' example to fulfil it.

### ***Decree:***

*By our love for one another, everyone will know that we are His disciples!*



## JANUARY 4

***But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.***

*(Romans 7:6)*

There are a lot of paradoxes in this promise of new life. Some of them make sense – for example, that we have to die in order to live. Paul speaks here of the need to die to the things that enslave us – the word actually refers to the things that keep us restrained, that hold us back. The old way of living – for the Jews, it was following a written code; for us, it is our lives apart from Jesus – holds us back from the life that God has appointed for us, and so we need to die to it; we need to separate ourselves from those attitudes and patterns.

However, there is another paradox in this verse that is completely counter-intuitive, but so typical of Jesus. We are set free in order to serve! The Bible recognizes that we are never really free in the sense of doing whatever we want to. In our old life apart from God, we think we are free but actually we are enslaved by so many things – our own desires, others' expectations, the devil's schemes, and much more; in a word, sin.

And so, Paul speaks of being released in order to serve in the new way of the Spirit – well, the word used here for “serve” actually means “to be a slave.” Jesus sets us free from the past in order to be slaves to Him, because He knows that this is true freedom. But He doesn't just set us free from sinful behaviour, He also sets us free from futile religion. This verse tells us that we are set free from the obsolescence of religion and released into the freshness of relationship.

The independence we think we have apart from God is just an illusion – we are actually in abject slavery. But Jesus releases us from the old, so that we can choose to be His slaves. He gives us His Holy Spirit to help us make that choice each day, and to live in the freshness of this new life.

Today, if you will, consider maybe one area of your life – thoughts or actions or attitudes – that you can see held you back in this past year. Die to it, and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with its opposite (e.g. die to an area of unforgiveness, and ask the Holy Spirit to give you a forgiving heart instead).

### ***Decree:***

*I have been released from my old way of life, into the freshness of life in the Spirit.*



**JANUARY 5**

***Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.***

***Sing to him a new song;***

***Play skillfully, and shout for joy.***

***For the word of the LORD is right and true;***

***He is faithful in all he does.***

*(Psalm 33:2-4)*

In a post I read recently, Greg Hood writes, “Many churches today are happy with the old religious ways. I hear people say often, ‘Give me some of that old-time religion.’ I say, no thank you. I want what Jesus is doing today.”

I see this attitude more frequently when it comes to the hymns of old. Don’t get me wrong – I recognize that many of our beloved hymns have glorious language and profound theology, and they came from people who loved God and were surely inspired by the Spirit. And yet, the hymns that they composed were new songs in their time, flowing from their authors’ fresh experiences and revelations of Jesus.

In our love for the hymns and choruses we grew up with, or even those that we came to faith with, we can settle into what is familiar and pleasing to us rather than focusing on what pleases God. He is looking for the overflow of what He is revealing to us of Himself and what we are experiencing of Him.

When you look at the world around you, or even at the difficult circumstances of your own life, you might wonder where these new songs would come from. But the psalmist is not telling us to base our worship on our ever-changing circumstances; rather, we have the assurance of the unchanging God, whose word is “*right and true*” and who is “*faithful in all He does.*” He is always worthy of new songs!

And here’s the wonderful news: you don’t have to be a musician or songwriter or even a good singer to sing a new song to Jesus. You just have to desire to praise Him. He is the Father who delights more in His baby’s first words than a Beethoven symphony, who treasures His child’s scribbled drawing more than a Mona Lisa!

So let me challenge each one of us: sing a new song to Jesus today. It can be just one line, like “Jesus you are \_\_\_\_\_”; or you can pick up an instrument and play a couple of chords and let the words come; or you can sit down and write a poem or spoken word. Don’t worry about pitch or key or melody or rhythm or rhyme. You have an audience of One, and He’s already captivated by you!

***Decree:***

***I will sing to Jesus a new song, for His word is right and true, and He is faithful in all He does!***



## JANUARY 6

***“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. . . . I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”*** (Jeremiah 31:31, 33b)

Tim Sheets refers to the prophecies in the Old Testament as “embryonic sermons” – God’s purposes that were declared in advance and came to pass in their proper time. He told His people through Jeremiah that the days of the new covenant were coming; the great news for us is that they have come, and we live in the age of the new covenant!

That doesn’t mean the old covenant was not good – on the contrary, it was perfect for the purposes for which God established it. Through the old covenant of the law, He revealed Himself as a holy God who desires a holy people; however, He also convicted us through that same law of our inability to ever be holy by our own efforts.

Have you ever felt frustrated, discouraged, even defeated by your inability to be holy, to match up to Jesus’ standards? I know I have, every day of my life, even before I committed my life to Him. The dos and don’ts that are supposed to bring us closer to Him and make us more like Him, only seem to drive us further away, in our guilt and shame at falling short constantly. They are a burden we find impossible to carry.

God, of course, knew this all along, and things were always going according to His plan. He spoke constantly through the prophets of the new covenant that was to come. And then, in Jesus, every embryonic sermon was fulfilled!

The burden of the old covenant prepared us for the freedom of the new! This passage in Jeremiah tells us two things about the new covenant:

1. God **EQUIPS** us to follow His laws by writing them on our minds and hearts through the Holy Spirit.
2. God **EMBRACES** us as His people, as those who belong to Him, even before we are able to follow His laws.

Today, don’t let any sense of guilt or shame or failure or inadequacy keep you from drawing close to Jesus. Instead, receive the equipping of His Holy Spirit, and rest in the embrace of your Father’s arms.

### ***Decree:***

*We live in the days of the new covenant!*



## JANUARY 7

***I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.***

*(Ezekiel 11:19-20)*

Yesterday we saw how, in the new covenant, God equips us to follow His laws and embraces us as His people. Today we look at another wonderful aspect of God's working in us, that He spoke to the next generation of His people through Ezekiel, and that is again fulfilled in this new covenant age.

God not only embraces and equips us, He also does a work of transformation within us. He goes to the heart of the matter – which is, in fact, our heart! Again, we can get caught up in the externals, in appearances, in duties and requirements and rituals – but, as God told Samuel, while man looks at outward appearances, He looks at the heart. God wants to transform us from our innermost being, not merely alter some shallow exteriors.

And so, the Bible gives us the first mention of heart transplant surgery! God says He has removed our old hearts – hard as stone, unable to receive His Spirit, where His Word does not penetrate. And He has replaced them with new hearts – soft and pliable, able to soak in His Spirit, open to His Word.

You and I received new hearts when we came to Jesus! And these new hearts have a very important characteristic – they are undivided. The Hebrew simply means “one heart”. Hearts that have one focus, one purpose, one desire, one love – Jesus! Hearts that can only be satisfied with more of Him, and that have been built to contain and carry His Spirit.

Today, put your hand on your heart and thank Jesus for giving you a new heart. Ask Him to restore its “oneness”, by dealing with the things you've allowed to clutter your heart.

### ***Decree:***

*God has removed my heart of stone and given me a heart of flesh!*



## JANUARY 8

***See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare;  
before they spring into being I announce them to you.***

*(Isaiah 42:9)*

Why do we find it so hard to trust God? After all, He has given us enough reasons to! In today's verse, through the prophet Isaiah, God draws our attention to all that He has already done for us, all the promises that have already come to pass. He is faithful, and His Word is both powerful and true.

So why do we not trust Him? Why do we find it easier to put our faith in fallible humans and their institutions? There are two answers that I see in this verse:

1. What we focus on, what we dwell upon – simply put, what we see. We see the storm, and lose sight of the One who can still it with a whisper. We see our problems, and forget that Jesus has been there for us so many times in the past.
2. Our expectations – we want God to fulfil His promises in our way and time, but He uses the language of growth, like a plant sprouting; it often takes time for what God has appointed to fully mature, but we get impatient.

If we choose to dwell instead on how faithful He has already been, and recognize that His methods and timing have been perfect, then we also trust that He will surely fulfil the new things He is declaring to us. We trust in the process and timeline He chooses. We have hope, not despair. We step into a new season with confidence in His Word – both general and specific promises – and assurance of the future. We move forward in faith, not fear.

Has God given you a promise or prophetic word for this new year? Trust Him to bring it to pass. Watch in excitement as it unfolds in your life.

***Decree:***

*God has declared new things, and they will surely spring into being!*



## JANUARY 9

*Jesus said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”*  
(Matthew 13:52)

The teachers of the law were the most learned theological scholars of Jesus’ time. And yet, when they became disciples of Jesus, they had to add new knowledge and understanding to what they knew. The old was not discarded, but it wasn’t sufficient.

We may not be biblical scholars, but we, too, are invited into this aspect of the kingdom – to grow in our knowledge of Jesus, to deepen our understanding of His ways, to mature in our discernments and judgments. In effect, we are invited to store in our hearts and minds and spirits, the treasures of the kingdom of heaven!

And as we do so, we are able to be a blessing to those around us, to those we come in contact with, to those who are in need. We are able to draw on what we know of Jesus, and what we have received from Him, to minister to others. But we can’t let this process stop, otherwise we will only have the old to share and not the new – like drawing water from a stagnant pool instead of a flowing river.

Don’t be intimidated by the mention of “teachers of the law.” Deeper study of the Bible is very good, and shouldn’t be ignored. But the very best way to get to know Jesus better, to receive His new treasures each day, is to spend time in His presence. Let us not be satisfied with what we already know and have experienced of Jesus. He invites us into new experiences and revelations each day.

Today, let’s do a brief exercise. Write down at least one way in which you experienced Jesus afresh in the past year. Then write down one way you’ve experienced Him afresh in just the past week of this new year (I’m confident you will think of at least one thing!). Finally, ask Jesus for many new kingdom treasures in this year ahead!

### **Decree:**

*I will bring out of the storeroom of my life new treasures as well as old.*



**JANUARY 10**

*I waited patiently for the LORD;  
he turned to me and heard my cry.  
He lifted me out of the slimy pit,  
out of the mud and mire;  
he set my feet on a rock  
and gave me a firm place to stand.  
He put a new song in my mouth,  
a hymn of praise to our God.*

*(Psalm 40:1-3a)*

In an earlier devotion, we saw that our new songs don't have to be inspired by our circumstances but can flow from God's unchanging nature. However, our lives are full of concrete examples of God's goodness and faithfulness that can inspire new songs. We see one example here, and David's experience is so true for each one of us.

God rescues David from a place of desperate need, a situation in which he is trapped and sinking deeper into trouble. David has no solution except to cry out to God and wait patiently for Him to act. And he is not disappointed. God reaches down and lifts David up, and brings him to a place of safety and security and stability.

Can you identify with David's crisis and God's response? I know I can – too many times! In fact, what Jesus has done for us on the cross is the most wonderful example of what David is describing. Jesus has rescued us from the pit of sin and death and hell that we were in, and set us on the solid foundation of a relationship with Him, now and for eternity.

How can new songs not spring forth in praise of such an awesome God? David says that God Himself "put a new song" in his mouth – what David surely means is that God's goodness so overwhelmed him, and his heart was so full of praise, that it overflowed in this new song.

When our hearts are full of gratitude for what God has done for us, new songs of praise will surely be released.

Today's exercise is simple. Remember a time that God came through for you, brought you out of a difficult situation, met an urgent need, answered a desperate prayer – or even just remember that He died for your sins! And let a new song overflow from your grateful heart!

**Decree:**

*He has put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to my God!*



## JANUARY 11

***Sing to the LORD a new song;  
sing to the LORD, all the earth.  
Sing to the LORD, praise his name;  
proclaim his salvation day after day.  
Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvellous deeds among all peoples.***

*(Psalm 96:1-3)*

Let's continue with this theme of singing new songs to our God. In today's verse, we see two different types of songs that we can – and should – sing to Him.

The first type is songs of intimacy. The first three lines of Psalm 96 all begin with “*Sing to the LORD.*” Our songs are addressed *to* God, they are not *about* Him. Many of today's worship songs are of this nature. They are songs of feeling and emotion, songs of adoration and devotion, songs of love and passion, songs of admiration and appreciation. We tell God how wonderful, beautiful, special He is; we tell Him how we feel about Him. It is the natural expression of the intimate relationship Jesus invites us into.

The second type we see here are songs of testimony. The psalmist tells us to “proclaim” and “declare” with our new songs. These are songs that are *about* God rather than *to* Him; this is a characteristic of many of the older hymns. They are addressed to others, or even to no one in particular, and are proclamations of how amazing God is and declarations of His wonderful works. We testify to God's goodness and faithfulness, holiness and majesty, power and might, and so on.

Both types of songs are pleasing to Jesus. So, let's try and sing two new songs to Him today, one of intimacy and one of testimony. Write or sing out a line or verse telling Jesus how you feel about Him, even something as simple as “I love You, Jesus!” And then write or sing out another line or verse telling the world how awesome Jesus is, even something as simple as “Jesus is amazing!”

### ***Decree***

*I will sing to the Lord as well as sing about Him!*



**JANUARY 12**

***Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.  
They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.***

*(Lamentations 3:22-23)*

It is the year 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army has defeated Judah. They have broken down the wall of Jerusalem and set fire to the city, including the temple of the LORD. They have carried off the temple treasures, including the most sacred vessels and objects. They have captured thousands of the residents of Judah to take into exile in Babylon. They leave behind a shattered remnant in a destroyed city.

In the midst of the devastation wanders Jeremiah, the prophet of the LORD. Imagine his sorrow at the utter destruction of all he holds dear – his nation, his city, his loved ones, even the temple of the God he serves. The short book in the Bible that describes what he feels is rightly called Lamentations.

Yet, in the midst of it all, Jeremiah chooses to turn away from the hopelessness of what he is seeing; instead, he focuses on the LORD. He calls to mind God's great love and faithfulness, when he can see only terrible judgment. He finds hope in God, when all around him is nothing but hopelessness.

And he expresses the most incredible affirmation of God's love and faithfulness – that His compassion, mercy, tenderness is showered upon us anew and afresh each morning. No matter what we are going through, we can be sure of this – God is releasing new grace and mercy and love for us, more than enough for this new day.

We are never without hope, because His compassions never fail! They never cease! They never run out! Today, spend a few minutes thanking God for the new mercies He has poured out upon you.

***Decree***

***His compassions are new every morning, and they never fail!***



**JANUARY 13**

***We were buried with Christ through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.***

*(Romans 6:4)*

Jesus' death on the cross wasn't the end of His mortal journey. There was one last step – He was buried. But, of course, that wasn't the end of the story – on the third day, the Father revealed His glory through the resurrection, and Jesus entered into a new, immortal life.

In the same way, our story of faith doesn't end with coming to Jesus on the cross, with acknowledging our sin and accepting His forgiveness. Our old life has to be buried with Jesus, and we have to be raised up into new life, just as He was. You see, Jesus didn't come just to save us from the old; He came to release us into the new!

Baptism is a ritual that expresses this death and resurrection – we are “buried” when the water covers us, and “raised up” when we come out of the water. However, the true significance of the word comes from its meaning – to be dipped or submerged or immersed. Our life in Jesus is one of immersion in Him, in what He did for us on the cross, in burying the things that are not good in our lives. And then, just as Jesus rose to an immortal life, we can step into the new life that He gives us – a life of knowing Him, a life of resurrection power.

One final, incredible fact about this new life – just as the Father was glorified in Christ being raised from the dead, we too bring glory to Him as we live out our new lives!

Is there anything from the past year or years that you still need to bury with Christ? Why don't you do that now? And then believe that He has raised you into new life in that area. Because He will!

***Decree***

*I have been buried with Christ, and raised up into a new life!*



**JANUARY 14**

***Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit.***  
(Ezekiel 18:30b-31a)

We are now coming to the end of the second week of this new year. I suspect many New Year resolutions have already been dead and buried, and will probably be resurrected next January! Perhaps part of the problem is that we head towards the new without first turning away from the old.

The first word of Jesus' public ministry was "Repent!" He knew the importance of turning away from the old. The word means the same here in today's verse – to turn away. In fact, Ezekiel is saying, "Turn, turn away from your offenses . . . ." Our sins are offenses to God, because they are rebellion against His will and purpose, and that's enough reason to turn away from them. But the Bible even gives us a very practical rationale for doing so – the sin that we need to turn away from is a stumbling block and obstacle to us moving into the new.

And so, we are exhorted to turn away from those old habits, patterns, ideas, attitudes, prejudices, priorities – things that we ourselves know are not good for us, which is why we make resolutions in the first place! More than that, we are commanded to get rid of them – cast them off, throw them away – so they don't continue to trip us up.

In this way, we remove the barriers to allowing Jesus to form in us the new heart and new spirit He wants to give us. It is a process of cooperation and partnership, and the result is not just new actions and behaviours, but new life from deep within.

Let's make a fresh resolution today – to turn away from and cast off the stumbling blocks to receiving the new heart and spirit Jesus is forming in us.

***Decree***

*Sin will not be a stumbling block to the new!*



**JANUARY 15**

***From now on I will tell you of new things,  
of hidden things unknown to you.  
They are created now, and not long ago;  
you have not heard of them before today.  
So you cannot say,  
“Yes, I knew of them.”***

*(Isaiah 48:6b-7)*

Recently, I heard someone say that our walk with Jesus is a journey, not a trip – because a trip is to a place, while a journey is with a person. And it’s such a shame that being in a relationship with Jesus is seen as something boring and a kill-joy; it is, in fact, the most exciting journey we could embark upon!

Imagine walking side by side, every day, with Jesus – the One who has all the knowledge in the universe; who knows all of the past, present, and future; who knows the intricacies of everything in creation, because He is the Creator! What amazing things would He share with us?

We get a glimpse of this when Jesus tells His disciples that the prophets and righteous men and kings of old longed to see what they saw and hear what they heard. And that was even before the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit!

When Jesus invites us into relationship, He invites us into a journey of incredible revelation. Through Isaiah, in today’s passage, God tells us that not only will He share with us things that were formerly hidden, He will reveal to us new things that He is creating, new purposes that He is bringing to pass.

And the result will be God’s glory alone; we will not be able to take credit for anything – and why would we want to?! Wouldn’t we rather stand amazed as we journey with our awesome God into greater revelation and deeper intimacy? It’s a journey beyond compare!

***Decree***

*From now on, Jesus will tell me of new things, of hidden things unknown to me!*



**JANUARY 16**

***He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*** *(2 Corinthians 3:6)*

We have been marveling at all the treasures that are ours in this age of the new covenant – new heart, new spirit, new life. All of these, and so much more, are simply the result of being in a relationship with Jesus. And as wonderful as this reality is, it gets even better! Jesus doesn't just want to do a work of transformation *in* us – He wants to transform the world *through* us!

So, Jesus invites us not just into relationship but into responsibility. He wants us to be ministers of this new covenant, to share what He has given us with a world that doesn't even know it is lost without Him. The unconditional love, freedom from bondage, forgiveness of sins, deliverance from guilt and shame, and all that we experience in Jesus, is not meant to be kept a secret. It is all meant to be proclaimed!

Now, we might feel utterly inadequate for such a commission. But Paul tells us in this verse that Jesus has made us competent, that is, qualified, for this service. He has entrusted the good news of the new covenant of life to us. The world is desperate for freedom from the bondage of religions and rituals and philosophies and ideologies. And only the work of the Spirit, communicated through Jesus' disciples – us! – can bring that freedom.

Life in Jesus Christ is more than a life of love, joy, peace, and all of the rest that we long for; it is a life of amazing meaning and purpose! We are privileged not just to live a new covenant life, but to bring others into that same wonderful promise.

***Decree***

***Jesus has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant, one that gives life!***



**JANUARY 17**

***Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.***  
(Revelation 21:1-2)

One of the most frustrating, and even confusing, aspects of the new life is how much of the old we still see. Legalism still taints our new life of grace, suffering still mars our new life of joy, conflict still disturbs our new life of peace, hate still seems to overpower our new life of love. But we have hope! A time is coming when nothing of the old will spoil the new.

Jesus showed the apostle John a glorious vision of what is to come – a new heaven and a new earth, completely replacing the former earth and heaven that were defiled by the fall of mankind. And with no chance of sin and evil intruding into this new creation – that’s what is meant by “*there was no longer any sea*”, for the sea was considered to be the source of trouble and suffering in the ancient world.

God isn’t even going to merely restore the “very good” creation of Genesis 1; He’s going to create something far better, something fresh and novel. And, just as He populated the first earth with mankind, He will prepare a glorious new people for this new earth! A new Jerusalem, representing God’s people, coming down from heaven rather than being formed out of the dust.

Finally, a new dress for a new people! We are taken from the filthy rags of our futile good works without Jesus, and then from the garments of white given to saints washed in Jesus’ blood, to this amazing picture of a bride beautifully dressed for our Husband, Jesus Himself! The incredible truth is that the new heaven and new earth and new people – in short, the new creation – is not in our distant future; it was inaugurated by Jesus Himself, and continues to increase and advance in our midst!

***Decree***

*The first heaven and the first earth will pass away, and there will no longer be any sea!*



**JANUARY 18**

***Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.***  
*(Galatians 6:15)*

The world is focused on the externals – how we look, the clothes we wear, the cars we drive, the phones we use, the houses we live in, the institutions we studied in, the language we speak, the people we know . . . the list is endless.

The church is no different! We measure our spirituality by equally superficial standards – traditions, denominations, baptism, confirmation, church attendance, committee appointments, and even super-spiritual stuff like speaking in tongues, lifting hands in worship, saying “Amen” and “Praise the Lord” every now and then, and much more. And all this in addition to what the world values!

Don’t get me wrong. None of the externals mentioned here are bad; in fact, almost all of them are good things to have and to do. But they are awful measures of a person.

The early church was similarly obsessed with whether a believer was circumcised or not, as if that alone was the mark of a good Christian. But Paul is vehement in his opposition to such shallow Christianity. What matters is the new creation – the inward change that the Holy Spirit is doing in each one who comes to Jesus!

There is an indescribable freedom in focusing on the work that Jesus is doing in your heart and mind and spirit, and an inexpressible joy when you see the transformation that results. And you begin to see others the same way, looking beyond the externals – whether good or bad in the eyes of the world – to how Jesus sees them.

Today, ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify a couple of areas where you have let the external define your spirituality. Then, ask Him to help you focus instead on the work of new creation He is doing within you.

***Decree***

*The externals don’t matter; what counts is the new creation.*



## JANUARY 19

***You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*** (Hebrews 12:23b-24)

The Israelites in the time of Moses had a relationship with God based mostly on fear. God had delivered them, protected them, healed them, and provided for them in awesome ways. Yet, when He drew near in relationship, they were terrified. The writer of Hebrews tells us that when God came down on Mount Sinai, the Israelites “*begged that no further word be spoken to them,*” and that even Moses said he was “*trembling with fear*” at the sight. That was the nature of the old covenant – terrific and yet terrifying!

But we don’t have to respond to God in the same way; Jesus has ushered in the new covenant. We can approach God – the same awesome God of Moses and the Israelites – with love and reverence, and without fear. The writer of Hebrews gives us four reasons for such confidence:

1. We come to God, the Judge of all, and we can trust that He will be just – that He will judge us through the work of the cross, where the penalty for our sin has already been paid!
2. We come to the One who has already made us right with God through Jesus’ blood, and who will make us perfect one day, for eternity.
3. We come to Jesus, who loved us so much that He made the new covenant possible, by standing between the wrath of God and sinful mankind.
4. We come to the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, that cries out for mercy where Abel’s blood cried out for justice.

And so, we realize the four reasons really come down to one – the cross! The ultimate manifestation of God as both awesome and approachable. We come to Him with reverence, yes, but not fear – instead, we come full of love for what He has done for us on the cross.

### ***Decree***

*Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant, one of love and not fear.*



## JANUARY 20

### ***Hallelujah!***

***Sing to the LORD a new song,***

***his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.***

***Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;***

***let the people of Zion be glad in their King.***

***Let them praise his name with dancing***

***and make music to him with timbrel and harp.***

*(Psalm 149:1-3)*

It's time for another new song to the LORD! I don't know about you, but I've enjoyed writing and singing new songs to Jesus whenever they've popped up in these devotions. They've been little more than baby talk in musical terms, but I know my Father has been pleased. And I can imagine His delight in all the new songs He's heard in just this month!

In today's passage, the psalmist gives us two reasons to be joyful:

1. God is our Maker – not just that He has created us, but also that He has made us part of this fellowship of saints, the Body of Christ; we belong to His special family!
2. God is our King – how privileged and blessed we are to have such an amazing ruler; what a sense of security He brings when we give Him charge of our lives; what peace we have when we know He is sovereign over all creation!

Surely it is only natural for our joy to overflow in exuberant praise! The psalmist encourages us to express our worship in singing and music and dancing. The images he evokes are of two iconic worshippers in the Old Testament:

1. Miriam leading the women of Israel with tambourine and dancing, as they celebrated their freedom from slavery in Egypt.
2. David dancing with abandon before the presence of the LORD, as well as his times of worship with the harp.

Today, let our new songs be with actions, not words. Find a few moments alone, put on a lively gospel song or even a catchy instrumental piece, and dance for joy before the LORD. You'll feel quite silly – I know I will! – but just imagine the smile on Jesus' face.

### ***Decree***

***We will praise Your name with dancing!***



## JANUARY 21

***I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*** (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

When God repeats Himself, you know what He's saying must be very important. This is the third time God tells us through the prophet Ezekiel that He will replace our hard hearts. Three times He tells us that He will give us a new heart and a new spirit.

We have already seen some of the wonderful implications of God's heart surgery – equipping of the Spirit, identity as His people, openness to His Word, and oneness of purpose. Today we discover one more wonderful facet of what God does in our hearts and spirits.

God doesn't just give us a new spirit – He puts His Spirit in us! When we say "Yes" to Jesus, when we enter into relationship with Him, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells within us. At Christmas we celebrate Emmanuel – God with us; but every day we live with the incredible reality of the Holy Spirit – God within us! And it is not just the presence of the Spirit within us that is promised, it is also His power.

God says in this passage that He will move us to follow and keep His laws. I think this is even more incredible – because how many of us are really good at following rules and regulations?! And even if we follow them, how many of us really want to?! But the Spirit of God within us moves us to be obedient, even careful, in keeping God's laws – it is another aspect of His transforming work in us. We obey because we want to, not because we have to. We obey out of desire to please, not to avoid punishment. We obey out of love, not fear.

Consider some aspect of obedience in your life today that was absent or difficult before you knew Jesus. And then, thank the Holy Spirit for moving you to be obedient in that area.

### ***Decree***

*You put Your Spirit in me and move me to follow Your decrees.*



**JANUARY 22**

***For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,  
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,  
her salvation like a blazing torch.  
The nations will see your vindication,  
and all kings your glory;  
you will be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.***

*(Isaiah 62:1-2)*

Following Jesus is the most wonderful journey ever – as well as the most dangerous! Jesus literally promises trouble and suffering and persecution for His disciples, and these can come in different ways. Often, they take the form of labels that people attach to us, as we seek to put Jesus first. Here are a few examples:

- Intolerant – for believing Jesus is the only Way
- Bigot – for upholding God's values rather than the world's
- Radical – for being completely sold-out for Jesus
- Fundamentalist – for believing God means what He says in His Word
- Foolish – for obeying the Spirit even when it doesn't make sense
- Cultist – for just imitating the church in Acts!
- Impractical – for walking by faith rather than by what you see
- Outdated – for preferring biblical standards to modern ideas of morality

You may have been called other names, and experienced criticism and mocking in different ways. The world hated Jesus, and it will hate you if you follow Him. And sometimes you wonder where He is, when even your closest family and friends turn on you, when you persevere in following Him though there seems to be little reward.

God says that He will vindicate you! He will not stand by and watch His children shamed. The God of the universe will move on your behalf. He will shine His brilliant light upon you. The rightness of your cause will be displayed in glory before the world. And, God will call you by a new name! A name that proceeds from His own mouth, that flows from His heart of love. A name that cancels all the names the world labels you as you follow Jesus.

Today, especially if you are in a place of persecution of any degree, ignore the labels of the world and listen to your Father's voice. He is calling you by a new name, and it is one of love and pride and joy!

***Decree***

*I will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.*



## JANUARY 23

***Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."***

*(Luke 22:19-20)*

The Bible is, in one sense, the history of God's covenants with mankind. "Covenant" is a biblical word that is rich in meaning, referring to an agreement or contract between God and His creation, whether a single man like David, or a nation like Israel, or even the whole earth, as was the case after the great flood.

So, we see Jesus with His closest disciples, the night before His crucifixion, celebrating the deliverance of God's people from slavery many centuries earlier. Soon after that deliverance, at Mount Sinai, God made a covenant of Law with His people. That covenant was sealed with the blood of bulls, sprinkled by Moses over the people, with the words *"This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you . . . (Exodus 24:8)"*

Jesus echoes these words of Moses as He lifts up the cup. The Upper Room is His Mount Sinai. A new covenant, of Grace rather than Law, is being established. Except there is no animal's blood to ratify this new covenant. The Hebrew word for covenant means "to cut or divide", referring to the Jewish custom of cutting an animal in half, and the two parties to the covenant walking in between the pieces to confirm their agreement. Jesus was saying, as He picked up the cup and passed it around, that the body to be slaughtered, and the blood to be poured out, would be His own.

The new covenant is one of abundant and eternal life, and it could only be established by the ultimate sacrifice – the Son of God, broken for us, poured out for us. Today, just thank Jesus for the new covenant life that we enjoy – a life that we have been freely given, but which cost Him everything.

### ***Decree***

*I live in the age of the new covenant, established by Jesus' blood poured out for me.*



**JANUARY 24**

***And they sang a new song, saying:***

***“You are worthy to take the scroll***

***and to open its seals,***

***because you were slain,***

***and with your blood you purchased for God***

***persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.***

***You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,***

***and they will reign on the earth.”***

*(Revelation 5:9-10)*

We’ve been learning the importance of singing new songs and how much God delights in them. And here we see that, even in heaven, new songs are being sung! Imagine the angels, who have been in God’s presence ever since creation, still finding new songs to worship Him with! The book of Revelation is full of songs being sung in heaven, and I suspect almost all of them are new songs.

The song in today’s passage starts with saying that Jesus is worthy. The word “worship” actually comes from “worth-ship”, that is, there is something that is worthy of honour or praise; hence we worship. And Jesus, the Son of God, is worthy of worship simply because of who He is – holy, awesome, majestic, glorious, beautiful beyond compare . . . .

Yet, astonishingly, this new song is being sung in the heavens because Jesus is worthy on account of what He has done! The angels burst into song as they consider Jesus’ most significant work – His death on the cross. Yes, Jesus is worthy of worship because He is awesome and glorious; but He is also worthy because of His love for sinful mankind – incomprehensible, unconditional, sacrificial, holding nothing back . . . .

And we have even more reason to worship Jesus when we see the results of the cross – the redemption of sinners, that is, you and I; access to our heavenly Father; and the restoration of our identity as a royal priesthood.

Take a few moments today to worship Jesus for the cross – for He is worthy!

***Decree***

***Jesus is worthy, because He was slain, and by His blood He has purchased mankind for God.***



**JANUARY 25**

***Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body***  
..... *(Hebrews 10:19-20)*

Access is a wonderful thing, isn't it? We all want access to high places and important people. Imagine having the ability to enter, whenever you pleased, into the office of the President or Prime Minister of your country, or even just the principal of your college or the CEO of your company. Well, there is no more important person than God Almighty, and no higher place than His throne room! And the writer of Hebrews tells us that we have access to Him. But it wasn't always this way.

The Most Holy Place in the tabernacle, and later the temple of Jerusalem, was precisely that – most holy, most set apart, out of bounds. A thick curtain blocked access to it – in effect, to God's presence. Only the High Priest could enter it, once a year, with the blood of animals as a sin offering. God was seen as distant, unapproachable, and to be feared.

Jesus changed it all on the cross. He tore open the curtain, entered with His own blood, and gave us all access to the Most Holy Place! He obliterated the old restrictions that kept us at a distance from God, and extended an open invitation to draw close to our heavenly Father. So, isn't it tragic that so many of His children still worship at a distance, comfortable with our traditions and rituals, and fail to respond to His invitation?

The glorious, amazing, incredible truth is that we have access to the very throne room of the God of the universe; we are welcomed into the open arms of our heavenly Father; we are privileged to sit at the feet of Jesus and gaze upon His indescribable beauty.

Draw close to Him. He's waiting for you!

***Decree***

*We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus!*



**JANUARY 26**

***You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.***  
(Colossians 3:9b-11)

Old clothes are comfortable, aren't they? Even when we get new stuff, we prefer wearing our old, well-worn clothes. They are just, well, comfortable! The same with habits and routines and practices – we just move very naturally into default modes of functioning. We take refuge in cultural and social labels that give us identity and behavioural patterns. They are safe, and effortless, and, yes, comfortable!

But when we come to Jesus, it's off with the old! This verse makes it very emphatic – Paul says that we have completely stripped off our old clothes and thoroughly renounced our old ways of doing things! He doesn't say that we should do it, he says we have already done it. When we said "Yes" to Jesus, we said "No" to our old identities and practices. We stripped off those comfortable labels that gave us our identity; we renounced those comfortable practices that conformed to the world around us.

If you didn't realise it before, you know it now! So don't live in the old anymore – it doesn't exist for you. Instead, become aware of and embrace the new work of transformation that Jesus is doing in you. He is transforming you into His image, and this process is fuelled by your deepening relationship with Him. He is not just transforming the individual believer, but also the community of believers, dealing with the divisions and prejudices. Until all that remains is Christ!

To quote a few lines from St. Patrick's famous hymn: "Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me . . . Christ beneath me, Christ above me . . ."

Spend a few moments today reflecting on how radically your life has changed since you came to know Jesus. I think you will be pleasantly surprised!

***Decree***

*I have taken off my old self with its practices and have put on the new self!*



**JANUARY 27**

***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.*** (1 Peter 1:3-4a)

“Nothing is certain except for death and taxes!” Variations of this statement became famous when used by Benjamin Franklin and later Mark Twain, though it was first spoken in an English play a few decades earlier. And it is quoted so often simply because there is more than a grain of truth in it – mankind despairs at the permanent nature of death and the transient nature of material wealth!

Well, don't worry, because two thousand years ago, Jesus dealt with both these issues! When we are born naturally, we come into the old world of death and taxes, and all the futility of life that they signify. But remember, we have hope, because we live in the age of the new covenant! The new life that Jesus promises begins with a new birth, and the apostle Peter tells us two wonderful things that come when we are born again (or born anew).

First, we are born with the hope of eternal life rather than the despairing certainty of death. Jesus guaranteed this through His resurrection from the dead. Death has been defeated, and it has no hold over His children. We have a living hope!

Second, we are born into a spiritual inheritance that is far more valuable than any of the material things we might accumulate or possess or treasure on earth. The government can't even tax it, because it can't get hold of it! Peter goes on to say that Jesus is actually guarding our inheritance for us in heaven! So we needn't worry about what we have on earth and how to take care of it; something far more precious awaits us in heaven.

No wonder Peter bursts into praise, as he reflects on the blessings we enjoy in the new birth. Let's join him today in thanking Jesus for the living hope and glorious inheritance that we have in Him.

***Decree***

*He has given me new birth into a living hope, and an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.*



**JANUARY 28**

***You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.***

*(Ephesians 4:22-24)*

Paul is writing to new converts in Ephesus, and this is how he describes their former way of life – futile thinking, darkened understanding, separated from the life of God, hardened hearts, seared consciences, given over to sensuality and indulgence and impurity. Sounds a lot like us, before we knew Jesus, right? Yet, these are the very people that Paul now addresses as saints and faithful in Christ Jesus. How did the change take place in them? And how does it happen for us?

This passage describes the process of this radical and fundamental change, from a life apart from God to becoming like Him. It starts with a familiar concept – laying aside the old self. Just like our physical bodies decay with time, so too the spiritual – it is degenerating and being ruined, not by age but by our deceitful desires. It is only when we acknowledge this reality, and don't want to continue this way of living, that we can change.

The next step is the renewing of our minds – literally, the “spirit” of our minds, our innermost attitudes and thoughts and desires. Paul says that, while our old self was once being dragged into lower levels, the renewing of our minds takes us into higher levels of living. We are raised up from the degenerate state of our old life.

And then comes an amazing picture – the word for putting on the new self literally means “to sink into a garment”. So here's how it looks to me: God has created a new self for each one of us, one of true righteousness and holiness, and we progressively fit into it as we allow Him to renew our minds!

God has created beautiful new garments that make their wearers right with Him and set apart for Him – and one of those is a perfect fit for you!

***Decree***

*I have put off my old corrupted self, and have put on the new self of righteousness and holiness!*



**JANUARY 29**

***No one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.***  
*(Luke 5:37-38)*

In Jesus' time, wine was stored in bottles made of animal skins. Wineskins lost their elasticity with age, and became brittle. They were thus inadequate for storing new wine; as the wine fermented and released gases, the wineskin was unable to expand in response and would eventually burst. Both the wine and the wineskin would be lost.

Old wineskins are only good for storing old wine. As long as we are content with our knowledge and experience of Jesus, we will be satisfied with our old and familiar traditions and rituals. But Jesus is not satisfied! He wants to bring greater revelation and deeper intimacy into our lives; He wants to take us to higher levels of experiencing Him.

Jesus wants to pour new wine into us! And, no, the Bible is not talking about fermented grape juice – here, wine is a symbol for the Holy Spirit. Jesus wants to pour the Holy Spirit into us; and not just as a one-time event, but daily. But for that He needs new wineskins.

We are called to be vessels to carry the new wine of the Holy Spirit. This means letting go of our old comfortable ways and being ready for the change God wants to bring. It means embracing the transformation He is bringing in our hearts and minds, attitudes and ideas, behaviours and habits. It means being open to the radical, and often incomprehensible, ways in which God works in and through our lives.

Jesus is looking for new wineskins – for hearts, lives, families, households, communities, churches, denominations, institutions, cities, and even nations – that are able to receive the new wine. And then the Holy Spirit is poured out, without measure, fresh each day, and sufficient for all we need to be and do!

Say a simple prayer right now: “Jesus, make me a new wineskin, and fill me with new wine. Amen!”

***Decree***

*New wine is being poured into new wineskins.*



**JANUARY 30**

***See, I will create***

***new heavens and a new earth.***

***The former things will not be remembered,***

***nor will they come to mind.***

***But be glad and rejoice forever***

***in what I will create,***

***for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight***

***and its people a joy.***

*(Isaiah 65:17-18)*

The word “see” in this passage may be better translated as the more archaic word “Behold!” God is calling our attention to something wonderful that He is going to do. The problem is, we have to first shift our focus from what we are going through. In fact, the verse before this passage refers to past troubles, and the verse after it refers to weeping and crying. So, God is saying, “Stop dwelling on your troubles and the sorrow that they bring, and instead focus your attention on me!”

I feel compelled today to declare this passage prophetically over this new season. For if God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, then He is already doing in some measure the things that He promises for the future. So, just as one day God will create new heavens and a new earth, right now He is at work creating a new environment for us. He is shaping this season in such a way that the pain and despair of what we have gone through will no longer have a hold over us.

God is replacing this season of hopelessness with one of joy. In just one verse, He uses the word for “joy” four times! We are commanded to be glad and rejoice, because God is creating us to be a people who will delight not just Him, but even the world. He is giving us joy that, unlike the sorrow of the past, is not temporary – instead, it will be forever.

The word “Behold!” actually appears again in this passage – God exhorts us to pay attention to the new people He is shaping, those who will be a delight to Him and the world. Imagine the witness we would be if, in this season of gloom and doom, we displayed the joy that comes from turning our attention instead to Jesus and the new things He is doing – and then proclaimed that joyous hope to the world!

***Decree***

***The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.***



## JANUARY 31

***He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:5)***

It is one of the most powerful scenes in the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. Jesus collapses under the weight of the cross He is carrying, bruised and battered and bleeding. His mother, Mary, comes rushing to Him and holds His ravaged face in her hands, in total despair and hopelessness. And Jesus looks into her eyes and says, "See, Mother, I make all things new!" Now, I know that scene isn't in the gospels – Mel Gibson clearly used artistic license and borrowed that line from Revelation. But I think he touched the heart of something very significant.

In today's verse, God proclaims in a vision to the apostle John that He is making everything new. He had shown John both the horrors and wonders of what was to come, but now God was speaking in the present. He was speaking into what John and the church of the first century were going through – terrible persecution. And God uses the same word we came across yesterday – Behold! God is saying, "Turn your attention to what I am doing – I am making everything new!"

John was able to trust in what he was hearing – and so, too, we are able to trust that God is making everything new – because the One who said those words is seated on the throne. Not just any throne, but the throne in heaven! The One who is seated in the highest place of authority, who has dominion over all creation, who is absolutely sovereign – He is the One who says He is making everything new.

As we come to the end of the first month of this new year, let us attend to what Jesus is saying to us. In our troubles, sorrows, disappointments, discouragements, losses, and even persecutions, Jesus is making everything new. He is able to do so because He is seated on the throne of heaven. But, as the scene in *The Passion* reminds us, Jesus is on the throne because He was first on the cross. As He carried that cross, as He bore our sin, He was already beholding the new reality that He was releasing for us – Jesus was already making everything new!

### ***Decree***

*Jesus is making everything new!*



# Prayer

*Lord, teach us to pray*



FEBRUARY

## FEBRUARY 1

*Lord, teach us to pray . . . .*

*(Luke 11:1b)*

Jews in the time of Jesus knew how to pray. Jewish religion, even Jewish culture, was steeped in prayer. Devout Jews prayed three times a day. They had liturgical prayers for those three daily times, as well as for numerous other occasions. They had prayers for the Sabbath, and for the annual festivals. They had prayers in their Scriptures, especially the Psalms. They had role models for prayer in those Scriptures as well, mighty men and women of prayer. So Jesus' disciples would have been familiar with prayer – with the manner and content of praying.

They had been hanging around with Jesus ever since He called them to follow Him. They had heard Him teach as no one had taught before. They had seen Him heal the sick, cast out demons, and even raise the dead. They had seen Him multiply food, and command the storm to be still. They had even, by this time, gone out on their first mission in His authority and performed miracles themselves.

It is very significant that the disciples didn't ask Jesus to teach them how to heal the sick or cast out demons or raise the dead; how to worship or evangelize or teach; how to exert power over the forces of nature. Of course, Jesus must have taught them all these things at some point.

But the only thing Jesus' closest disciples are ever recorded as asking Him to teach them is how to pray. As they observed Jesus at such close quarters, they saw something in Him that they lacked more than anything else. In a culture that prayed visibly and often, they saw a prayer life in Jesus that was completely different in quality. And, to their credit, they wanted to learn how to pray in the same way.

Let's embark on an adventure in learning about prayer. And let's start the way the disciples did, with a simple five-word prayer!

### **Prayer**

*Lord, teach me to pray . . . .*



## FEBRUARY 2

***The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.***

*(James 5:16b)*

James, in his typical Old Testament style of writing, gives us a simple reason to pray – prayer works! In this particular context, he is encouraging us to pray for healing, both physical and spiritual. And before his readers can doubt the truth of his assertion, he follows it with an illustration in the next two verses.

*Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.*

Elijah's prayers were powerful and effective. They had the power of God to back them, and they achieved their purpose. Elijah's prayers literally brought a nation and its rulers to their knees before Yahweh. And James, the brother of Jesus, tells us that our prayers are just as powerful and effective as Elijah's!

Do I hear two objections to what James is saying? Let me deal with both:

1. But Elijah was a mighty prophet, and I am nowhere in his class! Well, James says he was a man just like us. He is saying that Elijah had the same nature – feelings, emotions, passions, even infirmities – as us. So if Elijah could pray nation-transforming prayers, we can as well!
2. But I am not righteous, like Elijah was – God will not listen to a sinner like me. Here's a wonderful truth – no one is righteous in their own strength, but everyone who is in Christ is made righteous by His blood!

What excuse do we have for not praying audacious and extravagant prayers – prayers for healing and deliverance, prayers for transformation of lives, even prayers for our cities and nations to turn to God? Jesus has made us righteous, and He is backing us with His awesome power – all that is left is for us to pray! Will we?

Today, pray at least one audacious prayer! And let it be the first of many.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, give me faith to pray the powerful and effective prayers You desire.*



## FEBRUARY 3

***This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.***  
*(1 John 5:14)*

Have you ever felt like you were speaking to someone but they weren't really listening? Or have you ever tuned out while someone was speaking to you? College lectures and Sunday sermons come to mind! And in this area of prayer, we often feel as if God isn't hearing our prayers, as they continue to go unanswered.

The apostle John gives us the secret to being sure our prayers are both heard and answered – asking according to God's will. Sounds simple enough! But how do we know what is God's will? One obvious source of knowing God's will is His written Word. Another is discerning His will in relationship with Him, and I want to focus on that today.

We often think of “will” as something of the mind, while we see desires as being of the heart. Well, the Greek word used for God's will actually means “desires or wishes” – God's will is the desire of His heart. So, as we draw closer to Jesus in intimate relationship, we get a deeper understanding of His heart; as we fall more in love with Him, we discern His desires. In fact, His desires become ours; the things on His heart move our hearts as well. And out of the overflow of what we desire, we pray.

Not timid, hesitant, tentative, hopeful, “if it be your will” prayers. John says that we approach God – the Creator and Ruler of the universe – with boldness and freedom. And, confident that we are praying according to His will, and that He hears those prayers that are according to His will, we ask. John goes on to say in the next verse that, if we know our prayers have been heard, then we can also be confident that they have been answered!

So let's resolve to seek God's heart and discern His will, that our prayers may be both heard and answered!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, teach me to pray according to Your will.*



## FEBRUARY 4

***Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.***  
(Jeremiah 33:3)

How do we see prayer? I think prayer is universally seen as asking or requesting or even begging of God. So prayer becomes something that originates with us, with our needs and desires and wants. Prayer is too often seen as an application to get something, at times even moving into negotiation with God!

But prayer isn't our idea – it originated in the heart of God. It isn't an application, or a negotiation, or anything else we might make it in order to get what we want. Prayer is an invitation. It is God inviting us into something higher and deeper. Prayer is an invitation from the Lord of the universe to engage with Him, to draw close to Him, to enter into levels of knowledge and experience beyond our mortal existence.

Today's verse makes that explicit. It is one of the most extravagant promises in the Bible, and it is about prayer.

*"Call to me,"* God tells us through the prophet Jeremiah. Isn't that an exhortation to pray? But there's a difference in this prayer – it isn't focused on our requests, but rather on God Himself. We call out to God for His own sake, to connect with Him. God is inviting us into relationship.

*"I will answer you,"* God continues. This is a prayer that will not go unheard or unanswered, because it is according to His will. In fact, it is in direct obedience to His exhortation. God is waiting to answer those who call to Him in this way, seeking Him rather than His gifts.

And what an incredible answer God promises to give those who call to Him in this way! He says that He will reveal *"great and unsearchable things you do not know."* God is saying He will make conspicuous to us things that are greater than what we know, and incomprehensible for us in normal circumstances. He is speaking of the secrets of His heart, the mysteries of His creation, the glory of His purposes, and so much more – beyond our imagination, but accessible in intimate relationship with Him.

Prayer is an invitation into the wonders of the Divine, the very heart and mind of God! How will we respond?

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, show me great and unsearchable things as I call to You.*



## FEBRUARY 5

***During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.*** (Hebrews 5:7)

There are many role models in the Bible for us to learn from about prayer, but, of course, none greater than Jesus. Jesus, the Son of God, the Word made flesh, God with us, was a man of prayer! At first glance, it might seem a little strange – why would Jesus need to pray? What did He need that He couldn't get Himself? Isn't prayer an acknowledgment of weakness and of needing someone higher?

The incredible truth is that, in coming to us in the incarnation, God the Son took on our weakness and infirmities. He suffered as we do. He struggled with the temptations we struggle with. But, unlike us, He did not succumb to those temptations, He did not get overwhelmed by His troubles, He did not surrender to His weakness. Instead, He prayed to His Father, for strength, guidance, provision, protection, and whatever else He needed. And, in doing so, He gave us an example of how to pray.

What a picture we have of Jesus praying, in today's verse. The Son of God praying with fervent cries and tears – the words refer to loud and vehement crying with great emotion, to the extent that the sounds being uttered don't even sound human. Most commentators believe this verse is referring to Jesus agonizing in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before His crucifixion. I have no doubt that this is how Jesus prayed then, but I believe it must have also been a regular part of His prayer life, during all those early mornings and late nights alone with His Heavenly Father. If He agonized over His trial to come, surely He would have agonized over His disciples, His people, and all of mankind in the same way.

One final point – Jesus was heard by the Father, not because He was privileged or special, but because of His reverent submission! May our prayers, too, come from a place of great emotion, reverence, and surrender.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, teach me to pray with fervent cries and tears.*



## FEBRUARY 6

***Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

*(Philippians 4:6-7)*

The CNI order of service uses this verse as a blessing: “The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” A wonderful blessing to end the service with – except that, in this passage, it isn’t really a blessing; it is a conditional promise!

We all need peace that transcends understanding, even if we don’t realise that we do! And Paul tells us how it can be ours. The secret is prayer that satisfies certain conditions:

1. Don’t be anxious: The word actually means “to not be drawn in opposite directions”; anxiety distracts our prayers and makes us confused about what we are really asking for.
2. In every situation: Bring every situation before God in prayer; nothing is too big or too small for our heavenly Father.
3. With thanksgiving: This is really the most important condition in today’s passage; we are exhorted to thank God, even in those situations that we would normally be anxious about; we can always find something to be thankful about in any situation, and if not, we can just thank God for who He is and what He’s going to do!
4. Talk to God about it: This may seem obvious, but it isn’t always so; we often beat around the bush in our prayers or think they need to sound lofty; instead, simply make your need known to God.

And then comes the promised peace, beyond comprehension, that guards our hearts and minds from being troubled in those situations that we bring before God in prayer. You see, if we choose to pray without anxiety and with thanksgiving, then God gives us a peace that actually enables us not to worry!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, help me to pray with thanksgiving and without anxiety in every situation; thank You for Your promise of incomprehensible peace!*



## FEBRUARY 7

***Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.***  
(Mark 11:24)

This is probably the most misused verse on prayer in the Bible. The belief that, if we have enough faith, we can get whatever we ask for, has resulted in terrible distortion of prayer, as well as much disappointment. In prayer, we don't manipulate God but rather submit to Him.

So, what is Jesus teaching us here about prayer? I once heard someone say that, if we see a "therefore" in the Bible, we need to see what it is "there for". That is, here we need to see the context of Jesus' words. He has just caused a fig tree to wither by cursing it. He goes on to tell His disciples that they can move mountains if they believe. Jesus is clearly talking about the role of faith in answered prayer. But what kind of faith?

Jesus begins this teaching session a few verses earlier with the words, *"Have faith in God."* Those words could also mean "Have faith from God" or "Have the faith of God". No matter what translation we use, the meaning is clear – it is faith in God that works, not the power of our faith; and we need His faith to operate through us, not somehow manufacture our own faith.

If prayer is an invitation, then faith is God's gift to respond appropriately to that invitation! When we have faith in God to accomplish something, and pray for it with the faith that He gives us, then we know without a doubt that we are praying according to His will. And we are commanded by Jesus to believe we have received our answer, even before we see any evidence of it.

This is the faith that moves mountains!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, give me the faith that believes I have received whatever I ask for in prayer.*



## FEBRUARY 8

***In my distress I called to the LORD;  
I cried to my God for help.  
From his temple he heard my voice;  
my cry came before him, into his ears.***

*(Psalm 18:6)*

In today's verse, we see David in a place of great danger to his life. He describes his situation, in the previous verses, as being entangled by the cords of death and overwhelmed by a flood of destruction. In his great distress, David prays.

First, David knows who he needs to go to in his distress. He goes to God. He calls to Yahweh, the God who has demonstrated His awesome power time and again.

Then, David makes it personal! He says, "my God." He cries out, not holding back the extent of his distress, to the One with whom he has a relationship.

Finally, David acknowledges his inability to do anything about the situation, and that he needs God's help.

What can we learn from David's prayer? We pray from our place of distress, from the place of our helplessness, not to a distant God, but to the One who has called us to Him in relationship.

And here's the great news: we pray from the place of distress, but we are heard in God's dwelling place. The temple in the Old Testament is a picture of heaven. God is saying that there is no place we can be, no trouble we can be in, from where He will not hear our prayers in heaven. The language is so personal – our cries don't just reach God's ears, they come before His face.

When you are feeling crushed by your troubles, and feeling there's no way out, don't give up. Cry out to the God who loved you enough to establish an intimate relationship with you. The place of distress is not your permanent condition. Jesus hears from the place of His presence. And we know that when He hears, He answers. And He will do for us what He did for David, who testifies to this further on in the psalm: *"He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me."*

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, thank You that when I call to You in my distress, You hear from heaven, and bring me into a spacious place.*



## FEBRUARY 9

***Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.***  
*(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)*

In these three exhortations, Paul gives us a picture of what the Christian life should look like. This is God's will – His desire – for all those who are in relationship with Jesus, both the individual Christian as well as the community of believers.

Joy, prayer, and thanksgiving are to be continual aspects of the Christian life, not intermittent events based on our circumstances or emotions. How is this even possible, we may ask? The answer is in the phrases themselves, so let's unpack them briefly:

1. **Rejoice always:** This joy has nothing to do with favourable circumstances, and everything to do with God. The word in Greek means to “lean towards grace.” So, we are delighted as we experience God's grace. And since His grace upon our lives is constant and unceasing, we can always, at all times, rejoice!
2. **Pray continually:** This phrase seems rather intimidating, especially in the older versions of the Bible, which translate it as “pray without ceasing.” But it actually refers to praying without any unnecessary time intervals, meaning we should not let anything distract us from our prayer times. This would refer to both our routine times of prayer, as well as the many opportunities for prayer that arise throughout each day. We are being called to cultivate a lifestyle of prayer, sensitive to the Spirit's promptings, and always ready to enter into that intimate place of God's presence.
3. **Give thanks in all circumstances:** Again, the Greek word for giving thanks includes the word “grace.” Literally, we are thankful for “God's good grace”, and of course, no matter how difficult the circumstance, we can always see God's grace in its midst. We don't deny the trouble or suffering or pain or loss, as the case may be, but we can be thankful for God's grace through it all.

I don't think it is by chance that the injunction to pray continually is between rejoicing and giving thanks always. For prayer is the place where we enter into and remain in God's presence; it is the place where we become aware of God's grace, and then we rejoice and give thanks. Continual prayer will naturally lead to continual rejoicing and thanksgiving!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, teach me to rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances.*



## FEBRUARY 10

***They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.*** (Acts 1:14)

Welcome to the most consequential prayer meeting in the history of the world! Jesus was crucified, rose from the dead, and, forty days later, ascended into heaven. Before leaving, He told His disciples to go to Jerusalem and wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit. And so we see the disciples, 120 of them, both men and women, waiting in Jerusalem in obedience to Jesus' command.

What did they do while waiting? They prayed. This brief verse reveals two aspects of their prayer meeting – how they prayed, and what they prayed.

1. The disciples prayed in one accord, with one mind. There was a spirit of unity among them. I believe they were especially united in what they were seeking – the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit. They had all actually spent time with the Son of God in person, but they knew that He Himself had promised something – rather, Someone – better! The disciples were also steadfast in their obedience. Jesus had not given them a time frame, so they had no idea how long they had to carry on. Maybe, after a few days, they started wondering how long it would take. But they didn't give up, and they persevered in prayer until the answer came.
2. What could they have possibly been praying continuously for ten days?! The Greek actually says that they "*all joined together constantly in the prayer.*" The disciples were praying the prayer that Jesus had taught them, what we call the Lord's Prayer. And no, they were not repeating it endlessly like a mantra. They were using it as Jesus intended, as a pattern for prayer. For those ten days, the disciples were immersed in the pattern of the Lord's Prayer – prayers of praise, intercession, provision, confession, and protection.

And, in unity and perseverance and obedience, their prayers inaugurated the age of the Spirit at Pentecost – and the world was never the same again!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, teach us to join together constantly in prayer.*



## FEBRUARY 11

***Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.***  
(Luke 6:27-28)

We are confronted in today's verses with some of the most difficult commands Jesus ever gave His disciples. Loving our enemies, doing good to those who hate us, and blessing those who curse us are near impossible commands to obey. Of course, we have as our example Jesus on the cross, doing exactly what He commanded us to. By dying for the salvation of even His persecutors, He loved and blessed and did good to them. He also prayed for those who were mistreating Him: *"Father, forgive them . . ."*

Today, let's look at Jesus' command to pray for those who mistreat us. The word "mistreat" is a rather mild word for what the Greek really means – to insult, molest, revile, smear, treat wrongfully, speak maliciously against . . . It is the use of intimidations, threats, and false accusations to slander someone and destroy their reputation. It is one of the worst ways of being attacked, and, as we see so often in today's cancel culture, often impossible to recover from even if one is innocent. Every cell in our bodies, every inclination of our hearts, is to retaliate when "mistreated" in this manner. And, if we are powerless to do anything, to ask the One who can – that is, God – to avenge us!

Instead, Jesus says to pray for those who mistreat us! Not to pray against them, but *for* them. Do you see what Jesus is saying here? When people speak against us, we speak to God on their behalf. When they use their words with people to destroy us, we use our words with God to benefit them. When the hate in their hearts overflows with false accusations against us, we speak to God out of the overflow in our hearts that they may know the truth of His love for them. When they think the worst of us, we pray for God's best for them. Prayer is the most powerful weapon in the face of any kind of mistreatment.

Does this mean that our persecutors will change? Maybe, maybe not. But we most certainly will! We will draw closer to the Father, we will become more like Jesus, and we will be filled afresh with the Holy Spirit! Isn't it worth obeying Jesus for such a reward?

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, help me pray for those who mistreat me.*



## FEBRUARY 12

***So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.***

*(Ezra 8:23)*

Behind today's verse about God answering prayer is an endearing as well as powerful picture of Ezra, a priest and teacher of the Law of God. It is eighty years since the Jews started returning home, after their exile in Babylon. Ezra is heading to Jerusalem with a large company of Jews. Ezra has such favour with King Artaxerxes that he is being sent to Jerusalem with a large quantity of gold and silver, articles for worship in the temple, and whatever supplies of food and wine that he requires. And so, Ezra and his company of people, priests, and elders set off for Jerusalem.

But there's one problem – the journey is long, and fraught with danger from bandits and other enemies, and Ezra has no soldiers to guard them. Why, we may wonder, does Ezra not ask the king for protection, since he has such favour with him? Well, it appears that Ezra has boasted about how awesome his God is! In his own words: *I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him."*

I love Ezra's humble confession. And I love what he does next. He can choose to ask the king for protection, and thus have the assurance of the physical presence of soldiers and horsemen. Or he can trust in God, and have faith that they are being protected even though nothing is physically visible. Ezra's decision is not based on his desire for protection, but on his greater desire for God to be glorified.

And so, Ezra and the whole company pray. They add fasting to their prayer, humbling themselves before God and seeking Him earnestly. In their act of praying, they choose God above the king's soldiers; they choose God's glory above their own need; they choose faith over fear. And God is pleased to answer their prayer.

May we, too, desire God's glory above our own needs, when we pray!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, may the answers to my prayers bring You glory!*



## FEBRUARY 13

***Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.***

*(Colossians 4:2)*

Prayer isn't always easy. In fact, it is often a struggle. Three of the most common hindrances to meaningful prayer are disappointments, distractions, and dullness. And in this short verse, we have the exhortation to push past these hindrances to our prayer life.

Disappointment in prayer causes us to give up. We don't see answers to our prayers; we feel as though things are actually getting worse; it seems as if God is not even there, or if He is, He isn't hearing us. Paul says, "devote yourselves to prayer." We are to continue to pray with even more intensity, despite the apparent lack of reward, to endure despite the temptation to give up, and to stay in a fixed direction despite the difficulties.

Distraction may be the chief enemy of prayer! Who among us has not sat down to pray, and found our minds wandering before we know it?! But it's more than that. We let the daily busyness of life, and the things we prioritize, distract us from giving prayer priority. Paul exhorts, "be watchful." The word literally means to stay awake! We need to be alert when we pray. We need to be vigilant about the things that would keep us from praying. We need to give strict attention to our prayer life, that it is aligned with what God desires.

Dullness is defined as "arousing little interest, lacking liveliness, boring." Does that sound like how most people view prayer? How we have perverted this precious gift that God has given us! We treat prayer like a tedious duty to be performed, when in fact it is the highest privilege God has given us. Paul writes, "be thankful." If we are thankful for the gift of prayer and all that it implies – that we are sons and daughters of God, that we have access to the throne room, and that we have been called into kingdom partnership with Jesus – prayer will never be dull. Instead, it will be the most exciting thing we do!

Today, spend a few moments letting go of past disappointments in prayer, identifying distractions to giving prayer priority, and confessing any dullness you have allowed to creep into your prayer life.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, help me cultivate a prayer life that is devoted, watchful, and thankful.*



## FEBRUARY 14

***For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer.***

*(1 Peter 3:12a)*

What a wonderful assertion Peter makes in this verse! What an incredible picture of God in heaven, even as we pray here on earth! But let's start by looking at the nature of the prayer, before we consider God's response.

Firstly, it is the prayer of the righteous that Peter is talking about here. And, before you feel excluded, as we would all be if righteousness were dependent on our deeds, remember that, in Christ, we are considered righteous. That is, we are approved by God, and seen as conforming to His will and standards. So, if we are approved by God, then we will pray prayers that are pleasing to Him. If we conform to His will, then our prayers will also be according to His will.

Secondly, the type of prayer referred to here is one that in older English might be called "supplication". It is a heart-felt petition arising out of deep need. It is prayer that is personal, urgent, and specific. How heartening, then, to be assured that our prayer in a time of such need is surely coming before God!

And how does God respond? His eyes are upon us, completely aware of our circumstances. His ears are turned towards us, completely attentive to our cries for help. Our God is a God of relationship, and His response to the prayers of His children is deeply personal. Even before we see the answers to our prayers, we can be comforted and strengthened by the knowledge that the God of the universe is wholly present in our act of prayer!

Don't get caught up in just the answers to your prayers. The process is even more rewarding, being aware that Jesus' eyes and ears are focused, not just on your prayers, but on you! How will you respond to Him?

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, help me always be aware that Your eyes are on me, and Your ears are attentive to my prayer.*



**FEBRUARY 15**

***“It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer.”***

*(Matthew 21:13a)*

Isn't it interesting that Jesus did not call the church a house of worship, or house of evangelism, or house of charitable deeds, or house of fellowship, or house of Bible study, or house of whatever it is that we give priority to over prayer? Don't get me wrong – all of those things are very important, and are absolutely necessary elements of following Jesus. But prayer should have the highest priority.

Jesus was quoting the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. The house Isaiah was referring to was the actual physical temple. It was a place of regular animal sacrifices and many prescribed rituals. And yet, God wanted prayer to be priority even in the temple.

Today, in New Testament times, what is the house of God? Too many Christians still think of church as a building, and think their prayers are more likely to be heard if they are in that physical place. Of course, we can feel more at peace and closer to God in certain places, especially places of worship, and so find it easier to pray there. But that's not what Jesus meant at all.

The church is not a building, but people. *We* are the house of God. Paul calls us “the temple of God,” and Peter refers to the people of God as “a spiritual house.” Jesus doesn't want us to construct buildings that people can come to and pray. He is looking for a people of prayer. He wants a people who give prayer top priority in our lives, whose first instinct in any situation is to pray, who uphold the world around us in prayer.

Jesus desires a people devoted to prayer. *We* are His house of prayer! Are we willing to live out this high calling?

***Prayer***

*Lord, may we be the house of prayer that You desire.*



## FEBRUARY 16

***May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.*** *(Psalm 141:2)*

In Psalm 141, David is crying out to God for help in desperate circumstances. And yet, as we see in today's verse, the first thing David prays is for his prayer to be acceptable to God. He wants to please God with his prayers, before God pleases him with His answer!

David prays, *"May my prayer be as incense before You."* In the tabernacle, and later in the temple, there was the altar of incense placed in the Holy Place, just outside the curtain to the Holy of Holies. The High Priest had to burn fragrant incense on this altar every morning and every night, so that incense would rise up continually before the presence of the LORD. This incense, rising up outside the Holy of Holies, was a picture of the prayers of God's people rising up to the throne room of God. The incense was unique and fragrant, depicting the special nature of prayer and the delight it gives God.

Fast forward to the Book of Revelation. Jesus shows the apostle John the throne room of God in heaven. Around the throne, closest to God, are four living creatures and twenty-four elders. Each of them is holding a harp (representing worship) and a golden bowl full of incense (representing prayer). Three times in Revelation, the incense is called the prayers of the saints. And who are the saints? Not some extraordinarily holy men and women of faith – the saints are you and I, every ordinary Christian. Just as the incense rose before God's presence in the tabernacle, so also our prayers rise before Him like incense in the throne room of heaven!

What an awesome privilege! And what a humbling responsibility. Therefore let us, like David, desire that our prayers are pleasing and acceptable to God.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, may my prayer always be set before You like incense!*



## FEBRUARY 17

***The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.*** (Romans 8:26)

Do you struggle to pray? I know I do. We want to give prayer priority, we want to pray according to God's will, we want our prayers to be pleasing to God, we want to see Jesus glorified through the answers to our prayers – but we struggle. The great news is that we have two divine intercessors praying for us – Jesus at the right hand of the Father in heaven; and the Holy Spirit here on earth, living in us!

Our primary struggle in prayer is knowing what we ought to pray for. Albert Barnes suggests four reasons why this is the case:

1. We do not know what would really be best for us.
2. We do not know what God is willing to grant us.
3. We are ignorant of the character of God.
4. We are confused and perplexed in difficult situations, as to what to ask God for.

Do any, or all, of the above, sound like something you struggle with in prayer? In this verse, Paul says that the Holy Spirit knows about our struggles, and He is there to help. He comes alongside us when we pray, sharing the burden of our needs, and assisting us in our prayers. How does He do this? Well, at one level, He helps us know what we ought to pray for:

1. He shows us what is best for us.
2. He shows us what God is willing to grant us.
3. He reveals the character of God to us.
4. He dispels our confusion in difficult situations, so we have clarity as to what to ask God for.

But the Spirit does something even more wonderful for us. He intercedes *for* us! Literally, He bends over for our benefit, in order that we may come in line with God's eternal purposes. And the Spirit does this, not with ordinary prayer, but with a groaning that goes beyond words. The Holy Spirit is so invested in our prayer life that He labours with great intensity on our behalf, so that our prayers may be strong and not weak!

What more do we need to stir us to a deeper and higher life of prayer?!

### ***Prayer***

*Holy Spirit, teach me to know what I ought to pray for. Thank You for interceding for me.*



## FEBRUARY 18

***Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.***

*(Romans 12:12)*

Faithfulness is a key element in prayer. It is the same word in Greek that is also translated “continually”, “steadfastly”, “devoted to” or “persisting in”. Today, let’s look at the three times this word appears in the book of Acts, which is the story of the early church.

In Acts 1:14, we see the 120 disciples waiting in Jerusalem, in obedience to Jesus’ instructions before He ascended into heaven: *“They all joined together constantly [that is, were faithful] in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”* The life of the church, even before it was inaugurated at Pentecost, was saturated with prayer. And the glorious reward was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit!

In Acts 2:42, we read the very first description of the early church: *“They devoted themselves [that is, were faithful] to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”* Prayer didn’t stop being a priority once the blessing of the Holy Spirit had been received and regular church life established. Instead, it became an integral part of the life of the early church, and the new converts were devoted to a lifestyle of prayer. The result was a church that experienced the blessing of fellowship and favour!

Finally, in Acts 6:4, the apostles were confronted with an internal dispute in the church that threatened to distract them from their apostolic ministry. Instead of getting caught up in administrative matters, they appointed other men to leadership, saying: *“We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention [that is, be faithful] to prayer and the ministry of the word.”* The apostles had learned the importance of prayer from Jesus, and they guarded their prayer life zealously. And so, the gospel continued to spread, and the number of disciples increased rapidly!

Jesus’ blueprint for His church hasn’t changed. He is still looking for leaders, as well as every believer, to give prayer priority. He is looking for faithfulness in prayer. And the rewards of our faithfulness will be amazing!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, make me faithful in prayer.*



## FEBRUARY 19

***And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*** (Mark 11:25)

Forgiveness is a big deal to Jesus! A key element of being a new creation is that our sins have been forgiven. Jesus did that work on the cross. And, every day, we experience His forgiveness, when we come before Him in prayer and say sorry for our sins. But Jesus also calls us to be like Him, which means we have to be forgiving as well.

It's not just a matter of imitating Jesus. It's far more serious than that – actually, it's quite terrifying. It's a matter of our own forgiveness. On at least five separate occasions recorded in the gospels, Jesus speaks about the importance of forgiving those who hurt us. And He makes our forgiveness conditional upon it!

Why is Jesus so insistent that we forgive? It's because an unforgiving nature reflects a lack of awareness of the grace and mercy and forgiveness we ourselves have received. It reflects a serious weakness in our relationship with God. How can our prayers be pleasing to God, when we are not right with Him? And how can we be right with Him, if we do not extend to others the grace He has poured out upon us?

I don't believe the Father actually withholds His forgiveness. Jesus finished His work on the cross, which means forgiveness has been released for every sin ever committed. Rather, I believe we cut ourselves off from that forgiveness. Like an ever-flowing river, Jesus' forgiveness flows to us. But, like a dam, our unforgiveness cuts off that flow in our lives.

When prayer begins with an awareness of the loving God we have come before, and all that He has done for us, then unforgiveness has no place in our hearts. Today, and every day, if the Holy Spirit convicts you of any unforgiveness in your heart as you pray, release forgiveness swiftly! And receive afresh His forgiveness for yourself.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, help me to forgive easily and quickly, just like You forgive me!*



## FEBRUARY 20

***After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.*** (Acts 4:31)

In Acts 4, we see the second description of a prayer meeting of the early church. The results are similar to the first one, the ten-day prayer meeting that ended with the Holy Spirit being poured out at Pentecost. But the background to this prayer meeting is completely different.

Peter and John heal a crippled beggar in the temple courts, and then preach about Jesus, resulting in a large number of conversions. As a result, they are arrested, put in jail overnight, questioned by the Sanhedrin, commanded not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, and finally released after further threats. It is the first act of persecution against the church.

What is the response of the church? The Bible says: *“They raised their voices together in prayer to God!”* Even more significantly, what did they pray for? No, they did not pray for protection from persecution, or for peace to carry on with their lives. Rather, they prayed for the ability to carry on doing what Jesus had commanded them to do, and what the authorities had forbidden them from doing!

*“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”* It was a prayer God was pleased to answer, as today’s verse shows. The place where they were meeting was shaken, as if by an earthquake – a miraculous sign that confirmed God’s presence and power. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, equipped afresh to continue the work of the gospel. They were given the boldness they asked for, to speak God’s Word.

Do we pray for comfortable lives? Do we pray out of fear when confronted with trouble? Or do we pray kingdom prayers, seeking boldness and power to be witnesses for Jesus, no matter what the consequences? God is ready to shake our churches and cities and nations, and to fill us with boldness and power by His Spirit. Let’s ask Him!

### **Prayer**

*Holy Spirit, fill me afresh every day, and help me speak the word of God with boldness.*



## FEBRUARY 21

***And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. (Ephesians 6:18)***

This verse in Ephesians immediately follows Paul's description of the armour of God. The implication is that prayer is a weapon that we use in spiritual warfare. Let's look at an important aspect of prayer that Paul mentions here – praying in the Spirit.

Unfortunately, in some Christian circles, praying in the Spirit has become synonymous with praying in tongues. But that can't be what Paul means, since otherwise, those who haven't been given the gift of tongues can't pray in the Spirit. And that's something we are all exhorted to do.

The Greek for "praying *in* the Spirit" can also be translated "by means of the Spirit," or "with the help of the Spirit," or "in connection with the Spirit," or "in the sphere of the Spirit." In effect, we are called to pray according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things, and of course that includes prayer.

When we pray in the Spirit, our prayers conform to the Father's will, and they align with Jesus' intercession at the right hand of the Father.

The Holy Spirit helps us to put aside the flesh, that is, our own desires and wishes, and seek what is on God's heart. He also helps us to pray on all occasions, that is, in every season that comes into our lives, whether good or bad, whether we think we need God or not. And He teaches us to pray all kinds of prayers – not just prayers for provision or protection or help of some kind, which we normally pray – but also warfare prayers, prophetic prayers, deliverance prayers, and so much more. The Holy Spirit teaches us to have a complete prayer life.

As we increasingly surrender to the Holy Spirit, and deepen our relationship with Him, we will grow and mature in our prayer life. We will learn to, as Paul says, "*pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers.*"

### **Prayer**

*Lord, teach me to pray in the Spirit always!*



## FEBRUARY 22

***Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*** (Matthew 26:41)

It is the darkest moment of Jesus' time on earth. The night before His crucifixion. Jesus agonizes over what awaits Him – not the suffering on the cross, but the separation from His Father when He becomes sin for mankind. He describes His state in these words: *“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”* And He asks His three closest disciples to support Him in this time of great distress: *“Stay here and keep watch with me.”* Jesus' anguish is so great that, as He prays, the blood vessels surrounding His sweat glands rupture, causing His sweat to be mingled with blood. There, in the darkness of the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus battles with His own flesh on behalf of all mankind.

Yet, in the midst of great anguish of body and soul, Jesus is concerned about His disciples! He comes back to find them sleeping rather than praying. And His words to them are not about how they have let Him down in His time of greatest need; rather, He strengthens them in their weakness. Jesus knows the danger they are in from the enemy; in fact, He has already prayed for their protection. But the disciples need to pray as well.

*“Watch and pray,”* Jesus instructs. For the disciples then, and for us today, vigilant prayer is the protection against falling into temptation. We have to be alert, not just to the devil's schemes, but even more to our weaknesses. Because those are the areas the enemy attacks. Every day, we face the truth of Jesus' words: *“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* We are eager to do what is right, to please God, to live up to all that He has done for us – and yet, we fall short every day. Flesh triumphs over spirit, too easily and too often.

Jesus, in the moment of His greatest weakness, prayed until spirit had overcome flesh. We are called to do the same.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, my spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Help me to watch and pray, that I may not fall into temptation.*



## FEBRUARY 23

***If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:13)***

The context of this incredible promise of answered prayer is the disciples asking Jesus to teach them to pray. Jesus first gives them a template for prayer – what we call the Lord’s Prayer. Next, Jesus tells them a parable, teaching them to be persistent in prayer. Then comes the three-fold promise and three-fold assurance of answered prayer:

*“So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

But even this isn’t the most amazing part of what Jesus promises! That’s in today’s verse. Jesus goes on to tell the disciples the most important thing they can ask for, and be certain to receive. When we pray, we ask God for good things. But the best thing we can ask for in prayer is the Holy Spirit.

Of course, every person who has a relationship with Jesus already has the Holy Spirit. But still, Jesus encourages us to ask for Him. Because the Holy Spirit working in us, and through us, is the One who helps us fulfil all that we were created and redeemed for. We can ask for more of the fruit of the Spirit in our daily lives. We can ask for spiritual gifts to minister in His power. We can ask for a deeper experience of the Father’s love. Everything we need, to be like Jesus or carry out His kingdom purposes, is available in the Holy Spirit, and we can ask for it.

When we ask the Father for the Holy Spirit, what we are really asking for is more of Him. God’s best gift is of Himself. He gave Himself fully in Jesus, born as a man and crucified for our sin. And He has given Himself fully in the Holy Spirit, to live within us and work through us. Jesus is teaching us to ask for more of God in our lives. It is a prayer we need to make daily, even continually, and it is a prayer our heavenly Father is always pleased to say “Yes!” to.

### ***Prayer***

*Father, thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit! Give me more of You, every day!*



## FEBRUARY 24

***I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.*** *(1 Timothy 2:1)*

Once again, we see the primary importance of prayer being emphasized. Paul exhorts all types of prayer, for all people, to be a priority of the church and of every Christian. Today, let us glean a deeper understanding of prayer, from the four different words Paul uses in this verse:

1. Petitions or supplications or entreaties are prayers that arise out of deep personal need; they are heart-felt and urgent.
2. Prayers – this is the most general word for prayer in Greek, and it literally means “an exchange of wishes”; when we pray, we interact with God – it is a personal connection; there is an exchange of wishes – we tell Him what is on our hearts, and He does the same.
3. Intercession is drawing near to God and agreeing with His revealed will; it is an intervention led by God, marking intersection between heaven and earth; it leads to action directed by God’s hand.
4. Thanksgiving, as we have already seen, is being grateful for God’s good grace.

How much richer our prayer life would be if we incorporated these various dimensions of prayer!

But the interesting thing is that Paul is not exhorting us to pray first of all for ourselves – his urging here is that we pray for others. He actually says that these prayers be made for the betterment or advantage or benefit of all people. Paul is calling every believer to petition and pray and intercede and give thanks on behalf of all people, so that they may benefit.

In this way, prayer is also the channel through which we release blessing to those around us, those we are concerned about, those whom God lays on our hearts.

Today, let’s spend a few moments putting what we have learnt into practice. Think of three people, and pray the four types of prayer for each of them.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, help me to petition, pray, intercede, and give thanks for all people.*



## FEBRUARY 25

***When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.*** (Matthew 6:5)

Jesus spoke so much about prayer, yet interestingly, His first recorded words on prayer are on how *not* to pray! We saw earlier that Jewish life was steeped in prayer. So, in a way, Jesus' disciples had to unlearn some of the things they already knew about prayer. They had to recognize poor role models and patterns of prayer, especially within the religious leadership of their time.

In this verse, Jesus deals not with how to pray or what to pray, but with the motive in prayer. He cautions against praying in order to receive the praise of men rather than the approval of God. Jesus refers to those who pray in this way as pretenders and performers.

William Barclay writes:

“The Jewish system of prayer made ostentation very easy. The Jew prayed standing, with hands stretched out, palms upwards, and with head bowed. Prayer had to be said at 9 a.m., 12 midday, and 3 p.m. It had to be said wherever a man might be, and it was easy for a man to make sure that at these hours he was at a busy street corner, or in a crowded city square, so that all the world might see with what devotion he prayed. It was easy for a man to halt on the top step of the entrance to the synagogue, and there pray lengthily and demonstratively, so that all men might admire his exceptional piety. It was easy to put on an act of prayer which all the world might see.”

What a tragic perversion of prayer! We are often guilty of the same, every time we shift our focus from God to those around us. And what a tragic result of prayer: that our reward for prayer is not the answer and approval of God, but rather the praises of man.

May God keep us from wrong motives in prayer!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, keep me from praying like the hypocrites, for the praises of men.*



## FEBRUARY 26

***When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:6)***

Yesterday, we saw Jesus cautioning us about having the wrong motive in prayer, namely, praying in order to be seen and admired by men. Today, we see His antidote to that temptation.

Prayer is, in its essence, a conversation with God. It is meant to be an intensely personal and private matter. Just like any other meaningful relationship in our life is nourished by times of intimacy, so too is our relationship with God nurtured by prayer. Prayer is like the intimate times between husband and wife, the special times set aside for a close friend, the parent-child bonding moments.

Jesus tells us to go into our room and close the door, when we pray to the Father. This room in a typical Jewish home referred to an inner chamber or secret room, a place of privacy and quiet solitude. Jesus is telling us to find a place, and make the time, to be alone with our Father in prayer, away from every distraction, because prayer is the most intimate of times with God. Jesus Himself, even when He was away from His home, sought places of solitude early in the mornings and late at night, to commune with His Father. These times that Jesus had with His Father were so precious, He did not let anything or anyone come in the way of His time in the secret place.

This doesn't mean that corporate prayer isn't important. We have already seen how the early church joined together constantly in prayer. But the power of praying together comes from the intimate times of prayer each one has in the secret place with God.

The reward we receive from this kind of prayer, which is seen only by our Father in heaven, is, well, heavenly! We receive the approval of our Father, the pleasure of His company, the revelation of His heart, the discernment of His will for us, and, yes, the answers to our petitions!

May we cultivate our prayer lives in the secret place of God's presence, and receive His heavenly rewards!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, teach me to pray in the secret place, where all that matters is You!*



## FEBRUARY 27

***When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.***  
(Matthew 6:7-8)

Jesus cautioned against the wrong motive in prayer, and, two verses later, He addresses wrong content and nature of prayer. Babbling! It means vain repetitions; repeating the same thing endlessly; saying the same thing in different words; going on and on in a meaningless manner; using many idle words. It means praying as if God will not hear unless we really harass Him! The word for babbling is said to have been derived either from King Battus of Cyrene, who stuttered, or the author Battus, who wrote tedious and wordy poems!

Sadly, so much Christian prayer is babbling. Long, wordy prayers that keep on repeating the same thing; mechanical repetitions of common prayers like a mantra; the same liturgical prayers recited Sunday after Sunday. These vain repetitions reflect a lack of understanding of our heavenly Father. It makes us like the pagans or Gentiles, who at that time had not yet received the kind of revelation that the people of God, the Jews, had received. The prayers of the Gentiles reflected their lack of knowledge of God. And the same is true of us, when our prayers are babbling!

God is our Father. We are His sons and daughters. He knows what we need before we ask Him, so we don't have to inform Him repeatedly of our needs. He loves us, and wants to meet those needs, so we don't have to persuade Him with our many words. Our Father just wants us to come into His presence and spend time with Him! He wants the genuine conversations that constitute meaningful relationships. And, yes, they will include telling Him what we need, even what we desire – but in relationship, not manipulation.

Prayer as “babbling” is not worthy of our heavenly Father, nor of the children He has chosen and redeemed. Let our prayers reflect and reveal the awesome God of love and power!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, keep me from prayer that is vain, idle, meaningless babbling.*



## FEBRUARY 28

***Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.***

*(Matthew 6:10-13)*

In the Sermon on the Mount, after teaching on how not to pray and what to do instead, Jesus concludes with these words: *“This, then, is how you should pray:”* And He teaches them the Lord’s Prayer. Again, at another time, when the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, He gives them the same prayer.

The words of the Lord’s Prayer are meaningful and powerful, but if we only use them as a prayer, we miss the point of what Jesus was teaching. He said, *“This is how you should pray”*; that is, in this manner, in accordance with this description, in keeping with . . . .

The Lord’s Prayer is what was known as an index prayer, the kind of prayer rabbis in that time taught their disciples. Each line represents a topic for prayer. The simple words of the Lord’s Prayer invite us into the depths of the heart of God, and into the adventure of an exciting prayer life!

The Lord’s Prayer, first and foremost, reveals the priority in prayer:

1. We approach God as our heavenly Father, thus grounding prayer in personal relationship.
2. We desire the exaltation of God’s Name.
3. We intercede for the advance of God’s kingdom on earth.

And *then* we petition God for our own needs:

4. We pray for our immediate needs.
5. We ask for forgiveness of our sins.
6. We seek protection from our own sinful nature, as well as the attacks of the enemy.

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer as a pattern for prayer, it is easy to pray for an hour, as Jesus asked His disciples at Gethsemane. In fact, an hour is too little time to cover the topics of the Lord’s Prayer!

We started this series of devotions with the prayer, *“Lord, teach us to pray.”* Let’s make Jesus’ response to His disciples, namely, the Lord’s Prayer, the priority and pattern of our prayer lives.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, teach me to pray according to the priority and pattern of the Lord’s Prayer!*



## FEBRUARY 29

***The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.***

*(Proverbs 15:29)*

Today's verse makes two connections: first, between prayer and character, and second, between prayer and relationship with God. It underlines the fact that prayer is first and foremost about being in a loving and reverential relationship with God. It emphasizes the significance of God's presence and pleasure in answered prayer. And it implicitly rebukes the notion that we can continue in wickedness and disobedience, and yet expect our prayers to be answered.

John Gill, in his *Exposition of the Bible*, comments on this verse:

“The Lord is far from the wicked: Not as to his essence or powerful presence, which is everywhere, for he is God omnipresent; but with respect to his favour and good will, he is far from helping in distress, and from hearing their cries when they apply unto him in desperate circumstances; nor does he admit them to nearness and communion with him now, as he does the righteous; nor will he receive them to himself at the last day, but bid them depart from him; they are far from him and from his law, and from all righteousness; and he is far from them, and keeps them at a distance from him; but he hears the prayer of the righteous; they draw nigh to him, and he draws nigh to them; he is nigh to all that call upon him in truth; and there is none like them that has God so nigh them as they have; his eyes are upon them, and his ears are open to their cries; he is a God hearing and answering their prayers, and bestows upon them the favours they ask for, and stand in need of.”

In summary, we might say that there are three aspects to answered prayer:

1. **God's Presence:** We pray to a God who is near, not far away. We desire Him more than we desire His gifts. And so, we focus on deepening our relationship with Him in prayer.
2. **God's Pleasure:** God is pleased with obedience. The relationship we have with God is meant to be personal and intimate, not merely functional. And God is pleased to respond to the one who seeks to be righteous in order to please Him.
3. **God's Power:** For those who seek God's presence and pleasure, in prayer and righteousness, God manifests His power with answered prayer. He delights to answer the prayer of those who delight in Him!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to be righteous, in order that You may be close to me, pleased with me, and hear my prayers!*



# Worship

*Let everything that has breath*



*Praise the LORD. Hallelujah!*

MARCH

## MARCH 1

***Worship always begins with God.***

*(Louie Giglio)*

This would seem like an obvious truth, and yet, worship is so often about ourselves. It begins with us worshipping when we feel like it. It consists of the things that we enjoy doing. It ends with us feeling good about ourselves! I realise how guilty I am of this as well. I can go through a whole time of worship, enjoying the music and lyrics; singing songs that have pleasing melodies and exciting rhythms, in a genre that I prefer – and not think of God at all! Worship should be all about God. Without Him at the centre of our worship, without Him as the focus of our worship, it becomes just another activity we enjoy spending time doing.

Worship always begins with God. We might live out the truth of this statement better, if we understood what worship is at its essence. The most common words that are translated “worship” in our Bibles, in both Hebrew and Greek, mean exactly the same thing: “to bow down and pay homage, to prostrate oneself before a superior.” It is the act of showing reverence to one who is greater than yourself.

So, worship begins with the recognition and acknowledgement that God is greater than us, and is worthy of our reverence. It is based on our knowledge of the nature and character of God. It is our response to the revelation of how awesome He is. In worship, we bow down and pay homage, not necessarily literally but figuratively, to the One who is worthy of our reverence. The elements that comprise our worship, whether actions or songs or proclamations or prayers or even just silence, come from a place of humbling ourselves before the Creator of the universe, the King enthroned in heaven, the Saviour on a cross, and all the manifold ways in which God has revealed Himself.

This month, let’s embark on another exciting journey, unpacking the wonderful gift that is worship!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, may my worship always begin with You.*



## MARCH 2

### ***Hallelujah!***

***Praise the LORD, you his servants;  
praise the name of the LORD.***

***Let the name of the LORD be praised,  
both now and forevermore.***

***From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,  
the name of the LORD is to be praised.***

*(Psalm 113:1-3)*

Hallelujah! Perhaps the most common word of praise in the Bible, as well as in Christian worship. It consists of two words – *halal*, which means to shine, to boast, to rave, to celebrate, to be clamorous; and *Yahweh*, which is the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses and Israel. So, when we say Hallelujah, we are boasting about our God, celebrating Him, loudly and excitedly proclaiming the brilliance of His glory!

These three verses of Psalm 113 give us a brief description of this kind of worship:

1. Who should praise the LORD? His servants. The word is the same as that used for slaves. The people of God were once slaves in Egypt and in bondage, but now, they are slaves of God and free to worship. All of God's servants are called to be worshippers, as we too have been set free from slavery and bondage, to worship Him.
2. What is the content of our praise? The name of the LORD. The many names of God are a reflection of His nature and character. And so, when we worship God for who He is, we can praise Him using the names with which He has revealed Himself in Scripture.
3. When should the LORD be praised? Always – now and forevermore. There is no limitation of time for when God should be praised. When we are praising Him for who He is, there is no time when He is not worthy of praise, since He never changes. God is worthy of our worship, every second of every day, and for all eternity! No wonder there is endless worship around His throne in heaven.
4. Where should God be praised? From one end of the earth to the other. There is no limitation of space when it comes to praising God. He should be praised everywhere, because everything has been created by Him and is sustained by Him. All of creation reveals His glory, so there is no place where we will not be stirred to worship God.

God is worthy to be praised, always and everywhere, because of who He is and what He has done for us. And so, with the psalmist, we cry out: Hallelujah!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, may my praise be the proclamation of how awesome You are!*



## MARCH 3

***When we face up to the glory of God, we soon find ourselves facedown in worship.***

*(Matt Redman)*

Worship is a function of perspective. If we focus on ourselves, or others, or the world around us, our worship will reflect those realities. But if we fix our gaze heavenward, to the majesty and glory and holiness of God, our worship will flow from that place of vision. When we are overwhelmed by who God is, our whole beings – body, soul, spirit – will respond.

The first example we see of this in the Bible is when the Tabernacle of Moses is finally set up, and the ministry of the priests is inaugurated. *“Moses and Aaron then went into the tent of meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown (Leviticus 9:23-24).”*

The common posture for worship in the tabernacle was standing, often with hands raised. However, when the glory of the LORD was manifested with power, the people could not help but fall on their faces before such an awesome God. Their hearts were overwhelmed by His presence, and their bodies responded in humility and amazement.

Matt Redman writes: “Facedown worship always begins as a posture of the heart. It is people so desperate for the increase of Christ that they find themselves decreasing to the ground in an act of reverent submission. When a soul is so captivated by the Almighty, to bend low in true and total surrender seems the only appropriate response.”

Today, why don't you find a few moments where you can be alone, and fall facedown before God? You don't have to say anything; your posture will say it all. Let it be your act of worship today.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, make me a facedown worshipper!*



## MARCH 4

***God's presence is the only essential ingredient in worship.***

*(Myles Munroe)*

God created us to live in His presence. He planted a garden for Adam and Eve, a place where He could meet with them face to face. Genesis 3:8 alludes to this intimate relationship beautifully: *"The man and the woman heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day."* God had placed man in the environment most suited for him, namely, God's presence. And it was *that* environment of God's presence that was lost when man fell.

It was a situation that was unacceptable to God. Perhaps the whole history of God's interactions with mankind, may be said to be the desire to restore us to His presence.

Fast forward to about 2,500 years later. God speaks to Moses, the leader of His newly liberated people, and commands him in Exodus 25:8: *"Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them."* The tabernacle, and the temple that followed, were God's plan to restore some measure of His presence among the people He had chosen.

What does this tell us? God's plan to dwell among His people was to have them build a place of worship. Therefore, the key to restoring the environment of God's presence, is worship.

Myles Munroe writes: *"God's presence is the only essential ingredient in worship. Our praise and the other elements of our meetings must lead us into the presence of God. If they don't, there is no reason to do them. Oh, yes, they may be nice and may make us feel good, but the purpose of the gathering is to enter the presence of the Lord. Anything that does not contribute to this is simply unnecessary clutter. God's presence in our presence is the only worthwhile end to our meetings."*

And what he says about church meetings is equally true of our private times of worship as well. They are futile without God's presence. May our primary – no, only – aim when we worship, be to enter into His presence. It is the environment that we were created for!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, may Your presence be the essential ingredient in my worship!*



## MARCH 5

***Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Hallelujah!***

*(Psalm 150:6)*

The book of Psalms has been called “the Hymnbook of the Bible.” It is a compilation of songs that encapsulates the whole gamut of human experiences and emotions, from the depths of despair to the heights of joy. The book’s many authors express the myriad aspects of relationship with God, from feelings of utter abandonment to the blessed intimacy of His presence. And here, in the very last verse of this divine songbook, we have a fitting doxology to centuries of worship!

Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! The Hebrew actually reads, “*Let all breath praise the LORD!*” Spurgeon writes of this phrase: “Let all breath praise Him: that is to say, all living beings. He gave them breath, let them breathe His praise. His name in the Hebrew is composed rather of breathings than of letters, to show that all breath comes from Him: therefore let it be used for Him.” What an incredible thought! God has breathed life into us. He has revealed breath as integral to His name. And with that very breath we praise Him! Psalm 150, the song that ends this Scriptural hymnbook, is one of extravagant praise. The psalmist exhorts praise in the heavens and on the earth. He calls for worship with a variety of musical instruments, the picture being of an orchestra, where all the instruments combine to make one joyous sound of praise.

And, just as the instruments combine to praise God with one unified sound, so too all living creatures! As Barnes puts it: “Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord – All living things in the air, the earth, the waters. Let there be one universal burst of praise. Let his praises be celebrated not only with instruments of music, but let all living beings unite in that praise; let a breathing universe combine in one solemn service of praise.”

What an amazing and exciting thought – that whenever we worship, we join the chorus of all breath in heaven and on earth, in a symphony of praise!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, thank You for the privilege of being part of the universal chorus of praise!*



## MARCH 6

***The heart of worship is surrender.***

*(Rick Warren)*

If, as we have already seen, worship is about God and His presence, then that will determine our response as well. Our acts of bowing down or being facedown before Him are not meant to be mere physical gestures, but to reflect hearts that are surrendered to Him. As Paul writes in Romans 12, *“offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God.”*

The dictionary defines “surrender” as “yielding to the power, control, or possession of another.” Not something that anyone wants to do! Surrender is seen as weakness, as loss, as humiliation. But not so, when it is to Jesus Christ!

Rick Warren writes: “Surrendering to God is the heart of worship. It is the natural response to God’s amazing love and mercy. We give ourselves to Him, not out of fear or duty, but in love, because ‘he first loved us.’ ” He continues: “Offering yourself to God is what worship is all about.”

We worship God – in His awesome power, amazing grace, and unfailing love – because He is worthy of worship. And as we respond to this revelation with music and singing, dance and movement, words and actions, and all the many ways in which worship is expressed, we find ourselves in a place of surrender. Not because we have to, but because we want to. Not forced, but invited. Not compelled by His decrees, but by our desire for Him.

When we realise that the heart of worship is surrender, we offer Jesus not just our times of singing and dancing, but the whole of our lives. We acknowledge that worship is a lifestyle of surrender. As Paul affirms in Romans 12: *“Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual [that is, proper and reasonable in God’s sight] act of worship.”*

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, please give me a heart of surrender.*



## MARCH 7

***God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.***

*(John 4:24)*

God desires worship that is aligned with His nature. That's why idolatry is so abhorrent to God, because He is spirit. As He told Israel in the desert, before they entered Canaan: "You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire (Deuteronomy 4:15)." God is spirit, and, while there are physical aspects to worshipping Him, these should never become priority over the spiritual.

Today's verse is part of a conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan woman, about which is the best place to worship God. Jesus essentially tells her that it is not about the externals of worship; rather, what is important is the nature of one's worship.

We are called to worship "in spirit" or "in the Spirit." This means that we worship God from the depths of our inner being, not just with outward actions. We worship with the help of the Holy Spirit, who knows what is most pleasing to God. The place and patterns associated with formal religion are less important than what is happening in our hearts. To quote Pett: "It was to be worship from the inner heart, as moved by the Spirit, made directly towards God, and irrespective of place."

We are called to worship "in truth." This means that we worship God for who He truly is, not based on our own ideas about Him. We worship the God who has revealed Himself in Scripture, and most clearly in Jesus. This adds to the case against worshipping idols, as they are false representations of God.

One final point: I said that God desires this kind of worship. Well, actually, Jesus says that the Father is seeking *worshippers*; those who will worship Him in spirit and truth. Will you be the kind of worshipper the Father is seeking?

### ***Prayer***

*Father, may I be the kind of worshipper You seek, one who worships in spirit and in truth.*



## MARCH 8

***Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.*** (Psalm 103:1)

The word for praise used here is better translated “bless.” It is the Hebrew word *barak*, and it means to bless God as an act of adoration, to kneel expectantly and quietly before Him. David is not addressing God in this verse; in fact, he is addressing himself! David is exhorting his innermost being to bless God, to adore Him in quiet expectancy. He is instructing his soul – including his desires, passions, appetites, and emotions – to bless God. David wants his desire to be for God, his passion to be about God, his appetite to be for more of God, his emotions to be stirred by God.

David continues, exhorting all that is within him to adore the LORD. We see here the application of what Jesus calls the first and greatest commandment – “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength (Mark 12:30).*” David knows that it is so easy to slip into worship that is superficial, with just the externals, without heart involvement. And he is determined not to give God anything less than all of himself; he is determined to worship with all of his being.

The subject of this extravagant, all-in praise is God’s holy name – who the LORD is, utterly set apart from everyone and everything else, unique in His nature. And then, David goes on, in the next four verses, to enumerate some ways in which God’s praise-worthy nature is manifested in our lives:

1. Spiritual healing
2. Physical healing
3. Spiritual deliverance
4. God’s pleasure in us
5. Deep sense of satisfaction
6. Renewed strength and vitality

Spend the next few moments reflecting on these six ways in which God has blessed you, and then bless Him with all that is within you!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, help me to adore You with all that is within me – heart, soul, mind, and strength.*



## MARCH 9

***Each Name of Christ is a key to who we are worshipping and why. Worship is a response and will grow or shrink in direct proportion to our view of Him.*** (Graham Kendrick)

The word “worship” is derived from the Old English word for “worth”. It meant dignity, honour, or reputation. Worship is the act of affirming that God is worthy. It is a declaration of who God is, and therefore how worthy He is to be praised, believed, served, surrendered to, and all the other appropriate responses to God.

Worship doesn’t begin with our desire to honour God; rather, it begins with God’s desire to make Himself known to us. From the beginning of creation, God has revealed Himself to mankind in so many ways – through intimate relationship, through Scripture, through His works, through the person of Jesus, and, in this age, through the testimony of the Holy Spirit. As we get to know God better, we are able to worship Him more fully.

We have seen earlier, that it is so easy in worship to lose sight of God. Our focus shifts from the object of our worship to the trappings of worship, to our own selves, and to those around us. But fixing our eyes on God brings worship back to what it should be. As we allow the awesomeness of God to fill our hearts and minds and spirits, our worship will be all about Him, and will give Him pleasure.

The names of Christ reveal who He is, and thus, they can help us worship Him. The Bible is full of names and titles of God, as well as, more specifically, of Christ. As we name them and reflect upon them, as we consider who God is and how that aspect of His nature has impacted our lives, we can flow into the kind of worship that pleases God.

Today, spend a few moments reflecting on any one of the names of Christ – what it reveals about Him, and what it tells you about His work in your life – and let your worship be in response to that revelation.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, may my worship always be in response to who You truly are.*



## MARCH 10

***Worship thrives on wonder. We cannot worship without wonder. For worship to be worship, it must contain something of the “otherness” of God.*** (Matt Redman)

Do you sometimes feel like you are just going through the motions in worship, as if it is coming from the mind rather than the heart, out of academic knowledge of God rather than excitement or emotion? I know I do, more often than I care to admit, even to myself.

The long-time Christian can get so jaded in the faith, that our worship can become stale. Worship needs fresh revelation to nurture it. We need to be in that place of being amazed at our amazing God and His amazing ways. Because He truly *is* amazing beyond compare! What is missing is wonder – and it is missing because we bring God down to our level rather than lifting our gaze up to His!

Matt Redman writes: “I’ve come to love that word – ‘otherness.’ It’s such a great worship word. A sense that God is so pure, matchless and unique that no one else and nothing else even comes close. He is altogether glorious – unequalled in splendour and unrivalled in power. He is beyond the grasp of human reason – far above the reach of even the loftiest scientific mind. Inexhaustible, immeasurable and unfathomable – eternal, immortal, invisible.”

And, in his indictment of the Church, Redman continues: “We take the extraordinary revelation of God and somehow manage to make Him sound completely ordinary! We fail to communicate the sense of God’s otherness. As A. W. Tozer puts it, ‘Left to ourselves we tend immediately to reduce God to manageable terms.’ ”

The words of the song “Wonder” are a prayer to avoid such worship:

“May we never lose our wonder . . . .  
Wide-eyed and mystified  
May we be just like a child  
Staring at the beauty of our King . . . .”

Today, sing this song as a prayer, that your worship may always thrive on that sense of wonder in the “otherness” of God.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, may we never lose our wonder!*



## MARCH 11

***The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. (Psalm 19:1-2)***

It isn't just human beings who are worshipping God; all of creation worships its Creator. In these two verses, David sings of worship that proceeds from the heavens above us. The heavenly bodies – sun, moon, stars – were the first objects of idol worship in history, and, sadly, they continue to be worshipped. But, in fact, they themselves are worshippers, of the One who brought them into being with just a word.

David tells us that these glorious lights in the skies declare the glory of God. Their very beauty and splendour make conspicuous the work of their Creator. In fact, we see the glory of God revealed in the work of His hands, His awesome creation. Their revelation of His glory is continuous, day after day, and night after night. The sun comes out in the day, and reveals His beauty and splendour and power; the moon and stars come out at night, and do the same! In fact, they cannot help themselves – the revelation of God through them is like a spring bubbling up, overflowing to all of mankind. No man is without the revelation of God's glory, because all are witness to the worship of the heavens, day and night!

Let me conclude with the words of Charles Spurgeon, from his classic commentary on the Psalms, *Treasury of David*: "Every moment God's existence, power, wisdom and goodness, are being sounded abroad by the heavenly heralds which shine upon us from above. He who would guess at divine sublimity should gaze upward into the starry vault; he who would imagine infinity must peer into the boundless expanse; he who desires to see divine wisdom should consider the balancing of the orbs; he who would know divine fidelity must mark the regularity of the planetary motions; and he who would attain some conceptions of divine power, greatness, and majesty, must estimate the forces of attraction, the magnitude of the fixed stars, and the brightness of the whole celestial train."

The heavens are worshipping God unceasingly; let our worship not be any less!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, like the heavens, may my life overflow with worship that reveals Your glory!*



## MARCH 12

***Surely that which occupies the total time and energies of heaven (i.e. worship) must be a fitting pattern for earth.*** *(Paul E. Billheimer)*

Worship is a 24-7 activity in heaven. Well, they probably don't have hours and days in heaven, or time as we know it, but you know what I mean! We have seen that worship is our response to the revelation of God, and, in heaven, where His face is seen without any hindrance or limitation, worship cannot but be extravagant and everlasting! I don't believe that this means we will spend eternity floating in heaven with harps in our hands, as some seem to suggest. But our worship in heaven will be of a depth and intensity beyond anything we have experienced on earth.

The apostle John is given a glimpse of the worship of heaven in Revelation 4. He is shown the throne in heaven, and the living creatures – most likely, seraphim – and elders around the throne. This is what they are doing: *“Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.’ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever.”*

What is happening around the throne of God? The four living creatures circle the throne endlessly, and, each time they do so, they receive a fresh revelation of God – they see another facet of His beauty and glory and majesty and splendour and power and love. And they burst into worship, saying, “Holy, holy, holy!” – and the twenty-four elders follow, falling face down in worship. This process continues in loop, so to speak, for all eternity, because the wonder of who God is will never be exhausted!

When we worship in response to the revelation of God, with our limited understanding of Him, we are also preparing for an eternity of worshipping Him, as we see Him face to face!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, enable me to declare Your absolute holiness, and fall facedown before You in worship, here on earth, and for all eternity!*



## MARCH 13

***Worship is the thank you that can't be silenced.***

*(Max Lucado)*

Worship is the natural, even inevitable, outcome of being aware of God and His works, especially in our own lives. When we turn our gaze away from our own selves, from what we want but don't have, from our disappointments and complaints with God, and instead, focus on how much He has blessed us, we cannot help but worship.

The devil and the world will try to stop us! We see one example of this in the Gospels, as Jesus approached Jerusalem. The crowd of disciples began to praise God joyfully, and some of the Pharisees asked Jesus to stop them. Jesus replied, *"I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out (Luke 19:40)."*

Stovall Weems calls this "irrepressible worship"! It is David dancing madly before the LORD, not caring what his subjects, and even his wife, thought of him. It is Paul and Silas singing in prison, stripped and flogged and chained to the stocks. It is Richard Wurmbrand dancing for joy in his cell, after being tortured for his faith. It is the band on the Titanic playing hymns, even as she sank into the icy depths. It is the children shouting praises in the exalted halls of the Temple, as Jesus performed miracles.

Max Lucado writes: "Worship is when you're aware that what you've been given is far greater than what you can give. Worship is the awareness that, were it not for His touch, you'd still be hobbling and hurting, bitter and broken. Worship is the half-glazed expression on the parched face of a desert pilgrim as he discovers that the oasis is not a mirage. . . . Worship is a voluntary act of gratitude offered by the saved to the Saviour, by the healed to the Healer, and by the delivered to the Deliverer."

Are you saved, healed, delivered? Have you experienced God's provision, protection, pardon, and so much more? Let nothing silence your worship!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, may my worship truly be the "thank you" that cannot be silenced!*



## MARCH 14

***Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.*** (Psalm 42:11)

Like David in Psalm 103, the author of Psalm 42 is also addressing himself, not God or others. He is examining the state of his inner self, and giving himself instruction. We see the state of his soul described in two words – downcast and disturbed. The psalmist has been humbled by his circumstances, and is bowed down in sorrow as a result. Even more, there is an uproar and clamour within his soul, because of the condition he finds himself in.

What is the psalmist's situation? What has caused his innermost being to fall into such depths of despair? Is it poverty, or persecution, or any of the myriad problems that befall mankind? No! We see the answer in the first two verses of the psalm:

*“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.  
My soul thirsts for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”*

The psalmist is desperate for the presence of the LORD. He is lost, when away from the dwelling place of God. He longs to see God, to appear before Him – in effect, to worship – with the same intensity of one who is extremely thirsty. Just like the deer cannot live without water, so too the psalmist cannot live without being in God's presence. He goes on to describe what he longs to do in God's presence – shouts of joy and thanksgiving in the House of the LORD!

What is the psalmist's advice to himself? He determines to continue to put his hope in God, to wait expectantly for Him. He trusts that God will surely see the deepest desire of his heart, and draw him once again into His presence. And, in the meantime, the psalmist will continue to praise God!

What is the deepest desire of our hearts? Like the psalmist, may we intensely thirst for God's presence, and determine to worship Him, no matter what our circumstances.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, increase my thirst for Your presence!*



## MARCH 15

***It is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence to men.***

*(C. S. Lewis)*

C. S. Lewis was a renowned theologian, scholar, author, and Christian apologist of the twentieth century. Today, we will look at how he resolved what was a crisis of faith for him: Why does God demand worship?

In his book *Reflections on the Psalms*, he writes: “When I first began to draw near to belief in God and even for some time after it had been given to me, I found a stumbling block in the demand so clamorously made by all religious people that we should ‘praise’ God; still more in the suggestion that God Himself demanded it. We all despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtue, intelligence or delightfulness; we despise still more the crowd of people round every dictator, every millionaire, every celebrity, who gratify that demand. Thus a picture, at once ludicrous and horrible, both of God and His worshippers, threatened to appear in my mind. The Psalms were especially troublesome in this way . . . .”

C. S. Lewis came to understand, however, that like everything else God demands of us, worship is for our benefit, not God’s! It is in the place of worship that we are able to see God more clearly. For it isn’t just that we draw close to God in worship; He also draws close to us, and His presence is often more real to us in worship than any other time. C. S. Lewis also realised that worship is the natural outcome of enjoying God, of a deepening relationship with Him.

In his words: “I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent . . . .”

Today, tell God how wonderful He is, not because He demands it, but because it’s how you feel about Him! And just rest in His presence . . . .

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, may Your presence be tangible whenever I worship!*



## MARCH 16

***Anything you do that brings pleasure to God is an act of worship.***

*(Rick Warren)*

The Westminster Catechism starts with the question, “What is the chief and highest end of man?” And the answer is: “Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him forever.” In effect, to worship!

To glorify God is to praise, extol, exalt, laud, honour, magnify, and revere Him; it is to acknowledge and reveal His majesty and splendour; it is to elevate Him. To enjoy God is to give priority to our relationship with Him; to continually seek to know Him better; to draw ever closer to Him in intimacy; to delight in being in His presence, without any agenda of wanting something from Him. We are called to do these with all of our lives, not just in the allotted time of “worship” in a church service.

Rick Warren writes: “Worship is far more than praising, singing, and praying to God. Worship is a lifestyle of enjoying God, loving Him, and giving ourselves to be used for His purposes. When you use your life for God’s glory, everything you do can become an act of worship.” He reiterates: “Every activity can be transformed into an act of worship when you do it for the praise, glory, and pleasure of God. . . . Martin Luther said, ‘A dairymaid can milk cows to the glory of God.’ ”

But let’s consider the more common understanding of worship, in this light. If anything that brings God pleasure is worship, surely every act of what we consider worship should be to give Him pleasure. When we sing, or make music, or dance, or perform any action that we use in worship, our desire should be to give God pleasure. We should come away from a time of worship, whether corporate or individual, knowing that we have delighted God’s heart. And I think the Westminster Catechism gives us a key to pleasing God – when we fully enjoy Him, in worship or anything else, He enjoys us!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, may my worship always give You pleasure!*



## MARCH 17

***Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. (Psalm 95:6)***

This Psalm of David's is a call to worship. In fact, there are three calls to worship in this psalm, and from them we get a wonderful picture of how our view of God determines our worship.

First, David calls the people to sing for joy and shout aloud. Who are they worshipping in such an exuberant fashion? The One who is the Rock of their salvation. Next, David calls for music and songs of thanksgiving, as we behold the God who is the Creator, Ruler, and Sustainer of all creation.

And then, a sudden shift of mood, in this sixth verse. David calls us from the joyous and loud worship of the previous verses, to a place of solemn adoration. All the three verbs – bow down, worship, and kneel – refer to a posture of surrender, down on our knees, or even faces, before Yahweh our Maker. Why is David not urging exuberant praise for our Creator, as before? Because he shifts his gaze from the greatness of the Creator to the intimacy of God's relationship with us.

David goes on to say, in the next verse: *"For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care."*

What a lovely picture of tenderness! Who else but David, who spent his childhood tending sheep, could have received such a revelation and understanding of God? For him, the mighty Yahweh was also the loving Shepherd, who cared for all the needs of the flock. David knew how much he had to do to protect and provide for the flocks under his care, and he recognized that God did the same – even more – for His people.

David, even as King, had no problem considering himself and his people as sheep in God's pasture, with all the dependence upon God that it entailed. He was so assured of God's loving care of His flock, that he even wrote the most well-known line of all the Psalms:

Yahweh Rohi – the LORD is my Shepherd!

Today, bow down in adoration before your good Shepherd, and rest in the safety and security and comfort of being part of the flock under His care.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, I bow down in worship to You, my Maker and my Shepherd.*



## MARCH 18

***Christian worship must contain both the cross and the crown. Sing of majesty, and sing of mercy.***  
*(Matt Redman)*

Worship flows from revelation, and our worship should reflect the many facets of who God is. It is easy to focus our worship on aspects of God that we are comfortable with, or that make us feel good. We might worship God for His love for us, and not consider His holiness. We might thank Him for protection and security, and not praise Him for His triumphs. Our worship may even focus too much on ourselves – our surrender, our feelings, our desires – and neglect lifting up His glorious Name.

Matt Redman writes: “In the seventeenth century, Richard Sibbes encouraged worshippers everywhere to ‘take whole Christ’ and not to ‘divide Lord from Jesus, and so make a Christ of their own.’ When we encounter the whole Christ, we find an incredible mix of power and patience, glory and grace. He speaks in words of both tenderness and toughness, rebuking the hard heart yet welcoming the sinner. There is a certain kindness in His majesty. Christ is neither a hard taskmaster nor a soft touch. . . . He is easy to please but hard to satisfy – the smallest offering of an honest heart will bring Him pleasure, yet He also has an insatiable desire to see us live out lives of the utmost holiness.”

Worship should encompass the fulness of who God is, not just what we are comfortable with. We worship the One who is both King and Saviour, Creator and Redeemer, Mercy and Justice, Love and Power. He deserves worship for all of who He is!

There is an amazing picture in Revelation 5: “*Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.’ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.*” The apostle John was shown that Jesus Christ is both the Lion and the Lamb, and He is to be worshipped as both. To paraphrase Matt Redman, we should sing of the crown and majesty of the Lion, as well as the cross and mercy of the Lamb.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, help me sing of majesty as well as of mercy; may my worship contain both the cross and the crown.*



## MARCH 19

***Praise is your access, your key, into the presence of God.***

*(Myles Munroe)*

How do we approach God? How do we enter into His presence? The answer to both these questions is worship.

Psalm 100:4 says: *“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.”* The picture is of the Temple, where you first entered in through the gates, and then you were in the courts. Further in were the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, where God’s presence was represented by the Ark of the Covenant. Thus, thanksgiving and praise, both elements of worship, were the way in which you approached God. Worship prepared your heart for God, and invited His presence.

We see a similar principle in the pattern of the Lord’s Prayer. We say “Hallowed be your name” before “Your kingdom come” – that is, we approach God with worship, before we begin our intercession. Praise brings us into God’s presence, and then we can present Him with our petitions.

But, in a very real sense, to approach God is to invite Him! Psalm 22:3 tells us that God inhabits the praises of His people. How amazing to know that, as we worship, God comes in our midst, in His awesome presence. Some versions translate this verse as God being enthroned on our praises. I love this picture, that as we worship, Jesus sets up His throne among us, and we find ourselves in His royal presence!

Myles Munroe writes: *“Praise is how you come to know God. Praise is God’s dwelling place, His sphere of influence and authority in your life. In essence, God will show up if you praise Him in the midst of your darkest moments.”*

Each of us is seeking more of God’s presence. That is why we are doing these daily devotions. The key to God’s presence is worship. Even if you’re going through a tough time today, just worship. He is waiting to come to you with His sweet and powerful presence!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, thank You for the gift of worship, that gives me access to Your presence!*



## MARCH 20

***Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.*** (Psalm 63:3-4)

We would be forgiven for thinking that David wrote this psalm at a peaceful and blessed time of his life. And that, as he basked in the awareness of God's love, he composed a love song to Him. The reality is quite the opposite! David is in the Desert of Judah, most likely fleeing from his own son, Absalom, who had rebelled against him. David goes on to say later in the psalm, that his enemies are seeking to destroy his life. He is in a state of physical and emotional exhaustion, hungry and thirsty, and feeling the deep hurt of betrayal.

Yet, what does he focus on? Rather, who does he focus on? God!

David starts this psalm by expressing his desire for God. Even more than his thirst for water, he is thirsting for God's presence. He chooses to remember what he has experienced of God – His power and glory revealed to David in the sanctuary; the true satisfaction David felt in His presence; the safety in the shadow of His wings.

So, David sings, *"Your love is better than life."* For David, being loved by God trumps life itself; for him, the spiritual relationship with God is far more important than physical blessing. And, in the midst of this terrible situation, David worships – not some token praise, but with all of his being!

These two verses describe extravagant praise on David's part. *"My lips will glorify you"* – David shouts out loud praises; *"I will praise you"* – David bows down in adoration; *"I will lift up my hands"* – David acknowledges the greatness of God's name. At a time when David could have been upset and disappointed with God, when he could have been desperately pleading for help from God, he chooses instead to worship! May we do the same.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, may the spiritual always trump the physical in my life, and result in extravagant worship!*



## MARCH 21

***Worship changes the worshipper into the image of the One worshipped.*** (Jack Hayford)

Worship doesn't just make us feel good, or make God feel good. Worship changes us. It does a work of transformation in us, for better or for worse. How could worship change us for the worse? Surely worship would only change us for the better! Well, that depends on who or what we worship.

The Bible tells us that we become like what we worship. For example, Psalm 115 is a terrifying description of the result of idol worship:

*“Their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands.  
They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see.  
They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell.  
They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats.  
Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.”*

If we worship false gods, and put our trust in them, we will be transformed into their image. They don't have to be physical idols – our idols can be money, or possessions, or career, or relationships, or our bodies, or even ourselves – the list of potential idols in our lives is endless. And, in each case, whether we realise it or even want it, we are being transformed into the image of what we worship.

Why does this happen? I can think of three reasons:

1. We worship what we admire, and we seek to emulate or imitate that thing or person.
2. The word for “worship” in the Bible also means “service”, and we become like what we serve.
3. Worship is a spiritual activity, and, what we worship impacts the deepest part of our beings, that is, our spirit.

So, the good news is this: as we worship the one true God, and as we put our trust in Him, we are transformed into His image, from our innermost being to our outward characteristics. Isn't that an incredible reality? It motivates us to draw closer to Jesus, and know Him more intimately, so that we may worship Him better, and be changed into His image!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, thank You that as I worship You, I am being changed into Your image!*



## MARCH 22

***Worship begins in holy expectancy, it ends in holy obedience.***

*(Richard J. Foster)*

Today's devotion is taken from Chapter 11: The Discipline of Worship, of Richard J. Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline*:

"A striking feature of worship in the Bible is that people gathered in what we could only call a 'holy expectancy.' They believed they would actually hear the voice of God. When Moses went into the tabernacle, he knew he was entering the presence of God. The same was true of the early Church. It was not surprising to them that the building in which they met shook with the power of God. When some dropped dead and others were raised from the dead by the word of the Lord, the people knew that God was in their midst. As those early believers gathered they were keenly aware that the veil had been ripped in two, and, like Moses and Aaron, they were entering the Holy of Holies. No intermediaries were needed. They were coming into the awe-full, glorious, gracious presence of the living God. They gathered with anticipation, knowing that Christ was present among them and would teach them and touch them with his living power.

Just as worship begins in holy expectancy, it ends in holy obedience. If worship does not propel us into greater obedience, it has not been worship. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change. Resentments cannot be held with the same tenacity when we enter his gracious light. As Jesus says, we need to leave our gift at the altar and go set the matter straight. In worship an increased power steals its way into the heart sanctuary, an increased compassion grows in the soul. To worship is to change. Holy obedience saves worship from becoming an opiate, an escape from the pressing needs of modern life. Worship enables us to hear the call to service clearly so that we respond, 'Here am I! Send me.' "

May we cultivate hearts of holy expectancy as we come into the place of worship, and may we end our times of worship in a spirit of holy obedience!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, may my worship begin in holy expectancy and end in holy obedience!*



## MARCH 23

***Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.***

*(Psalm 145:3)*

It is interesting that, in an entire book of songs in the Bible, only one is titled “A psalm of praise.” It is Psalm 145, a psalm of David. Charles Spurgeon writes of this psalm: “It is David’s, David’s very own, David’s favourite. . . . It is altogether praise, and praise pitched in a high key. David had blessed God many a time in other psalms, but this he regarded as his peculiar, his crown jewel of praise.”

Psalm 145 is a song of extravagant praise. David piles words upon words, runs riot with adjectives, as he strives to describe God. But he falls short, by his own admission, as today’s verse acknowledges.

First, David proclaims that the LORD is most worthy of praise. In fact, the Hebrew describes praise that is most forceful and exceedingly abundant, for that is the kind of worship God is worthy of. God is great, and so His praise must also be great.

Second, David proclaims that the LORD’s greatness is beyond our understanding. It is unfathomable. But the implication is that God’s greatness is something that deserves searching out. God’s greatness is seen in His awesome works – literally, His “fearful” works. And those mighty acts invite us to meditate upon them, and gain deeper revelation into God’s greatness.

But, for David, worship does not end with receiving revelation about God’s greatness and offering Him extravagant praise. Worship is also proclamation of who God is. He goes on in the next verse of this psalm to say: *“One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.”* This is an incredible picture of the church as a worshipping community. Each generation witnessing God’s awesome works, and seeking deeper understanding of His greatness, and then proclaiming this awesome God to the next generation of believers!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, as I search out the depths of Your greatness, may my worship be the extravagant praise You are worthy of!*



## MARCH 24

***Worship is first and foremost for His benefit, not ours, though it is marvellous to discover that in giving Him pleasure, we ourselves enter into what can become our richest and most wholesome experience in life.*** *(Graham Kendrick)*

I found this account in a blog called Rachel's Ramblings:

"A few weeks ago, we visited Ben's parent's church for the first time. It is a small church . . . a work in progress. There isn't a 'worship team' there yet. Instead they worship to music from a CD with one woman that sings on stage. I have to admit, I had a very hard time getting into it. I didn't even sing at first, even though I knew the songs. Then I looked down at my 8 year old daughter. She was singing her little heart out. She looked up at me and gave me the biggest smile. I immediately felt convicted. My little girl was singing and worshipping our Lord, while her mother just stood there. I then started singing right away and soon found that it wasn't that difficult for me after all. After the service, when we were in the car driving, Ben and I began talking about the service. Ben said that he felt the same way that I did about having a hard time getting into the worship at first. He felt convicted as well. He said that he felt like he was putting conditions on his worship. He told me that we should never have conditions on our worship."

I don't know about you, but this account definitely convicted me! Too often, I find myself analysing the worship rather than worshipping. A wrong note here, a missed beat there, and I get distracted. The problem, of course, is not the worship – the problem is me. It is me thinking worship is for my benefit, to make me feel good. It is me expecting the worship to cater to my needs. Instead, God expects me to worship Him, to please Him, even if it means gritting my teeth and getting on with it!

But the Graham Kendrick quote for today gives us a wonderful promise: that when we worship for God's benefit, we will be rewarded as well. When we worship for God's pleasure, we are transported into pleasure ourselves. Worship that is for God alone is the best kind of worship for us as well!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, may my worship be first and foremost for Your benefit and Your pleasure!*



## MARCH 25

***When you feel abandoned by God yet continue to trust Him, you worship Him in the deepest way.***  
(Rick Warren)

The Christian life is not a bed of roses. Our walk with Jesus can be full of missteps and stumbles, discouragement and disappointment, and too many times when we feel God is distant. What do we do in those moments?

Rick Warren writes: “God is real, no matter how you feel. It is easy to worship God when things are going great in your life – when he has provided food, friends, family, health, and happy situations. But circumstances are not always pleasant. How do you worship God then? . . . . The deepest level of worship is praising God in spite of pain, thanking God during a trial, trusting him when tempted, surrendering while suffering, and loving him when he seems distant.”

The most glorious example of such worship is seen on the cross. The Father, for the first time in all of eternity, has turned His face away from the Son. And, in far greater agony than from His physical wounds, Jesus cries out, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* Jesus is feeling the full force and horror of being abandoned by His Father.

What does Jesus choose to do? Look at His final three words from the cross, after this desperate cry. They are all spoken to the Father, and they are all quoting the Scriptures:

*“I thirst”* – Jesus expresses His desire for the Father, that He is desperate for the Father’s presence as the deer pants for water.

*“It is finished!”* – Jesus proclaims that He has completed the mission for which the Father sent Him; to the end, He is obedient to the Father.

*“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”* – Jesus looks up into the void, this distance between Him and His Father, and, in complete confidence, surrenders His spirit to the Father who has turned His face away from Him.

To paraphrase Rick Warren’s quote from above – Jesus felt abandoned by the Father, yet continued to trust Him, and, in doing so, He worshipped the Father in the deepest way!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, may I trust You and worship You, even when You seem distant and I feel abandoned.*



## MARCH 26

***Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. (Psalm 108:5)***

The Psalms are often heartfelt outpourings of raw, unfiltered emotion. Many of the psalms start with prayer in the midst of a difficult situation, and end with praise. An example of this is Psalm 22, which Jesus quoted on the cross; its twenty-one verses of agonised cries are followed by ten verses of grateful praise.

Psalm 108 follows a different pattern. It starts with extravagant praise, and then abruptly shifts to desperate petition – “Save!” “Help!” “Deliver!” Charles Spurgeon writes of this psalm: “Sometimes we must climb to praise by the ladder of prayer, and at other times we must bless God for the past in order to be able in faith to plead for the present and the future. By the aid of God's Spirit we can both pray ourselves up to praise, or praise the Lord till we get into a fit frame for prayer.”

Worship prepares us for prayer! In worship, we praise God for His wonderful attributes, and it raises our faith that He can do the things we are asking of Him. In worship, we also thank God for what He has done in the past, and it gives us confidence that He will do the same for us again. In worship, we fix our eyes on God rather than ourselves, on His love and power rather than our weakness and problems, and that brings boldness to our prayers.

Finally, in worship, we focus on honouring and magnifying God, and that is exactly what David is saying in today's verse. His desire is for God's glory and exaltation. In his praise, David lifts up the name of God higher than the highest part of creation – the heavens. And he desires that the whole earth may be covered in God's glory. This is the kind of extravagant praise that prepares our hearts for faith-filled prayer, no matter how desperate our circumstances!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, let extravagant worship lead me into the prayer of faith.*



**MARCH 27**

***Our heavenly Father loves us with an extravagant abandon. Passionate, undignified worship is our only reasonable response.***  
*(Matt Redman)*

Worship is a response to revelation, and extravagant worship is our only possible response to the revelation of God's extravagant love for us.

Matt Redman writes of Charles Wesley as an example of an extravagant worshipper: "Within the space of 50 years, this undignified lover of God wrote around 6,500 songs of praise. One of his earliest songs, written to mark the first anniversary of becoming a Christian, was a song with the first line 'O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise.' When I first heard this hymn, I thought to myself, 'A thousand people singing to God isn't really all that impressive. After all, we've probably all been in meetings bigger than that.' But then I discovered what Wesley was really imagining. He was picturing himself having a thousand tongues! He was saying, 'I wish I had a thousand tongues, because if I did, I'd praise God with every single one of them.' In one sense utter foolishness, yet a beautiful picture of extreme worship."

Extravagant, passionate, undignified worship should be our natural response to our heavenly Father's love. Because that's how His love for us is! His love is extravagant, giving His Son for us, while we were yet sinners. His love is passionate, tearing open the veil and giving us access to His throne room. His love is undignified, like that of the prodigal father, running to embrace his filthy, smelly, ragged son who has returned to him.

If you sense a coolness or formality or routine in your worship, maybe the problem is a lack of awareness of the Father's love. Ask the Holy Spirit to pour the Father's love afresh into your heart. And then let worship flow without hindrance!

***Prayer***

*Lord, may I respond to Your extravagant love with passionate, undignified worship!*



## MARCH 28

***The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express the same delight in God which made David dance.***  
(C. S. Lewis)

We spoke yesterday of passionate, undignified worship. Of course, when we think of undignified worship, the first person that comes to mind is David. Not the shepherd boy, but the King. We read the story in 2 Samuel 6. The Ark of the Covenant was being brought to Jerusalem, with much rejoicing and many sacrifices. And verse 14 says, *“David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might . . . .”*

King David took off his royal robes and wore the simple dress of a worshipper. It seems to me that, along with the grand garments, he also put aside his dignity! He was not a king before his subjects; rather, he was a subject before the King of kings. I cannot begin to imagine the delight and excitement that prompted King David to dance in a fashion that his wife would later despise as vulgar.

Matt Redman writes: “In Luke 6:45, Jesus tells us: ‘Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.’ And so, too, out of what’s stored up in our hearts we sing and serve and live. That’s what King David’s frenzied dancing was all about. It wasn’t a show; nor was it just adrenaline or hype. It was an overflow of the abundance of love for God that was in his heart.”

David told his wife, Michal, that it was before the LORD that he had danced, and that he would be willing to become even more undignified before Him. I think that is the secret of undignified worship. It is before the LORD, before Jesus, who blesses us so abundantly, who loves us so extravagantly. We forget about ourselves, our dignity and reputation; we forget about the others around us; and we worship from the overflow of all that we are feeling for Jesus.

It is the kind of worship that liberates! Try it this week. Worship in a way that you feel is undignified; it may range from lifting your hands in a high Anglican service, to doing a mad jig in the privacy of your room. And feel the delight of God’s heart!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, help me to dance before You as David danced!*



## MARCH 29

### ***Praise the LORD!***

***How good it is to sing praises to our God,  
how pleasant and fitting to praise him!***

*(Psalm 147:1)*

In Psalm 147, we are exhorted to praise the LORD. The phrase “sing praises” in today’s verse actually refers to making music with instruments, along with singing. The psalmist uses three words to describe such worship:

1. He says it is good to praise God, by which he means that worship is pleasant and agreeable to our senses. Worship delights our hearts.
2. He says that it is pleasant to praise God, by which he means that our worship is delightful to God.
3. He says that it is fitting to praise God, by which he means that we are attractive to God when we worship Him.

Three wonderful reasons to praise God!

However, this verse, and the psalm that it is part of, becomes all the more powerful when we understand the context in which it was written. Some ancient manuscripts title this psalm, “A psalm of Haggai and Zechariah, when they urged the rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem.” Almost twenty years had passed since the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem after their exile in Babylon. Conditions were very hard, and there was much discouragement and disillusionment among those who returned. Eventually, they gave up trying to build the temple, and just focused on surviving. It was the prophetic ministry of Haggai and Zechariah that encouraged the people to prioritise building the temple.

Psalm 147 was likely written as part of that exhortation. It reminded the people of God’s sovereignty in creation, as well as His care for His people. It was in the midst of a ruined city, and an abandoned temple, that they sang: *“Hallelujah! How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise Him!”*

No matter what our circumstances, our worship will delight our hearts, please God, and make us attractive to Him!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, it is truly good and pleasant and fitting to praise You!*



**MARCH 30**

***Awe combined with intimacy is the essence of Christian worship.***

*(J. D. Greear)*

Worship reflects who God is, and responds to how He has revealed Himself. And, as a result, it needs to mirror the different, seemingly contradictory, aspects of God. He is a holy God, but He became sin on the cross. He is the Creator, and yet He submitted to humiliation by those He had created. He is righteous, and also merciful. He is the God who calls out to us in tenderness, but His commands are absolute. He is the God of wrath, and yet we can hurt Him deeply. He is majestic and royal, but He became humble and lowly. He is omnipotent, yet His power is limited by His partnership with us. He is loving, but also just. I could go on for all eternity, but you get the picture!

How do we balance all these aspects of God in our worship? As today's quote goes, we do so by combining awe with intimacy.

He is the transcendent God, above all of the universe, set apart from all of creation, high and exalted. And as we behold His glory, majesty, splendour, holiness, and power, we respond with awe-filled worship. He is the awesome God, who is worthy of awe. Our worship acknowledges that He is far above us, and our praise is loud and exuberant. We lift up our hands, wave and clap, and dance for joy before our amazing God. Or we just stand in awe, humbled in His glorious presence, overwhelmed by the reverence that the Bible calls "the fear of the LORD."

He is also the immanent God, the One who draws close to us in relationship. The One who desires us so much that He even poured Himself out completely for us, in the incarnation as well as the crucifixion. The One who comes to dwell in us by His Holy Spirit. So, we respond with intimate worship, bowed down in adoration as we are overcome by His extravagant love. We sing love songs to Him, expressing our desire, our hunger, our thirst for more of Him. We tell Him how lovely He is; we pour out our hearts in His presence. We kneel in wonder, even lie down and soak in His love.

He is the God who inspires awe and invites intimacy. May our worship combine both!

***Prayer***

*Lord, may my worship truly be awe combined with intimacy!*



## MARCH 31

***Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength  
and honour and glory and praise!***

***To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honour and glory and power,  
for ever and ever!***

***Amen.***

*(Revelation 5:12-13)*

Revelation chapter 5 gives us a glimpse into a worship service being held in heaven. As we would expect, it is characterized by exuberant and extravagant worship! After all, the God of the heavens and the earth is worthy of such worship. Isn't He worthy because He is glorious, majestic, holy, all-powerful, all-knowing, magnificent, and so on? Of course, He is all of those and much, much more – and yet, in this heavenly worship service, the Lamb is being declared worthy, not for any of those things, but rather because He was slain!

Philippians 2 tells us that God the Son did not hold on to what was His heavenly right, but let go completely. He let go of the power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise that He was already worthy of. He became nothing for us, a slave of mankind, humiliated on the cross. And, in doing so, the worship of heaven tells us that Jesus became worthy of all that He had given up!

What could be so worthy about Jesus dying on a cross, that all of heaven worships Him so extravagantly? The cross was considered weakness by the Jews, and foolishness by the Greeks. By human standards, we can understand why they thought that. But, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:25, *“the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.”* Christ crucified is, in fact, *“the wisdom and power of God.”* No wonder the Lamb who was slain is declared worthy!

There is a wonderful progression of worship in Revelation 5. First, the four living creatures and twenty-four elders around the throne worship the Lamb. Then, *“many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand,”* join in the worship of the Lamb. And, finally, *“every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them”* – which includes all of us! – add our voices to the heavenly chorus!

What an awesome privilege! Truly, worthy is the Lamb!

### ***Prayer***

*Lamb of God, may You always receive the worship You are worthy of.*



# The Cross

For God so loved the world that he gave  
his one and only Son



that whosoever believes in him shall not  
perish but have eternal life.

**APRIL 1**

***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*** *(John 3:16)*

I was standing in the middle of the slum, one of Bombay's better ones, looking around idly as I waited for someone. I saw the tiny houses closely packed together, and the stinking gutter winding its way in between them. I thought of Jesus, leaving His heavenly home for this world, and wondered if I would be willing to leave my nice house to stay in such a slum, if God asked me. After some thought, I decided that maybe I would be able to do so, though admittedly not very willingly! I was feeling rather pleased with myself, when I saw some little children, running and playing around the gutter that was right outside their front doors. And I felt God saying, "Would you let your son live here?" I thought of my little one at home, and knew immediately that the answer was "No!" I was ready to make the sacrifice myself, but I could not bear to put my child through the same.

We focus so much on the Son when we think of the cross that sometimes we forget about the Father. This verse, John 3:16, perhaps the most well-known verse in the Bible, is all about the Father. It is about the extent of God the Father's love, not just for good people or saints or Jews or Christians, but for the whole world. Father God so loved the world – a world full of sinners living in wilful rebellion and enmity to Him, a world that had rejected Him almost since it was created – that He was willing to send His one and only Son into it. Imagine the extent of the pain the Father must have felt in sending His Son, from the divine heights of heaven to the depraved depths of this world. That is how much the Father loves you and me!

Father God risked losing His one and only Son, in order that He might save us from eternal damnation and bring us into eternal life. He wanted so much for us to spend eternity with Him! Today, take a few moments to contemplate the Father's love for you. Let the truth of it occupy your mind. Ask the Holy Spirit to pour His love deep into your heart. Adore Him with a single word, "Father!", and let that reality overwhelm your spirit.

***Prayer***

*Father, thank You for loving me so much, that You gave Your Son for me!*



## APRIL 2

***This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.***  
*(1 John 4:10)*

I remember reading somewhere that the first song anyone writes is about love. I thought that I would be different. Then I wrote my first song, and its highly original title was – you guessed it! – “I love you”. We live in a world obsessed with love, yet marked by broken love relationships. The reason we fail so often and so tragically at love is because we don’t know the Lover.

The disciple John knew the Lover. John is known as the Apostle of Love. In fact, he refers to himself as “*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*” Some people think that this meant Jesus loved him more than the other disciples. I believe John referred to himself in this way because he had such a deep revelation of Jesus’ love for him. The wonderful reality of being loved by Jesus became the core of John’s identity. The word “love” appears in John’s gospel more than the other three gospels put together. Church tradition tells us that, in his last years, all John could speak about was love!

In this verse, John gives us the definition of love. Love is the Father sending His Son to die for us. We see so many aspects of the Father’s love in this simple statement by John:

1. The Father chose to love us: He really had no reason to. In fact, He had – and still has – every reason not to love us. We show Him every day, with our acts of rebellion, how much we hate Him. Yet He loves us.
2. The Father sent His Son: He could have sent another prophet, like the many He had sent before. He could have sent an angel, maybe even one of the archangels. But He sent His Son – His one and only Son, His beloved.
3. The Father sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins: He could have just sent His Son as a messenger. Or as a living demonstration of God. Of course, Jesus was both of those things, and much more. But the Father sent His Son to die, to pay the price for our sins, to be the innocent sacrifice in our place.

This is love, the very definition of love – the Father making the ultimate sacrifice of His Son, for sinners like you and me.

### ***Prayer***

*Father, thank You for sending Your Son as an atoning sacrifice for my sins.*



**APRIL 3**

***But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.***  
(1 John 2:1-2)

The past two days, we have focused on the Father's love for us, demonstrated in His giving His Son to die for us. But the Father didn't send His Son only because of His love; He also sent His Son because of His justice. God is love, but He is also just – and, in His love, He must also satisfy the needs of justice.

There is a phrase in today's verse that gives us a very different picture of God from the Father who loves us extravagantly. "Atoning sacrifice" – actually, one word, "propitiation." John writes that Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice, or propitiation, for our sins. This word means "an offering to appease an angry God." Yes, you heard right – Jesus Christ became an offering to appease the wrath of the Father.

I once spent an hour, maybe more, on a railway station platform, sharing the gospel with someone. I thought I did a pretty good job telling her how Jesus, in His love for us, came to earth and paid the price for our sins on the cross. She listened attentively, and seemed quite impressed with Jesus. At the end of my gospel presentation, she just said, "But I don't think I am a sinner!"

We will not fully experience the love of the Father if we do not comprehend His wrath. It is as absolute as His love. God is fiercely angry about sin; He hates it completely. Some would say that, in a sense, God hates all sinners, since we cannot be separated from our sin. A holy God demands that justice be served, that the price for sin be paid, that His wrath be satisfied. But that same God, also a loving Father, sent His only Son to satisfy His wrath and save us from our deserved punishment.

We sin every day, countless times. Every sin stirs up God's wrath towards us. Thank God that Jesus Christ stands between us and that wrath. In a real sense, between the Father's wrath and doomed sinners, stands the ultimate demonstration of the Father's love – the cross.

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You that You are the offering that satisfies the Father's wrath.*



**APRIL 4**

***And I will put enmity***

***between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.***

*(Genesis 3:15)*

It was a catastrophic day in Eden. The beauty of the garden that God Himself had planted was now tainted by the ugliness of sin. Adam and Eve had, astonishingly, decided that the serpent was speaking the truth and that God was a liar. They had believed the serpent's lies that God did not want the best for them. They had chosen to eat the forbidden fruit, desiring to become like God. In an instant, Adam and Eve lost their innocence, their purity, their integrity, their intimacy.

Most tragic of all, their relationship with God was broken. As He walked in the garden in the cool of the day, Adam and Eve hid from Him. From the moment of their creation, they had been in unbroken and unlimited relationship with God. They had been created to live in the environment of His presence. But now they could not bear to even come before Him, in their guilt and shame.

Imagine the dismay in God's heart as He contemplated their sin. The crowning glory of His creation, man and woman made in His own image, brought to life by the breath of His own Spirit, representing God Himself on earth. He loved them intensely and passionately, and now they were doomed to death – both natural and spiritual. There was a barrier of sin between them and God.

But, in the midst of a seemingly hopeless and impossible situation, where mankind was doomed to eternal separation from its Creator, God was already at work to redeem us. In these words to the serpent, God was already speaking of His solution to the problem of sin – the cross. In the devil's first victory, God was already proclaiming his final defeat.

On the cross, the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, the offspring of a woman, was wounded by the serpent. The devil thought he had won a decisive victory, even greater than his triumph in the garden so many thousands of years ago. But, in fact, he had only signed his own death warrant. On the cross, in a place of utter humiliation and seeming defeat, Jesus crushed the head of the serpent.

God did not leave Adam and Eve without hope, even as they chose to rebel against Him. And He has not left us without hope either. Jesus has already triumphed over the enemy of our souls. Let us live in that victory!

***Prayer***

***Lord Jesus, thank You that, for my sake, You suffered the serpent's bite, and crushed his head!***



**APRIL 5**

***Jesus of Nazareth was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*** (Acts 2:23-24)

I once preached a Good Friday sermon called, "Who put Jesus on the cross?" The title was borrowed from A. W. Tozer's famous book of the same name. Tozer concludes that it was you and I, our sin, that put Jesus on the cross. Of course, he is not wrong in his conclusion. However, I suggested that it was, in fact, the Father's will that was behind that fateful event.

Peter makes the same assertion in his Pentecost sermon. He starts by saying that Jesus was "handed" over to the Jews. That word was commonly used for surrendering or delivering into the hands of the enemy. Who handed Jesus over to the Jews – actually, to the chief priests and scribes? Who else but the Father, in His very act of sending His Son to the world? Then, the gospel narratives tell us, the Jewish religious leaders handed Jesus over to Pilate and the Gentiles, to be sentenced to death. Finally, Pilate handed Him back to the Jews to be crucified.

Peter is at pains to make two things crystal clear:

1. The crucifixion of Jesus was a terrible act carried out by wicked men; both the Jewish leaders and people, as well as the Roman authorities, were guilty of putting an innocent man to death.
2. The crucifixion of Jesus was within the ordained purpose of God, in line with His perfect plans for mankind.

We encounter here the mystery of God's sovereignty and man's free will. I will not presume to know the answers to these age-old questions. But let us respond as Peter does: He trusts in God's foreknowledge and purposes in wicked circumstances, even as he judges those who have carried out that wickedness.

The good news is that God did not hand over Jesus without setting a boundary to His suffering; the agony of death – more spiritual than physical – was overturned by raising Jesus to life. Therefore, we can, in our sufferings, even injustices, proclaim God's sovereignty, trust in His perfect purposes, and hope in His deliverance!

***Prayer***

*Lord, thank You for the perfection of Your purposes, and the hope of Your deliverance!*



## APRIL 6

***Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*** (Isaiah 53:4-6)

Isaiah chapter 53 is perhaps the most powerful and graphic account of the cross, even more so than the gospel narratives. It gives us a sense of what Jesus suffered on the cross as well as, even more importantly, what He accomplished.

Nicky Gumbel, in his Alpha talk “Why did Jesus die?”, draws our attention to the pronouns used in this passage. Let’s do the same – in a sense, they speak for themselves:

*He* took up *our* pain. *He* bore *our* suffering. *He* was pierced for *our* transgressions. *He* was crushed for *our* iniquities. *Our* peace came through *His* punishment. By *His* wounds *we* are healed.

This is what is known as the Divine Exchange. Derek Prince puts it beautifully in his book of the same name: “Here is the true meaning and purpose of the cross. On it a divinely ordained exchange took place. First, Jesus endured in our place all the evil consequences that were due by divine justice to our iniquity. Now, in exchange, God offers us all the good that was due to the sinless obedience of Jesus.” He goes on to summarize eight wonderful aspects of this divine exchange:

1. Jesus was punished that we might be forgiven.
2. Jesus was wounded that we might be healed.
3. Jesus was made sin with our sinfulness that we might be made righteous with His righteousness.
4. Jesus died our death that we might receive His life.
5. Jesus endured our poverty that we might share His abundance.
6. Jesus bore our shame that we might share His glory.
7. Jesus endured our rejection that we might have His acceptance with the Father.
8. Jesus was made a curse that we might enter into the blessing.

Jesus completed His part of the divine exchange on the cross. All that is left is for us to receive it for ourselves. If you haven’t already done so, today may be a good day to say “Yes” to all that Jesus offers you, in exchange for all that anyway isn’t good in your life!

### **Prayer**

*Jesus, thank You for the divine exchange on the cross!*



**APRIL 7**

***Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,  
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin,  
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,  
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.***

*(Isaiah 53:10)*

The gospels do not describe Jesus' physical suffering on the cross. Perhaps the writers were aware that the people of their time knew exactly what a crucifixion entailed. For us, today, the cross has become such a religious symbol, we lose sight of how horrible it really was.

Isaiah says in this verse that it was the Lord's will to crush Jesus. That word "crush" means to "beat to pieces, break into pieces, bruise, contrite, destroy, humble, oppress, smite." There is a sense of being reduced to crumbs. That was what was done to Jesus' body. In fact, before His crucifixion, He endured a brutal flogging.

Nicky Gumbel writes: "Eusebius, the third-century church historian, described Roman flogging in these terms: the sufferer's veins were laid bare, and . . . the very muscles, sinews and bowels of the victim were open to exposure." After a flogging that would have killed most men, Jesus was then crucified.

Klausner, the Jewish writer, says, "Crucifixion is the most terrible and cruel death which man has ever devised for taking vengeance on his fellow-men." Cicero, the Roman scholar, called it "the most cruel and the most horrible torture." Tacitus, the Roman historian, called it "a torture only fit for slaves."

As terribly as Jesus' body was broken, it would seem that His spirit was bruised even more. His separation from His Father is the only cry of pain from the cross that is recorded. The crushing of Jesus' body mirrored the crushing of His spirit.

But this verse in Isaiah also has good news. We are told that the will of the Lord "prospered" – that word means to "break out, come mightily, push forward." Praise God for His perfect purposes – for, on the cross, the breaking into pieces of Jesus' body and spirit was followed by the breaking out of God's salvation for all mankind!

In our own times of being broken, let us trust that breakthrough is also coming.

***Prayer***

*Lord, help me to trust You, in the crushing, for the breakthrough!*



## APRIL 8

***He poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*** (Isaiah 53:12)

Isaiah tells us that the Messiah chose to be identified with sinners. Jesus did this so that He could bear our sins, and intercede on our behalf. But, in order to release this blessing for us, Jesus had to “pour” Himself out unto death. The root word for “pour” is “to be naked or bare”!

On the cross, the Son of God allowed Himself to be made naked in every way. He emptied Himself out; He allowed Himself to be demolished; He was left destitute; His very being was spread out. All of these phrases describe what it means to be poured out, and Jesus allowed sinful men to ravage His body in the most painful and humiliating manner.

Barnes describes the physical pain associated with crucifixion. “Since it was the most ignominious punishment known, so it was the most painful. The following circumstances made it a death of special pain:

1. The position of the arms and the body was unnatural, the arms being extended back and almost immovable. The least motion gave violent pain in the hands and feet, and in the back, which was lacerated with stripes.
2. The nails, being driven through the parts of the hands and feet which abound with nerves, created the most exquisite anguish.
3. The exposure of so many wounds to the air brought on a violent inflammation, which greatly increased the poignancy of the suffering.
4. The free circulation of the blood was prevented, producing an intense pressure and violent pain. The consequence was that there was a great increase of blood in the veins of the head, producing an intense pressure and violent pain. The same was true of other parts of the body.
5. The pain gradually increased. There was no relaxation and no rest. There was no prospect but death.”

On the cross, the Creator of the world made Himself totally vulnerable and endured unimaginable suffering. For sinners like you and me.

### **Prayer**

*Jesus, thank You for pouring Yourself unto death for me, for suffering so terribly, that I might be set free.*



**APRIL 9**

***Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and the gospel will save it.***  
(Mark 8:34-35)

What does it mean to “take up our cross”? A secular dictionary defines this phrase to mean “to deal with our burdens and problems.” So, when we carry our cross, we are dealing with our own burdens. Many Christians have the same view of what it means to take up our cross. We look at the burdens in our lives – strained relationships, injustices, illnesses, consequences of our bad choices, and so on – and, with martyr-like self-pity, speak of bravely carrying our cross! What a travesty of what Jesus meant!

The context of Jesus’ statement is very instructive. Jesus had just spoken plainly with His closest disciples about His imminent crucifixion. Peter immediately took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him, saying such a thing could not happen. What upset Peter so much that he dared to rebuke the One he knew was the Christ? Was it love for Jesus, or for himself? From Jesus’ subsequent words, I believe it was the latter. Peter knew that if His Master had to undergo such persecution and suffering, then His disciples would have to as well. And, quite understandably, Peter didn’t want that.

Jesus proceeded to rebuke Peter most harshly, even calling him Satan! And then, Jesus made clear what it meant to be His disciple, as in today’s verses. “Taking up our cross” means being willing to do what Jesus did. It means a radical commitment to follow Him, even if that involves humiliation, suffering, persecution, and death. It means dying to our own self – our desires, wants, needs, ambitions, and so on. It means living only for Jesus and His gospel.

And, no, that doesn’t mean we leave everybody and everything, and go to some remote place to preach the gospel, though Jesus might well ask us to do that! It usually means dying to ourselves and living for Jesus, in the regular circumstances of our lives – our families, our friends, our offices, our recreation, our neighbourhoods . . . .

So, let’s stop whining about our burdens as our crosses, and take up the cross that is radical obedience to Jesus!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to deny myself, take up my cross, and follow You.*



**APRIL 10**

***And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (Matthew 27:50-51)***

The loudest cry that issued from Jesus' lips on the cross was not one of pain, despite the intense suffering He went through. Rather, it was a shout of triumph. John tells us that Jesus cried out, "*It is finished!*" That phrase is just one word in Greek, *tetelestai*. It is also just one word in Hebrew, *asah*, which is what Jesus most likely said, since He was quoting Psalm 22. Dutch Sheets looks at the meanings of these two words, and writes the following: "Putting these definitions together, Jesus was announcing that He had accomplished all that was necessary – for all time and eternity, paid the debt in full, consummated our redemption so that we could now enter the next phase of God's plan: the new creation in Him!"

Jesus' proclamation of the fulfilment of His mission is followed immediately by the curtain of the temple being torn in two. This curtain, or veil, had been commanded by God, in Exodus, to "*separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.*" Even though the tabernacle was the place where God chose to dwell among His people, they were still separated from His manifest presence by this curtain.

But, around 1400 years later, Jesus changed it all. At the moment of His death, the veil was torn. The Greek word used is a very strong one – *schizo* – meaning to rent, divide, cleave, to cause a schism. This curtain was between 30 and 60 feet high, and 4 inches thick. Dividing it in this manner would be a superhuman task. Matthew very deliberately points out that the veil was torn from top to bottom – it was God's doing, heaven invading earth. Clearly, this was a key part of what Jesus came to do, a key aspect of the new creation in Him.

Jesus didn't just go around the veil, as the High Priest was allowed to do once a year. He tore through it! He got rid of it! And, in doing so, Jesus gave us access to the Most Holy Place – to the throne room of Almighty God, to our Father in heaven. What an awesome privilege!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You for the torn veil, and for access to the very presence of God!*



**APRIL 11**

***The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah. (Acts 2:34-36)***

What a difference fifty days can make! Peter and the apostles are in Jerusalem, just as they were on that fateful day of Jesus' crucifixion. At that time, they were cowering in fear, having abandoned and denied Jesus. Now, they are boldly proclaiming His name in the temple courts. As the sun set that Friday evening, their hopes seemed to sink into oblivion as well. Now, in the brightness of the morning, they rejoice in a new dawn, the age of the Spirit.

Peter is speaking to a crowd similar to the one that asked for Jesus to be crucified, and that stared and mocked as He hung, naked and ravaged, on the cross. Maybe some of the very same people who had been there at that bloody Passover were back in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost! And Peter proclaims the identity of the One they crucified – Lord and Messiah!

These two titles were significant to Peter's hearers:

1. Lord – a master who held absolute ownership rights. To say "Jesus is Lord" was to make a political statement, for Caesar was exalted as Lord in the Roman empire. It was a statement of belief that proclaimed allegiance to a higher power than the highest authority in the land. It was a declaration that risked, and often resulted in, persecution and martyrdom.
2. Messiah – the anointed one, the Christ. By contrast, "Jesus is Messiah" was a spiritual statement. It recognized that the promised Messiah of the Old Testament was Jesus; that the many Messianic prophecies were realised in Him. It was to accept Jesus' fulfilment of the Law, and to enter into the new covenant He established.

Peter was not condemning the crowd for crucifying Jesus. Rather, he was inviting them into relationship with the One who was Lord and Messiah. That invitation rings out today as well, to each one of us: to surrender to Jesus' lordship, and enter into the new life He offers!

***Prayer***

*Jesus, may I truly surrender to You as Lord and Messiah!*



**APRIL 12**

***The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.*** (Acts 5:30-31)

There is a lot of talk in our time about rights and the freedom to make our own choices. We don't like to surrender or submit ourselves to others, especially if we have power of our own. By contrast, the cross – and what followed – is the story of the One who had all the power in the universe, submitting Himself, not just to His Father, but even to sinful men. In this brief segment of Peter's defense of the gospel before the Jewish Council, we see Jesus submitting thrice – and, each time, there is the sense of Him being lifted up.

First, Jesus was hung on a cross by the wickedness of men. Roman soldiers dutifully ensured Jesus suffered as much as possible, after He was handed over to them by the Jewish authorities. As Jesus Himself explained to Nicodemus, *"the Son of Man must be lifted up [on a pole] . . . . (John 3:15)."*

Then, Jesus was raised from the dead by the Father. The One through whom the whole universe came to life, who raised the dead while He ministered on earth, was helpless in the tomb. He surrendered His lifeless body to be wrapped and placed in a borrowed grave. All Jesus had was faith in His Father's promises, recorded in the Scriptures concerning the Messiah, and surely also spoken to Jesus in His times of prayer, that He would rise from the dead. And so it was. The lifting up on the cross was followed by the lifting up from the grave, as the Father honoured the Son's submission.

Finally, there was a lifting up from earth to heaven. Jesus was restored to the position He had in heaven before the creation of the world. But He did not grasp it by Himself. It was the Father who exalted Jesus, by lifting Him from this world and seating Him on the throne at His right hand. The humiliation of being lifted up on the cross culminated in Jesus' being lifted up to heaven's throne!

So too for us. There is exaltation at the end of every struggle or injustice or humiliation, if we will only surrender to the God of heaven. There is a crown that follows our cross!

***Prayer***

*Father, help me to trust that my surrender will only result in exaltation!*



**APRIL 13**

***You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*** (Romans 5:6-8)

Rita Snowdon relates an incident from the life of T. E. Lawrence. In 1915 he was journeying across the desert with some Arabs. Things were desperate. Food was almost done, and water was at its last drop. Their hoods were over their heads to shelter them from the wind which was like a flame and full of the stinging sand of the sandstorm. Suddenly someone said, "Where is Jasmin?" Another said, "Who is Jasmin?" A third answered, "That yellow-faced man from Meen. He killed a Turkish tax-collector and fled to the desert." The first said, "Look, Jasmin's camel has no rider. His rifle is strapped to the saddle, but Jasmin is not there." A second said, "Someone has shot him on the march." A third said, "He is not strong in the head, perhaps he is lost in a mirage; he is not strong in the body, perhaps he has fainted and fallen off his camel." Then the first said, "What does it matter? Jasmin was not worth ten pence." And the Arabs hunched themselves up on their camels and rode on. But Lawrence turned and rode back the way he had come. Alone, in the blazing heat, at the risk of his life, he went back. After an hour and a half's ride he saw something against the sand. It was Jasmin, blind and mad with heat and thirst, being murdered by the desert. Lawrence lifted him up on his camel, gave him some of the last drops of precious water, slowly plodded back to his company. When he came up to them, the Arabs looked in amazement. "Here is Jasmin," they said, "Jasmin, not worth ten pence, saved at his own risk by Lawrence, our lord." (from *William Barclay's Daily Study Bible*)

Paul tells us that rarely will anyone die for a righteous person. But we are not righteous, not a single one of us. In these three verses, we are called powerless, ungodly, and sinners. We are spiritually sick, unable – and often unwilling – to do anything about our wickedness. And the truth is, we would not bother to rescue anyone like us! Yet God, in His infinite love, reached down and sought us and rescued us, in the desert of our lostness!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You for dying for me, a sinner.*



**APRIL 14**

***Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!***  
*(Romans 5:9-10)*

Paul tells us that we were God's enemies. The Greek word means someone who is openly hostile, animated by deep-seated hatred; it implies irreconcilable hostility and a resolve to inflict harm. Think about that for a minute. Have you ever seen yourself in those terms with regard to God? Of course not! Yet, that's the position sin puts us in – enemies of God. And that makes what God has done for us all the more incredible!

Paul uses three words to describe what has been done for us by Jesus on the cross:

1. We have been **JUSTIFIED** by Jesus' blood: A short definition of justification is "the act of making someone right with God." On the cross, Jesus acquitted us of our guilt, He cleared us of all charges relating to our sin. In effect, we are now considered as righteous, conforming to God's righteous standards, and approved by Him!
2. We have been **RECONCILED** to God by Jesus' death: This word means "to decisively change to the exact same position." Without Jesus, ungodly mankind was far away from a holy God. But, through the cross, where Jesus came down to our position, we are now raised up to God's! The relationship has been changed from enmity to friendship.
3. We have been **SAVED** from God's wrath through Jesus: We have been delivered out of danger, rescued from the destruction that we deserved in our sin. We have also been brought into divine safety, a place of wellness and wholeness in Christ.

God looks at us through the prism of the cross, and says: "You are acquitted! You are my friend! You are safe!" Praise Jesus!!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You that I am justified, reconciled, and saved by Your cross!*



**APRIL 15**

***Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*** *(Romans 6:3-4)*

One of my greatest joys is baptising people. We've had baptisms in the sea, in swimming pools, in bath tubs, in baptismal fonts. And where immersion was not possible, we've poured water over them. There is an inexpressible wonder in seeing someone step forward and publicly express their desire to follow Jesus, through this concrete act.

Paul uses the imagery of baptism to describe the process of new birth in Christ. Barclay writes: "Commonly, baptism was by total immersion, and that practice lent itself to a symbolism to which sprinkling does not so readily lend itself. When a man descended into the water and the water closed over his head, it was like being buried. When he emerged from the water, it was like rising from the grave. Baptism was symbolically like dying and rising again. The man died to one kind of life and rose to another; he died to the old life of sin and rose to the new life of grace."

In the early church, conversion and baptism followed each other almost immediately. Thus, for the new convert, the immersion in water perfectly mirrored their decision to leave their past behind, and their rising up out of the water heralded their new life in Christ. The point, of course, is not so much baptism as it is commitment. When we say "Yes" to Jesus, our old self is buried with Him. And, just as He rose from the dead, we are raised up into a new life.

That's what happened to you when you put your faith in Jesus. And the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in you, to help you live this new life!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me live the new life that I have, as a result of being buried and raised up with You.*



**APRIL 16**

***For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.*** *(Romans 6:6-7)*

In Romans chapter 6, Paul is dealing with a strange argument. It seems there were some who taught that, since God's grace increased in order to deal with man's sin, we should simply go on sinning so that grace might increase! The argument was that our sin brought glory to God, since it demonstrated His grace all the more!

Paul vehemently opposes this argument. First, as we saw yesterday, he shows how baptism symbolised our burial with Christ, in order that we might be raised with Him to a new life. In these two verses, he expands on that idea of our death – not physical, but spiritual.

Our old self – that person who was a sinner, an enemy of God, lost and headed for hell – was crucified with Christ! Now, if we were really crucified, it would be an excruciating death, as we know. Instead, Jesus was crucified – and, on the cross, He took upon Himself our sinful nature. When He died, our old self died with Him on that cross. We didn't have to go through that painful death – Jesus did it all for us.

But He did something even more amazing! Physical death sets us free from our physical existence. In the same way, the death of our sinful self, with Christ on the cross, sets us free from sin. Without Jesus, we were all slaves to sin, unable to break free and be holy and righteous, no matter how hard we tried. But, when we say "Yes" to Jesus, we appropriate the crucifixion of our old self, and we are set free from slavery to sin!

Do we still sin? Unfortunately, yes – every day! But we don't have to be enslaved by sin. Jesus has set us free! Let us live in that freedom!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You that my old self has been crucified with You, and that I am no longer a slave to sin.*



**APRIL 17**

***Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.***

*(Romans 6:8-10)*

Paul continues to deal with the argument that we should sin more, since that causes grace to increase. He has used the imagery of baptism as a picture of being buried with Christ and being raised with Him. He has spoken of our old, sinful selves being crucified with Christ on the cross, thus setting us free from enslavement to sin. Now he expands on the idea of new life in Jesus.

Sometimes we focus so much on the death of Jesus, we miss out on what His resurrection means for us. In the garden of Eden, God told Adam that, if he ate the forbidden fruit, he would surely die. The wages of sin is death. And so, Jesus dealt with sin on the cross, and He dealt with the penalty for sin by His resurrection. When Paul writes that death no longer has mastery over Jesus, he means that it no longer has mastery over us as well. If Jesus died to sin once for all, so did we. If Jesus now lives His life to God, so do we!

Too many Christians live in the awareness of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins, but not in the reality of a new life of freedom because of His resurrection. How do we bridge this gap? Paul continues in Romans chapter 6, telling us what to do:

*“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.”*

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, help me live in the reality of both Your death and Your resurrection.*



**APRIL 18**

***For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*** *(1 Corinthians 1:18)*

Paul had been on both sides of this statement he makes. He had considered the message of the cross to be foolishness, even blasphemous, and had actively persecuted the early church. He had also been saved when he encountered the power of Jesus on the road to Damascus. Throughout the New Testament narratives, we see these two responses to the cross – either as a symbol of folly and weakness, or as the instrument that released God’s saving power.

Throughout the day that we now call Good Friday, Jesus was mocked and insulted by the mob, bystanders, rulers, religious authorities, soldiers, and even one of those hanging on a cross beside Him. For them, the message of the cross – the Messiah crucified – was utter foolishness. And yet, that same day, the centurion in charge of the crucifixion was able to see the truth of the cross, as he realised finally who Jesus was – the Son of God! At that moment, the power of God broke through his ignorance, and revealed the identity of the man he had helped execute so savagely.

Or consider Jesus’ closest disciples. Even after Jesus preparing them for both His crucifixion as well as resurrection, they were shattered and scattered by the cross. His talk of resurrection, leave alone the kingdom to come, must have seemed mere fantasy before the reality of the cross. The Messiah on the cross would have been foolishness to them. Until three days later, when, breaking through their fear and unbelief and confusion, the risen Jesus was revealed. Suddenly, they would have realised that the cross was, in fact, the power of God manifested most gloriously!

What about us? Each of us is called to a cross. Do we consider it foolishness, or do we allow the power of God to manifest through it?

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You that Your cross is the power of God to me!*



**APRIL 19**

***Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.***

*(1 Corinthians 1:22-24)*

I don't think that, if any of us were God, we would have used the cross as our method and message of salvation! A crucified Messiah really makes no sense, if we are honest. That broken body on the cross is the very epitome of weakness. The Creator surrendering Himself to the wickedness of His creation is utter foolishness.

The Jews were looking for a Messiah who would be conqueror and king; one who would perform miraculous signs to demonstrate to the whole world his greatness. To them, the fact that Jesus was crucified actually disproved His claims to being the Messiah, leave alone the Son of God! And so, Christ crucified became a stumbling block to them. The root word for "stumbling block" is the same as that for "scandal" – they were scandalized; they took offense at the notion of the Messiah on a cross.

What about us? Does the cross and its implications offend us? How do we feel about the command to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Jesus? Does what He ask us to do – e.g. forgive someone who has hurt us deeply – offend us?

The Greeks, on the other hand, were looking for a Messiah who would be a great orator and impart sophisticated wisdom. Now, Jesus undoubtedly spoke with great power and authority, and His teaching is the wisest of all time! But He didn't meet their qualifications. Even less so, His disciples! Barclay writes: "The Greeks were intoxicated with fine words; and to them the Christian preacher with his blunt message seemed a crude and uncultured figure, to be laughed at and ridiculed rather than to be listened to and respected."

What about us? Does the message of the cross offend our intellect? Do the teachings of Jesus clash with our sense of what is prudent and sensible? Do we, in our pride and independence, prefer to judge Jesus' words rather than submit to them?

Paul was a learned Jew, brought up in the upper strata of Greek society. The cross would have seemed weakness and foolishness to him as well, until he encountered the risen Christ. If you're struggling in this area, if Jesus and His cross offend you, why not ask God to reveal afresh to you His power and wisdom? He surely will!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You that You are the power and wisdom of God!*



**APRIL 20**

***I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.***

*(Galatians 2:20)*

A famous quote by D. H. Lawrence goes like this: “If only we could live two lives: the first in which to make one’s mistakes, and the second in which to profit by them.” The point is, of course, that we only get one life. Right? Well, the good news is that we actually do get a second life to do better!

Paul knew all about a life spent making mistakes – even as he pursued what he considered to be righteousness. He strove to keep the Law of God. He zealously persecuted those who he felt were blaspheming the name of his God. He had tried it all, and failed. His life would have been one of utter failure, if not for the second life that he got!

Paul says he has been crucified with Christ. You see, Jesus didn’t just die to take away the penalty for our sins. He died so that we might live a life without sin. On the cross, He also carried the death of our sinful natures. Too often, we come to the cross for the forgiveness of our past sins, but then leave with our sinful natures intact. Instead, like Paul, we can receive the gift of a second life – by leaving our sinful nature to die on Jesus’ cross.

We are invited to leave the cross as “dead men walking”! Dead to our former lives apart from God, dead to our love of sinning, dead to ego and independence and rebellion. And yet, because Christ now lives in us, we leave the cross truly, fully alive!

Jesus died on the cross, not just to forgive our past, but to transform our present and future. He loved us, and gave Himself up for us, in order that we may live brand new lives – dead to our old lives, and alive in Him!

To return to the D. H. Lawrence quote – in Jesus Christ, we do get a second life to profit from our mistakes; it is a life lived by faith in the Son of God, and it is the best possible life!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, I have been crucified with You, and I no longer live; thank You that, now, You live in me; help me to live by faith in You.*



**APRIL 21**

***Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written:  
“Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”*** *(Galatians 3:13-14)*

A solemn ceremony was conducted in Joshua chapter 8, after Israel had entered the promised land and begun its conquest of the nations living there. The people stood in front of two mountains, Gerizim and Ebal; half of the people pronounced blessings upon Israel, and the other half pronounced curses. They did this in obedience to God’s command through Moses, and, in doing so, became an accursed people because they could not keep God’s Law. God’s purpose in doing this was for people to realise the futility of relying on observance of the Law, and to acknowledge their need for a Saviour.

Paul tells us that, on the cross, Christ also dealt with this curse of the Law. To be cursed means to be doomed to destruction, and that’s what Jesus did for us. He redeemed us – that is, purchased us fully from the state of accursedness we were in. And the price for our redemption was that Jesus, the Son of God, the source of all blessing, Himself became a curse for us on the cross.

Martin Luther, in his commentary on this verse, wrote: “God, our most merciful Father, sent His only Son into the world, and laid upon him all the sins of all people, saying, be thou Peter, that denier; Paul, that persecutor, blasphemer, and cruel oppressor; David, that adulterer; that sinner which did eat the fruit in Paradise; that thief who hung upon the cross; and, briefly, be thou the person who has committed the sins of all people; see, therefore, that thou pay and satisfy for them.”

As Israel entered the promised land, there were two mountains, one representing blessing and the other curses. Thousands of years later, on another mountain, all of those curses were paid for, and unfathomable blessing released!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You for redeeming me from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for me.*



**APRIL 22**

***Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.***

*(Galatians 5:24)*

We have been seeing how dying to our old self is a key aspect of responding to the cross, and receiving all that it releases for us. This verse specifies exactly what we are crucifying with Christ: the “flesh” with its “passions” and “desires”. Interestingly, all of those three are not bad in themselves – they are part of how God created us, but become evil when they are independent of Him.

It is the “flesh” that we are putting to death. This is the physical part of us, and it is essential for living out the life of faith God desires for us. However, it more often refers to what we do according to our self, apart from God; the decisions and actions that come from unaided human effort, from the parts of our self that are untouched by God.

It is our “passions” that we are destroying on the cross. This refers to the capacity to experience strong feeling and deep emotion. Again, passion is a gift from God, but becomes negative apart from faith. When they proceed from our flesh, passions can result in very destructive behaviour.

It is also our “desires” we are letting go of. This refers to the things we covet, earnestly seek, have urges for, even lust after. When our desires are aligned with God’s heart, they are wonderful. But, all too often, our desires come from our flesh, and they are in opposition to God’s will.

The Christian walk is one of constantly crucifying these aspects of our flesh, with its passions and desires. It is a step we have to take constantly, with every decision and choice we make, big and small. It is, really, the only way to live when we belong to Jesus!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, please help me to crucify my flesh, with its passions and desires.*



**APRIL 23**

***May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*** *(Galatians 6:14)*

Sir James Simpson was passionate about pain relief during surgery, especially in his speciality of obstetrics. His discovery in 1847 of chloroform as an anaesthetic, was one of the most significant medical innovations. He also pioneered other obstetric applications, and advocated for medical reforms. He published extensively on archaeology, and had many varied interests. Dr. Simpson was once asked what he considered to be the most valuable discovery of his lifetime. His surprising reply: “My most valuable discovery was when I discovered myself a sinner, and that Jesus Christ was my Saviour.”

Like Sir James Simpson, the apostle Paul also had much that he could boast about. His Jewish pedigree was impeccable, as he writes in Philippians 3: *“circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”* His later reputation as an apostle of Christ was equally impressive – Paul wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament, and planted many churches all across the Roman world.

Yet, both Sir James Simpson and Paul recognized that all of their amazing achievements paled in comparison to the cross. Their realisation of their sinfulness, and their need for a Saviour, overshadowed everything else. They acknowledged that, apart from Jesus, even their incredibly successful lives amounted to nothing. And so, they boasted – held their heads up high – not in themselves, but in Jesus Christ and His cross, for all He had done for them!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, may I never boast except in Your cross, and all You have done for me.*



**APRIL 24**

***Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.***

*(Ephesians 2:4-5)*

These two verses have three wonderful words – love, mercy, and grace – that describe how God feels towards us and how He deals with us. But we will not appreciate them fully until we understand our condition apart from God. Paul describes us in this manner in the previous verses – dead in our sins, following the ways of the world, obedient to the devil, gratifying our sinful cravings, following our own desires, and, therefore, objects of God’s wrath.

What does God do? In His great love, He shows us mercy and grace!

1. God loves us greatly: There is no measure to His love. And His love is *agape* – it is not based on feelings as much as the will; it involves faithfulness and commitment. *Agape* is God choosing to look with favour and delight upon us, irrespective of our condition. We are hateful towards God in our sin, but He still loves us exceedingly.
2. God is rich in mercy towards us: Mercy is God having compassion on us and forgiving our sins, instead of punishing us for them. The wages of sin is death, and that is what we deserve – but God, in His mercy, chooses to forgive us. In effect, we do not receive the punishment we deserve.
3. God saves us by His grace: Not only does God not punish us as we deserve, He goes on to bless us! Grace has been defined as “God’s favour towards the unworthy” or “God’s benevolence on the undeserving.” In effect, we receive blessings that we do not deserve. The primary blessing is that of being saved – that is, we are delivered from destruction and brought into divine safety.

Barclay writes: “The Cross is the proof that there is no length to which the love of God will refuse to go in order to win men's hearts; and a love like that demands an answering love. If the Cross will not waken love in men's hearts, nothing will.”

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, may I respond wholeheartedly to Your love, mercy, and grace!*



**APRIL 25**

***Christ Jesus:***

***Who, being in very nature God,***

***did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;***

***rather, he made himself nothing***

***by taking the very nature of a servant,***

***being made in human likeness.***

***And being found in appearance as a man,***

***he humbled himself***

***by becoming obedient to death—***

***even death on a cross!***

*(Philippians 2:6-8)*

Philippians 2:6-11 is considered by many to be an early Christian hymn, possibly composed by Paul himself. It is concerned with the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus. In today's half of this hymn, we look at the aspect of humiliation, or the humility of Jesus.

Paul starts by making it clear that Jesus was – and is – in very nature, God. By this he meant that Jesus was the outward expression of God that perfectly embodied His essential substance. The form of Jesus was in complete harmony with the essence of God. In the light of this glorious truth, the humiliation of Jesus – which He willingly chose – is all the more amazing. Each phrase that follows is a picture of Jesus' submission:

1. Jesus did not forcefully grasp or seize or hold on to what was His by right, that is, equality with God
2. Jesus emptied Himself, poured Himself out fully, even to the extent that He might be considered worthless
3. Jesus took on the form, instead, of a bond servant, a slave, one without any rights
4. Jesus traded His glorious and eternal spirit form for the frail and perishable body of a man
5. Jesus made Himself low, as one not relying on self but fully dependent on God
6. Jesus was fully obedient to the will of the Father, even though it meant an excruciating and humiliating death on a cross

No wonder Paul, even as he writes about the incarnation and crucifixion, cannot help but shift from prose to poetry! The magnitude of the journey God the Son undertook, from heaven to earth, is truly incredible! And, lest we forget, He did it for you and me!

***Prayer***

***Lord Jesus, I stand in awe and gratitude at Your humility and surrender, all for my sake.***



**APRIL 26**

***Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.***

*(Philippians 2:9-11)*

As we saw yesterday, Philippians 2:6-11 is considered by many to be an early Christian hymn, possibly composed by Paul himself. It is concerned with the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus. We have already looked at the aspect of humiliation, or the humility of Jesus. Today, we will explore the second half of this powerful hymn, which deals with Jesus' exaltation. The poem rises from the utter depths of the cross, and soars to the glorious splendour of heaven!

This second half starts with the word "therefore". There is a critical connection between the two aspects of humiliation and exaltation, submission and glory. If the former had not been accepted, the latter would not be received. Jesus obeyed His Father, and suffered all the indignities of the incarnation and crucifixion – and He was rewarded extravagantly. As we did yesterday, let us look at the various phrases used to describe Jesus' exaltation:

1. Jesus was exalted beyond measure, elevated to a very high degree – in fact, to the highest place. This word is used only once in the New Testament, because the place to which Jesus is exalted is utterly unique!
2. Jesus was given the name above every name; in effect, everything in all of creation that has been named is under the authority of Jesus. It also means that, in Jesus' name, we can have victory over anything that we can name – disease, injustice, struggle, and so on!
3. Jesus will be worshipped as God by all of mankind, as well as the angelic beings, including those who have fallen. The One who was raised up on a cross will have all of creation bowing before Him as He sits on His throne! The One who was insulted and mocked and rejected will be acknowledged by every voice in the universe as Lord!
4. And, just as the Son brought glory to the Father by His obedience in humiliation, He will bring the Father glory in His exaltation!

God is waiting to say to each one of us: "You were obedient to me, even if it meant suffering; therefore, I am lifting you up, vindicating you, rewarding you beyond measure. And, in both your humiliation and exaltation, I receive glory!"

***Prayer***

*Father, may You be glorified in all of my life, whether humiliation or exaltation!*



**APRIL 27**

***For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*** (Colossians 1:19-20)

There are three wonderful mysteries in these two verses, all testifying to one crystal clear reality – God’s indescribable love for us!

1. The fullness of God in a man: We have already seen that Jesus poured Himself out and took on the form of a man. But here we see that the fullness of God – that is, the sum total, completeness, even super-abundance of God – established a permanent residence in Him! Jesus was fully human and fully God, and in Him we see the complete and perfect image of God.
2. A holy God reconciling to Himself sinful man: Jesus came to restore the relationship that was damaged in the garden of Eden, and only got worse over the history of the world. It was mankind that broke the relationship and moved away from God; yet, it was God’s initiative to bring about full reconciliation!
3. Peace achieved through terrible violence: Nations in defensive wars are forced to engage in violence in order to achieve peace. Law enforcement authorities usually have to forcibly keep the peace. God did something very different. He suffered the violence Himself, in order to make peace between God and man. The wages of sin is death, and blood is the only acceptable currency. Jesus paid that price!

These are just a few of the many mysteries we encounter when we “survey the wondrous cross”, as the famous hymn puts it. But, well, it *is* a wondrous cross – and it screams out one indisputable fact, written in bold and large letters – God loves you!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You for taking the initiative in reconciling me to Yourself, paying the price in Your blood for my sins.*



**APRIL 28**

***When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.***  
*(Colossians 2:13-14)*

I remember a conversation with college friends towards the end of our college days. We were sharing what we wanted out of life. I had no idea at that time what I wanted, but one of the girls there was very clear: "I want the good things in life." I remember wondering, even then, if the good things she desired would really be "good".

The world has its own standards of what are the "good things in life", what makes life worth living. Fame, fortune, power, success, possessions, security, even fun, are some of these "good things". They are what most of us feel are the ingredients of a good life. However, the Bible begs to differ.

Paul says that, when we were living by the standards of the world, we were actually dead! We were dead because of our sinful lives, most of which the world would probably have considered good! We were dead because our flesh was operating to please ourselves rather than being surrendered to God. The life that we led apart from God was actually death!

Far from being good, the life that the world values and promotes makes us guilty. We are condemned in God's court. There is a long list of sins that stands as a testimony against us, confirming the penalty of death. We stand in the dock – our defense futile, the charges proved beyond any doubt, our punishment assured. Our cause is utterly hopeless.

And then, Jesus walks into the courtroom, His body still bearing the scars of the cross. The prosecution's case falls apart! And the Judge pronounces His verdict – Innocent! And we are set free to finally, truly, live – in Christ!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You for making me truly alive, by Your work on the cross.*



**APRIL 29**

***And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*** *(Colossians 2:15)*

Jesus allowed the temple guards to arrest Him, the Jewish leaders to condemn Him, the Roman governor to sentence Him to death, the Roman soldiers to flog and crucify Him, and the bystanders to mock and insult Him. Behind all of these people, however, were the forces of evil. Satan and his demonic beings revelled in the fact that they had destroyed the Messiah, the Son of God. There must have been great rejoicing in hell that day. But, of course, their joy was short-lived; all they had done was participate in their own defeat.

Paul paints a vivid picture of the victory that Jesus won over the powers of darkness, by using the image of a Roman triumph. This is how Barclay describes it:

“Jesus has stripped the powers and authorities and made them his captives. . . Jesus conquered them forever. He stripped them; the word used is the word for stripping the weapons and the armour from a defeated foe. Once and for all Jesus broke their power. He put them to open shame and led them captive in his triumphant train. The picture is that of the triumph of a Roman general. When a Roman general had won a really notable victory, he was allowed to march his victorious armies through the streets of Rome, and behind him followed the kings and the leaders and the peoples he had vanquished. They were openly branded as his spoils. Paul thinks of Jesus as a conqueror enjoying a kind of cosmic triumph, and in his triumphal procession are the powers of evil, beaten for ever, for everyone to see.”

Too many Christians are too fearful of the power of the devil. But he is a conquered foe. We need to see with eyes of faith what Paul saw – Jesus in triumphant procession, with the devil and all his demons paraded in chains behind Him! Then we will live in the victory of the cross.

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, I praise You for the triumph of the cross!*



**APRIL 30**

***Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)***

The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. Too many of us set off in our walk with Jesus as if it's a 100-metre race – and we run out of steam soon enough, when there are still miles to go! The writer of Hebrews uses the metaphor of a race to instruct us in how to live this life of faith.

Just like the track in an athletic meet, there is a race marked out for us, and we need to stay in our lane. We need to be in the centre of God's will and purpose for our lives.

The sprinter expends all his energy in a few seconds; the marathon runner knows that he needs to use his energy wisely over a long period of time. Similarly, we need to run with endurance, to persevere until the end.

The athlete has his role models and heroes, those who have gone before him and achieved success. Our model is Jesus, and we fix our eyes on Him. He is the One who has shown us the way. He is the One who starts us off in our life of faith, and who enables us to finish well. Finally, the athlete undergoes the rigours of training because of the reward that awaits him. So, too, with Jesus. The cross was His marathon, and He endured its suffering. In fact, He looked down upon and disregarded the shame of the cross, in the light of the joy to come. What was this joy? Pett writes: "As He 'ran the race' He joyed in the thought of being able to fulfil all that the Godhead required of Him, in being the restorer of lost Manhood, and in the glory that had been His and would be so again. He joyed in His own restoration and glorification, and in being able to be the Restorer for all Who are His, their Kinsman Redeemer."

There is joy set before us as well, if we run with perseverance. It is the approval of Jesus, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me run with perseverance the race marked out for me, with my eyes fixed on You, the pioneer and perfecter of my faith!*



# Revival

*Revival is a*



*community saturated  
with God*

MAY

## MAY 1

*Lord, I have heard of your fame;  
I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord.  
Repeat them in our day,  
in our time make them known;  
in wrath remember mercy.*

*(Habakkuk 3:2)*

The prophet Habakkuk remembers the awesome deeds God has done in the past, and he prays for them to be repeated in his day. In fact, the word “repeat” used in this verse actually means “revive.” Habakkuk is crying out for revival!

In August of 1801, Barton Stone, a Presbyterian minister, organised a four-day camp meeting at Cane Ridge, Kentucky. He promised it would be one of the greatest meetings of its kind ever known! By the second morning, more than 25,000 people had come to the small log cabin church, many after travelling great distances. The huge crowd necessitated seven ministers preaching simultaneously to different sections of those who had gathered. An extraordinary move of God broke out in that meeting. A spirit of conviction fell upon many. One eyewitness described it like this: “Sinners dropping down on every hand, shrieking, groaning, crying for mercy, convulsed; professors praying, agonizing, fainting, falling down in distress, for sinners or in raptures of joy! As to the work in general there can be no question, but it is of God. The subjects of it, for the most part are deeply wounded for their sins, and can give a clear and rational account of their conversion.”

The Cane Ridge meeting was characterised by the awesome presence of God, manifestations of supernatural power, and the conversion of sinners. Revival fires spread all across the American frontier. There was an explosion of church planting. The Cane Ridge revival was one of those that sparked the Second Great Awakening. As testimonies of the revival spread to different parts of the United States, the prayer that arose from those who were desperate for God was: “Lord, make it like Cane Ridge!”

“Do it again” was the prayer of Habakkuk, and the overflow of Cane Ridge. Let us make this prayer the cry of our hearts!

### **Prayer**

*Lord, repeat Your awesome deeds in our day; in our time, make them known!*



**MAY 2**

***Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,  
that the mountains would tremble before you!  
As when fire sets twigs ablaze  
and causes water to boil,  
come down to make your name known to your enemies  
and cause the nations to quake before you!***

*(Isaiah 64:1-2)*

Revival is God coming down from the heavens in His awesome power and shaking the earth with His presence. The Welsh revival of 1904-1905 is an incredible example of what can happen when God answers this prayer of Isaiah and rends the heavens. In fact, an eyewitness account of the impact of the revival on Wales is titled *Rent Heavens*. The author, R. B. Jones, writes:

“If one were asked to describe in a word the outstanding feature of those days, one would unhesitatingly reply that it was the universal, inescapable sense of the presence of God. Revival is the exact answer to such a sigh as that of Isaiah 64:1 – *Oh that Thou would rend the heavens, that Thou would come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence*. In 1904, the Lord had literally rent the heavens, and had scattered the satanic foes entrenched therein. The Lord had come down! The mountains were gloriously melted down in His presence.

A sense of the Lord’s presence was everywhere. It pervaded, nay, it created the spiritual atmosphere. It mattered not where one went, the consciousness of the reality and nearness of God followed. Felt, of course, in the Revival gatherings, it was by no means confined to them; it was also felt in the homes, on the streets, in the mines and factories, in the schools, yea, and even in the theatres and drinking-saloons.”

The impact of the Welsh revival was not confined to Wales, however. This move of God spread all over the world, from America to Australia; it touched Britain, Scotland, Ireland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Korea, Africa, France, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, India, China, and many more locations. Truly, the nations were shaken before the presence of the Lord!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, won't You rend the heavens and come down? Make Your name known to Your enemies, and shake the nations!*



**MAY 3**

***For when you did awesome things that we did not expect,  
you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.***

***Since ancient times no one has heard,***

***no ear has perceived,***

***no eye has seen any God besides you,***

***who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.***

*(Isaiah 64:3-4)*

Yesterday we looked at the first two verses of Isaiah 64, which were a prayer for God to rend the heavens and come down in power. In these next two verses, Isaiah remembers the times that God had already come down and done awesome works that the people weren't even expecting. Revival always exceeds our expectations, because God is not limited by our imagination! Our task is to wait for Him to act.

What does it mean to wait for the Lord? Isaiah uses the Hebrew word *chakah*, which is "waiting", like someone waiting for a bus. Chaim Bentorah describes the full meaning of this word:

"... it is a continuing process not just waiting but waiting patiently. The word ... indicates moving to a higher level. In other words, it is like waiting in line and moving forward. God is patiently letting us run through all our fleshly endeavours trying to satisfy all our needs. Then suddenly He appears next in line. It is then that we discover ... that all this time He has been holding us in the palm of His hand. Thus, we finally ... invite God to enter our lives and He gives us ... His presence, filled with His graciousness and mercy."

Waiting for revival is more than us crying out to God to rend the heavens and come down; it is also God waiting for us to come into the right place, where He can then pour out His presence in awesome power!

***Prayer***

*Lord, help me to wait patiently for You, in the assurance that You will do awesome things beyond my expectation!*



## MAY 4

***If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.***  
(2 Chronicles 7:14)

The desire for revival is usually the greatest when things are at their worst. Good times result in complacency, and the church becomes lukewarm and apathetic to God's kingdom purposes. Sadly, it often takes difficult situations, like disasters or persecution, to cause revival prayer to arise in the church. Furthermore, it requires not blaming the world for the state of things, but acknowledging that the problem is the church. The good news is that the solution is also the church!

In the preceding verse, the LORD describes three types of judgments that He visits upon the land because of the people's wickedness:

1. The heavens are shut up, and there is no rain, resulting in drought.
2. Locusts devour the land, resulting in famine.
3. A plague is sent among the people, spreading disease and death.

God's solution is for His people to humble themselves. This humbling of the church has three aspects:

1. We are called to pray, in the sense of interposing ourselves between God and man, and interceding on behalf of the land.
2. We are called to seek God's face, not His blessings; our desire is to be for His presence and for restoration of intimacy with Him.
3. We are called to turn from our wicked ways; too often, we look at the wickedness of unbelievers and ignore our own neglect of God's laws. God is calling His church to return to His holy and righteous ways.

When the church humbles herself, God will send revival! In this verse, revival has three aspects:

1. God will hear the prayers of His people who have humbled themselves.
2. God will forgive the sins of His people, and in doing so, restore our relationship with Him.
3. God will heal the land, from the various disasters that have afflicted it.

Revival is on God's heart, far more than it is on ours!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, help me to humble myself and pray and seek Your face and turn from my wicked ways.*



**MAY 5**

***In revival, God is not concerned about filling empty churches, He is concerned about filling empty hearts.***  
*(Leonard Ravenhill)*

We had a church camp recently, and the highest number ever attended. It is so tempting to see that as a sign of a successful camp! But, of course, the real measures of success are quite different: Did God show up? Were hearts touched? Were lives changed?

It is human nature to confuse church attendance with spiritual life. We think of a megachurch as being alive and dynamic, even revived, while an empty church is seen as dead. Then, revival in our minds becomes about filling up that empty church, so that it resembles the megachurch! But, the truth is, a church with millions of members may be just as spiritually dead as one that is empty.

Leonard Ravenhill writes: "What God wants is not to fill up empty pews. He is not concerned about filling empty churches, He is concerned about filling empty hearts. And empty lives, and empty eyes that have no vision; empty hearts that have no passion, and empty wills that have no purpose."

Revival is about God filling hearts that are empty, even though they have been stuffed with everything the world offers.

Revival is about God filling lives that are empty, even after a lifetime of achievement and success by the world's standards.

Revival is about God filling empty eyes, giving them sight to see His vision of what life is truly about.

Revival is about God filling empty hearts, with a passion for Him and His kingdom.

Revival is about God filling empty wills, replacing our meaningless and futile ambitions with His glorious purpose for us.

And, when empty hearts have been filled by God, so will the empty churches!

***Prayer***

*Lord, send revival! Fill our empty hearts! Fill my empty heart!*



**MAY 6**

***A revival is the church falling in love with Jesus Christ all over again.*** (Vance Havner)

In Revelation chapter 2, we have Jesus speaking to the church in Ephesus. There are so many admirable things that Jesus praises this church for – their deeds, hard work, perseverance, intolerance of false apostles, endurance of hardship on account of His name, and hatred of practices that He hates. And yet, Jesus holds one thing against them, something that overshadows everything else. He says, *“You have forsaken your first love.”*

Sadly, Jesus would say the same thing to too many Christians, and too many churches. Our first love for Jesus – that excitement, that intimacy, that expectation – has diminished. Jesus’ place as first in our lives has been replaced by other people and possessions and priorities. We go through the motions, even with great perseverance and earnestness, but the fire of passion for Jesus is only dying embers. We need revival to fan those flames of love once again, to not just love Jesus but be *in love* with Him.

Vance Havner writes: "Revivals should not be necessary. God intended that His people should grow in grace without periodic spells of backsliding and repenting. But so long as we have such a malarial brand of Christianity, a fever and a chill, a fever and a chill, we shall need revivals. . . . Jesus wants mature Christians who still have the fire of their first love. Jesus does not grow cold in His love for His bride. He does not love His church less now than when He chose to lay down His life for her. He loves her fervently, and He wants that kind of love in return. The idea of love growing dim and fading is based on our weak human nature, and what we experience because we let love slide."

In 1904, as the Welsh revival was in its early stages, God worked through the testimony of a young new believer named Florrie Evans. When her pastor asked for testimonies, Florrie arose and with a trembling voice said, "I love Jesus with all my heart." Many credit this simple statement of love as one of the major sparks of that worldwide revival.

***Prayer***

*Lord, may we fall in love with You all over again!*



**MAY 7**

***When is a revival needed? When carelessness and unconcern keep the people asleep.***  
*(Billy Sunday)*

Billy Sunday was a professional baseball player who became one of the most influential evangelists of the early twentieth century. He is estimated to have preached to one hundred million people by the end of his life. He spoke passionately on the need for revival. . . .

“When is a revival needed? When the individuals are careless and unconcerned. If the Church were down on her face in prayer, they would be more concerned with the fellow outside. The Church has degenerated into a third-rate amusement joint, with religion left out.

When is a revival needed? When carelessness and unconcern keep the people asleep. It is as much the duty of the Church to awaken and work and labour for the men and women of this city, as it is the duty of the fire department to rush out when the call sounds. What would you think of the fire department if it slept while the town burned? You would condemn them, and I will condemn you, if you sleep and let men and women go to hell. It is just as much your business to be awake. The Church of God is asleep today; it is turned into a dormitory; and has taken the devil’s opiates.

When is a revival needed? When the Christians have lost the spirit of prayer.

When may a revival be expected? When you are willing to make a sacrifice for the revival; when you are willing to sacrifice your feelings. Make a sacrifice of your business, of your time, of your money; you are willing to give to help to advance God’s cause. When you give your influence and stand up and let people know you stand for Jesus Christ, and it has your endorsement and time and money. Somebody has to be willing to make a sacrifice. They must be willing to get out and hustle and do things for God.”

We need revival – O God, how we need revival!

***Prayer***

*Lord, forgive our carelessness and unconcern that keeps us asleep; may we make the sacrifices needed for revival.*



## MAY 8

***Prayer is the burden of revival; repentance is the breakthrough of revival; evangelism is the blessing of revival; holiness is the bounty of revival.*** (Steve Camp)

There are four words in this quote – burden, breakthrough, blessing, bounty – that give us a sense of the progress of revival. Let's explore each of these phrases:

1. Prayer is the burden of revival: The Hebrew word for burden literally means "He has given you" – it is the giving of responsibility. God places a burden on His people to pray for revival. Often, the burden is rejected by God's people; sometimes, just one or two choose to respond and carry the burden of revival in prayer. And God, in His infinite grace and mercy, answers with revival!
2. Repentance is the breakthrough of revival: The Hebrew word for breakthrough means "bursting forth, causing a breach." It is an interesting picture – as we pray for revival, a breach is caused in hardened hearts and minds, walls are broken through, and the result is conviction of sin. The repentance that follows is truly of the Spirit, not human emotion.
3. Evangelism is the blessing of revival: The Hebrew word for blessing refers to a gift or present. The blessing that we seek for in revival is not for ourselves but for others, the salvation of their souls. And so, in revival, God gives us the power to be His witnesses, to proclaim the gospel, and to see many come to Jesus.
4. Holiness is the bounty of revival: Blessing is a gift, while bounty is a reward. The Hebrew word for reward comes from the root word *shalom*, which means peace, but also conveys a sense of completion. The gift of revival is seeing souls saved, but our reward in revival is holiness – to be purified and set apart, to be holy before our holy God.

Revival starts with a burden from God, and ends with deeper fellowship in His presence!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, we pray for the burden, breakthrough, blessing, and bounty of revival!*



**MAY 9**

***Revival is when God's people return to God and God returns to them, and everyone sees the difference.***  
(Henry Blackaby)

We visit the Welsh revival once again, to see today's quote in action. Bill Holland writes:

“This revival started in 1904, and was the largest Christian awakening in Europe during the twentieth century. Many eyewitness events were noted, such as there being an overwhelming sense of God's presence in homes, at work, in the public marketplaces, and even in the bars and nightclubs. The conviction of sin was so powerful, it was widely recorded that many were seen laying flat on the ground, in the agony of guilt and repentance, while countless others were seen falling on their knees, crying out for God's mercy. Church members and spiritual leaders confessing their secret sins were coming forth, as a flood of honesty and humility resulted in long-standing debts being paid, stolen goods returned, church and family feuds healed, and enemies being reconciled. As sin was being dealt with, the presence of God began to release an overwhelming sense of joy, peace, and praise! It was common to see gatherings last for eight hours, and were filled with testimonies, worship, healing and excitement. As these services would last all night, men would arrive in their work clothes with their lunches, and in the morning they would leave and go to work. Prayer meetings were held in schools, train terminals, businesses, and in open fields. Bookstores sold out of Bibles, as people were consumed with the desire to study God's Word and to share the gospel everywhere they went. It was estimated that 100,000 people accepted Christ in six months and, at its peak, a staggering 90 percent of the people were attending church. Remarkably, much of the nation began to embrace and demonstrate the nature and character of God.”

Quite simply, this is what happened in Wales: God's people returned to Him in heart-felt repentance; God returned to His people in His awesome presence; and the world, seeing the difference, responded to God!

***Prayer***

*Lord, may we return to You, and You return to us; and may all those around us see the difference!*



**MAY 10**

***We cannot organize revival, but we can set our sails to catch the wind from Heaven when God chooses to blow upon His people once again.*** (G. Campbell Morgan)

One common human failing is to try to accomplish with our own efforts what God alone can do. An example of this is the organising of “revival meetings”, which are really nothing more than special church gatherings or evangelistic campaigns. As today’s quote declares, we cannot organize revival; man cannot do what God does in revival, though we may manufacture poor imitations. All we can do is prepare ourselves to catch the wind of revival when it blows. As the song *Prepare the way* goes, we can make ready our hearts, our homes, and our churches.

How do we “set our sails to catch the wind from Heaven”? Stephen Olford writes: “Some time ago I read through Dr. Edwin Orr’s *Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain*. In this magnificent work, he tells how revival swept the British Isles one hundred years ago. Analyzing the substance of his entire treatment, I came to the conclusion that two indispensable conditions for revival are unity and prayer.”

We see a wonderful example of this in the early church, in the ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven: *“They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. . . . When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit . . . . (Acts 1:14, 2:1-4)”*

Here we see the 120 disciples of Jesus, witnesses of His resurrection, united in mind and purpose, and giving themselves to prayer. Both the indispensable conditions of revival are observed here – unity and prayer. In effect, they had set their sails to catch the wind from heaven, whenever God chose to blow upon them. And, sure enough, on the day of Pentecost, when the wind of the Spirit blew, they were able to catch it – and they proceeded to turn the world upside-down!

### **Prayer**

*Lord, help me to set my sail to catch the wind from heaven!*



**MAY 11**

***Revival is God revealing Himself to men in awesome holiness and irresistible power.***

*(Arthur Wallis)*

One of the most well-known revivals is Azusa Street, which started in 1906 and lasted for three years. It impacted the worldwide church, and almost all Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations trace their roots to this revival. Azusa Street was a powerful demonstration of today's quote – the revelation of God's holiness and power.

Frank Bartleman, in his book *What Really Happened at Azusa Street?*, writes about God's holy presence descending: "Suddenly the Spirit would fall upon the congregation. God himself would give the altar call. Men would fall all over the house, like the slain in battle, or rush for the altar en masse to seek God. The scene often resembled a forest of fallen trees. . . . Some claim to have seen the *shekinah* glory by night over the building. . . . One man at Azusa said, 'I would have rather lived six months at that time than fifty years of ordinary life. I have stopped more than once within two blocks of the place and prayed for strength before I dared go on. The presence of the Lord was so real.' . . . Scores of people were seen dropping into a prostrate position in the streets before they ever reached the mission. Then many would get up, speaking in tongues without any influence from the Azusa people. God had come to accomplish His work!"

The stories of the miracles that took place at Azusa Street are incredible, often beyond belief. Here is a description of one particular day at Azusa Street: "One man had his shoulder and arm ripped off. William Seymour prayed and, as people watched, the bone grew out followed by flesh. It took about two seconds for the entire arm to grow out. Members of the congregation began to pray for each other. In one case a man's fingers had been cut off. They grew back before everyone's eyes. Another member held her finger on a man's gum where a tooth was missing. The entire tooth grew back while she watched. A skinny cancer victim was healed and also gained 40 pounds within three hours."

The God of Azusa Street hasn't changed. He still desires to – and He will – reveal Himself to His people as well as an unbelieving world!

***Prayer***

*Lord, reveal Yourself in awesome holiness and irresistible power!*



**MAY 12**

***As long as we are content to live without revival, we will.***

*(Leonard Ravenhill)*

It is so easy to be content with our spiritual lives. We stay in our comfort zones of traditions and rituals, worship habits and experiences, and familiar relationships. We are satisfied with our daily quiet time, church service on Sundays, and maybe a midweek Bible study; we don't want any more spiritual activity to clutter our time. We enjoy occasional "mountain-top" experiences of God, at a special programme or retreat or camp, but are happy to come down off that mountain to regular existence. We criticize those who are passionate about Jesus and on fire for Him, for the lack of "balance" in their lives. We say we love God, but too much of Him makes us uncomfortable. We say we have faith, but we don't want to be fools for Christ!

Revival is uncomfortable. Revival looks foolish. Revival is radical, and fundamentalist, and disorderly, and uncontrollable – words that the contented church abhors. Revival will only come when we are in a state of discontent, when we are dissatisfied with the way things are – in our hearts, our homes, our society, our cities and nation.

Moses had a more intimate relationship with God than anyone in human history, apart from Jesus. The Bible says that *"the LORD would speak with Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend (Exodus 33:11)."* He spent days on end in the very presence of God, whether on Mount Sinai or in the Holy of Holies. His face literally shone with the glory of God after each of these times of communion. God promised that His Presence would go with Moses and the Israelites to the promised land, because He was pleased with Moses and knew him by name.

But Moses was not satisfied. He said, *"Now show me your glory."* He refused to be content with what he already knew and experienced of God. He wanted more, as much as was humanly possible, of God. It needs to be the same with us. As long as we are satisfied with dead religion, or brief touches of the Spirit, we will not see revival. Like Moses, would we cry out for a greater revelation of God's glory? God is waiting to hear the cry of discontented hearts, and willing to answer with revival!

***Prayer***

*Lord, stir up within me a spirit of holy discontent, that I may not be satisfied with anything less than revival!*



**MAY 13**

***Revival is the eruption of God's heart on a life poured out.***

*(Lou Engle)*

Evan Roberts was born in 1878. He grew up in a coal mining community in a tiny town in Wales, and worked in the coal mines from the age of 9. His family was Christian, and Evan was converted at the age of 13, when he started seeking for a deeper experience of God. At one service, a church deacon posed the question, "What if the Spirit came and you were absent?" Something stirred in Evan's spirit, touching his hunger for more of God.

From that day on, he attended every church meeting for the next 13 years. Almost every day of the week, before or after his duties at the mine, Evan would attend whatever Bible study or prayer meeting or church service was being conducted. No matter the weather or other hindrances, overcoming the temptation to do other things with his friends, Evan would be seeking after God. He would take his Bible into the mines, and read it during the breaks. For over a decade, Evan prayed for revival in Wales. And, at the age of 26, he decided to leave the mines and prepare for theological school. Evan Roberts was, as Lou Engle puts it, "a life poured out."

In the spring of 1904, Evan was woken up one night at 1:00 am by the overwhelming presence of God. He found himself face to face with God, filled with awe and trembling uncontrollably. He prayed for four hours in that state, and then the presence lifted, and he was able to sleep. This happened every morning for a few months. Evan would refer to this as his Mount of Transfiguration experience. In September of that year, in a prayer meeting, as Evan cried out, "Bend me, Lord; the altar is prepared, waiting for the fire!", the fire of God fell upon him. Just over a month later, revival broke out in his home town, and travelled all over the world! God's heart erupted, not just on Evan Roberts, but over the whole world! Lou Engle writes about revival: "It is the Father's response to those who have been His lovers, and to whom He gave promises and sent fire on their offerings."

***Prayer***

*Lord, make my life one that is poured out for You.*



**MAY 14**

***A revival is nothing else than a new beginning of obedience to God.*** (Charles Finney)

Charles Finney was perhaps the most prominent figure in the Second Great Awakening, which swept the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century. Today's devotion is taken from his writings on the importance of repentance by the church in revival.

“A revival always includes conviction of sin on the part of the church. Back-slidden professors cannot wake up and begin right away in the service of God without deep searchings of heart. The fountains of sin need to be broken up. In a true revival, Christians are always brought under such conviction . . . .

Just as in the case of a converted sinner, the first step is a deep repentance, a breaking down of heart, a getting down into the dust before God, with deep humility, and a forsaking of sin. . . .

While they are in their backslidden state they are blind to the state of sinners. Their hearts are hard as marble. The truths of the Bible appear like a dream. They admit it to be all true; their conscience and their judgment assent to it; but their faith does not see it standing out in bold relief, in all the burning realities of eternity. But when they enter into a revival, they see things in that strong light which will renew the love of God in their hearts. This will lead them to labour zealously to bring others to Him. They will feel grieved that others do not love God, when they love Him so much. . . .

They will not only be urging them to give their hearts to God, but they will carry them to God in the arms of faith, and with strong crying and tears beseech God to have mercy on them, and save their souls from endless burnings. . . .

Revival brings them to such vantage ground that they get a fresh impulse towards heaven; they have a new foretaste of heaven, and new desires after union with God; thus the charm of the world is broken, and the power of sin overcome.”

***Prayer***

*Lord, stir my heart into a new obedience to You; give me a deep conviction of my sin, as well as Your heart for the lost.*



**MAY 15**

***Our prayers lay the track down which God's power can come. Like a mighty locomotive, his power is irresistible, but it cannot reach us without rails.*** (Watchman Nee)

In 1949, the Isle of Lewis in the Hebrides experienced a massive revival which spread throughout the entire island. It filled the church with the youth, extended through even the most resistant communities, and brought thousands of lost souls to Christ. It was not charismatic preaching that brought about this revival, but, as today's quote puts it, fervent and persevering prayer that laid down the tracks for God to come.

Leslie Bennett describes the prayer warriors who were key figures in the Hebrides revival:

“Meet Peggy and Christine Smith.

The Smith sisters rarely left their roadside cottage in Barvas on the Isle of Lewis off the coast of Scotland. If you happened upon them, you'd feel compassion for the elderly ladies in their eighties. Peggy, the elder of the two, was blind. Christine was severely crippled with arthritis. You may assume their season for serving the Lord had come and gone. But despite appearances, God had an assignment for these two ailing sisters who were particularly sensitive and responsive to His Spirit.

Like other discerning villagers in 1949, Peggy and Christine recognized the church wasn't thriving as it once had. God gave them a burden over the spiritual indifference among Christians. They were troubled by a growing trend of young people toward worldliness. It became clear that an outpouring of God's Spirit in revival was the only hope to supernaturally reverse the situation.

Revival fires had been experienced in Barvas ten years earlier. Men and women whose lives had been forever changed were keenly aware of the island's dismal spiritual state, and were willing to devote themselves to the work of prayer.

None are more hailed than the Smith sisters. Peggy and Christine believed God gave them the promise of Isaiah 44:3: *'I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground.'* In faith, they inclined their hearts to pray and believe that God would be faithful to His Word. They appealed to their pastor, Rev. James MacKay, and urged him to call the leaders of the church for special times of seeking the Lord. The decision was made to pray through the night twice a week. Peggy and Christine rose from their beds to pray fervently during the same hours that the church leaders gathered in a thatched barn.”

Eighteen months later, revival broke out!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord, make us a people of fervent and persevering prayer; may we lay down the tracks for revival to come!*



**MAY 16**

***Revival is the visitation of God which brings to life Christians who have been sleeping and restores a deep sense of God's near presence and holiness. Thence springs a vivid sense of sin and a profound exercise of heart in repentance, praise, and love, with an evangelistic outflow.***  
(J. I. Packer)

In Revelation 3, Jesus is speaking to the Church in Sardis. He says, “*I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up!*” It is human nature to equate activity with life; that was the case in the first century church, and that remains the case today. The traditional denominations consider their dutiful preservation of age-old traditions and rituals, performed weekly as well as on special occasions, as signs of spiritual life. Other denominations look at all the busyness of their church calendars, and feel good about their spiritual state. But, as Jesus says to the church in Sardis, we may be extremely active, and yet spiritually dead.

The truth is, too many churches and most Christians are, in J. I. Packer’s words, sleeping. And the tragedy is, we don’t even know it. Our spiritual activities and religious routines keep us from seeing it. But, if we are brutally honest with ourselves, if we seriously examine our hearts and spirits, we will know that something is missing. Not something, but someone. And not any someone, but the only One who matters!

We need a visitation from God, in our lives and homes and churches, before we can think of our nations being touched. We need the restoration of, as J. I. Packer puts it, “a deep sense of God’s near presence and holiness.” We cannot be content with worshipping Him from afar, substituting our rituals for intimacy. We cannot continue to let our traditions trump His Word. We cannot dilute His holy standards with our acceptance of the world’s ways.

We need a visitation from God, to wake us – no, shake us! – out of our slumber. The Greek word for visitation actually means “oversight that goes on to provide personal care and attention.” God comes to give us the life we need, to resurrect dead churches and people, by ministering in the specific areas where we have fallen asleep. Then we will respond to Him, to quote J. I. Packer, “with a profound exercise of heart in repentance, praise, and love, with an evangelistic outflow.”

***Prayer***

*Come, Lord Jesus, in a visitation that will wake us up and restore Your presence!*



**MAY 17**

***The depth of our repentance will determine the depth of our revival.***      (Frank Bartleman)

A powerful illustration of the above quote is the little-known Pyongyang revival of 1907. Representatives of Presbyterian Korean churches would meet at the beginning of each year for a two-week Bible study. William Blair, a Presbyterian missionary in North Korea, writes about what happened on January 14, after a Korean pastor stood up and confessed his sin of stealing one hundred dollars:

“Man after man would rise, confess his sins, break down and weep, and then throw himself to the floor and beat the floor with his fists in perfect agony of conviction. . . . Sometimes after a confession, the whole audience would break out in audible prayer, and the effect of that audience of hundreds of men praying together in audible prayer was something indescribable. . . . And so the meeting went on until two o’clock a.m., with confessions and weeping and praying.”

The next night, another pastor stood up and confessed his hatred for an elder in his church as well as for Blair. He asked Blair to forgive him, and pray for him. Blair began to pray, but could only say two words, “Apa-ge, Apa-ge” (Father, Father). He writes what happened next: “It seemed as if the roof was lifted from the building and the Spirit of God came down from heaven in a mighty avalanche of power upon us. I fell at Kim’s side and wept and prayed as I had never prayed before. My last glimpse of the audience is photographed indelibly on my brain. Some threw themselves full length upon the floor, hundreds stood with arms outstretched toward heaven. Every man forgot every other. Each was face to face with God. I can hear yet that fearful sound of hundreds of men pleading with God for life, for mercy.”

It was the start of a revival that resulted in an explosion of conversions and church planting. By 1912, there were three hundred thousand Korean believers, despite persecution of the Church by the Japanese. Revivals started in universities. People walked hundreds of miles to attend revival services. Early morning prayer gatherings of thousands became common among Korean believers. It set the stage for the largest churches in the world, and the sending of thousands of missionaries all over the world.

Truly, the depth of their repentance was rewarded with a deep and abiding revival!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, give us a deep repentance, and bring a deep revival!*



**MAY 18**

***If we want revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God.***

*(Charles Spurgeon)*

Dead churches and a neglect of the Word of God go together. When the world's standards and the traditions of men dominate the church, the result is lifeless Christianity. We see the same situation in the history of God's people; evil reigned when they abandoned God's Word, and revival came when they obeyed Him.

One such revival is seen in the time of Josiah. The story is found in 2 Chronicles 34. Josiah had already spent six years cleansing the land of idolatry. But there was more to come. The Book of the Law was found in the temple, and brought to the king. As the words of the Law were read out, Josiah was gripped with conviction and remorse, as he realised how far the nation had strayed from God's Word. He called the leaders of the nation – elders, priests and Levites – as well as the men of Judah and Jerusalem, to hear the words of the Law. And, along with the nation, he renewed the covenant with the LORD, to obey all of His words. The result was a nationwide revival of worship of the true God for the rest of Josiah's reign. The same is true of revivals throughout history. Reverence for God's Word preceded and characterised revival. Lloyd-Jones writes:

“If you read the history of all the revivals of the past, you will find that they have been periods when men and women have believed this book to be the Word of God. They have believed it literally, they have regarded it as the revelation of God, and the truth concerning Him, and man's relationship with Him, and all that is involved. And they believed that this book has been written by men who have been divinely inspired. They have submitted themselves to it, they have not stood above it as judges, and as those who can decide what is right and wrong.”

We need that same radical commitment to, and reverence for, God's Word, if we wish to see revival in our day.

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, revive in us a reverence for Your Word!*



**MAY 19**

***Maybe you are the key to revival in your church.***

*(Leonard Ravenhill)*

Revival is the result of many factors – prayer, unity, preaching, surrender, to name a few – and, above all, God’s sovereign hand and timing. Most revivals have a person prominently associated with them, someone who becomes the face of that revival. However, revival is usually the result of someone labouring in prayer for many years, invisible and anonymous, preparing the way for God to come.

Duncan Campbell was the face of the Hebrides revival, but Peggy and Anne Smith were the octogenarian sisters who paved the way in prayer. Evan Roberts was the face of the Welsh revival, but it was Seth Joshua who prayed that God would raise up someone from the mines to lead the revival. D. L. Moody was the famous preacher, but two anonymous women prayed for him to have the power of the Spirit.

God is not just looking for pastors and preachers and evangelists to front the revivals He sends. He is also looking for those who will give themselves to labour in prayer for revival. There is a common saying to the effect that God is not looking for the able but the available. He is looking for those who are available for whatever He wants us to do, whether it is to pray in the midnight hours or preach from a pulpit.

Paul Scanlon speaks of how, while we are waiting for God to move, maybe He is waiting for us to move! Maybe God is saying, “I’m waiting for your availability and surrender; your desire and desperation; your fasting and prayer; your early mornings and late nights; your heart, mind, body, and soul. . . .”

There is an open door in heaven; maybe we are the key!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, I make myself available for Your revival purposes; use me as You will!*



**MAY 20**

***I don't want revival...I WANT CHRIST! And if we have Christ, there will be a revival.***

*(Paul Washer)*

Like everything good, the desire for revival can be corrupted by wrong motives and focus. It is so easy to shift our gaze from the One who blesses, to the blessings He showers upon us. And it is human nature to get carried away by the dramatic manifestations and abundant fruit of revival, and lose sight of what is most important: Jesus.

Paul Washer speaks of people wanting revival for the wrong reasons, for supernatural experiences and blessings, instead of Jesus:

“We're praying for revival, we're praying for the Spirit of God to fall down upon this place and we believe that the Spirit of God can so manifest Himself here that it could lay us low. Not praising God for a new Mercedes, but lay us low with His holiness, with His love. We believe God can manifest Himself, but I want to tell you something: Some people spend their entire life jumping from one experience to another. Their desire is experience. I know some people who started out well and have gone astray, because all they talk about now is revival. They want revival, revival, revival. I don't want revival, I want Christ! And if we have Christ, there will be revival. There will be revival.”

During Jesus' years of ministry, on several occasions the religious leaders demanded miraculous signs from Him, and the crowds looked for material blessings. They had the very presence of God among them – *Emmanuel*, God with us – but they looked for supernatural experiences and provision instead. They had not learnt from Moses, who had greater supernatural experiences than anyone in history, yet only desired more of God's presence. Even as we seek revival, we need to desire Jesus above all – His presence, pleasure, purpose, and power. Like the psalmist in Psalm 42, our prayer needs to be: *“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God.”*

***Prayer***

*I want You, Jesus. Only You. All of You.*



**MAY 21**

***We will never meet God in revival until we have first met Him in brokenness.***

*(Nancy Leigh DeMoss)*

This quote reminds me of Psalm 51, and the revelation that comes to David in his brokenness: *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”*

Nancy Leigh DeMoss writes:

“There are no shortcuts to revival. We may be so eager to experience the fruit of revival that we bypass God’s conditions for revival: humility, repentance, contrition, prayer, and obedience. There is no such thing as a ‘painless Pentecost’. Weeping comes before joy. The cross comes before the resurrection. Death comes before life. Brokenness comes before wholeness. . . We cannot arrive at the desired result of revival if we are unwilling to walk through the process that God requires. . . . There is no revival where there is not deep brokenness and contrition over the seriousness of our sin against a holy God. . . . Brokenness implies mourning and grieving over our sin and hating everything that does not please God.”

We cannot manufacture or work up this kind of brokenness. Only God can break our hearts in this way.

On July 8, 1741, while revival fires were breaking out all over the American colonies, the town of Enfield remained resistant. That evening, Jonathan Edwards preached his famous sermon, *Sinners in the hands of an angry God*. He spoke in a solemn tone, without theatrics or emotion, as was his nature. He trusted God to do His work through His Word. And that was exactly what happened. A terrible spirit of conviction, and the accompanying brokenness, fell upon the formerly apathetic congregation, as Edwards spoke. Daniel Norris describes the scene in this way:

“Many had taken a firm hold of their seats for fear of falling straight through the floor. They were convinced they were sliding down into the pits of hell itself. They clawed at the pews in front of them, digging their nails deep into the wood. Others clung to one another like a man drowning in deep water. Some fell to the ground as if they were brought down by an axe laid to their feet. They lay motionless upon the floor. Those who once stood now clung to the posts of the church, believing the ground beneath them was giving way. . . . Revival had come to Enfield.”

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, give me a broken and contrite heart and spirit.*



**MAY 22**

***A revival may be expected when Christians have a spirit of prayer for a revival. That is, when they pray as if their hearts were set upon it. When Christians have the spirit of prayer for a revival. When they go about groaning out their hearts desire. When they have real travail of soul.***  
(Charles Finney)

One man who prayed in the way that Finney describes, and who saw revival in the unlikeliest of places, was John Hyde. He is better known as “Praying Hyde”, and the “Apostle of Prayer”.

John Hyde came to India as a missionary in 1892. The first seven years of ministry left him disappointed, as he saw very few conversions and little fruit. It led him into a prayer life that was deep and abiding. Daniel Norris describes Praying Hyde’s prayer life in these words:

“Hyde would spend countless hours in study and in prayer, often missing meals, barely sleeping. He loved spending time with his Saviour. He would lie face down upon the floor for hours, calling out to God. Hyde’s peers in ministry rebuked him for his zeal, but heaven apparently saw things differently. Revival was coming to India, and this man was praying it in.”

A convention was called in Sialkot (now in Pakistan) in 1904, to unite Christians in prayer for India. It was poorly attended, but during that year, through much prayer, Hyde was able to stir up many others to labour in prayer. Edwin and Lillian Harvey describe what happened the following year:

“The Sialkot Convention of 1905 was preceded by much prayer. The glorious result was that, at the close of the first service, the entire congregation went to their knees, continuing in prayer and confession of spiritual deflection until the dawn of day. From that time, the United Presbyterian Mission at Sialkot was lifted onto a higher spiritual plane than it had ever been reached previously. ‘Good’ missionaries become known as ‘powerful’ ones. The effect was felt throughout all India, and the breath of Heaven sweeping over the land could be traced to the kneeling figure of ‘praying Hyde’.”

In 1910, Hyde was persuaded to see a doctor about his failing health. To the doctor’s astonishment, Hyde’s heart had shifted out of its natural position, to a place on the right side of his chest. It was supposed that the countless hours of travelling in prayer, face down on the floor, had caused this shift. Daniel Norris says of this incredible fact, “No doubt, this man with the shifted heart had shifted the heart of God!”

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, pour upon me a spirit of prayer for revival!*



**MAY 23**

***Revival is not just a feeling of excitement of the Lord. We get excited about many things, but excitement is not a revival if God is not the thing that gets us excited. (Jerry Falwell)***

There is a saying, “Don’t major on the minors.” It means to be careful not to focus on and emphasize what is less important, at the expense of what really matters. With revival, it can be so easy to focus on the tangible evidences of the supernatural, and neglect the intangible sense of God’s presence. We can be tempted to stir up physical manifestations with our own efforts, rather than wait upon God to do His work.

Jerry Falwell, in his sermon “*A Church to Change the World*”, defines revival and also offers two warnings:

“A revival is when ‘God pours His presence on His people.’ The greatest thing about revival is when God invades a church, or His people with His presence. Revival is when God shows up to do wonderful things for His people. . . . However, let me give you two quick warnings about revival:

1. Don’t judge the success of any revival meeting by its outward manifestations. I remember what Dr. B. R. Lakin used to tell me, ‘You can’t tell the power of an automobile by the toot of its horn; but rather, the power of a car is measured by what’s under the hood.’ So, I want you to get happy, but getting happy doesn’t mean it’s revival. Some churches today have a lot of ‘happy-clappy’ Christianity. But that doesn’t mean God is present. They shout, clap and sing, but that doesn’t mean that church is spiritual, that they are experiencing revival.
2. Don’t look to methods or results, look to God. Remember, I told you a revival is God’s presence in the midst of His people. Therefore, when you look for revival, always look for God.”

I think of the story of Martha, in the gospel of Luke. She was distracted by her work for Jesus, and neglected being in His presence. Let us be careful not to be distracted by the works of Jesus, and instead, like Mary, focus all our attention on Him. The presence of Jesus is far more exciting than His power!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, may You be the one thing that excites me, above all else!*



**MAY 24**

***When the church really takes on the humble characteristics of Christ, that's going to lead to revival.***  
*(Francis Chan)*

Paul prefaces his famous hymn in Philippians 2, on the humbling and exaltation of Jesus, with these words: *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. . . .”* What does it mean to be humble like Jesus? Andrew Murray writes in his book, *Humility*:

“He was nothing, that God might be all. He resigned Himself with His will and His powers entirely for the Father to work in Him. Of His own power, His own will, and His own glory, of His whole mission with all His works and His teaching – of all this He said, It is not I; I am nothing; I have given Myself to the Father to work; I am nothing, the Father is all.

This life of entire self-abnegation, of absolute submission and dependence upon the Father's will, Christ found to be one of perfect peace and joy. He lost nothing by giving all to God. God honoured His trust, and did all for Him, and then exalted Him to His own right hand in glory. And because Christ had thus humbled Himself before God, and God was ever before Him, He found it possible to humble Himself before men too, and to be the Servant of all. His humility was simply the surrender of Himself to God, to allow Him to do in Him what He pleased, whatever men around might say of Him, or do to Him. It is in this state of mind, in this spirit and disposition, that the redemption of Christ has its virtue and efficacy. It is to bring us to this disposition that we are made partakers of Christ. This is the true self-denial to which our Saviour calls us, the acknowledgment that self has nothing good in it, except as an empty vessel which God must fill, and that its claim to be or do anything may not for a moment be allowed. It is in this, above and before everything, in which the conformity to Jesus consists, the being and doing nothing of ourselves, that God may be all. Here we have the root and nature of true humility.”

Jesus understood the power of humility, and the revival it unleashed in His time. May we imitate Him in His humility, and witness the revival power that follows!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, teach us to be humble like You.*



**MAY 25**

***Revival is a community saturated with God.***

*(Duncan Campbell)*

The revival on the Isle of Lewis in the Hebrides from 1949 to 1952 surely shaped this understanding of revival. The many accounts of what happened during that revival consistently emphasize the overwhelming presence of God.

Chet and Phyllis Swearingen, on their website *Beautiful Feet*, write about some of the remarkable aspects of this revival:

- So overwhelming sometimes was the presence of God that people were afraid to open their mouths lest they utter words that would bring judgment upon themselves.
- People walking up to the church services went silent. There was no talking as they entered the church and sat down. The presence of God created a fear, and it was so real that some said it sent shivers down their spines.
- Not long after being seated in the church, people would begin weeping. For some, the tears were due to an overwhelming love of God. For others, it was due to the conviction of sin.
- Some testified that they were drawn to the services by the power of God, against their will.
- The drawing power of God blanketed the island of Lewis. This power created a longing for God, a hunger for His Word, and an overwhelming conviction of sin—leading many to accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour.
- Following church services there were always several homes in the village that would be opened wherein those seeking God could go for further spiritual instruction, and these homes were almost always packed. The atmosphere in these homes was similar to what was experienced in the church buildings—filled with the presence of God.
- People leaving the church carried with them the awareness of the presence of God. With that presence was the fear of God. When these individuals would come into contact with those not yet converted, those people would sense God, become fearful, and due to the tremendous conviction of sin, often become converted.
- Many had a very hard time sleeping because of the presence of God being so real. Day and night, whenever they woke up, the presence of the Lord was there.
- Many sailors gave their testimony that while their ships were passing the island they would feel the presence of the Lord.

Truly, it was a community saturated with God! May the same be true for our communities today!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, may we be a community, even a nation, saturated with God!*



**MAY 26**

***Lord, bend me!***

*(Evan Roberts)*

Seth Joshua was a Presbyterian evangelist who was holding evangelistic services in Wales in 1904. He was among those who were stirring up revival fires before Evan Roberts took centre-stage. On September 20, 1904, Seth Joshua wrote in his journal, “The Revival goes on. I cannot leave the building at New Quay until twelve and even one o’clock in the morning. I have closed the service several times, and yet it would break out again quite beyond the control of human power.” Seth Joshua had been labouring in prayer and evangelism for years, crying out for revival in Wales, and God was answering in power!

On September 29, 1904, Evan Roberts and nineteen other students attended Seth Joshua’s convention at Blaenannerch. On the way there, they began to sing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “It is coming, it is coming – the power of the Holy Ghost – I receive it – I receive it – the power of the Holy Ghost.”

David Matthews, an eyewitness, records what took place at the seven o’clock meeting: “Almost in desperation, the evangelist [Seth Joshua] prayed fervently at what seemed to be the close of the difficult meeting, ‘Bend us—bend us—bend us, O Lord!’ Speaking humanly, many believe that this very sentence gave birth to the revival. It became famous.”

Rick Joyner writes about what happened at the nine o’clock meeting that followed, as Evan Roberts was deeply stirred by Seth Joshua’s words of ‘Bend us, O Lord!’:

“With tears streaming down his face, Evan just began to cry: ‘Bend me! Bend me! Bend me! Bend us!’ Then the Holy Spirit came upon him with a mighty baptism that filled Evan with what he called ‘Calvary’s love, and a love for Calvary.’ That night the message of the cross was so branded upon Evan’s heart that there would be no other theme of the great revival he would soon help lead. From that night on, Evan Roberts could focus on one thought – the salvation of souls at the foot of Jesus’ cross. Historians would refer to that night as ‘Blaenannerch’s great meeting.’ ”

“Bend me, Lord.” It is the ultimate cry of surrender. And it birthed an unprecedented, worldwide revival. God will do the same today, if we cry out as Seth Joshua and Evan Roberts did.

***Prayer***

*Lord, bend me! Bend us!*



**MAY 27**

***The coming revival must begin with a great revival of prayer. It is in the closet, with the door shut, that the sound of abundance of rain will first be heard. An increase of secret prayer will be the sure harbinger of blessing.*** (Andrew Murray)

Revival prayer is prayer in the closet, in the secret place. It is prayer that follows Jesus' words: "When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matthew 6:6)." This doesn't mean that revival prayer has to be solitary and individual. Rather, it refers to the motive for our praying, and the setting apart of ourselves to prayer. When we pray in the secret place, we are focused on God alone, and His purpose and pleasure. We set apart the time and place of prayer, and set ourselves apart from all that would distract or hinder the prayer time. The ten days before Pentecost were a perfect example of what Andrew Murray speaks of, praying in the closet with the door shut. The 120 disciples set themselves apart, joining together in prayer, shutting out all distractions from the outside world as well as from within themselves. Their sole focus was seeking God and His promised Holy Spirit. And they waited until the promise came to pass.

Andrew Murray references the story of Elijah in his quote. God had promised to send rain and end the three and a half years of drought. So Elijah "climbed to the top of Mount Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees (1 Kings 18:42)." Elijah was in his closet, in the secret place of prayer. And he stayed there, despite all evidences to the contrary, until God answered with abundant rain. But Elijah had already heard the sound of that rain, in his earlier times in God's presence, before there was even a cloud in the sky!

God is calling us to prayer in the secret place. He is inviting us into the prayer closet. It is the place where the world is shut out, our inner voices silenced, and we give ourselves to praying what is on God's heart. Like Elijah, we will hear the sounds of revival before it appears. And, like the disciples at Pentecost, we will be overwhelmed by revival when it comes in its fullness!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, stir up a great revival of prayer – in me, and in Your church!*



**MAY 28**

***If you can explain what is happening in a church, apart from the sovereign act of God, it is not revival.***  
*(Martyn Lloyd-Jones)*

Steve Gray was at what he described as the lowest point of his life. After twelve years of pastoring a small country church in Smithton, Missouri, he was bruised and broken and exhausted. For twelve years, he had preached and proclaimed revival, seemingly to no avail. He wrote of that time: “. . . my passion for ministry had been suffocated. My faith in people was nearly destroyed, my faith in myself utterly gone. I felt crushed and unusable, worthless and wounded beyond repair. I had tried my best but believed God was finished with me.”

What hope was there for Steve Gray and his church to recover, leave alone to experience revival? None, in human terms – but God is the God of the impossible. Steve Gray took a two-week break and visited the revival taking place in Brownsville Assembly of God church in Florida. He returned personally refreshed, but still unsure about the church and ministry. The Sunday evening service was in progress when he walked into the church building. He had taken eight steps when, in his own words:

“Then, with astounding suddenness and great intensity, a bolt of spiritual power hit me. I felt as though I had been struck by lightning. My arms shot up into the air, the emotional weights flew off my shoulders, and I began to jump up and down and twirl as I had never done in my life. I felt indescribable joy and hope, and a lightness about life that had never been so strong, even when I was baptized in the Holy Spirit twenty years before. It did not hit only me. The bolt of heaven-sent electricity seemed to shoot off in individual tributaries and strike everyone in the church all at the same time. People began to leap. Many rushed forward. We all were jumping up and down, dancing and laughing, having the best time we had ever had together, and we had no idea what had caused it—other than the Lord—or why it was happening.”

It was the beginning of a four-year long revival known as The Smithton Outpouring. Over a quarter of a million people attended the revival. Church leaders from over sixty nations came to receive the fire and carry it back to their own churches. In Martyn Lloyd-Jones' words, only a sovereign act of God could explain how this happened in a struggling church with a burnt-out pastor. It was truly revival!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, move sovereignly in a mighty revival in our churches, cities, and nation!*



**MAY 29**

***Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?***

*(Psalm 85:6)*

Why do we seek revival? What do we desire when we pray for revival? Perhaps a better question is, who do we seek and who do we desire in revival? The Sons of Korah give us the answer in this prayer for revival that is found in the middle of Psalm 85. The prayer is actually four verses, and it gives us the right reasons to seek revival.

*Restore us again, O God our Saviour, and put away your displeasure toward us. (v.4):* Our cries for revival stem from the realisation that God has turned away from us because of our sin, and we implore Him to turn back to us. We acknowledge our sin has displeased God, and we desire for Him to be pleased with us once again. And so, we pray for revival.

*Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? (v.5):* Our revival prayers come from a place of grief at how we have stirred God's anger, and dismay at the broken relationship. Revival, then, means the restoration of intimacy with God.

*Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? (v.6):* Our desire in revival is not that we may enjoy God's blessings, or exult in spectacular manifestations, but rather that we may rejoice in God. It is the desire to have a greater revelation of God, to behold His beauty in all its facets, to glimpse His glory and majesty, and then to respond with joy!

*Show us your unfailing love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation. (v.7):* Finally, we pray for a deeper experience of God's covenant love in revival. We pray for salvation in its fullest sense, that is, freedom from the things that hold us in bondage, and freedom to love God fully.

This anointed prayer in Psalm 85 teaches us that revival is about more of God – more revelation, more intimacy, more freedom!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?*



**MAY 30**

***Let us acknowledge the LORD;  
let us press on to acknowledge him.  
As surely as the sun rises,  
he will appear;  
he will come to us like the winter rains,  
like the spring rains that water the earth.***

*(Hosea 6:3)*

Israel was in a terrible situation, rejected by God and destroyed because of her lack of acknowledgement of God and the accompanying disobedience. The nation was under God's wrath, torn to pieces like a lion tears its prey. Her only option was to return to God. The cry for revival is most often stirred by such desperate circumstances. In today's verse, we see the heart of revival, in how we are to come to God and how He will respond.

Revival prayer begins with seeking to know God more deeply, acknowledging our neglect of Him and the resultant consequences of our sin. It is the desire – and effort – to draw close to Him, that we may receive greater revelation and know Him more perfectly. It is, as Peter Pett puts it, “to truly know Yahweh and go on knowing Him continually.” We press on to know God – the word “press” means to pursue and to chase after God! And we do so with the assurance that God will surely come through, just as surely as the sun rises each morning! He will surely move, in response to our desire for more of Him!

Revival in this passage is described as the winter and spring rains, or, in other translations of the Bible, the former and latter rains. In Israel, there were two distinct seasons of rain. The winter – or former – rain softened the parched ground, and made it ready for the planting of seed. The spring – or latter – rain was a heavier outpouring that prepared the crop for the harvest. Just as rain is often a picture of the Holy Spirit, the former and latter rains are a picture of revival. The Holy Spirit comes like the winter showers, to soften hardened hearts, to bring conviction of sin and deep repentance, to stir up a desperation for genuine intimacy with Jesus. And then He also comes in a mighty outpouring, like the spring rains, to bring forth the harvest of transformed lives and communities and even nations.

Hosea's words are a call to pursue a deeper relationship with God, as well as the assurance that He will surely respond with revival!

***Prayer***

*Holy Spirit, come to us, like the winter and spring rains!*



**MAY 31**

***And afterward,***

***I will pour out my Spirit on all people.***

***Your sons and daughters will prophesy,***

***your old men will dream dreams,***

***your young men will see visions.***

***Even on my servants, both men and women,***

***I will pour out my Spirit in those days.***

*(Joel 2:28-29)*

The revival at Pentecost was probably the most dramatic Biblical revival. We see at Pentecost the perfect illustration of the process of revival.

First, there was the PROMISE of revival. Jesus had told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the promised Holy Spirit came upon them. He was reiterating what had been prophesied in the Scriptures, most notably in today's passage from Joel, where the outpouring of the Spirit upon all people had been promised.

Second, there was PRAYER. The disciples persevered in united prayer, waiting upon the Lord in obedience to Jesus' command, not even knowing when the promise would be fulfilled.

Third, there was the POURING OUT of the Spirit. Each of the 120 believers in that place were filled with the Holy Spirit. The word for "pouring out" in both Hebrew and Greek refers to a gushing forth, to an abundance of what is being poured out. The Holy Spirit was given, not just to the apostles, or to the early church, but for the whole world, without measure.

Fourth, there was the manifestation of the Spirit's POWER. The place where they were meeting was shaken, there was a sound of a mighty wind, tongues of fire settled on each believer, and they all spoke in tongues. All these were manifestations of the Spirit's power, which was also seen in the bold preaching by Peter that followed.

Fifth, the spirit of PROPHECY was released. Joel declares, and Peter confirms, that when the Spirit is poured out, the primary manifestation will be the release of prophetic gifts – prophecies, dreams, and visions. The church in revival is a prophetic church, receiving God's heart in intimate relationship, and communicating His kingdom will and purpose to a lost world.

Finally, and most importantly, revival is characterised by the PRESENCE of God. Every element of the Pentecost revival, from the united prayer that preceded the outpouring, to the church of 3000-plus believers that was established, was saturated with the awesome presence of the Holy Spirit.

We live in the age of Pentecost, and the revival that was birthed that morning two thousand years ago was never meant to cease. The Holy Spirit still waits for a people who will wait for Him, that He may pour Himself out afresh, in an even greater revival than Pentecost!

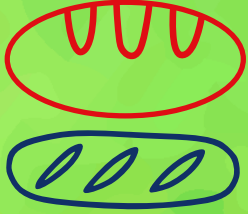
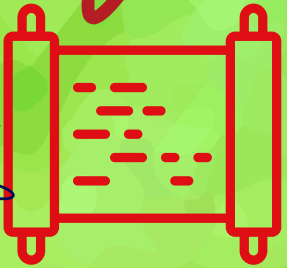
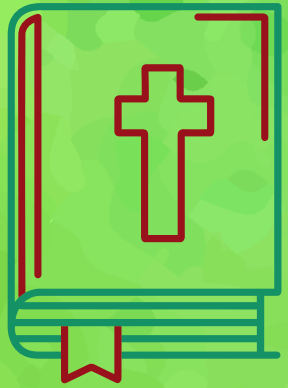
***Prayer***

***Holy Spirit, be poured out afresh, upon our sons and daughters, upon old and young, upon men and women, upon Your servants!***



# The Word

Your word is a lamp for my feet



and a light on my path.

JUNE

**JUNE 1**

***All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.***  
(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

William Barclay shares the following true story:

“In Brazil, Signor Antonio of Minas bought a New Testament, which he took home to burn. He went home and found the fire was out. Deliberately he lit it. He flung the New Testament on it. It would not burn. He opened out the pages to make it burn more easily. It opened at the Sermon on the Mount. He glanced at it as he consigned it to the flames. His mind was caught; he took it back. He read on, forgetful of time, through the hours of the night, and just as the dawn was breaking, he stood up and declared, 'I believe'.”

In this month’s devotions, we will look at the Word of God. We will consider its power, as seen in the above story. We will get a glimpse of its beauty. But let’s start with the origin and purpose of Scripture, which Paul describes so succinctly in today’s verses.

All Scripture – the whole of Scripture, every part of Scripture – is God-breathed! This compound word is used only once in the Bible, perhaps to underline the absolute uniqueness of the Bible. It uses two words – *theos*, meaning “God”, and *pneo*, meaning “breathed out”. The origin of Scripture is God Himself! As one author puts it, the implication is that Scripture as God-breathed “serves as an extension of God” and is “representative of God’s perfect power.” Furthermore, the word for the Holy Spirit is itself derived from the word for breath; thus, the Spirit was actively involved in the inspiration of Scripture.

How amazing that, when we open our Bibles, we encounter the very breath of God – words and concepts and ideas that have originated from His very essence!

Paul also emphasizes the purpose of Scripture – not just to give us academic knowledge, but to equip us for life. The Bible is useful – for the student to learn, for the sinner to be rebuked, for the stray to be corrected, and for the saint to be trained – so that we may be complete and mature in our faith.

Praise God for His glorious Word!

***Decree:***

*We are being equipped for every good work by Scripture, which has been breathed out by God Himself!*



**JUNE 2**

***He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*** (Deuteronomy 8:3)

The vast number of Israelites who had been delivered from slavery in Egypt now faced another crisis: starvation. Possibly the stores of food they had brought with them from Egypt, when they left hurriedly, had been used up. There was no sign of food in the desert to which God had taken them. And, as was already becoming a pattern for God's people, they grumbled and complained.

But God had a plan. He was humbling His people – that is, deliberately causing them suffering – in order to teach them an important lesson. They had to trust Him each day for provision, for food that was unique to them, provided in a manner that was supernatural. But that was only part of the lesson – in fact, it was the minor part!

Peter Pett puts it like this:

“They had had to forget what they had done in the past and look to Him for their provision. They had had to depend daily on what He had promised to give them, what came ‘from His mouth’. And He had done this in order that they might recognise that life is not dependent only on bread. They had to learn that bread is not everything. His purpose was that they might learn that they must receive their provision from His mouth. They must recognise that all that they had come from Him and resulted from His promises. He had wanted them to recognise that it is what Yahweh says and what Yahweh commands and what Yahweh promises that is the basis of life, so that they might recognise that obedience to Him is all. His aim was that they learn the vital lesson of hearing God and trusting Him in all circumstances.”

God wants us to trust Him, not just for our physical and material needs, but even more for spiritual nourishment. Manna came from God's mouth, in a manner of speaking, and fed their bodies. In the same way, all that proceeds from God's mouth, that is, His Word, has been given to nourish every aspect of our lives!

***Decree:***

***We do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord!***



## JUNE 3

***For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.***  
(Hebrews 4:12)

The writer of Hebrews tells us that God's Word is living and active. God's Word releases life, not just physical but also spiritual – the life of abundance and quality that God desires for us. God's Word is full of energy; it is effective; it produces the results that He desires. God's Word is not dormant, but is at work to accomplish His purposes – whether to form stars and planets, or to transform human lives!

God's Word is compared to a double-edged sword, the Roman *machairan*, that had two edges, which made it easier to penetrate deeper into the body, as well as to cut a wider area. Barnes writes of the metaphor being used: "Such a sword would seem to penetrate even the joints and marrow of the body. It would separate the joints, and pierce through the very bones to the marrow. A similar effect, Paul says, is produced by truth. It seems to penetrate the very essence of the soul, and lay it all open to the view."

God's Word is effective in doing two things, according to this verse:

1. The word of God penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit: Too often, we mistake our own voice for God's, and our own desires for His will. Even if we want to, we find it impossible to separate the two. However, God's Word is able to distinguish between what is of our own will and desire and self, and what is of the Spirit of God.
2. The word of God judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart: Our external behaviour often hides what is really in our hearts, and too often we ourselves fail to realise it. God's Word shines a light on, and exposes, our inner passions and intentions, the driving forces behind what we say and do and are – not to condemn, but to transform.

God's Word is at work in each one of us, penetrating and examining our innermost being, in order to produce abundant life!

### ***Decree:***

*The Word of God is alive and active, and it will surely accomplish His purpose within us!*



**JUNE 4**

***Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.***

*(James 1:22)*

James is warning against knowledge that is not translated into action. He elaborates on this point in the next two verses: *“Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.”*

William Barclay comments on these verses:

“James presents us with two of the vivid pictures of which he is such a master. First of all, he speaks of the man who goes to the church meeting and listens to the reading and expounding of the word, and who thinks that that listening has made him a Christian. He has shut his eyes to the fact that what is read and heard in Church must then be lived out. It is still possible to identify Church attendance and Bible reading with Christianity but this is to take ourselves less than half the way; the really important thing is to turn that to which we have listened into action.

Second, James says such a man is like one who looks in a mirror – ancient mirrors were made, not of glass, but of highly polished metal – sees the smuts which disfigure his face and the dishevelment of his hair, and goes away and forgets what he looks like, and so omits to do anything about it. In his listening to the true word, a man has revealed to him that which he is and that which he ought to be. He sees what is wrong and what must be done to put it right; but, if he is only a hearer, he remains just as he is, and all his hearing has gone for nothing.

James does well to remind us that what is heard in the holy place must be lived in the market place – or there is no point in hearing at all.”

Like the foolish man in the parable of the wise and foolish builders, we deceive ourselves that our lives are secure, if we only hear the Word and fail to obey it!

***Decree:***

*We will not deceive ourselves by merely listening to the Word; we will do what it says!*



**JUNE 5**

***Blessed are those whose ways are blameless,  
who walk according to the law of the LORD.***

***Blessed are those who keep his statutes  
and seek him with all their heart—***

***they do no wrong***

***but follow his ways.***

*(Psalm 119:1-3)*

Over the next twenty-two days, we will be looking at Psalm 119. *The Family Devotional Study Bible* describes Psalm 119 as “a long, passionate love poem about God’s law.” The writer goes on to wonder: “How do you fall in love with law? Most people admit that rules are necessary, and appreciate them grudgingly. But no one writes love poems about laws.”

Well, no one except the psalmist! That is probably because no Law is worthy of our love, except God’s Law. And, hopefully, as we understand what the psalmist loves about God’s Word – His laws, decrees, statutes, and so much more – we too will fall in love with it.

Psalm 119 starts with the word “*Blessed*”. The book of Psalms begins with the same word: “*Blessed is the man . . .*” Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount also begins with this concept: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit . . .*” God wants us to be blessed – but blessedness does not consist of wealth, possessions, success, status, or any of the things we usually seek. This psalm connects the blessed life with our obedience to God’s Word.

How is this obedience manifested in our lives?

1. We walk according to God’s law: This means that our actions and choices, the manner of our lifestyle, our life’s journey, is in line with God’s Word.
2. We keep God’s statutes: This doesn’t just mean that we obey what He has commanded, but also that we guard His Word in our hearts, so that we may not go astray.
3. We seek God with all our heart: This means that we recognize that God’s laws are not merely regulations to be dutifully obeyed, but rather that the end goal is to draw closer to God in relationship.
4. We follow God’s ways: This means that we don’t chart our own paths, but rather see how God acts, and imitate Him. We follow in His footsteps, doing what He does, as revealed in His Word.

Then, as the psalmist says, our ways will be blameless, and we will be truly blessed!

***Decree:***

***We will be blessed, even as we walk in God’s ways, keep His statutes, seek Him with all our heart, and follow His ways!***



**JUNE 6**

***I seek you with all my heart;  
do not let me stray from your commands.***

***I have hidden your word in my heart  
that I might not sin against you.***

*(Psalm 119:10-11)*

In an earlier verse, the psalmist (most probably David) says that he is able to keep God's statutes because he seeks God with all his heart. But here he turns it into a prayer. His desire is for God, for His presence, for intimacy, for more of Him. He seeks the Giver, not the gifts. He longs for the One who blesses, not the blessings. And this seeking is not some casual effort; it is with all of his heart, with every fibre of his inmost being.

David is serious about seeking God; it is his top priority. However, he recognises that one crucial element of achieving what he desires is obedience. And so, he prays that God will keep him from straying from His commands. David knows that obedience to God's Word is one sure way of drawing close to God; God's commands lay down a pathway into deeper intimacy and experience of relationship.

In order to make sure he doesn't sin against God by disobeying Him, David goes a step further. He stores up God's Word in his heart, as a person stores treasure, so that it will keep him from straying from God's perfect ways. I think of so much emphasis that is given to memorising of Bible verses by children and youth – but to what end? Just to know the Bible and win quiz competitions? Even the devil knows Scripture! David, even from his days as a shepherd boy, hides God's Word in his heart for a very specific purpose – in order to live a pure life. Surely this is what every generation needs – God's Word stored up in our hearts, not as academic knowledge, but as treasure. Then, the Holy Spirit draws from this storehouse to guide us in His ways, and to keep us from straying.

***Decree:***

***I will seek You with all my heart, and hide Your Word in my heart!***



**JUNE 7**

***Open my eyes that I may see  
wonderful things in your law.***

*(Psalm 119:18)*

Charles Spurgeon's introduction to Psalm 119 may very well be applied to God's Word as a whole. This is what he writes:

"Many superficial readers have imagined that it harps upon one string, and abounds in pious repetitions and redundancies; but this arises from the shallowness of the reader's own mind: those who have studied this divine hymn, and carefully noted each line of it, are amazed at the variety and profundity of the thought. Using only a few words, the writer has produced permutations and combinations of meaning which display his holy familiarity with his subject, and the sanctified ingenuity of his mind. He never repeats himself; for if the same sentiment recurs it is placed in a fresh connection, and so exhibits another interesting shade of meaning. The more one studies it the fresher it becomes. As those who drink the Nile water like it better every time they take a draught, so does this Psalm become the more full and fascinating the oftener you turn to it. It contains no idle word; the grapes of this cluster are almost to bursting full with the new wine of the kingdom. The more you look into this mirror of a gracious heart the more you will see in it. Placid on the surface as the sea of glass before the eternal throne, it yet contains within its depths an ocean of fire, and those who devoutly gaze into it shall not only see the brightness, but feel the glow of the sacred flame. It is loaded with holy sense, and is as weighty as it is bulky. Again and again have we cried while studying it, 'Oh the depths!' Yet these depths are hidden beneath an apparent simplicity, as Augustine has well and wisely said, and this makes the exposition all the more difficult. Its obscurity is hidden beneath a veil of light, and hence only those discover it who are in thorough earnest, not only to look on the word, but, like the angels, to look into it."

In God's Word are hidden indescribable treasures, and He has given us the Holy Spirit to reveal its wonders. He will open the eyes of our heart, if we will just ask Him!

***Decree:***

*God will open our eyes to see wonderful things in His law!*



## JUNE 8

***I have chosen the way of faithfulness;***

***I have set my heart on your laws.***

***I hold fast to your statutes, LORD;***

***do not let me be put to shame.***

***I run in the path of your commands,***

***for you have broadened my understanding.***

*(Psalm 119:30-32)*

In April of 2011, a line of deadly tornadoes ripped across the state of Alabama, leaving some 250 people dead in its wake. Near Wellington, Alabama, by the time the Hardy family realized the storm was coming, it was too late to find a permanent shelter. They considered trying to take shelter in a metal clubhouse, but it had already been turned on its side by the strong winds. So, in desperation, they took shelter in a small stand of trees. They tied a rope around the children and huddled around them in the trees as the storm passed. A family member said that while they had been scratched by flying dirt and debris, none suffered any serious injuries.

David knows that he will face far greater storms in life, which will have far worse consequences if he is not rooted and grounded in God's Word. In these three short verses, we see four ways in which he secures himself:

1. David makes a choice to follow God's way: There were many ways of life to choose from, but he chooses the way of faithfulness, which also means truth. Today, there is an urgent need to choose the way of truth, God's Word, as we are buffeted by deception on every side.
2. David sets his heart on God's Word: His choice to follow God's laws is not just in superficial action, but with a heart commitment. He agrees fully with the Word, and makes the heart adjustments needed to be in alignment with it.
3. David chooses to hold fast to God's Word: Just like the family in today's illustration clung to the trees and ropes, he clings to God's Word. In fact, that word is used of the husband and wife being joined together. If we are serious about God's Word, we will keep it close to us, as in an intimate relationship.
4. David runs in the path of God's Word: He puts all of his energy and effort into keeping God's laws. His is no dutiful obedience; rather, it is passionate commitment to be fully surrendered, and to please God with his obedience.

We are called to make the same choice: to cling to His Word, to align our hearts with it, and to obey with all our energy.

### ***Decree:***

*I choose Your way, I set my heart on Your laws, I cling to Your statutes, and I run in the path of Your commands!*



**JUNE 9**

***Teach me, LORD, the way of your decrees,  
that I may follow it to the end.***

***Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law  
and obey it with all my heart.***

***Direct me in the path of your commands,  
for there I find delight.***

*(Psalm 119:33-35)*

Martin Luther once said, “The Holy Scriptures require a humble reader who shows reverence and fear toward the Word of God, and constantly says, ‘Teach me. Teach me. Teach me. . . .’” This is the heart of a disciple, one who doesn’t approach the Word with pride, but rather with humility and the desire to learn. What a contrast to so many scholars down the ages, and even too many ordinary Christians, who judge and critique the Bible with their own feeble intellect!

David has this same heart of a disciple. He doesn’t presume to know what the Word says, or that he can truly understand it on his own. Instead he asks God to instruct him in the Word. We see three examples in these verses of David’s desire and willingness to be taught by God:

1. *Teach me, LORD . . . .* The Hebrew word used for “teach” in this verse means “to shoot or aim”, as in shooting an arrow at a target. As one writer puts it, “This word (to point, to shoot), when added to the concept of teaching, meant pointing instruction and aiming it towards the student. It was like being shot by knowledge – an attack, so to speak, which could be burdensome and it could hurt (anyone studying for a final exam knows that), but it could, and would, also illuminate.”
2. *Give me understanding . . . .* David asks for more than mere knowledge, which too often results in the accumulation of facts but little wisdom in how to use them. David seeks discernment; he wants the right perspective; he asks for the ability to act wisely. David desires to know God’s heart behind the words of the Scriptures.
3. *Direct me . . . .* David is asking God for more than just the actions or duties or behaviour the Word demands; he is asking God to direct the path of his life’s journey. David wants his lifestyle to be aligned with God’s Word; his desire is to tread a path that God Himself has set for him, and he knows he will find it in God’s Word.

If we too, like David, approach God’s Word as disciples, we will discover what David did – delight!

***Decree:***

*I choose to be a disciple of Your Word, Lord; I will be taught by You, receive Your understanding, and be directed in Your way!*



**JUNE 10**

***May your unfailing love come to me, LORD,  
your salvation, according to your promise;  
then I can answer anyone who taunts me,  
for I trust in your word.***

*(Psalm 119:41-42)*

We saw earlier that Psalm 119 has been called a love poem about God's Law. This verse is the first time that the word "love" appears in this psalm. David is seeking the experience of God's love – the Hebrew word is *hesed*, which has been translated as love, mercy, goodness, kindness, and even loving-kindness. It refers to God's unfailing, covenant love.

What David is saying here is that God's Word is the manifestation, the demonstration, the overflow of His love. We tend to think of rules and regulations and commands as restrictive measures that originate out of a need for order and justice. But God's laws proceed from His love for us. He wants what is best for us, that we may lead the best life possible.

As Nicky Gumbel puts it, God's Word is "a love letter. The main point of the Bible is to show us how to enter into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ." God, in His infinite love for us, shows us in His Word how to be free from the bondage of sin, and free to worship and serve Him fully!

David knows God; he has experienced His covenant love; he recognizes that God's Word reveals and reflects that love. Therefore, he is able to trust in God's Word, and put his hope in God's promises. He is confident that his obedience to God's Word will be his protection against those who would seek to taunt or reproach him.

But David goes further in his response to God's unfailing love as manifested in the Scriptures. He is able to say, a few verses later, that he loves God's Word. Surely, this is because that Word reveals its author, who is worthy of our love!

***Decree:***

*Your unfailing love comes to me in Your Word, O Lord, and so I put my trust in Your Word.*



**JUNE 11**

***Remember your word to your servant,  
for you have given me hope.***

***My comfort in my suffering is this:***

***Your promise preserves my life.***

*(Psalm 119:49-50)*

As we read the words of this psalm, we may get the impression that David is sitting in the shade, in a green pasture and beside a gently flowing stream, composing this love song about God's Word, while his sheep graze nearby! It may seem to us that it is easy to trust God and praise Him and love Him in such an idyllic setting.

However, the truth is very different. This particular stanza of Psalm 119, along with a few others, is being written in a time of great trouble for David. It is a time of grave injustice for David, where he is being mocked without restraint by arrogant people. The temptation for David in this situation is to compromise on obeying God, presumably by taking matters in his own hands and getting back at his enemies – but David resists, and instead finds his comfort in God's promises. He knows from God's Word that his life is not in the hands of the wicked, but rather preserved in God's loving care.

But David's suffering is not just because of the attacks on him. He is also gripped by indignation for another reason – that the wicked have forsaken God's law. In fact, he is burning with anger at how God's Word is being treated, rather than at his own situation. It is a reflection of David's love for God and His Word, similar to the zeal that Jesus felt when He saw His Father's house being violated.

What do we do when we suffer injustice? What do we feel when we see God's Word being forsaken? Like David, can we be zealous for God, while finding our comfort in His Word?

***Decree:***

***Your Word comforts me in my suffering, and Your promise preserves my life.***



**JUNE 12**

***You are my portion, LORD;***

***I have promised to obey your words.***

***I have sought your face with all my heart;***

***be gracious to me according to your promise.***

*(Psalm 119:57-58)*

It was the fulfilment of centuries of waiting on God's promise, made first to Abraham, that He would settle His people in their own land. Now, under Joshua, after living in tents, oppressed in slavery, and wandering in the wilderness, the land was being allocated to the people of Israel. Every tribe was given its inheritance in the promised land, this land of milk and honey – land that would be further allocated to every clan and every family. But there was one exception. The tribe of Levi, the priestly class, received no land as their inheritance. For God had said, through Moses, that He Himself would be their inheritance, or their portion!

David, of course, would have had the ancestral property that was his portion in Bethlehem. Furthermore, as king, he had vast riches of land and possessions. And yet, in this verse, he echoes what God said of the Levites, and declares it of himself – that the LORD is his portion, his inheritance.

Barnes writes, with regard to David's statement: "God was to David what other people seek in wealth, honour, pleasure, fame. To him, God was all and in all. He asked nothing else."

This desire of David's for God alone is manifested in how he treats God's Word. In this stanza of Psalm 119 alone, David determines to obey God's words, turn his steps to God's statutes, hasten to obey God's commands, not forget God's Law, give thanks for God's righteous laws, and befriend all who follow God's precepts!

And this desire is manifested by him seeking God's face with all his heart. There is a desperation with which David seeks God's presence, to the extent that he is physically weak with longing! Truly, David desired nothing else, and sought nothing else, than God alone – and he recognised God's Word as a key element in achieving his goal.

***Decree:***

***You are my portion, O Lord; I seek Your face with all my heart!***



**JUNE 13**

***The law from your mouth is more precious to me  
than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.***

*(Psalm 119:72)*

There is a video on YouTube, posted by International Christian Concern. Boxes of Bibles are opened in a house church in China. The people rush to pick up Bibles, like a starving mob scrambling for food. Their excitement is palpable. The room is filled with delighted exclamations. Tears can be seen as they hold these precious books in their hands. Some kiss the Bibles reverently. Others smile broadly. “This is what we needed the most . . . This is what we needed,” says one lady. And then there is a solemn silence, as they begin to open the Bibles, reading the words of Scriptures perhaps for the first time in their lives. The picture is grainy and the audio scratchy, but the message is unmistakable. These people love God’s Word. It is precious to them. It is treasure for them. It is what they value.

Jesus spoke of the futility of accumulating possessions on earth, and the need instead to store up treasure in heaven. These Christians in China know that they risk their livelihoods, their freedoms, and even their lives, by possessing a Bible. And yet they are ecstatic when they have one – because God’s Word is more precious to them than all those things.

So too for David. He had everything that a man could desire in worldly terms – power, wealth, status, women, possessions – but God’s Word was more precious to him. Why? Because, as this verse states, it originated from the mouth of God.

We are blessed to have such easy access to God’s Word. But do we treasure it? Let’s pray today that God would give us that same excitement, desire, love, passion, and value for His Word, that we see in these Chinese Christians and in David.

***Decree:***

***Your Word is more precious to me than earthly treasure!***



**JUNE 14**

***Your hands made me and formed me;  
give me understanding to learn your commands.  
May those who fear you rejoice when they see me,  
for I have put my hope in your word.***

*(Psalm 119:73-74)*

The maker of a product usually knows best what that product can do – or not do – and how to make the best use of it. David recognises God is the Creator, and therefore best suited to instruct His creation. There is a general aspect to this truth – God has created all things, so He knows best how the universe works, and how men and women can lead their lives to the fullest. However, David also acknowledges a very specific aspect – God has fashioned David in a special and unique way, and He is able to instruct him in how best to live. To that end, as many have said, God has given us an instruction manual – His Word.

Rick Warren writes:

“Having the right equipment is often the difference between success and failure. To insert a screw, a carpenter doesn’t use a knife. When you’re under anaesthesia, you don’t want your surgeon using a chainsaw. A climber on Mount Everest won’t use dollar store equipment.

Professionals are picky about using the right equipment as they know it can be dangerous if they aren’t.

Life can be dangerous, too, so it’s essential that you use the right equipment.

One of those pieces of equipment is the Bible. It’s like God’s owner’s manual for your life. Like any good owner’s manual, the Bible gives you instructions and you can consult it when you need help. . . . You never know what the day will bring you. But whatever it is, make sure you’re equipped with the Bible, God’s owner’s manual for life.”

Like David, you too have been specially and uniquely created. God had amazing plans and purposes for you, even before you were conceived in your mother’s womb. He desires a wonderful, blessed, full life for you. And He has given you an instruction manual, to show you how to steward His gift of life!

***Decree:***

*You have formed and fashioned me, and have wonderful plans for my life; I will trust Your Word to help me live this life to the fullest!*



**JUNE 15**

***My soul faints with longing for your salvation,  
but I have put my hope in your word.***

*(Psalm 119:81)*

This stanza of Psalm 119 is another one which is written by David in a time of extreme distress. Each verse of this stanza expresses David's suffering:

1. David is faint with longing for God's salvation. He is at the end of his strength, and cannot hold on anymore; he needs God's deliverance.
2. David's eyes are failing, getting weak as he desperately looks for God to comfort him.
3. David says that he has been reduced to the state of a wineskin in the smoke – dark and dingy and worthless.
4. David questions God's delay in punishing those who are persecuting him.
5. David is in danger of falling into the traps that his arrogant enemies have laid out for him.
6. David is being persecuted unjustly, without cause.
7. David cries out that his life is in danger; in fact, his enemies almost succeeded in killing him.

We are reminded of Jesus, who, after all the injustice and rejection and torture He underwent, finally cried out from the cross, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* David does the same in his state of weakness and desperation. He cries out, *"How long . . . ?"* And yet, in the midst of it all, David is still able to say, *"I have put my hope in your word."* Just like Jesus said, *"Into your hands I commit my spirit."*

No matter how dire our circumstances may be, we have the unchangeable and unshakeable Word of God to put our hope in. We can fully trust in the words that God has ordained to be written down in the Bible, no matter what we are feeling!

***Decree:***

*Even in my moments of weakness and desperation, I put my hope in Your Word.*



**JUNE 16**

***Your word, LORD, is eternal;  
it stands firm in the heavens.***

***Your faithfulness continues through all generations;  
you established the earth, and it endures.***

***Your laws endure to this day,  
for all things serve you.***

*(Psalm 119:89-91)*

Tremper Longman lists some common arguments against the Bible, such as:

- The Bible is full of contradictions and discrepancies.
- The Bible's descriptions of nature and natural history are hopelessly at odds with science.
- The Bible was written by ancient and primitive people, and has no value to modern people anymore.

The above statements are fairly standard criticisms of the Bible, not just by those who don't believe, but even by many Christians. The absolute truth of the Bible is doubted. The facts of the Bible are disputed. The relevance of the Bible is questioned.

David has no such doubts or questions or disputes! Today's three verses, which come in the centre of this glorious psalm, are his replies to these arguments against the Word of God.

1. God's Word is eternal, and it stands firm in the heavens. His Word is not outdated or irrelevant to any society or culture or age. The principles in God's Word apply to men and women for all time. In fact, our current, post-modern society needs the Word of God more than ever before! As Jesus said, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*
2. God's Word is faithful and true. David is so confident in the truth of God's Word, he compares it to the solid foundation of the earth itself. Just as we can trust the ground beneath our feet to endure, so too can we put our trust in God's Word. Science is theory, but God's Word is truth!
3. God's Word endures because it is *His* Word, and is given to us for His purposes. All things in heaven and on earth are for God's service, and that includes His Word. Only if we, like David, approach God's Word with humility, will we be able to make sense of the apparent contradictions and discrepancies.

God's Word, written thousands of years ago, over thousands of years, continues to speak His truth to us today. Will we listen?

***Decree:***

***Lord, Your Word is eternal, Your truth is firmly established, and Your laws are relevant even today!***



**JUNE 17**

***Oh, how I love your law!***

***I meditate on it all day long.***

*(Psalm 119:97)*

David loves God's Word. He is consumed by his passion for God's Word. His love comes from his personal experience of God, which has resulted in his love for God's laws. David's is not a mere thirst for knowledge, like so many academics and scholars. He longs to plumb the depths of the Word, and thus of God's heart. And so, David invests his days in meditating on God's Word, and reflecting on it. His education in God's Word is not formal; it comes from his devotion to God, and his desire to be obedient.

David goes on to list the wonderful results of meditating on God's Word: more wisdom than his enemies, more insight than his teachers, and more understanding than the elders. What was the secret of David's deep insight into Scripture, insights that even Jesus remarked upon in His teachings? Why was David so devoted to God's Word? Perhaps it is what David says of God's Word in this stanza of the psalm: *"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth."*

The story is told of William McPherson, who was severely injured when a charge of dynamite exploded in front of his face. Although he survived the blast, he lost his eyes, hands and the feeling in parts of his face. He realized how much the Bible meant to him, and he greatly needed its strength. He could not read it in Braille because of his artificial hands. He tried to place his lips on the dots, but they were numb. He found he could use his tongue to decipher the Moon Type System of dashes. Although the metal left his lips and tongue bleeding and very sore, he prayed to God to help him continue to learn the letters of the alphabet. In the 65 years that followed, he read the Bible through four times with his tongue.

I suspect William McPherson, despite his bleeding lips and tongue, would have said of the Bible what David said: *"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth."*

***Decree:***

***How I love Your Word, O Lord! It is sweeter than honey to my mouth!***



**JUNE 18**

***Your word is a lamp for my feet,  
a light on my path.***

*(Psalm 119:105)*

The terrain of Israel in ancient times was often harsh and dangerous. It was easy to get lost or injured as one travelled the rugged mountains or wilderness. This was especially true in the dark, as there were no paved roads or street lights! David compares the difficulties of travelling in those circumstances to the road of life, with all its pitfalls. And he joyously declares the blessing of having God's Word as a light, not just to show the way, but also to keep us from falling.

Charles Spurgeon writes of this beautiful verse:

“We are walkers through the city of this world, and we are often called to go out into its darkness; let us never venture there without the light giving Word, lest we slip with our feet. Each man should use the Word of God personally, practically, and habitually, that he may see his way and see what lies in it. When darkness settles down upon all around me, the Word of the Lord, like a flaming torch, reveals my way. Having no fixed lamps in eastern towns, in old time each passenger carried a lantern with him that he might not fall into the open sewer, or stumble over the heaps of ordure which defiled the road. This is a true picture of our path through this dark world: we should not know the way, or how to walk in it, if Scripture, like a blazing torch, did not reveal it. One of the most practical benefits of Holy Writ is guidance in the acts of daily life: it is not sent to astound us with its brilliance, but to guide us by its instruction. It is true the head needs illumination, but even more the feet need direction, else head and feet may both fall into a ditch. Happy is the man who personally appropriates God's Word, and practically uses it as his comfort and counsellor, a lamp to his own feet. It is a lamp by night, a light by day, and a delight at all times.”

***Decree:***

*Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light on my path!*



**JUNE 19**

***You are my refuge and my shield;  
I have put my hope in your word.***

*(Psalm 119:114)*

David was in danger many times in his life. He was pursued by King Saul and his army for many years, as he fled from place to place as a fugitive. His life was always threatened when he led Israel in battle against her enemies. And he even faced betrayal and rebellion from his own son, Absalom. Through all these trials, David trusted in God for protection. In today's verse, we get a glimpse of how God's Word played a key part in these times of danger.

David says that God is his refuge. The word is often translated "hiding place". It was a secret place, a covering where he was hidden from the enemy. God is also David's shield, that part of the warrior's armour that protected him from the enemy's weapons. Matthew Henry writes: "Now God was both these to him, a hiding place to preserve him from danger, and a shield to preserve him in danger . . ." And David goes on to connect both these aspects of God's protection to His Word, to putting his hope in God's Word and trusting in Him.

There are times when we have to flee from danger, when we seek a place of refuge – whether from external attacks like persecution, or internal ones like temptation. God's Word can give us the covering we need; His promises of protection will keep our hearts in His peace or purity, as the case may be. At other times, we are called to step into the battle, to put ourselves in danger, whether physical or spiritual, or even cultural or relational. God's Word can be our shield, protecting us from the arrows of the evil one, if we put our trust in it. Whether we are in danger from physical harm or spiritual stumbles, whether we are defending ourselves or attacking the works of the enemy, God's Word gives us the protection we need.

***Decree:***

*You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in Your Word.*



**JUNE 20**

***Because I love your commands  
more than gold, more than pure gold,  
and because I consider all your precepts right,  
I hate every wrong path.***

*(Psalm 119:127-128)*

The corruption of the Church is not a modern phenomenon. In our days, we see ungodly secular and even perverted practices entering the church, and we are astonished. But a cursory look at the history of the church through the ages shows too many instances of compromise with the world's values and principles. In ancient times, especially medieval Europe, the temptation was for power. Today, the church preaches love – and, in her desire to look loving to the world, tolerates wanton evil.

Love and hate often go together. It is impossible to deeply love someone or something, without hating that which violates or contradicts the object of that love. David understood and experienced this dynamic when it came to God's Word. He follows an extravagant proclamation of love with an equally passionate declaration of hate! He says that precisely because he loves God's Word so much – more than pure gold – he hates whatever opposes it.

David's love for God's Word causes him to hate every wrong path. The word that is translated "wrong" actually means "deception or falsehood." What a relevant message for the church today! We are bombarded from every side by false ideologies and practices, and the church all too often adopts an attitude of tolerance and acceptance, calling it "love for sinners."

The truth is, like David, we are called to hate these false beliefs with every fibre of our being. But we will only do so if, again like David, we love God's Word passionately. We cannot counter the relentless propaganda of the world – no, of the devil – if we are not, once again like David, fully convinced of the truth and rightness of God's Word.

Culture and society are degenerating at a pace never seen before. Our children and youth are especially in danger. The antidote is the apparently contrasting, but actually complementary, emotions of love and hate – love for God's Word, and hate for the world's falsehoods.

***Decree:***

***Because I love Your Word, and because I know Your words are true, I hate every deceitful path.***



**JUNE 21**

***Your statutes are wonderful;  
therefore I obey them.***

***The unfolding of your words gives light;  
it gives understanding to the simple.***

***I open my mouth and pant,  
longing for your commands.***

*(Psalm 119:129-131)*

One of the definitions of “wonder” is “rapt attention or astonishment at something awesomely mysterious.” So many things around us can evoke a sense of wonder. The beauty of creation often causes even atheists to marvel – landscapes comprising of soaring mountain peaks and verdant valleys; the extraordinary hues of a sunset; sunlight sparkling on the surface of the sea; the crash and roar of immense waterfalls; the majesty of an elephant or lion; the vastness of space with its countless stars; the list is endless, of course. We are also often amazed at astonishing feats by people, technological advances, and so much more. What about God’s Word?

David says here that God’s Word is wonderful, meaning that it evokes a sense of wonder in him. As he reads God’s laws and statutes and testimonies and promises, David is gripped by astonishment and amazement, he is captivated by what he is reading. Why would this be? The answer is in the next verse – the “unfolding” of God’s words.

God’s Word reveals, above all else, God Himself – His nature, His heart, His desires, His purposes, His will. It reveals His love and mercy and grace and justice; His beauty and majesty; His wisdom. God’s Word illuminates the one who comes to it in humility and surrender, as David does. The mysterious and even inscrutable thoughts and ways of God are revealed to us. Light is shed on what are otherwise unknowable areas of knowledge. Surely even a glimpse into the heart of God would evoke a sense of wonder!

David continues with an almost inevitable conclusion. Even as the unfolding of God’s Word evokes this sense of wonder in him, he longs for more! “*I open my mouth and pant,*” he writes. David uses the image of an animal that is desperately thirsty. In the same way, he longs for more of God through His Word. He opens himself – his heart, mind, spirit – to receive what God would pour into him. And that, of course, evokes a fresh sense of wonder, and a greater longing!

God’s Word is wonderful! Ask Him to evoke a sense of wonder in you, every time you read His Word.

***Decree:***

***Your Word is wonderful; I long for more of You, God.***



**JUNE 22**

***You are righteous, LORD,  
and your laws are right.  
The statutes you have laid down are righteous;  
they are fully trustworthy.***

*(Psalm 119:137-138)*

Maurice Flavius Tiberius, commonly referred to simply as Maurice, was an outstanding general and emperor, who brought a great measure of order and peace to the Byzantine Empire in the sixth century A.D. Towards the end of his reign, dissatisfaction within his army, because of the imposition of high taxes on the people, resulted in a revolt in which he was overthrown. Gibbon records that when the deposed Emperor was led out to be executed, his five sons were murdered one by one before him. As each one of his sons was struck down, Maurice declared this verse from Psalm 119: *“Righteous are you, O LORD, and your laws are right!”*

Once again, David is writing this stanza in a time of danger and trouble. However, he does not take his eyes off God and His Word. It is so easy for believers, especially those who feel they have been righteous, to blame God – or, at the very least, doubt His promises of love and protection – when they are suffering unjustly. But, as Brooks puts it, “David's great care, when he was under the afflicting hand of God, was to clear the Lord of injustice.” No matter what David is going through, he acknowledges God as righteous in all He does.

But it is not God alone who is called righteous by David; he goes on to declare God’s Word as righteous as well. Jesus said that our words proceed from what is in our hearts. The same is true of God’s Word. It is a reflection of who He is – and so, if He is righteous, so is His Word.

We cannot see God, but we can know Him through His Word. But the reverse is also true – if we know God is trustworthy, then so is His Word. It is faithful and steadfast, as He is, and we can trust in His Word to help us lead a righteous life, one that reflects who God is.

***Decree:***

*You are righteous, O Lord, and Your Word is righteous; it will help me lead a righteous life!*



**JUNE 23**

***I call with all my heart; answer me, LORD,  
and I will obey your decrees.***

***I call out to you; save me  
and I will keep your statutes.***

***I rise before dawn and cry for help;  
I have put my hope in your word.***

*(Psalm 119:145-147)*

There is a close relationship between prayer and the Word. Both are means of communication between God and us. We see this relationship in each of today's verses.

1. David is calling out to God with all his heart, seeking His answer, and committing to obey His decrees.
2. David is calling out to God to save him, and he is promising to keep His statutes.
3. David is crying out for God's help in the early hours of the morning, and he declares that his hope is in God's Word.

Prayer and the Word are inseparable aspects of deepening our relationship with God. Just like prayer, reading the Word is also a conversation with God – He speaks, and we respond with obedience and trust. Interestingly, David's promises to obey God's Word in this stanza start out as conditional upon God answering his prayers favourably; and then they just shift to being unconditional!

Spurgeon writes of this connection between prayer and the Word, in David's life:

“He could not expect the Lord to hear him if he did not hear the Lord, neither would it be true that he prayed with his whole heart unless it was manifest that he laboured with all his might to be obedient to the divine will. His object in seeking deliverance was that he might be free to fulfil his religion and carry out every ordinance of the Lord. He would be a free man that he might be at liberty to serve the Lord. Note well that a holy resolution goes well with an importunate supplication: David is determined to be holy, his whole heart goes with that resolve as well as with his prayers. He will keep God's statutes in his memory, in his affections, and in his actions. He will not wilfully neglect or violate any one of the divine laws.”

Just like prayer, God's Word is an invitation into the two-way communication that establishes and deepens relationship. Like David, even as we cry out to God in our struggles and pain, let us resolve to unconditionally keep His Word!

***Decree:***

***My relationship with You will be deepened through my obedience of Your Word.***



**JUNE 24**

***All your words are true;  
all your righteous laws are eternal.***

*(Psalm 119:160)*

From the very early days of the Soviet Union, religion was seen as an evil that had to be wiped out. It was state-sponsored persecution at every level – clergy killed, church buildings confiscated, worship outlawed, and access to the Bible denied. Soviet propaganda mocked and slandered the Bible as a book of fairy tales. For example, a Soviet encyclopedia included the following statements: “The Bible includes myths about the origins of the world and humans . . . . includes religious interpretations of customs, legends, parables . . . . Biblical myths were dismissed in the ancient world . . . . The Bible is playing a reactionary role [with its] falsification of science.” The historicity of Jesus was also denied; He was termed the “mythical founder of Christianity”, and historians were said to have dealt a “devastating blow to church dogmas about the historicity of Christ.”

The Soviet Union was desperate to deny the truth of the Bible, and especially what it records about Jesus Christ, hoping that would put an end to its power and influence. How wrong they were! Nicky Gumbel shares a story of how he distributed Bibles in the USSR in 1977, when Bibles were still illegal. It illustrates the failure of the Soviet state to crush the influence of the Bible.

“On one occasion I followed a man, who was probably in his sixties, down the street after a service. I went up to him and tapped him on the shoulder. There was nobody about. I took out one of my Bibles and handed it to him. For a moment he had an expression of almost disbelief. Then he took from his pocket a New Testament which was probably a hundred years old. The pages were so threadbare, they were virtually transparent. When he realised that he had received a whole Bible, he was elated. He didn’t speak any English and I didn’t speak any Russian. We hugged each other and he started to run down the street jumping for joy . . . .”

As David puts it, God’s Word is true, and it is everlasting. In a real sense, it is eternal precisely because it is true! In this transitory world of falsehoods, we have this treasure of God’s Word – absolutely true and eternal!

***Decree:***

***Your Word is true, and it is everlasting!***



**JUNE 25**

***Great peace have those who love your law,  
and nothing can make them stumble.***

*(Psalm 119:165)*

Peace is something almost everyone desires. The Hebrew word for peace is the well-known word *shalom*. Though it is usually translated peace, its meaning is far richer – completeness, wholeness, well-being, welfare, even prosperity. *Shalom* is the life that God wants for each one of us – life lived to the fullest, in His will and purpose. It is the life that Jesus desires for us, as He says in John 10:10 – “*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*”

David tells us that the secret to living this abundant life, to enjoying the fullness of *shalom* that God desires for us, is to love God’s Word. There is a close relationship between loving God and loving His Word. As Jesus said, “*If you love me, you will obey my commands.*” Too often, our attitude to the Word is religious rather than loving; we dutifully follow its precepts rather than embrace its principles. The result is a life that falls far short of the *shalom* that Jesus desires and the Word promises. When, instead, we love God’s Word, obedience becomes a delight, because we seek to please the One we love, and the result is *shalom*, no matter what our circumstances.

However, there is opposition to the abundant life Jesus promises. It is in the same verse, John 10:10 – “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.*” The enemy of our souls, the devil, hates everything that Jesus stands for, and seeks to thwart His plans for us. As David puts it in today’s verse, he is looking to make us stumble. But the devil will not succeed if we have the *shalom* of God.

How does *shalom* protect us? The Hebrew word picture for *shalom* can be deciphered as follows: “*Destroy the authority that establishes chaos.*” The devil wants to bring chaos into our lives rather than peace. He puts obstacles in our way that cause us to stumble. But if we love God’s Word, then we have His peace, and this *shalom* doesn’t just protect us but actively wars against the enemy’s attacks and schemes!

Jesus came that we might experience *shalom*. Let’s resolve to love God’s Word, that His great peace may truly be our portion!

***Decree:***

*Those who love Your Word have Your shalom, and nothing can make us stumble.*



JUNE 26

*I long for your salvation, LORD,  
and your law gives me delight.  
Let me live that I may praise you,  
and may your laws sustain me.  
I have strayed like a lost sheep.  
Seek your servant,  
for I have not forgotten your commands.*

*(Psalm 119:174-176)*

David began Psalm 119 by declaring the blessedness of those who walk according to God's Word and seek Him with all their heart. Throughout the many verses of the psalm, he has proclaimed his love for God's Word and his commitment to live in obedience to it. And yet, astonishingly, David ends on such a humble note: *"I have strayed . . . Seek me . . ."* It is as if, after David has exhausted all his vocabulary in declaring the excellence of God's Word, he is faced with the reality of his inability to fully obey, apart from God's direct intervention.

Barnes comments on the last verse of Psalm 119, exploring this aspect of David's humility before God:

"I am a wanderer. I have lost the path to true happiness. I have strayed away from my God. I see this; I confess it; I desire to return. It is remarkable that this is almost the only confession of sin in the psalm. This psalm, more than any other, abounds in confident statements respecting the life of the author, his attachment to the law of God, the obedience which he rendered to that law, and his love for it – as well as with appeals to God, founded on the fact that he did love that law, and that his life was one of obedience. This is not, indeed, spoken in a spirit of self-righteousness, or as constituting a claim on the ground of merit; but it is remarkable that there is so frequent reference to it, and so little intermingling of a confession of sin, of error, of imperfection. The psalm would not have been complete as a record of religious experience, or as illustrating the real state of the human heart, without a distinct acknowledgment of sin, and hence, in its close, and in view of his whole life, upright as in the main it had been, the psalmist confesses that he had wandered; that he was a sinner; that his life had been far from perfection, and that he needed the gracious interposition of God to seek him out, and to bring him back."

May David's prayer be ours as well, for we continually stray like lost sheep from God's Word. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who graciously seeks us out. And, more often than not, He uses His Word to restore us.

**Decree:**

*Even though I have strayed like a lost sheep, Jesus will seek me out and restore me, for I have not forgotten His Word!*



**JUNE 27**

***No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*** (2 Peter 1:20-21)

There are five common theories of the inspiration of the Bible:

1. The neo-orthodox view, which states that the Bible is fallible words written by fallible men, yet through which God chooses to speak to us. In effect, the Bible isn't inspired at all!
2. The dictation view, which has God speaking the words, and men writing them down like secretaries. This is obviously true of many of the prophetic parts of the Bible, but not of other parts.
3. The theory of limited inspiration states that parts of the Bible are directly inspired by God while others are of human origin; that is, the Bible is not the Word of God, but contains the Word of God.
4. The dynamic inspiration view believes that God revealed His Word to the authors, but allowed them to express it in their own words.
5. Finally, the orthodox belief is called the theory of verbal, plenary inspiration. It states that every single word in the Bible is the very Word of God. Today's verses from 2 Peter are seen as undergirding this belief. The word for "carried along" was also used for a sail catching the wind and causing the boat to move on the water. So, human authors caught the wind of the Spirit as they wrote the Scriptures. Thus, they are the very words of God, but reflect the individual personalities of their writers.

We can see, from these different theories, that the problem has always been how to reconcile the fact that the Bible is God's Word with its having been written by more than thirty-five authors over several millennia. Like so many things to do with God, the answer may be a mystery! But that need not stop us from trusting the Bible as God's Word. I love Nicky Gumbel's analogy in his Alpha talk, "*How and why should I read the Bible?*":

"Sir Christopher Wren, the greatest English architect of his time, built St. Paul's Cathedral. He started aged 44 in the year 1676, and for 35 years the cathedral was built under one architect. It was completed in 1711, when Wren was 79 years of age. Sir Christopher Wren 'built' St. Paul's Cathedral. But actually he didn't lay a single stone. Other people put the stones in. Many different builders were involved. But there was one mind, one architect, one inspiration behind it. And so it is with the Bible—many different writers, one architect, one inspiration behind it all: God Himself."

***Decree:***

*The Bible is God's Word, written as its human authors were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*



**JUNE 28**

***For the word of the LORD is right and true;  
he is faithful in all he does.***

*(Psalm 33:4)*

Psalm 33 is a song of praise. “*Sing joyfully to the LORD,*” is how it begins. It goes on to list some of the things God has done that are worthy of our praise: the creation of the universe, the defeat of His enemies, and the covenant love by which He blesses His people. These are examples of the works of God that are praiseworthy, and they are a reflection of who He is. So is His Word – it is right and true, and therefore, so are His works. This is because of an important reality that is revealed in the very first page of the Bible – God’s Word is powerful, and brings His will into being.

Again and again, in Genesis chapter 1, we read the words, “*God said . . . . And it was so . . . . And God saw that it was good.*” As the psalmist puts it later on in Psalm 33, “*For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.*” God’s Word brought into existence everything that was on God’s heart, and it reflected God’s nature.

Charles Spurgeon writes of Psalm 33:4:

“For the word of the Lord is right. His ordinances both natural, moral, and spiritual, are right, and especially his incarnate Word, who is the Lord our righteousness. Whatever God has ordained must be good, and just, and excellent. There are no anomalies in God's universe, except what sin has made; his word of command made all things good. . . . And all his works are done in truth. His work is the outflow of his word, and it is true to it. He neither does nor says anything ill; in deed and speech he agrees with himself and the purest truth. There is no lie in God's word, and no sham in his works; in creation, providence, and revelation, unalloyed truth abounds.”

We can be certain that all that God has done and is doing and will do is good – right, true, faithful – because He is good. And we can put our trust in His Word, because it is the instrument that accomplishes His good, pleasing, and perfect will in the world.

***Decree:***

***God’s Word is true, and all His works are true!***



**JUNE 29**

***The decrees of the LORD are firm,  
and all of them are righteous.  
They are more precious than gold,  
than much pure gold;  
they are sweeter than honey,  
than honey from the honeycomb.***

*(Psalm 19:9-10)*

I love sweet things. My worst nightmare is getting diabetes, and being told I can't have sweets anymore. To paraphrase Patrick Henry, "Give me sweets or give me death!" After all, life without sweets would be nothing but a slow, torturous death! I suspect I am not alone in having these thoughts, as evidenced by the popularity of sweets all over the world, despite the endless warnings by doctors, health advisors, and dietary experts.

Honey was the standard of sweetness in biblical times. Canaan, the promised land, was described by God as "*flowing with milk and honey.*" David often referred to the sweetness of honey in his psalms. So, it is no wonder that the sweetness of honey is used to describe the sweetness of God's Word. In fact, the prophet Ezekiel and the apostle John were both instructed to eat scrolls with God's words written on them. And when they did so, it was described as sweet as honey in their mouths.

Several times in the Bible we see the health benefits of honey, of its ability to revive and rejuvenate. But Solomon wrote: "*Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul and health to the bones.*" What words could be more pleasant than God's Word?! It is not just sweet – that is, delightful to our senses, and something we should desire. It also releases health into our whole beings – heart, mind, soul, spirit, and body.

Let me return to my love – well, most people's love – of sweets. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we loved and desired and delighted in God's Word the same way? We need to taste the sweetness of God's Word, and trust the health it brings to every part of our lives. As Spurgeon writes, "The sweetest joys, yea, the sweetest of the sweetest falls to his portion who has God's truth to be his heritage."

***Decree:***

***God's Word is sweeter than honey; it is sweet to my soul and health to my bones!***



**JUNE 30**

***As the rain and the snow  
come down from heaven,  
and do not return to it  
without watering the earth  
and making it bud and flourish,  
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,  
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:  
It will not return to me empty,  
but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.***

*(Isaiah 55:10-11)*

Peter Pett writes of these two verses:

“God declares that His powerful Word works like the God-given rain and snow, and it is all under His control. Just as the rain goes forth and does not immediately return, so it is with His Word. It continues its work day by day, season by season, it waters and feeds, it brings about new birth, it produces, first buds, and then full grain, which reproduce themselves both to provide further grain and to feed men’s bodies, and it will finally result in a forested, evergreen, thorn-free world that bears testimony to its Creator. . . . This is also what God’s Word accomplishes. It too brings about His will and prospers in His purposes. And the Paradise that will result will be all His work. Here, as elsewhere in the Scripture, the Word of God is seen as a powerful and living, almost personal, force that goes forth to accomplish what it wants to do. As in the account of creation, God speaks, and His purpose is fulfilled.”

We are so prone to disappointment in God’s Word. When His promises don’t come to pass in the way that we expect, or according to our timeline, we get discouraged. It is so easy to doubt God’s faithfulness and the efficacy of His Word. But we are encouraged by these verses to not give up on God’s Word, and not to neglect its study and application.

Let us end this month’s devotions on the Word of God with the exhortation of Martin Luther, the catalyst of the Protestant Reformation and his rallying cry of *sola scriptura*:

“The neglect of Scripture, even by spiritual leaders, is one of the greatest evils in the world. Everything else, arts or literature, is pursued and practiced day and night, and there is no end of labour and effort; but Holy Scripture is neglected as though there were no need of it. . . . But its words are not, as some think, mere literature; they are words of life, intended not for speculation and fancy but for life and action. . . . May Christ our Lord help us by His Spirit to love and honour His holy Word with all our hearts. Amen.”

***Decree:***

*Your Word will not return to You empty, but will accomplish what You desire and achieve the purpose for which You sent it!*



# Love one another

*A new command I give you:*

*Love one another.*



JULY

**JULY 1**

***A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.***

*(John 13:34-35)*

A new command to love one another? The command to love was as old as the Law that God gave Moses. What Jesus means here is that He is commanding a new way to love. We are to love one another in the same way that He loved us. That will be our greatest witness to the world around us, and will stir those around us to love like Jesus as well.

In his book, *Miracle on the River Kwai*, Ernest Gordon tells the following story of Scottish prisoners of war forced to build a railroad by their Japanese captors:

“A shovel was missing. The officer in charge became enraged. He demanded that the missing shovel be produced, or else. When nobody in the squadron budged, the officer got his gun and threatened to kill them all on the spot . . . . It was obvious the officer meant what he had said. Then, finally, one man stepped forward. The officer put away his gun, picked up a shovel, and beat the man to death. When it was over, the survivors picked up the bloody corpse and carried it with them to the second tool check. This time, no shovel was missing. Indeed, there had been a miscount at the first check point.

The word spread like wildfire through the whole camp. An innocent man had been willing to die to save the others! . . . . The incident had a profound effect. . . . The men began to treat each other like brothers.

When the victorious Allies swept in, the survivors, human skeletons, lined up in front of their captors . . . . and, instead of attacking their captors, insisted: 'No more hatred. No more killing. Now what we need is forgiveness.' ”

One man loved his fellow prisoners like Jesus, and it transformed the others around him to do the same!

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help me to love others as You have loved me, and may that be my witness to the world.*



**JULY 2**

***Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.***

*(Romans 15:7)*

The desire to be accepted is universal. It is one of the most powerful motivators of behaviour, as evidenced by the power of peer pressure. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “accept” as “to give admittance or approval.” The meaning of the word in Greek is even more forceful – “to take to oneself, to aggressively receive, with strong personal interest.” And this is exactly how Jesus has accepted us.

In the gospels, we see Jesus often spending time with those society did not accept. In Luke 15, we read the following: *“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes [that is, accepts] sinners and eats with them.’ ”* We are not told exactly who these sinners are, but the word refers to those who were considered detestable. On other occasions, we see Jesus accepting women who were considered immoral or unclean.

Jesus, the Son of God, absolutely sinless and holy and pure, was willing to accept those whom even society considered too sinful. He received them with strong personal interest. He admitted them into His presence. This doesn’t mean that He condoned their sinful lifestyles or choices; on the contrary, He exposed their sin, not with condemnation but in love, and transformed their lives.

Jesus does the same for us; and, Paul says, we should therefore do the same for one another. People are different, even within the church. We come from different backgrounds. We struggle with different issues. And it is natural to include only those who are similar to us or conform, and exclude the rest, especially those we consider sinners. But Jesus accepts us, warts and all. When we accept those who are different, maybe even in the wrong, we imitate Jesus, and we create the possibility of transformation.

And the result is that God is glorified!

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help me to accept others, just as You accept me.*



**JULY 3**

***Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace.***

*(2 Corinthians 13:11)*

“Encourage one another,” Paul writes. There are more than one hundred verses in the Bible that speak of encouragement. Merriam-Webster defines “encourage” as “to inspire with courage, spirit or hope.” I think the essence of encouragement is found in the word itself – when we encourage someone, we give them courage to do something that might be difficult or fearful for them. The Hebrew word for encourage actually means “to strengthen, to cause to stand firm”; and that is exactly what we are called to do for one another.

But let’s focus on the word that Paul uses in today’s verse. It is *parakaleo*, the root of a very well-known word, *parakletos*. In John 14:16, Jesus says to His disciples, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever . . . .” The word Jesus uses, not once but four times for the Holy Spirit, is *parakletos*. The Holy Spirit is also called the Paraclete in theological writings.

What does this mean? The essential nature of the Holy Spirit is to encourage! He encourages us to follow Jesus, to obey Him, and to become more like Him. He encourages us in our lostness by revealing Jesus to us, He encourages us to lead holy lives by convicting us of sin, He encourages us toward maturity by giving us spiritual gifts and operating them through us, and so much more. Without the Holy Spirit, even if we somehow came to believe in Jesus, we would fall away very quickly. He is the Encourager.

And so, when we encourage one another, we are merely imitating the Holy Spirit. We are being exhorted by Paul to do what the Holy Spirit does, because even as He is the Spirit of Jesus, we are the Body of Christ. Maybe today you could ask God to show you someone who needs encouragement; and then, encourage them as the Holy Spirit enables you.

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, make me an encourager like the Holy Spirit!*



**JULY 4**

***Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.***

*(Romans 12:10)*

The word for love that Paul uses in this verse is the Greek for family love. The church is not just fellowship or community; it is family. John chapter 1 tells us that those who believe in the name of Jesus are children of God. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, whether we like it or not! There is a common saying that we can choose our friends but not our family. This is also true of our church family. There should be a special affection shared between members of God's family, because we have been divinely adopted, and we have the same heavenly Father.

This brotherly love is also manifested by the honour that we give each other. This means that we respect one another, and view each other with value. I think one of the hardest things we are called to do is seen in the words "*above yourselves.*" We are exhorted by Paul to counter our natural tendency to put ourselves first and to put others down, and instead honour them even above ourselves.

Barclay writes: "More than half the trouble that arises in Churches concerns rights and privileges and prestige. Someone has not been given his or her place; someone has been neglected or unthanked. The mark of the truly Christian man has always been humility. One of the humblest of men was that great saint and scholar Principal Cairns. Someone recollects an incident which showed Cairns as he was. He was a member of a platform party at a great gathering. As he appeared there was a tremendous burst of applause. Cairns stood back to let the man next him pass, and began to applaud himself; he never dreamed that the applause was for him."

Imagine a church where each one was devoted to, and honoured, the other above themselves! We would truly represent and reflect Jesus Christ!

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help me to be devoted in love to my brothers and sisters in Christ, and to honour them above myself.*



**JULY 5**

***You were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.*** *(Galatians 5:13)*

The believers in Galatia had come to believe in Jesus, after hearing Paul's message of salvation by grace through faith. Then, some teachers came later, and convinced them that they needed to follow the Law of Moses as well, in order to be saved. This led them into a form of legalism that was oppressive and enslaving. So, Paul forcefully admonishes them for receiving these false doctrines, and steers them back to the freedom that is in Christ. However, it is human nature to go to one extreme or the other – to let rules be corrupted into the slavery of legalism, or to let freedom result in indulgence of our desires. The Galatians had fallen into the trap of the former, and Paul now warns them of the danger of the latter.

The same is true for us. We were set free from slavery to our sinful nature, the world, and the devil, when we received the work of the cross in our lives. But, too often, we either exchange that freedom for a legalistic form of Christianity – religion rather than relationship – or we indulge the sinful desires of our flesh, taking God's grace and mercy and love for granted. Paul tells us the true purpose for which we have been set free – to serve one another!

The word that Paul uses for serve is from the root *doulos*, which is most commonly used in the New Testament for a servant. It means a slave; it was the word used for those who had no personal rights, and were entirely governed by their owners. Even their very lives were at the mercy of their masters. It is one of the beautiful and amazing paradoxes of the Christian life – we have been freed in order to be slaves, not by force but out of choice, not to serve reluctantly or dutifully, but out of love.

Imagine a church where each of us laid down our rights and served the other humbly in love! We would transform our world in no time at all!

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help me to use my freedom to serve others humbly in love, rather than to indulge my sinful desires.*



**JULY 6**

***I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another.***

*(Romans 15:14)*

The growth and maturity of the Body of Christ is the responsibility of the whole Body, not just the leadership. No wonder the phrase “*one another*” appears so many times in the New Testament. Here, Paul tells the Christians in Rome that they have the responsibility of instructing one another. One would assume that this is a role that would be reserved exclusively for the church leadership. But, as Matthew Henry writes of this verse, “It is a comfort to faithful ministers to see their work superseded by the gifts and graces of their people. How gladly would ministers leave off their admonishing work, if people were able and willing to admonish one another!”

The phrase “to instruct” can mean a number of things – to admonish, warn, counsel, and exhort. It refers to the process of reasoning with someone and appealing to their mind. Thus, Paul presents a picture of church that is very different from what we commonly see, where the sole source of instruction and admonition is the pastor or elder. Instead, instruction in the church is meant to be far more dynamic and organic and participatory – a function of not just the leadership, but the entire community.

However, Paul gives two qualifications for those who would instruct others in the Body of Christ:

1. Goodness – a personal quality that is reflected primarily in kindness to others, in desiring to benefit them.
2. Knowledge – not merely factual information, but experiential knowledge that is able to connect theory with application.

As Calvin puts it, “[Paul] ascribes both these qualifications to the Romans, bearing them a testimony — that they were themselves sufficiently competent, without the help of another, to administer mutual exhortations: for he admits, that they abounded both in kindness and wisdom. It hence follows, that they were able to exhort.”

If these two qualities are absent, our instruction of one another is likely to cause more harm than good. So, it becomes our responsibility to excel in goodness and knowledge, that we too may be able to instruct one another.

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, fill me with goodness and knowledge, and enable me to instruct others in Your Body.*



**JULY 7**

***Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.*** *(Romans 13:8)*

The phrase “pay it forward” was popularised by a bestselling novel of that name written by Catherine Ryan Hyde in 1999 and made into a Hollywood movie the following year. The concept, however, has ancient origins. It was a key plot element in a 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Athenian play, and was rediscovered by Benjamin Franklin, when he urged a friend of his to repay a favour by doing good to someone else and asking that person to do the same in turn.

Paul writes here that every Christian has a duty to “pay it forward.” What are we paying forward? The love that we have received from Jesus. Each one of us is indebted to God for what Christ has done for us on the cross. The Father so loved us that He gave His only Son. And the Son loved us so much that, while we were yet sinners, He died for us. As the early Church Father Origen puts it, “The debt of love remains with us permanently and never leaves us; this is a debt which we both discharge every day and forever owe.”

How do we repay this love? One way, Paul says, is by loving one another. True, it is a debt that will never be fully repaid – but it is also a debt that we can have great joy in repaying!

Interestingly, Paul draws a connection between loving others and fulfilling the law. What he means is that, when we obey God’s commandments – that is, we love God – we also love one another. Barclay writes: “It is Paul's claim that if a man honestly seeks to discharge this debt of love, he will automatically keep all the commandments. . . . There is a famous saying, ‘Love God--and do what you like.’ If love is the mainspring of a man's heart, if his whole life is dominated by love for God and love for his fellow men, he needs no other law.”

The Christian life is one of “paying forward” the most incredible gift of love ever – the Son of God hanging on a cross for sinful man. And we are privileged, by our acts of love, to invite the world to receive this same gift.

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, may I never fail to repay my continuing debt to You, by loving others!*



**JULY 8**

***Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.***

*(Ephesians 4:2)*

Are there some members of your church that you don't get along with? Do some of their mannerisms annoy you? Do you get irritated by some things during the worship service? If you answered "No" to these three questions, you're in line for sainthood! For the rest of us, the answer is a resounding and hapless "Yes!" We get annoyed and irritated by so much, don't we? – the person who is too friendly, the choir member who's always late for practice, the enthusiastic congregant who sings loudly and off-key, the testimony that becomes a mini-sermon, the prayer that meanders endlessly – I'm sure each one of us can add to the list!

However, we are exhorted by Paul to bear with one another in love. He is not speaking merely of tolerating minor irritants, though, of course, those would be included. The one time Jesus uses the same word, this is what He said: *"O unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with [or bear with] you?"* Sometimes it may be very hard to bear with one another, but we are commanded to do so. Paul recommends three qualities that will enable us to do so:

1. Humility, which refers to lowliness of mind – having a humble opinion of ourselves, by comparing ourselves to the Lord rather than to others.
2. Gentleness, which refers to having our instincts and passions under control – so that we submit their exercise to God's control.
3. Patience, which refers to the opposite of being short-tempered – the KJV translation of this word is longsuffering, which paints a vivid picture of this quality!

Jesus, of course, had all of these qualities, which is why He was able to bear with His disciples despite all their shortcomings and failures – and the result was a community that turned the world upside down! We are called to imitate Him – and the result will surely be the same!

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help us to be completely humble, gentle, and patient, bearing with one another in love.*



**JULY 9**

***Agree with one another in what you say and may there be no divisions among you, but be perfectly united in mind and thought.*** (1 Corinthians 1:10)

One of the major scandals of the Church is our disunity. Estimates of how many denominations there are in the world today range from 1,100 to over 30,000. Of course, the larger numbers include the countless non-denominational house churches – but you get the picture, and it isn't a pretty one! The witness of God's people to the world is terribly weakened by our divisions. Most people think that it was the Protestant Reformation that sparked this disunity, but, as today's verse shows, division in the Church is as old as the Church itself!

The fledgling church that Paul had established in Corinth was in trouble. Various factions had been formed, based on which leader they claimed to follow. This would appear to refer to some key doctrines that each leader focused on. However, ironically, the leaders themselves – that is, Paul, Apollos, and Cephas – were completely united! The result of these divisions was pride and conflict, as each clique sought to establish their superiority.

We may not be able to do much about denominational divisions, but we can work towards unity within our local church or community of believers. How do we do this? Paul exhorts the Corinthians, and also us, to *“agree with one another in what you say.”* The familiar saying that *“what unites us is greater than what divides us”* is surely true of every local church, and we can focus on declaring those things rather than emphasizing our differences, especially before the world. However, Paul doesn't ignore the diversity that makes up the church. The word that is translated *“perfectly united”* refers to the mending of a garment by knitting. We are exhorted to be knit together in mind and thought, to allow the Spirit of God and our identity in Christ to bring us together despite our differences, so that what results is one beautiful garment!

Then the world will witness the family that Jesus deserves.

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help us as a church to agree with one another, and be perfectly knit together!*



**JULY 10**

***Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.*** (1 Peter 1:22)

The Christian life is meant to be characterized by love. Peter tells us to love one another deeply, from the heart. The context of this exhortation is the new life we enter into when we are born again. We are purified by the blood of Jesus, we walk in obedience to His Word, and we experience the love of our new family in Christ. These are precious gifts, and our response should be to love one another deeply.

The phrase actually means “to love earnestly, strenuously, fervently.” We are called to be fully stretched out, to extend ourselves in love. Like a wire that is completely taut and without slack, we are called to love to our full potential, without letting up. This is the love that is termed “*agape*”, the love that Jesus has for us, and that we are to show to one another.

D. L. Moody shares the following anecdote:

“Show me a church where there is love, and I will show you a church that is a power in the community. In Chicago a few years ago a little boy attended a Sunday school I know of. When his parents moved to another part of the city the little fellow still attended the same Sunday school, although it meant a long, tiresome walk each way. A friend asked him why he went so far, and told him that there were plenty of others just as good nearer his home.

‘They may be as good for others, but not for me,’ was his reply.

‘Why not?’ she asked.

‘Because they love a fellow over there,’ he replied. . . .

Let love replace duty in our church relations, and the world will soon be evangelized.”

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help us to love one another deeply – earnestly, strenuously, fervently!*



**JULY 11**

***Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.***  
*(Ephesians 5:18-19)*

The Christian life, Jesus said, is one of being in the world but not of the world. The more we are exposed to the godless and depraved values of the world, the greater is the temptation to retreat into our Christian enclaves and wait for Jesus' return! But we are commanded to be in the world and make a difference instead. Of course, the first step is to not let ourselves be influenced by the world. Too often, the church takes on the values of the world, and believers' lives look no different from everyone else's. As someone has said, we are to be like scuba divers – in the water, but breathing air that we take with us.

How do we keep ourselves from being corrupted by the world? In Ephesians 5, Paul contrasts the pagan life with a Christian one. He says that instead of being intoxicated with wine, we should be filled with – or by – the Spirit. Not just as a one-time event, but continually. And he gives us one way in which we can, not just be filled ourselves, but help others in the Body to be filled with the Spirit as well – through worship!

Most of our worship is directed towards God, as it should be. However, there is also a place for songs that are directed towards others – that is, songs that declare and proclaim who God is and what He has done. When we declare the goodness of God, when we proclaim His mighty works of the past, when we remember His promises, we are encouraging and building each other up. And the power of these declarations is magnified when they are done in song, because music has a unique and powerful impact on human beings. Paul uses words that cover the whole range of spiritual music – psalms, hymns, songs; in the next verse he also includes the melody of instruments. The Holy Spirit loves variety; in fact, as today's verse says, He is the One who inspires these songs, and enables us to be filled continually!

***Prayer:***

*Holy Spirit, fill me continually; and enable me to help others be filled as well, through music and songs that You inspire.*



**JULY 12**

***In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.***

*(Philippians 2:5)*

In Philippians 2, Paul is instructing the believers in how they should behave with one another. He asks them to do two extremely difficult things – to consider others better than themselves, and to look not only to their own interests but to the interests of others as well. While most of us would love to be as selfless and humble as Paul exhorts, the truth is that our egos and selfish desires get in the way! What is the solution?

Paul says, *“have the same mindset as Jesus.”* The Amplified Bible translates this as having *“the same attitude and purpose and mind”* as Jesus. Jesus is our example of the humility and selflessness that should characterise our relationships, especially within the church. Paul goes on to describe these attributes of Jesus in the verses that follow.

J. B. Phillips, in his translation of Philippians 2:5-8, paints a vivid picture of Christ’s humility:

*“Let Christ himself be your example as to what your attitude should be. For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God’s equal, but stripped himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man. And, having become man, he humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, and the death he died was the death of a common criminal.”*

If our Lord and Saviour, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, was willing to humble Himself in such a manner, should we not be willing to do likewise? As Dr. Robert Neighbour writes, *“Shall we exalt ourselves, when He humbled Himself? Shall we demand to live, when He was willing to die? Shall we demand in death, a bed of roses, when He died on a rugged Cross? Shall we seek to die mid our friends, when He died between His enemies?”*

Can we not put aside our ego and selfish desires, and relate to one another with the same heart and mind and attitude of Jesus? Surely we can, with the help of the Holy Spirit!

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, may I have Your mindset in my relationships with others!*



**JULY 13**

***If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*** (1 John 1:7)

Someone who called himself a “solitary Christian” posted the following: “I prefer this lifestyle because I experience more quality time with my daily prayer and meditation in communion with God. My spiritual light stays bright. . . . These days, I still go to church but as an anonymous member. (I am seen but not seen). Ever since becoming a hermit, my love for God is both immense and prolonged. It suits my personality.”

Sounds super spiritual, doesn't it? And most of us would know someone like this, someone who says they are serious believers but not really “into church”! The apostle John would probably say to every solitary Christian – “you've got it wrong!” As he writes in this verse, if we walk in the light – that is, if we have fellowship with God – then we have fellowship with one another. So it would seem impossible – or, at the very least, incomplete – to be a solitary Christian. The word translated “fellowship” is the beautiful and rich Greek word “*koinonia*”. It means participation, communion, sharing, contributory help, association, community, partnership. It is the kind of church we see in Acts.

Jessica Brodie describes *koinonia* in this way:

“It is a shared community that involves deep, close-knit participation among its people. While some are tempted to substitute the word “fellowship” for *koinonia*, it's far deeper. Fellowship is a more surface-level, friendly relationship, while *koinonia* is full, intimate unity. And it's an important element in the New Testament particularly, as the apostles became filled with the Holy Spirit and then helped establish the first communities of new believers, who shared not only in the Spirit, but also in all aspects of life together, from meals and homes to money. . . .

In the Bible, *koinonia* is more than friendship. It is a divinely intimate, holy unity among believers—and between believers and the Lord—involving everything from spiritual oneness in the Holy Spirit, community life, sharing contributions from money to food gifts, and the communion partaken in the body and blood of Christ Jesus.”

“*Koinonia*” is, in effect, all of the “one anothers” we are looking at in this month's devotions! And the solitary Christian who is disengaged from church is, sadly, missing out on one of the most precious gifts Christ has given His children.

**Prayer:**

*Lord Jesus, as I walk in Your light, help me to experience true fellowship in Your church.*



**JULY 14**

***Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.***

*(1 Peter 4:9)*

The word “hospitality” in Greek literally means “loving strangers.” Though Peter is speaking of being hospitable to those who were part of the church, these were often strangers coming from distant places, recommended by nothing other than the faith that they shared with the host.

Barclay comments on this verse: “First, Peter urges upon his people the duty of hospitality. Without hospitality the early church could not have existed. The travelling missionaries who spread the good news of the gospel had to find somewhere to stay and there was no place for them to stay except in the homes of Christians. Such inns as there were, were impossibly dear, impossibly filthy and notoriously immoral. Thus we find Peter lodging with one Simon a tanner, and Paul and his company were to lodge with one Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple. Many a nameless one in the early church made Christian missionary work possible by opening the doors of his house and home. Not only did the missionaries need hospitality, the local churches also needed it. For two hundred years there was no such thing as a church building. The church was compelled to meet in the houses of those who had bigger rooms and were prepared to lend them for the services of the congregation. Thus we read of the church which was in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, and of the church which was in the house of Philemon. Without those who were prepared to open their homes, the early church could not have met for worship at all. It is little wonder that again and again in the New Testament the duty of hospitality is pressed upon the Christians.”

The situation may be different today, but the exhortation remains the same. We are part of the family of God, and being hospitable is not optional but a key aspect of the Christian life, even if we don't feel very hospitable!

Stephen Rhodes writes: “. . . most of us know what true hospitality feels like. It means being received openly, warmly, freely, without any need to prove ourselves. Hospitality makes us feel worthy, because our host assumes we are worthy. This is the kind of hospitality that we have experienced from God, and all that God asks is that we go and do likewise . . .”

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help me to be hospitable without grumbling.*



**JULY 15**

***Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*** (Colossians 3:13)

In today's verse, Paul says to forgive as we have been forgiven. In fact, we will never be able to forgive as we have been forgiven, because the sheer multitude and magnitude of our sins that God has forgiven will never compare to the petty things we need to forgive! Jesus prepared His disciples, which includes us, to be a forgiving community, with this parable in Matthew 18:

*Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"*

*Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times [or seventy times seven]."*

*"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.*

*"At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.*

*"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.*

*"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'*

*"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.*

*"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.*

*"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."*

Today, examine your heart to see if you are harbouring unforgiveness toward anyone – and, in obedience, simply forgive as Christ has forgiven you!

**Prayer:**

*Lord Jesus, thank You for forgiving me! Help me to forgive as You have forgiven me.*



**JULY 16**

***Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister. For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.*** (1 John 3:10-11)

In John's gospel, the apostle tells us that, to all who received Jesus and believed in Him, Jesus gave the right to become children of God. But here, in his first epistle, John says that we are not God's children if we don't do two things – do what is right, and love one another. Doing what is right, obeying God's commandments, is a key aspect of loving God. But John holds it on par with loving others, especially our family in Christ. Too often, we find it easier to love God than one another, and even use the activities that signify our love for God as excuses to avoid loving one another.

The well-known parable of the Good Samaritan is a stark example of this separation between loving God and others. It is found in Luke chapter 10:

*“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ ”*

The priest and the Levite were going about God's business. They served in the temple. They probably did not want to touch the man lying on the road in case he was dead, and they were subsequently defiled and prevented from carrying out their temple duties. But, In John's words, their lack of love for the man negated – and even gave the lie to – their professed love for God. It was the Samaritan man, though not even considered part of the people of God, and forbidden from entering the temple, who showed that he was truly a child of God by caring for his neighbour.

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help my love for You to be manifested by my love for others.*



**JULY 17**

***Encourage one another daily, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.***

*(Hebrews 3:13)*

The writer of Hebrews has a stern warning for the church in chapter 3 of the epistle. He looks back to one of the darkest and most tragic events in Israel's history – their refusal to enter the promised land. He writes: *“Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.”*

The people of God had been rescued from slavery in Egypt. They had been witness to some of the most extraordinary miracles in history. They had the tangible and manifest presence of God with them day and night. And yet, when it came to entering the promised land of Canaan, they preferred to trust the fearful report of ten men, rather than believe the God who had done so much for them. Even the positive reports of Joshua and Caleb, and the desperate pleas of Moses and Aaron, failed to change their minds. This was because their hearts had been hardened by their unbelief.

This is what we are being warned against: *“See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.”* What is one important defense that we have against our hearts being hardened? Encouragement! Remember that when we encourage one another, we are imitating the work of the Holy Spirit, who is called the *Paraclete* (or Encourager).

The devil is the father of lies, and he deceives us into sinful unbelief. But we can counter his evil schemes by encouraging one another, not rarely but daily, so that our hearts remain soft to God's Word, and our faith is not shaken by the devil's lies. Is there anyone in your church or fellowship who is struggling in their faith? Maybe they just need to be encouraged. Maybe you can be the one to encourage them!

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help us to encourage one another daily, that none may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*



**JULY 18**

***Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.***

*(Ephesians 5:21)*

In Ephesians 5 and 6, Paul speaks of three examples of submission – wives to husbands, children to parents, and slaves to masters. While on the face of it, he seems to be simply affirming the social and cultural norms, not just of that time but of all biblical history, Paul is actually doing something quite revolutionary. In ancient society, wives had no choice but to submit to their husbands, children had to compulsorily obey their parents, and slaves were at the mercy of their masters. However, everything changes when we are in Christ. Paul makes submission a voluntary act for the disciple of Jesus!

Paul starts this section on submission in relationships with an even more astonishing statement – *“Submit to one another!”* Not because society demands or expects it, but out of reverence for Christ. When we live our lives in the constant awareness of who Christ is and what He has done for us, we find it easy to submit to one another.

What does submission mean? The Greek literally is “to arrange under.” In the context of the church, therefore, it is to be under God’s arrangement and to submit to His plan. When we are fully submitted to God, the various relationships in the church fall into their proper arrangement. The wife willingly submits to a husband who is ready to lay his life down for her. The children submit to a father who is careful not to provoke them. The slaves submit to masters who know that they have a Master in heaven themselves.

It is an amazing picture of church that Paul is painting here – one of mutual submission. It is a community where the power structures that society mandates are replaced by relationships where the weaker parties choose to submit and the stronger ones choose to serve. And the motivation and foundation for every relationship is reverence for Christ.

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help us to submit to one another out of reverence for You!*



**JULY 19**

***And this is God's command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.*** *(1 John 3:23)*

The apostle John is known as the Apostle of Love, and rightly so. Over a quarter of the references to “love” in the New Testament are in John’s books. In this verse, he continues to exhort us to love, but, in addition, connects it to belief in Jesus.

Barclay expounds on what it means to believe in the name of Jesus:

“We must believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ. Here we have that use of the word ‘name’ which is peculiar to the biblical writers. It does not mean simply the name by which a person is called; it means the whole nature and character of that person as far as it is known to us. . . . So, then, to believe in the name of Jesus Christ means to believe in the nature and character of Jesus Christ. It means to believe that he is the Son of God, that he does stand in relation to God in a way in which no other person in the universe ever stood or ever can stand, that he can perfectly reveal God to men and that he is the Saviour of our souls. To believe in the name of Jesus Christ is to accept him for what he really is.”

What John is pointing out is that, if we don’t fully believe in Jesus – in the fullness of who He is, what He has done, and what He expects of us – we will not be able to fully obey the command to love one another.

To return to Barclay:

“When we put these two commandments together, we find the great truth that the Christian life depends on right belief and right conduct combined. We cannot have the one without the other. . . . We cannot begin the Christian life until we accept Jesus Christ for what he is; and we have not accepted him in any real sense of the term until our attitude to men is the same as his own attitude of love.”

Let the evidence of our faith in Jesus be our love for one another!

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help me to believe in Your Name, and to love others as You have commanded me.*



**JULY 20**

***Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another.***

*(James 4:11)*

James goes on in this verse to say: *“Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.”*

The word that is translated “slander” here is a very strong word in the Greek. It is defined as “to speak evil of.” It is also used of speaking down to someone in a hostile and deriding manner, detracting from someone’s reputation by speaking maliciously about them to others, mocking and railing at someone, or defaming and backbiting. Sadly, this type of speech is all too common in churches today – as it evidently was in the churches that James addressed in his epistle.

James gives us three reasons why we should not speak against one another:

1. We are brothers and sisters, part of the family of Christ: We are to speak well of each other, and, if we have nothing nice to say, it is better to say nothing at all! Even if we are aware of something negative about a brother or sister, it is not our place to reveal it, unless we are called to by God. Matthew Henry also makes the point that our slander of each other gives ammunition to those in the world who would persecute the church.
2. We break the law: Leviticus 19:16 says, *“Do not go about spreading slander among your people.”* Gossip, slander, backbiting, complaints, and so much else that we may consider harmless chatter are nothing but disobedience to God. In fact, Paul actually includes gossip and slander in a list of sins along with envy, murder, strife, deceit, God-hating, and arrogance.
3. We judge the law, and therefore God Himself: To quote Matthew Henry, “The sum and substance of both [the law of Moses and the law of Christ] is that men should love one another. A detracting tongue therefore condemns the law of God, and the commandment of Christ, when it is defaming its neighbour. To break God's commandments is in effect to speak evil of them, and to judge them, as if they were too strict, and laid too great a restraint upon us.”

Let us restrain our tongues from slandering one another, and instead use them to release blessing and favour!

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help me to never speak against my brothers and sisters in Christ.*



**JULY 21**

***Encourage one another and build each other up.***

*(1 Thessalonians 5:11)*

We have already seen that encouragement is a key aspect of relationships within the church, because it reflects the essence of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In today's verse, Paul connects encouraging one another with building each other up.

The work of "building" is a very significant one in the New Testament. The church is called God's building. Jesus said that He would build His church – and He did. But He has also left His disciples the responsibility of continuing to build upon the foundation that He laid. The apostles in the early church, such as Paul, saw themselves as building the church upon the foundation of Jesus. Paul actually calls himself an expert builder, but goes on to say that, after him, others are to continue to build. Who are these others? Not just apostles or prophets, or pastors or elders, but every ordinary Christian.

Peter describes the church as a spiritual house, and each one of us as living stones. We are being built together – yes, by the ministry of the clergy, but also by encouraging one another. Ephesians 4:16 puts it this way: *"From [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."*

Of course, all of these verses make it clear that the church is not a physical building but rather a spiritual one. Therefore, what we are constructing is not a physical structure, but rather, building one another's character. The Greek word also means "to help the other be strong and sturdy", just as a physical house needs to be sturdily built. We are apt to think that instruction and correction are the tools necessary for building each other up, and of course they are. But it would seem from the writings of the apostles that encouragement is a far more powerful instrument available to each one to build the Body of Christ.

Let us resolve to encourage one another, and not ignore or neglect the opportunities we get to build each other up.

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help us to encourage one another, and build each other up.*



**JULY 22**

***Beloved, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.*** (1 John 4:7)

The word for love, “*agape*”, appears four times in this one verse. The *New Bible Dictionary* describes *agape* in this manner: “The most common word for all forms of love in the New Testament is *agape, agapao*. This is one of the least common words in classical Greek, where it expresses, on the few occasions it occurs, that highest and noblest form of love which sees something infinitely precious in its object.” This *agape* love is at the heart of, is the essence of, God’s dealings with us and the relationship He invites us into.

We can discern four aspects in this verse that help us to love one another with *agape*:

1. We are loved by God: In fact, we are divinely loved. As those who experience God’s *agape* love, it is possible for us to love one another in the same way.
2. Love comes from God: John is not really telling us to love one another with human love. The source of our love is divine. God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. So we enter into relationships in the church and in the world with this advantage of being filled with the very love of God.
3. We have been born of God: Our former sinful selves would not be able to love in the way that *agape* demands. It is only because we have been born again, our natural selves uniting with the Holy Spirit to give spiritual birth to a new creation, that we are capable of *agape* love.
4. We know God: As His disciples, filled with and guided by the Spirit, we grow in relationship with God. We draw closer to Him in intimacy and our hearts align with His heart. It is only out of such intimacy that we are able to love one another truly and fully.

***Prayer:***

*Holy Spirit, thank You for pouring God’s love into our hearts; help us to love one another with agape love.*



**JULY 23**

***Be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.***

*(1 Peter 3:8)*

Yesterday we saw that the most common type of love described in the Bible is agape. Today's verse has another Greek word for love, "*philos*" or "*philia*", which is used for friendship; it is an experience-based love, unlike *agape* which is value-based. Jack Zavada describes this kind of love:

*"Philia* means close friendship or brotherly love in Greek. It is one of the four types of love in the Bible. St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo [in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.], understood this form of love to describe a love of equals who are united in a common purpose, pursuit, good, or end. Thus, *philia* refers to love based on mutual respect, shared devotion, joint interests, and common values. It is the love near and dear friends have for one another."

Peter surrounds his command to "*love one another*" with four separate attributes, all of which are necessary for the relationships of brotherly love Jesus desires in His church:

1. Like-mindedness: We are called to share the same perspective, to live in one accord, with a unity that the Spirit produces. In effect, we are called to live in harmony.
2. Sympathy: We are called to feel with one another, especially when a brother or sister in the faith is suffering.
3. Compassion: We are called to be tender-hearted, to feel from the very depths of our being for one another. This is no superficial love, but "gut-level" emotion.
4. Humility: We are called to lowliness of mind with regard to ourselves, which results in considering others more positively.

Perhaps the best example of this kind of love in the Bible is the friendship between David and Jonathan. Though David was an obvious challenger to Jonathan's throne, we read the following in 1 Samuel 18: *"After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. . . . And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself."*

**Prayer:**

*Lord Jesus, help us to love one another in a spirit of like-mindedness, sympathy, compassion, and humility.*



**JULY 24**

***Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another.***

*(Hebrews 10:24-25)*

One of the things that dismays me about the church is the low priority that is given to attending church services and midweek meetings. More than anything else, I have found myself exhorting people to simply come to church on Sunday – or worship, prayer, Bible study during the week – but the results have been, more often than not, disappointing. The issue isn't numbers – it is the spiritual growth of the community of believers.

Acts 2:42-47 is my favourite picture of church – the first New Testament church, so alive and dynamic, moving in power and love. I believe two phrases were the secret to their success – they *“devoted themselves”* to the life of the church, and *“they continued to meet together.”* It is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of meeting together as often as possible, for the life of the church.

One main reason why people neglect coming to a church gathering is because they see it only as a place to receive, not contribute. And, of course, you can receive from a sermon on YouTube just as well, while relaxing in the comfort of your home! But the writer of Hebrews tells us that we meet together to *“spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”*

The Greek word translated “spur” is a very strong word. It is actually the root of the English word “paroxysm”! It can be translated as stimulation, provocation, irritation, angry dispute. It means “a provocation which literally jabs someone so they must respond.” The Bible is telling us that, when we meet together, we are to provoke feelings that spur one another to action in the form of love and good deeds!

We are not called to be passive members of church, simply spectators and consumers of the professional ministry. The Bible knows of no such description of Christ's Body. Instead, we are invited – no, commanded – to the high calling of sharpening one another, stirring each other's gifts, provoking the passive into action, encouraging the disappointed into fresh purpose. And I believe it starts with, quite simply, giving priority to meeting together!

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help us to give priority to meeting together as church, and to spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*



**JULY 25**

***Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.***

*(1 John 4:11-12)*

John, the Apostle of Love, continues to exhort us to love one another, and the foundation of this command is always the love that God has shown us. Today's verses are preceded by two significant proclamations of God's love. First, the demonstration of God's love was that He sent His Son in order that we might live. Second, the very definition of love is God sending His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

So, firstly, we love because we are loved. As Matthew Henry writes:

“Divine love to the brethren should constrain ours. . . . This should be an invincible argument. The example of God should press us. We should be followers (or imitators) of him, as his dear children. The objects of the divine love should be the objects of ours. Shall we refuse to love those whom the eternal God hath loved? We should be admirers of his love, and lovers of his love (of the benevolence and complacency that are in him), and consequently lovers of those whom he loves. The general love of God to the world should induce a universal love among mankind. . . . The peculiar love of God to the church and to the saints should be productive of a peculiar love there, for one another.”

Secondly, God's love – even more, God Himself – is demonstrated to the world through our love. William Barclay puts it like this:

“It is by love that God is known. We cannot see God, because he is spirit; what we can see is his effect. We cannot see the wind, but we can see what it can do. We cannot see electricity, but we can see the effect it produces. The effect of God is love. It is when God comes into a man that he is clothed with the love of God and the love of men. God is known by his effect on that man. It has been said, ‘A saint is a man in whom Christ lives again’ and the best demonstration of God comes not from argument but from a life of love.”

***Prayer:***

*Father in heaven, thank You for Your incredible and amazing love for me. Help me to reflect and reveal You by loving others.*



**JULY 26**

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

We are commanded by God to forgive because we have been forgiven by Him. We are often told that forgiveness releases us from hurt and pain, sets us free from bitterness, and brings healing to our hearts, minds, and even bodies. Forgiveness is recommended even when the guilty party is not sorry, or may not even know they have hurt us. In this way, forgiveness becomes a form of self-help. But today's verse indicates that forgiveness also releases the one who is in the wrong. Too often, even when there is sorrow and penitence, we find ourselves unable or unwilling to forgive. Paul says that, when we forgive one another, we are showing kindness and compassion. As the well-known saying goes, "Forgiveness is for giving!" – giving yourself healing and freedom, but also giving others grace and mercy.

This poem by Denis Martindale, titled "*Forgiving Is For Giving*", expresses today's verse beautifully:

Forgiving is so hard to do,  
Let's keep it to ourselves  
And let's forget each chance to view  
God's Bibles on those shelves . . . .

And let's forget the tears we see  
When others plead their cause,  
Like we've not heard of Calvary  
God meant to open doors . . . .

Forgiving is so hard, I know,  
No need to grit your teeth,  
Just tell such people they should go,  
Deserving all their grief . . . .

Then watch them walk away heads bowed,  
Because you're in the right,  
Why should your pardon be allowed?  
Hold back with all your might . . . .

That's what I thought, till God found me,  
Forgiving all my sins,  
From gruesome guilt He set me free,  
As if somehow He wins . . . .



He took my heart and broke it fast,  
In seconds, I found peace,  
Yes, peace that God has meant to last,  
Else why grant me release?

'Forgiving is for giving, son . . . .'  
That's what God seemed to say  
And once His miracle was done,  
Not one could take away . . . .

So now He watches from above,  
Will I show pardon, too?  
Will I forgive and share God's love,  
Let God make all things new?

Or will I stumble like a clown,  
Not fit for Kingdom use?  
If so, I'll let my Saviour down  
Each time that I refuse . . . .

Oh, Lord! I tremble at the thought!  
But it's so hard and yet,  
Grant strength that I do what I ought,  
Teach me not to forget . . . ."

**Prayer:**

*Lord Jesus, help me to be kind and compassionate to those who hurt me, forgiving them just as You have forgiven me.*



**JULY 27**

***Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.*** (Colossians 3:16)

We have already seen that Paul urges us to speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, as well as to instruct, admonish, and warn one another. In this verse, he says that we are to teach and admonish one another through songs from the Spirit. How can we do that? We need an inner foundation as well as an outward expression.

First, we need the message of Christ dwelling richly among us. The word translated “message” is actually *logos*, which means “reasoning expressed by words.” It is used especially of Christ, expressing the thoughts of the Father through the Spirit. We are meant to be a community which is inhabited by *logos*, by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Not in a superficial or shallow manner, but abundantly. The sense of this verse is that the message of Christ has settled among us, and that is the source of our teaching and admonishing one another with wisdom. It is not the responsibility of a few individuals, but of the whole Body.

Second, we are called to the outward expression of worship – singing to God with gratitude in our hearts. When we worship with the songs that the Spirit inspires, with hearts filled with gratitude for all that God has done for us, it is an instrument of teaching and admonishment to others. Our worship teaches the ignorant of God’s greatness, and admonishes those who are doubting God’s goodness. The psalms are full of this kind of worship – the community of God’s people teaching and admonishing one another, even as they declare the praises of the LORD. For example, Psalm 118:1-4:

*“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
his love endures forever.*

*Let Israel say:*

*His love endures forever.*

*Let the house of Aaron say:*

*His love endures forever.*

*Let those who fear the Lord say:*

*His love endures forever.”*

Finally, we teach and admonish with all wisdom – that is, biblical truth is applied to real life. We are immersed in the Word, and overflowing with worship, in order that, together, we may live lives that are characterised by God’s wisdom.

**Prayer:**

*Lord Jesus, may Your word dwell abundantly in us, and may we teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, through our songs of gratitude.*



**JULY 28**

***Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged.***

*(James 5:9)*

The primary sin of the Israelites, when they were in the desert on their way to the promised land, was not idolatry or immorality but grumbling! They grumbled about the lack of water and food on multiple occasions; they grumbled about the lack of meat; they grumbled against the leadership of Moses; they grumbled about the harsh conditions in the wilderness; and they grumbled about the obstacles facing them as they entered Canaan. No doubt the conditions were difficult, but God expected His people to trust in Him, after all He had done for them. As a result, they constantly came under His judgement. As Psalm 106 puts it:

*"Then they despised the pleasant land;  
they did not believe his promise.*

*They grumbled in their tents  
and did not obey the Lord.*

*So he swore to them with uplifted hand  
that he would make them fall in the wilderness . . . ."*

The early church was also going through times of stress. In fact, the word for grumbling implies "groaning because of pressure." James is writing these words to the disciples in the context of being patient in a time of suffering. Often, in such seasons, we turn on each other – grumbling about leadership, finding people to blame for our problems, speaking against one another. When we do this to each other, we are actually grumbling against God. He knows what we are going through, and yet, just as grumbling was not an option for the Israelites in the wilderness or the early church facing persecution, it is not an option for us. In fact, God calls it wickedness, because grumbling reflects a lack of faith in Him, a lack of gratitude for what He has done, and a lack of surrender to His ways.

In the verses before and after today's verse, James gives us several reasons why we should not grumble:

1. We will be judged.
2. Jesus is coming back one day.
3. We have the example of the prophets, like Job, who were blessed for their perseverance.
4. God is full of compassion and mercy.

God has been so good to us, even though we deserve nothing but condemnation and death. Grumbling against Him, and even against one another, is not an option in His church.

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help me to never grumble against others in Your church.*



**JULY 29**

***Live in harmony with one another.***

*(Romans 12:16a)*

Harmony is usually associated with music – for example, it is defined as “the combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce a pleasing effect.” But we also find the following definitions for harmony – “the quality of forming a pleasing and consistent whole; the state of being in agreement or concord.” This is what harmony in the Body of Christ looks like – different people coming together to form one glorious Body. The Greek is actually, “be of the same mind.” As Barnes puts it: “Think of, that is, regard, or seek after the same thing for each other; that is, what you regard or seek for yourself, seek also for your brethren. Do not have divided interests; do not be pursuing different ends and aims; do not indulge counter plans and purposes; and do not seek honours, offices, for yourself which you do not seek for your brethren, so that you may still regard yourselves as brethren on a level, and aim at the same object.”

Paul goes on in this verse to identify the main obstacle to harmony in the church, and the way in which we can overcome it: *“Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.”* Barclay records a powerful illustration of this verse:

“Dr James Black in his own vivid way described a scene in an early Christian congregation. A notable convert has been made, and the great man comes to his first Church service. He enters the room where the service is being held. The Christian leader points to a place. ‘Will you sit there please?’ ‘But,’ says the man, ‘I cannot sit there, for that would be to sit beside my slave.’ ‘Will you sit there please?’ repeats the leader. ‘But,’ says the man, ‘surely not beside my slave.’ ‘Will you sit there please?’ repeats the leader once again. And the man at last crosses the room, sits beside his slave, and gives him the kiss of peace. That is what Christianity did; and that is what it alone could do in the Roman Empire. The Christian Church was the only place where master and slave sat side by side. It is still the place where all earthly distinctions are gone, for with God there is no respect of persons.”

As we let go of pride in the church, we will live in harmony with one another and be a wonderful witness for Christ to the world.

***Prayer:***

*Lord Jesus, help us to live in harmony with one another.*



**JULY 30**

***Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.”*** (1 Peter 5:5)

We saw yesterday that we have to let go of pride. The opposite of pride is, of course, humility. Peter exhorts us to clothe ourselves with humility – it is not meant to be an occasional action, but our state of being. The word for “clothed” means “to be securely girded.” Like an apron or any other vestment of labour, humility is to be the uniform or badge by which we are distinguished.

Probably no disciple of Jesus could speak about pride and humility from personal experience more than Peter. In his impulsiveness and enthusiasm, he was often arrogant and boastful. On one occasion, he even saw fit to rebuke Jesus for predicting His death at the hands of the Jewish leaders. However, Peter’s most famous incident of pride is his denial of Jesus when He was arrested. The Old Testament proverb that he quotes in this verse – “*God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble*” – was fully experienced by Peter that night and in the days that followed.

We are familiar with the story. On the night before Jesus was crucified, as He spent those precious hours with His disciples, Jesus predicted that all of them would desert Him. Peter boasted, “Even if all fall away, I will not.” And Jesus had to tell Peter, surely with sorrow in His voice, that he would disown Jesus three times that very night. And so it was. Peter didn’t just deny Jesus – he swore and cursed and lied in his fear, distancing himself from his Lord and Saviour. But, to his credit, he was immediately ashamed and repentant, though he must not have thought there was any scope of restoration, even after Jesus rose from the dead. He must have felt deep inside that God opposed him because of his pride.

It was a couple of weeks later that Peter experienced the second part of the proverb – God’s favour or grace in his humility. Jesus appeared to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, helped them get a big catch of fish after a fruitless night of fishing, and fed them breakfast on the seashore. Then he took Peter aside, and restored him to the leadership of the church with a three-fold commissioning – “*Feed my lambs . . . take care of my sheep . . . feed my sheep.*”

In his darkest hour of utter failure, Peter received grace in his humility. And Jesus desires the same for us.

**Prayer:**

*Lord Jesus, help us to clothe ourselves with humility toward one another, and, in so doing, receive Your grace.*



**JULY 31**

***You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.*** (John 13:13-15)

It was the night before His crucifixion. Jesus must have been thinking about all that He wanted to share with His disciples, as well as the impending suffering to come. But His disciples were arguing about who was the greatest among them! It was with this spirit that they entered the Upper Room for the Last Supper. The jug of water, and basin and cloth, were kept there for a servant to wash the dust off their feet. But there was no servant present, so the least among them should have taken on that duty. Except none of them wanted to be the least! They actually sat down to eat with their feet unwashed!

So, we are told by John, *"Jesus, with the full knowledge that the Father had put everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from the supper-table, took off his outer clothes, picked up a towel and fastened it round his waist. Then he poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel around his waist."*

It was an incredible display of humility and expression of servanthood. The Son of God, the Creator of the universe, the Rabbi who had just spent three years mentoring His disciples, stooped down and washed the dust off His disciples' feet. John says that Jesus was showing them the full extent of His love. And, as today's passage shows us, Jesus was also setting an example for His disciples – which means all of us – to follow. It is a picture of love in action, coming from a place of utter humility.

Barclay writes:

*"So often, even in churches, trouble arises because someone does not get his place. So often even ecclesiastical dignitaries are offended because they did not receive the precedence to which their office entitled them. Here is the lesson that there is only one kind of greatness, the greatness of service. The world is full of people who are standing on their dignity when they ought to be kneeling at the feet of their brethren. In every sphere of life, desire for prominence and unwillingness to take a subordinate place wreck the scheme of things. . . . When we are tempted to think of our dignity, our prestige, our rights, let us see again the picture of the Son of God, girt with a towel, kneeling at his disciples' feet."*

**Prayer:**

*Lord Jesus, help us to wash one another's feet, in humility and love, even as You have washed our feet.*



# Fruit of the Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit is love,  
joy, peace, patience, kindness

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control



AUGUST

## AUGUST 1

***The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*** (Galatians 5:22-23)

Jesus spoke a great deal about fruit. He said that we will be recognised by the fruit that we bear, because, in His words, *“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit (Luke 6:43-44).”* So, too, with men and women. Jesus is looking for His children to be fruitful. He commands us to abide in Him, and submit to the Father’s pruning, so that we may be even more fruitful. *“This is to my Father’s glory,”* Jesus told His disciples, *“that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples (John 15:18).”*

There are many kinds of fruit that we bear in the kingdom. One of the more significant kinds is the fruit of the Spirit. It is nothing less than the image of Jesus reflected in us as we mature in character.

But the fruit of the Spirit isn’t just about being a godly person. It is about choosing a lifestyle that is contrary to the ways of the world. Paul writes in his preface to the list of fruit: *“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh.”* He goes on to list some of the lifestyle choices that result from gratifying our desires: *“The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*

This is the context of the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control: these are the qualities we choose to nurture when we submit to the Holy Spirit rather than ourselves. And, frankly, these are the qualities that most people desire but find almost impossible to cultivate. The good news is that they are the fruit of the Spirit, not our fruit – and He will bear them in us, if only we will remain in relationship with Jesus, and surrendered to our Father’s purposes.

### ***Prayer***

*Holy Spirit, bear Your fruit in me, as I remain in Christ.*



## AUGUST 2

***As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*** (Colossians 3:12)

As we saw yesterday, life in the Spirit is contrasted with the ways of the world. Paul emphasises this difference in Colossians 3, using the language of the old and new self. He declares that since we have been raised with Christ, we need to set our hearts on things above rather than earthly things. He writes that we have taken off our old self, and “*have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*” A key part of this renewal is, of course, the fruit of the Spirit, which is clearly being referenced in today’s verse. Paul uses the image of changing our clothes – he says that we take off our old selves, and we put on our new selves.

The word used for “clothe” in this verse is a very descriptive one – it has the sense of sinking into a garment. The clothing of the new self is, in a manner of speaking, ready and waiting to be put on by us. And when we put it on, it fits us perfectly, because it moulds itself to our shape. It is a wonderful picture of the work of the Holy Spirit, gently transforming us from deep inside as we yield to Him, and the result is visible to all.

Paul gives us three reasons to clothe ourselves with this spiritual fruit:

1. We are God’s chosen people, His elect: Just like Israel was chosen from all the nations, we who are in Christ have been chosen by God. His choice is not arbitrary and impersonal, but rather He chooses us out of a personal preference and with loving intention.
2. We are holy, set apart by God and for His purposes: In our very identity, we are different from the world, and therefore our character reflects this difference. The wonderful news is that He is the God who makes us holy by His blood shed upon the cross, as well as the God who helps us to remain holy through the Holy Spirit.
3. We are dearly loved: The word is *agape* – God has chosen to love us. He takes pleasure in us. He longs for intimacy with us.

In a sense, the fruit of the Spirit is the uniform of those who are God’s children through Christ and filled with His Holy Spirit. It is our privilege and responsibility to be clothed with the character of Jesus.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to be clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.*



## AUGUST 3

***If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*** (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

The church in Corinth had many problems, and Paul was addressing these in his two letters. One of the main issues that was causing strife was pride, jealousy, disunity, and confusion in the area of spiritual gifts. Some gifts, especially tongues, were exalted above others. Those with the more obviously supernatural gifts were given higher status in the church. Worship services had become disorderly, because of the misuse of spiritual gifts for personal glory rather than God's purposes. Paul attributed much of these problems to the believers' ignorance of spiritual gifts.

So, in 1 Corinthians, he devotes two full chapters to the topic of spiritual gifts and how they are to be exercised. And yet, aware of the danger of gifting being exalted and promoted at the expense of character, he separates these two chapters with his classic essay on love. In effect, Paul is saying that the fruit of the Spirit is more important than His gifts.

The first fruit of the Spirit is love – *agape*. In fact, some commentators feel that love is the only fruit, and the other eight qualities that are mentioned are simply the outworking of love.

Paul refers to six prominent spiritual gifts in this passage, and declares that they are worthless if we do not have love. Speaking in tongues without love is as good as making meaningless sounds, no matter how loud. Prophecy, knowledge, and mountain-moving faith are nothing without love. Sacrificial giving, and suffering persecution for Christ, do not gain us any reward if we do not love.

Today, let's take a moment to examine ourselves. Do we take pride in our gifts – whether spiritual or natural? Do we exalt performance over character? Is there love in the things that we do, whether for God or for others – or are we doing it all for ourselves? Using our spiritual gifts, natural abilities – in fact, every resource that we have – for God's purposes is amazing, but let's not forget Paul's exhortation that precedes this passage – *"I will show you a still more excellent way (one of the choicest graces and the highest of them all): unselfish love."*

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to live in this most excellent way of love!*



## AUGUST 4

***‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.***

*(Matthew 22:37-40)*

The fruit of the Spirit is love. Here we see Jesus responding to a question of Law by teaching the primacy of love. There are three aspects to love:

1. **Loving God:** We are called to love God with all of our being – with our emotions, will, intellect, and energy; with our feelings, choices, thoughts, and actions. As Barclay puts it: “The verse which Jesus quotes is Deuteronomy 6:5. That verse was part of the Shema, the basic and essential creed of Judaism, the sentence with which every Jewish service still opens, and the first text which every Jewish child commits to memory. It means that to God we must give a total love, a love which dominates our emotions, a love which directs our thoughts, and a love which is the dynamic of our actions.”
2. **Loving Yourself:** We cannot love others unless we love ourselves, not in a worldly way but as God desires. Self-love usually centres around satisfying our sensual selves, and results in a warped view of self. We end up hating ourselves in the ways that really matter – emotional and relational. We need to love ourselves as God loves us, by seeing ourselves through His eyes and heart. When we do that, when we are secure in His love, we will truly love ourselves, and will be able to truly love others.
3. **Loving Others:** We are commanded to love our neighbour. Jesus is again quoting the Old Testament, this time Leviticus 19:18. But who is our neighbour? Not just our friends. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus defines our neighbour as anyone in need, even a stranger. The extreme of loving our neighbour is, of course, loving our enemies, which we are also commanded to do by Jesus. Loving our neighbour the way Jesus desires is sacrificial, unconditional, forgiving, serving, gracious, and merciful.

Jesus says that all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. This means that every law of God can be described as a manifestation of loving God or loving man. It also means that, when we fulfil the law of love, we fulfil the whole Law. Thank God for the Holy Spirit, who bears this fruit of love in us!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to love You with all my heart and soul and mind and strength, to love myself as You love me, and to love others as You desire.*



## AUGUST 5

***Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.*** (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

The fruit of the Spirit is love. And here, in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul gives us a description of love. Max Lucado writes: “1 Corinthians 13 is the Mount Everest of love writings. And no words get to the heart of loving people like verses 4-8. . . . Someone challenged me to replace the word love in this passage with my name. I did and became a liar. The passage set a standard I could not meet. No one can meet it – except Jesus.”

Of course, what is true of Max Lucado is true of each one of us. Only Jesus met – and still meets – the standard of love that Paul sets. In fact, let’s read the passage with the word ‘love’ being replaced by ‘Jesus’:

*“Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind. He does not envy, He does not boast, He is not proud. He does not dishonour others, He is not self-seeking, He is not easily angered, He keeps no record of wrongs. Jesus does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. He always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Jesus never fails.”*

This is the love that compelled the Father to send His only Son as an atoning sacrifice for us. This is the love that motivated Jesus to become a man for our sakes, and to die on a cross for our sins. This is the love that He expresses even now, by interceding for us without ceasing at the right hand of the Father. This is the love that the Holy Spirit wants to reveal and release in and through us. We can never produce this kind of love with our own efforts – but we don’t have to! The Holy Spirit fills us with God’s love, and causes it to overflow through our lives.

Today, let’s prophesy this love for our own lives, trusting in the Holy Spirit to bear His fruit in us:

“I will be patient, I will be kind. I will not envy, I will not boast, I will not be proud. I will not dishonour others, I will not be self-seeking, I will not be easily angered, I will keep no record of wrongs. I will not delight in evil but will rejoice with the truth. I will always protect, always trust, always hope, always persevere. I will never fail.”

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, help me to love as You love!*



## AUGUST 6

***The joy of the LORD is your strength.***

*(Nehemiah 8:10)*

The fruit of the Spirit is joy. Standard dictionaries define joy as a feeling of great pleasure and happiness, or a state of well-being and contentment, because of people or circumstances that cause those feelings to arise. But joy is seen very differently in the Bible. We are often commanded to rejoice even in situations of extreme distress. For example, James writes: *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds . . . (James 1:12)”*

How is this possible? Only through the Holy Spirit. He doesn't just enable us to rejoice in difficult circumstances, He actually fills us with the joy of the Lord, and that joy strengthens us in our weakness.

We see a wonderful example of this joy in the book of Nehemiah. It had taken almost a hundred years, since the first return of exiles from Babylon, for the walls of Jerusalem to be finally built up again under Nehemiah's leadership. The following month a sacred assembly was called, and the Law of Moses was read by Ezra and the Levites. As the people heard God's Word, they were gripped with conviction of the many ways in which they had violated God's laws. Nehemiah intervened with these words: *“This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep. . . . Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our LORD. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”* His exhortations had their desired effect, for *“all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.”*

The people of Jerusalem were in a state of desperate weakness – just about surviving in adverse circumstances, surrounded by hostile nations, uncertain about their future, and deeply convicted of their disobedience to God. And yet, in the midst of it all, they were able to rejoice with the joy that God gave them, and that joy strengthened them to continue in His purposes.

The Holy Spirit produces in us that same joy – *His* joy – which strengthens us in any situation.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You for Your joy, that strengthens me in every circumstance.*



## AUGUST 7

***You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*** (Psalm 16:11)

The fruit of the Spirit is joy. And this joy is experienced most of all in intimate fellowship with Jesus. His presence is the environment of joy, both in this life and in the one to come. We have seen how the joy of the LORD gives us strength for the struggles of this life. But we also have the hope of joy for the future, for eternity.

In Psalm 16, David chooses to worship God in the midst of trouble. Even though he starts by asking for protection, David focuses on praising God for His goodness in his life. And as he does so, David receives a revelation of eternity – a glimpse of the joy that we will experience forever in God's presence. There are three aspects to this revelation:

1. God has made known the path of life to us, and it is not the meaningless one that evolution and secularism offer. Our life's journey begins in God's heart, and He desires it to end in His presence for all eternity. This hope is enough to cause us to rejoice! But there is more.
2. We are filled with joy in God's presence. Yes, one day we will be in His presence without the hindrance of sin, and our joy will be perfect. But the amazing news is that, even now, through the Holy Spirit, we are filled with joy in His presence. And it is an overflowing joy.
3. We are promised eternal pleasures at God's right hand. This is an image of the most intimate fellowship, and it will be forever. We cannot imagine the pleasures we will enjoy in heaven, but we get a foretaste of them in His presence here on earth.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century Anglican scholar, John Trapp, writes of this verse: "Here is as much said as can be, but words are too weak to utter it. For quality there is in heaven joy and pleasures; for quantity, a fulness, a torrent whereat they drink without let or loathing; for constancy, it is at God's right hand, who is stronger than all, neither can any take us out of his hand; it is a constant happiness without intermission: and for perpetuity it is for evermore. Heaven's joys are without measure, mixture, or end."

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, thank You for making known to me the path of life, and for the hope I have of overflowing joy in Your presence, both now and forevermore.*



## AUGUST 8

***Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them. (Psalm 126:5-6)***

The fruit of the Spirit is joy. Psalm 126 is a wonderful expression of the extravagant joy God gives. The word for “joy” appears five times in this short psalm. The psalmist says that “*our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.*” Unlike the earlier exhortations to rejoice in suffering, here the joy comes from what God has done in bringing back His people from a place of captivity – “*The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.*”

However, there is a prelude to such joy – tears, weeping, sorrow. We want to experience joy in our time, but we balk at paying the price. We seek the move of God in restoration, reformation, renewal, revival – but these are all works of partnership with Him; we have a part to play, even as He does amazing things. Psalm 126 is a manual for what we need to invest, in order to fully bear the fruit of the Spirit that is joy. We need to weep for what grieves God’s heart, we need to travail in tear-soaked prayers for salvation of the lost, we need to labour for God’s kingdom to come in all its glory. This is the seed that we sow, just like a farmer sows into the soil with hard labour.

And our reward is joy, just as the farmer receives his reward of reaping the harvest. The joy that the Spirit gives floods our hearts and spirits, in the same way that flooding renews a desert. As Spurgeon puts it, “Even as the Lord sends floods down on the dry beds of southern torrents after long droughts, so can he fill our wasted and wearied spirits with floods of holy delight.”

As we look around us at the depravity and chaos that is modern society, we must not succumb to the voices of doom and gloom that surround us. Rather, we have the joyful hope that Jesus is the One who restores and renews and revives. And we have the promise of reaping inexpressible joy, as we labour with tears for His kingdom purposes.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help us to sow in tears, so that we may reap with songs of joy.*



## AUGUST 9

***I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*** (John 16:33)

The fruit of the Spirit is peace. The word “peace” appears in the Bible more than four hundred times. The Hebrew word for peace, which Jesus most certainly was using here, is “*shalom*”. It refers to a satisfied condition, a feeling of peacefulness, a sense of well-being. It is a state of completeness and wholeness. Peace, therefore, is the state in which Jesus desires His children live. And so, even as He tells His disciples that they are going to be separated from Him, that a time of grief and sorrow awaits them, Jesus comforts them with the promise of peace.

Jesus says that His disciples, and that includes each one of us, will have peace *in* Him. This also means being in right relationship with God and others. How did He accomplish this? The answer is in today’s verse itself – “*I have overcome the world.*” Jesus did this on the cross, where He won the victory over sin and subdued the power of the devil. As a result, both relationships that make for peace can be restored.

1. We have peace with God: Because of the cross, we who were once separated from God by our sin, and enemies of God in our rebellion, now have access to God and are called His children.
2. We have peace with others: The work of Jesus on the cross destroyed the divisions that separate people from each other, and made it possible for us to be truly one in His Body.

Jesus said we would have trouble in this world – in this case, referring to the internal pressure caused by our own anxiety and fear, because of our circumstances. These pressures prevent us from accessing the peace that the cross has released. But we have the Holy Spirit, who brings about this two-fold peace in our lives – He assures us of the Father’s love and of our position as His children, and He enables and empowers godly relationships with one another. All we have to do is remain in Jesus!

### **Prayer**

*Holy Spirit, help me to remain in Jesus, and experience the peace that He released for me on the cross.*



## AUGUST 10

***Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*** (John 14:27)

Jesus was speaking to His disciples in the Upper Room, preparing them for the events of the cross that were to follow, as well as for His eventual departure from the earth. He said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.” By this, Jesus meant more than a feeling or emotion or state of being. He was actually referring to a Person. You see, in the verses preceding this statement, Jesus told His disciples that the Father would send them the Holy Spirit to be with them forever. Clearly, the Holy Spirit is the One through whom Jesus’ peace touches and fills our lives.

I think one of the most wonderful statements in the Bible is, “*I do not give to you as the world gives.*” If the peace that Jesus gave us was the same as the world, it would be so superficial and transitory, susceptible to our feelings and circumstances. This is because the peace that the world gives is nothing more than the absence of overt and obvious conflict. In the Bible, the opposite of peace is not war but, rather, anxiety and fear. And, because so many things in our lives cause us to be anxious, the peace that the world gives is quite useless most of the time.

By contrast, Jesus gives us true peace through the Holy Spirit. As Paul writes in Philippians 4: “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” The peace that Jesus gives is beyond our comprehension – and it will be beyond the comprehension of the world as well! It is a peace that transcends our circumstances and rises above our anxieties and fears. It will surely attract the world to Jesus!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You for the peace that passes all understanding, that You give me through Your Holy Spirit.*



## AUGUST 11

***Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.***  
*(Colossians 3:15)*

The fruit of the Spirit is peace. The Greek word for peace is “*eirene*”, which refers to a state of untroubled, undisturbed well-being. However, it also means a state of wholeness, where all essential parts are joined together. This second meaning is very important for those who Paul is addressing in this verse – the church. The peace that comes from the Holy Spirit is not just for individuals in our relationships with God and with others, but also for the Body of Christ as a whole.

We have been called to peace as individual believers, and we have been called to peace as a Body. It is a summons by our Lord Jesus Christ, an integral part of His invitation into relationship with the Father. Barclay writes of this verse:

“Paul uses a vivid picture. ‘Let the peace of God be the decider of all things within your heart.’ Literally what he says is, ‘Let the peace of God be the umpire in your heart.’ He uses a verb from the athletic arena; it is the word that is used of the umpire who settled things in any matter of dispute. If the peace of Jesus Christ is the umpire in any man's heart, then, when feelings clash and we are pulled in two directions at the same time, the decision of Christ will keep us in the way of love and the Church will remain the one body it is meant to be. The way to right action is to appoint Jesus Christ as the arbiter between the conflicting emotions in our hearts; and if we accept his decisions, we cannot go wrong.”

Today, the church is beset by division and conflict. We look to human leaders, human traditions, and human regulations to resolve these issues, usually to no avail. Paul says that we have been given an arbiter, the Holy Spirit, who will bring about peace instead of conflict, if we will seek Him and surrender to His ways.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, may Your peace rule in Your church, through our submission to the Holy Spirit.*



## AUGUST 12

***A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense.***

*(Proverbs 19:11)*

The fruit of the Spirit is patience. Patience may be defined as “the ability to endure waiting, delay, or provocation without becoming annoyed or upset, or to persevere calmly when faced with difficulties.” The Hebrew phrase that is translated “patience” actually means “slow to anger”, and is one of the defining characteristics of God Himself. In Exodus 34, the LORD reveals His glory to Moses with these words: *“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.”* When we are patient – that is, slow to anger – we are imitating God.

The Bible consistently contrasts patience with anger, especially a quick temper. Too often, episodes of hot temper are justified by the circumstances in which our anger flares up. But consider the following verses:

*“A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly (Proverbs 14:29).”*

*“A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel (Proverbs 15:18).”*

*“Patience is better than pride (Ecclesiastes 7:8).”*

The Bible sees patience as the fruit of wisdom. The one who is patient has understanding, is a peacemaker, brings calm, controls tempers, and overlooks offenses. By contrast, the Bible describes an impatient person as foolish, quarrelsome, a troublemaker, out of control, and proud.

As Matthew Henry puts it:

*“A wise man will observe these two rules about his anger: 1. Not to be over-hasty in his resentments. Discretion teaches us to defer our anger, to defer the admission of it till we have thoroughly considered all the merits of the provocation, seen them in a true light and weighed them in a just balance; and then to defer the prosecution of it till there be no danger of running into any indecencies. 2. Not to be over-critical in his resentments. Whereas it is commonly looked upon as a piece of ingenuity to apprehend an affront quickly, it is here made a man's glory to pass over a transgression, to appear as if he did not see it or, if he sees fit to take notice of it, yet to forgive it and meditate no revenge.”*

How much better a place the world would be if we were patient – that is, slow to anger, and long-suffering – as God is!

### **Prayer**

*Holy Spirit, give me the wisdom to be patient, slow to anger as God is.*



## AUGUST 13

***Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.***

*(Proverbs 25:15)*

The fruit of the Spirit is patience. In this proverb, Solomon connects patience with gentle words. The rule of the world is that those who speak loudly and aggressively get their way. However, as always, the Bible is counter-cultural, and shows us a better way. Words spoken softly and in their proper time can have far-reaching impact, even on rulers and their decisions. We see a wonderful example of this in the story of David and Abigail, found in 1 Samuel 25.

David's men have been insulted by Nabal, a wealthy man whose sheep and shepherds had been protected by them. Interestingly, Nabal means "fool", and he shows his foolishness in the angry words with which he addresses David's men and insults David. As a result, David sets off with four hundred armed men to kill Nabal, and probably his household as well. When Nabal's wife, Abigail, hears of this, she goes to meet David with many donkeys loaded with gifts for David and his men.

David is approaching Nabal's house, breathing violence in his great anger, when Abigail reaches him. He actually makes a vow: *"May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!"* But David did not follow through with his threat. What changed his mind?

Not the gifts that Abigail sent. Rather, as today's verse says, he was persuaded by her gentle words. When Abigail met David, she bowed down with her face to the ground and fell at his feet. What followed was a speech full of grace and wisdom, without fear or judgment. Abigail patiently appealed to David's sense of justice and righteousness, and, as a result, prevented him from committing a serious sin in his anger. Truly, her gentle words were able to persuade a ruler, and have a tremendous impact on his life as well as hers. As David said to her: *"Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request."*

If a ruler can be persuaded through patience, surely it will work equally well in the situations and circumstances that we face daily!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to have the patience that is persuasive, and gentle words that have a powerful impact.*



## AUGUST 14

***Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.***

*(James 5:7)*

The fruit of the Spirit is patience. The Bible exhorts patience, not just in our relationships with others but also in our relationship with God. Here, in the New Testament, patience has the meaning of perseverance. James is writing to believers who are suffering persecution, and he exhorts them to persevere until the Lord comes again. In this context, he is speaking of the Second Coming.

Pett writes:

“The idea behind ‘patience’ here is ‘patient endurance’. It does not speak of a quiet waiting, but of a standing up to the trials that face them without wavering and without retaliation. It includes the idea of ‘longsuffering’, facing up to whatever men throw at them and loving them just the same. He makes clear that it will not always be easy. They are thus to praise the Lord through gritted teeth under all circumstances, and are to remember that the Lord is coming. Just as the farmer does year by year when he waits for the early and late rains which will produce his hoped for harvest, sometimes with great apprehension when there appears to be a delay, so are they to wait with patient endurance for what the Lord will do. But one thing they can be sure of. One day the great day of Harvest will come, and great will be their rejoicing.”

Patience is an integral part of our relationship with God. So often we find ourselves in difficult, even unjust, situations, and wonder why God is taking so long to intervene on our behalf or answer our prayers. Our impatience can cause us to give up, and thus miss out on the blessing God has planned for us. As the writer of Hebrews says, “*After waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised (Hebrews 6:15).*” In Psalm 37, David encourages us to “*be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.*” And, the prophet Isaiah urges us to be patient – to wait upon the LORD, to put our hope in Him – so that our strength may be renewed (Isaiah 40:31).

Today, bring a situation where you need to be patient with God, and trust His ways and timing. James assures us that He will surely come into our situation; we just have to be patient, and persevere in trusting Him.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to be patient in my difficult circumstances, trusting that You will surely come.*



**AUGUST 15**

***Anyone who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty.***

*(Job 6:14)*

The fruit of the Spirit is kindness. The word that Paul uses for kindness, in his list of the fruit of the Spirit, means “one’s disposition to furnish what is useful or profitable for others.” It refers to a grace which pervades the whole nature, a softness and tenderness of heart which seeks the other’s benefit.

In today’s verse, Job connects kindness to others with fear of God. He suggests that our kindness to others, or the lack of it, reflects our relationship with God. Perhaps the best example of kindness in the Old Testament is the story of David and Mephibosheth. David had finally secured his reign over all Israel, after years of war between his house and the house of Saul. Any descendant of Saul was a possible rival to David’s throne. And yet this is what we read in 2 Samuel 9: *“David asked, ‘Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?’ Now there was a servant of Saul's household named Ziba. They called him to appear before David, and the king said to him, ‘Are you Ziba?’ ‘Your servant,’ he replied. The king asked, ‘Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?’ Ziba answered the king, ‘There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet.’ ‘Where is he?’ the king asked.”*

David had no reason to be kind to a grandson of Saul, and every reason to treat him as a threat. But he chose to be kind to Mephibosheth. He gave him everything that had belonged to Saul, including land and servants. And he welcomed him to live in Jerusalem and eat at the king’s table. I believe there were two reasons for this. First, on account of David’s friendship with Jonathan, Saul’s son and Mephibosheth’s father. Second, because David knew God’s heart was one of kindness. No wonder God referred to David as a man after His own heart!

David’s actions demonstrate the fruit of kindness, which is a quality of the heart that desires and seeks the benefit of others.

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to be kind, as David was to Mephibosheth, out of reverence for You.*



## AUGUST 16

***He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.*** (Acts 14:17)

Kindness is an attribute of God. In His extravagant love for us, He desires our benefit. The context of today's verse is the aftermath of an amazing miracle that Paul performed in Lystra. The people of the city responded by preparing to worship Barnabas and Paul. Horrified and dismayed, the apostles pleaded with the crowd to turn away from worshipping human beings and idols, and to look only to the Creator God. They pointed to the testimony God gives of Himself in nature – in the provision of rain and crops and food.

Barnes writes of this verse:

“Rain is one of the evidences of the goodness [or kindness] of God. Man could not cause it; and without it, regulated at proper intervals of time and in proper quantities, the earth would soon be one wide scene of desolation. There is scarcely anything which more certainly indicates unceasing care and wisdom than the needful and refreshing showers of rain. The sun and stars move by fixed laws, whose operation we can see and anticipate. The falling of rain is regulated by laws which we cannot trace, and it seems, therefore, to be poured, as it were, directly from God's hollow hand. . . . It is remarkable, and a striking proof of the divine goodness [or kindness], that so few seasons are unfruitful. The earth yields her increase; the labours of the farmer are crowned with success; and the goodness [or kindness] of God demands the expressions of praise.”

Kindness is also an integral aspect of Jesus' nature. When He exhorts us to surrender to Him and take up His yoke, He says: *“For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:30).”* Literally, He is saying, “My yoke is kind!” When we submit to Jesus, we are embracing His kindness, and allowing the Holy Spirit to fashion hearts of kindness within us.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You for Your kindness to all of mankind, and especially to me!*



## AUGUST 17

***The Lord bless him! He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.***

*(Ruth 2:20)*

Ruth was a Moabite woman who had married one of the sons of Elimelech and Naomi after they had left Bethlehem to escape a famine. In the years that followed, Elimelech and both his sons died, and Naomi decided to return home. She told her widowed daughters-in-law to stay back in Moab and remarry. However, Ruth chose to go to Bethlehem with Naomi.

In Bethlehem, Ruth was disadvantaged in every way possible. She was a woman. She was a foreigner. She was a widow. She was childless. She was poor. And yet, at the end of the short book that bears her name, we learn that she was the great-grandmother of King David. How did a poor foreigner, without any hope or future, end up with such a glorious destiny? It was because of the kindness of one man – Boaz.

Boaz was an older relative of Elimelech. He could have looked down upon Naomi and Ruth because of the situation they were in, caused by their own actions. However, he looked with favour upon Ruth, seeing her love and commitment to Naomi. He first showed her kindness by making sure she was protected when she gleaned in his fields, and also ensuring that she was able to collect more than enough grain for Naomi and herself.

However, this kindness paled in comparison to what he did next. He chose to take up the duty of kinsman-redeemer, and paid the price to redeem Ruth. He need not have done this, as it might have affected his family inheritance. But, once again, Boaz showed extreme kindness to Ruth as well as to Naomi. He married Ruth, and the rest is history!

Boaz is a type of Jesus, and his kindness to Ruth foreshadows Jesus' kindness to you and me. We have been lifted up from our desperate state of sin, and redeemed by Jesus to be His Bride. And, as His children, we are to show the same kindness to those around us. Praise God for the Holy Spirit, who bears the fruit of kindness within us.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You for the example of Boaz; may my kindness to others also be sacrificial and costly, if required.*



## AUGUST 18

***We constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness. (2 Thessalonians 1:11)***

The fruit of the Spirit is goodness. This quality is closely linked to kindness, which we have looked at over the past three days. While kindness is a quality of the heart, goodness is about actions. In fact, goodness may be defined as active kindness. Thus, goodness is that quality of behaviour that is beneficial and advantageous to others, and seeks to promote their welfare. For example, Jesus tells us to love our enemies, which refers to the quality of our hearts; and then He tells us to do good to them, which is action reflecting what is in our hearts.

Eddie Foster makes the point that there is a huge difference between what the world calls good and what God considers good. He writes:

“Satan lied to Adam and Eve, convincing them that they would benefit by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And to this day, the world has been influenced by the devil’s deceptions concerning what is good and what is evil.

God wants us to demonstrate His goodness based on His commandments, based on His character. . . God knows what is best for us, because He created ‘good’. . . . Why does God want us to demonstrate goodness? Because it is good for us and good for those around us. We are to be a light showing what is truly moral—the beneficial commandments and righteousness of God.”

Paul knew that, just like his readers in Thessalonica, all Jesus’ disciples truly desire to live good lives. We recognise that goodness is an integral part of our calling in Jesus. But we struggle to do what is good, especially in a world that defines goodness so differently from God. The good news is that we have the Holy Spirit who, by His power, bears this fruit of goodness in us. He teaches us right from wrong, enables us to discern good from evil, and empowers us to live lives of goodness, as God desires.

### ***Prayer***

*Holy Spirit, bring to fruition my every desire for goodness, by Your awesome power!*



## AUGUST 19

***His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*** (2 Peter 1:3)

The fruit of the Spirit is goodness. In the rat race that is the world, goodness is often seen as an admirable virtue, but one that is a sign of weakness rather than strength. This attitude is seen in statements like “nice guys finish last” and “too good to succeed.” However, as always, the world gets it wrong. You see, the standard of “goodness” is God alone – and there is nothing weak about God! Even in His love and tenderness, He is the Almighty God, Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Thus, goodness is about strength, not weakness. Peter Pett comments on this verse, where goodness is translated as “virtue” in the King James Version:

“The word for ‘virtue’ does not just mean pure goodness. It contains within it the thought of actively powerful goodness. It is a word which denotes a good quality or excellence of any kind, and in the ancient classics it is used to denote manliness, vigour, courage, valour, fortitude. So the word includes the idea of energy or power of some kind, in contrast with what we commonly understand by virtue, and should, therefore, be allied to the energy or efficiency which God has displayed in the work of our salvation.”

God’s goodness can, thus, be manifested in rebuke, correction, and discipline as well, actions that are sharp or even harsh rather than tender and mellow. We see this so clearly in the interaction between Jesus and the rich young ruler. The young ruler is already good, not just in the eyes of the world but also with regard to God’s commandments. However, eager to excel in goodness, he comes to the one he considers good, that is, Jesus. And Jesus, out of love for the young man, prescribes perhaps the harshest requirement He ever gave anyone: “*You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me (Luke 18:22).*” Jesus’ advice was harsh, even shocking, but it was good for the man.

We are called to imitate the goodness of God, a goodness that is active and powerful and transformative; and He gives us His divine power to do just that, through the Holy Spirit.

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, thank You for Your divine power, that is manifested in Your goodness to me, and that enables me to lead a life of goodness.*



**AUGUST 20**

***Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge.***

*(2 Peter 1:5)*

The fruit of the Spirit is goodness. In this verse, and the ones that follow, Peter exhorts us to make every effort to excel in the virtues of goodness and knowledge, as well as several others. He says that we are to add them to our faith. Why is he saying this? I suspect it is because, too often, our faith becomes a theoretical and static thing, remaining at the level of belief and not being worked out in our lives. As James puts it in his epistle, *“faith without works is dead (James 2:26).”* These works that demonstrate our faith are often acts of goodness. As Paul writes in Ephesians 2, *“we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which he prepared in advance for us to do.”*

So, the incredible reality is that God has laid out all the groundwork for us to lead lives of goodness. First, He Himself is good, and He is the standard of goodness. Second, He gives us the perfect example of goodness in His Son. Third, He created us in His image, which means we are not just capable of goodness, but we desire to be good. Fourth, He has already prepared good works for us to do. And, fifth, He has given us the Holy Spirit, to bear the fruit of goodness in us!

What is our responsibility? Make every effort! The phrase Peter uses here means “to move quickly, to make haste, to show diligence and enthusiasm.” We are exhorted to show our commitment to obeying what is a priority for God by hastening to show zealous diligence, making our best effort, not procrastinating in doing good. As one commentator puts it, this “elevates the better over the good, and the more important over the important.” Thus, when we pursue the fruit of goodness, we are acknowledging, by our choices and actions, that those good works God has appointed for us to do are more important than so many other things that preoccupy us. And our faith in Jesus is manifested in the eagerness with which we strive to see the fruit of goodness in our lives.

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me make every effort to bear the fruit of goodness in my life.*



## AUGUST 21

***Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness.***

*(Joshua 24:14)*

The fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness. The Hebrew word for faithfulness comes from the root word “*aman*”, from which we also get “*Amen*”! It refers to firmness and endurance; a faithful person is, thus, worthy of trust or confidence, because he will stand firm and endure.

The speech in which we find today’s verse, where Joshua exhorts the people of Israel to serve God faithfully, includes his famous declaration: “*As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.*” It is Joshua’s commitment to faithfulness, a model for all Israel – and for all of us as well – to follow.

However, we are not called to be faithful in a vacuum. The context of Joshua’s call to faithfulness is, in fact, God’s faithfulness. After the first phase of conquering and occupying Canaan was over, Joshua gathered the leaders of Israel together to renew their covenant with the LORD. Before commanding Israel to serve the LORD with all faithfulness, Joshua reminded them of God’s extravagant and constant faithfulness to them. He observed how God had fulfilled His promises to the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He spoke of how God used Moses and Aaron to afflict the Egyptians, and bring Israel out of slavery. He reminded them of the LORD’s faithfulness to them during their long journey in the wilderness, including their conquests on the east of the Jordan. Finally, he drew their attention to where they were now, blessed by God to live in a “*land flowing with milk and honey.*”

How were the Israelites to respond to these centuries of God’s faithfulness? Joshua said, “*Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness.*” His words are just as relevant today as they were then, because God remains faithful. Jesus is the “*Amen, the faithful and true witness (Revelation 3:14).*” And we are called to faithfulness, especially in our relationship with Him.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to fear You, and serve You with all faithfulness.*



## AUGUST 22

***The Lord rewards everyone for their righteousness and faithfulness.*** (1 Samuel 26:23)

The fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness. We saw yesterday that, in the Old Testament, faithfulness is closely related to “Amen”, which means “sure”, “truly”, and “so be it”. Most often in the Bible, even when Jesus uses the word, it is to signify agreement with God’s Word. Therefore, a key aspect of faithfulness is conforming our actions and behaviour, even thoughts and attitudes, to what is on God’s heart.

The context of today’s verse reveals this aspect of faithfulness. Saul is hard on David’s heels, seeking to kill him. One night, even as Saul and his men sleep in their camp, David and Abishai enter it and come right up to where Saul is sleeping. The Bible records this astonishing conversation between Abishai and David:

*“Abishai said to David, ‘Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I won’t strike him twice.’  
But David said to Abishai, ‘Don’t destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the Lord lives,’ he said, ‘the LORD himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed.’ ”*

What David did was not just an act of mercy; as he says later, it was righteous and faithful – both words indicating an alignment to God’s heart. David was faithful to his understanding of God’s sovereignty, both in not killing Saul and also in trusting God to vindicate him. As Pett puts it: “Instead of trusting in Saul’s repentance he would put his trust in YHWH. Let YHWH work out events and give to every man what he was worthy of. And he was confident that YHWH would reward his own righteousness and faithfulness in not putting out his hand against the one who was consecrated to YHWH.”

And so it was. Saul was killed in battle, in God’s sovereign plan and time, and David became Israel’s greatest king! The same God is at work in us through the Holy Spirit, who reveals God’s heart to us and empowers us to be faithful to His Word – in effect, to say “Amen” to all that God desires.

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, reveal Your heart to me; and may I live a life of faithfulness, always saying “Amen” to what You desire.*



## AUGUST 23

***Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!***

*(Matthew 25:21)*

The fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness. Jesus is looking for this quality of faithfulness in His disciples. This truth is demonstrated most directly in the parable of the talents. The story is well known. A man goes on a long journey, entrusting three of his servants with five talents, two talents, and one talent respectively. (A talent was a unit of currency in that time, each talent worth more than a thousand dollars.) When he comes back, two of the servants have doubled what he had given them, while the third has buried his talent to keep it safe. The third servant is rebuked and punished, while the first two are praised and rewarded.

Let's look at what they are praised for. The master says, *"Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things . . ."* The two servants are praised by the master for their faithfulness. He had entrusted something to them, and they had been faithful in doing what he desired with it. Their faithfulness was manifested in two ways:

1. They recognised the talents as a trust, and that they were responsible to use them for their master's benefit.
2. They were diligent and urgent in their investment of the talents entrusted to them.

Today, the word "talent" is defined as "natural aptitude or skill", a meaning that is actually derived from this parable. Every aptitude or skill, ability or gift that we have, has been entrusted to us by our heavenly Father in order that we may accomplish His kingdom purposes. We need to do what the first two servants did: recognise the talents we have been entrusted with, and be diligent and urgent in using those talents as God desires.

Of all the words that Jesus might say to me when I get to heaven, I hope most of all that He will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" May those words greet each one of us when we enter into His eternal glory!

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, may I be faithful with every talent, gift, and resource that You have entrusted to me; I long to hear You say to me, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"*



## AUGUST 24

***In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*** (1 Peter 3:15)

The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness. In this verse, Peter is exhorting the disciples to always be prepared to share the reasons for their faith in Jesus. But the context of this sharing is not a peaceful or friendly conversation about religion. Rather, it is persecution. In fact, one of the titles for this section in our Bibles is “Suffering for doing good.” Peter is saying that, even in times of persecution and injustice, we are to share our faith with gentleness and respect. Barnes writes that we are to give our reasons “with modesty; without any spirit of ostentation; with gentleness of manner. This seems to be added on the supposition that they sometimes might be rudely assailed; that the questions might be proposed in a spirit of evil; that it might be done in a taunting or insulting manner. Even though this should be done, they were not to fall into a passion, to manifest resentment, or to retort in an angry and revengeful manner; but, in a calm and gentle spirit, they were to state the reasons of their faith and hope, and leave the matter there.”

How can we possibly manifest the fruit of gentleness in such adverse circumstances? The key, Peter says, is to “*revere Christ as Lord.*” For, if He is truly our Lord, then we will imitate Him. Consider how Jesus treated His persecutors – those who arrested Him in the garden, those who insulted and abused Him at trial, those who mocked and ridiculed Him, those who spat on Him and slapped Him and tore out His beard, those who falsely accused Him, those who sentenced Him to death despite His innocence, and, finally, those who crucified Him. As He told His disciples when the armed crowd came to seize Him in the garden of Gethsemane, right at the beginning of all of these events, “*Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?*” Here we see Jesus demonstrating the true meaning of gentleness – “strength under submission to God.” If we call Jesus “Lord”, we too must respond to suffering with the gentleness that the Holy Spirit bears in us.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, may I always share the hope that I have in You with gentleness, in imitation of You, no matter how adverse the circumstances.*



**AUGUST 25**

***Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.***

*(Philippians 4:5)*

The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness. The word that is translated “gentleness” in this verse has been rendered by different translators as patience, softness, modesty, forbearance, moderation, and magnanimity. The Greeks explained this word to mean “justice and something better than justice.” It referred to that quality of a man that didn’t merely apply the letter of the law in justice, but knew when to show grace and mercy.

Paul suggests that this quality of gentleness should be one of the hallmarks of the Christian community. It should be evident to those around us that, while we believe firmly in the absolute truth of God’s standards, we are finally guided by the Holy Spirit in dealing with one another in ways that go beyond the letter of the law. As James, the brother of Jesus, declares in his book, *“Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13)”*, and we see that so clearly in the way Jesus dealt with sinners.

Barclay writes:

“The Christian, as Paul sees it, is the man who knows that there is something beyond justice. When the woman taken in adultery was brought before him, Jesus could have applied the letter of the Law according to which she should have been stoned to death; but he went beyond justice. As far as justice goes, there is not one of us who deserves anything other than the condemnation of God, but he goes far beyond justice. Paul lays it down that the mark of a Christian in his personal relationships with his fellow-men must be that he knows when to insist on justice and when to remember that there is something beyond justice.

Why should a man be like this? Why should he have this joy and gracious gentleness in his life? Because, says Paul, the Lord is at hand. If we remember the coming triumph of Christ, we can never lose our hope and our joy. If we remember that life is short, we will not wish to enforce the stern justice which so often divides men, but will wish to deal with men in love, as we hope that God will deal with us.”

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, may my gentleness be the evidence of my hope and life in You; teach me to temper justice with grace and mercy.*



**AUGUST 26**

***Blessed are the meek [i.e. gentle], for they will inherit the earth.***

*(Matthew 5:5)*

The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness. The Greek word “*prautes*” is often translated “meekness.” Both these English words give us a very different sense of what the Bible means; they give us a picture of weakness. Nothing could be further from the truth. Aristotle described *prautes* as the middle ground between two extremes, getting angry without reason and not getting angry at all – that is, anger at the right time, in the right measure, for the right reason. Therefore, *prautes* refers to gentleness in power (not weakness); it is a balance born in strength of character.

As we have seen earlier, gentleness may be described as “strength under submission to God.” It is the attitude of spirit by which we accept God’s dealings with us as good, and do not dispute or resist Him. Thus, we are often called to be gentle or meek in times of persecution – and, while the world sees it as weakness, in God’s eyes it is true strength. A powerful image of gentleness may be seen in a horse, fierce and strong, but with its strength controlled by its rider.

Pett writes:

“The ‘meek’ are those who take the buffetings of life and do not rebel against them overmuch. They accept them from the hand of God. They do not get riled up at them. They are not always seeking revenge. They accept what life brings. They do not allow themselves to be upset over things that they can do nothing about. They do not throw their weight about. They concentrate on what does matter. They are ‘meek and lowly in heart’ like Jesus was. Thus the word could be used to describe an animal which responded to its reins. And yet like Him ‘the meek’ are strong for what is right. For they are bold in testimony. When necessary they speak out against sin. But even in boldness of testimony they remember Whose they are. They respond to His reins.”

Jesus is our model of gentleness or meekness. He had much power and influence; however, He submitted all He had for His Father’s purposes. And He surrendered completely to His Father’s dealings with His life, accepting them as good, even when “gentleness” meant death on a cross.

Today, will you let Jesus take over the reins of your life completely? That is the fruit of gentleness!

### ***Prayer***

*Holy Spirit, bear the fruit of gentleness in me. May whatever strength I have always be under submission to my heavenly Father, and may I accept all His dealings with me as good.*



**AUGUST 27**

***Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city.***

*(Proverbs 16:32)*

The fruit of the spirit is self-control. In this proverb, Solomon is connecting self-control with patience – that is, being slow to anger – and giving it more importance than mighty deeds of war. The warrior who was able to conquer a city was highly valued and praised; yet, here we are told that a person with self-control is to be admired even more!

Barclay shares this story of Alexander, who is considered one of the greatest warriors in history: “It was the lack of that very quality [of self-control] which ruined Alexander the Great, who, in a fit of uncontrolled temper in the middle of a drunken debauch, hurled a spear at his best friend and killed him. No man can lead others until he has mastered himself; no man can serve others until he has subjected himself; no man can be in control of others until he has learned to control himself.”

The comparison of self-control with war is deliberate and pointed. As John Piper puts it, “The very concept of ‘self-control’ implies a battle between a divided self. It implies that our ‘self’ produces desires we should not satisfy but instead ‘control’.” In fact, the phrase in today’s verse that has been translated as “one with self-control” literally means “he who rules his spirit.” So, as Pett puts it, “the one who is slow to anger and who is able to rule his spirit, in other words who conquers his emotions, shows such strength that he is more to be admired than a mighty warrior, or the conqueror of a city.”

There is a war on for our souls. It is fought every day – in the choices we make, the actions we take, the thoughts we dwell upon, and the desires we satisfy. Self-control is not simply a matter of saying “No” to our flesh; it is having dominion over our sinful desires by saying “Yes” instead to Jesus. And, praise God, we have the power of the Holy Spirit within us to help us win this battle, daily!

***Prayer***

*Holy Spirit, give me the self-control I need to win the battle over my sinful desires, daily!*



**AUGUST 28**

***Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.***

*(Proverbs 25:28)*

Walls were very important for cities in ancient times. Often they were the primary defense against invading armies. A city whose walls were broken was defenceless and vulnerable to destruction. No wonder Nehemiah, when he heard that Jerusalem's walls were broken down, broke down with weeping and mourning. He knew the danger his people were in, without walls to protect them.

The same is true of us when we lack self-control. It is as if our protection to temptation is gone, and we are vulnerable to falling into sin. Ironically, there is probably no greater example of this proverb than its author, King Solomon. His lack of self-control in indulging his fleshly desires led him into ever greater sin. The Bible tells us that he especially indulged himself in three areas – wealth, sex, and power – in ways that were expressly forbidden by the Law of Moses. His desire for wealth and power resulted in trading and political alliances with pagan nations. His love of women resulted in him having seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, many from foreign nations. We read in 1 Kings 11 of the tragic consequence of Solomon's lack of self-control: *“As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.”*

Solomon's walls were broken through by his indulgence of his flesh, and the result was probably far worse than he had ever imagined. He ended his days steeped in idolatry. After starting so well, having the LORD appear to him twice, and building a grand temple in Jerusalem, Solomon completely lost his relationship with God.

Today, let's ask the Holy Spirit to help us repair any breaches we may have allowed in the walls of our lives.

***Prayer***

*Holy Spirit, please protect me with the fruit of self-control; may my walls not be broken through, but strong and stable.*



**AUGUST 29**

***God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of self-control.***

*(2 Timothy 1:7)*

The fruit of the Spirit is self-control. The word that Paul uses in Galatians 5, when he lists the nine fruit of the Spirit, is “*enkrateia*”. It refers to keeping in check one’s strength or power or ability, and choosing not to indulge oneself. However, indulgence is not always about satisfying sinful desires. It is also possible to indulge our doubts and fears, allowing them to take over our hearts and minds, and affect our behaviour and actions.

Today’s verse is one which is much-quoted in Christian circles as a source of encouragement. Paul was dealing with an attitude of timidity and reticence that was preventing Timothy from fully exercising the spiritual gift he had been given for his work of ministry. Paul reminded him that he had received a different spirit – one of power and love and self-control – from the Holy Spirit. Timothy had the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish his work, and he had the overflow of the Father’s love poured into his heart through that same Spirit. But these would lie dormant if Timothy was not self-controlled – if he gave in to fear.

The word that Paul uses for “self-control” in this verse is actually “*sophronismos*”. It has also been translated as “self-discipline” and “sound mind”. Barnes writes: “The Greek word denotes one of sober mind; a man of prudence and discretion. The state referred to here is that in which the mind is well balanced, and under right influences; in which it sees things in their just proportions and relations; in which it is not feverish and excited, but when everything is in its proper place. It was this state of mind which Timothy was exhorted to cultivate; this which Paul regarded as so necessary to the performance of the duties of his office. It is as needful now for the minister of religion as it was then.”

This state of self-control is needful not just for the minister of religion but for every disciple of Jesus. We are buffeted on every side by pressures that seek to divert and distract and discourage us from God’s purposes for us – but we have the Holy Spirit, bearing the fruit of self-control within us, to keep us on the right track. We just have to let Him!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, may I not give in to fear, but serve You with a spirit of power, love, and self-control.*



## AUGUST 30

***Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.*** (Matthew 12:33)

We saw, at the start of this month, how important fruitfulness is to Jesus. Consider this parable that Jesus taught, found in Luke 13:

*“A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'*

*'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'*”

Jesus is looking for fruit in His disciples. In fact, our very purpose is to bear fruit; and if we don't bear the fruit that He desires, we are in danger of perishing!

However, as today's verse makes clear, there are different qualities of fruit, depending on the trees that bear them. So, too, with human beings. We bear good fruit or bad fruit, depending on what kind of people we are. For every one of the nine fruit of the Spirit, there is an opposite fruit that is bad, of the flesh, and displeasing to God.

The quality of our fruit depends on what is within us. As Jesus proceeds to say, *“The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.”* Good fruit comes out of the good that is within us. Now, only God is good, and He alone is the standard of goodness. So, we bear good fruit as we allow God to live within us by His Holy Spirit.

This is the secret of fruitfulness – a life that is led by, in step with, and surrendered to, the Holy Spirit. He is the source of fruit within us!

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, may I always be fruitful, and may the fruit I bear always be good, as I allow the Holy Spirit to produce His fruit in and through me.*



## AUGUST 31

***Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.*** *(Ephesians 5:8-10)*

Paul prefaces these verses with the recognition that his readers – and that includes you and I – were once darkness. While in darkness, we bore the fruit of that realm and lived lives apart from God’s light. But now, as we are in the light, we should live as children of light and bear the fruit of the light.

Pett writes:

“Living in the light is seen as a huge privilege. They should enjoy it and exult in the privilege and live continually in the light. To walk in the light, to be children of light, signifies living in the light, open before God, with nothing hidden from Him, being totally honest with Him and daily, no, each opportune moment, joyously bringing their lives to Him like an open book and letting His light shine on them. It is a life of not hiding anything from His gaze. . . . And this will result in the fruit of goodness, righteousness and truth, the very opposite of uncleanness and covetousness.”

The light of Jesus Christ produces good fruit. Paul refers to three qualities of the fruit that we produce when we are in the light, and all three would apply to the fruit of the Spirit as well:

1. Goodness, which refers to spiritual and moral excellence – it is exemplified by the old fashioned word, “virtue”.
2. Righteousness, which refers to what God deems right and approves of, both with regard to our dealings with God and man.
3. Truth, which is more than intellectual knowledge; it is moral truth that is experienced and lived out.

Finally, Paul says that, in the light, we find out what pleases God. As we seek to produce the fruit that He desires – living as children of our heavenly Father, abiding in Jesus, and drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit – we receive ever-greater revelation of God’s heart, and we know what gives Him pleasure. And Jesus’ words will be true for our lives as well: *“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples (John 15:8).”*

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, help us to live as children of light, bearing fruit that is good and righteous and true, and giving You pleasure.*



# Prayer

II

*God does nothing but by prayer*

*and everything with it*



SEPTEMBER

## SEPTEMBER 1

***Prayer is aligning ourselves with the purposes of God.***

*(E. Stanley Jones)*

The Cambridge dictionary defines “alignment” as “an arrangement in which two or more things are positioned in a straight line or parallel to each other.” Another meaning it gives for alignment is “an agreement between people who want to work together because of shared interests or aims.” Both these definitions help to clarify today’s quote on prayer.

Prayer is positioning ourselves and our petitions in line with what is on God’s heart, rather than seeking our own desires. Prayer is agreeing with God’s heart, will, and purpose for things on earth.

E. Stanley Jones writes in his book *“How we pray”*:

“Prayer is not bending God to my will, but it is a bringing of my will into conformity with God’s will, so that his will may work in and through me. When you are in a small boat and you throw out a boathook to catch hold of the shore, do you pull the shore to yourself, or do you pull yourself to the shore? Prayer is not bending the universe to your will, making God a cosmic bellhop for your purposes, but prayer is co-operating with the purposes of God to do things you never dreamed you could do.”

Consider the prayer of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. In overwhelming sorrow and agony of spirit, even as His body was physically buffeted by what He was feeling, He was able to say, *“Yet not as I will, but as you will.”* This was no lazy prayer of resignation; it was the Son aligning Himself fully with His Father’s purposes for Him and for all mankind.

Today, bring an issue before God that is heavy on your heart. Instead of bringing your petition to Him, wait in silence and seek to receive His heart for that situation. Then, align your prayer with His purposes!

### ***Prayer***

*Father, help me to always align my prayers with Your purposes.*



## SEPTEMBER 2

***Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing.***

*(John Piper)*

Have you ever tried to solve a problem by yourself, sought the help of others, and exhausted all the world's remedies, before finally turning to God in prayer? Well, that prayer was the acknowledgment that you needed God – and you would have been better off going to God in the first place!

Jesus had no problem acknowledging His need for His Father. He said, *"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing (John 5:19)."* And Jesus affirmed the same for us, when He said to His disciples, *"Apart from me, you can do nothing (John 15:5)."*

John Piper says that when we admit our need for God in prayer, we are in fact glorifying Him. He illustrates this truth in his book, *"Desiring God"*:

*"Suppose you are totally paralyzed and can do nothing for yourself but talk. And suppose a strong and reliable friend promised to live with you and do whatever you needed done. How could you glorify this friend if a stranger came to see you?*

*Would you glorify his generosity and strength by trying to get out of bed and carry him? No! You would say, 'Friend, please come lift me up, and would you put a pillow behind me so I can look at my guest? And would you please put my glasses on for me?'*

*And so your visitor would learn from your requests that you are helpless and that your friend is strong and kind. You glorify your friend by needing him, and by asking him for help, and counting on him. . . .*

*So how is God glorified by prayer? Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. And prayer is the turning away from ourselves to God in the confidence that he will provide the help we need."*

Today, bring an issue before God that you have struggled to resolve. Let your prayer be an admission that He alone can do something about it. And watch Him work!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, apart from You, I can do nothing; may my prayers always reflect this truth.*



## SEPTEMBER 3

***Beware in your prayers, above everything else, of limiting God, not only by unbelief, but by fancying that you know what He can do. Expect unexpected things 'above all that we ask or think'.***  
(Andrew Murray)

Jeremiah prays in chapter 33 of his book, *"Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Is anything too hard for you?"* And yet, it appears that he is doubtful about something God has asked him to do! And God, in His response to Jeremiah, reminds him with these words: *"I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?"*

The only thing that limits God is our prayers. And our prayers are limited by both our unbelief in the effectiveness of prayer as well as the smallness of our God. Jesus said that we would do greater things than Him; how could such an outrageous thing possibly be true? Paul writes that God is *"able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20)."* Do we really believe that?

God is looking for bold prayers that match how awesome He is. Joshua was a man who believed the impossible of God. He uttered one of the most incredible prayers in the Bible, and God answered in stupendous fashion. The incident is recorded in Joshua 10:

*"On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel:*

*'Sun, stand still over Gibeon,  
and you, moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.'*  
*So the sun stood still,  
and the moon stopped,  
till the nation avenged itself on its enemies,  
as it is written in the Book of Jashar.*

*The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a human being. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!"*

The God who stopped the earth from turning on its axis for a whole day can do absolutely anything; let us not limit Him by our prayers. Today, will you pray a bold, audacious, impossible-to-answer prayer?

### **Prayer**

*God Almighty, may I not limit You with feeble and unbelieving prayers; rather, help me to expect the impossible from You when I pray!*



## SEPTEMBER 4

***The greatest tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer. (F. B. Meyer)***

One of the most discouraging aspects of the Christian life, and definitely the greatest obstacle to prayer, is unanswered prayer. We take the Bible at face value, believe in the many promises of answered prayer, expect supernatural answers – and then, when we are disappointed, stop praying. We feel aggrieved with God’s lack of response, and justified in giving up on prayer – and yet, F. B. Meyer, a giant of prayer, echoes the words of the apostle James: *“You do not have, because you do not ask God (James 4:2).”* Jesus knew we would struggle with unanswered prayer – but He knew what would be even worse, so He exhorted His disciples to *“watch and pray”* and to *“always pray and never give up.”* Jesus knew, as F. B. Meyer discerned, that prayerlessness sounds the death knell of the Christian life.

What was F. B. Meyer’s solution? He laid a great emphasis on cultivating our private prayer life:

*“Nothing would be better for most of us than a great revival in our habits of private prayer. Perhaps we cannot do as Luther, who was accustomed to say, ‘I have so much work to do today that I cannot get through it with less than three hours of prayer’; or as Andrewes, who regularly set apart five hours each day for private devotion; or as Law, the author of the Serious Call, who was accustomed, as the clock rang out each third hour, to turn to prolonged prayer, allocating to each occasion some special subject. But that we should pray more, that we should labour in prayer as Epaphras did, that we should cultivate the art of prayer, is clear. Habits of prayer need careful cultivation. The instinct and impulse are with us by the grace of the Holy Spirit, but we need to cultivate the gracious inward movements until they become solidified into an unbending practice.”*

When we make prayer a habit, we will avoid the sin of unoffered prayer and counter the discouragement of unanswered prayer. Today, consider your daily schedule, and resolve to cultivate your private prayer life.

### ***Prayer***

*Father, forgive me for every unoffered prayer; help me to cultivate a healthy prayer life that can withstand the disappointment of unanswered prayer.*



## SEPTEMBER 5

***Prayer is the one prime, eternal condition by which the Father is pledged to put the Son in possession of the world. Christ prays through His people.*** (E. M. Bounds)

Today's devotion is taken entirely from E. M. Bounds' classic book, "*Purpose in Prayer*":

"The Gospel, in its success and power, depends on our ability to pray. The dispensations of God depend on man's ability to pray. And yet, conscious as we are of the importance of prayer, of its vital importance, we let the hours pass away as a blank. . . .

When we calmly reflect upon the fact that the progress of our Lord's kingdom is dependent upon prayer, it is sad to think that we give so little time to the holy exercise. Everything depends on prayer, and yet we neglect it – not only to our own spiritual hurt, but also to the delay and injury of our Lord's cause upon earth. The forces of good and evil are contending for the world. If we would pray, we would add to the conquering power of the army of righteousness; and yet our lips are sealed, our hands hang listlessly by our sides, and by holding back from the prayer chamber we jeopardize the very cause in which we profess to be deeply interested.

Prayer is the one prime, eternal condition by which the Father is pledged to put the Son in possession of the world. Christ prays through His people. If there had been importunate, universal, and continuous prayer by God's people, the earth would have been possessed for Christ long before this. The delay is not to be accounted for by the inveterate obstacles, but by the lack of the right asking.

God has no force and demands no conditions but prayer. . . .

If more or all of the disciples of Christianity were to pray, with an earnest and unalterable resolution, in order that heaven should not withhold anything that the most persistent prayer could obtain, it would be a sign that a revolution of the world was at hand."

### ***Prayer***

*Father, forgive our neglect of prayer; teach Your Church to possess the world for Christ through our prayers!*



## SEPTEMBER 6

***As is the business of tailors to make clothes and cobblers to make shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray.***  
*(Martin Luther)*

Martin Luther is a giant among Christian leaders, and easily the most prominent name of the Protestant Reformation. When he nailed his “95 Theses” to his church door, he took a lone stand against a formidable foe. Melody Mason writes of Luther’s courage and steadfastness: “What was his secret? How could he stand so courageously against the most influential and powerful religious system in the world and yet not be ruffled? The answer was prayer. His strength came from the secret place of prayer.”

As today’s quote shows, Martin Luther understood prayer to be the primary task of Christians. And his life and work demonstrated this truth.

Mary Jane Haemig writes:

“While many are accustomed to thinking of Luther as an insightful teacher, important reformer, and prominent figure in church history, fewer think of him as a pastor, giving practical advice on basic matters of the Christian life. Luther wrote and spoke frequently about prayer. His instructions on prayer permeated his work, occurring in a wide variety of his writings. In all these types of speaking and writing, Luther emphasized that God has commanded us to pray and that God has promised to hear us. Luther also frequently noted that God has given us the words to pray. Luther saw prayer as an integral part of the Christian life. He consistently advocated that prayer be frequent, bold, honest, and forthright. Prayer’s starting place is not the human but rather God—God has spoken, in both command and promise, and has invited, encouraged, and shaped our response. Luther gave much practical advice on how to pray. He discussed the timing and occasions for prayer, the structure and content of prayers, specific challenges faced by those praying, and even the physical postures involved.”

Martin Luther transformed the world, because he was a man of prayer. May we follow in his footsteps!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, may prayer truly be my business, the activity I give priority to.*



## SEPTEMBER 7

***If you do all the talking when you pray, how will you ever hear God's answers?***

*(A W. Tozer)*

We have all heard the standard definition of prayer as “talking to God.” Which means, I suppose, that He just listens in silence to our requests, and is then expected to fulfil them! What a shallow, even perverse, understanding of prayer. Prayer is communication, which is always two-way if it is to have any significance. Nicky Gumbel makes the point emphatically in his book *“Questions of Life”*, with this absurd illustration:

“Prayer is a two-way conversation. Suppose I go to the doctor and say, ‘Doctor, I have a number of problems: I have a problem of fungus growing under my toenails, I have piles, my eyes itch, I need a flu jab, I have very bad backaches and I have tennis elbow.’ Then, having got through my list of complaints, I look at my watch and say, ‘Goodness me, time is getting on. Well, I must be off. Thanks very much for listening.’ The doctor might want to say, ‘Hang on a second. Why don’t you listen to me?’ If whenever we pray we only speak to God and never take time to listen, we make the same mistake.”

A. W. Tozer, who wrote a great deal on this subject, recognized that in prayer it is more important to listen than to talk. He speaks of “a closed mouth and silent heart.” This is because, for Tozer, prayer is primarily about communing with God. He writes:

“Almost every book on prayer deals with the ‘get’ element mainly. How to get things we want from God occupies most of the space. Now, we gladly admit that we may ask for and receive specific gifts and benefits in answer to prayer, but we must never forget that the highest kind of prayer is never the making of requests. Prayer at its holiest moment is the entering into God to a place of such blessed union as makes miracles seem tame and remarkable answers to prayer appear something very far short of wonderful by comparison.”

Prayer is the means of deepening our relationship with God. He loves to listen to us, but He also longs to speak to us. As we come into the place and time of prayer, we are invited into God’s heart, if we will only care to listen.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, teach me to listen to You when I pray!*



## SEPTEMBER 8

***No man is greater than his prayer life. The pastor who is not praying is playing; the people who are not praying are straying.*** (Leonard Ravenhill)

Ravenhill's famous book, *"Why Revival Tarries"*, opens with this scathing indictment of a Church that does not pray:

"The Cinderella of the church of today is the prayer meeting. This handmaid of the Lord is unloved and unwooed because she is not dripping with the pearls of intellectualism, nor glamorous with the silks of philosophy; neither is she enchanting with the tiara of psychology. She wears the homespuns of sincerity and humility and so is not afraid to kneel!"

Ravenhill despairs of ministers and congregations that do not pray, and connects the dead state of the Church directly to her state of prayerlessness. He writes:

"Poverty-stricken as the Church is today in many things, she is most stricken here, in the place of prayer. . . .

The two prerequisites to successful Christian living are vision and passion – both of which are born in and maintained by prayer. The ministry of preaching is open to few; the ministry of prayer—the highest ministry of all human offices—is open to all. Spiritual adolescents say, 'I'll not go tonight, it's only the prayer meeting.' It may be that Satan has little cause to fear most preaching. Yet past experiences sting him to rally all his infernal army to fight against God's people praying. . . .

This world hits the trail for hell with a speed that makes our fastest plane look like a tortoise; yet alas, few of us can remember the last time we missed our bed for a night waiting upon God for a world-shaking revival. . . .

The secret of praying is praying in secret. A sinning man will stop praying, and a praying man will stop sinning. We are beggared and bankrupt, but not broken, nor even bent."

We all aspire to greatness. Leonard Ravenhill exhorts us to prayer that is great in its commitment and passion, which will give us the true measure of the quality of our life.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, keep me from the playing and straying that comes with prayerlessness; help me to have a prayer life that is truly great!*



## SEPTEMBER 9

***In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart.***

*(John Bunyan)*

John Bunyan is best known for his allegorical novel “*The Pilgrim’s Progress*”, which was at one time second in popularity only to the Bible. However, he also wrote passionately about prayer, including a treatise that he wrote while in prison, entitled “*I will pray with the spirit and with the understanding also; or a discourse touching prayer.*”

John Bunyan believed that prayer was vitally important for the Christian. He saw prayer as indispensable for the heart connection between man and God. He wrote, “Prayer is an ordinance of God to be used both in public and private; yea, such an ordinance as brings those that have the spirit of supplication into great familiarity with God. It is also so prevalent [i.e. powerful] an action that it gets from God, both for the person that prayed, and for them that are prayed for, great things. It is the opener of the heart of God, and a means by which the soul, though empty is filled. By prayer the Christian can open his heart to God, as to a friend, and to obtain fresh testimony of God’s friendship to him.”

Ian McNaughton writes of Bunyan’s insistence that prayer had to be from the heart: “For Bunyan, prayer is most of all fellowship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, it must be undertaken with the deepest sincerity and affection. In this vein, Bunyan wrote that prayer is a ‘sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to his Word, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God.’ ”

Bunyan encouraged extemporaneous prayers that were from the heart, to the extent that he considered even praying from the Book of Common Prayer as forbidden by Scripture! He wrote: “Even the Lord’s Prayer can become blasphemy if uttered without spirit or understanding.” One may disagree with Bunyan’s objection to liturgical prayer, but it came from that place of wanting to obey Jesus’ commands against vain repetitions, and desiring prayer that was acceptable to God.

### ***Prayer***

*Father, may my prayer always be from the heart, rather than with vain words.*



## SEPTEMBER 10

***Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.***

*(Max Lucado)*

Max Lucado has a chapter called “*The Power of a Timid Prayer*” in his book “*He Still Moves Stones*.” In it, he tells the story of Jim Redmond:

“His son Derek, a twenty-six-year-old Briton, was favoured to win the four-hundred-meter race in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Halfway into his semi-final heat, a fiery pain seared through his right leg. He crumpled to the track with a torn hamstring. As the medical attendants were approaching, Redmond fought to his feet. ‘It was animal instinct,’ he would later say. He set out hopping, pushing away the coaches in a crazed attempt to finish the race. When he reached the stretch, a big man pushed through the crowd. He was wearing a t-shirt that read ‘Have you hugged your child today?’ and a hat that challenged, ‘Just Do It.’ The man was Jim Redmond, Derek’s father. ‘You don’t have to do this,’ he told his weeping son. ‘Yes, I do,’ Derek declared. ‘Well, then,’ said Jim, ‘we’re going to finish this together.’ And they did. Jim wrapped Derek’s arm around his shoulder and helped him hobble to the finish line. Fighting off security men, the son’s head sometimes buried in the father’s shoulder, they stayed in Derek’s lane to the end. The crowd clapped, then stood, then cheered, and then wept as the father and son finished the race. What made the father do it? What made the father leave the stands to meet his son on the track? Was it the strength of his child? No, it was the pain of his child. His son was hurt and fighting to complete the race. So the father came to help him finish. God does the same. Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.”

Today, bring a situation before God that you neither have the faith nor the words for. It may be something deeply personal, or even some global issue. Just know that your prayer is making a difference.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You that even my awkward and feeble prayers make a difference, because You still hear and answer.*



## SEPTEMBER 11

***We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, few pray-ers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere.*** (Leonard Ravenhill)

We live in an upside down world, where the eternal is ignored and the temporal is sought after. Unfortunately, the Church is often upside down as well – we major on the minors, investing in the unimportant matters of the world rather than pouring ourselves out for the things of eternal significance. In no area is this more obvious than in our prayerlessness.

Let's examine each part of Leonard Ravenhill's damning description of the Church, and see what Jesus desires:

- We have many organizers, but few agonizers – God is looking for Elijahs who will agonize in prayer for the rain.
- We have many players and payers, but few pray-ers – God is looking for Daniels who are faithful in prayer.
- We have many singers, but few clingers – God is looking for Jacobs who will cling on to Him until the blessing is released.
- We have lots of pastors, but few wrestlers – God is looking for Epaphrases who will wrestle in the secret place for His people.
- We have many fears, but few tears – God is looking for Hannahs who will pour their hearts out in His presence.
- We have much fashion, but little passion – God is looking for John the Baptists whose 'Sunday best' is a heart of passion for His kingdom.
- We have many interferers, but few intercessors – God is looking for Annas who are on their knees behind the scenes.
- We have many writers, but few fighters – God is looking for Joshuas who will wage spiritual warfare.
- Failing here, we fail everywhere – God is looking for Pauls and Peters, and so many like them, who will lay hold of what Jesus won on the cross.

At the end of the chapter that contains today's quote, Ravenhill writes:

"In the matter of New Testament, Spirit-inspired, hell-shaking, world-breaking prayer, never has so much been left by so many to so few. For this kind of prayer there is no substitute. We do it – or die!"

### ***Prayer***

*Holy Spirit, make me an agonizer, pray-er, clinger, wrestler, intercessor, and fighter; give me tears, give me passion; may my prayers be Spirit-inspired, hell-shaking, and world-breaking!*



## SEPTEMBER 12

***Prayer delights God's ear; it melts His heart; and opens His hand. God cannot deny a praying soul.***  
*(Thomas Watson)*

Thomas Watson was a Presbyterian Puritan preacher in seventeenth century England, well known for imparting theological understanding with memorable phrases and illustrations. One of his classic volumes was on The Lord's Prayer. We read in his lengthy exposition on the very first line, "Our Father in heaven", how significant he considered the parent-child relationship between us and our Abba Father. For him, prayer was coming as a child to our loving Father.

In another place, Watson wrote:

"Prayer is the soul's traffic with heaven. God comes down to us by his Spirit, and we go up to him by prayer. . . . A godly man cannot live without prayer. A man cannot live unless he takes his breath, nor can the soul, unless it breathes forth its desires to God. As soon as the babe of grace is born, it cries; no sooner was Paul converted than 'behold, he prayed.' "

What a tender and beautiful picture! Forgive me if this sounds a bit heretical – but our Abba Father is a big softie! He loves to hear our prayers, just as a father rejoices in the gurgling cries of his new-born baby! His heart melts at the slightest gesture of affection on our part, just as a father delights in his child's hugs! He cannot resist opening the treasures of heaven to us when we ask with childlike faith, just as a father cannot refuse a request that starts with "Please, Daddy!"

Jesus said, "*Will not your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him?*" So, let's ask Him, assured that He is our Father. The good news is that He is already delighted in us, His heart is already melted, and His hand is fully open to bless us! As Thomas Watson puts it, He cannot deny His praying children!

### ***Prayer***

*Father, may my prayers delight You, melt Your heart, and open Your hand!*



## SEPTEMBER 13

***Every great movement of God can be traced to a kneeling figure.***

*(D. L. Moody)*

Dwight Lyman Moody was one of the greatest evangelists of the nineteenth century. He is said to have shaken two continents for Jesus, preaching thousands of sermons in hundreds of cities across the United States and England. He was well acquainted with the power and necessity of prayer. The following story is taken from the online blog, “*Women of Christianity*”:

“After the Chicago fire he [that is, D. L. Moody] went to London to rest and to learn from the Bible scholars there. He had no intention of preaching. One Sunday morning he was persuaded to preach in a church in London. Everything about the service dragged. He wished that he had never consented to preach. There was a woman in the city who had heard of Mr. Moody’s work in America and had been asking God to send him to London. This woman was an invalid. Her sister was present at the church that Sunday morning. When the hearer reached home she asked her sister to guess who had spoken for them that morning. She guessed one after another of those with whom her pastor was in the habit of exchanging, never guessing aright. Her sister said, ‘No, Mr. Moody from Chicago.’ The sick woman turned pale, and said, ‘This is an answer to my prayer. If I had known that he was to be at our church, I should have eaten nothing this morning, but waited on God in prayer. . . . Leave me alone this afternoon: do not let anyone come to see me; do not send me anything to eat.’ All that afternoon that woman gave herself to prayer. As Mr. Moody preached that night, he soon became conscious that there was a different atmosphere in the church. ‘The powers of an unseen world seemed to fall’ upon him and his hearers. As he drew to a close he felt impressed to give out an invitation. He asked for all who would accept Christ to rise. Four or five hundred people rose. He thought that they misunderstood him, and so he put the question several ways that there might be no mistake. But no, they had understood.”

May God raise up many kneeling figures from among us, to release great movements of revival all across the world!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, stir me to be a kneeling figure who will help usher in a great movement of God in this nation.*



## SEPTEMBER 14

***If you are a stranger to prayer, you are a stranger to the greatest source of power known to human beings.***  
*(Billy Sunday)*

Today's quote is from a sermon preached by Billy Sunday, titled "Teach Us To Pray." He ended the sermon with these words:

"Every man and every woman that God has used to halt this sin-cursed world and set it going Godward has been a Christian of prayer.

Martin Luther arose from his bed and prayed all night, and when the break of day came he called his wife and said to her, 'It has come!' History records that on that very day King Charles granted religious toleration, a thing for which Luther had prayed.

John Knox, whom his queen feared more than any other man, was in such agony of prayer that he ran out into the street and fell on his face and cried, 'O God, give me Scotland or I'll die.' And God gave him Scotland and not only that, he threw England in for good measure.

When Jonathan Edwards was about to preach his greatest sermon on 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,' he prayed for days; and when he stood before the congregation and preached it, men caught at the seats in their terror, and some fell to the floor; and the people cried out in their fear, 'Mr. Edwards, tell us how we can be saved!'

The critical period of American history was between 1784 and 1789. There was no common coinage, no common defense. When the colonies sent men to a constitutional convention, Benjamin Franklin, rising with the weight of his four score years, asked that the convention open with prayer, and George Washington there sealed the bargain with God. In that winter in Valley Forge, Washington led his men in prayer and he got down on his knees to do it. When the battle of Gettysburg was on, Lincoln, old Abe Lincoln, was on his knees with God; yes, he was on his knees from five o'clock in the afternoon till four o'clock in the morning, and Bishop Simpson was with him. . . .

Lord, teach us to pray."

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, forgive me for being a stranger to prayer. Thank You for this great privilege. May my prayers release Your great power to bless the world.*



## SEPTEMBER 15

***Prayer is where the action is.***

*(John Wesley)*

John Wesley is said to have preached to nearly a million people. He ushered in a mighty revival in England. He was a man of prayer, and insisted on his ministers spending hours daily in prayer. No doubt he learned the value of prayer from his mother, Susanna.

Sharon Glasgow writes of Susanna Wesley's prayer life:

"Susanna Wesley was married to a preacher. They had ten children, of which two grew up to bring millions of souls to Christ. That would be John and Charles Wesley. It's a powerful story if you stop there, isn't it?

But, behind the door of her home, hopeless conditions were the norm. She married a man who couldn't manage money. They disagreed on everything, from money to politics. They had nineteen children. All except ten died in infancy. Sam (her husband) left her to raise the children alone for long periods of time. This was sometimes over something as simple as an argument.

One of their children was crippled. Another couldn't talk until he was nearly six years old. Susanna herself was desperately sick most of her life. There was no money for food or anything. Debt plagued them.

Sam was once thrown into debtor's prison because their debt was so high, which doubled their problems. Twice the homes they lived in were burned to the ground, losing everything they owned. It was assumed that their church members did it because they were so mad at what Sam preached in the pulpit! Someone slit their cow's udders so they wouldn't have milk, killed their dog, and burned their flax field!

When Susanna was young, she promised the Lord that for every hour she spent in entertainment, she would give an hour to Him in prayer and in the Word. Taking care of the house and raising so many kids made this commitment nearly impossible to fulfill. She had no time for entertainment or long hours in prayer! She worked the gardens, milked the cow, schooled the children and managed the entire house herself. So she decided to instead give the Lord two hours a day in prayer!

She struggled to find a secret place to get away with Him. So she advised her children that when they saw her with her apron over her head, that meant she was in prayer and couldn't be disturbed. She was devoted to her walk with Christ, praying for her children and knowledge in the Word no matter how hard life was."

John and Charles Wesley did mighty things for God; but it all started with a housewife and mother praying, one hour each morning and one hour every evening, with her head buried in an apron!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, I want to be a person of action – so make me a person of prayer!*



## SEPTEMBER 16

***Prayer causes things to happen that wouldn't happen if you didn't pray.*** (John Piper)

The following is part of the transcript of a talk by John Piper on prayer:

“It's simply staggering that God would ordain – now get this – that God, the sovereign ruler of the universe, would ordain that prayers cause things. They do! Prayers cause things to happen that would not happen if you didn't pray.

Listen to this: when James 4:2 says, ‘*You do not have because you do not ask,*’ that does not mean ‘*You would have anyway, even if you didn't ask, because I got a plan.*’ The verse doesn't mean the opposite of what it says it says! ‘*You have not because you ask not.*’ That means prayer causes things to happen that wouldn't happen if you didn't pray.

This is why this is a staggeringly glorious privilege – to be taken by the sovereign God of the universe, who runs all things according to His infinite wisdom, and folded in to His causality. This is breath taking!

If you do not avail yourself of the privilege of bringing to pass events in the universe, that would not take place if you didn't pray, you are acting like a colossal fool, aren't you? I'm just thinking logically here. If you are offered the privilege of engaging with God in such a way that your requests could bring into being things that would not otherwise come into being, not to avail yourself of that privilege is folly of the highest or lowest order.

That's why we pray. God is beckoning us into our share in the running of the universe. Do you not know that you would judge angels? Do you know who you are, child of God?”

That is the crux of the matter, isn't it? We don't know who we are in Christ, and we don't know the privilege and authority we have been given. Even when we pray, we do so out of duty or habit, not really believing our prayers will make a difference. But if we truly believed, as John Piper declares, that our prayers cause things to happen, it would transform the quality and quantity of our praying!

### ***Prayer***

*Father, thank You for the awesome privilege that my prayers cause things to happen, in Your sovereign plan. May I never neglect this responsibility to pray.*



## SEPTEMBER 17

***Before prayer changes others, it first changes us.***

*(Billy Graham)*

On February 28, 2018, at the Billy Graham Memorial Service, President Trump shared the following story:

“In the spring of 1934, Billy Graham’s father allowed a group of Charlotte, North Carolina businessmen to use a portion of the family’s dairy farm to gather for a day of prayer. On that day, the men prayed for the city. They prayed that out of Charlotte the Lord would raise up someone to preach the Gospel to the ends of the Earth. We are here today, more than eighty years later, because that prayer was truly answered. Billy Graham was fifteen years old at the time. Just a few months later he accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour. That choice didn’t just change Billy’s life, it changed our lives. It changed our country and it changed, in fact, the entire world.”

Billy Graham knew the power of prayer. He knew he could not have carried out his decades of worldwide evangelism without prayer. He once said that the most important steps in preparing for an evangelistic outreach were “prayer, prayer, and prayer!” And yet, even as he saw prayer changing situations and drawing people to Jesus, Billy Graham knew that it first changes the one who prays. Consider another one of his quotes on prayer:

“We are to pray in times of adversity, lest we become faithless and unbelieving. We are to pray in times of prosperity, lest we become boastful and proud. We are to pray in times of danger, lest we become fearful and doubting. We are to pray in times of security, lest we become self-sufficient.”

It seems to me that what Billy Graham was getting at was this: no matter what the situation may be, when we pray, something happens within us for the better. Praying in times of adversity increases our faith; praying in times of prosperity keeps us humble; praying in times of danger gives us courage; praying in times of security keeps us dependent on God. Therefore, when we pray, even as we look to God for His answers, let’s also be aware of what He is doing within us!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You for changing me when I pray; help me to always be aware and cooperative of what You are doing in me through prayer.*



## SEPTEMBER 18

***Prayer is an exchange. We leave our burdens, worries and sin in the hands of God. We come away with oil of joy and the garment of praise.*** (F. B. Meyer)

This quote by F. B. Meyer appears to reflect two famous verses in the Bible, one from each Testament. Both have that element of exchange.

In Matthew 11:28, Jesus says, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”* Of course, prayer is the way that we come to Jesus, and it is in the place of prayer that an incredible exchange takes place. To use Meyer’s words, our burdens, worries and sin are given to Jesus, and, in exchange, He gives us rest! We go into His presence with our souls weighed down with troubles and sorrows, anxieties and struggles – and we leave the time of prayer with the ability to face the same situations, not with our own striving but with His peace.

In Isaiah 61:1-3, the prophet speaks of the ministry of the Messiah to come, in these words:

*“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,  
because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favour  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,  
the oil of joy instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”*

Here again, we see a picture of divine exchange. The Messiah – Jesus Christ – came to the earth with the anointing to proclaim good news to the poor in spirit, in all of its manifestations. And He is still doing the same today. We go to Jesus with our broken hearts, in our captivity to sin and blindness to truth, and grieving and despairing. In the place of prayer, Jesus does His wonderful work of healing and deliverance, taking our broken hearts and grieving spirits, and giving us joy and praise.

Today, no matter what you are struggling with, take it to Jesus in prayer, and receive all that He gives you in exchange!

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, help me each day to leave my worries, burdens and sin in Your hands, and receive the oil of joy and garment of praise in exchange.*



## SEPTEMBER 19

***Some people pray just to pray and some people pray to know God.*** (Andrew Murray)

Jesus said, “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you (John 15:7).” Answered prayer is the result of abiding in Christ, according to this verse. However, as Andrew Murray realised, the secret of abiding in Christ is itself prayer! He writes:

“Prayer is both one of the means and one of the fruits of union to Christ. As a means, it is of unspeakable importance. All the things of faith, all the pleadings of desire, all the yearnings after a fuller surrender, all the confessions of shortcoming and of sin, all the exercises in which the soul gives up self and clings to Christ, find their utterance in prayer. In each meditation on abiding in Christ, as some new feature of what Scripture teaches concerning this blessed life is apprehended, the first impulse of the believer is at once to look up to the Father and pour out the heart into His, and ask from Him the full understanding and the full possession of what he has been shown in the Word. And it is the believer, who is not content with this spontaneous expression of his hope, but who takes time in secret prayer to wait until he has received and laid hold of what he has seen, who will really grow strong in Christ. However feeble the soul's first abiding, its prayer will be heard, and it will find prayer one of the great means of abiding more abundantly.”

If prayer is merely a religious activity in our lives, aimed at getting what we want from God, we miss out on both the power and the purpose of prayer. We should pray primarily to draw closer to Jesus, to have intimacy with our heavenly Father, to surrender to the leading of the Spirit – and the answers to our prayers will surely follow. But, by then, they may simply be bonuses to the joy of abiding in Jesus!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to pray in order to know You better!*



## SEPTEMBER 20

***Prayer should not be regarded as a duty which must be performed, but rather as a privilege to be enjoyed.***  
(E. M. Bounds)

Today's quote appears in a chapter entitled "Secret Prayer", in the book "Purpose in Prayer." Bounds is expounding on these words of Jesus: "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint (Luke 18:1)." He writes:

"The *always* speaks for itself. Prayer is not a meaningless function or duty to be crowded into the busy or weary activities of the day; and we are not obeying our Lord's command when we content ourselves with a few minutes on our knees in the morning rush or late at night, when the faculties, tired with the tasks of the day, call out for rest. God is always ready to hear our call, it is true; His ear is ever attentive to the cry of His child, but we can never get to know Him if we use the vehicle of prayer as we use the telephone – for a few words of hurried conversation. Intimacy requires development. We can never know Him by brief and fragmentary and thoughtless repetitions of intercession that are requests for personal favours and nothing more.

That is not the way in which we can come into communication with heaven's King. 'The goal of prayer is the ear of God,' said Spurgeon; and this is a goal that can only be reached by patient and continuous waiting upon Him, by pouring out our hearts to Him, and permitting Him to speak to us. Only by so doing can we expect to know Him; and as we come to know Him better, we will spend more time in His presence and find that presence a constant and ever increasing delight.

*Always* does not mean that we are to neglect the ordinary duties of life; what it means is that the soul that has come into intimate contact with God in the silence of the prayer chamber is never out of conscious touch with the Father; that the heart is always going out to Him in loving communion; and that the moment the mind is released from the task upon which it is engaged, it returns as naturally to God as the bird does to its nest. What a beautiful conception of prayer we get if we regard it in this light, if we view it as a constant fellowship, an unbroken audience with the King! Prayer then loses every vestige of dread that it may once have possessed; we regard it no longer as a duty that must be performed, but rather as a privilege that is to be enjoyed, a rare delight that is always revealing some new beauty."

### ***Prayer***

*Father, may I never regard prayer as a duty which must be performed, but always as a privilege to be enjoyed!*



## SEPTEMBER 21

***To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.***

*(Martin Luther)*

Martin Luther acknowledged in numerous writings that he could not accomplish anything without regular, even unceasing, prayer. Austen C. Ukachi writes:

“For Luther, prayer was not just a perfunctory business, but also a serious work. His heart and whole being was very much attuned to prayer. As he stated, ‘Grant that I may not pray alone with the mouth; help me that I may pray from the depths of my heart.’ It is in the place of prayer that he struck an intimate chord with God. ‘Prayer is climbing up into the heart of God,’ he said. That he depended on prayer to make progress in his endeavour is evident from this statement. ‘The less I pray, the harder it gets; the more I pray, the better it goes.’ ”

In the same vein, Martin Luther exhorted the daily practice of prayer for every Christian. In his book, *“A Simple Way to Pray,”* he recommended that prayer “be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, ‘Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that.’ Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day.”

In another of his books, *“Large Catechism,”* he exhorted:

“Therefore from youth on we should form the habit of praying daily for our needs, whenever we are aware of anything that affects us or other people around us, such as preachers, magistrates, neighbors, and servants; and, as I have said, we should always remind God of his commandment and promise. This I say because I would like to see people learn to pray properly and not act so crudely and coldly that they daily become more inept in praying. This is just what the devil wants.”

The devil wants to steal, kill, and destroy. What better way to do this than by keeping you from prayer? Don't let him!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, may prayer be as essential to my life as breathing!*



## SEPTEMBER 22

***I think that some of the greatest prayer is prayer where you don't say one single word or ask for anything.*** (A. W. Tozer)

Today's quote is taken from Tozer's book, *Worship: The Missing Jewel*. He is commenting on Psalm 116:1-2, which says: *"I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications. Because he has inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call upon him as long as I live."*

Tozer writes:

"I think that some of the greatest prayer is prayer where you don't say one single word or ask for anything. Now God does answer and He does give us what we ask for. That's plain; nobody can deny that unless he denies the Scriptures. But that's only one aspect of prayer, and it's not even the important aspect. Sometimes I go to God and say, 'God, if Thou dost never answer another prayer while I live on this earth I will still worship Thee as long as I live and in the ages to come for what Thou hast done already.' God's already put me so far in debt that if I were to live one million millenniums I couldn't pay Him for what He's done for me.

We go to God as we send a boy to a grocery store with a long written list, 'God, give me this, give me this, and give me this,' and our gracious God often does give us what we want. But I think God is disappointed because we make Him to be no more than a source of what we want. Even our Lord Jesus is presented too often much as 'Someone who will meet your need.' That's the throbbing heart of modern evangelism. You're in need and Jesus will meet your need. He's the Need-meeter. Well, He is that indeed; but, ah, He's infinitely more than that."

Truly, God is infinitely more than an ATM or Santa Claus! Let our prayers reflect that reality. Today, why don't you sit in silence in His presence, with nothing to ask in prayer, but just to be with Him for the joy of His company?

### **Prayer**

*Father, forgive me for all the times I have treated You as nothing more than a "Need-meeter".*



## SEPTEMBER 23

***The value of persistent prayer is not that He will hear us but that we will finally hear Him.***

*(William McGill)*

Jesus commanded persistent prayer. He exhorted us to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking. This doesn't mean that prayer is a form of spiritual nagging. God hears us even before we utter a word in prayer. But do we hear Him? The story of Hannah is a powerful example of how persistent prayer results in us hearing God.

Hannah was married to Elkanah, who also had a second wife, Peninnah. Hannah was childless, while Peninnah had several sons and daughters. And, to add to Hannah's grief at her barrenness, Peninnah kept mocking her. Surely Hannah prayed desperately for a child, especially every year when the whole family went to sacrifice to the LORD at Shiloh. Yet there was no answer. And then, one year, everything changed. We read in 1 Samuel 1:

*"Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the LORD's house. In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, 'LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.' . . . Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son."*

What changed? Did Hannah's nagging finally work? Not at all. Rather, Hannah finally heard God. Her prayer changed from what she desired, to what God desired. Hannah went from asking for a son for herself, to asking for a son for God's service. You see, in a time of social lawlessness and spiritual corruption, God was looking for someone who would be dedicated to His purposes and raised in His presence. In her desperation, maybe even unknowingly, Hannah heard the desire of God's heart, and her prayer changed. God answered, Samuel was born, and the rest is history!

As the Bible records: *"The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD (1 Samuel 3:19-20)."*

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, help me to persist in prayer until I finally hear You!*



**SEPTEMBER 24**

***Prayer is not a preparation for the battle; it is the battle!***

*(Leonard Ravenhill)*

In his book, *“Why Revival Tarries,”* Leonard Ravenhill describes prayer as our weapon to transform society:

“As the first atom bomb shook Hiroshima, so prayer alone can release that power which would shake the hearts of men. This cultured paganism at our doors, those idol temples, those fear-gripped, sin-mesmerized millions can only be moved to God as the Church is moved of God for their lost condition. With every possible guile that he knows, the devil would snatch us from the closet of prayer. For in prayer man is linked with God, and in that union Satan is baffled and beaten. Well he knows this; and so, if the closet is shut tightly, the mind is invaded with legitimate cares or with imaginations as big or more real than life. Here we need to plead our main defense – the blood. Another useful way to offset wandering thoughts and to help concentration is to pray audibly or to give some utterance at least, though it need not be loud.

Having thus moved and gained the mastery over Satan, our next power is in the ‘exceeding great and precious promises of God.’ Here we are on concrete foundation. Here are our trading currencies with heaven. Here God is pledged, and longs to hear us honor Him. Here we may be engaged in warfare not with God but against principalities, for Satan delights in loss no more than any other being. Souls of men are his treasures. Damned souls, doubting souls, drunk souls, disobedient souls, sick souls, religious souls, souls of the young, souls of the old, and all souls outside of the regenerating power of the Spirit are mastered by him, though the degrees of his mastery vary. . . .

Prayer is our secret weapon. . . . We do not conquer Satan by prayer; Christ conquered him two thousand years ago. Satan fools and feints, blows and bluffs, and we so often take his threats to heart and forget ‘the exceeding greatness of God's power to usward.’ The Master Pray-er said, ‘I give you power over all the power of the enemy.’ That is the victory.”

The world of today seems very much like the world Ravenhill describes. Praise God that the power of prayer is still the same!

***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to engage in, and remain in, the battle for this world, through my commitment to prayer.*



## SEPTEMBER 25

***Prayer will make a man cease from sin, or sin will entice a man to cease from prayer.***

*(John Bunyan)*

John Bunyan understood well the power of prayer to deal with sin, as well as the power of sin to take us away from prayer. He also considered very important the need to pray with the help of the Holy Spirit, who gives us understanding of all things, including the awareness of our sinful condition.

Amy Mantravadi writes:

“The beginning of all right prayer, according to Bunyan, was the knowledge of one’s sinful condition and the greatness of God’s mercy. ‘For mark, I beseech you, there are two things that provoke to prayer. The one is a detestation to sin, and the things of this life; the other is a longing desire after communion with God, in a holy and undefiled state and inheritance.’ Furthermore, he stressed that a sense of our guilt should not keep us from praying.

‘Thou criest out that thou art vile, and therefore God will not regard thy prayers; it is true, if thou delight in thy vileness, and come to God out of a mere pretence. But if from a sense of thy vileness thou do pour out thy heart to God, desiring to be saved from the guilt, and cleansed from the filth, with all thy heart; fear not, thy vileness will not cause the Lord to stop his ear from hearing of thee.’ . . .

One area where we need knowledge, according to Bunyan, is in our comprehension of our own sinful state. ‘Nothing but the Spirit can show a man clearly his misery by nature, and so put a man into a posture of prayer,’ he wrote. ‘No, here is the life of prayer, when in or with the Spirit, a man being made sensible of sin, and how to come to the Lord for mercy; he comes, I say, in the strength of the Spirit, and crieth Father.’ Bunyan concluded, ‘That one word spoken in faith, is better than a thousand prayers, as men call them, written and read, in a formal, cold, lukewarm way.’ ”

Prayer that is devoid of the Spirit soon fades away, as sin overwhelms our desire for prayer. However, as we pray through the Holy Spirit, we allow Him to do His work of conviction in us and deal with sin in our life. And our prayer life becomes deeper and richer.

### ***Prayer***

*Holy Spirit, may my prayer life be one that causes sin to cease in my life; may sin never entice me away from prayer.*



## SEPTEMBER 26

***Don't worry about having the right words; worry more about having the right heart. It's not eloquence he seeks, just honesty.*** *(Max Lucado)*

In his book, *"They Walked with God,"* in a chapter on Job, Max Lucado shares the following story:

"When I lived in Brazil I took my mom and her friend to see Iguazu Falls, the largest waterfalls in the world. Some weeks earlier I'd become an expert on the cataracts by reading an article in a National Geographic magazine. Surely, I thought, my guests would appreciate their good fortune in having me as a guide.

To reach the lookout point, tourists must walk a winding trail that leads them through a forest. I took advantage of the hike to give an Iguazu nature report to my mom and her friend. After some minutes, however, I caught myself speaking louder and louder. A sound in the distance forced me to raise my voice. With each turn in the trail, my volume increased. Finally, I was shouting above a roar, which was proving to be quite irritating.

Only after reaching the clearing did I realize that the noise we heard was the waterfalls. My words were drowned out by the force and fury of what I was trying to describe. I could no longer be heard.

There are times when to speak is to violate the moment . . . when silence represents the highest respect. The word for such times is reverence. The prayer for such times is 'Hallowed be thy name.' Only you and God are here, and you can surmise who occupies the throne.

Don't worry about having the right words; worry more about having the right heart. It's not eloquence he seeks, just honesty."

Max Lucado goes on to explain that if Job had one fault, it was that he talked too much. He spent chapter after chapter defining, explaining, and reviewing God. And then, God began to speak – and Job was silent. Max Lucado continues: "Notice the change. Before he heard God, Job couldn't speak enough. After he heard God, he couldn't speak at all. Silence was the only proper response."

God is not merely interested in our words; He is more interested in our hearts. And sometimes, sitting in silence before our awesome God, just raw and honest, may be our most eloquent prayer.

### ***Prayer***

*Father, may I always have the right heart, when I come to You in prayer.*



## SEPTEMBER 27

***We have to pray with our eyes on God, not on the difficulties.***

*(Oswald Chambers)*

In his book, “*God’s Workmanship*”, Oswald Chambers addresses the issue of interceding for others. He speaks of how our wrestling in prayer for people in need can be so easily derailed, when we dwell on their circumstances rather than on God. In fact, he recognises that this is a primary tactic of the devil. Oswald Chambers writes:

“Our wrestling is to be against the thoughts suggested to our mind which press down on us and make us say, ‘What is the good of asking God to bring peace to a broken-hearted woman? Or of asking God to sustain people whose lives are ruined?’ If I try to describe to my own heart a bereaved home and let the sorrow of it weigh with me, instantly my faith in God is gone; I am so overcome with sympathy and fellow-feeling for them that my prayer is nothing more than a wail of sympathy before God. The telepathic influence of my mind on another, whether I speak or not, is so subtle that the prince of this world will use it to prevent my getting hold of God; whereas if I remain confident in God I lift the weight off lives in a way I shall never realise till I stand before Him. We have to pray that the enemy shall not exact upon the hearts and minds of God’s children and make them slander Him by worry and anxiety. As the Lord’s remembrancers we are to hold off the exactings of Satan, not add to them.

Do I expect God to answer prayer? The first thing that will stagger our faith in God is the false sentiment arising out of a sympathetic apprehension of the difficulties. ‘Peter therefore was kept in the prison: but prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him’: the church prayed, and God did the impossible thing, and Peter was delivered. We have to pray with our eyes on God, not on the difficulties.”

Today, bring difficult situations in your life as well as the lives of others before God in prayer. And pray with your eyes on God, not on the difficulties!

### ***Prayer***

*Father, help me to always pray with my eyes on You rather than on the circumstances.*



## SEPTEMBER 28

***Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays.***

*(Soren Kierkegaard)*

Karen Wright Marsh, in her article titled *“The startling prayer life of Soren Kierkegaard,”* describes her surprise at finding how much prayer influenced this Danish philosopher, often considered the father of existentialism. She writes: “Prayer, Soren’s ongoing conversation with God, became the source of his greatest earthly happiness. Soren likens prayer to a gyroscope, a practice that balances him come what may. Happily for you and me, he recorded his prayers in a journal. On those pages, Soren speaks frankly to God of his questions, confidence, doubts, joys, pains, consolation, suffering, love, longing, depression. It is all there. And finally he arrives at gratitude.”

Kierkegaard’s practice of prayer was what led to his inner transformation, according to his writings. A key aspect of his prayer life was this belief in God’s unchanging nature, and in his own need to change. The following prayer written by him is a wonderful example of his piety and faith:

“O You who are unchangeable, whom nothing changes! You who are unchangeable in love, precisely for our welfare not submitting to any change: may we too will our welfare, submitting ourselves to the discipline of Your unchangeableness, so that we may in unconditional obedience find our rest and remain at rest in Your unchangeableness. Not are You like a man; if he is to preserve only some degree of constancy he must not permit himself too much to be moved, nor by too many things. You on the contrary are moved, and moved in infinite love, by all things. Even that which we human beings call an insignificant trifle, and pass by unmoved, the need of a sparrow, even this moves You; and what we so often scarcely notice, a human sigh, this moves You, O Infinite Love! But nothing changes You, O You who are unchangeable. O You who in infinite love does submit to be moved, may this our prayer also move You to add Your blessing, in order that there may be wrought such a change in him who prays as to bring him into conformity with Your unchangeable will, You who are unchangeable!”

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You that You are the unchanging God, and that You bring about change in me as I pray!*



## SEPTEMBER 29

***God shapes the world by prayer. Prayers are deathless. They outlive the lives of those who uttered them.*** (E. M. Bounds)

The opening words of E. M. Bounds book, *“Purpose in Prayer”*, are:

“The prayers of God’s saints are the capital stock in heaven by which Christ carries on His great work upon the earth. Great throes and mighty convulsions in the world have come about as a result of these prayers. The earth is changed, revolutionized; angels move on more powerful, more rapid wings; and God’s policy is shaped when the prayers of His people are more numerous and more efficient.

The most important lesson we can learn is how to pray. Indeed, we must pray so that our prayers take hold of God. The man who has done the most and the best praying is the most immortal, because prayers do not die. Perhaps the lips that uttered them are closed in death, or the heart that felt them may have ceased to beat, but the prayers live before God, and God’s heart is set on them. Prayers outlive the lives of those who uttered them – outlive a generation, outlive an age, outlive a world. . . .

The mightiest successes that come to God’s cause are created and carried on by prayer in God’s day of power. When God’s church comes into its mightiest inheritance of the mightiest faith and mightiest prayer, the angelic days of powerful activity occur. God’s conquering days are when the saints have given themselves to mightiest prayer.

The life of the church is the highest life, and its office is to pray. Its prayer life is the highest life, the most fragrant, the most conspicuous. When God’s house on earth is a house of prayer, then God’s house in heaven is busy and powerful in its plans and movements. ‘For mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people,’ says our God. Then, His earthly armies are clothed with the triumphs and spoils of victory, and His enemies are defeated on every hand.

God shapes the world by prayer. The more praying there is in the world, the better the world will be and the mightier the forces against evil everywhere. Prayer, in one phase of its operation, is a disinfectant and a preventive. It purifies the air; it destroys the contagion of evil.

The very life and prosperity of God’s cause – even its very existence – depend on prayer. And the advance and triumph of His cause depend on one thing: that we ask of Him.”

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, forgive my prayerlessness; may my prayers join with those of all Your saints, past, present, and future, in shaping the world!*



## SEPTEMBER 30

***God does nothing but by prayer, and everything with it.***

*(John Wesley)*

Today's quote is not mere fanciful rhetoric. John Wesley understood and experienced, deeply and personally, the power and necessity of prayer. The following is a story shared by E. M. Bounds that illustrates John Wesley's simple faith in prayer:

"Dr. Adam Clarke, in his autobiography, recorded that, when Mr. Wesley was returning to England by ship, considerable delay was caused by contrary winds. Wesley was reading, when he became aware of some confusion on board; and asking what was the matter, he was informed that the wind was contrary. 'Then,' was his reply, 'let us go to prayer.'

After Dr. Clarke had prayed, Wesley broke out into fervent supplication that seemed to be more the offering of faith than of mere desire. 'Almighty and everlasting God,' he prayed, 'You have sway everywhere, and all things serve the purpose of Your will. You hold the winds in Your fists and sit upon the floods of water, and You reign as King forever. Command these winds and these waves, that they may obey You, and take us speedily and safely to the haven where we wish to go.'

The power of this petition was felt by all. Wesley rose from his knees, made no remark, but took up his book and continued reading. Dr. Clarke went on deck, and to his surprise found the vessel under sail, standing on her right course. Nor did she change until she was safely at anchor. On the sudden and favourable change of wind, Wesley made no remark; he so fully expected to be heard that he took it for granted that he was heard.

That was prayer with a purpose – the definite and direct utterance of one who knew that he had the ear of God, and that God had the willingness as well as the power to grant the petition that he asked of Him."

The God of Wesley, and Bounds, and Ravenhill, and Tozer, and all those we have heard from over this past month of devotions, is still the same. He is waiting to hear our prayers. He will do nothing without our prayers, and everything with them!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, teach us to pray!*



# Spiritual Warfare

*Put on the full armor of God*



OCTOBER

## OCTOBER 1

***Lift up your heads, you gates;  
be lifted up, you ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.***

***Who is this King of glory?***

***The LORD strong and mighty,  
the LORD mighty in battle.***

*(Psalm 24:7-8)*

David most likely wrote Psalm 24 to commemorate the occasion of the Ark of the Covenant being moved to Jerusalem; in fact, it is probable that he actually sang these words as the procession approached Jerusalem. The background to this event was Israel's bitter loss in battle to the Philistines in Eli's time – a loss made even more bitter by the capture of the ark by the Philistines. Eli's daughter-in-law, giving birth to a son on that day, named him Ichabod, saying "*The glory has departed from Israel (1 Samuel 4:22).*" It was a day that seemed to mark a terrible defeat of the LORD at the hands of Philistine idols; even more, it felt as if God had abandoned His people. Even though the Philistines returned the ark within months, plagued by God's judgments, it remained in a private residence for over a hundred years. Now, finally, King David was moving the ark into a special tabernacle he had prepared for it, for the LORD's presence, in his capital city of Jerusalem.

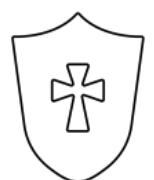
*"Lift up your heads!"* he cries – to the gates, to the city, to God's people. They had hung their heads in shame when the glory departed; now, they are to lift their heads high in pride and honour, as the King of glory enters their midst. The question is asked: "*Who is this King of glory?*" The stage is set for a renewed revelation of the LORD! The answer is: "*The LORD, strong and mighty, mighty in battle.*" God is revealed as the One who is mighty in battle – Israel may have lost that battle to the Philistines because of their sin, but God was never defeated. David goes further in the last verse of this psalm to reveal the Name of the LORD – the LORD Almighty, Yahweh Sabaoth!

It is a name of God that means "Lord of hosts", or "Lord of angel armies". It is a picture of the LORD at the head of an army of angels that is beyond counting and immeasurably powerful. Yahweh Sabaoth is the God who is always victorious and can never be defeated.

We are in a battle for souls – souls of individuals, even the souls of nations. It is a battle of good versus evil, and it may seem that good is losing. Perish the thought! Jesus is Yahweh Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts, and He has already conquered the devil on the cross. We, His church, are called to follow Him into battle, until His victory is fully manifested on earth!

### ***Decree***

***We will lift our heads high, for Jesus is the King of glory, the Lord of angel armies, and He has already won!***



## OCTOBER 2

***For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.***  
(Ephesians 6:12)

As we saw yesterday, we are in a battle of good versus evil. Jesus is advancing His kingdom through His people, aided by angel armies; the devil and his demons are seeking to “steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10)” all that God has created and redeemed. Now, too many Christians don’t think we are in a battle at all – they believe we can just lead a good, moral life and get to heaven. Well, that may be true – but that would be like hiding in a bunker while war raged on. We are still affected, and God’s purposes still remain to be accomplished.

Let’s look briefly at today’s verse. First, we are told that we are in a struggle – the word is “wrestling”. Now, in wrestling, if we do not fight, we are simply pinned down and we lose. That is the case with Christians who don’t think we are in a battle – we are pinned down, and don’t even know it. Paul assumes that the people of God are wrestling, but he wants us to direct our energies at the right opponent.

Second, we are informed that our battle is not against flesh and blood. This doesn’t mean that there aren’t evil people doing evil things in the world. Just like God works through His people, the devil also uses people to do his evil deeds. But if we only focus on the human agents and manifestations of evil, we will never win – because behind them are spiritual forces of darkness that first have to be defeated.

Third, Paul identifies the real enemy. William Gurnall, in his classic “*The Christian in Complete Armour*”, suggests that the four words Paul uses refer to the general characteristics of the enemy. He writes:

“First, then, the devil or whole pack of them are here described by their government in this world – *principalities*. Second, by their strength and puissance [i.e. influence], called *powers*. Third, in their kingdom or proper territories – *rulers of the darkness of this world*. Fourth, by their nature in its substance and degeneracy – *spiritual wickedness*. Fifth, by the ground of the war – *in the heavenly places*, or about heavenly things.”

We are in a war with a highly organized, very powerful, and exceedingly wicked enemy. We have no choice but to fight. Let’s ask God how to!

### ***Decree***

*We are in a war against the rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms - and, in Jesus’ name, we will see victory!*



## OCTOBER 3

***The LORD is a warrior;  
the LORD is his name.***

*(Exodus 15:3)*

For the first time in the Bible, in Exodus 15:3, the LORD is called a warrior. What brought about this revelation?

The Israelites had seen God move in amazing ways through the ten plagues to bring them out of slavery in Egypt. However, they had found themselves trapped between the Red Sea and the mountains, with the Egyptian army bearing down on them. As the people cried out to Moses, he said, *“The LORD will fight for you!”* They did not have to do anything but trust; God was going to do what was needed. And He did. The waters were parted, and the Israelites crossed over on dry ground. However, the Egyptian army soon followed, but it was not smooth sailing for them – God threw them into confusion, until they cried out, *“Let’s get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.”* The enemy, the oppressors of God’s people, finally got it – God was fighting for His people! But it was too late for them - the waters closed over them, and the entire army was destroyed.

This incredible miracle, following after all the previous ones, caused Moses and the Israelites to break out into worship as they stood on the other side of the Red Sea, finally free from Egypt’s grasp. And they sang, *“The LORD is a warrior!”*

Our God is a warrior. He is fighting for us. As we look around at situations – in our own lives, in the lives of those we are praying for, in the world around us – we can be overwhelmed and feel very inadequate and helpless to do anything about them. The fight for what is good and right and just seems impossible to win in our own strength. And, of course, that’s true. The problem is that too many Christians don’t know that the LORD is a warrior! We don’t live with the awareness that God is fighting for us and against the enemy. The irony is that, like the Egyptian army, the devil does know this! And he must be so pleased that God’s people, in our ignorance, struggle against him and his demonic hordes in our own strength, rather than drawing on the heavenly resources available to us! If we would only take our stand behind the One who is a warrior, we would see every scheme of the devil come to nothing, and experience supernatural victories in our lives.

### ***Decree***

***The LORD is a warrior, and He is fighting for us and against the devil!***



## OCTOBER 4

***Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.*** (Ephesians 6:10-11)

Every Christian is called to spiritual warfare. We are in a war, whether we like it or not, and whether we fight or not. If we don't fight, we have surrendered, even if we don't know it. God is fighting for us, but we too are supposed to fight. The good news is that we have been given heavenly resources for spiritual warfare. Paul gives us a description of these resources in Ephesians 6, and we will go through them over the next few days. Today, we look at what we are called to do in this battle against evil:

1. We are called to be strong in the Lord: This phrase means "to be empowered." God wants to fill us with His mighty power, and then release that power through us in spiritual warfare. We have dwelling within us the Holy Spirit, the One whose power raised Jesus from the grave. And, as we surrender to Him, God's mighty power will be manifested through us to bring about His kingdom purposes.
2. We are called to put on the full armour of God: The word "put on" means "to sink into a garment, to be clothed." The armour is prepared and available, but it requires our will and effort to put it on. As Gurnall puts it, "It is one thing to have armour in the house, and another thing to have it buckled on." The armour is made for us, and it will fit us perfectly. However, just as a soldier would be foolish going into battle without being fully equipped, we must put on the full armour. We can't say, for example, that we are happy to carry the sword of the Spirit, but the breastplate of righteousness makes us uncomfortable!
3. We are called to take our stand against the devil's schemes: The purpose of the armour is so that we can withstand the devil's plan – to steal, kill, and destroy; to deceive and manipulate and lead astray; to accuse and tempt and slander. Gurnall suggests that we stand in two ways – we are kept from falling into the devil's hands, and we are also empowered to live in Christ's victory over him.

Jesus has won the victory, and given us every divine resource to claim that victory. Let us do our part!

### ***Decree***

*We will be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power, taking our stand against the devil, equipped with the full armour of God!*



## OCTOBER 5

***Put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*** (Ephesians 6:13)

Paul says that the full armour of God keeps us prepared for the day of evil. What is this day of evil? In a real sense, it is every day, as long as evil remains in the world. The battle is a continuous one. And we are called to stand victorious!

This brings us to an interesting point. Is the armour offensive or defensive? Most commentators consider it to be largely defensive, painting a picture of Christians withstanding attack after attack of the enemy, until Jesus comes back and rescues us! Dr. Ed Murphy, in his book *“The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare”*, writes:

“Many commentators and preachers affirm that all the weapons listed in Ephesians 6:14-17, with the possible exception of the sword of the Spirit, are defensive. Is that really true? No. A warrior who never attacks the enemy but only defends himself is a trapped warrior. An army that only defends itself but never attacks is unfit for war. A church which does not reach out to war but only stands and defends itself is already defeated. In spiritual warfare, the best defense is to go on the offense.”

Paul is referring to Roman military formations when he exhorts us to stand firm, most likely the feared Roman wedge. In *“An Illustrated History of the Roman Empire”*, we have the following description:

“The wedge was commonly used by attacking legionaries – legionaries formed up in a triangle, the front ‘tip’ being one man and pointing toward the enemy – this enabled small groups to be thrust well into the enemy and, when these formations expanded, the enemy troops were pushed into restricted positions . . . . The wedge was an aggressive formation used to ‘crack open’ enemy lines. Relatively small groups of legionaries could form such a triangle and then drive their way into the enemy ranks. As more Roman soldiers reinforced the wedge from behind, the enemy line could be forced apart. As breaking the enemy’s formation was very often the key to winning a battle, the wedge formation was a vitally important battlefield tactic of the Roman army.”

This imagery also emphasizes that we fight as a Body, not as individuals. The devil has no defense against a united people of God, clad in full armour, and on the offensive!

### ***Decree***

*With the full armour of God, we will stand victorious in this war against the devil.*



## OCTOBER 6

***Stand firm . . . with the belt of truth buckled around your waist.*** (Ephesians 6:14a)

Paul most likely wrote the book of Ephesians while in a Roman prison. Barclay writes: “Paul suddenly sees a picture ready-made. All this time he was chained by the wrist to a Roman soldier. Night and day a soldier was there to ensure that he would not escape. Paul was literally an envoy in a chain. Now he was the kind of man who could get alongside anyone; and beyond doubt he had talked often to the soldiers who were compelled to be so near him. As he writes, the soldier's armour suggests a picture to him. The Christian too has his armour; and part by part Paul takes the armour of the Roman soldier and translates it into Christian terms.”

The phrase that is translated “belt of truth” is literally “loins girded with truth.” This image suggests several things:

1. The belt around the soldier's tunic was the place from which his sword hung. This gave him freedom of movement as well as easy access to the weapon. In the same way, the truth enables us to navigate life's situations with certainty and ease, not confused by the world's deceptions.
2. In Luke's gospel, the girding of one's loins was a phrase used by Jesus as a sign of readiness for service. When we put on the belt of truth, we indicate our readiness to join the battle.
3. Paul may have also been thinking of Isaiah 11:5, where the Messiah is depicted with a belt of righteousness and truth around His waist. The church is Christ's Body on earth today, and we are called to be clothed as He was clothed, equipped with the truth.
4. Finally, what is this truth that we are to ready ourselves with? It could refer to the whole Word of God, or, more specifically, to the gospel – the good news about Jesus. Either way, as we live by the truth and proclaim the truth, we wage war against the one who is called the father of lies.

The belt of truth demonstrates our readiness to wage spiritual warfare, and it enables us to defeat the falsehoods with which the devil has deceived the world and led so many astray.

### ***Decree***

*We will stand firm, in victory over the devil's lies, with the belt of truth buckled around our waists.*



**OCTOBER 7**

***Stand firm . . . with the breastplate of righteousness in place.***

*(Ephesians 6:14b)*

The next piece of armour is the breastplate of righteousness. The word “righteousness” refers to what is deemed right by God and approved of in His sight. So what does the breastplate of righteousness refer to? Some would say that it refers to a righteous life. As Barclay puts it, “When a man is clothed in righteousness he is impregnable. Words are no defence against accusations but a good life is.” However, while it is absolutely right that we are called to lead righteous lives, this is probably not what is meant here in the context of spiritual warfare.

Paul wrote a lot about the righteousness that we receive from God. In Romans 1:16-17, he says: *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes . . . . For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.”* He is also clearly referring to the picture of the Messiah in Isaiah 59, where the LORD puts on *“righteousness as his breastplate.”* It is a picture of the LORD entering into battle, in order to judge wickedness and bring about justice. When we engage in spiritual warfare, we are following in our Lord’s footsteps. But do we dare to face the enemy with our own righteous deeds?

As Dr. Ed Murphy puts it, “The righteousness of God, in this context, is a power term. The gift of the righteousness of God to the believer totally defeats the enemy. This righteousness of God in turn transforms the believer’s life. The result of experiencing the divine righteousness is a life of righteousness.”

The breastplate protects the heart. And that is what the breastplate of righteousness does. We are protected from the accusations of Satan, the accuser, by the righteousness that Jesus gives us and by faith in His work on the cross. We are also emboldened to enter into spiritual warfare, confident that *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).”* When the devil looks at us across the battlefield, he doesn’t see our sinful hearts; rather, he sees the breastplate of God’s righteousness, and he is already disarmed!

### ***Decree***

*We will stand firm, in victory over the devil’s accusations, with the breastplate of God’s righteousness over our hearts.*



## OCTOBER 8

***Stand firm . . . with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.***  
*(Ephesians 6:15)*

Pett writes of this verse, combining the aspects of footwear and peace:

“Having the feet shod in good footwear was a vital part of a soldier’s equipment. It affected all his movements, including his sense of comfort, his ability to travel long distances at speed, and his agility on the battlefield. It put him at peace with himself. Nothing is better for our peace of mind than to know that we have peace with God and peace from God, two aspects of the same privilege. Then there is nothing between us and God and His peace fills our souls. Then are we ready to stand in the battle and are equipped for what we must face. Then can we march forward in comfort and strength. And being at peace with one another we will fight as one whole.”

The key aspect of this part of the armour is our readiness. As we have already seen, and as we observe all around us, most Christians are not at all ready to engage in spiritual warfare. By this, I don’t mean that we don’t have the ability or knowledge needed, but rather that we are not willing. The Christian who puts on the full armour of God is saying, in effect, that he or she is ready to do battle for Christ’s kingdom.

Paul, when writing this, may have been thinking of Isaiah 52:7:

*“How beautiful on the mountains  
are the feet of those who bring good news,  
who proclaim peace,  
who bring good tidings,  
who proclaim salvation,  
who say to Zion,  
‘Your God reigns!’ ”*

We are being called to go into a world that is desperate for the gospel, which literally means good news! The act of declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ is an act of war, and it has the power to defeat every false religion and ideology. When we bring good news in difficult times, when we proclaim peace to those who are oppressed, when we bring good tidings to those who only hear bad news, and when we proclaim salvation to those who are bound by religion or unbelief, we are doing spiritual battle. Most significantly, in a world that seems to be overrun with evil and where evil appears to hold sway, we boldly proclaim that God is sovereign and Jesus is on the throne!

### ***Decree***

*We will stand firm, ready to do spiritual battle, by proclaiming the gospel of peace and the sovereign reign of Jesus Christ!*



**OCTOBER 9**

***Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.***  
(Ephesians 6:16)

Faith plays an important role in our salvation, for we are “*saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8).*” It is an indispensable element of our lifestyle, for “*the righteous will live by faith (Romans 1:17).*” And we need faith to be approved by God, for “*without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).*” However, today we see that faith also plays a critical part in spiritual warfare. In fact, the shield of faith is possibly the most important piece of the armour.

Barclay describes the Roman shield that Paul is alluding to:

“The word Paul uses is not that for the comparatively small round shield; it is that for the great oblong shield which the heavily armed warrior wore. One of the most dangerous weapons in ancient warfare was the fiery dart. It was a dart tipped with tow dipped in pitch. The pitch-soaked tow was set alight and the dart was thrown. The great oblong shield was made of two sections of wood, glued together. When the shield was presented to the dart, the dart sank into the wood and the flame was put out.”

Andrew Lincoln shares the Roman historian Livy’s description of the danger posed by flaming arrows: “Livy graphically describes how these arrows, even when not hitting the body but caught up by the shield, caused panic because they blazed fiercely and tempted soldiers to throw down their burning shields and become vulnerable to the spears of their enemies.”

Lincoln continues: “Here the burning arrows represent every type of assault devised by the evil one, not just temptation to impure or unloving conduct but also false teaching, persecution, doubt, and despair. Faith is the power which enables believers to resist and triumph over such attacks.”

The apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 5:8-9, “*Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith . . .*” We don’t just protect ourselves from the devil with our faith; we resist him. And, as any occupying force will attest, resistance is a powerful weapon of offense!

### **Decree**

*We will take up the shield of faith, by which every flaming arrow of the evil one will be extinguished!*



**OCTOBER 10**

***Put on the helmet of salvation.***

*(Ephesians 6:17a)*

The helmet is, of course, purely a defensive part of a soldier's armour. But it is of critical importance, since a blow to the head is often fatal. We are instructed by Paul to put on the helmet of salvation. Here again, Paul invokes the Messianic picture of the LORD in Isaiah 59, putting on a helmet of salvation as He wages war. Interestingly, while we have so far been exhorted to take up each of the previous pieces of armour, here the verb means, as S. D. F. Salmond puts it, "not merely 'take,' but 'receive,' i.e., as a gift from the Lord, a thing provided and offered by Him."

Dr. Ed Murphy writes: "The helmet of salvation protects us from the most fatal of all blows to a child of God, the doubts about his acceptance 'warts and all' by God." The Bible is emphatic that our mind – the place of thoughts, attitudes, ideas, opinions, doubts, fears, worries, anxieties, decisions, and so much more – is a battlefield. It is the arena of fiercest conflict, the strategic location most attacked by the devil. That's why Romans 12:2 commands us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. That's why repentance is, literally, changing our minds.

Perhaps the area of our mind that is attacked the most is this aspect of our salvation. The devil has three weapons in this area: he makes us feel too guilty or ashamed to believe we can even come to Jesus and be saved; he deceives us that good works are the means of salvation, thus causing us to futilely strive to be saved; he makes us doubt the certainty and security of our salvation in Christ, even after we have come to Jesus in repentance and surrender.

Andrew Lincoln says that, for Paul, "what ultimately protects believers is that God has already rescued them from bondage to the prince of the realm of the air and seated them with Christ in the heavenly realms. By appropriating this salvation as their helmet, believers have every reason to be confident of the outcome of the battle."

Receiving salvation as Jesus' free gift, and putting on the helmet of salvation, we engage in spiritual warfare as confident sons and daughters of the King of kings!

***Decree***

*We will put on the helmet of salvation, assured of and secure in our identity as children of God.*



**OCTOBER 11**

***Take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.***

*(Ephesians 6:17b)*

There are three words that Paul uses here which are crucial for understanding this piece of our armour.

1. The *machairan*: This was a short sharp sword, as opposed to the long sword, and it was a crucial offensive weapon in close combat. It was allied with the Roman wedge formation, where its sharpness and size allowed for quick and deadly thrusts from behind the protective wall of shields. Paul is saying that we need to engage the enemy at close quarters when we wield the sword of the Spirit.
2. The *rhema* of God: This word is often contrasted with *logos*, though the distinction is not so clear-cut. *Rhema* is God's word spoken into a specific situation or to a specific person. It is a sub-component of *logos*, which is the general word of God, most importantly His written Word. Paul is saying that we need to discern what words are required to wield as weapons, whether specific utterances or words from Scripture, in the specific arenas and circumstances of spiritual warfare that we find ourselves.
3. The sword of the *Spirit*: As Lincoln puts it, "the Spirit is not so much the one who supplies the sword – both the helmet and the sword are to be received from God – but the one who gives it its effectiveness, its cutting edge." We cannot wield the sword of the Spirit without the guidance, discernment, and power of the Holy Spirit.

We saw earlier that receiving the helmet implies simply accepting the assurance of salvation that Jesus gives. By contrast, receiving the sword means that we do have some work to do, in terms of our knowledge of the Bible! But the effort will be well worth it. As William Gurnall puts it:

"A pilot without his chart, a scholar without his book, and a soldier without his sword, are all alike ridiculous. But, above all these, it is absurd to think of being a Christian, without knowledge of the word of God and some skill to use this weapon. The usual name in Scripture for war is 'the sword.' . . . And this because the sword is the weapon of most universal use in war, and also that whereby the greatest execution is done in the battle. Now such a weapon is the word of God in the Christian's hand. By the edge of this his enemies fall, and all his great exploits are done."

***Decree***

*We will take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and see the enemy fall in His Name.*



**OCTOBER 12**

***Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.***

*(Ephesians 6:18a)*

Paul ends his memorable description of the full armour of God with this mention of prayer. Dr. Ed Murphy writes: “Prayer is not a seventh piece of spiritual armour, however. It is too grand, too foundational, too all encompassing to be listed as just another piece of spiritual armour, important as they are. . . . Indeed, it is the key to effective warfare with high-level, cosmic powers of evil. In Ephesians 6 it is the total context in which spiritual warfare is engaged and won.”

Let us conclude these reflections on the armour with a paraphrase of the words of William Gurnall, from his classic *“The Christian in Complete Armour”*:

“We have completed our presentation before you of the Christian in armour; and now all that you need for the battle, or to enable you for the victory, is the presence of your general to lead you on, and bring you honourably off again by the wisdom of your conduct; in order to obtain this, the apostle instructs you to pray – ‘praying always.’ It is as if he is saying, ‘You have now, Christian, the armour of God; but be careful not to use it without asking God for His assistance by humble prayer, in case, after all of this, you lose in the fight. Only He who gives you the arms can teach you to use them, and enable you to overcome by their use.’ . . . [Prayer] is connected, not just with the last preceding words, but with the whole discourse of the armour; it seems to be superadded as a general duty that influences all the pieces that have been named, and may be read with every piece: - Take up the belt of truth, praying with all prayer; having on the breastplate of righteousness, praying with all prayer, and the same for the rest. The Christian’s armour will rust unless it is furbished and scoured with the oil of prayer. What the key is to the watch, that is prayer to our graces – it winds them up and sets them going.”

Finally, we wage spiritual warfare by praying *in the Spirit* – that is, with the Spirit’s help, according to the Spirit’s will, and trusting in the power of the Spirit. The devil quails at the thought of the praying saint, clad in the full armour of God, and wholly surrendered to the Holy Spirit!

***Decree***

*We will pray in the Spirit, on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests, fully equipped with the armour and fully engaged in the battle.*



## OCTOBER 13

***It is God who arms me with strength  
and keeps my way secure.  
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer;  
he causes me to stand on the heights.  
He trains my hands for battle;  
my arms can bend a bow of bronze.***

*(Psalm 18:32-34)*

David was surely the greatest warrior Israel ever had. 2 Samuel 8 gives us a list of the peoples he defeated in battle – it included the Philistines, the Moabites, the Arameans, the Ammonites, the Edomites, and the Amalekites. Yet, David always recognized that he was victorious only because of God, and in today's verses he gives God all the credit for even his ability to fight.

Physical battle in the Old Testament teaches us valuable lessons for spiritual warfare in New Testament times. In these verses, we see God at work, training us for battle against the forces of darkness. We can also see parallels to the armour of God that we have already looked at.

1. God arms us with strength: In fact, the Hebrew says that God “girds us with strength”, like the belt of truth in the armour. We are encompassed and surrounded by God's strength, and this is what enables us to complete the battle. Too often, otherwise, we may begin fighting but give up in our weakness. Not so when we fight with God's strength and in His way.
2. God makes our feet secure and our position triumphant: Pett writes of David that “he was sure of foot, like the hind on the mountainside, swift and sure footed, skipping from slippery gradient to slippery gradient, with never a falter, and thus, like the hind, standing on high places, from where he can look down in triumph.” The heights have always been seen as positions of dominance in war, and God enables us to ascend without falling, our feet fitted in His armour, to that place of victory in spiritual warfare.
3. God trains our hands for battle: Just as we use our hands to wield a sword, here David is skilled in using a bow. The bronze bow was much harder to use than a wooden one, requiring not just skill but also strength. And David attributes his ability to use a bronze bow to the equipping he has received from God. So too in spiritual warfare, God gives us the skill we need to wield the weapons that we find in the armour of God.

### ***Decree***

*We will wage spiritual warfare, strengthened and equipped and trained for battle by God Himself.*



**OCTOBER 14**

***I will sing to the LORD,  
for he is highly exalted.***

***Both horse and driver***

***he has hurled into the sea.***

*(Exodus 15:1)*

At the time of Israel's deliverance from slavery, Egypt was probably the superpower of the Middle East, both financially and militarily. And yet, in the span of less than a year, Egypt was reduced to poverty and misery by God's mighty works on behalf of His people.

God did this by sending ten plagues upon Egypt, followed by the *coup de grace* at the Red Sea. However, these were not arbitrary actions on God's part. The encounters that took place to defeat Egypt were not between Moses and Pharaoh; they weren't even between God and Pharaoh. Rather, they were between the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the idols and deities of Egypt. Here is a brief list of the deities that were judged by the LORD in the plagues:

1. The Nile turning to blood was judgment against Hapi, the god of the Nile, Khnum, the guardian of the Nile's source, and Osiris, whose bloodstream was the Nile.
2. The plague of frogs judged Heket, the goddess of fertility, whose head was a frog.
3. The plague of lice was judgment against Geb, the god of the earth.
4. The plague of flies judged Khepri, the god of creation and rebirth, whose head was a fly.
5. The plague on livestock was judgment against Hathor, the goddess of love and protection, whose head was a cow.
6. The plague of boils judged Sekhmet, the goddess of healing.
7. The plague of hail was judgment against Nut, the goddess of the sky.
8. The plague of locusts judged Seth, the god of storms and disorder.
9. The plague of darkness was judgment against Ra, the sun god, and Thoth, the moon god.
10. The plague of the death of the firstborn judged Pharaoh, who was considered the son of Ra.

Finally, the destruction of the Egyptian army, at a place called Baal-Zephon, demonstrated the defeat of a powerful deity known as Lord of the North or Lord of Hidden Things, and also considered Lord of the sea and of the storm.

Spiritual warfare today, as it was in the time of the Exodus, consists of defeating the hidden forces of darkness that are behind visible evils, and then seeing God's kingdom manifested on the earth.

### ***Decree***

***The LORD is highly exalted, and He has already defeated every spiritual force of darkness that is behind today's evils.***



**OCTOBER 15**

***I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.*** (Luke 10:19)

This verse may be the clearest statement by Jesus on the authority that we have been given in spiritual warfare. Jesus had sent seventy-two of his disciples on a mission trip, armed with His authority. When they returned, their only testimony was, “*Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!*”

Most of the Church is quite happy to avoid the implications of what Jesus said. We either ignore it altogether, or apply it only to the apostles or prominent Christian leaders. But, as Francis Frangipane puts it, “I believe the Scriptures are clear: Not only do Christians have the authority to war against these powers of darkness, but we have the responsibility to as well. If we do not pray against our spiritual enemies, they will, indeed, prey on us.”

Even when we do accept Jesus’ words and seek to obey Him, we are plagued by self-doubt and lack of confidence with regard to what exactly we have been authorized to do. C. Peter Wagner writes: “How much power did Jesus give His disciples? . . . because not one of us is the Son of God, we cannot expect to have the same unobstructed relationship with the Father or the Holy Spirit without measure. *Practically*, we may not see divine power operating so regularly in our ministries, but *potentially*, the same degree of power Jesus possessed is there. Nothing less.”

“Snakes and scorpions” refer to demonic entities, which we engage with in spiritual warfare. Jesus deliberately uses the word “trample”, not just because snakes and scorpions are generally found at ground level, but in order to evoke the imagery of Genesis 3:15: “*He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*” On the cross, Jesus trampled the head of that ancient serpent, the devil – and we, his disciples, have been authorized and empowered to do the same to his demonic hordes. And we are assured of His protection.

As Pett writes: “The evil spirits which are symbolised as serpents and scorpions can do no harm to those sheltered under the authority of Jesus, who can tread on them with impunity. Even their heels are not vulnerable. . . . Because they are within God’s Kingly Rule, serpents have become their plaything.”

### ***Decree***

***We have been given authority to trample on snakes and scorpions, and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm us!***



**OCTOBER 16**

***He made my mouth like a sharpened sword,  
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;  
he made me into a polished arrow  
and concealed me in his quiver.***

*(Isaiah 49:2)*

We see in this verse a picture of Jesus before His public ministry, hidden from the world, being prepared in the secret place by His Father and through the Spirit. There are three crucial aspects of spiritual warfare that are revealed through this verse:

1. Jesus didn't just have weapons of warfare to use: He Himself was the weapon – the sword, the arrow, fashioned by God Himself. In the same way, each one of us has been created to be a weapon in God's hands against the powers of darkness. Our lives, our words and deeds, our very presence, are weapons that can counter evil, just as the light dispels darkness simply by shining.
2. The sword is sharpened and the arrow is polished: The sharpened sword, as Spurgeon puts it, "is all edge; and whichever way it strikes, it wounds and kills. There is no such a thing as the flat of the sword of the Spirit: it has a razor edge every way." The polished arrow, in Pett's words, "is one that has been made deadly accurate. It will not swerve from its main course [and will] move forward with accuracy and speed." God does not send us into battle unprepared. He trains and equips us, just as a soldier undergoes rigorous training before being deployed. Often, the difficult seasons of our lives are used by God to prepare us for spiritual warfare.
3. The sword is hidden, and the arrow is concealed: Ecclesiastes 3:8 says that "*there is a time for war and a time for peace.*" Spiritual warfare is not just about preparation but also timing. Jesus was only released into His ministry of destroying the works of the devil at the age of thirty, in His Father's appointed time. We need to be sensitive to, and guided by, God's timing in spiritual warfare, neither going ahead of His purposes nor holding back when He wants us to act. We are not presumptuous in spiritual warfare, nor are we timid.

What an incredible picture: You and I, every believer, sharpened and polished weapons, safe in God's hands, and released with deadly speed and accuracy when God desires!

***Decree***

*God has made me a sharpened sword and polished arrow; He has hidden me in His hand and concealed me in His quiver; and He will use me to wage war against the enemy!*



**OCTOBER 17**

***Together they will be like warriors in battle  
trampling their enemy into the mud of the streets.  
They will fight because the LORD is with them,  
and they will put the enemy horsemen to shame.***

*(Zechariah 10:5)*

Zechariah 10 speaks of future blessings for Israel, especially in the weak state they found themselves in after their return from exile. However, even this state of blessing includes a picture of warfare. The previous verse tells us who is in charge:

*“From Judah will come the cornerstone,  
From him the tent peg,  
From him the battle bow,  
From him every ruler.”*

Jesus is our captain when we wage spiritual warfare. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is the cornerstone, the One who is the foundation of all that we do, and with whom we need to be aligned. He is the tent peg, the One who provides stability and security. He is the battle bow, the most powerful weapon of God. He is the ruler, who has absolute authority and power, and He delegates His authority to, and fills with power, His appointed warriors.

It is with this mighty Commander, behind Him and beside Him, that we wage war. Pett writes of the scene being described in today’s verse:

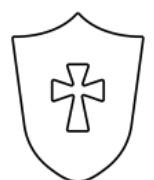
“This is a picture of triumph and overcoming . . . . The vivid scene was well known to the prophet and his contemporaries, for some had seen it in reality. The mud-filled streets of a city, the powerful champions against whom none could prevail, their forward progress trampling all before them, enemy cavalry beaten and destroyed. In the past, this had been true of their enemies who had seemed invincible. Now it was to become true of them. In their turn, they will be the victors because YHWH is with them.

We may be engaged in a different kind of battle, a spiritual battle, but the way is still miry and the enemy still battling in desperation. Ours too will be the victory if God is with us.”

We live in an age of grace, and Jesus promises us His rest – yet, we are called to battle. Spiritual warfare can be messy and confusing, but we are promised victory. Most of all, we are assured of the presence of the One who has already conquered the enemy of our souls!

***Decree***

*We are warriors in battle, fighting alongside Jesus, trampling the enemy and putting him to shame, because the Lord is with us!*



## OCTOBER 18

***You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you.*** (2 Chronicles 20:17)

In the time of Jehoshaphat, a vast army comprising of three nations came against Judah. When he heard of this, Jehoshaphat did a number of things, all of which are weapons of spiritual warfare:

1. **SEEKING THE LORD:** Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD. He called an assembly of the people, and they came from every town in Judah to seek the LORD. This is our primary posture in spiritual warfare – seeking Him in our weakness and dependence.
2. **FASTING:** The whole nation was called to fast. Fasting is wonderful as an individual activity, but there is great power in corporate fasting. Many times, in the Bible as well as in church history, incredible things have happened when God’s people have fasted together.
3. **PRAYER:** Jehoshaphat brought the situation before God, along with the people of Judah. He sought the LORD’s help and guidance, saying *“We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.”* Again, we see that there is power in corporate prayer.
4. **STILLNESS:** When faced with a crisis, our reaction is usually panic and striving. Even prayer becomes difficult, as we are stressed and distracted. But we need to be still before God, to wait upon Him, until He speaks or moves as He sees fit. *“Be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10),”* the Word says. Stillness is a powerful weapon in our fight against the devil.
5. **THE WORD OF GOD:** As they waited, God spoke through a prophet. It was a word of assurance as well as one of direction. And it set the stage for the victory to follow. God’s *rhema* word, even if it is simply a verse from the Bible, is what we need to go into battle with.
6. **PRAISE:** Jehoshaphat received God’s word, and his response was to worship. They marched into battle with musicians and singers at the head of the army! As Beni Johnson puts it, *“The people of God fought a war by worship. Their worship set in motion a shift in the heavenly realms, and God did the rest.”*

### ***Decree***

*We will use every weapon of warfare that God has revealed to us, and we will surely see the deliverance that God has given us.*



**OCTOBER 19**

***I have commanded those I prepared for battle;  
I have summoned my warriors to carry out my wrath—  
those who rejoice in my triumph.***

*(Isaiah 13:3)*

War is serious business – but, at the end, there is rejoicing for the victors. When we engage in spiritual warfare, however, the battle has already been won by Jesus on the cross! Satan is already a conquered foe! So, we can rejoice even as we fight, because we already know the end!

Beni Johnson has a chapter entitled “*Warfare through Worship and Joy*” in her book “*The Happy Intercessor*”. She writes:

“When you use joy in your warfare, it is because you are expecting good things to happen. I took my interns to a Buddhist monastery in our area. I thought it would be a good experience for them to pray in a place where another god is served. I had been to this place several times before and had found that it was an easy place to pray at. When we got there, I told them to just walk around and begin praying and feeling what God wanted to do. While we were having this time of walking, one of my interns came leaping by me, smiling and giggling. I like to call her Tigger. I love to pray with her because she is always finding God’s heart. She told me in a singsong voice that there were a lot of demons here and that it was really easy to pray. When you experience God’s presence around you, even in a demonic setting, you can find it easy to pray. Needless to say, we had a great time praying together that day. When you carry the joy of the Lord with you, all kinds of things happen. Joy brings excitement to the air, and it releases life. Really, it releases all of Heaven.”

In ancient times, warriors put on war paint when they went into battle. Our war paint can be the oil of joy, as we enter battles that have already been won!

***Decree***

*We will rejoice in the triumph of the cross, even as we wage spiritual warfare.*



## OCTOBER 20

***Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.***

*(James 4:7)*

The devil is always on the attack. He is constantly bringing pressure to bear on us, through the many means at his disposal – the world's values, deceptions, our own thoughts and desires, rebellious people, to name just a few. Too often, we find ourselves being pushed back in the face of his relentless pressure, either giving in to the temptations and compromising, or retreating into safe places and handing over territory to him.

The apostle James says that we are to resist the devil. How do we do this? Let's look at some examples of Jesus resisting the devil:

1. Jesus resisted the devil by continuing to fast, when He was being tempted to prove His identity by turning stones into bread and satisfying His hunger. Jesus preferred spiritual satisfaction to physical, and, in doing so, resisted the devil's attempts to have Him indulge His flesh.
2. Jesus resisted the devil with the Word of God, using it to counter every temptation in the wilderness, until the devil was forced to leave Him. Most likely, Jesus had been meditating on these Scriptures through His forty days of fasting in the wilderness, and He was ready to face the devil and overcome.
3. Jesus resisted the devil's temptation to avoid the cross, delivered through a well-intentioned Peter, by choosing to be obedient to His Father. In fact, this temptation appears to have been a potent one, because it elicited fierce resistance from Jesus, manifested in the stern rebuke He gave Peter.
4. Jesus resisted the devil's plans for Simon Peter, by praying for him when He knew that Peter would fall and deny Him three times. In doing so, Jesus made sure that Peter could be restored eventually.
5. Jesus resisted the devil's temptation in the garden of Gethsemane to seek His own will; instead, Jesus surrendered to His Father's will.

In Ephesians 6, Paul exhorts us four times to stand firm against the devil and his dark forces. We are not to pull back but press forward, resisting him until he has no choice but to flee. Yes, the devil will return, but we just have to send him packing again!

### ***Decree***

*We will resist the devil, and he will flee from us!*



OCTOBER 21

***The LORD will march out like a champion,  
like a warrior he will stir up his zeal;  
with a shout he will raise the battle cry  
and will triumph over his enemies.***

*(Isaiah 42:13)*

In war, as in most enterprises, an inspirational leader can make all the difference between success and failure, victory and defeat. History is replete with stories of warriors who led from the front, or who commanded their troops with brilliant strategies. Spiritual warfare is no different, and the good news is that we have the most awesome general and warrior of all time to lead us in this battle!

Isaiah gives us a rousing picture of the LORD leading His troops in battle. As Pett puts it, God is “described in terms of a Champion going out to war. He will go out like a warrior, He will stir up zeal in Himself, like soldiers stir up each other’s zeal before the battle.” Barnes adds: “He shall stir up jealousy – He shall rouse his vengeance, or his indignation. The word ‘*qinah*’ means vengeance, or indignation, as well as jealousy. The image here is that of a warrior who rushes on impetuously to take vengeance on his foes. He shall cry – He shall give a shout, or a loud clamour. Warriors usually entered a battle with a loud shout, designed to stimulate their own courage, and to intimidate their foes. All this language is taken from such an entrance on an engagement, and denotes the fixed determination of God to overthrow all his enemies.”

In earlier centuries, when generals actually led their troops into battle, the sight of their general at the head of the attack gave courage to the soldiers, for two reasons – they were stirred up by their leader’s courage, and they saw that he was confident of victory. In spiritual warfare, we follow our General, Jesus Christ, who took the courageous step of becoming man for our sakes and even submitting to death on a cross.

Jesus marched out like a champion, from heaven to earth. Like a warrior, in His zeal He laid waste to the devil’s forces and schemes on the earth. His battle cry was a shout of “*It is finished!*” even as He hung dying on the cross. And He triumphed over sin and death, sickness and suffering, and every weapon of the enemy, when He rose from the grave.

***Decree***

*We will follow our general, Jesus Christ, raise His battle cry, and triumph over the enemy.*



## OCTOBER 22

***For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.*** (2 Corinthians 10:3-4)

Paul speaks in these verses of strongholds. The word he uses means “a heavily fortified containment; a strong-walled fortress.” Strongholds were the hardest places to conquer in battle. In the Old Testament, in Joshua 6, we have an incredible example of a physical stronghold being brought down by spiritual warfare. Israel had finally entered Canaan, and the very first city they were led to attack was Jericho, a stronghold if there ever was one! The walls of Jericho were three-tiered, in all almost one hundred feet high and over sixty feet wide. Jericho was absolutely impossible for the Israelite army to conquer, since their first task would be to bring down these walls. Against the conventional weaponry of that time, Jericho’s walls were simply impregnable. But the LORD said to Joshua, “*See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in.*”

Joshua and the people obeyed, and, on the seventh day, “*at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.*”

Jericho was defeated with spiritual weapons. Three of these were:

1. **PRESENCE:** The whole purpose of the procession was to carry God’s presence around the city; in effect, God was laying siege to Jericho. God’s presence is our most powerful weapon of spiritual warfare.
2. **SILENCE:** Though the soldiers were marching around the wall, they had to behave very unlike soldiers: no strategizing, planning, plotting, preparing siege weapons, or looking for weaknesses in the wall; plus the silence – no chitchat, marching songs, cursing, coarse jokes; they had to be patient and simply march. Could it be that their silence was countering a specific demonic stronghold in Jericho, such as proud boasting?
3. **PRAISE:** An environment of praise was established, with the only sound being the blowing of the trumpets by the priests. It culminated in a final shout of praise, a declaration of God’s time to manifest on earth what had been achieved in the heavenly realms.

The strongholds we face may seem like Jericho – formidable, insurmountable, impossible; but the weapons we fight with have divine power to demolish every stronghold!

### **Decree**

***Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds!***



**OCTOBER 23**

***We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.***

*(2 Corinthians 10:5)*

Paul deals specifically with strongholds of the mind. He speaks of arguments and pretensions and thoughts that are opposed to the knowledge of God. As Dr. Ed Murphy puts it, “The strongholds and arguments to be overcome by God’s power are, in general, human evaluations . . . . They are ways of thinking and evaluating that are false, arrogant, and destructively disobedient. . . . Misbeliefs are beliefs that are untrue about oneself, others, or circumstances. They can become demonic strongholds against one’s life, family, church, etc. . . of course, the ultimate source for all such deception is Satan.”

The website *gotquestions.org* has the following explanation for this verse and the two verses preceding it:

“Here’s the picture: the Christian, wearing his spiritual armour and bearing his spiritual weapons, sets out to ‘conquer’ the world for Christ, but he soon finds obstacles. The enemy has erected strongly fortified garrisons to resist the Truth and thwart God’s plan of redemption. There is the fortress of human reasoning, reinforced with many subtle arguments and the pretense of logic. There is the castle of passion, with flaming battlements defended by lust, pleasure, and greed. And there is the pinnacle of pride, in which the human heart sits enthroned and revels in thoughts of its own excellence and sufficiency. The enemy is firmly entrenched; these strongholds have been guarded for thousands of years, presenting a great wall of resistance to the Truth. None of this deters the Christian warrior, however. Using the weapons of God’s choosing, he attacks the strongholds, and by the miraculous power of Christ, the walls are breached, and the bastions of sin and error are battered down. The victorious Christian enters the ruins and leads captive, as it were, every false theory and every human philosophy that had once proudly asserted its independence from God.”

We live in an age where philosophies, ideologies, and even religions have been captured by the most perverse and dangerous deceptions. We see our most treasured institutions compromised, and the loudest voices in society spouting the most absurd delusions. Praise God that, in Christ, we have the power to bring down every high thing that sets itself up against His Truth!

***Decree***

***We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.***



## OCTOBER 24

***You armed me with strength for battle;  
you humbled my adversaries before me.  
You made my enemies turn their backs in flight,  
and I destroyed my foes.***

*(Psalm 18:39-40)*

David wrote Psalm 18, and perhaps, as he wrote these verses, he was thinking about the event that shot him to fame, his epic encounter with Goliath. The story is well-known, so let's just look at the battle itself. David, the shepherd boy, dressed in his shepherd's garments and armed with a sling and five stones, approached Goliath, the giant warrior. Goliath mocked and cursed David when he saw him, already looking forward to his victory. 1 Samuel 17 records their battle:

*“David said to the Philistine, ‘You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.’*

*As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground.*

*So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.*

*David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine’s sword and drew it from the sheath. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword.*

*When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran. Then the men of Israel and Judah surged forward with a shout and pursued the Philistines to the entrance of Gath and to the gates of Ekron. Their dead were strewn along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron. When the Israelites returned from chasing the Philistines, they plundered their camp.”*

Goliath had every advantage of worldly warfare – strength, training, and weapons. David said that his weapon was the name of the LORD, Yahweh Sabaoth, the Lord of hosts. What a perfect illustration of spiritual warfare, and what an example and encouragement for us today! We may see ourselves as Davids before the Goliaths of the world – but that's okay, because we all know how that story ended!

### ***Decree***

*God arms us with strength for battle, and humbles our adversaries before us. Our enemies will turn their backs in flight, and we will destroy our foes!*



**OCTOBER 25**

***You are my war club,  
my weapon for battle—  
with you I shatter nations,  
with you I destroy kingdoms.***

*(Jeremiah 51:20)*

Some commentators believe that this verse refers to Babylon, which was used by God to punish many nations including Judah. Others believe that Cyrus the Mede is referred to here, who was used by God to destroy Babylon. I believe God could even be referring to the prophet Jeremiah's ministry. And undoubtedly there is a Messianic flavour to this verse, since it is true of Jesus. No matter how we choose to understand it, we see here that God chooses people to execute His will in warfare. The same holds true for spiritual warfare, even over nations and kingdoms, as today's verse indicates.

Just as we often have a "small" God, limited by our lack of faith, so too can we have a deficient understanding of the scope of spiritual warfare. Jesus told us, in the Great Commission, to make disciples of nations, not just of individuals. He was deliberately echoing the Genesis Commission given to Adam and Eve, to have dominion over the whole earth. Jesus' kingdom is the whole earth; it is all the nations and kingdoms, not just individual beings. He wants us to disciple the culture, the social institutions, the traditions and rituals, and the values of our nations.

Why then does this verse say that God wants to shatter nations and destroy kingdoms? Because, often, we need to destroy something before it can be rebuilt. Judah had to be defeated, and Jerusalem and the temple destroyed, before there could be a fresh beginning after the Babylonian exile. Jeremiah's call made this clear: *"See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant (Jeremiah 1:10)."*

In spiritual warfare, we often have to first destroy what is evil, before we can pray into being what is good. We have to uproot the deep tentacles of evil and tear down the foundations and walls of strongholds. We have to destroy the works of darkness and overthrow the demonic powers. Only then can we build societies that are righteous, and plant seeds that will bring forth a Kingdom harvest. God wants to first tear down the structures of evil in our midst, and we are the war club He desires to use!

### ***Decree***

*We are God's war club, His weapon for battle – with us, He shatters nations and destroys kingdoms!*



## OCTOBER 26

***As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the poplar trees, move out to battle, because that will mean God has gone out in front of you . . .***

*(1 Chronicles 14:15)*

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the battles of the greatest warrior in the Old Testament teach us so much about spiritual warfare. The context of today's verse is that the Philistines had attacked Israel, and David inquired of the LORD for guidance. He did this despite having won many battles against them previously; David did not depend on his own experience or wisdom, but sought God's strategy. And God gave him this word:

*"As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the poplar trees, move out to battle, because that will mean God has gone out in front of you."*

David could not rely on his own battle-hardened experience and previous victories, but had to wait for God to move. The sign was the sound of marching in the treetops. This was not just the wind making a sound, but the sound of an actual army marching. The Hebrew is literally "the sound of stepping." As David and his army waited in the woods, an army of angels with God at its head was marching out to do battle ahead of them. The Bible goes on to say that it was God with His angelic army that actually struck the enemy first!

David had to move the moment he heard the sound of marching. He had to move after God moved, but before God attacked. He had to move in faith, based on God's word rather than his own sight. And as a result, David won a mighty victory over the Philistines that day.

We see here how events in the heavenly realms are manifested on earth. As the angelic army marched out, David had to follow on the earth by stepping into battle. And when God struck the enemy, David won the victory on earth and defeated the Philistine army. This is the very essence of spiritual warfare – seeking God's strategy, waiting for Him to move, discerning angelic activity, responding in obedience and surrender, and reaping the harvest on earth for what is accomplished in heaven!

### ***Decree***

*We will move when God moves, and manifest on earth what has been accomplished in heaven!*



**OCTOBER 27**

***Some trust in chariots and some in horses,  
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.  
They are brought to their knees and fall,  
but we rise up and stand firm.***

*(Psalm 20:7-8)*

Today's devotion is taken from Charles Spurgeon's exposition of these verses, in his classic "*Treasury of David*":

"Chariots and horses make an imposing show, and with their rattling, and dust, and fine caparisons, make so great a figure that vain man is much taken with them; yet the discerning eye of faith sees more in an invisible God than in all these. The most dreaded war engine of David's day was the war chariot, armed with scythes, which mowed down men like grass: this was the boast and glory of the neighbouring nations; but the saints considered the name of Jehovah to be a far better defence. As the Israelites might not keep horses, it was natural for them to regard the enemy's cavalry with more than usual dread. It is, therefore, all the greater evidence of faith that the bold songster can here disdain even the horse of Egypt in comparison with the Lord of hosts. Alas, how many in our day who profess to be the Lord's are as abjectly dependent upon their fellow men or upon an arm of flesh in some shape or other, as if they had never known the name of Jehovah at all. Jesus, be thou alone our rock and refuge, and never may we mar the simplicity of our faith. . . .

How different the end of those whose trusts are different! The enemies of God are uppermost at first, but before long they are brought down by force, or else fall of their own accord. Their foundation is rotten, and therefore when the time comes it gives way under them; their chariots are burned in the fire, and their horses die of pestilence, and where is their boasted strength? As for those who rest on Jehovah, they are often cast down at the first onset, but an Almighty arm uplifts them, and they joyfully stand upright. The victory of Jesus is the inheritance of his people. The world, death, Satan, and sin, shall all be trampled beneath the feet of the champions of faith; while those who rely upon an arm of flesh shall be ashamed and confounded for ever."

As Spurgeon makes clear, what is true of physical battles is all the more true of spiritual warfare. Our trust is in the name of Jesus – that is, we remember what He has done and still does, and we boast in His power to bring about the fullness of His reign on earth.

### ***Decree***

***Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.  
The forces of darkness are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm!***



**OCTOBER 28**

***The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.***

*(Zephaniah 3:17)*

One of the most enduring images of the Hollywood blockbuster “*Gladiator*” is the respect and affection the troops have for their General. We can get so caught up in the practice of spiritual warfare, especially in the dark nature of the enemy, that we can lose sight of how wonderful our General is. He is worthy of our reverence, and also of our love. In today’s verse, we are given a glimpse into the heart of the Mighty Warrior!

1. The Mighty Warrior is with us; literally, He is in our inward parts. It speaks of the intimacy of God’s presence with us – not just as an aloof general leading us into battle, but in such intimate relationship that He now dwells in us through His Holy Spirit.
2. The Mighty Warrior takes great delight in us; literally, He exults over us! His delight in us is exceedingly great, and it is not based on whether we are good at spiritual warfare! God sees us through the prism of the cross, and He is delighted with what He sees.
3. The Mighty Warrior no longer rebukes us in His love; literally, He quiets us with His love. His delight and discipline are not contradictions. In fact, the context of this verse in Zephaniah is Jerusalem’s restoration after judgment and punishment. I see here a tender picture of a father, after disciplining his child, taking him in his arms in a loving embrace, and quieting his sobs.
4. The Mighty Warrior rejoices over us with singing; literally, He twirls and spins around with excitement. God is so in love with us, He dances and sings over us, like a father treasuring his little baby in the crib!

We have done nothing to deserve God’s presence, delight, comfort, love, and ecstatic joy – and we can never earn it. All we can do is know how He feels about us, and respond in kind. This is perhaps our greatest protection, as well as foundation, when we move into spiritual warfare: knowing just who is ahead of us, with us, in us, and for us. He is the Mighty Warrior who is, to put it simply, crazy about us!

***Decree***

*The Mighty Warrior is with us, delighting in us, quieting us with His love, and rejoicing over us with singing!*



**OCTOBER 29**

***Praise be to the LORD my Rock,  
who trains my hands for war,  
my fingers for battle.***

***He is my loving God and my fortress,  
my stronghold and my deliverer,  
my shield, in whom I take refuge,  
who subdues peoples under me.***

*(Psalm 144:1-2)*

Spiritual warfare is a partnership between God and us. He could do it all by Himself, of course – God could defeat Satan with one word. But God has chosen to work in this world through His people. We saw the same principle repeated again and again, when we spoke of the partnership we have in prayer. David speaks here of the partnership of battle, his physical battles, which of course teach us about our spiritual battles.

David begins by bowing down in adoration before the LORD, whom he refers to as his Rock. This was an image of strength, stability, and security; a place of protection in a desert land. However, David is not praising God just for keeping him safe in battle, but also for equipping him to fight. God has trained him, taught him, expertly instructed him in the art of war – David's hands wield the sword and spear, while his fingers pull the bow strings to shoot the arrow. In the same way, we wage war with Jesus as our Rock. He is our foundation, and He is our security. We stand firm on the Rock as we fight the enemy. And we are trained for battle by God – He shows us how to use the armour of God and how to wield the weapons of our warfare. We become proficient in spiritual warfare as we continue to fight and be trained.

David continues with the language of battle to describe the LORD – fortress, stronghold, deliverer, shield, refuge. While all of these terms were related to protection, they were the position from which God gave David the victories he enjoyed. As the psalm declares, God subdued peoples under David. God did the work in the heavenly realms, and David manifested the reality on earth. In the same way, we wage spiritual warfare from our security in Christ. He is our fortress and stronghold. The devil cannot snatch us from Jesus' hands. We see answers to our prayers, breakthroughs in situations, transformation of lives and even nations, but behind it all is God at work in the heavenlies.

This is the principle of kingdom partnership, in spiritual warfare as in every aspect of kingdom life – God is all, and does everything; yet He prepares and uses His servants to accomplish His purposes.

***Decree***

***The LORD is my Rock, who trains me for battle; He is my fortress and refuge, who subdues the forces of evil through me!***



OCTOBER 30

***I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.***  
(Matthew 16:19)

This is possibly the most important statement on spiritual warfare that Jesus made. Peter had just had the revelation that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Following that, Jesus had told His disciples that He would build His church, and the gates of Hades would not overcome it.

C. Peter Wagner, in his book *“Confronting the Powers”*, writes:

“The gates of hell would constantly produce obstacles to the spread of the gospel, but these gates would not be able to withstand. How could they be opened? Jesus said to His disciples, ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.’ This means that the disciples themselves would be the primary agents to move the kingdom of God through these formidable gates of the enemy. . . . What, then, are the keys that would have the power to unlock and penetrate the gates of hell? They are ‘binding’ and ‘loosing’ – ‘Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.’ ”

Wagner continues:

“This means that an essential synchronization exists between activities on earth and activities in heaven. And it establishes the crucial sequence: heaven *first*, then earth. This reminds us once again of the absolute necessity of hearing from God in the ministry of spiritual warfare. . . . The personal prayer life of one who would attempt to bind the strongman is essential. Through prayer we draw into intimacy with the Father so that we can most clearly hear His voice to us. Through our personal prayer lives, and also through association with other members of the Body of Christ who have gifts of intercession and prophecy and discernment of spirits, we can know what has or has not been bound in heaven. It is foolish, as well as dangerous, to confront the enemy by binding and loosing outside the will of God or outside of His timing.

I have observed many efforts of binding and loosing, which, although done with high purposes and out of a good heart, have not produced satisfactory results either short term or long term. Many of these ineffective initiatives have been based on the mistaken premise that we first choose what we want to bind, and *then* heaven will follow suit. That is not the way it works.”

We have been given the incredible privilege and responsibility of binding and loosing, in order to advance God’s kingdom. Let us deepen our prayer lives, individually and corporately, to discern what heaven has already bound and loosed, so that we may do the same here on earth.

### ***Decree***

***We have been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven; we will bind and loose on earth what has already been bound and loosed in heaven!***



**OCTOBER 31**

***The battle belongs to the LORD.***

*(2 Chronicles 20:15b)*

We return to the story of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20. As the king and all the people of Judah stood before the LORD, helpless in the face of the crisis they were facing, God sent His word through a prophet: *“Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of his vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.’ ”*

When did the battle become God’s and not theirs? I believe it was when they chose to go before the LORD and seek His face, with fasting and prayer. When they brought their problem to God instead of to man, it became His problem! And God is pleased to take ownership of our battles, if we will just go to Him in humility and surrender.

All the more when it comes to spiritual warfare. We are fighting on His behalf, to see His kingdom come. Even as we recognize the kingdom partnership He has called us into, even as we fulfill our responsibility to bind and loose, even as we receive His training and get better at fighting the enemy, we must never lose sight of the fact that the battle belongs to Him!

Jehoshaphat took God’s words to heart. If the battle belonged to God, and if the victory was already assured, the only logical response was to worship. And their song was very simple: *“Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever!”*

This is what happened next:

*“As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. The Ammonites and Moabites rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another. When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped.”*

The battle truly belonged to God, for while they worshipped, He fought! Every spiritual battle we will ever fight belongs to God. As we surrender and trust, as we listen and obey, as we step out with strength and courage, we will see the awesome power of heaven being unleashed on the earth, and the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdoms of our Lord!

***Decree***

***The battle belongs to the LORD!***



# Thanksgiving



## NOVEMBER 1

***Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
his love endures forever.***

*(1 Chronicles 16:34)*

It was a day of great celebration for David and the people of Jerusalem. The Ark of the Covenant of the LORD was brought to Jerusalem, after almost a century of being in people's homes, and placed in the special tent that David had set up for it. The day was filled with exuberant praise and worship, extravagant offerings of animal sacrifices, and gifts for everyone. To commemorate the day, David wrote a psalm of thanks, which he then entrusted to Asaph and the other Levites who had been assigned to worship before the LORD. The phrase "give thanks" appears thrice in this song.

What is the Hebrew word that is translated "thanks" in this verse? It is "*yadah*", which means "to throw or to cast."

The website [globalwordministry.org](http://globalwordministry.org) gives the following definitions and description of this word:

"*Yadah* is defined as: To give thanks, laud or praise. An expression of thanks or praise in ritual, public and personal praise. It is found mostly in the book of psalms, some 70 times. *Yadah* comes from the root YAD meaning hand. *Yadah* then is to throw out the hands, or extend the hands in the giving of thanks as part of our worship experience. *Yadah* praise is one in which we raise our hands in an outburst of spontaneous gratitude for what God has done. Our hands are used as an extension of our expression of thanks."

Interestingly, even though thanksgiving is gratitude for what God has done, David sings "*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good!*" Not "Give thanks for what He has done." You see, our thanksgiving is not based on the fact that God has blessed us with good things, but on the enduring fact that He is good, no matter what. Because God is always good, everything He does is good – even when He judges or punishes or disciplines.

David knew that God was good when He allowed the ark to be captured by the Philistines; He was good when the ark remained forgotten in someone's house rather than the tabernacle; He was good in allowing David to bring the ark to Jerusalem; and He would be good no matter what happened next. Because, as David continued, "*His love endures forever.*"

### ***Prayer***

*Father, cultivate in me a heart of gratitude that will always thank You for Your constant goodness and enduring love.*



## NOVEMBER 2

***With incense sweet our thanks ascend;  
Before thy works our powers pall;  
Though we should strive years without end,  
We could not thank thee for them all.***

*(Paul Laurence Dunbar)*

Paul Laurence Dunbar was the son of two formerly enslaved people from Kentucky. He became one of the first influential black poets in American literature. In its entirety, Dunbar's literary body is regarded as an impressive representation of black life in turn-of-the-century America. Frederick Douglass, the great social reformer and abolitionist, referred to Dunbar as "one of the sweetest songsters his race has produced." Undoubtedly, Dunbar would have had a hard life, yet he was able to be grateful to the Almighty for His goodness. Today's devotion is a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar, titled "A Thanksgiving Poem":

The sun hath shed its kindly light,  
Our harvesting is gladly o'er  
Our fields have felt no killing blight,  
Our bins are filled with goodly store.

From pestilence, fire, flood, and sword  
We have been spared by thy decree,  
And now with humble hearts, O Lord,  
We come to pay our thanks to thee.

We feel that had our merits been  
The measure of thy gifts to us,  
We erring children, born of sin,  
Might not now be rejoicing thus.

No deed of our hath brought us grace;  
When thou were nigh our sight was dull,  
We hid in trembling from thy face,  
But thou, O God, wert merciful.

Thy mighty hand o'er all the land  
Hath still been open to bestow  
Those blessings which our wants demand  
From heaven, whence all blessings flow.



Thou hast, with ever watchful eye,  
Looked down on us with holy care,  
And from thy storehouse in the sky  
Hast scattered plenty everywhere.

Then lift we up our songs of praise  
To thee, O Father, good and kind;  
To thee we consecrate our days;  
Be thine the temple of each mind.

With incense sweet our thanks ascend;  
Before thy works our powers pall;  
Though we should strive years without end,  
We could not thank thee for them all.

**Prayer**

*Father, truly even all eternity would not be enough for me to thank You for all Your blessings!  
Give me a heart that is eternally thankful.*



## NOVEMBER 3

***So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.***  
(Colossians 2:6-7)

We don't often think of thankfulness as being an integral part of Christian character. However, see what Paul says here about the implications of receiving Christ Jesus as Lord – we are to live in Him, be rooted in Him, grow in Him, strengthen our faith and, yes, be thankful!

What are we to be thankful for in this context? As Barnes puts it, “Expressing overflowing thanks to God that you have been made acquainted with truths so precious and glorious. If there is anything for which we ought to be thankful, it is for the knowledge of the great truths respecting our Lord and Saviour.”

We are to be thankful for the treasures we have received in Jesus. But Paul gives us another reason for gratitude, a theme that we see throughout his letter to the Colossians – that we have been delivered from the oppressive systems of religion and superstition and ideology. The deceptions of the devil and the world are meant to put heavy burdens on us and oppress us. Jesus sets us free with the truth and releases us into new life in Him.

How are we to be thankful? “*Overflowing with thankfulness,*” as Paul puts it. The Greek refers to abundance or surplus, going beyond the expected measure. The Christian life should be one of thankfulness that goes further than and surpasses what is expected. No matter what may be visible on the surface in the circumstances of our lives, the reality of our freedom in Christ – what He has delivered us from and released us into – should result in a deep well of gratitude that causes us to overflow with thankfulness.

Overflow is so often associated with being blessed – e.g. my cup overflows, a full measure, pressed down and overflowing, and so on. May the primary overflow that people see in our lives be not of blessings, but of our thanksgiving to the One who blesses us!

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, thank You for all that I received when You came into my life as Lord; may my life always overflow with thankfulness!*



## NOVEMBER 4

***Even when life may be difficult, we should thank God for all He does for us which we do not deserve.***  
(Billy Graham)

We all have gone through seasons, even a lifetime in some cases, of struggles and difficulties. We wonder in those times what God is up to, if He hears our cries and sees our tears, if He even exists!

Michelle Cox, in a *Guideposts* article, suggests five thanksgiving prayers we can pray when things are tough:

1. *Lord, I thank You for trusting me enough to give me this situation:* God has a purpose and a plan for every moment of our lives. My prayer is that I will respond to the situation with a Christ-like attitude, and that others also will see that God is “enough” for every situation.
2. *Father, I’m grateful for what You will teach me through this difficult time:* There’s something about going through a trial that makes us learn things we wouldn’t learn otherwise.
3. *God, thank You for how this will mature me spiritually:* This is an opportunity to learn patience and acceptance for God's plan for me—even if it’s not the one I’d choose. “Lord, draw me closer to You!”
4. *Lord, thank You for how this difficult situation will help me know You more intimately:* Hard times do wonders for our prayer lives and lead us to spend more time in God’s Word as we seek comfort and guidance. And it’s often in those moments that we’ll see Him in ways we’ve never seen Him before, when we’ll feel His presence hovering close.
5. *Father, I thank You for how I can take what I’ve learned through these difficult days and use it for You:* None of our life experiences go to waste. God can use all of them if we’ll let Him. Whether it’s a hug, taking time to pray with a hurting friend, giving a monetary gift to someone who needs it or sharing how God was faithful to us when we needed Him, we can help comfort others because of what we’ve lived through.

As Billy Graham puts it, God has done so much for us that we do not deserve. And, astonishingly, that includes all He does even in our times of difficulty!

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, thank You for all that You do for me and in me, even in times of difficulty, and for all that You will do through me!*



## NOVEMBER 5

***Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.***

***For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations.***

*(Psalm 100:4-5)*

Psalm 100 is the only one out of one hundred and fifty psalms that has the title: “A psalm of thanksgiving”. It reveals the importance of thanksgiving in the protocol of the kingdom. The Cambridge English dictionary defines protocol as “the system of rules and acceptable behaviour used at official ceremonies and occasions.” Imagine if we had the opportunity to meet the President of India or the King of England; we would want to be aware of the protocol that was involved. Well, there is protocol involved in approaching the King of kings, and one aspect of it is seen in today’s verses from Psalm 100.

We are exhorted to “*enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.*” Here we see Hebrew parallelism, where thanksgiving and praise are synonyms, both referring to aspects of worship. The picture is clearly that of the temple, or the tabernacle before that – first you entered through the gates, and then you found yourself in the courts of the temple. The deeper you went into the temple premises, the closer you approached the presence of the LORD. Of course, only Levites were allowed in the Holy Place, and only the High Priest in the Holy of Holies, but all those restrictions were removed by the cross!

Today, we have access to the very presence, the very throne room, of God Almighty – but we have to follow protocol as we approach Him. And the first step is thanksgiving! Thanksgiving and praise prepare our hearts for meeting with God, and invite His presence in our midst. They cause us to focus on God rather than on ourselves and our circumstances.

The psalmist gives us three reasons to be thankful, all to do with the character of God:

1. He is good – a quality so unique to God that Jesus says no one is good but God alone!
2. He is loving – not just in passing, not temporary and transient, but forever.
3. He is faithful – not just in the present, but through all generations.

Each day, whenever we approach God in prayer or worship, let us remember to follow the protocol of Psalm 100 – to enter His presence with thanksgiving, aware of His goodness, enduring love, and faithfulness!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to follow the protocol of Your kingdom, always entering Your presence with thanksgiving for Your goodness, love, and faithfulness.*



**NOVEMBER 6**

***Give thanks with a grateful heart***

***Give thanks to the Holy One***

***Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son***

*(Don Moen)*

The website *Songfacts* records the story behind the song "Give Thanks":

"This worship song was written in 1978 by Henry Smith. The young seminary graduate penned it during a difficult time in his life, when he was struggling to find work and coming to terms with a degenerative eye condition that would eventually leave him legally blind. Smith's inspiration was the scripture, *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."* Finding hope in 2 Corinthians 8 v 9's description of God becoming human to save man, he penned this simple song of trust and giving thanks.

Following the introduction of the song during a worship service at the Williamsburg New Testament Church in Virginia, a military couple reintroduced it to a congregation in Germany. It eventually caught the attention of executives at Integrity Music, which is known for producing praise and worship music series under their label, Hosanna! Music. In 1984, a young worship leader named Don Moen was hired by Hosanna! Music. This song was recorded as the title track of his debut album, which was laid down during a live worship service at Covenant Church of Mobile, Alabama in July 1986. Give Thanks was a tremendous success, becoming Hosanna's best-selling release, with more than one million copies sold worldwide. Church congregations around the world picked up on the song, and it is now recognized as one of the most popular contemporary hymns."

Why does "Give Thanks" strike such a chord with Christians all over the world? Perhaps because it reminds us that thanksgiving is a choice, not a feeling; that gratitude is not based on blind faith or mindless duty, but the reality of God's love for us; that we are strong when we are weak and rich when we are poor, because Jesus became both weak and poor for our sakes.

Today, try thanking God for your weakness and poverty, and receive in faith the strength and riches He offers.

***Prayer***

*Thank You, Father, for giving Your Son, Jesus Christ; thank You that when I am weak, then I am strong, and when I am poor, then I am rich.*



## NOVEMBER 7

***Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

*(Philippians 4:6-7)*

M. R. Vincent, a nineteenth century Presbyterian minister, wrote: "Peace is the fruit of believing prayer." Too often, even after we pray, we are not at peace. I know that's very true of me. We strive to do everything right in prayer, and yet we remain burdened and disturbed by the things we are anxious about. It is as if we are making a dish, but something is missing from the recipe! In these two verses, Paul shares with us the secret ingredient that releases peace through our prayers. Barclay writes:

"Paul lays it down that 'thanksgiving must be the universal accompaniment of prayer.' The Christian must feel, as it has been put, that all his life he is, 'as it were, suspended between past and present blessings.' Every prayer must surely include thanks for the great privilege of prayer itself. Paul insists that we must give thanks in everything, in sorrows and in joys alike. That implies two things. It implies gratitude and also perfect submission to the will of God. It is only when we are fully convinced that God is working all things together for good that we can really feel to him the perfect gratitude which believing prayer demands. . . .

The result of believing prayer is that the peace of God will stand like a sentinel on guard upon our hearts. The word that Paul uses is the military word for standing on guard. That peace of God, says Paul, as the Revised Standard Version has it, passes all understanding. That does not mean that the peace of God is such a mystery that man's mind cannot understand it, although that also is true. It means that the peace of God is so precious that man's mind, with all its skill and all its knowledge, can never produce it. It can never be of man's contriving; it is only of God's giving. The way to peace is in prayer to entrust ourselves and all whom we hold dear to the loving hands of God."

It may not seem like much of a secret ingredient, but the simple act of giving thanks, even as we bring our problems to God in prayer, releases a peace that will guard our hearts from disappointment, discouragement, unbelief, and bitterness.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to bring all my anxious requests to You with thanksgiving, and to receive the incomprehensible peace with which You promise to flood my heart!*



## NOVEMBER 8

***Gratitude is an offering precious in the sight of God, and it is one that the poorest of us can make and be not poorer but richer for having made it.*** (A. W. Tozer)

The story is told in Luke 17 of ten lepers:

*“Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us!’*

*When he saw them, he said, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were cleansed.*

*One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.*

*Jesus asked, ‘Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?’ Then he said to him, ‘Rise and go; your faith has made you well.’ ”*

The one who came back was poor in every way. As someone with leprosy, he would have been a social outcast, most likely living in poverty as well. Furthermore, he was a Samaritan, and therefore looked down upon by Jews. He was healed at the same time as the other nine, and would have been just as eager as them to get on with his new life. But, instead, he turned back in gratitude, praising and worshipping and thanking Jesus profusely.

Jesus’ response is significant. *“Were not all ten cleansed?”* and *“Your faith has made you well.”* All ten had faith; imagine the faith it took for them to head off to show themselves to the priests, just based on Jesus’ command, without any evidence yet of being healed. All ten were cleansed – not just physically healed but also, as a result, made ceremonially pure and able now to participate in public worship. But only one was made well.

The word used here is *“sozo”*, which means *“to save.”* It is used in the New Testament mainly of God rescuing believers from the penalty and power of sin, and into His provision of safety. In effect, it means to be made whole. Faith brought cleansing for the nine who moved on, but faith along with gratitude brought wholeness of both body and spirit for the one who came back!

### **Prayer**

*Father, may my offerings of gratitude always be precious in Your sight.*



## NOVEMBER 9

*I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart;  
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.*

*(Psalm 9:1)*

Thanksgiving and testimony go together. David, in this verse, connects giving whole-hearted thanks to God with telling everyone of God's wonderful deeds. He is, of course, testifying most of all to the wonderful things God has done in his own life.

P. B. Power, who served in the Church of England in the nineteenth century, writes of this verse in his book *"The 'I Will' of the Psalms"*:

"When we have received any special good thing from the Lord, it is well, according as we have opportunities, to tell others of it. When the woman who had lost one of her ten pieces of silver, found the missing portion of her money, she gathered her neighbours and her friends together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost.' We may do the same; we may tell friends and relations that we have received such and such a blessing, and that we trace it directly to the hand of God. Why have we not already done this? Is there a lurking unbelief as to whether it really came from God; or are we ashamed to own it before those who are perhaps accustomed to laugh at such things? Who knows so much of the marvellous works of God as his own people; if they be silent, how can we expect the world to see what he has done? Let us not be ashamed to glorify God, by telling what we know and feel he has done; let us watch our opportunity to bring out distinctly the fact of his acting; let us feel delighted at having an opportunity, from our own experience, of telling what must turn to his praise; and them that honour God, God will honour in turn; if we be willing to talk of his deeds, he will give us enough to talk about."

If we are hesitant to share the stories of God's goodness in our lives, could it be because we are not truly thankful? Thankful hearts overflow in testimony. And I love what Power says at the end, that testifying to God's goodness in our lives will result in even more wonders to be thankful more, spurring us on to fresh testimony, and the cycle will continue!

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, may my thankfulness for all Your wonderful deeds in my life overflow in testimony to those around me, especially family and friends and colleagues.*



## NOVEMBER 10

***Once again I look upon the cross where You died  
I'm humbled by Your mercy and I'm broken inside  
Once again I thank You  
Once again I pour out my life***

*(Matt Redman)*

Matthew Henry, in the “Thanksgiving” section of his famous *“A Method for Prayer”*, writes: “Thank God for the Cross of Christ and All Its Benefits: For the full satisfaction which Christ made to the justice of God for the sin of man by the blood of his cross, for the purchases, victories, and triumphs of the cross, and for all the precious benefits which flow to me from the dying of the Lord Jesus.”

The cross has become such a common symbol for Christianity, such a staple in Christian teaching and worship, and so ubiquitous in church architecture and personal expressions of faith, that we all too often lose sight of what it meant for Jesus. As the saying goes, salvation is free for us, but it wasn't cheap for Jesus. It was costly, every minute of it, from the manger to the cross.

Matt Redman's song, *“Once Again”*, echoes the words of Paul in Philippians 2: *“[Jesus] poured himself out, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”* And we are invited in the song, through Redman's own response, to imitate Jesus.

We can't respond appropriately to the cross if we take our eyes off it. Maybe that's why Jesus gave us the sacrament of communion – but see what an empty ritual we have made of it! When we look at the cross, really look, we are humbled by the humility of the Son of God crucified by His creation. We are broken hearted at the reality of His ravaged body, broken to save us from the consequences of our sins. We are astounded that the Son of God would pour Himself out and become nothing, out of love for us.

Matt Redman's response needs to be ours: “Once again I thank You; Once again I pour out my life.” Thanksgiving and surrender are the only possible responses to the cross. How can I hold on to my life, when the Son of God poured His life out for me? How can I take for granted His sacrifice on the cross, and not be grateful every moment of my life?

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You for the cross! May my response be one of humility, brokenness, and surrender.*



## NOVEMBER 11

***Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.***

*(1 Thessalonians 5:17)*

The church in Thessalonica may not have had much to be thankful for in the eyes of the world. Within the very first month of Paul and Silas introducing them to the Christian faith, there was a riot in the city targeting the new believers. Some of their leaders were dragged before city officials, falsely accused, and arrested. In fact, Paul and Silas were sent away quietly by night, after just three sabbath days of preaching the gospel. It seems the persecution and opposition against the fledgling church in Thessalonica continued. They were also beset with moral and ethical problems, issues of doctrine, and the temptation to return to Judaism. In the midst of these difficult circumstances, Paul exhorts them to be thankful – not as some technique of positive thinking, but in obedience to God's will. Thanksgiving, thus, is a choice to be obedient to Jesus!

Billy Graham once wrote: "Having an attitude of thankfulness in all of life's circumstances will help you react as old Matthew Henry did when he was mugged. He wrote in his diary, 'Let me be thankful first because I was never robbed before; second, although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, because although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.' I wonder if I could be that thankful!"

Barclay writes about what marks a genuine church in Paul's eyes, commenting on this verse: "It is a thankful Church. There is always something for which to give thanks; even on the darkest day there are blessings to count. We must remember that if we face the sun, the shadows will fall behind us, but if we turn our backs on the sun, all the shadows will be in front."

Today, take a few moments to list out the circumstances of your life, both good and bad, pleasant and difficult. Then, give thanks in each of those circumstances. I suspect that, by the time you're done thanking, you will begin to see your life in a new light!

### ***Prayer***

*Father, help me to give thanks in all circumstances, in obedience to Your will.*



**NOVEMBER 12**

***O Lord that lends me life, Lend me a heart replete with thankfulness.***

*(William Shakespeare)*

The Free Dictionary defines “replete” as “abundantly supplied; abounding; filled to satiation.” It refers to one’s appetite being completely or excessively satisfied, usually by food or drink. In the context of Shakespeare’s play, the words are spoken by King Henry VI, marveling at the beauty of his queen, Margaret of Anjou. But, of course, the truth is that our deepest satisfaction can never come from satisfying physical and material appetites.

“O Lord that lends me life,” the quote starts. God has given us life – not just the physical life that He gave other living things, but, more significantly, spiritual life. He has breathed His very breath into us, and has made us in His own image. Our hearts can never be satisfied with only material things. Nicky Gumbel, in his book *“Questions of Life”*, quotes the columnist Bernard Levin, who takes great pains to assure us that he is not a Christian: “Countries like ours are full of people who have all the material comforts they desire, together with such non-material blessings as a happy family, and yet lead lives of quiet, and at times noisy, desperation, understanding nothing but the fact that there is a hole inside them and that however much food and drink they pour into it, however many motor cars and television sets they stuff it with, however many well balanced children and loyal friends they parade around the edges of it . . . it aches.”

Maybe Shakespeare hit on something important when he continued the quote with “Lend me a heart replete with thankfulness.” We cannot truly enjoy the life that God has given us if we are not thankful. In a sense, a heart of thankfulness acknowledges the reality of being blessed, and expresses gratitude to the One who has blessed. By contrast, lack of gratitude grounds all of our lives in the material and the physical, in the self and the world, and results ultimately in meaninglessness and despair. The act of being thankful satisfies our innermost being more than the gorging of our physical appetites.

The psalmist writes in Psalm 103, *“Praise the LORD, O my soul . . . who satisfies your desires with good things.”* And one of the good things that God satisfies us with is thankfulness for all of those things!

***Prayer***

*O God who has given me life, satisfy me with a heart filled with thankfulness!*



## NOVEMBER 13

***For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.***

*(1 Timothy 4:4-5)*

Paul is dealing with a certain kind of heresy that had crept into the early church and was threatening to derail the faith of the new believers. In the previous verse, he states: *“They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.”* The false teachers were preaching a form of abstinence and legalism that was contrary to God’s will. They were forbidding the enjoyment of those things which were gifts of God, meant to be received with thanksgiving rather than avoided out of a false piety.

Legalism is the enemy of thanksgiving, and unfortunately, too often, religion is legalistic. It takes what God has created, what He has permitted by His Word, and makes it something sinful and evil, something to be shunned. In Paul’s time, it was to do with issues of marriage and food. Celibacy was exalted, and avoidance of certain foods was commanded. In the history of the church, we have seen the same with many aspects of life: clothes, jewellery, dancing, music, spiritual gifts, and sexual pleasure, to name a few. In recent years, we have seen the battles raging within the church over the issue of contemporary forms of worship. The issue is often framed as one of order and reverence; but I wonder if a lack of thanksgiving plays a key role.

God has given wonderful gifts to His people – in fact, to mankind – to be enjoyed. His Word has consecrated these gifts, just as Jesus’ words made every food clean, including those that had been previously forbidden under the Law. Furthermore, in prayer, we can be guided by the Holy Spirit as to the suitability of partaking of these gifts. Hence, Paul exhorts us to receive them with thanksgiving. This would mean that the rejection of these gifts, in legalistic and religious fervour, indicates a lack of thankfulness for God’s gifts.

Let’s apply today’s verses to one of the worship battles of our time. Dancing as a form of worship is a gift from God, created by Him, a reflection of His own nature. His Word has sanctified dancing as seen in Old Testament worship, especially that of David. In prayer, we can let the Holy Spirit guide us in the use of dance in our worship, so that it is always reverential and not inappropriate. And the key to it all is receiving this gift of dance with thanksgiving, recognizing it as a gift, acknowledging the Giver, and desiring to honour Him with how we use it.

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to receive every good gift that You have given with thanksgiving, and to use it in a way that delights and honours You.*



## NOVEMBER 14

***How do I say: “Thank You, Lord”?***

***For the way that You love***

***And the way that You come***

***For all that You've done***

***And all that You'll do***

***My heart pours out: “Thank You”***

*(Jonathan David Helser)*

Friday nights were special at All Saints. A handful of us would gather for six hours of worship and prayer, often accompanied with fasting that we would break after midnight. It was simply a time of seeking God. We would just worship and pray, and try to be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit – but, most of all, we would desire His presence. The primary cry of our hearts was for more of Him. And, the gracious and loving God that He is, He would respond. Some of our most intense experiences of God’s presence came during those times.

The song “Thank You”, from which today’s verse is taken, will always be connected with those Friday nights. It seemed too hard to play live, so the first time we sang it, we used a lyric video. The lyrics flashed on the screen, and the music filled the sanctuary. The chorus of the song is:

*“You don’t have to come*

*But You always do*

*You show up in splendour*

*And fill the whole room”*

And He came! There was such an awesome sense of His sweet presence. But it was not an unusual occurrence during those Friday nights. Every week was special in some way – there were visible manifestations, prophetic words and actions, and other ways in which the Spirit worked – but the constant was that God came. Sometimes His presence was intense, at other times it was tender and gentle. But He came.

God came to us in the Incarnation through the Son. He came to us at Pentecost through the Spirit. And He still comes when we call, when we desire, when we seek Him. The response of our hearts can only be “Thank You.” Thanksgiving for all that He has done in our lives, and the lives of our loved ones. Thanksgiving for all that we can be sure He will do, because He is unchanging and faithful. Thanksgiving for the extravagance of His love, expressed in the cross and in so many little things every day. And yes, thanksgiving for His presence, not just the constant presence of the omnipresent God, but His manifest presence when we seek Him in worship and prayer.

What else can we do but pour out of our hearts, “Thank You”?

### ***Prayer***

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: for the way that You love and the way that You come, for all that You’ve done and all that You’ll do, may my hearts always pour out, “Thank You!”*



## NOVEMBER 15

***Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;***

***let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.***

***Let us come before him with thanksgiving***

***and extol him with music and song.***

*(Psalm 95:1-2)*

Psalm 95 has two calls to worship. This is the first one, at the beginning of the psalm. The second one, in the middle of the psalm, is by contrast a call to more intimate and solemn worship. The psalmist paints a vibrant picture of thanksgiving in these opening verses, exhorting us to give thanks in several ways: sing for joy, shout aloud, come before Him, and extol Him with music and song. In today's devotion, we will use Spurgeon's exposition of each of these expressions:

*"O come, let us sing unto the LORD. . . . We love him, we admire him, we reverence him, let us express our feelings with the choicest sounds, using our noblest faculty for its noblest end.*

*Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.* With holy enthusiasm let us sing, making a sound which shall indicate our earnestness; with abounding joy let us lift up our voices, actuated by that happy and peaceful spirit which trustful love is sure to foster.

*Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving. . . .* We may make bold to come before the immediate presence of the Lord, for the voice of the Holy Ghost in this psalm invites us, and when we do draw near to him we should remember his great goodness to us and cheerfully confess it. Our worship should have reference to the past as well as to the future; if we do not bless the Lord for what we have already received, how can we reasonably look for more? We are permitted to bring our petitions, and therefore we are in honour bound to bring our thanksgivings.

*And make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.* We should shout as exultingly as those do who triumph in war, and as solemnly as those whose utterance is a psalm. . . . One can imagine David in earnest tones persuading his people to go up with him to the worship of Jehovah with sound of harp and hymn, and holy delight. The happiness of his exhortation is noteworthy, the noise is to be joyful; this quality he insists upon twice."

Today's verses are a call to dynamic, boisterous, and joyful thanksgiving. Surely our God is worthy of that!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, help me to sing for joy, shout aloud, come before You with thanksgiving, and extol You with music and song; may I hold nothing back in my expression of thanksgiving!*



## NOVEMBER 16

***The greatest gift one can give is thanksgiving. In giving gifts, we give what we can spare, but in giving thanks we give ourselves.*** (David Steindl-Rast)

The story of Job is a powerful illustration of today's quote. The book of Job starts with Satan challenging God regarding Job's love for God. So, God allows Satan to ruin Job's life. In a single day, Job's wealth is destroyed and his children are killed. The Bible records the following response from Job:

*"At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said:*

*"Naked I came from my mother's womb,  
and naked I will depart.*

*The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;  
may the name of the LORD be praised."*

*In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing (Job 1:20-22)."*

Satan goes back to God and challenges Him again, saying that Job will surely curse God if he himself is afflicted. God allows this as well. The biblical record continues as follows:

*"So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.*

*His wife said to him, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!"*

*He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"*

*In all this, Job did not sin in what he said (Job 2:7-10)."*

We often focus on the trouble that befell Job, and his choice to stay loyal to God. But that assumes that Job was dwelling on his suffering. His responses indicate that this was not the case. In the first instance, Job bows down in worship, and look at what he says! He recognizes that everything he possessed came from God in the first place. In the second instance, we see Job remaining steadfast in his integrity. And, in his words, we see the recognition that God has done so much good in his life. In both cases, Job focused on the blessings that he had received from God all his life, rather than his present troubles. That sounds to me like a thankful heart! When Job had absolutely nothing to give, he gave God himself in thanksgiving. He chose to look at God with grateful eyes rather than blaming Him for his suffering.

We can learn from Job, and give ourselves to God in thanksgiving, no matter what our circumstances. And that's really all that God desires!

### **Prayer**

*Father, help me to always focus on the good You bring into my life, and to offer You myself in thanksgiving.*



## NOVEMBER 17

***I will praise God's name in song  
and glorify him with thanksgiving.***

*(Psalm 69:30)*

Today's devotion is an excerpt from John Piper's devotional on this verse:

"There are two kinds of magnifying: microscope magnifying and telescope magnifying. The one makes a small thing look bigger than it is. The other makes a big thing begin to look as big as it really is.

When David says, '*I will magnify God with thanksgiving,*' he does not mean, 'I will make a small God look bigger than he is.' He means, 'I will make a big God begin to look as big as he really is.'

We are not called to be microscopes. We are called to be telescopes. Christians are not called to be con-men who magnify their product out of all proportion to reality, when they know the competitor's product is far superior. There is nothing and nobody superior to God. And so the calling of those who love God is to make his greatness begin to look as great as it really is. . . .

The whole duty of the Christian can be summed up in this: feel, think, and act in a way that will make God look as great as he really is. Be a telescope for the world of the infinite starry wealth of the glory of God.

This is what it means for a Christian to magnify God. But you can't magnify what you haven't seen or what you quickly forget. Therefore, our first task is to see and to remember the greatness and goodness of God. . . ."

How do we do this? According to David, with thanksgiving! John Piper continues:

"When we give thanks to him from our hearts, God is magnified. Gratitude glorifies God. Why does it? The answer is simple: Givers are more glorious than receivers. Benefactors are more glorious than beneficiaries. When we thank God, we acknowledge and display that he is the giver; he is the benefactor. We pay him a high compliment. . . .

Therefore, when gratitude springs up in the human heart toward God, he is magnified as the wealthy source of our blessing. He is acknowledged as giver and benefactor and therefore as glorious."

God is absolutely, incredibly, unimaginably, incomprehensibly awesome! Too often, we make Him small in the eyes of the world by our lack of faith and obedience. Thanksgiving is one way in which we can magnify Him before the world, showing everyone just how amazing He is, through what He does in our lives!

### ***Prayer***

*God Almighty, may I always glorify and magnify Your Name with my thanksgiving!*



## NOVEMBER 18

***Thank You Jesus  
You set me free  
Christ my Saviour  
You rescued me***

*(Matt Crocker & Hannah Hobbs)*

Hannah Hobbs shares the story of how the song “*Thank You Jesus*” was written:

“Toward the beginning of 2013, a group of songwriters from our church put some days aside to spend time collaborating and seeking God for new songs. Across the three days, we had seven or eight writing sessions, each with a different combination of people. On the second day, Matty Crocker and I started our session; it was the first time we had ever written together.

As a songwriter, you always hope that every writing session leads to an incredible song, but unfortunately it doesn’t always happen. That day, however, I think Matt and I both knew we had come across something special – the song ‘Thank You Jesus’. The idea was sparked from a comment that our Creative Pastor, Cass Langton, made about how it would be great to have a ‘Thank You’ song in church. A song themed around the message of gratitude towards God. From there we began to work on a chorus that simply said:

*‘Thank You Jesus, You set me free. Christ my Saviour, You rescued me.’*

There was something about the simplicity of those words that we both instantly loved – thanking Him for setting us free and thanking Him for giving everything to rescue us. As Christians, it is important to call to remembrance the day of your salvation. Personally, I remember that day so clearly. It was the day I made a decision to follow Jesus and it changed my life forever. I want to always keep it fresh in my heart.

When we introduced this song to our church, our hope was that it would stir people’s hearts to worship God and it seemed to do just that. People stood to their feet and started singing it loud. It was overwhelming to watch people step in to the presence of God and embrace this song as their own. It is humbling to see how God can use something as simple as a song to draw people closer to Him.”

Many of us may not have a specific event or moment when we first made a decision to follow Jesus. But that doesn’t prevent us from being eternally grateful – literally! – to Jesus for rescuing us from the dominion of darkness, and setting us free in His kingdom of light!

### ***Prayer***

*Thank You Jesus, You set me free; Christ my Saviour, You rescued me!*



## NOVEMBER 19

***Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love  
and his wonderful deeds for mankind.***

***Let them sacrifice thank offerings  
and tell of his works with songs of joy.***

*(Psalm 107:21-22)*

Psalm 107 is a glorious song of thanksgiving. It starts with the familiar exhortation to worship: *"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever."* As we can see, the main theme of the psalm is thanksgiving for God's goodness and enduring love. The psalmist goes on to describe four situations where God's love is seen. And four times we come across the refrain: *"Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind."*

Let's look at each of these four situations briefly, and give thanks for how God has redeemed us in similar circumstances:

1. *Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle:* There are those of us who have erred, been led astray and deceived. We find ourselves in a spiritual wilderness, unable to find our way home to our Father and settle in His promised rest. But God finds us, and guides us to Him once again. Thanks be to God!
2. *Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom . . . for they had rebelled against the words of God:* There are those of us who find ourselves in bondage and captivity, whether physical prison or mental affliction or spiritual oppression, because of our own rebellion and disobedience. But God breaks our chains, and brings us out of the darkness and gloom. Thanks be to God!
3. *Some became fools through their own rebellious ways and suffered afflictions because of their iniquities:* There are those of us who get physically sick, even to the point of death, because of our sinful ways. The effects on the body of alcoholism, drugs, stress, even sexual promiscuity or perversions, are examples of this. But God sends His word and heals us. Thanks be to God!
4. *Others went out to sea in ships . . . They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wits' end:* Just like sailors caught in a fierce storm, we can find ourselves without hope, helpless and desperate, in the storms of life. But God brings stillness and calm into those situations, and brings us to safety. Thanks be to God!

Each of us has been in one or more, maybe even all, of the above situations. Our only response to God's goodness should be thanksgiving. The psalmist exhorts us to thank God for His unfailing love, for His deeds which are extraordinary and surpassing in greatness, and to do so in public and joyful exaltation.

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, thank You for guiding me out of the wilderness, for breaking my chains of bondage, for healing me from the consequences of my own sin, and for calming the storms in my life.*



## NOVEMBER 20

***If you have enough breath to complain about anything, you have more than enough reason to give thanks about something.*** (Mattie Stepanek)

The following details are taken from the website *mattiematters.org*:

“Matthew Joseph Thaddeus Stepanek (‘Mattie’) was born July 17, 1990. He was the youngest of four children, each of whom died during childhood from an inherited rare and fatal neuromuscular disease called Dysautonomic Mitochondrial Myopathy. . . . The prognosis for Mattie’s medical and developmental future was grim . . . . Like his siblings, Mattie needed a tracheostomy tube, ventilator, oxygen, central lines, feeding tubes, monitors, medicines, routine blood transfusions, a wheelchair, and other life supporting medical interventions. Especially during his early and final years, he spent many months at a time living in hospital Pediatric Intensive Care Units. Mattie defied medical and developmental odds; not only did he live almost 14 years rather than the handful of hours anticipated early on, he was also developmentally and academically advanced, becoming a gifted writer, a respected teacher, and a spiritual and inspirational speaker. . . .

Baptized at birth and confirmed in the Catholic Church at the age of 8, Mattie enjoyed a close friendship with God throughout his brief life. . . . At the age of 3, Mattie began sharing his ‘Heartsongs’ — which he described as each person’s unique reason for being, given to us by God, and expressed through talents and gifts. He believed that his purpose was to be a ‘messenger’ — shaping with words what God placed in his heart for the good of our world. . . . He ultimately published seven bestselling books — six collections of Heartsongs poetry and one collection of Just Peace essays and letters. As a spokesperson for disability and peace organizations and a catechist in his parish CCD program, Mattie became a source of hope and peace for people of many ages and abilities and aspirations, bringing diverse global neighbours together in prayer and purpose.”

Mattie’s story is inspirational, but what does it have to do with breathing, which is what his quote is about? Well, one of the main systems that was affected by his disease was the respiratory system, and Mattie had great difficulty breathing! He must have perceived every breath as a gift, something that we take for granted. Imagine if we were thankful for every breath, if we used every breath to give thanks instead of all the other things we waste our breath on – well, just imagine!

### ***Prayer***

*Holy Spirit, help me to use the breath You have given me to be thankful rather than to complain!*



## NOVEMBER 21

***Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*** (Colossians 3:17)

Billy Graham shares the following story:

“Some years ago I visited a man who was wealthy and successful. He was the envy of all his friends and business associates. But as we talked, he broke down in tears, confessing that he was miserable inside. Wealth had not been able to fill the empty place in his heart.

A few hours later I visited another man only a short distance away. His cottage was humble, and he had almost nothing in the way of this world’s possessions. And yet his face was radiant as he told me about the work he was doing for Christ and how Christ had filled his life with meaning and purpose. I am convinced that the second man was really the rich man. Although he didn’t have much, he had learned to be thankful for everything that God had given him. . . . A spirit of thankfulness makes all the difference.”

In today’s verse, Paul indicates that everything we do can be done for Christ, and prescribes thanksgiving as an ingredient of every aspect of our lives. Let me suggest five reasons to be thankful, “*whatever you do, whether in word or deed*”:

1. Ability: We can be thankful that we have the ability to do that thing – whether it is physical capability, health, intellect, skill, talent, ideas, words – whatever we need to carry out the task.
2. Opportunity: We can be thankful that God has given us the opportunity to do something that is useful and productive, that will be profitable for us, or a blessing for others, or preferably both!
3. Privilege: We can be thankful that we have the privilege of knowing Jesus, of being His ambassadors on earth, and therefore of being able to do all that we do in His name – by His authority and for His glory.
4. Result: We can be thankful for the good results of whatever we do or say, when Jesus is so intimately involved in our lives – even when things don’t turn out the way we want or expect!
5. Reward: We can be thankful that there will be a reward that far outweighs any tangible results – the joy of doing it all in His name, His pleasure at our stewardship of His gifts and opportunities, and drawing closer to Him in relationship.

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, help me to do all that I do, whether in word or deed, in Your Name and with thanksgiving!*



## NOVEMBER 22

***So if you listen to my heart  
Every beat will say  
Thank You for the Life  
Thank You for the Truth  
And thank You for the Way***

*(Steven Curtis Chapman & Geoff Moore)*

Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6)."* This is such a familiar verse, that most of us have come to take it for granted. We use it as a verse for evangelism, to call the lost to faith in Jesus. In doing that, we fail to see how significant it is for our own lives, and how immensely grateful we should be that Jesus is all of those things.

Barclay comments on these three tremendous claims that Jesus made:

1. "Suppose we are in a strange town and ask for directions. Suppose the person asked says: 'Take the first to the right, and the second to the left. Cross the square, go past the church, take the third on the right and the road you want is the fourth on the left.' The chances are that we will be lost before we get half-way. But suppose the person we ask says: 'Come. I'll take you there.' In that case the person to us is the way, and we cannot miss it. That is what Jesus does for us. He does not only give advice and directions. He takes us by the hand and leads us; he strengthens us and guides us personally every day. He does not tell us about the way; he is the Way."
2. "Moral truth cannot be conveyed solely in words; it must be conveyed in example. And that is precisely where the greatest human teacher must fall down. No teacher has ever embodied the truth he taught--except Jesus. Many a man could say: 'I have taught you the truth.' Only Jesus could say: 'I am the Truth.' The tremendous thing about Jesus is not simply that the statement of moral perfection finds its peak in him; it is that the fact of moral perfection finds its realization in him."
3. "In the last analysis, what man is always seeking for is life. His search is not for knowledge for its own sake, but what will make life worth living. A novelist makes one of his characters who has fallen in love say: 'I never knew what life was until I saw it in your eyes.' Love had brought life. That is what Jesus does. Life with Jesus is life indeed."

We don't have to wander around in a lost world; we don't have to be deceived by the falsehoods all around us; we don't have to live a substandard life. In Jesus we have, in our very being, the Way, the Truth, and the Life! Surely that is reason enough to be constantly overflowing with thanksgiving!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, thank You for the Life, the Truth, and the Way; thank You that You are all of these to me!*



## NOVEMBER 23

***Sacrifice thank offerings to God,  
fulfill your vows to the Most High,  
and call on me in the day of trouble;***

***I will deliver you, and you will honour me.***

*(Psalm 50:14-15)*

It was the worst natural disaster in all of history. For forty days and nights, “*the springs of the great deep burst forth and the floodgates of the heavens were opened (Genesis 7:11).*” The whole earth was flooded, until even the highest mountains were submerged. Every living thing, except presumably some of the sea creatures, including all mankind, perished in this great deluge. All except Noah and his family, and the living creatures with them in the ark. The waters covered the earth for one hundred and fifty days, and then started receding. Finally, Noah and those with him were able to come out of the ark after more than a year inside it. They stepped out into a world completely – and probably, terrifyingly – different from the one they were used to before the flood.

What was the very first thing Noah did? He took some of the animals and birds, perhaps the most precious resource on earth apart from his own family, and sacrificed them to the LORD! I can only believe that this was a sacrifice of thanksgiving for saving their lives, and, if so, it is the first instance of a thank offering in the Bible. Noah had so many things that were calling for his attention – after all, he had to reboot mankind itself! – but his priority was to worship his Saviour, to give thanks for the LORD’s blessings.

How did God respond? Genesis 8 tells us that the LORD smelled the aroma of the offering in his heart, and was pleased. He promised never to curse the earth again because of mankind’s evil, and never to destroy all living creatures. He blessed Noah and his sons, renewing the commission that He had given first to Adam and Eve. And, to top it all, God gave the rainbow as a sign that never again would a flood destroy the earth. What an extravagant response to Noah’s simple act of thanksgiving – but, then, that’s our God!

We, too, have been rescued from destruction by an ark – for the ark is a type of Jesus Himself. May our lives be a perpetual thank offering to the One who has saved us from the consequences of our own sin, and given us the Great Commission to advance His kingdom!

### ***Prayer***

*Lord Jesus, make my life a thank offering for the cross!*



## NOVEMBER 24

***In ordinary life, we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich.*** (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote these words from a prison cell, while facing certain execution. The *Truthful Grace* blog has the following account by an unknown author:

“Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a good example of thankfulness allowing us to become better not bitter. Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor imprisoned by the Nazis during World War II and eventually executed for refusing to be quiet about what was happening in Germany. He had every reason to be bitter about what life had handed him. Yet an English officer who was imprisoned with Bonhoeffer and survived had this to say, ‘Bonhoeffer always seemed to me to spread an atmosphere of happiness and joy over the least incident, and profound gratitude for the mere fact that he was alive. . . . He was one of the very few persons I have ever met for whom God was real and always near.’ ”

Bonhoeffer believed that “gratitude must be learned and practiced.” He warned against the danger of ingratitude. He wrote: “Ingratitude begins with forgetfulness, from forgetfulness flows indifference, from indifference discontent, from discontent despair, from despair blasphemy. God shows those who are grateful the way to salvation. Ask yourself whether or not perhaps through ingratitude that your heart has become so sullen, so sluggish, so tired, so despondent. Offer thanks to God . . . .”

Ryan Huber, in a reflection on Bonhoeffer’s writings on memory and gratitude, summarizes it like this:

“For Bonhoeffer, if Jesus Christ is the ground of all reality, and in Him we are given everything, particularly grace, then reality must be discerned within a practice of gratitude. This doesn’t preclude suffering, evil, pain, and acknowledgment of our own shortcomings, but true discernment of reality, for Christians, always includes gratitude at some point.

Here’s one other way to think about it: If we believe that grace is real, and must be received, and that it changes everything, then there must be some trace when people receive grace from God or others in their lives. That trace, that evidence that grace has been here, has met me, has transformed me, is called gratitude.”

Most of us will never experience the hardships that Dietrich Bonhoeffer experienced. May his commitment to gratitude be an example to us all!

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, help me to enrich my life with a spirit of gratitude!*



**NOVEMBER 25**

***Those who cling to worthless idols  
turn away from God's love for them.***

***But I, with shouts of grateful praise,  
will sacrifice to you.***

***What I have vowed I will make good.***

***I will say, 'Salvation comes from the LORD.'***

*(Jonah 2:8-9)*

The prophet Jonah is famous for all the wrong reasons! When God told him to preach to the people of Nineveh, he got in a ship and headed for Tarshish, which was in the opposite direction! When God sent a great storm because of Jonah's disobedience and the ship was in danger of sinking, he went below deck and slept. Finally, he admitted he was responsible for their predicament, and accepted the consequences by having the sailors throw him overboard. We know how the story goes – the storm ceased, a big fish swallowed Jonah, vomited him out near Nineveh, and he went on to do what God had commanded him to. The people of Nineveh repented and were spared, and Jonah sulked because of God's mercy!

Yet, a fifth of the book of Jonah consists of his prayer while in the belly of the great fish. And, in that hot and stinking place, Jonah promises to give thanks! In today's verses, we see the pattern of Hebrew parallelism. The contrast between those who offer thanksgiving, and those who don't, is described.

*"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them."* Jonah is talking about himself. His idol was himself, his views about Nineveh, and his desire for the city to be destroyed. As he clung to that idol of self, he turned away from God's love for him, manifested in the privilege of being God's messenger. He ran away from God's presence. He forgot about God's mercy towards Israel and towards him personally, and didn't want the same for Nineveh. In effect, Jonah was ungrateful!

But, it all changes in the belly of the great fish. Jonah prays, *"But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you."* Jonah turns back to God, with thanksgiving – for the deliverance that God will grant him, but perhaps also for the mercy by which he has been given a second chance to obey God. He promises to fulfil the vow he has made, which probably refers to the decision Jonah made to be God's prophet when God called him. Sadly, Jonah ends the book on a surly note – but here, in impossible circumstances, in the belly of a great fish, we see a heart of thanksgiving!

### ***Prayer***

*Father, thank You for Your mercy upon me and upon my nation; thank You for not just second chances, but many chances, to turn back to You!*



## NOVEMBER 26

***All good gifts around us  
Are sent from heaven above,  
Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord  
For all His love.***

*(Matthias Claudius)*

Matthias Claudius was the son of a Lutheran pastor in eighteenth century Germany. In his twenties and thirties, he strayed from the faith under the influence of rationalism. However, he became seriously ill in 1777, and this crisis brought him back to his childhood faith. He wrote many devotional poems during this time of sickness, as well as later on in life. But the only one that has become popular is *"We plough the fields and scatter"*, the refrain of which is today's quote. It was originally seventeen verses, but most hymnals only use three verses along with the refrain. The hymn is generally used on occasions of harvest and thanksgiving.

Claudius based his poem upon a number of Scripture passages. The verse that the refrain clearly references is James 1:17 – *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."* Interestingly, in the previous verse, James tells his readers, *"Don't be deceived."* He is opposing a belief that bad things come from God as well. He emphasizes that nothing which comes from God can be bad, and everything which comes from God is good. And the reason that James gives for this truth is the unchangeable nature of God.

Barclay explains what James is getting at:

*"What he is stressing is the unchangeableness of God. To do so he uses two astronomical terms. The word he uses for changeableness is *parallage*, and the word for the turn of the shadow is *trope*. Both these words have to do with the variation which the heavenly bodies show, the variation in the length of the day and of the night, the apparent variation in the course of the sun, the phases of waxing and waning, the different brilliance at different times of the stars and the planets. Variability is characteristic of all created things. God is the creator of the lights of heaven – the sun, the moon, the stars. . . . The lights change but he who created them never changes."*

This is the ground of our thanksgiving – that all good gifts come from God, because He has done so in the past, and He is unchanging. And therefore, we can thank Him for whatever He gives us, knowing it must be good!

### ***Prayer***

*Thank You, Father, for every good gift!*



## NOVEMBER 27

***Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** (Ephesians 5:18-20)

Sue Bohlin shares how she struggled with this verse. Her dilemma is one that resonates with us, and her journey of coming to terms with it will be useful to us:

“Early in my walk with Christ, I learned the life-changing, perspective-changing discipline of giving thanks for everything. EVERYTHING.

Initially, I stumbled over Ephesians 5:20, “*always giving thanks for everything,*” thinking that surely that must not be an accurate translation, or there was a footnote or asterisk or something that would mitigate the implication of the absolutes of ‘always’ and ‘everything’. I even bought a Greek-English interlinear New Testament so I could check out the original language.

Yep, that’s what it says. . . .

But why is it so important to give thanks? I had a lightbulb moment when reading Romans 1:22 and saw the incredibly important role of giving thanks in protecting ourselves from spiralling down into a really bad place. . . .

*‘For although they knew God, they never glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.’*

Giving glory and thanks to God is a spiritual retaining wall that keeps us from descending to the next level, where our thinking becomes futile and our foolish hearts become darkened. And after this point, a downward spiral into depravity is inevitable.

So giving thanks as an ongoing self-discipline is a protection for us! But far more than that—it helps keep us in a healthy relationship to God. The warning from Romans 1 is that people who knew God but refused to give thanks to Him were refusing to embrace His sovereignty. There is an ugly spirit of rebellion in rejecting God’s right to be God!

When we give thanks for everything that God allows into our lives, we are saying, ‘I acknowledge that You are God and I am not, and You know what You’re doing. Even if I don’t like this thing You have allowed to touch me, I trust You to make it turn out okay in the end.’ I think that kind of trust is pleasing to the Lord. And my own experience is that getting (and staying) in the habit of giving thanks for everything keeps our hearts tender toward Him.”

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, help me to always give thanks for everything, acknowledging You as a good God and keeping my heart tender towards You.*



## NOVEMBER 28

***Thanksgiving is the language of heaven, and we had better start to learn it if we are not to be mere dumb aliens there.***  
(A. J. Gossip)

This quote appears in Dr. Arthur John Gossip's book, *"The Galilean Accent"*, in a chapter titled *"The Need of Communion with God."* Today's devotion is a couple of excerpts from that chapter:

"It is impressive and arresting to note some of the things that kept sending Christ to God. Very often, it was gratitude; He was always wanting to thank God for something, not seldom for things that would have soured us, and shattered our crazy faith to bits. . . . Our prayers are largely a hot protest, a desolate wail, an offending pointing out that for One who claims to be Love, it is on the face of it ridiculous to treat us as He is proposing, and we say firmly that it just won't do. There was no touch of that in Christ. . . ."

Within a fortnight of his death, when old and ill and very weary, Luther wrote a letter to his wife and signed it, 'Martin Luther, your old lover.' There wasn't much in it. Yet I think that she would cherish that one more than most. And if you come to praise God for your happiness and all the gladness that He has bestowed on you, with everybody else begging for this, and crying out for that, and not one of them satisfied, it seems, I think that He will like your poor prayer just as well as most. . . ."

A. J. Gossip understood the importance of thanksgiving. No wonder he could speak words of hope to his congregation just the day after his wife had collapsed and died suddenly, ending his sermon with these words:

"I don't think you need to be afraid of life. Our hearts are very frail, and there are places where the road is very steep and very lonely, but we have a wonderful God. And, as Paul puts it, 'What can separate us from his love? Not death,' he writes immediately. No, not death, for standing in the roaring of the Jordan, cold with its dreadful chill and very conscious of its terror, of its rushing, I, too, like Hopeful in Pilgrim's Progress, can call back to you who one day in your turn will have to cross it, 'Be of good cheer, my brother, for I feel the bottom and it is sound.' "

Let's perfect thanksgiving, the language of heaven, here on earth, so that we will be at home in heaven!

### ***Prayer***

*Holy Spirit, in the midst of all my asking and crying out, may I not forget to prioritize thanksgiving in my communion with God.*



## NOVEMBER 29

***Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire”.***

*(Hebrews 12:28-29)*

Through Jesus, we have such easy access to the Father, to the Holy of Holies, to the very throne room of God, that we take it for granted and fail to be thankful. The writer of Hebrews vividly describes the contrast between how God’s people approached God in Old Testament times and how we are privileged to do so now:

*“You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded . . . .*

*But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”*

Let us be thankful for the cross, by which the veil was torn from top to bottom and the way made open for us to approach the Father. Let us be thankful for the blood of Jesus that makes our relationship with God Almighty possible. Let us be thankful that we don’t come before a shaking mountain, but into the loving arms of Jesus. Let us be thankful that what we have cannot be shaken or taken away from us, because it is sealed by the Holy Spirit. Let us be thankful that God, who is a consuming fire, doesn’t consume us in His wrath, but in His love consumes the wrong that is in us. Let us be thankful for the kingdom that has been entrusted to us, and that we partner with God in advancing. And let us be thankful that we serve such an awesome God!

### ***Prayer***

*Thank You, Jesus, for the access I have to the Father, for the relationship that I enjoy with You, and for the privilege of advancing Your kingdom through the Holy Spirit.*



## NOVEMBER 30

***Blessings on blessings on blessings on blessings  
If I still got breath in these lungs  
That's all I need to get down on my knees  
And be thankful for all that He's done***

*(Chris Tomlin)*

The first Thanksgiving Feast, in what eventually became the United States of America, was celebrated in November 1621, by fifty three Pilgrims and ninety Native Americans. The Pilgrims had lost more than half their number since landing on these shores the previous winter. William Bradford had been elected Governor of Plymouth Colony, when the first Governor died within six months of their arrival. Bradford had also lost his wife during that terrible first winter. And yet, barely a year later, helped by the native Wampanoag tribe to survive on the land, they chose to give thanks for God's provision. The gratitude that the Pilgrims felt towards God can be seen in this Thanksgiving proclamation by Bradford, two years later:

"Inasmuch as the great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, peas, beans, squashes, and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as he has protected us from the ravages of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience:

Now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, do gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the day time, on Thursday, November 29th, of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty-three and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings."

As Robert Hayes puts it, "Few Americans have had more setbacks than the Pilgrims, who made seven times more graves than huts. They still set aside a day for giving thanks."

Every day we receive "blessings on blessings on blessings on blessings." There are countless small things that we can be grateful for. Our only suitable response is worship. As Chris Tomlin says, with reference to his song 'Thank You Lord', "Worship comes from a thankful heart, and there's so much to be thankful for." May God cultivate in each one of us a heart of thanksgiving.

### ***Prayer***

*Father, thank You for the countless blessings in my life. Give me a heart of thanksgiving, and may I never cease to be grateful for all You've done.*



# Christmas

*The Word became flesh and made*

*His dwelling among us.*

DECEMBER



## DECEMBER 1

***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:1-5)***

Each of the gospel writers starts at a different place. Mark ignores Jesus' birth altogether and starts with John the Baptist's ministry. Matthew lists Jesus' genealogy and then begins his narrative with Jesus' birth. Luke's gospel starts with the announcements by the angel Gabriel of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. John, however, takes us all the way back to before creation!

He refers to Jesus as the Word – the *logos*. He used this word because it had meaning for both Jews and Greeks.

In the Targums, which were the Aramaic translations of the Old Testament, Yahweh was often substituted with the phrase "the word of God", especially when it was felt that God was being spoken of in too human a way. So, the Aramaic word *memra*, which means the word of God, became a substitute for God – the agent of God, co-worker with God, God Himself and yet somehow distinct from God.

For the Greeks the Word – that is, *logos* – referred to the controlling order of the universe, pervading all things. It was also the creating, guiding, directing, sustaining power of God, as well as the intermediary between the world and God.

Therefore, John saw the advantage of using *logos* to refer to Jesus. He knew it would speak to both the Jews and the Greeks, (meaning all of civilized society of that time and place), of the Messiah who was actually the Son of God. In these opening verses of his gospel, John shares some key facts about Jesus:

1. John speaks of the eternal existence of the Word, pre-existing before creation, and therefore before time as we know it.
2. The Word was face to face in close relationship with God, such that one blended into the other; even beyond that, the Word *was* God!
3. Not only was the Word present at creation, He was intimately involved with the process of creation.
4. John represents the Word as that which went forth and created everything – echoing the Genesis account of God speaking and bringing forth the created world, but also satisfying the Greek understanding of the creative power of *logos*.
5. Finally, the Word gave life to man, through the life that was in Him – a special quality of life that is the light of all mankind, referring to the image of God in each one.

As we explore the Christmas story in this month's devotions, let us pray for a deeper understanding of the Son of God, the Word, Jesus Christ!

### ***Decree***

***In Jesus is life, and that life is the light of all mankind!***



## DECEMBER 2

***The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*** (John 1:9-11)

In the creation account in Genesis, we read the following: “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light (Genesis 1:2-3).” Just as the earth was in physical darkness before the Word began to do His work of Creation, so too the world in Jesus’ time was in darkness. It was the spiritual darkness of sin, idolatry, ignorance, and rebellion. And, just as God released light into the darkness at creation, so too Jesus came as the light into our darkness.

Earlier in the chapter, John wrote: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5).” John was perhaps foreshadowing the rejection, persecution, and crucifixion of Jesus. The darkness did everything it could to overcome the light, but it failed. John could also be meaning that we – that is, those in darkness – failed to lay hold of or receive the light.

Why do so many reject the light? One simple reason is this – the darkness throws up a whole host of counterfeit lights that look attractive but only lead us deeper into darkness. False religions, philosophies, and ideologies have abounded from time immemorial, all of them competing for our attention and investment, but all alike in taking us away from the true light and into the darkness of hell.

Jesus is the true light. He is the only one who can actually give light. In the incarnation, the true light came into the darkness, to give light to everyone. The Creator came into the world He had created out of darkness. But, John says, the world did not recognize Him. The word for “recognize” is probably better translated “acknowledge.” Comfortable in our darkness, we deliberately closed our eyes to the light. We refused to acknowledge the true light, even though in the depths of our souls we knew Him to be true, preferring the false lights instead. Jesus came to His own – literally, He came home! But His family – both His chosen people, the Jews, as well as the larger family of man – turned their backs on Him.

Are we any different? Do we acknowledge the true Light, or prefer the darkness? Have we rejected Jesus, or received Him? Today may be a good day to examine our hearts afresh, and receive Him fully.

### **Decree**

*Jesus is the true Light, who gives light to everyone!*



## DECEMBER 3

***To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*** *(John 1:12-13)*

John has been speaking of how Jesus was rejected by those He had created, how His light was ignored for the darkness, and how His own people failed to receive Him. However, he now shares the good news – that those who do receive Jesus become children of God! John emphasizes the fact that this privilege is not a matter of natural birth or human decree. Too often we hear the platitude that everyone is a child of God – a statement that is true only insofar as we have all been created by God, in His image, and He loves us – but the privilege that Jesus gives us is one of intimate relationship!

Barclay writes:

“It is the claim of John that men can enter into that true and real sonship only through Jesus Christ. When he says that it does not come from blood, he is using Jewish thought, for the Jews believed that a physical son was born from the union of the seed of the father with the blood of the mother. This sonship does not come from any human impulse or desire or from any act of the human will; it comes entirely from God. We cannot make ourselves sons of God; we have to enter into a relationship which God offers us. No man can ever enter into friendship with God by his own will and power; there is a great gulf fixed between the human and the divine. Man can only enter into friendship with God when God himself opens the way.”

And the wonderful truth of the Christmas story is this – God opened the way for friendship with Him, through His Son! However, we have a part to play as well – we have to believe in His name. The Greek actually means to “believe into His name.” It is not simply academic or head knowledge of Jesus as the Son of God – as James writes, even the demons have that kind of belief! John is speaking of a personal, responsive faith, where we put our trust in Jesus, in who He is, and in what He requires of us. In one word, we surrender.

The reward is incredible – a new birth and a new identity, apart from any human or worldly mechanism. We experience a spiritual birth, we are born again, we are born of God, because of Jesus. The Word that gave life to mankind now gives new life to all those who believe in and receive Him!

### ***Decree***

*All who receive Jesus, who believe on His name, are children of God, born of God!*



## DECEMBER 4

***The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.***

*(John 1:14)*

These ten words are the very essence of the incarnation. They include two concepts that have become so familiar – too familiar – to Christians today; but they are realities that are astounding in their depth and scope. The heart of Jesus is revealed in these ten words.

*The Word became flesh.* The eternal Son became flesh. The controlling, directing, guiding, sustaining, all-pervading power of God became flesh. The agent and co-worker of God became flesh. The One through whom all creation came into being became flesh. The true Light of the world became flesh. The omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God became flesh. As Paul writes in Philippians 2, Jesus, though “*being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*” God became man in the fullest sense. It was not the Word putting on flesh like a garment over His divinity – the Word *became* flesh. Jesus retained His divine identity as the Son of God, but He put aside every other privilege of divinity, becoming man in every sense of the word. As the writer of Hebrews makes clear, that was the only way Jesus could fully take our place on the cross, and it is also why we can have confidence that He knows all we are going through, because He went through the same trials and temptations as us but overcame and remained sinless.

*The Word made His dwelling among us.* Literally, John writes that Jesus “*tabernacled among us!*” The reference to the tabernacle of Moses couldn’t be clearer. God told Moses, “*Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them (Exodus 25:8).*” The sanctuary was the tabernacle, and later the temple. It was the place where God chose to dwell among His chosen people. It was the place where the ark of the covenant, representing God’s presence and His throne, was placed. God’s desire to dwell among His people could never be satisfied by a wooden chest behind a veil – He sent His Son, in the flesh, to dwell among us! And we know that, after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, we have something even more wonderful than the Son of God in human form dwelling among us – we have the indwelling Spirit, living in each believer!

Today, will you pause for a few minutes, and allow the enormity of these ten words to sink deep into your heart, mind, and spirit?

### ***Decree***

*The Word continues to make His dwelling among us, through His Spirit!*



## DECEMBER 5

***For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.*** (John 1:17-18)

John now addresses the Jews, who were under the law of Moses. He contrasts the Law with what Jesus offers. This doesn't mean that the Law was wrong or bad, merely that it was always pointing to something – or someone – better! The Law, by its very nature, judged and condemned. But Jesus comes with grace and truth. Grace is undeserved favour, the gift of God freely bestowed on those who are not worthy of it. Truth is Jesus Himself, because the Law, though from God, was always only a shadow of the truth that was to come. Grace and truth are woven throughout the Law of Moses, but they find their full and complete expression in the person of Jesus Christ. As a result, while the Law was followed out of duty and fear, we obey Jesus out of love!

John goes on to explain the most important difference from the time of the Law, in fact from all previous ages – God is revealed fully in Jesus Christ. The question of all ages, the desire of all seekers, the speculations of all philosophers, is found in Jesus. As John says in an earlier verse, *“We have seen his glory (John 1:14).”* The glory of God, hidden from mankind, glimpsed only briefly and faintly, is finally revealed in its full splendour! Not in eloquent words, but in a Person.

John uses three amazing phrases to describe why Jesus can reveal God so completely:

1. Jesus is *“the one and only.”* This phrase had come to mean “unique and specially beloved” in colloquial Greek. Jesus is unique, one of a kind – there never was, and never will be, anyone like Him. And He is specially loved by His Father, a unique love that is reflected in the unique place Jesus has in God's purposes for all mankind.
2. Jesus is *“himself God.”* Of course, no one can reveal a person better than that person Himself. And, in Jesus, God reveals the fullness of who He is. Jesus told His disciples that if they had seen Him, then they had seen the Father!
3. Jesus is *“in closest relationship with the Father.”* The Greek actually says, “who is in the bosom of the Father!” What a picture of intimacy! It is a Hebrew phrase used of mother and child, husband and wife, and the closest of friends. It is the deepest intimacy that is possible, and it speaks of the complete and uninterrupted intimacy between Jesus and the Father.

Only Jesus could reveal God, and He has done so fully and wonderfully! May we have eyes to see and hearts to receive this revelation.

### ***Decree***

*Jesus, the unique and beloved Son, God Himself, who is in the bosom of the Father, has revealed God fully and completely!*



## DECEMBER 6

***The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”***  
*(John 1:29)*

Too many people, even Christians, think that Jesus came to set an example for us, to show us how to live godly lives. In fact, the Law was more than enough for that. The Bible is quite clear that Jesus’ primary purpose in coming to us was to save us. Paul writes to Timothy that “*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).*” Jesus Himself said that He had come “*to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).*” In effect, Jesus’ purpose in being born as a man was to die for you and me. And that is what John meant when he called Jesus the Lamb of God. There are several Old Testament images that help us understand what it means that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

1. The first time we read of a lamb being offered as a sacrifice is in Genesis 22, when Abraham believed God would provide a lamb in place of Isaac. In fact, God provided a ram on that occasion. Could Abraham have been prophesying, without even knowing it, that Jesus, the Lamb of God, would one day be provided, not just in Isaac’s place, but for all mankind?
2. In Exodus 12, God asked His people to prepare for the first Passover by sacrificing a lamb that was without defect, one for each household. The blood of the lambs was put on the doorframes of their houses, so that the angel of death would pass over them and only kill the firstborn of the Egyptians. Jesus, the Lamb of God, is our Passover Lamb. He was without sin, just as the lamb had to be without blemish, and His blood saves us from the fatal consequences of our sin.
3. In Exodus 29, we read that two lambs were offered on the altar every day, one in the morning and one in the evening. By contrast, Jesus is the Lamb of God who has been offered once and for all; but His blood constantly pleads on our behalf, staying God’s judgment and sanctifying us.
4. Finally, we see the vivid image in Isaiah 53 of the Messiah being led like a lamb to the slaughter, oppressed and afflicted, but silent despite the injustice. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was innocent, but He chose not to defend Himself, surrendering to His Father’s will and submitting to the cross.

God would have been fully justified in taking away or removing sinners, and destroying the world, on account of our sin; instead, the Lamb of God takes away – not just once, but continually – the sin of the world!

### ***Decree***

***Jesus, the Lamb of God, takes away the sin of the world!***



## DECEMBER 7

***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*** (John 3:16)

This is perhaps the most famous verse in the whole Bible! And often we don't realize that it is actually a verse about Christmas, because it is about the incarnation. And while all our focus at Christmas is on Jesus, the Son, we fail to realize that it is also the story of our heavenly Father's love for us!

The incarnation is the demonstration of the extent of the Father's love for us. The Father loved us so much, such was the intensity of His desire for us, that He sent His Son for us. And John tells us that the Father didn't just love His own people, or good people – He loved the whole world.

The ancient complaint when we speak of God's love is – “If God is so loving, what is He doing about evil and suffering?” Well, He did do something – He sent His only Son, His unique and beloved Son, to die in our place. He did this so that we would not perish – Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. This is the simple and stark truth – we are all headed to eternal damnation, not by God's will but because of our own sinful choices. And the Father, in His extravagant love, gave His Son, so that we might have eternal life instead.

We cannot begin to imagine the sacrifice it took for the Father to send His Son, not on some noble errand or mission, but to be sacrificed on the cross. As Spurgeon puts it:

“He did not give his Son, as you might do, to some profession in the pursuit of which you might still enjoy his company; but he gave his Son to exile among men. He sent him down to yonder manger, united with a perfect manhood, which at the first was in an infant's form. There he slept, where horned oxen fed! The Lord God sent the heir of all things to toil in a carpenter's shop: to drive the nail, and push the plane, and use the saw. He sent him down amongst scribes and Pharisees, whose cunning eyes watched him, and whose cruel tongues scourged him with base slanders. He sent him down to hunger, and thirst, amid poverty so dire that he had nowhere to lay his head. He sent him down to the scourging and the crowning with thorns, to the giving of his back to the smiters and his cheeks to those that plucked off the hair. At length he gave him up to death—a felon's death, the death of the crucified.”

This Christmas season, may the love of the Father overwhelm us!

### ***Decree***

*The Father loves the world so much, that He sent His beloved Son to save us from eternal damnation and give us eternal life!*



## DECEMBER 8

***God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.***  
(John 3:17)

Spurgeon described the world that God so loved in this way: “What was there in the world that God should love it? There was nothing lovable in it. No fragrant flower grew in that arid desert. Enmity to him, hatred to his truth, disregard of his law, rebellion against his commandments; those were the thorns and briars which covered the waste land; but no desirable thing blossomed there.” It is a world that deserves to be judged and condemned, not loved and saved.

God would have been completely justified in sending His Son to judge the world. But the manner of Jesus’ coming shows us that He came to save and not condemn. If Jesus had come to condemn the world, He would have come in glory and majesty, arrayed in all of His divine glory and displaying the full might of His divine power. He would have come as a King and warrior, as a conqueror and judge. His appearance would have struck fear in the strongest and bravest of hearts. However, He came in humility, even humiliation.

Perhaps the best description of the lowliness of the Son in the incarnation is found in Isaiah 53:2: “*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him.*” Jesus did not choose a place or position of honour and pride on earth, even by the standards of men. The circumstances of His life were humble and unassuming, even inviting contempt and ridicule. It seems as if He wasn’t even particularly attractive in appearance! He was born in a poor household, with rumours of illegitimacy. He grew up in Nazareth and spent most of His ministry in Galilee, both places not well regarded in religious circles. Jesus made it clear that He had come to save and not to condemn.

And yet, John writes in the very next verse: “*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe in him stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.*” As Barclay puts it: “By his reaction to Jesus Christ, a man stands revealed and his soul laid bare. If he regards Christ with love, even with wistful yearning, for him there is hope; but if in Christ he sees nothing attractive he has condemned himself. He who was sent in love has become to him judgment.”

May we be among those who receive Jesus and are saved, and not among those who condemn ourselves by our rejection of Him.

### ***Decree***

*Jesus came to save the world, not to condemn it.*



## DECEMBER 9

***The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means “God with us”).***  
*(Matthew 1:23)*

There are said to be over four hundred Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, all of which find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. The fact of these prophecies, many of them written down hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, is a powerful testament to the identity of Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Today’s verse is actually the very first Old Testament prophecy that is recorded in the New Testament as fulfilled in Jesus. Isaiah prophesied the virgin birth seven hundred years before Christ, as well as the fact that the child to be born of this miraculous event would be of an extraordinary nature and identity.

Why was a virgin birth necessary? Kevin Bauder suggests the following:

“The virgin birth is not a tangential doctrine located on the periphery of the Christian faith. It is a theological nexus that holds many important doctrines together. Without a virgin birth there could have been no God-man. Without a God-man there could have been no sacrifice for human sin. Without a sacrifice there could have been no human salvation. Without human salvation God’s plan for creation would have failed. The virgin birth of Christ is one of the core doctrines of the Christian faith.”

Coffman also draws a connection between the virgin birth and Immanuel:

“Observe the word Immanuel. It means God with us; and right here is the citadel and fortress of the Christian faith. God entered the ranks of humanity, became a man in the person of his son Jesus Christ, and paid the penalty for human sin, laying upon himself in the person of his Son the iniquity of us all. . . . In all of the ethnic cults, it is man who always pays. The most valiant young man goes out to fight the dragon, or it is the fairest daughter in the tribe that becomes the sacrifice. It is some Prometheus who is forever chained to the rocks where the vultures eat out his liver; but in the Christian religion, God Himself pays the penalty of redemption.

But consider what this entails. God will become a man? How? Would God kill a man and take his body? All of the unbelievers on earth have never come up with a better suggestion as to how God could become a human being than the plan prophesied and executed in the Holy Bible.”

For Immanuel to be born, the virgin birth was essential. And the proclamation of this incredible, unprecedented event remained hidden, until God revealed it in the fullness of time through the apostle Matthew. Just the first of many Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Jesus, revealed in the New Testament!

### ***Decree***

*Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, born of a virgin, in order to be our Saviour!*



## DECEMBER 10

***The angel said: “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”***

*(Luke 1:30-33)*

Luke introduces Mary as a virgin who lived in Nazareth, and who was pledged to be married to Joseph, a carpenter. These few details are enough to deduce that Mary had an unremarkable life. She was from Nazareth, in Galilee, both being places that were looked down upon in Jewish society. Mary was probably looking forward to a peaceful, uneventful, conventional life as the wife of a carpenter; bearing and raising children, and managing her household. But her world is turned upside down by the angel Gabriel’s visit.

Gabriel’s first words to Mary, this simple and insignificant young girl, are: *“You who are highly favoured.”* And later he tells her once again that she has found favour with God. In the eyes of the world, and surely in her own eyes as well, Mary would have been insignificant and unremarkable – yet, in the Lord’s eyes, she was highly favoured!

That favour is seen in what God had purposed for Mary:

1. There was to be an unusual conception, as a result of which she would give birth to a son.
2. That son would be called Jesus – *Yeshua*, which means “The LORD saves.”
3. Her son would be great; in fact, He would be called the Son of the Most High, a clear reference to His divine identity.
4. Her son would be seated on David’s throne, ruling over an everlasting kingdom – indicating a kingdom and a reign that were far more than a physical throne and an earthly dominion.

Jesus was the evidence of God’s great favour upon Mary. Interestingly, the phrase “highly favoured” is only used twice in the New Testament – once for Mary, and then in Ephesians 1:6 for those who believe in Jesus! Just as all that mattered was how God saw Mary, so too for you and me! We may see ourselves as insignificant, and the world may do so as well, but we are highly favoured in God’s sight, and He is with us. And, just like He birthed something incredible through Mary, entrusting His Son to her care, so too with us – He desires to bring forth His kingdom purposes through us, and He has entrusted us with His Son’s inheritance and mission on earth.

### ***Decree***

*We are highly favoured, and God is with us; through us, He will birth and establish His kingdom purposes on earth!*



## DECEMBER 11

***The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*** (Luke 1:35)

When the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she will give birth to the Son of the Most High, she asks only one question: “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” It seems that there is a sense of immediacy in Gabriel’s words, that the things he is speaking of will not wait for her planned marriage and the normal course of events. Furthermore, Mary seems to realize that what the angel is saying cannot possibly happen through the usual way of having a child. The angel has just given her the most incredible news, and her question is not one of doubt or skepticism, like Zechariah before her, but of a genuine desire to understand.

Gabriel’s answer is that the Holy Spirit would “come upon” her – the word that is used refers to a forceful action that accomplishes its purpose – and that the power of God would “overshadow” her. Today, let’s explore this word further:

1. Gabriel was referring to God’s overshadowing presence, casting a shade over Mary and bringing about His will. God’s presence is non-physical, so to speak, but the shadow it casts brings about change in the physical realm.
2. Gabriel was looking back to the process of creation, where the Holy Spirit moved over the waters and brought the world into existence. That same creative energy would be exerted over Mary’s womb, to bring what God desired into being.
3. Gabriel was saying that God’s presence would envelop Mary, as the cloud of glory enveloped the three disciples when Jesus was transfigured before them on the mountain. Just as they saw Jesus’ heavenly glory unfiltered for that brief moment, so too the glory of God would envelop Mary in order to conceive Jesus in her womb. This image of an overshadowing cloud is also present throughout the Old Testament, and signifies God’s presence and power at work.

The Spirit of God overshadowed Mary, enveloping her with His presence and working in her with His power. The incredible truth is that He wants to do that with us and in us and through us every single day. Of course, nothing we do will come close to what God did in Mary. But, just as Peter’s shadow healed people on the street, (and the very same word is used – “overshadowed”!), because he was filled with the Spirit, we too are called to cast God’s shadow over a hurting, broken, and lost world.

### ***Decree***

*The power of the Most High is overshadowing us and, through us, transforming the world around us!*



## DECEMBER 12

***“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.”***

*(Luke 1:38)*

*“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.” (Luke 1:34-37)*

As the angel Gabriel finishes all he has to say, we come to a turning point in Mary’s life. How will she respond to this revelation, to what God is saying to her, to God’s call upon her life? Moses made excuses when called; Jeremiah said he was too young; Jonah ran away; the rich ruler chose his wealth . . . . Mary surrendered.

*“I am the Lord’s servant.”* By saying this, Mary surrenders her very identity. She is no longer simply Mary of Nazareth in Galilee, a virgin pledged to be married to Joseph the carpenter. She is the Lord’s servant. The word used is that of a female slave, fully bound to her master.

*“May your word to me be fulfilled.”* Mary also surrenders to the will of God concerning her. She doesn’t just mean the supernatural work that is about to be done in her body and the glorious plans for the son to be born. She also means all that God’s will entails for her – becoming pregnant before marriage, and the scandal that would follow. Joseph almost broke off the engagement. Rumours of Jesus’ illegitimacy continued well into His time of ministry. Furthermore, not only was Mary surrendering her reputation to God’s will, she was also surrendering all her plans for her future.

We are all called to make that same response to God. “I am your servant. Your will be done in my life.” We often say the words, “Your will be done” in a vacuum. But these words were not said in a vacuum by Mary. She was saying “Yes” to God, knowing what God’s will was. She may not have fully understood everything, but she knew that her life was no longer her own, and that accepting God’s will included suffering. Thirty four years later, the child that Mary bore also prayed, *“Not my will but Yours be done (Luke 22:42).”* He knew what the Father’s will was. He knew He was saying “Yes” to the cross and to separation from His Father. We often say “Yes” to God, and then when His will is revealed, we don’t want to do it!

May we be like Mary, surrendering both our identity and our will to His perfect purposes!

### **Decree**

*I am the Lord’s servant. Not my will but Yours be done.*



## DECEMBER 13

***The angel said: “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”***

*(Matthew 1:20-21)*

Joseph means “He will increase” in Hebrew. When we encounter Joseph in the gospel narrative, he must have been thinking that God had only increased complications in his life! The simple, uncomplicated future he had been planning had been upturned by the news of his fiancée’s pregnancy. And he knew he wasn’t the father! Now, an angelic visitation with incredible – as in, hard to believe – revelations about Mary’s pregnancy and the child to be born! Joseph’s response tells us a lot about him, and why God chose him to be Jesus’ earthly father.

1. Joseph was a righteous man, that is, he conformed to God’s standards and found approval in God’s eyes. He sought to obey God’s laws, and be holy before God.
2. Joseph was compassionate. He would have been fully justified in dragging Mary before the village elders and having her condemned for adultery. However, he didn’t want to expose her to public disgrace, and he decided to divorce her quietly. This decision of Joseph’s is a wonderful example of tempering justice with mercy.
3. Joseph believed the angel, taking God at His word. He put his faith in something unprecedented and unimaginable, despite being afraid of what it meant. Faith is the best antidote to fear.
4. Joseph was obedient. He obeyed instantly, without reluctance or hesitation. On two more occasions, Matthew records this instant and complete obedience on Joseph’s part, to whatever instructions God gives him, no matter how difficult. And it started with perhaps the most difficult instruction of all – choosing to marry Mary, in spite of her situation and all the complications that would follow.
5. Joseph was God-fearing. This is, of course, obvious from the earlier points. However, Matthew also records that Joseph “*had no union with [Mary] until she gave birth to a son.*” Joseph would have been well within his rights to consummate his marriage to Mary at any point after marriage. Yet he waited until Jesus was born. It is as if he discerned that Mary wasn’t his, despite their marriage – she was God’s vessel, for His divine purpose, and Joseph respected and honoured that.

As we saw, Joseph means “He will increase.” Joseph was a righteous, loving, and God-fearing man, and God rewarded his faithfulness by increasing his responsibility. He gave Joseph the privilege of raising His beloved Son on the earth. And God knew He had chosen well. May the same be true of you and me!

### ***Decree***

*God is increasing His presence and power and purposes on earth, through countless disciples like Joseph!*



## DECEMBER 14

***When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"*** (Luke 1:41-42)

The angel Gabriel gives Mary a way to confirm all that he has said, by pointing to the miracle of Elizabeth's pregnancy in old age. So, Mary sets off to visit Elizabeth in Judah. She may not even be aware at this point that Jesus has already been conceived in her womb! And the first confirmation of it is most likely Elizabeth's greeting, when her baby reacts to the presence of divinity in Mary's womb. Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit and prophecies; thus, she is the first person recorded as prophesying in the power of the Spirit since the last Old Testament prophet Malachi! Elizabeth confirms the essence of what Gabriel told Mary when she exclaims, "Why am I so favoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" What an assurance it must have been for Mary to hear these words of joyous confirmation from Elizabeth, even before she could tell her all that had happened!

The most significant thing that Elizabeth calls Mary is "blessed." She repeats the word thrice in five verses. Mary is "blessed among women." The child she will bear is "blessed." And, Elizabeth continues, "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished."

How is Mary blessed? Two different words are used here:

1. *Eulogeo*, from which we get the English word "eulogy." It means to be spoken well of, to be praised. Mary would be spoken of favourably, she would be praised, she would be regarded as one who was highly favoured by God. Of course, this came to pass, as Mary has been greatly revered (perhaps too highly at times!) for most of the past two millennia. Mary had accepted God's calling upon her life, and she would be blessed because of the blessedness of the son she would bear.
2. *Makarios*, which is the same word used in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. In effect, Elizabeth's words constitute the first beatitude recorded in the gospels! It means to be in a happy and enviable position, because of the benefits, advantages, and grace that God has extended to you. However, Mary is blessed because of her faith in what God had told her – she believed the impossible.

Biblically, one is pronounced blessed when God is present and involved in one's life; when the hand of God is at work in one's life; when one's life is ever before the face of God; when one is favourably affected and influenced by God – and we see all of these aspects play out in Mary's life.

### ***Decree***

***Blessed are those who believe that the Lord's word will be accomplished!***



## DECEMBER 15

**And Mary said:**

***“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.***

***From now on all generations will call me blessed . . .***

*(Luke 1:46-48)*

Today’s verses are the beginning of what is known as Mary’s Magnificat. The final confirmation from Elizabeth of what the angel told Mary causes her to burst into a song of extravagant praise and thanksgiving. She magnifies (or glorifies) God, and rejoices from deep within her spirit, for what He has done. Mary is in awe that God has done such an amazing thing for someone as lowly as her. She declares that all generations will call her blessed. We saw yesterday what it means to be blessed, and the truth of these words throughout history. However, the stained glass paintings, ornate frescoes, and millions of statues hide the reality of Mary’s blessedness.

How was Mary blessed in the years that followed?

1. Was she spoken of favourably? Probably not at first. The fact of her premarital conception appears to have been public knowledge, albeit in a small village. It would have been a source of shame and scandal for Mary, first within her family and then in the larger community. Even the adult Jesus was scorned as illegitimate. Mary had to endure the taint of immorality, even though she was innocent.
2. Was God’s will for her life enviable? No doubt, many women throughout the millennia have wished they could have had the privilege that Mary had. But consider the pain that came with that privilege. Mary was a mother who saw her eldest child, one she knew was the Son of God, pure and innocent, nailed to a cross in utter humiliation, His body completely ravaged beyond recognition. As Simeon prophesied to Mary, *“a sword will pierce your own soul too (Luke 2:36).”* Who among us wants the blessedness of a sword piercing our souls?

As we see in the Sermon on the Mount, almost all the beatitudes speak of present suffering and future joy, of temporary suffering and eternal joy. Blessedness is not happiness and comfort and ease, as the world and most of the church seems to think. Blessedness, at its heart, is God’s presence in our lives, tangible and active, working out His perfect purpose in and through us!

*“All generations will call me blessed,”* Mary exclaimed. And truly she was blessed. Blessed when she was chosen by God, blessed when she believed His word and surrendered, blessed when she gave birth to the Son of the Most High, blessed when she saw His mighty works. But Mary was also blessed when she suffered the accusations of adultery, when she had to escape a murderous king, when she saw her son crucified. Through it all, she was blessed, because she was in God’s purposes. Are we ready for such a life of blessedness?

### **Decree**

*All generations will call Mary blessed, because of God’s presence and power in her life.*



DECEMBER 16

***Because of the tender mercy of our God,  
the rising sun will come to us from heaven  
to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.***

*(Luke 1:78-79)*

There isn't much about Zechariah in the Bible. He's there at the beginning and end of Luke chapter 1. He starts off on the wrong foot with the angel Gabriel, doubting God's word that he would have a son despite his advanced age, and ending up unable to speak until the promised child, John, is born. But he departs the scene on such a glorious note – obeying God in naming John and then, filled with the Spirit, prophesying powerfully about both John the Baptist as well as Jesus the Messiah! Zechariah's song, as it is called, is a wonderful piece of poetry. The two verses of today's devotion are the end of that song, and they are such a beautiful description of what Jesus would do.

*Because of the tender mercy of our God . . . .* A better translation here is "God's deep compassion." It was the reason for Jesus coming to earth, as opposed to wrath or judgment. God looked down upon our lost and depraved world, and He felt deep compassion, not anger. Jesus was His response.

*The rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death . . . .* Just as the rising sun dispels the darkness, so too Jesus was coming to bring the light of righteousness to a wicked world. There is a clear reference here to Malachi 4:2 – "*the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings.*" Jesus came to heal this broken world. However, there is so much else in the Old Testament being referenced here, and we will consider these in a later devotion. Whether it's Mary's song or Zechariah's song, they are very much in the style of the Old Testament prophets.

*To guide our feet into the path of peace . . . .* Here, Zechariah would have been using the Hebrew word *shalom*, which means right relationship with God and men. That's exactly what Jesus came to do – to reconcile us to God and to each other. In a dark world, we are all lost and unable to find the right path. Jesus came to show us the way.

The deep compassion of God sent the Messiah, who came as the light, taking away the darkness of night with all its hopelessness and lostness, and guiding us into the path of genuine and eternal peace. And He's still doing it!

### ***Decree***

*The rising sun has come to us from heaven, to shine on those living in darkness, and He is guiding us into peace.*



## DECEMBER 17

***While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for the baby to be born, and Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*** (Luke 2:6-7)

We all know the drama of that first Christmas. Mary and Joseph travelling to Bethlehem, Mary heavily pregnant and riding a donkey, with Joseph walking beside her. Bethlehem is crowded because of the census, so the local motel is fully booked. The kindly innkeeper allows them to stay in the stable, where Mary gives birth to Jesus, ox and ass looking on. The shepherds land up that night, followed soon after by three wise men bearing one gift each. That's the popular Christmas story. Every Nativity scene depicts it. Every Nativity play narrates it. There's just one problem – most of those details are wrong!

God had a few millennia to plan His Son's birth; do you really think He made such a mess of it? Doesn't it make more sense that every detail of the Christmas story was perfectly planned by Him? Let's look at some of the details in today's verses:

Why was Jesus born in Bethlehem? They had to be in Bethlehem, according to the Scriptures. So, God causes the Roman emperor to order a census, necessitating Joseph and Mary heading from Nazareth to Joseph's hometown of Bethlehem. We know Mary was pregnant, but we have no idea how far gone she was. There's no need to believe God got her to travel with labour pains due any moment!

Why was there no room for them? Remember, Bethlehem is Joseph's hometown. He would most certainly have had a home there, and ancestral land, and relatives. The kind innkeeper is the best invention of the Christmas story! So, Joseph and Mary went to his home, but it must have been crowded because of so many relatives. The guest room was thus unavailable. Most households in that time had animals, and a cave in which they were kept. So that's where Mary was settled, to have her baby. The stable would have been cleaned out, and the manger would have made a comfortable crib because of its shape. They may have put some straw and a blanket to make it ready for the baby.

God is a God of details. He placed Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem, and then He placed Mary in a stable. They were exactly where He wanted them to be. And, when the time came – His perfect time, the fullness of time – His Son was born in the humblest of circumstances. Look again at the Nativity scene. Strip off all the trappings. Only one object is worthy of our gaze – the Son of God, the Creator of the world, the Judge to come, King of kings and Lord of lords – a baby, lying in a manger.

### ***Decree***

***The babe in a manger is the Son of God and Lord of all!***



## DECEMBER 18

***The angel of the Lord said: “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”***  
*(Luke 2:10-12)*

It's just like God to choose lowly shepherds to be the first to hear the good news of the Messiah's birth – after all, the Messiah was lying in a manger in a stable! The angel of the Lord came to them while they were watching their flocks in the field. That is, they encountered God in the humdrum of their normal lives, not at some special event. God often breaks into our routines, and it can be uncomfortable, at the very least – in the shepherds' case, they were terrified; but we need to stop and pay attention.

What was the “*good news of great joy*” that the angel brought? It was communicated using three titles for the One who was born:

1. SAVIOUR – the One who has come to save us from sin, death, the devil, hell, and our greatest enemy, ourselves!
2. MESSIAH – the Anointed One who was chosen, equipped, and qualified to fulfil God's saving purpose.
3. LORD – the only One who is worthy of our surrender, the best person to whom we can give control of our lives.

Why was “*a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger*” a sign for the shepherds? Well, you see, these may have been lowly shepherds, but they weren't exactly ordinary. Or rather, the sheep they were watching over weren't ordinary. These were flocks that were being raised to serve as sacrificial animals in temple worship. The shepherds were specially trained for this task, including taking care that the animals were not damaged or blemished in any way. One of the things they would do was to wrap newborn lambs in swaddling cloths to protect them from injury. One of their most important tasks was at Passover, when they took care of and chose the lambs to be sacrificed. So, these shepherds were very familiar with the image of a Passover lamb, wrapped in swaddling cloths, without blemish, and destined for sacrifice. God was revealing the true Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God who John the Baptist would one day identify, to those who were most intimately involved with the Passover lambs. The shepherds most likely did not understand the full import of what had been revealed – but, as we can see, God was very intentional in His choice of who would be the first recipients of His Son's birth announcement!

We have even better news of greatest joy to share with the world – not a baby in a manger, but the risen Christ enthroned in heaven! He continues to be Saviour, Messiah, and Lord!

### ***Decree***

*Jesus is Saviour, Messiah, and Lord!*



## DECEMBER 19

***Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.***

*(Luke 2:14)*

At first, there was just one angel proclaiming the “good news of great joy” to the shepherds. So, the purpose of the angelic visitation had been served, and the shepherds had been informed. But, Luke records, “suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared.” It seems to me as if the angels could not contain themselves; what was happening was so amazing, they just had to get involved and express themselves! A heavenly choir appears, and a glorious song bursts forth!

There are two aspects to the angelic chorus. First, they praise God. Next, they bless mankind. Let’s look at both these aspects:

1. *“Glory to God in the highest!”* The Greek word for glory, *doxa*, refers to God’s infinite, intrinsic worth. The angels have spent all of their existence, ever since they were created, in the presence of God the Son in heaven. They have seen and experienced His glory, unhindered and unfiltered. And now they praise God for the manifestation of His glorious purposes in the Incarnation. The angels praise the Father for choosing to send His Son in such humility, and they praise the Son for His loving sacrifice. Implied in their praise is the exhortation for all of heaven and earth to likewise give God glory, for what He has done and for what He will accomplish.
2. *“On earth, peace to men on whom His favour rests.”* The angels proclaim a blessing of peace on the earth. The Greek word for peace, *eirene*, refers to wholeness, when all essential parts are joined together in harmony. Peace is God’s gift of wholeness to a strife-torn earth. As we have seen before, God was bringing about peace between Himself and sinful men, as well as between divided mankind. But there seems to be a qualification to this peace – *“on whom His favour rests.”* It means those with whom God is pleased. And we can only please God if we put our faith in His Son. The gift of peace is freely available to all mankind, but our access to God’s peace is through our faith in His Son.

Today, let us give God glory for the gift of His Son. And let us acknowledge afresh that gift in faith, and receive the peace He promises.

### ***Decree***

*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests.*



## DECEMBER 20

***So the shepherds hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.***  
*(Luke 2:16-18)*

The shepherds responded immediately to the angel's message. *They said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."* Let's consider four questions in today's devotion:

1. What did the shepherds leave behind in their search for Jesus? They left their flocks in the fields, their sheep which were very valuable. In effect, they diverted from their work, their livelihood, that which occupied most of their time, energy, and attention. They also left behind the fear that they felt when they saw the angel, as well as any perfectly reasonable doubts they may have had about what they had been told.
2. How did the shepherds respond to the message? The shepherds chose to seek out the Messiah, even though they had not been specifically instructed to do so. The message of the angels had stirred in them a desire, and they responded in the best way possible. They hurried off to Bethlehem, and we see in those words a sense of urgency to their quest. This was not a casual response, but one that was intentional and important to them. They didn't take their flocks with them, thus leaving behind anything that might distract them in their search.
3. How did the shepherds respond to Jesus? They saw Jesus, neither dismissing the angel's message nor believing blindly, but verifying for themselves. As they beheld the baby in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes, they were fulfilling their function of inspecting the Passover lamb! Then they spread the word about Jesus. The shepherds could not contain the good news, and they testified about all that they had seen and heard. In a very real sense, the shepherds were the first evangelists!
4. What did the shepherds take back with them? They returned to the routine of their lives, but it was not the same anymore. The pastures and the sheep and the work were just as they had been before, but the shepherds had changed. They took back with them a sense of wonder, glorifying and praising God for everything. I wonder if some of these shepherds were still around thirty three years later, and remembered these events when Jesus was crucified. Did they know that the man on the cross was the baby they had seen in a manger? I would like to believe so!

God wants to reveal Himself to you afresh, in the midst of the busyness and routine of this Christmas season. He is inviting you to seek Him, leaving behind the things that will distract. How will you respond? Will you finish this season with a sense of wonder?

### ***Decree***

*We will seek Jesus afresh, leaving behind all that distracts, spreading the good news, and receiving a renewed sense of wonder!*



## DECEMBER 21

### ***Simeon said:***

***“My eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel.”***

*(Luke 2:30-32)*

Who was Simeon? Luke records: *“Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.”*

In the Christmas story, and in Jesus’ early childhood, we see so many people who are called righteous – Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph, and now Simeon. He was righteous and devout, careful to keep God’s laws. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, looking for the fulfilment of God’s promise of the Messiah. We know from history, that in Israel, and even other nations, there was a sense of expectancy – people were anticipating the coming of the Messiah. Simeon was waiting with longing for the One who would bring comfort to His people.

It had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah. What an incredible promise! Though this was happening in what is the New Testament for us, it was still Old Testament times. Imagine being told by God that you are going to see the Messiah with your own eyes, and believing that!

Simeon was led by the Spirit to the temple, at the right time; he saw Mary and Joseph with the baby, and it was revealed to him that this was the Messiah. Imagine the faith Simeon required, to believe that this poor, insignificant-looking couple were the parents of the Messiah! It would have been easier for him to believe if Jesus had been born in Herod’s palace, or in the High Priest’s house.

But Simeon trusts the leading of the Holy Spirit, goes up to Mary and Joseph, and, taking Jesus in his arms, praises God by declaring who Jesus is! He testifies that Jesus is God’s salvation on public display – not hidden, but out in the open, where He can be touched, heard, and seen. Simeon is testifying to Jesus’ public ministry thirty years later. He says Jesus is a light for the Gentiles – such a unique and extraordinary thing for a Jew to say about the Messiah – and that He would reveal the true God to the nations. Finally, Simeon declares that Jesus would reveal the glory of God to His people, the glory formerly connected to the temple or tabernacle. This person, still just a baby boy, would reveal God, for the fullness of God’s glory was in Jesus!

### ***Decree***

*Jesus is a light for revelation to all nations, and for glory to His chosen people.*



## DECEMBER 22

***Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”***

*(Luke 2:34-35)*

When Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms and prophesied concerning who He was, Mary and Joseph marvelled. But then Simeon shifted from praise to prophecy, and it was a sobering word. He only addressed Mary – probably because Joseph would not be there when these things happened; he died before Jesus turned thirty and started His public ministry. Simeon prophesied three things:

1. People would fall or rise depending on how they responded to Jesus. Barnes writes: “The word ‘fall’ here denotes ‘misery, suffering, disappointment, or ruin.’ . . . Many expected a temporal prince, and in this they were disappointed. They loved darkness rather than light, and rejected him, and fell unto destruction. . . . Many others would be made happy or be saved. Many of the poor and humble, that were willing to receive him, would obtain pardon of sin and peace – would ‘rise’ from their sins and sorrows here, and finally ascend to eternal life.” The same is true today. The true meaning and worth of our lives will depend on how we have responded to Jesus.
2. Jesus would face much opposition, but the purpose of it all would be to reveal what was hidden in people’s hearts (e.g. the hypocrisy of the religious leaders was exposed). Throughout His ministry, hearts were exposed – through their opposition or through their acceptance of Jesus’ radical claims, what was inside people’s hearts was revealed. That’s why the tax collectors, sinners and prostitutes came flocking to Him. Even though they were seen as sinners, their hearts were not as society thought them to be. The religious leaders who looked devout, on the other hand – well, their hearts were revealed as anything but! What does our response to Jesus reveal about our hearts?
3. Finally, a most piercing word. Simeon told Mary that a sword would pierce her soul. Mary would also suffer, surely referring to seeing her firstborn on a cross. She would suffer when Jesus was persecuted, rejected, flogged, and crucified. She would suffer as His body lay in the tomb. Luke writes that Simeon “*blessed them.*” How on earth could this be a blessing? The blessing, of course, was to be in the centre of God’s will and purpose, to be used by Him, even if it meant suffering – and to experience the joy that was to follow! Just like Mary, we are called to have our souls pierced, in order that we may also experience His glory.

### ***Decree***

*Jesus is causing the rise and fall of everyone, and revealing the thoughts of every heart.*



## DECEMBER 23

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

We have all heard the carol, “We three kings of Orient are,” or read the stories about the “Three Wise Men.” Well, the Bible neither calls them kings nor wise men, but Magi. Who were the Magi?

Barclay writes: “Herodotus [a fifth century BC Greek historian] has certain information about the Magi. He says that they were originally a Median tribe. The Medes were part of the Empire of the Persians. They tried to overthrow the Persians and substitute the power of the Medes. The attempt failed. From that time the Magi ceased to have any ambitions for power or prestige, and became a tribe of priests. They became in Persia almost exactly what the Levites were in Israel. They became the teachers and instructors of the Persian kings. In Persia no sacrifice could be offered unless one of the Magi was present. They became men of holiness and wisdom. These Magi were men who were skilled in philosophy, medicine and natural science. They were soothsayers and interpreters of dreams.”

This particular group of Magi would have had the legacy of a prominent Jewish prophet – Daniel! He was appointed chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners in the Babylonian kingdom by Nebuchadnezzar. The Medo-Persian empire conquered Babylon, and Daniel had a prominent position under Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian as well. The Magi would have had access to Daniel’s writings and prophecies; they would most likely have studied them closely. They would have known about Daniel’s prophecy concerning the Messiah, in connection with Jerusalem (Daniel 9). The company of the Magi would have been searching the skies in expectancy around this time, looking for a sign to confirm Daniel’s prophecy. And when it came, they discerned it correctly. No one is exactly sure what kind of heavenly light or phenomenon they saw, but it stirred the Magi to travel to another land to worship a king!

Barclay comments on the global significance of this birth of a baby boy in a tiny Jewish village: “There is not the slightest need to think that the story of the coming of the Magi to the cradle of Christ is only a lovely legend. It is exactly the kind of thing that could easily have happened in that ancient world. When Jesus Christ came, the world was in an eagerness of expectation. Men were waiting for God and the desire for God was in their hearts. They had discovered that they could not build the golden age without God. It was to a waiting world that Jesus came; and, when he came, the ends of the earth were gathered at his cradle. It was the first sign and symbol of the world conquest of Christ.”

### ***Decree***

***Jesus was born king of the Jews; but He is now King of kings and Lord of lords!***



## DECEMBER 24

***But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.***

*(Matthew 2:6)*

The Magi came to Jerusalem seeking the Messiah. In their understanding, the one who was born was the king of the Jews. So, they came to the capital city of Judah, and to the palace of the reigning king. Herod asked the chief priests and elders of the law what the prophets had spoken concerning the birthplace of the Messiah, and they quoted the prophet Micah. Micah had prophesied that Bethlehem, though tiny and insignificant, would be the place from where the Messiah – the ruler and shepherd of God’s people – would arise. Isn’t it just like God to use, as Paul says, “*the weak things of the world to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27)*”? Then King Herod told the Magi about the prophecy, and asked them to come and report to him once they found the baby, so that he could worship Him as well. In today’s devotion, let’s briefly consider the various responses in Jerusalem to the news of the Messiah’s birth:

1. King Herod was disturbed and troubled by the news. He saw the Messiah as a threat to his power and position, and plotted to kill Him. There was such a lack of the fear of God in Herod, that even the obvious supernatural and divine events surrounding the Messiah’s birth did not deter him from his plotting.
2. Matthew tells us that all Jerusalem was disturbed by the news. The people were disturbed rather than excited at the possibility of the Messiah’s birth! Why would this be? Well, Jerusalem, being the capital city as well as the place of the temple, was the power centre of Judah. And the people of Jerusalem preferred the status quo of their influence and affluence to any move of God that might bring about change.
3. The religious leaders knew the Bible by heart; they could rattle off Micah’s prophecy instantly! They knew about the fever of expectation all over the world concerning a Saviour. But they did not catch that fever – they were cold towards the prospect of the Messiah’s birth. They weren’t even stirred to travel the few miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to see for themselves. The religious leaders were too comfortable in their traditions and scholarship to seek after God Himself!

What about us? Just as Jesus invaded humanity two thousand years ago, He seeks to invade human hearts every single day. He announces Himself and His will for our lives, through His Word and by His Spirit; through songs and sermons; even through the familiar trappings and traditions of Christmas. Does the advent of the Son of God in our own lives disturb us or excite us? Do we reject Him or seek Him? Are we comfortable in our lives or willing for Him to take over?

### ***Decree***

***Out of Bethlehem has come a Ruler and Shepherd, not just of Israel, but of all mankind; and He continues to reign!***



## DECEMBER 25

***On coming to the house, the Magi saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.*** (Matthew 2:11)

As we saw yesterday, Jerusalem rejected the news of the Messiah's birth, because of the change such an event would herald. As a capital city, most of its population would have been invested in the government and the establishment. A change in dispensation would probably have threatened the influence and status and position of many in the city. All of that was far more valuable to them than the coming of the Messiah. And this was what lay at the heart of their feeling of disturbance: they were not willing to let go of what was precious to them, what they treasured.

The people of Jerusalem, the "cream" of God's people, closed their fists tight around what was precious to them. Not so the visitors from a pagan land!

Even as King Herod and all Jerusalem were greatly troubled by the news of the Messiah's birth, the Magi were overjoyed! Leaving Jerusalem, they followed the star to the little village of Bethlehem, and to the humble dwelling where a poor carpenter and his family lived.

What did they expect to find when they set out from their land? Surely anything but this! They went first to Jerusalem because they expected to find the king in a palace. And surely they came with a caravan of splendour befitting such a king. I'm reminded of the Queen of Sheba coming to visit King Solomon with a very great caravan of riches that she deemed worthy of the reports she had heard about him. Undoubtedly the Magi did the same, and came with riches worthy of the grandeur and glory they expected to encounter.

Nothing met their expectation – not His village, not His home, not His poor parents – but it didn't matter to them. So often we are let down by Jesus, not because of Him but because of our own expectations, and we fail to accept Him on His own terms. Faced with a scene totally contrary to their expectations of greatness, the Magi responded with joy and worship.

And then they opened their treasures! We so cheapen and dilute the Christmas story with our scenes of three wise men with one small gift each. No! They came with camels laden with treasures – the word in Greek refers to "store-house of riches," – in modern terms, a safe or a bank vault. They opened what was precious to them, and lavished it upon the little baby. They were generous, not with something ordinary or dispensable, but with their treasures.

The Magi let go of their treasures, even as the people of Jerusalem held on to theirs. Today, I invite you to consider what your treasure is. Then, open your treasure chest and give extravagantly to Jesus!

### ***Decree***

***King Jesus is worthy of all our treasures!***



## DECEMBER 26

***Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.***

*(Luke 2:19)*

We have heard the glorious testimony of the angels and their exuberant worship. We have seen the excitement and joy of the shepherds. And then Luke tells us about Mary's response to the tumultuous events of that first Christmas night. He writes, "*But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.*" Today's devotion on this verse is taken from a sermon by Aneela Rao:

"Mary's behaviour or response in this situation, where we have already seen some dramatic angelic visitations, a dream, an unbelievably supportive husband, a miraculous conception, and some unexpected visitors, is being contrasted with that of others.

The account says 'But Mary!' In other words there was something different about Mary. She treasured all the things that had happened. The word 'treasure' means 'to hold close, cherish, hold dear.' Mary's response was to hold close to her heart what she had seen and witnessed. They were not experiences that she regarded lightly.

Mary set an example for us: she treasured and pondered. Others were amazed and marvelled. She took it closer. Mary's response was to mull over, ponder, hold close things that God had spoken to her, that she had seen or witnessed, or had been revealed to her.

As I thought of the word 'mull', my mind went to the mulled wine that we hear so much of in this season, where the wine is infused with the flavour of the spices that are added into it. And so also, when Mary pondered upon or mulled over what had happened, it would have infused her mind, her spirit, her very being.

Mary set an example for us that is so profound. She held what others were looking at, close, till it impacted her from the inside out. There's a difference between knowing something that we have seen, or even shared, to knowing it intimately, so that it becomes a part of us from deep within.

We want to learn from the shepherds, who were excited and witnessed and celebrated with joy. And we also want to learn from Mary, who treasured what she saw, held it close, deep within her being.

As we draw to the close of another Christmas season and another year, it may be worthwhile for us to reflect upon the words that God has spoken to us, that which He has revealed to us, or the things we have witnessed or experienced. Have we, like Mary, been able to treasure, hold close, guard carefully, ponder over those things, or are they things that we have celebrated, even shared and acted upon, but not allowed to possess us in our deepest being?"

### ***Decree***

*We will treasure the things that God has done for us, and the words He has spoken to us, and ponder them in our hearts.*



## DECEMBER 27

***Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.***

*(Luke 2:52)*

A few verses earlier, Luke writes something similar: “*And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.*” These two verses are extremely significant in what they reveal about the incarnation. To put it simply, Jesus grew! Jesus didn’t come with everything fully downloaded – He had to grow, to learn, to understand, to receive revelation. Jesus had to grow and develop in four areas – intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially. They are the same areas in which all of us need to grow. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus shared in our humanity, and that He was tempted in every way just as we are. He even writes that Jesus “*learned obedience from what he suffered (Hebrews 5:8).*” So often people talk about Jesus as if, because there was something so obviously supernatural about Him, we can’t really be like Him. But He was fully human, and He had to grow in these different areas just like any other child.

Luke tells us that Jesus had something to help Him grow in the way that He needed to – the grace of God upon Him. God’s grace is not some vague feel-good concept; it is His power at work in us to accomplish His purposes. And so it was with Jesus. He grew strong, He was filled with wisdom, He found favour with God and with men. We too have the grace of God at work in us, through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ life would have been so much a life of faith. Consider the fact of His understanding of who He was. We’ve seen what Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the Magi, and everyone associated with the Christmas story had to believe. Imagine what Jesus had to believe growing up, and even as a man! At some point, He had to come to know that He was the Son of God, not with some divine understanding, but having to believe what the Scriptures were saying and the Spirit was revealing to Him.

For many, it is easier to think of Jesus as some kind of superhuman – God simply camouflaged as man. But our understanding of Jesus, our appreciation of Him, and our ability to follow Him are all enhanced when we realise that He, too, had to grow into all He was meant to be and do. May the ways in which He grew – wisdom, stature, favour with God and men – be our goal as well.

### ***Decree***

*We will grow in wisdom and stature, and favour with God and men, as the grace of God enables us.*



## DECEMBER 28

*The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness  
a light has dawned.*

*(Isaiah 9:2)*

There is a popular phrase that has arisen at Christmas, in response to the commercialization and secularization of the season – “Jesus is the reason for the season.” However, it is only partly true. In reality, we – you and I, every person who ever lived and who will ever live – are the reason for Jesus being born; to be very precise, our sin. We have sanitized the Christmas story, airbrushing sin out of it – but “*the good news of great joy for all the people*” makes no sense without the context of our desperate state.

Isaiah 9:1-2 describes the desperate state of the people with three words:

1. **Distress:** We are in a state of suffering, anguish, and pain, caused by the consequences of our sin and the sin of others. The good news is that Jesus came to bind up the brokenhearted.
2. **Darkness:** We are lost in the darkness of sin and ignorance and blindness, often not even aware of how doomed we are. The good news is that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.
3. **Death:** We are condemned to both spiritual and physical death, in this life and for eternity. The good news is that Jesus came to give us abundant life.

God’s solution for a world lost in sin was to send His only Son. The incarnation reveals the heart of the Trinity:

1. **We see the love of the Father:** The oft-repeated complaint is, “If God is so loving, what is He doing about suffering and evil?” Well, He has done something; He sent His Son!
2. **We see the lowliness of the Son:** Before Jesus poured out His life on the cross, He poured Himself out in the incarnation. He humbled Himself in coming as a man, and that too in circumstances that were lowly by the standards of the world.
3. **We receive life by the Spirit:** Jesus came to give life to those destined for death; not just any life, but life to the full. And that life fills us and flows through us by the Holy Spirit.

Christmas has become a grand holiday based on a sweet story. But behind that story is something awful as well as something awesome. Christmas is an acknowledgement of our state of sin and its awful consequences. And Christmas is a celebration of God’s extravagant response in unconditional, sacrificial, and life-giving love!

### **Decree**

*The light of Jesus shines in the distress, darkness, and death of our desperate circumstances, and leads us to abundant life.*



## DECEMBER 29

*For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.*

*And he will be called*

*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*(Isaiah 9:6)*

Who is Jesus? What is He like? What will He do? Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah revealed five titles of the Messiah.

1. **WONDERFUL:** The Hebrew word refers to a miracle, a wonder, something extraordinary that God has done. It also means something that is separate, different, distinguished from the ordinary. Jesus Himself is a wonder; He is full of wonder; He is the One who causes us to wonder. May we never lose the wonder of the Christmas story, for it is about the One who is called Wonderful!
2. **COUNSELOR:** The Hebrew word refers to one who advises, guides, resolves, and deliberates. Jesus is our Counselor. He has all the wisdom, and all the answers, and all the reasons. He gives us direction and guidance, and leads us into all truth. We don't have to struggle with all our questions and doubts and fears, for we have the One who is called Counselor!
3. **MIGHTY GOD:** The Hebrew word refers to strength and power. It is used most often of warriors, champions, heroes. Jesus is a mighty warrior, the undefeated champion, and the only hero worth exalting! He is stronger than any enemy we could encounter. We don't have to live in defeat, because of the One who is called Mighty God!
4. **EVERLASTING FATHER:** The Hebrew refers to something that is forever, eternal, stretching into the future. It gives us a sense of continuity, of God's faithfulness. Jesus is our Father, our *Abba*. He is always going to be there for us. He holds not just our immediate but also our eternal future. We can be secure in the One who is called Everlasting Father!
5. **PRINCE OF PEACE:** The Hebrew word refers to wholeness of being, favour, right relationships. Jesus brings peace between man and God, and between men. He also brings peace within us. He has the authority, as ruler, to defeat chaos, crisis, and confusion, and give us rest. We can receive true and lasting peace from the One who is called Prince of Peace!

Finally, when Isaiah says that Jesus is called all these titles, he means that Jesus is to be declared, proclaimed, encountered and experienced as each of these. These names are not just who Jesus is, but how we can relate to Him. We are called to know Jesus fully as all of these names, and proclaim Him through our lives to a world that needs Him.

### **Decree**

*Jesus is Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace!*



**DECEMBER 30**

***Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.***

***He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,***

***establishing and upholding it***

***with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.***

***The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.***

*(Isaiah 9:7)*

We despair at the corruption and tyranny of government today. But most governments throughout history, whether democracies or monarchies or dictatorships or republics, have not been very different. Human governments seem to only differ in their degree of oppression and injustice. The Christmas story, however, is one of hope. It speaks of the child to whom will be given all authority and dominion. It speaks of government that is godly, because it is of God. Matthew Henry unpacks this verse:

“The government shall be upon his shoulder – his only. He shall not only wear the badge of it upon his shoulder, but he shall bear the burden of it. . . . Glorious things are here spoken of Christ's government:

1. That it shall be an increasing government: It shall be multiplied; the bounds of his kingdom shall be more and more enlarged, and many shall be added to it daily. The lustre of it shall increase, and it shall shine more and more brightly in the world.
2. That it shall be a peaceable government, agreeable to his character as the prince of peace: He shall rule by love, shall rule in men's hearts; so that wherever his government is there shall be peace, and as his government increases the peace shall increase.
3. That it shall be a rightful government: He that is the Son of David shall reign upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, which he is entitled to. God shall give him the throne of his father David.
4. That it shall be administered with prudence and equity, and so as to answer the great end of government, which is the establishment of the kingdom: He shall order it, and settle it, with justice and judgment.
5. That it shall be an everlasting kingdom: There shall be no end of the increase of his government (it shall be still growing), no end of the increase of the peace of it, for the happiness of the subjects of this kingdom shall last to eternity and perhaps shall be progressive in infinitum – for ever.
6. That God himself has undertaken to bring all this about: The heart of God is much upon the advancement of the kingdom of Christ among men, which is very comfortable to all those that wish well to it; the zeal of the Lord of hosts will overcome all opposition.”

Christmas is a message of hope for righteous government, for it heralds the birth of the righteous King!

### ***Decree***

***Jesus is reigning on David's throne and over all the earth, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness, and He will reign forever!***



## DECEMBER 31

***A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.***

***The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and of might,  
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—  
and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.***

*(Isaiah 11:1-3)*

There was a time when being of the family of David was a matter of great prestige. But that was no longer the case by the time of Jesus' birth. This messianic prophecy states that the Messiah would be born when the family of David was insignificant – like the stump of a tree, cut down and seemingly unfruitful. Yet, from this place of insignificance, the Messiah would arise. And so it was. Jesus was born in the family of a poor carpenter, in the tiny village of Bethlehem, and He grew up in the obscurity of Nazareth. But the externals were not what was important; rather, what mattered was what was within Him. The Spirit of the LORD rested, settled, and remained upon Him; in fact, Jesus was completely filled and overflowing with the Spirit. It was because He was anointed and equipped by the Holy Spirit that Jesus was able to fulfil His mission on earth.

We end this month of devotions on Christmas, and this year as well, with a glorious picture of the qualities imparted to Jesus by this resting of the Holy Spirit upon Him:

1. The Spirit of wisdom – the ability to apply God's principles to life's circumstances. Jesus did not quote Scripture blindly, but applied it with discernment to specific situations.
2. The Spirit of understanding – the ability to discern between alternatives. Jesus was able to discern the heart of every matter, and judge accordingly.
3. The Spirit of counsel – the ability to advise and guide others. As we have already seen, Jesus is the One who is called Counselor.
4. The Spirit of might – the ability to bring to pass what He willed to happen. Jesus performed many miracles and supernatural signs and wonders when He was on the earth, and He continues to do so today, through the Holy Spirit in His people.
5. The Spirit of knowledge – the ability to not just know intellectually but to experience personally. Jesus had genuine relationships, albeit of varying degrees of intimacy, with His disciples, with the women who served Him, with the people He encountered, and most of all with His Father.



6. The Spirit of the fear of the LORD – the attitude of reverence and piety towards God. Jesus related to His Father with the deepest possible intimacy, and yet with the greatest depth of reverence.

Of all the impartations Jesus received from the Spirit, the one He delighted in most was the fear of the LORD! I think most of us would be more excited about power and wisdom. But Jesus knew what was of utmost importance – His relationship with His Father. The same Spirit that anointed Jesus dwells within us. May we receive the same impartations to continue Jesus' mission, and may we, too, delight in the fear of the LORD!

**Decree**

*The Spirit of the Lord rests upon us – the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord. We will delight in the fear of the Lord, even as we fulfill Jesus' purposes on the earth.*



  
**HIGHWAY**

*Designed by Supriya Balasundaram*