



# A Journey through the Bible

## Day 1

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**Read: 2 Timothy 3:16-17**

### Introduction

Welcome to a guided tour through the Bible. Each day, we will be looking at a passage of Scripture from Genesis through Revelation.

The purpose of this venture is to give our readers an overview of the Bible and to provide exposure to some books that are seldom read.

We have chosen a variety of writers for this journey, eleven in all. They have been asked to approach this challenge a little differently from the normal commentary on Scripture that is pattern we try to follow in *The Journey*. For this study, the writers were asked to choose the passage of Scripture that is most meaningful to them in the particular book of the Bible and then to explain why it is special to them.

As we know from our Scripture reading for today, the Bible is the inspired word of God. It is meant not only to inform us but also to shape our lives. When Paul wrote these words to Timothy, he was really talking about what we call the Old Testament, which, of course, makes up the much greater part of the Bible. Thus, it is clear that we are to know the Bible as a whole, and we are hopeful that this “journey through the Bible” will be helpful in exposing all to its remarkable variety and depth.

*R&D How would you describe the Bible’s place in your life?*

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, You have inspired the writers of Holy Scripture to give us a picture of Your love affair with Your people, and You have blessed us with copies of the Bible that we can read and understand. We are grateful!*

## Day 2

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**Read: Genesis 15:1-21**

### God Promises

Genesis is the first book of the Bible, narrating the history of Israel from the creation to the death of Joseph. Genesis is a huge book, both in number of chapters and sheer historical scope.

The story of Genesis spans from the very beginning of the world to the creation of Israel—including human creation, Eden, original sin, the great flood, Sodom and Gomorrah. How can one pick from such a vast number of people and their stories? The thing to remember is that there are many human characters in Genesis, but only one major, consistent Character—and that is God, revealing Himself as Yahweh, the great “I AM”.

In the chosen passage, God lays out His covenant with Abram. This is a promise from God to Abram (later renamed Abraham) to make a great nation of Abram’s descendants. According to *The New Bible Dictionary*, “The covenant is a sovereign administration of grace and forbearance, divine in its origin, disclosure, confirmation, and fulfillment.” (This forbearance part

becomes especially important to remember as we read about Israel's almost continuous misbehavior). This covenant shows that God is continually seeking a re-connection of the relationship he had with Adam in the Garden of Eden, where they walked hand-in-hand.

This is a very personal relationship for a person or people. It was a radical idea at the time, and is still difficult for many people to accept. Those who are able to use the image of a parent attempting to reconnect with a wayward child are better able to begin to understand it. When one understands that the Parent in this case also has infinite patience and love and faithfulness, do you see what a hopeful message this is?

*R&D How can I use my experience with my parents, or my experience as a parent, to better understand God's love for me?*

*Prayer: Help me Lord to see how Your promises apply to me, and accept them in my life.*

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### Day 3

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**Read: Exodus 2:23—3:22**

#### God Delivers

Exodus, which means “going out,” is the second book of the Bible and contains the most thorough description we have of the Mosaic constitution. It tells of Moses leading the Israelites from captivity in Egypt.

Exodus is the book of deliverance of the children of Israel (Jacob) from Egypt. What started out as a migration due to famine and a favored people under a former Pharaoh has become slavery under a later Egyptian ruler. These verses capture in a nutshell what is going on, the calling of the prophet Moses, and God's promises of what is going to happen. God makes a dramatic sign—a bush on fire that is not consumed. Moses is told to take off his shoes (slaves went barefoot before masters as a sign of respect).

God has chosen an unlikely representative: Moses is in exile from the Egyptians, in hiding after committing manslaughter of an overseer. Moses also doubts his own abilities (even questioning God's judgment in choosing him!). God reassures Moses of His presence. Moses later argues with God over his speaking ability. Nonetheless, God persists with His plan, using His chosen instrument.

Moses asks God's name, which may seem strange, but names were (and are) very important. By knowing God's name, the belief was that one could call upon God's presence—a very dangerous prospect! That is why the name “I AM” or “Yahweh” is considered so holy that the most devout Jews will not say or write the name.

Yahweh is following through on His promise to Abraham, becoming the deliverer of His people, making it abundantly clear (through ten plagues) to the most powerful ruler in the known world that He is the true God, and the Israelites are His people. God does this with the help of the unlikeliest of leaders with a people who (as we shall see) are not the most faithful or patient.

*R&D Why does God choose to act through so many flawed people in the Bible?*

*Prayer: Lord, help me to remember that no matter how dire the situation or how flawed I am, You can deliver me and work through me to Your greater glory.*

## Day 4

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**Read: Leviticus 19:1-18**

### God Instructs

Leviticus, the third book of the Bible, consists of ritual laws. Its name comes from the tribe of Levi, to which the hereditary priests belonged.

Leviticus is less of a “story book” than Genesis or Exodus. It is viewed as an instruction manual for priests (Levites). Starting from the basis of the original Ten Commandments, the full body of the law is spelled out to the Israelites on all topics: worship, holy days, sacrifices, food, morality, and even personal hygiene. There was no part of their lives that God was not involved in.

Our reading today includes a re-iteration of the Ten Commandments, as well as the phrase that has been called “The Golden Rule”: love your neighbor as yourself. This was an important enough verse for Jesus to quote it specifically. Verse 9 expressly allows for the care of the poor and foreigners. Verse 17 tells us not to hate. These are commandments in and of themselves, but also reminders of why we follow the rules in the first place.

Although this book may seem very dry at times, we should realize its intent. God wanted the Israelites to be very different from the surrounding tribes and nations and to keep themselves pure and holy (apart). Those of us who are parents realize the amount of time we spend telling our children what to do—and especially what not to do. This is not a particularly rewarding part of parenthood, but a very important one. God showed His love, and emphasized His relationship with Israel by the detailed giving of His law to His children.

*R&D Do you ever follow the rules just to be seen as good, or just to get along, without thinking about why the rules are there? What is the spiritual impact of doing this?*

*Prayer: Lord, help me to follow Your law in my heart, not just with my lips. Help me to have such love for You and my neighbor that I cannot think of doing anything but Your will for me.*

## Day 5

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**Read: Numbers 23:13-26**

### God Persists

The fourth book of the Bible, Numbers, is so named because it contains two numberings of the people described in it. It covers the experiences of the Hebrews from their second year in the wilderness to their arrival at the borders of the Promised Land.

The book of Numbers resumes the story of Israel after the escape from Egypt. The people of Israel refuse to move into Canaan, and are frequently disobedient (including Moses’ siblings, Aaron and Miriam). Rebellion is followed by punishment and finally reconciliation with God. In this crucible of forty years in the wilderness the nation of Israel begins to form.

In our reading today, King Balak of Moab, has ordered his prophet Balaam to curse Israel. Balaam is a well-known prophet in the area. Balak feels threatened by the Israelites, and he sees Balaam as his answer to Moses. The only problem with this plan is the major character (God) again. God intervenes and tells Balaam to bless the Israelites instead of cursing them. In fact, Balaam blesses Israel seven times! Once again, God is doing the unexpected—He shows that He is not “just another god,” but The God, with dominion over all, not just Israel. He is acting through a foreign king and prophet to underline His will. Balak’s plan has so thoroughly

backfired that he tells Balaam to just shut up, but those with God's words in their mouths cannot do so.

The message from Balaam is a great message of hope, especially verse 19, about the steadfastness of God's promise. It shows that God is not finished with the children of Israel, even with their many faults. He is also not finished with us as individuals, and is always there when we stumble; working through people and in ways we cannot anticipate.

*R&D How has God shown you (through some totally unexpected channel) that He cares for you?*

*Prayer: Lord, You keep coming back to us, no matter how far we stray. Help us to see and respond when You show up unexpectedly in our lives.*

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## Day 6

### Deuteronomy 4:1-14

#### God Reminds

Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Bible. The name means "second law" and refers to the repetition by Moses of God's commandments. It consists almost entirely of addresses delivered by Moses.

The previous book, Numbers, ended with Israel camped with just the Jordan River between them and their destination: Canaan. But, like Leviticus, Deuteronomy pushes the "pause button" on the story for the sake of theology and speeches. In some ways this book is a re-iteration of the law. But what is said in Deuteronomy is vitally important for the children of Israel to hear.

Today's reading is a reminder of obedience: they are to keep themselves separate and bound to God and His word. This is the path to success for the Israelites; their identity is through their relationship with the One True God. They are about to act out in history the truth of their faith, and show the world who God is and what He can do. It is always a good time (as the Psalm says) to "be still and know that I am God."

The arrangement of the "books of Moses" (Genesis-Deuteronomy) actually teaches a lesson in and of itself. The story, no matter how important, is just a story. By stopping the narrative for recording, re-iterating, or expanding the law (word) of God, the arrangement says: Stop, Listen, This Is Important. It is not an editorial trick, but a reminder of what is truly essential. Note also the fact that God's Promise to Abraham is not even fulfilled in the first five books; so the arrangement is also a reflection of faith: the story will unfold, be patient and meanwhile attend the word of God.

*R&D When has God called you to be obedient, and to attend to His word? Did it come at a time that was convenient to you, or at the time you most needed it?*

*Prayer: Lord, we do not always take the time to hear what You are telling us through Your word. Help us to change, make the time and be attentive to You.*

## Day 7

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**Read: Joshua 24:1-15**

### God Bestows

Joshua, the sixth book of the Bible, is named from Moses' successor, who led the Israelites into Canaan. This book contains the only systematic account of the Hebrew conquest of the land.

The book of Joshua contains the story of the Israelites move into the Promised Land. On the surface, this appears to be a book about war and conquest. We need to realize, though, that God was taking back something that belonged to Him—from pagans who claimed the land in the name of false gods and defended it by the sword. God was enacting His will in history through His chosen people, establishing a beachhead of His kingdom on earth. The Israelites were not taking the land for their own glory or use, but for God's. The Canaanites had become the most horrific of the pagan cultures in that area, and the conquest was as much spiritual as it was military. This only made sense if Israel remained true to God, His plan and His word.

Our passage for today is Joshua's parting address to the people of Israel. This address closely mirrors his address in the first chapter of the book. Instead of summarizing what he (Joshua) had done, he summarizes what He (God) had done. He tells the Israelites to choose their master, and therefore their destiny. He ends with a bold and elegant statement of faith: "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Joshua's name means "the Lord saves." We should remember that there was a later Joshua (better known by the Greek version of the name—Jesus), who did another conquest in the same land. Witness what God has accomplished and make the choice of whom you will serve!

*R&D When have you had to make an uncomfortable choice about following God?*

*Prayer: Lord, help us to have faith, as Joshua did, to stick to Your purpose, believing that You can do anything. Help us to understand that we can participate in these wonders only through belief in You.*

## Day 8

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**Read: Judges 7:1-22**

### Gideon

The seventh book of the Bible, Judges, is so named because it deals with the activities of a number of "judges" of Israel, people who served as leaders during the period between their entry into Canaan and the establishment of monarchy.

The constant refrain in the book of Judges is "Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord." In response, God raised up judges such as Gideon, faithful men and women who were charged by God to hold His people to account. Although the Scripture passage assigned for today gives the heart of the message, you should really read Judges 6-8 to get the full story.

Here's Gideon, called by God, possessed of the very spirit of the Lord, standing in front of a massive army, confronted with a serious foe. That's when God looks at the situation and determines that there are simply too many people on Gideon's side. Too many? Lord, have you seen the opposition? Are you sure? How could there be too many on our side?

God's perspective is truly unique. God sees the full scope of human history. God knows just how far the East is from the West. When you and I see a falling star, it flashes before our eyes and is gone in an instant. From God's perspective, that star has been slowly burning itself out and He has been watching it fall for millions of years.

Gideon obeyed the Lord, sifted the troops, and sent the majority of them home. Ten thousand remained. That was apparently still too many. The Lord instructed Gideon to sift the people again until only 300 stood with Gideon against the mighty Midianites. Well, 300 + 1, The One, the One and only, the Lord God Almighty!

You and I tend to think there is safety in numbers. It is better to be on the side of the numeric majority. But ultimately, what really counts is whether or not we are on God's side of the equation.

*R&D Ask yourself this: In my heart of hearts, is it more important to be with the crowd or with the Christ?*

*Prayer: Holy God, help me to not be afraid of losing the world that I might gain You.*

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## Day 9

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**Read: Ruth**

### Hope

Ruth, the eighth book of the Bible, is a historical narrative about a family of Bethlehem that had been forced to migrate to Moab, and a Moabite daughter-in-law who became an ancestor of King David.

The book of Ruth is all about relationships. In it we see the grief of losing husband and sons, the relationships of women, the provision of relationships that sustain us, and, of course, our relationship with God. The book of Ruth is so brief that I commend the entire book to your reading today.

Naomi is facing a rough road. In the span of ten years, she has moved from Bethlehem to Moab, married off her two sons to foreign women, survived a famine, buried her husband, and then, almost unimaginably, both of her sons. As she packs for home (Bethlehem of Judah), she speaks words of sweet release to her daughters-in-law, encouraging them to remain in Moab, remarry, and live. Ruth 1:14 reads, "Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her."

Grief is common to us all because death is common to all humanity. We grieve. We grieve the loss of identity, the loss of dreams, the loss of love, the loss of life. We grieve, but, as Christians, we do not grieve as those who have no hope. In the midst of her grief, Ruth found that her core identity had been changed. She had not only become a part of the family of Elimelech and Naomi by marrying their son, Ruth had also put her faith in their God. She understood herself to be one of God's people and she committed herself to that path: "your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16b).

When you consider the many griefs you have suffered along life's journey, who are the people whose faith has been a source of solace, comfort, and security? Who are the people with whom you have wept and then parted ways? Who are the ones to whom you have clung? What have you learned about God and God's people as you walked with the Lord through the valleys of the shadow of death?

In the genealogy of Jesus recounted in the opening verses of Matthew's gospel, Ruth appears. God had a plan for her life that extended far beyond what Ruth could have ever imagined. Again, our perspective on the circumstances of life and death are terribly myopic.

*R&D What might God yet do with you as He sets before you His hope-filled future?*

Prayer: *Holy God, tend to my wounds; relieve my sorrow; fill my life as You see fit that I may serve You all my days.*

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## Day 10

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**Read: 1 Samuel 18:1-4**

### Christ-like

The ninth book of the Bible, 1 Samuel, records events leading toward the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel and subsequent events during the reign of Saul, the first king.

In 1 Samuel, we meet Hannah and Samuel, Eli and his sons, Saul, Jonathan, and David. In the opening verses of chapter 18 we read, “the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” David is then taken into the king’s palace and Jonathan essentially transfers his “sonship” to David, stripping himself of the princely robe, armor, sword, bow and belt and placing them on David. It is an unofficial but certainly symbolic act acknowledging that Jonathan views David as the successor to his father’s throne.

Have you ever had a friend like that? Have you ever had someone believe in you to the extent that they were willing to set aside their own positive possible future to support you in becoming all that you can be? Parents have been known to make such personal sacrifices for their children. Sometimes we witness it in extraordinary marriages. But between friends? It is truly rare.

The friendship of David and Jonathan verges on “sacramental”—pointing beyond itself to a spiritual grace. Jonathan has a heart like Christ. Jonathan sets aside his own position as the son of the king, in order that another might be lifted up. Jonathan humbles himself, becoming David’s servant, interceding on David’s behalf, and is willing to offer his life in David’s stead. Now, to be clear, Jonathan is not the savior, but he does demonstrate Christlike character. Philippians 2 reminds us that we are to imitate Christ’s humility, “do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...” (Philippians 2:1-11).

*R&D Somehow Jonathan was able to see the bigger picture of God’s Kingdom work. Somehow Jonathan knew the people of God would be better served if David were king. And then, he humbled himself in order that God’s plan might be advanced. Would I do that?*

Prayer: *O God, give me the very mind of Christ and the very heart of Jonathan. Open my eyes to see Your Kingdom purpose and then lead me by Your Spirit to set aside my agenda in order that I might advance Yours.*

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## Day 11

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**Read: 2 Samuel 12:1-14**

### Sin

Second Samuel, the tenth book of the Bible, concerns the reign of David, who became King of Judah and, later, of all Israel.

The soap opera continues. “Good Lord! Are you kidding me?” If you read the book of 2 Samuel you will find yourself face to face with a wide variety of human depravity and sin that will curl your toenails! Sleeping with the neighbor’s wife and then having the neighbor “off-ed”

on the front lines by friendly fire, are literally just the beginning! This is a book that should come with a warning label.

I find chapter 12 particularly spiritually provocative. The prophet, Nathan, confronts King David over his adulterous actions with Bathsheba and his treacherous “murder” of her husband, Uriah. Using a parable that leads David to “see” his own sin, Nathan delivers the line that cuts to the heart, “You are the man!”

When was the last time you came face to face with the reality of your sinfulness? When was the last time you looked yourself in the mirror and heard the prophet’s voice echo, “You are the man!” “You are the woman!” Maybe you lied to your friend. Maybe you betrayed a confidence. Maybe you didn’t tell your spouse the whole truth. Maybe you broke a vow. Maybe you walked too far down a “wrong way” road. Whatever the sin, you now stand convicted. You are the man and you know it. Now what?

David acknowledges his sin and his sinfulness. He repents and God forgives him, but he also has to face the harsh reality of the consequences of his own actions. The same is true for you and me. God is always faithful to forgive us and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. But nowhere does God promise to magically make the negative consequences vanish into thin air. Sin has consequences— here and now. David has to face the consequences (the wages of sin is death), but David also prays for the restoration of his heart and life of faith (read Psalm 51).

*R&D What sin is God asking you to admit and repent of?*

*Prayer: Holy God, forgive me for the times that I have knowingly sinned against You in thought, word and deed. Convict me today of the sins of which I am unaware and give me the faith to turn to You with a repentant heart, desiring to be right with You and with others.*

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## Day 12

**Read: 1 Kings 17:7-24**

### New Life

The eleventh book of the Bible, 1 Kings, tells of the death of King David, the reign of Solomon, the division of the kingdom after Solomon’s death, and part of the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Its “hero” is the prophet Elijah.

We tend to think that the only person who ever “came back” from the dead is Jesus. But Jesus himself raised a widow’s son, Jairus’ daughter, and Lazarus from the dead. And, as we see from today’s reading, it wasn’t the first time that the people of God had witnessed the raising of a person from death to newness of life.

Why doesn’t God always answer our prayers for children to be delivered from death? Why didn’t God answer the prayer of the mother who surely prayed day and night for her son to be healed prior to dying? Why? There may be nothing that we face in this life that is as “out of the right order things” as the death of a child. And we worship a God who knows the reality of that grief all too well.

There are no easy or cheap answers here. Death is real and it comes like a thief to rob and kill and destroy. Death is not the way of God. Death is the result of our sinfulness. Death comes into the world as a result of our desire to be our own gods. Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly, here and into eternity.

You will note that as Elijah prays he has complete faith in God’s ability to restore life. He has no doubt in God’s ability; what he seeks is God’s will. Can the prayers of the righteous “mo-



tivate” God to do something that God has not already willed to do? Good question. Here’s what we do know from the text: we should pray ardently for the demonstration of God’s power over life and death in order that God’s word might go forth and God’s work might be advanced.

There is no doubt that we have God’s ear; He is listening to our prayers. What are we asking of Him that we truly cannot do ourselves? Are we faithfully appealing to His revealed nature and ardently seeking to advance His revealed will?

*R&D Recall a dramatic instance in which God answered your prayers?*

*Prayer: O God, may my prayers be aligned with Your will; may my life be an instrument of Your grace; may my words be a balm to those around me; may You choose to use me as You used Elijah, to bring hope and Your Word of truth to others.*

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### Day 13

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**Read: 2 Kings 5:1-16**

#### Healing

Second Kings, the twelfth book of the Bible, continues the narrative of the separate kingdoms of Israel and Judah. It contains a number of stories about Elisha, the successor of Elijah begun in 1 Kings.

International intrigue and the varying degrees of reliance upon God and “self” litter the pages of 2 Kings. In the fifth chapter we meet Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aram. Naaman was a mighty warrior and a powerful man, but he was plagued with leprosy. He learns of the prophet Elisha in the land of Israel and he turns to him for help. Now, to be fair, he turns for worldly reasons, for physical healing, and he thinks he can “earn” the grace he desires through politics and money, but he turns nonetheless.

What motivates people to turn to God for help? It occurs to me that many people in our own times only turn to God when they come to the end of themselves, the end of their own resources, the end of their own abilities. God becomes a last resort, instead of the first and primary source.

What issues or challenges or questions are you facing in your life that you are trying to resolve by your own “resources” (intellectual and otherwise):

- Issues in your family
- Issues with your health
- Issues with your finances
- Issues in your home
- Issues in your heart
- Issues in your relationships
- Issues in your spirit
- Other issues?

What would it take for you turn to God for help with that? Are you not yet at the end of yourself? Even if you’re treating God as a last resort, He is ready to redeem. Just look at Naaman.

*R&D Think of an issue you face on which you need help. Turn to God first, in prayer.*

Prayer: *Holy God, forgive me for the times I have only turned to You as a last resort. Help me to turn to You as my primary help in all circumstances. I acknowledge that my resources are insufficient and that You alone are the All Sufficient Lord of my life.*

## Day 14

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**Read: 1 Chronicles 17:1-15**

### A Restful Place of Meeting

First and Second Chronicles, the thirteenth and fourteenth books of the Bible, recapitulate previous books, but concentrate on events in the Southern Kingdom (Judah), developments related to Temple worship and genealogies.

The tabernacle that God instructed Moses to build in the desert was called “The Tent of Meeting.” When David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, it was still housed in a tent. As David sat in his newly-constructed palace, he thought about how he was living in a magnificent place while God’s dwelling place on earth was still a simple tent. It just didn’t seem right to David. But David failed to account for the fact that God Himself had designed that tent!

Through the prophet Nathan, God told David that he could not be the one to build a new house for him. David explained to Solomon: “My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the Lord my God. But this word of the Lord came to me: ‘You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign. He is the one who will build a house for my Name’” (22:7-10a).

God wanted a man of peace to build the Temple—a house for His Name, not for Himself; for what He stood for, not for His person. Like the Tent of Meeting, it was to be a place where man would meet God; a place symbolized by peace, where God’s people could rest as God had rested after working for six days to create the world.

God’s temple on earth is now the Body of Christ—Christians. We are the place where God meets with man. We can enter into God’s rest because Christ has already done everything necessary for us to have victory and peace. The finished work of Jesus has assured us that we are totally equipped for whatever circumstances we find ourselves in. We can rest, trusting in Christ’s work, just like God rested from His work on the seventh day.

*R&D Is something keeping you from entering into God’s rest? How can you find His peace that passes all understanding?*

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for making us Your temple on earth.*

## Day 15

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**Read: 2 Chronicles 20:1-30**

### The Battle Is Not Ours

Second Chronicles, the fourteenth book of the Bible, continues the material in First Chronicles.

What is your first reaction when you see adversaries grouping around you to attack? Even though he commanded a huge army of experienced fighting men (17:12-19), Jehoshaphat was

alarmed and afraid. The even larger army of Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites coming against him threatened to be overwhelming.

Fear in itself is not a bad thing; it is an emotion that prompts us to respond to alarming situations. What matters is how we react to fear. Some people withdraw and try to avoid having to face it; others become irritable or resentful and rage at God and others around them. Jehoshaphat does none of these things, instead providing me (and all of us) with a wonderful example: “Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah” (v.3). He immediately thought to take his concerns to the Lord, and he also proclaimed a fast. When faced with stress, we tend to reach out for things we have always relied on to help us feel secure. Fasting is really about more than just denying ourselves food. It helps to keep us focused on trusting God instead of the other things we have counted on in the past.

Having reminded himself that God is the source of his help, Jehoshaphat reminds himself of who God is and what he has done in the past. Then he tells God, “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you” (v.12b). The Spirit of the Lord’s answer was that they should not be afraid or discouraged because the battle was not theirs, but God’s. What had seemed to be an impossible problem suddenly turned into a glorious blessing. They simply stood there in song and praise as the Lord fought the battle for them, setting ambushes that completely destroyed their enemies, leaving the Israelites with nothing to do but collect all the plunder left behind.

This was one of greatest victories Israel ever experienced and illustrates the kind of victories God wants for us, too, to experience in our lives. Trust God and realize the battle is not ours.

*R&D What are some of the things you have trouble trusting the Lord to help you deal with? What do you think would happen if you did?*

*Prayer: Thank You, Lord, that we can be free of the stress and fear of having to fight our own battles when we call upon You for help.*

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## Day 16

**Read: Ezra 10:1-17**

### Doing the Very Hard Thing

Ezra, the fifteenth book of the Bible, is closely linked with Nehemiah and with 1 and 2 Chronicles. It is named for the priest Ezra who is the chief figure.

The Lord moved the heart of Cyrus King of Persia to allow a group of Israelites to return from Babylonian exile to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the Temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Years later, Ezra, a priest of the line of Aaron, asked King Artaxerxes to let him lead another group out of Babylon to further strengthen and beautify the Temple. When he arrived, Ezra found an incredible condition. The Israelites who had gone before, including the priests and Levites, had not kept themselves separate from the other people living there, but had taken wives from the various Canaanite tribes. This was directly against God’s instruction. Moreover, this was the same thing that had undermined the power of God among them in the past, causing them to take up idolatrous practices that led God to deliver them into the hands of their captors.

After Ezra prays and confesses this great sin, God moves the hearts of the guilty people to come to Ezra in broken-hearted contrition. They admitted that they had been unfaithful to God and agreed to send away their wives and children. What an incredibly hard thing to do!

In Luke 14:26 Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.” He means that no matter what, our relationship with God must come first and foremost. This is very applicable to us today because we hold on to so many worldly things that we need to send away—even little things like grudges and hurt feelings that we have trouble admitting to ourselves we feel. I know I can come up with quite a list of personal things, both large and small, that are going to be really hard for me to let go of. How about you?

*R&D What are some of the things you need to send away? Will you pray for God to move your heart to do so?*

*Prayer: Break my heart, Lord, where it is stone. Give me a new heart, one You can call Your own.*

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## Day 17

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**Read: Nehemiah 8:1-18**

### The Message of Scripture Brings Joy

The sixteenth book of the Bible, Nehemiah, continues the history recorded in the previous books. The political leader for whom it is named shares credit with Ezra for the reconstruction of Jerusalem and the revival of Judaism following Babylonian exile.

It had not been easy; the opposition and harassment from Israel’s enemies had been very determined. But under the leadership of Nehemiah, the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem was finally complete. The rubble had been cleared, the holes repaired, and the gates hung and made secure. The city was reestablished and filled with people to care for it: priests, gatekeepers, singers, and others. The physical part was all in place, but there was still something missing—vitality and a sense of God-centered joy. Having been used by God to rebuild Jerusalem had brought a hunger for His presence and greater knowledge of Him.

In our reading for today, the people call on Ezra to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses in order to feed this hunger. The reading, instruction, and worshipping went on for days as Ezra and the Levites helped the people comprehend the meaning of the Scripture, making it relevant to their lives. The people’s mourning and weeping were turned to joy: “Then 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” (v.12).

True joy comes from knowing the Word of the Lord. When we understand the good news of Scripture and come to know Jesus, we are changed forever and want to live for him. We become infectious excited about opportunities to serve him. It brings the vitality that would be otherwise missing from our lives.

*R&D Why do you study the Bible? How does it feel when you come to understand something in a more meaningful way? Does it fill you with joy?*

*Prayer: Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders. (Psalm 119:27)*

## Day 18

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**Read: Esther 9:20-32**

### Celebrate to Remember

Esther, the seventeenth book of the Bible, has been called a historical novel. It is named for a Jewish woman who became queen of Persia.

Most of the book of Esther tells the exciting story of how Jewish exiles were delivered from almost impossible circumstances. Today's reading comes after all the exciting parts, but it emphasizes a very important lesson—the need to remember what God has done for us.

After the Jews struck down their enemies, the following day was one of resting, feasting, and joy. Mordecai encouraged them to make it an annual event, one that would be forever passed down from generation to generation, and it is still celebrated today. The Feast of Purim is a two-day event. On the first evening, the story of Esther is read aloud and noise-makers, drums, and horns accentuate booing and hissing whenever the name Haman is mentioned. The second day is given over to feasting, celebrating, and the exchanging of gifts. God never wants the Jewish people to forget how He delivered them and brought them victory. Jewish tradition says that the Feast of Purim is the only feast that will still be observed after the Messiah comes. All the others, like the Feast of the Tabernacles and Passover, will cease. Only the Feast of Purim will go on and on.

My Messiah has already come. Since becoming a Christian, I have the Holy Spirit living within me. I have a constant reminder that God is always walking with me, that the victory over death is going to last forever. Like the Jews in the story, my initial deliverance started a process that goes on and on; it's called sanctification. I can't forget what God has done for me because His light is shining in me and growing the Fruit of the Spirit in my life.

*R&D Do you have celebrations of times in your life when God did something special for you? Do they fill you with joy?*

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to remember what you did for me each and every day. Help my life to be a constant celebration of your love.*

## Day 19

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**Read: Job 28:12-28**

### How to Find Wisdom

Job, the eighteenth book of the Bible, is the first of five poetic books. Many believe it is based on actual occurrences. Its central theme is why a righteous person has to suffer.

What is more desirable than wealth, riches, and honor? When God appeared to Solomon and told him he could ask for anything he wanted, Solomon's request was for God to give him wisdom and knowledge (2 Chronicles 1:7-12).

In our reading for today, Job, as he continues to search for an explanation of what he is going through, ponders wisdom and how to obtain it. He notes how some men dedicate their lives to searching for treasure and, likewise, look for answers to the riddles of life. While they can find the gold, they cannot find the wisdom. Wisdom is elusive. Job wants to understand why God has treated him this way.

While we understand what's happening in Job's life because we have knowledge (from the beginning of the book) of the challenge that Satan made to God, we don't understand about many things in our own lives. In times of sudden trouble and despair, our hearts can cry out,

“Why is this happening? How can God let it?” Wisdom is the answer to that question! It is both the knowledge of the reasons behind what happens and, more importantly, how to use that knowledge to make things work out rightly. That is why it’s so much more valuable than riches.

Job describes how it can neither be bought nor found. So how do we get it? Where does it come from? Job reveals what God has spoken: “And he said to man, ‘The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding’” (v.28). We will never be able to understand the riddles in our lives until we come to the place where we stand before God with loving trust in Him. When we believe in our hearts that God knows what He is doing, we can begin to have wisdom. By obeying God, we start to understand.

*R&D What are some of the riddles in your life? What steps can you take to begin to understand them?*

*Prayer: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His precepts have good understanding. To Him belongs eternal praise. (Psalm 111:10)*

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## Day 20

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**Read: Psalm 18:46-50**

### The Lord Lives!

Psalms is the nineteenth book of the Bible. It is a treasury of prayer, praise, and adoration.

The Lord lives! There is nothing cloudy, or melancholy, or uncertain about this statement. Cup your mouths and shout it from the rooftops! Good News! He is alive! Is that not what our hearts yearn to identify? The very core of our being needs to know this truth. He lives.

The Hebrew word used here for “lives” is Chay, which means: raw; fresh; strong; quick; running; springing. This is a snapshot of how Jesus is today. We get a picture of movement and newness. Notice the present tense of the word. The Lord didn’t just live at one time, he continues to live; and not in any decrepit state. Revelation 21:5 says, “He who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true’” (ESV). He lives in freshness and in strength and in truth. Our lives are constantly in motion, our paths ever changing. There are times when things are familiar, and there are times when we feel like a blind person stumbling along with arms outstretched feeling the walls. Wherever we are on our journey, we know God is with us. He is not sitting in the corner, He is right with us.

One of Jesus’ greatest promises is found in John 14:19, “Because I live you also will live.” I recently had the privilege of being with my mother throughout her terminal illness. I saw her body becoming weak, but I witnessed her spirit—the person she really is—soaring. Inside she was still fresh, strong, quick, running, springing! I perceived deeply in my heart how the Holy Spirit was infusing her with life—even though it was the invisible life of the Spirit. I am certain as she breathed her last breath here, the Lord, who lives, brought her from the hands of death and carried her to life. She lives! And it is all due to the unfathomable love of God for us. By His one great sacrifice, God has joined the person in us—our spirit, the invisible part of us that God sees and knows and loves—to Himself.

The Lord lives! And we also will live. Forever! All praise, honor, and glory be to my Rock!

R&D *Bring to mind a recent painful situation. Looking back, how do you see God beside you through it?*

Prayer: *Almighty and everliving God, reveal Yourself to me as I journey through each day. Let me see Your life in every person I encounter.*

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## Day 21

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**Read: Proverbs 18:2-21**

### The Power of Life and Death

The twentieth book of the Bible, Proverbs, is considered “wisdom literature” containing maxims and wise sayings.

It’s interesting the way we associate words with ideas. When I think of something with a great deal of power, I picture something large and forceful. A hurricane fits the image. It sweeps across a huge area, and its force can devastate a region and impact lives for generations. Proverbs 18:21 declares, “The tongue has the power of life and death” (NIV). How can something so small and delicate have such power? Our words have the muscle of a hurricane; they can destroy us and ravage lives for generations. Or, on the other hand, our words can bring life and healing. Proverbs 15:4 says, “The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life.” I know the power one word of encouragement spoken at the right moment can produce. It is the same type of dynamic energy as a lightning bolt. We, astonishingly, have this control.

When my husband and I decided to get married we had no idea our pre-marital counseling classes were going to teach us lessons we would remember forever. The priest talked about this very subject Proverbs teaches: the power of words. Much to our surprise, in our very first counseling session we received instructions on how to fight fairly! We learned not to use words like “you never” or “you always.” “Them’s fightin’ words!” From then on when we overhear these kinds of phrases in a social situation, you can bet our eyes are as big as saucers as we ponder the destruction those words produce. I have heard the provocative statement: “I am the master of my unspoken words, and the slave of those which should have remained unsaid.” But, when we have caring words of affirmation and love for one another, we bring life and healing. The frightening thing is: the choice is ours.

R&D *Do you realize the power you have to bring life or death by your words? Is there someone in your family to whom you could bring life and healing by sharing some kind words today?*

Prayer: *Lord, Jesus, fill me with your words of wisdom and life so I can bring your love to everyone I encounter.*

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## Day 22

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**Read: Ecclesiastes 1:1—2:19**

### Which Way Is Up?

Ecclesiastes, the twenty-first book of the Bible, considers life with deep skepticism and pessimism but concludes with the admonition to remember the Creator and keep His commandments.

How do you find out what has meaning? Nothing can make things clearer than a crisis. When disaster strikes, suddenly priorities shuffle and in a split second your life has been reordered. In the midst of sudden chaos and pain we are shaken, and there bubbles up from some un-

seen place within us a fresh sense of priority. Anyone who has been in a crisis situation is stunned by how clear and right the new order is.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon deals with the order of his life. He uses the word “meaningless” 36 times to sum up the poverty of his soul. He has come to a place in his life where the most profound of all priorities—his relationship with God—must be explored. It must be dealt with; it can’t be pushed away any longer. And as he struggles with what is not meaningful, he exposes the wisdom of God. If anyone had riches and the finer things of life, it was Solomon. So many people think if they just had more of the creature comforts of food, money, cars, time, lovers—all the pleasures of this world—they would find happiness and fulfillment.

If we have come to this crisis of faith and found out for ourselves only God can satisfy our souls, only He can give our lives meaning, then “The kingdom of God has come near you” (Luke 10:9).

Recently a physician recommended I have some further diagnostic tests on a suspicious area. In no time at all I was reviewing my life, examining my faith, and reordering my priorities. The great shuffle was underway and I felt God’s protective hand over me. I came to a crisis of faith 22 years ago and it was then when I knew, deep within my being, God is the one who saves me, completes me, and satisfies the deepest and most profound longing of my heart. Jump off the diving board of faith into the great river of wisdom. The water is great!

*R&D Can you remember a time in your life when you were in a crisis situation? Did your priorities change? How were things reordered?*

*Prayer: Dear Lord, it is into Your hands I commend my spirit. Please help me order my life in such a way that You are always my highest priority.*

## Day 23

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**Read: Song of Solomon (Song of Songs) 6:1-13**

### **The Beauty of Love**

The Song of Solomon, also known as the Song of Songs, is the twenty-second book of the Bible. It is a poem of human love.

The young lovers we read about in the Song of Solomon are head-over-heels in love with one another. They praise each other’s beauty. When they are not together enjoying their love for one another, they are trying to capture images to describe their passion and loveliness. They have given themselves to each other without reserve; they hold nothing back. While there seems to be a sense of mystery and discovery and delightful surprise as they perfectly give and take, there is also trust and commitment.

Love doesn’t last very long without the unseen and deeper qualities of inner beauty. While outer beauty certainly fades, inner beauty can also change. As we look to Jesus and he transforms us by his spirit, we can grow more beautiful on the inside where it really counts. Because of his power by grace in our lives, we can develop the beautiful parts of our character that define who we are. These things are as discernable as any outer qualities. They are the traits of integrity, sensitivity, and sincerity. Do you know people who have these inner characteristics? Are they not some of the most beautiful people you know?

1 John 4:19 declares, “We love because he first loved us.” The beautiful love within the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is the blueprint for us in our love relationships. The Trinity is (1) Equal in nature, (2) Separate in persons, (3) Submissive in duties. Notice every chance,



every possible opportunity Jesus has he points to the Father. The Father is always lifting up Jesus. They both lift up the Holy Spirit. They are head-over-heels for each other! The magnificent beauty of love! What a thrill it is to be invited into this eternal love relationship.

R&D *Who comes to mind when you think of inner beauty? What quality is it that you admire?*

Prayer: *Dear Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thank You for Your love that created us. Help me love You with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and my neighbor as myself. Help me build up the inner qualities deep within me.*

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## Day 24

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**Read: Isaiah 55:1-13**

### **The Favor of a Reply Is Requested**

Isaiah is the twenty-third book of the Bible. It is the first of five prophetic books considered major works because of their length.

Invitations are not commands. The nature of an invitation is one of choice. You have the option of accepting or declining, but it is important to reply. In Isaiah 55, the Lord uses the imagery of an invitation to a banquet to exhort His people to receive the blessings He offers. He advertises the perfect menu. He has something to satisfy all who are hungry or thirsty.

Think about a young, 12-year-old Jesus sitting in the Temple in Jerusalem as he hears these words of the prophet Isaiah read and discussed. I envision him captivated by these expressions of love and grace. Now fast-forward 20 years and think of Jesus at age 32. Tired from a journey, he is sitting beside a well at high noon in the heat of the day. A Samaritan woman comes up to draw water and he asks her for a drink. He tells her about a different kind of water, living water; and those who drink of it will thirst no more. It is an invitation to the banquet of love and life from the Author of Life.

The Word was present in creation with the Father and the Holy Spirit. When God calls us to the banquet, “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters,” the very Author of Life invites us to meet him; the creator of all that is, seen and unseen. Think of it!

Professor Peter Kreeft made this type of analogy: It would be like Sherlock Holmes not meeting Watson or Dr. Mortimer, but Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It would be like Alice not meeting the Mad Hatter or the Cheshire Cat, but Lewis Carroll. It would be like Tom Sawyer not meeting Huck Finn or Injun Joe, but Mark Twain! We are invited to the very table of the Creator Himself! How do you say no? Why would you say no?

When I throw a party, I make sure to invite enthusiastic guests. They fire things up with their stories and laughter. When I get their reply and know they are coming, my heart leaps for joy. I can only imagine how God delights when we accept His grand invitation.

R&D *Your name is at the top of the invitation that says, “Come” (v.1), “Listen” (v.2), “See” (v.4), and “Seek” (v.6) the Lord. Have you given your reply? Are you willing and eager to say yes to His invitation?*

Prayer: *Dear Lord, Creator of all things; thank You for inviting me into Your love. Lord, I accept Your grand invitation to drink the living water of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## Day 25

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**Read: Jeremiah 1:1-19**

### Rescue Me

The twenty-fourth book of the Bible, Jeremiah, is named for the prophet who lived during a particularly difficult time in the history of the Jewish people. In the midst of power struggles descending upon them from every side, Jeremiah is clearly a sensitive and deeply feeling man who deplors his nation's sinful tendencies and impending doom.

Some of the most dramatic and beautiful stories we ever hear in the news revolve around a rescue. After hurricanes we see dramatic footage and vivid pictures of first responders plucking people and pets from rooftops. We have all heard heroic tales of a terrified parent running back into a burning building to rescue a child. I have heard of a panicked mother suddenly strong enough to lift a car to free a trapped child.

Jeremiah was afraid—and with good reason. He knew he would be persecuted for giving the people of Judah the dangerous and unpopular message that God was going to judge the nation that had fallen into idolatry, sin, and disobedience. Jeremiah needed to hear of God's protecting presence. "I am with you and will rescue you" (v.8). God promises never to be away when the hour of struggle comes. The prophet Jeremiah hears these vital words of security not once, but twice: "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you, declares the Lord" (v.19). The Hebrew word used here for "rescue" is *natsal* which means: snatch away, defend, deliver, pluck, preserve, rescue, save. This very same word is used over and over again in some of the most dramatic rescue stories in the Bible. It is used when God "delivered" His people from the hand of Pharaoh (Exodus 18:10 KJV). King David and his Mighty Men "defended" the land and defeated the Philistines (2 Samuel 23:12).

When it comes to rescue stories, the most awe-inspiring ones have the heroes giving their own lives to save another. Jesus is the perfect picture of the mighty rescuer. Talk about dramatic saves! "Jesus, being in very nature God, made himself nothing, taking the nature of a servant, became man, and became obedient to death" (Philippians 2:6-8). The most spectacular rescue mission ever! He saved me, rescuing me from spiritual death to live for all eternity in the presence of himself and all others who receive his atoning sacrificial love. Psalm 18:16 says, "He reached down from on high and took hold of me." Now that's safety. That's security. That is the rescue of a lifetime.

*R&D Rescue and protection go hand in hand. Can you bring to mind a story of how God has rescued you? What were the circumstances?*

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for your extravagant rescue; I would have no chance without you. You gave yourself just for me. I give myself to you; body, soul, mind and spirit.*

## Day 26

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**Read: Lamentations 1:1-9; 3:22-27**

### Why Lord?

Lamentations, the twenty-fifth book of the Bible, consists of five poems.

Lamentations was written by Jeremiah around 586 B.C., toward the end of his ministry. It was written during a three-month interval between the burning of Jerusalem and the departure of the remaining Jews to Babylon. This poem describes the woes of the people mixed with a message of repentance, and promise of God's mercy.

Jeremiah watched as Jerusalem was transformed by the Babylonians: from a wife to a widow (1:1), from a princess to a slave (1:1), from friends to enemies (1:2), from honor to shame (1:8), and from respectability to prostitution (1:9). Jeremiah, known as the “weeping prophet,” is in despair.

Yet, in the midst of his pain, Jeremiah sees hope. Despite the waywardness of the Israelites and God’s anger with their rebellion against Him, He loves them still. The Lord is merciful, compassionate, and faithful, bringing hope and salvation (3:22-26). In the direst circumstances that can befall anyone today, we are to wait on God our Father. Despite our waywardness, He loves us too.

*R&D Share a time when you were in need and the Lord came to your aid?*

*Prayer: Father, I thank You for being merciful, compassionate, faithful, and a source of hope and salvation.*

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## Day 27

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**Read: Ezekiel 36:24-32**

### I Am the Lord

Ezekiel is the twenty-sixth book of the Bible. It is named for a priest, mystic, and author who wrote with fervor and passion concerning the needs of his people in a time of crisis.

Ezekiel was born in 623 BC during the reign of King Josiah. It was during King Josiah’s reign that the Book of the Law was found in the Temple and a great reformation took place during that period. Ezekiel was 25 years old when he was taken into exile in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was removing people of political influence from Jerusalem. The Babylonians had taken Daniel the prophet eight years earlier during their first invasion.

Ezekiel the prophet had a unique two-part ministry. Part one was between 592 and 586 when his messages warned of the destruction of Jerusalem. After a time of silence (13 years) Ezekiel began a new message of hope, promise and comfort for the exiles.

Sixty-seven times the statement “I am the Lord” is found in this book. Although those specific words do not appear in our passage for today, the reading is a classic statement of who God is and what He means to His people. He promises to restore Israel both physically and spiritually. He will give them a new heart and put His Spirit within them. They will be convicted of their sinfulness and how far short of His glory they have fallen.

God’s promise has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Because of him, we can have a new heart and His Holy Spirit living within us. Yes, the Spirit does convict us of sin, but we have forgiveness through the grace of God and the blessings that God wants for each of us.

*R&D What does having a “new heart” mean to you?*

*Prayer: O Lord, give me a new heart that I may have a heart only for You.*

## Day 28

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**Read: Daniel 2:20-23**

### Daniel's Prayer

Daniel, the twenty-seventh book of the Bible, narrates the trials and triumphs of Daniel as a captive in Babylon. It is the last of the five major prophetic works and contains prophetic descriptions and visions.

Daniel was a slave in the court of the king of Babylon, though in a somewhat exalted place. The king had many soothsayers, astrologers and advisers, and Daniel was considered to be one of his advisers. The king had had a dream and wanted it interpreted. The problem was that he would not tell anyone what the dream was. He expected his advisers not only to be able to interpret the dream but to reveal the dream itself. This seemed an impossibility; and, having gotten no help from his advisers, the king was on the verge of having all of them eliminated.

In this dire situation, Daniel pleaded for mercy, not from the king but from God! During the night, the dream was revealed to Daniel in a dream. Our reading for today is Daniel's prayer in thanksgiving to God for His wisdom and power. Daniel told the king his dream and interpreted it for him. The dream foretold the four kingdoms that would dominate the world over the next roughly 1,000 years.

St. Jerome (AD 347-420) said this of Daniel and his gift of foretelling the future: "I wish to stress ... that none of the prophets has so clearly spoken concerning Christ as has this prophet Daniel. For not only did he assert that He would come, a prediction common to the other prophets as well, but also he set forth the very time at which He would come. Moreover, he went through the various kings in order, stated the actual number of years involved, and announced beforehand the clearest signs of events to come."

*R&D What do you recall about the life of Daniel?*

*Prayer: Lord, You helped Daniel out of a lot of tough situation. Please guide me through the challenges of life.*

## Day 29

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**Read: Hosea 3:1-11, 14:4**

### Redemption

Hosea is the twenty-eighth book of the Bible and the first of the group considered to be the "Minor Prophets" because their books are relatively brief. Hosea lived in the Northern Kingdom and was a contemporary of Amos.

Hosea ministered to the Northern Kingdom from about 770 to 725 BC ending just before the Assyrians took Judah into captivity in 722 BC. God used Hosea's life as an example of how to love a wayward people. Married to the prostitute Gomer, Hosea's life was his prophecy, giving the Israelites a visible example of their spiritual idolatry, and God's love for Israel in spite of her spiritual infidelity.

Hosea married Gomer even though he knew she would not be faithful to him. They had three children (whom God named with words reflecting Israel's unfaithfulness) and then Gomer committed adultery. God asked Hosea to take her back, which he did. In the course of this "soap opera" life Hosea was leading, the Lord also had him prophesy about Israel and what was happening to her as a result of her unfaithfulness to God.

Going to the end of the story, God, through Hosea, calls the people to repentance (14:1-3) and then promises redemption (v.4 and following). This is the ongoing story of God's love for His people. Whether it be the Jews of the Old Testament, or Christians today, we have a tendency to fluctuate in our faithfulness to the Lord. Yet, God never fails in His love for us. How blessed we are!

R&D *What are the evidences of unfaithfulness to God in our day?*

Prayer: *Father, forgive.*

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### Day 30

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**Read: Joel 2:12-17**

#### A Call to Repentance

Joel, the twenty-ninth book of the Bible, consists of only three chapters. The writer is a man of moral insight and force. The text is poetic in nature.

Joel was one of the earliest writing prophets, around 836 BC, and in his youth would have known both Elijah and Elisha. We know little about him, except that he was the son of Pethuel and may have lived in Jerusalem. His audience was Judah, the Southern Kingdom. His message is one of foreboding and warning, but is also filled with hope.

Joel's focus is on "the day of the Lord" as the time when God will judge the nations (2:28-32). Peter quoted this passage in Acts 2:16-21 as the outpouring of the Spirit predicted by Joel that happened at Pentecost.

Our reading for today, however, centers on God's call to repentance that must precede the outpouring of His Spirit on us. "Rend your hearts and not your garments" (v.13a), the Lord says. In Jewish tradition, deep remorse was shown by tearing one's clothes. But God is not interested in outward signs; He wants inward change. "Return to the Lord, for he is gracious and compassionate" (v.13b). God loves us and wants His best for us, which can happen if we are willing to give our hearts to Him and live in obedience to His will.

R&D *Prepare a prayer of repentance for our nation that it may return to the Lord.*

Prayer: *"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 will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).*

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### Day 31

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**Read: Amos 5:27**

#### The Day of the Lord

The thirtieth book of the Bible is Amos, considered to have been the first prophetic book to have been written. Amos speaks to the time of the reign of King Jeroboam II (786-746 BC) in the Northern Kingdom. Israel, despite threats from surrounding powers, had become prosperous, leading to complacency and moral laxity.

Amos, whose name means "Burden-bearer," was from the small town of Tekoa in the Judean hills. He was not the son of a prophet, nor of a priest. He was a humble shepherd, tending his sheep and sycamore-fig trees. He could have stayed where he was, performing his work, car-

ing for his family and worshipping his God. But the Lord had other plans for Amos, telling him to take a message of the future to the Northern Kingdom.

God gave Amos a vision of what was about to happen to the nation of Israel. Amos' prophecy begins by God's condemnation of all of the neighbors of the Northern Kingdom, including His scathing denunciation of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Amos' own home territory). These words must have been music in the ears of Israel. Suddenly, however, Amos pronounces God's judgment on Israel, enumerating their sins in detail.

In our reading for today, we face again (as we did in Joel) "the day of the Lord." Here the term means the imminent destruction about to be rendered by the Assyrian army as well as the future day of God's judgment of all nations. Although there were those who longed for the day of the Lord, it would not be what they hoped for but punishment for the sins of the people. God has no regard for their religious feasts, their offerings and their songs. Instead, "let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream" (v.24). For the faithful, the day of the Lord will be glorious; not so for those who do not love and serve Him.

R&D *How do you feel about "the day of the Lord"?*

Prayer: *Lord, show us our superficiality, remove our blind spots, and accept our sincere love.*

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## Day 32

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### Read: Obadiah

#### Security Only in the Lord

Obadiah is the thirty-first book of the Bible and the shortest of the prophetic books. The book, probably written in the first half of the fifth century BC, is in poetic form.

"The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD" (vv.3-4 ESV).

The book of Obadiah begins with the prophet denouncing the pride and treachery of the nation of Edom, which will result in their destruction, and ends by giving a vision of hope for the restoration of Israel. Edom traced its lineage back to Esau, the older twin brother of Jacob (Israel), and through their father Isaac to Abraham. Despite their common heritage, and contrary to God's express purpose for them, Edom frequently entered into military conflict with Israel. In 586 BC they committed the ultimate betrayal by participating in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the deportation of the inhabitants into captivity. As can be seen from verses 3-4 Edom prided itself on its geographical location which it believed rendered it invincible. However, as predicted by Obadiah, Edom was eventually destroyed; by the end of the fourth century Arabs from Nabatea had overrun Edom and by the first century AD the nation had completely ceased to exist.

Obadiah's message reminds us that neither our security nor our pride, either as individuals or as a nation, can be founded on our natural resources or abilities. Those who rely on their own strength, who place all their confidence in themselves, and who continue to walk contrary to God's purposes, can and will be overcome no matter how invincible they might appear. This is a word of caution to those who would disdain God's ways and His purposes and put all their confidence in themselves: their own strength, their own intellect, or their own wealth. It is likewise a

word of comfort to individuals or nations that are attempting to walk humbly according to God's ways in the face of seemingly overwhelming opposition.

*R&D Are you living in your own strength or the Lord's? Are you living according to your purposes or the Lord's?*

*Prayer: Lord, reveal to us those areas of our lives where our pride in our own abilities keeps us from relying on You. Give us strength to trust ourselves completely to Your purposes and tender care.*

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### Day 33

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**Read: Jonah 4:1-4**

#### **Reluctant Prophet**

Jonah, the thirty-second book of the Bible, is in the form of a story, considered by many to be a parable or allegory.

“You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster” (v.2 ESV)

Jonah has been called the reluctant prophet, and that is something of an understatement. When God tells other prophets to “arise” and to “go” they obey; not so Jonah, he rises up all right and then he goes—in the opposite direction! Jonah's only words of prophecy to the Assyrians, when he finally realizes that he cannot continue to disobey God's command to go to them, are summed up in a single line: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” That's it! No mention of God, no call for repentance, no words of hope for restoration. And yet these Gentiles trust that this is a message from the one true God and, without even a word of hope from the prophet that repentance will bring forth a change in the outcome of the prophecy, they repent. And God “relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.”

This is precisely what Jonah thought might happen, and didn't want to happen, and is now mad that it has happened. For Jonah knows this about God: “you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.” Jonah would have preferred Assyria's destruction!

I must confess that there are times when I can so associate with Jonah, when I am quicker to judge than to forgive; but thankfully for me, who needs much forgiveness, we have a God who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and who relents from disaster; a God who calls His children to share His character with those who do not know Him, and who, without our witness, are on the road to destruction.

*R&D Is your heart sometimes hardened against a person or a nation different from you? How might God use you to share His character with someone whom you might consider an enemy or at least very different culturally?*

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are indeed the Father of all nations and peoples; soften our hearts so that we might reflect Your character to those who without the knowledge of Your Son will surely perish.*

## Day 34

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**Read: Micah 6:1-8**

### What Is Good?

Micah is the thirty-third book of the Bible. The prophet Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah in Judah, the Southern Kingdom, during the reign of King Hezekiah, and prophesied about God's judgment to come for the nation's sins.

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (v.8 ESV).

Micah 6:8 is one of the most familiar passages from this prophet and, in the context of his prophecy, serves as a stark contrast to the actions of the rulers in authority in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem leaders of Micah's day had been lining their own pockets at the expense of the poor of the community, and the priests had rejected God's ways and led the people astray by giving them a false security: "her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money." Instead of exposing sinful practices in the community, acting with justice, and protecting the poor, the priests had been preaching platitudes and falsely reassuring the people of their security in the Lord: "Yet they lean upon the Lord and say, 'Is not the Lord among us? No disaster will come upon us.'" However, just as Micah prophesied, disaster did indeed come upon them.

Throughout the ages it has been tempting to rationalize sin, and in our day to call it indiscretion, or to blame it on upbringing or genes or even to call sinful behavior normal behavior. Those leaders in Micah's day who turned a blind eye to sin and gave the people false assurance received special opprobrium from God through the prophet. Through Micah the Lord pleads with His people to return to His ways, the ways that He has taught them from of old, to acknowledge and then repent of our sin, and "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with [our] God." He pleads with us still through His written Word.

*R&D Do we take our security in the Lord for granted, or do we walk humbly before Him, examining our lives for those areas of sin that He will gently reveal and will then readily "cast into the depths of the sea" when we repent of them?*

*Prayer: Lord God, Your compassion and steadfast love is never-failing; reveal to us we pray where we have taken our security in You for granted, teach us how to walk humbly with You, how to love kindness and do justice. We ask this in the name of the one who walked humbly amongst us, Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

## Day 35

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**Read: Nahum 1:1-13**

### An All-powerful God

Nahum, the thirty-fourth book of the Bible, probably covers the period 650-612 BC and may have been written just prior to the fall of Nineveh to a coalition of her enemies.

"The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him, but with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of his adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness" (vv.7-8 ESV).

Whereas in the 8th century BC Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, repented of their sins and were saved from destruction through the witness of Jonah, by the middle of the next century Nahum is prophesying the judgment that will be visited upon Nineveh and conse-



quently the downfall of that empire. And indeed by the end of the 7th century BC the Assyrian empire is overthrown by the Babylonians.

Interspersed among the words of judgment on Nineveh are words of comfort to Judah: “though they are at full strength and many, they will be cut down and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more. And now I will break his yoke from off you and will burst your bonds apart” (vv.12-13). But perhaps the most stirring of images that Nahum draws is that of God as a divine warrior coming to the rescue of His people (vv.2-8), an image that finds its echoes in the Revelation to John (Revelation 19:11-21.)

Although I know that our Lord fought a battle for us on the cross, the paintings and sculptures that portray his broken and bloodied body remain etched on my mind; and in my sorrow at his suffering on my account I can forget that our God is a warrior God. Our God is a mighty God, the commander of unnumbered armies of angels poised to do battle in our defense. Our God is the divine warrior, who delivered His people from oppression and from the power of sin at the cross, and who will deliver His people from the presence of sin at the end of the age.

*R&D Do you trust in the strength, the power, and the might of the Lord God? Do you know that He leads the angel armies in your defense?*

*Prayer: Lord God, heavenly king, teach us we pray to always remember that You are the defender of our cause, and that there is nothing that can stand against the strength of Your mighty arm.*

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## Day 36

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**Read: Habakkuk 3:1-19**

### Rejoice Nonetheless

The thirty-fifth book of the Bible is Habakkuk. The prophet was apparently a native of Judah who probably lived in Jerusalem.

Internal corruption in Jerusalem had reached epic proportions during Habbakuk’s time. The prophet is not only incensed by the social injustice, the graft, and the apparent impunity with which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, and with a society in which the righteous suffer and those who commit evil go unpunished, but he is also very unhappy with God for apparently doing nothing about it! Habbakuk spends some time in “vigorous fellowship” with God about His seemingly hands-off attitude.

Neither is Habbakuk particularly thrilled with God’s solution to the problem: the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon. However, Habbakuk reflects on all of God’s mighty deeds in the past and comes to a place of completely trusting in God to bring good out of evil. Even though things look like they are going to get worse before they get better he continues to trust that what God promises He can and will bring about.

There are seasons in my life when I find it is easier to trust God unconditionally than others. These are the times when I can see His blessings abound in the lives of those around me. And then there are those times when a child I know dies from cancer, when a husband decides to leave a loving wife and children because he needs “his own life,” when a teenager is killed in a car accident, and then I make my complaint to God. What never ceases to amaze me is the gentleness with which God deals with my complaints and how He leads me back to the Scriptures like our reading for today. And how on the other side of the complaint both my relationship with Him and my faith in Him have been deepened.

*R&D Are there times when you feel like railing against God like Habbakuk and Job? It's okay; they did, and wrestling with God has a tendency to bring us closer to Him. Be ready to be gently reminded, however, that He is God, and we are not, that He is good, and in all things we can trust in Him.*

*Prayer: Sovereign Lord, God of all creation, we thank You that You call us into honest relationship with You and for reminding us of Your past deeds and mighty acts, and of Your great kindness towards us. Teach us we pray to live our lives confidently trusting in You in all circumstances, through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

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### Day 37

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**Read: Zephaniah 3:14-20**

#### **A Remnant**

Zephaniah is the thirty-sixth book of the Bible. The author was probably active during the period of King Josiah of Judah, who reigned from 640 to 609 BC.

“The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.” (3:17)

Like Micah, Zephaniah decries the character and actions of the rulers and priests in Jerusalem: “her officials within her are roaring lions ... her prophets are fickle, treacherous men; her priests profane what is holy; they do violence to the law,” and he prophesies the judgment that will fall upon the city because of its sin.

The fearful circumstances of the Day of Judgment, the Day of the Lord, are counterbalanced by the tender care with which the Lord keeps safe a remnant who are humble and lowly, who “seek refuge in the name of the LORD.” As with so many of the prophecies, Zephaniah’s words can be interpreted on many levels: at the very least, at an historical level and at an eschatological level that looks forward to the end times. In his second epistle Peter says this about that time: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10 RSV).

As Christians this is a day that we should be looking forward to as it will bring with it the return of Christ, a new heaven and a new earth, and the final overthrow of sin and death. I must confess, however, it is not something that I focus on very often, until I read a passage like that quoted above and my heart yearns for that time when God is in our midst, when He Himself quiets us with His love, and exults over us with loud singing. Maranatha, Lord! Come, Lord Jesus!

*R&D Those of us who are “in Christ” need not fear that great and terrible day of the Lord, but do we really look forward to it? That is the exhortation of the New Testament writers; live in the present, but keep your eyes fixed on the Lord’s return.*

*Prayer: Lord God, heavenly King, we thank You that through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross those who call him Lord need not fear the day of that same Lord but may wait in eager expectation for its coming.*

## Day 38

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**Read: Haggai 1:1-9**

### Priorities

Haggai, the thirty-seventh book of the Bible, is concerned with the rebuilding of the Temple as the center of worship in Jerusalem.

Fifteen years earlier the foundation of the Temple had been laid. But nothing more had been done. The people had lost interest. God, speaking through Haggai, informs them that this was the reason for their poor crops.

The Lord says “These people say: the time has not yet come for the Lord’s house to be built” (v.2). At that time they lived in “paneled houses,” “planted much but harvested little... ate, but never had enough... drank but never had their fill... put on clothes but were not warm, earned wages but put them in purses with holes...” (v.4, 5). What a similar and sad reflection of our own society and our own discontented lives today.

The Lord’s message through Haggai was that “each of you is busy with his own house” (v.9). We all strive to be content and secure. Once when my husband and I were struggling financially, I told the Lord I just wanted to “get ahead,” to which His Spirit replied, “Get ahead of what? Ahead of My will? Ahead of your neighbor? Ahead with your own agenda?” Our focus must first be on building the house of the Lord—not a structural building but one within our heart, and putting the “things” of our life in the proper order.

*R&D Is God really first in my life with my desires, time and treasure? Do I seek His ways in all my decisions?*

*Prayer: Lord, help me to build Your house in my heart and offer all that I am to You, knowing my true contentment comes only when things are in their proper order, which means God first.*

## Day 39

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**Read: Zechariah: 4:1-10**

### By His Spirit

Zechariah is the thirty-eighth book of the Bible. It stresses the importance of Temple worship and looks toward a Messianic kingdom with an ideal ruler.

What is said here is meant directly for Zerubbabel and the house he was building. It is an exhortation to take courage, in the day of small beginnings, by keeping our eyes on the grandeur of the end. The angel speaking to Zechariah explains the visions seen in a dream. The angel asked, “Do you not know what these are?” (v.5). I am comforted by Zechariah’s response: “No, my lord” (v.5). He didn’t understand and, so often, neither do we. So much of what we seek to understand does not come easy; whether we are reading Scripture, experiencing daily challenges or facing the hardest questions of life.

The next verse brings great hope: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty” (v.6). His Spirit is the power we need. We don’t have to bring might or power or even understanding to the table to be successful in our lives. It is by His Spirit that we will succeed.

Verse 10 also asks, “Who despises the day of small things?” This is another verse to encourage us about the “small things” that we can offer to God in our own walk. God has always used imperfect people to carry out His plan. I’m convinced that He can use us too—even with our individual idiosyncrasies and failures—to do great things for Him “by His Spirit.”

R&D *Do I get frustrated when I don't understand? Do I have a tendency to despise the "small" things I do for the Lord?*

Prayer: *Lord, help me offer up my life to You even when I don't understand. Help me know that You will honor the small things I do for You and, by Your Spirit, create eternal differences in the lives of those around me.*

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## Day 40

**Read: Malachi 3:8-18**

### Tithing

Malachi, the thirty-ninth book of the Bible, is the last book of the Old Testament and the last of the minor prophetic works. The book deals with a period of great anxiety (perhaps between 458 and 432 BC) when the people have returned from exile, only to be afflicted with drought, destructive locusts, weak religious lives, and dim spiritual vision.

Robbing God sounds serious, not something we would intentionally do when you consider the consequences of an angry, powerful God. Yet He states that if we do not tithe, we are robbing Him.

But with the command to tithe comes an incredible promise: "Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty. And see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have enough room for it" (v.10). The floodgates of heaven; now that's an abundant blessing! He is a God who asks us to obey but also promises abundant blessings when we do obey. What a loving Father.

We don't always understand God's ways (Scripture says His ways are not our ways), but He asks us to obey by faith, not when we understand or when it "make sense" to us. God's financial request of us is to tithe 10%; and, if you consider that He owns everything, He is actually allowing us to keep 90%.

But we, just as the people in Malachi's time complain; "we see the arrogant blessed and the evildoers prosper" (v.15). The Lord responds, "You will see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not" (v.18). Once again, it is not for us to understand but to trust Him and obey His commands as a follower of God

R&D *Lord, am I faithfully giving You what You expect of me or do I need to seek forgiveness and give You what is Yours?*

Prayer: *Lord, help us be faithful in our tithes so that we do not rob You. Help us hold fast to Your promises of abundance when we are obedient to Your word and commands, especially when it's hard to obey.*

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## Day 41

**Read: Matthew 14: 22- 33**

### Relationship

Matthew, the first book of the New Testament and the fortieth book of the Bible, may have been composed as early as 80 AD. It is the first of the Gospels, meaning "good news," and has been brought to us about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Its focus is to show the Jewish people that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah.

This is the familiar story of Jesus walking on the water, and Peter's attempt to do so as well, that provides many wonderful insights into our relationship with Jesus.

Verse 27 – “Take courage! It is I, don't be afraid.” How often Jesus told his disciples (and us) not to be afraid. He is Lord of our life, of our loved ones, and of circumstances and the future; we need to take courage that he can still any storm!

Verse 30 – “But when Peter saw the wind, he was afraid.” Peter was willing to step out of the boat and walk on water, but when he saw the wind he was afraid. What are the winds in our lives that make us afraid? Jesus calls us to keep our eyes on him and not the wind.

Verse 31 – “Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’” Jesus is always there when we tremble and fear. He gently reaches out his strong hand to catch us and shows that our faith is too small.

Verse 33 – “Then those in the boat worshiped him.” When Jesus brings us through difficult times and we acknowledge that he was there all along, we come back to a place of worship.

*R&D How often has Jesus shown me that he will not leave me or let the winds and waves of life overpower me—and how often do I still doubt?*

*Prayer: Lord God, thank You for Your patience with us as we try to walk on the water but still falter when we see the winds and waves. Help us to increase our faith to keep our eyes directly focused on You and confidently walk on the waves and through the storms of our lives.*

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## Day 42

**Read: Mark 8:11-21**

### Signs

Mark is the second Gospel and the forty-first book of the Bible. It is the shortest Gospel, containing only sixteen chapters, apparently written for Gentiles outside of Palestine, in a simple and direct manner.

Despite the fact that for two years Jesus had been healing multitudes of people sick with every kind of disease and had fed the 5,000, the Pharisees were asking for a sign. Jesus sighed deeply and later told the disciples, “Be careful, watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees” (v.15). Be careful of their influence, just as we must be careful of the influence of our culture today.

Our lives are like that science experiment we did as children with white carnations. Based on the color of the water the carnations were placed in, they would soon turn the same color. What are we soaking up or immersing our lives in today? Whatever it is, it will surely reveal itself in our lives.

Jesus also challenges the disciples: “Don't you remember when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand?” (vv.18, 19). How many times in our lives do we desperately cry to the Lord with a dimming hope that He can help us, forgetting all that He has already done in our lives—the miracles, the grace, the tough spots He has brought us through and how He has brought us to this very day?

*R&D Am I careful of what I allow to soak up in my life? Am I reflecting more of Jesus or more of the world?*

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want more of you; help me to reflect your abundant life and not the dinginess and grayness of the world.*

## Day 43

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**Read: Luke 10:25-37**

### Good Samaritan

Luke is the forty-second book of the Bible, and the third Gospel. Probably written between 80 and 90 AD, its author also wrote the book of Acts. Luke is considered the most beautifully written of the Gospels and one of the most beloved books in the Bible.

Jesus talked a great deal about kindness, just the plain old-fashioned, everyday habit of common kindness. This is the wonderful and familiar story of the Good Samaritan. Concerning the priest and the Levite who passed, Jesus was showing that orthodox Jews at the time simply did not want to have anything to do with Samaritans, whom they considered as half-breeds, both physically and spiritually. These days, people are often fearful to stop and help others, knowing there is risk involved and perhaps feeling it's really "not our problem."

Jesus tells us that the Good Samaritan took pity on the wounded man, bandaged his wounds, put him on his donkey, took him to an inn and paid for his keep. This was not a simple act of kindness but an investment of time, effort and money given to a complete stranger. When Jesus asked the expert in the law which of the three was his neighbor, the expert replied, "The one who had mercy on him" to which Jesus replied, "Go and do likewise" (v.37).

I find it fascinating that the ultimate word to us from Jesus is to go and have mercy. Our lives are busy and we can be cynical of those who fall on tough times. To be the Good Samaritan that Jesus praises, we will have to set our prejudices aside, be available for a phone call or visit, and be willing to invest in other peoples' lives with mercy.

*R&D If I am honest, would I have been the self-righteous priest or the Good Samaritan?*

*Prayer: Lord, give me a merciful heart and help me look for ways each day to have mercy on those around me and give of myself to them, just as if that person were You.*

## Day 44

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**Read: John 14:11-21**

### Awakening

John, the forty-third book of the Bible, is also a Gospel, but its nature differs from the other three (and thus is not considered synoptic—i.e, having a similar viewpoint and arrangement). The Gospel of John looks at things from a more spiritual point of view and was apparently written for adult members of the new churches to confirm and strengthen them in the faith.

Verses 12-14 are the turning point. They became the "ahah!" Scripture for me. The day and the moment are very clear to me when the Holy Spirit moved me from being a nominal Christian to that of being a believer in the living Lord Jesus.

On that "ahah!" day, I was mulling over verse 12: "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." As I pondered what Jesus had done in the miracles, especially the healings, I wondered how I could do those things. Wasn't he speaking just to his disciples? And then the nickel dropped...I comprehended finally that Jesus would not leave a powerless Church! He, God the Son, went to his heavenly Father so that they could send the Holy Spirit to act through us, the Church. Our claim to this wonderful power is to believe that he is in the Father and the Father is in him. "Ahah! Alleluia!"

As I read on in the chapter, verse 20 sprang out: “On that day, you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me, and I am in you.” So that is what Jesus meant when he said (v.16), “I will ask the Father and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth” and the Spirit of truth had just acted on me! “Ahah! Thank you, Jesus!”

R&D *Do you have an “Ahah!” Scripture or event? How did it affect your life?*

Prayer: *Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds to comprehend the truth and power of the Scriptures, in Jesus name we ask it. Amen.*

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## Day 45

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**Read: Acts 2:32-47**

### Assurances

The Acts of the Apostles, commonly known as Acts,” is the forty-fourth book of the Bible and is an extension of the Gospel of Luke, Acts being called the “Gospel of the Holy Spirit” because it tells of the coming of the Spirit and how the early followers of Jesus lived, worked, and worshiped under the guidance of the Spirit.

Peter, on the day of Pentecost, reminded a crowd of God-fearing Jews of how Jesus fulfilled prophecies by the working of miracles, wonders, and signs, of which they were perfectly aware. Even so, with the help of wicked men, they had put Jesus to death. But the tomb could not hold him; God raised Jesus to life, and all the disciples were witnesses to his resurrection.

Peter continued, “Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Cut to the heart by Peter’s indictment, the crowd appealed to Peter and the other disciples, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter responded: “Repent, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off.”

As I read this passage, a second “Ahah!” came with recognition (finally and assuredly) that this Jesus was then...and still is alive! Not alive in some non-material, spiritual sense, but as alive as he ever was! His ascension took his resurrection body out of our sight, but not out of our lives. He is alive! “Alleluia!”

My third significant “Ahah!” came with the call to repentance. True repentance. It was for my sin that Jesus died. By my participation he was put to death. The Holy Spirit, through Peter’s speech recorded in Scripture, spoke powerfully to me that day! And I was cut to the heart.

My fourth “Ahah!” came quickly in Peter’s assurance of the gift of the Holy Spirit for me and for my children. (v.39). Indeed, it is assured for all who are far off, in time and location. Alleluia!

R&D *In what sense have you discovered how “far off” you have been?*

Prayer: *Almighty and most merciful Father, call us to true repentance, and help us to know that Your arm of grace is not shortened by time or distance, in our Savior Jesus’ name we ask it.*

## Day 46

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**Read: Romans 8:1-17**

### Spirit Vs. Law

Paul's Epistle to the Romans is the forty-fifth book of the Bible. It contains the most systematic statement of Paul's beliefs. It is one of four documents (along with the two letters to the Corinthians and the one to the Galatians) that sum up what he regarded as the essentials of the faith.

The gift of the Holy Spirit described in Acts 2 is more fully developed by Paul in his epistle to the Romans. Paul, through lengthy development, discusses the function of the Law and how through the Law we come to understand our sinful nature and the "law of the flesh."

Paul raises up the Law as good; but, in that the Law condemns sin, it is an instrument of condemnation. That is because, despite our best intentions and efforts, the law of our sinful nature wins out in our struggle against sin. Chapter seven ends with Paul's lament, rhetorical question, and revelation, "Wretched man that I am, who will save me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Paul goes on to celebrate that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Jesus Christ the law of the Spirit of Life has set us free from the law of sin and death.

Though free, we are not free to let our minds run aimlessly. We are to set our minds on what the Spirit desires. In fact, we have an obligation to live by the Spirit and put to death the misdeeds of the body.

But, will we succeed or fail, as Paul lamented in chapter seven? Paul encourages us not to be afraid, noting that if we are led by the Spirit of God, we are children of God. "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." Alleluia!

R&D *Do you have a fear of failure or a confidence that you are God's child?*

Prayer: *Father, we pray that Your Holy Spirit would testify with our spirits that we are indeed Your children, and that we may approach the throne of grace with humility and address You boldly as "Daddy."*

## Day 47

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**Read: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16**

### Wisdom

The First Epistle to the Corinthians is the forty-sixth book of the Bible and was believed to have been written by Paul at or near Ephesus, probably between 54 and 57 AD.

This passage to the Corinthians vividly points out that in the preaching of the Word, the preacher and the hearer play active roles. Paul says that in weakness and fear, and with much trembling, he preached the unadorned truth. Paul relied, not on his own "wise and persuasive words," but on a demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power, so that their faith would not rest on man's (Paul's) wisdom, but on God's power. Thus the effective delivery of God's word is the product of the Holy Spirit's power, not man's skill.

So much for the skill of the preacher. What about the hearer? Paul says that the Word is a mystery to those who hear it without the benefit of the Holy Spirit. "No eye has seen, no ear has



heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” But God has revealed it to us by His Spirit.

Without the Spirit, man cannot “accept the things come from the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (v.14). But the spiritual man is empowered/equipped and willing to receive the word effectively delivered by the empowered preacher. So much for the ability of the hearer to “figure out” what he’s heard. The incredible truth about the effective hearing of the word is that “we have the mind of Christ” (v.16b).

*R&D Despite our devotion to Jesus and the reading of the Word, some passages of Scripture remain mysteries. When this occurs as you read, pause and seek the mind of Christ.*

*Prayer: Almighty Father, we thank You that many of Your gifts and plans for us remain beyond our ability to comprehend, and we bless Your Holy Name for those that we can grasp, especially for Your Son Jesus.*

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## Day 48

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**Read: 2 Corinthians 3:1-18**

### Written on the Heart

The Second Epistle to the Corinthians is the forty-seventh book of the Bible. It was written over a period of time from various places in Macedonia and contains the first piece of autobiography in the early Christian Church, giving details about Paul not found elsewhere.

The question of how to read what is written about God goes beyond what pen and ink record. The truth of Jesus is to be read in the lives of the believers. Paul assures the Corinthians, “You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts” (vv.2-3).

An old but true saying reminds us Christians that “you may be the only Bible somebody has ever read.” The manner one reads, mediates upon, and interprets Scripture is very important; but the manner in which he lives out and shares that message is vital to the one who receives and/or observes the message-bearer. It is said that Ghandi had read the Christian New Testament and said, “I could well have become a Christian had I ever met one.”

Nevertheless, we are not to become afraid of failure as witnesses to our Lord Jesus. We should be confident that the prevenient grace of God will bring our weaknesses to perfection through the Holy Spirit and that that same grace will prepare the hearts and minds of those truly seeking the Lord.

That confidence comes from the freedom given by God’s indwelling Holy Spirit. Paul states, “Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit is, there is freedom. And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

*R&D Think of those you have known who truly glowed with the presence of God? What do you think of being transformed into His likeness?*

*Prayer: By the power of Your Holy Spirit, Lord, make us more and more into the image of Your Son Jesus; in his name we ask it.*

## Day 49

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### Read: Galatians 6: 1-10

#### Doing Good

The Epistle to the Galatians is the forty-eighth book of the Bible. Paul wrote it to the church or churches in Galatia following reports that some of the members were attempting to “Judaize” Christianity (impose unnecessary Jewish practices).

At the close of his epistle to the Galatians, Paul repeats his urgent theme: Live by the Spirit and beware of the sinful nature which leads to destruction.

Paul is a realist, however. He knows that even members of the Church backslide and get into trouble. The restoration of a fallen brother/sister should be done gently but carefully, lest we enter into the same sin ourselves. Not to address sin in the community is to give that sin patent approval and encourage its continuance and spread. To come against it too harshly may be to cause discouragement and to deny the grace and peace Jesus offered to the woman caught in adultery or to the thief on the cross. Paul encourages us, “Carry one another’s burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (v.2).

It may seem a contradiction in that, two verses later, Paul says “Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.” “God cannot be mocked.” He will not be hood-winked by our outward shows of goodness nor be blind to our sin. Each believer must take personal stock of his own actions and bear the load of constant vigilance over his own soul.

Keeping a watchful eye on his own soul, and gently reaching out to restore the fallen, the true believer proves to be the good steward of his master. A man reaps what he sows.

“The one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

*R&D Does Paul need to remind you of the power of the Holy Spirit in you to guide and protect you?*

*Prayer: Merciful Father, help us to address our own weakness before we focus on that of others. Thank You for Your mercy and grace at work in us and others, in Jesus’ name.*

## Day 50

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### Read: Ephesians 4:1-16

#### Paul’s Call to Unity

The Epistle to the Ephesians is the forty-ninth book of the Bible and may have been a sort of “circular letter” to a number of churches. In this book, Paul’s concept of the ideal church and the practical conclusions he draws from that concept are expounded.

The Epistle to the Ephesians is a different and refreshing type of Pauline letter. Instead of responding to a specific issue or providing help to correct a problem facing the young church of that time, Ephesians was written to encourage and edify the community of Christ. The central message of this encouraging letter is the mystery of unity; the unity of believers in Christ and the unity within the body of Christ.

Christ is the center of the Father's purpose to redeem people and adopt them as sons and daughters. Joined in Christ, people are made holy, forgiven and blameless. Upon joining Christ, believers are blessed in belonging to the one body and one Spirit (v.4).

Although this gift of reconciliation is free, Paul implored believers to live a life worthy of the calling they have received. They are to make known to the entire world the oneness of the union between Christ and believers and the unity within the body of Christ. Unity, however, does not mean uniformity. The Church is a body with Christ as the Head and it is made up of many parts that fulfill different roles for the edification of the entire body.

The fulfillment of this high calling requires constant vigilance of the sin which is insidious and can destroy the unity of the body of Christ. Paul exhorted each one of us to live as children of the light and avoid the deeds of darkness (5:8-11). We are not alone and defenseless in this calling, for we have the armor of God to protect us as we spread the message of forgiveness and unity to the world.

*R&D Are there things in my life that are sabotaging unity either in my relationships with other people or with God? What are they?*

*Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, and lead me to experience that great mystery of unity with Christ and with my fellow believers, and help me to become a unifying presence, a bearer of peace.*

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## Day 51

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**Read: Philippians 1:27—2:11**

### **Paul's Call to Selfless Surrender**

The Epistle to the Philippians is the fiftieth book of the Bible and is one of a series of letters sent by Paul from prison. Though written at a time when he was facing martyrdom, it is almost wholly an expression of joy.

The military trains its people to see themselves not as individuals but as part of something bigger than they are. In doing so, the units can better fulfill their mission and soldiers are more willing to make sacrifices. This is often referred to as *esprit de corps*, which is French for group spirit. This is vital for the military in carrying out dangerous and difficult tasks.

Paul was trying to promote the same spirit among the Christians in Philippi. Part of their mission, like that of every Christian, was to stand firm in one spirit, side by side, and live life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (v.27). Paul invoked in them a sense of friendship and exhorted each Christian to look beyond their interests to that of their fellow Christians.

Just as the military uses heroes as examples of people who embodied self-sacrifice, Paul pointed to Christ as the perfect example of self-giving for the sake of the Father's will. Jesus emptied himself and was obedient to the Father to the point of death on the cross (2:8). His sacrifice was not in vain and the Father exalted him so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (2:10).

Paul also showed how he, Timothy, and Epaphroditus all gave up their self-interests for the sake of the Philippians. They did it in obedience to the Lord, and Paul further stated that he lost all things to gain the Lord. There lies the key in all of us seeing beyond ourselves. We do so confidently, knowing that we will be victorious with the Lord. Like all our Christian heroes, we can do everything through him who gives us strength. (4:13)

R&D *Surrendering means to “give oneself up, as into the power of another.” It implies a loss of control unto a greater power. How well am I doing this in my relationship with God?*

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to surrender in those areas that I insist on being in control. I open my hands and choose to let go. I am yours.*

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## Day 52

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**Read: Colossians 2:6-12**

### Paul’s Call to Solid Faith

Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians is the fifty-first book of the Bible. It was occasioned by a report of a dangerous heresy spreading in Colosse.

One of the great dangers facing the Church today is the pervasiveness of heresies. These false teachings can be difficult to identify because they are often half-truths. A common lie that is being taught by some church leaders today is that Christ is “a way” to God instead of teaching that Christ is “the way” to God. This teaching sabotages the Christian message by just changing the article from “the” to “a”.

In his epistle to the Colossians, Paul models an effective way for Christians to confront modern day heresies. Believers in the church in Colosse had been led astray by false teachings that combined both paganism and secular teachings with the Christian faith. This amalgamation of teachings diluted the Christian message and denied the sufficiency of Christ for salvation.

Before Paul dealt directly with the false teachings, he focused on the supremacy of Christ. Paul taught that Jesus is ruler over all of creation and that all things within creation were created by him. He was fully human and fully God. Paul clearly taught that Christians are fully reconciled by Christ’s death on the cross and that their faith in him is sufficient for their salvation. There is no need to follow certain rituals and restrictions in order to be saved.

Heresies have plagued the Christian community from its infancy and will likely persist to the end of times. We can protect the faith by not watering it down or complicating it with human rules and ideas. We can follow Paul’s lead and always remember that Jesus was fully human and fully divine, and it is only through him that we are reconciled with God. Jesus Christ is the only way to God.

R&D *Are there danger zones in my faith, areas where a lack of knowledge or revelation is leaving me vulnerable? What are they?*

Prayer: *Lord God, without faith it is impossible to know You or please You. Help me to know my faith so well that I’ll be able to see the lies and deceptions and live in the light of Your Truth.*

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## Day 53

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**Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12**

### Paul’s Call to Action

The First Epistle to the Thessalonians is the fifty-second book of the Bible. Paul wrote it to one of the earliest churches he had established, in response to concern the Thessalonians had about the meaning of the Second Coming of Christ.

While I attended seminary, one of many things that we talked about was that the Church is to be counter-culture, not a sub-culture of the world. The Church is to be different from the world and its views. A temptation that faces many churches and Christians today is to change the

Christian message to make it more attractive to the world. This is often done in the belief that this is essential for church growth. Also, some Christians do not want to be seen as different from others, so they conform to the world.

Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to keep their faith and not give in to the pressure of conforming to the world and its ways. The Christians in Thessalonica were being harassed and pressured by both local Jewish and Gentile communities to give up their faith and return to their old lives. Paul urged them to remain strong and to continue in their faith. Paul reminds us of the truth that we only have an audience of one, our Lord. We are not to try to gain people's praise but to live a life worthy of God.

The Christian life can be difficult, yet we are to persevere like Paul told the Thessalonians to do. We are not to live an idle life with our complete focus on waiting for Christ's return. We are to live a life congruent with our faith and always encouraging and building each other up, realizing that in doing so we are demonstrating the Gospel to the world.

*R&D Whose praise is most important to me? Am I living for an audience of One?*

*Prayer: Lord, correct me in those areas where I've compromised my faith and strengthen me in those areas where I've been faithful. Help me to follow You.*

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## Day 54

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### **Read: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15**

#### **Paul's Call to Steadfastness**

The Second Epistle to the Thessalonians is the fifty-third book of the Bible. It was apparently sent shortly after the first letter to that church.

I had a friend in college who was a fellow pilgrim in the Christian walk. One day he shared with me that because the world is full of evil, he was excited and hopeful that Christ would return soon. As we spoke, not only was my friend looking forward to Christ's return but he was actually becoming impatient; he wanted to leave the world that day.

Many of the Christians in Thessalonica were so preoccupied with the belief that the return of the Jesus was imminent that some of them stopped working altogether as they, too, anxiously waited. This belief in the impending return of Christ was probably fueled in part by the continual persecution of Christians. Paul found it necessary to confront this issue more strongly than he had in his first epistle to them.

Paul did not deny the fact that the Thessalonian Christians were suffering, but he encouraged them to remain steadfast so that the name of the Lord would be glorified in them and through their faith. Paul tried to convince the Christian community that the "between times" were not meaningless and that they should not be living a life of passive waiting but an active and productive Christ-centered life.

Paul reminds us to remain steadfast in our faith and hold onto the hope of the final victory of the Lord. However, until that time comes, we are to live a life that is not idle but one that actively seeks to glorify the Lord. While we are still here on earth, we are to do God's work and allow the Holy Spirit to continue his sanctifying work in us.

*R&D When I think of Jesus' return, what feelings does that evoke? Why?*

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, as I live in these in-between times, show me your vision for my life and continue your sanctifying work in me so that I may be more fully ready for your return.*

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## Day 55

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**Read: 1 Timothy 6:6-21**

### **Paul's Call to Authentic Living**

The fifty-fourth book of the Bible is the First Epistle to Timothy. It is one of the three so-called Pastoral Epistles (along with 2 Timothy and Titus) because it is directed to church leadership (rather than to the whole people of God) concerning church government, practices, and teaching.

There is a danger of being too ethereal when speaking about the Christian faith. Discussion about the nature of Christ, theories of salvation and the like are important, but our faith is more than ideas; it is practical, and that is often forgotten. Paul's first epistle to Timothy is full of practical instruction for Timothy and in the management of day to day issues for the church at Ephesus. The underlying theme is that Christians should live their lives in a manner that honors God.

Paul commanded Timothy that, as a leader, he was to continually pursue a life full of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness (6:11). He was to ensure that church leaders led lives that conform to the teachings of the Christian faith. Paul said all of this because he knew that an authentic faith required a life that was congruent with the teachings of Christ.

Paul also had sound advice concerning the use of money. He did not say that money was evil, but he did warn that the love of money can lead to ruin, sorrow and straying from the faith (vv.9-10). Paul saw the need for people to work and earn money to take care of themselves and their families. He advised Timothy that the church needed to be a good steward and help those who were truly helpless, such as older widows with no families.

This letter to Timothy is full of wisdom that we should heed today. Our faith is a faith that we not only talk and think about but, more importantly, it is a faith that we live out day to day. It is a faith that calls us to be wise and authentic in our daily lives.

R&D *How does the way I live my life demonstrate the authenticity of my faith?*

Prayer: *Almighty God, please guide me with Your Spirit so that I may live a life that is worthy of You.*

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## Day 56

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**Read: 2 Timothy 3:10-17**

### **Says Who?**

The Second Epistle to Timothy is the fifty-fifth book of the Bible and is also a Pastoral Epistle, although it is much more personal than First Timothy.

It seems to be the question of our times: "Says who?" It is the question of authority. True or false; good or bad; right or wrong—"says who?" Paul reminds Timothy, and tells him to pass this along to others who are able to teach, that the Scriptures or the "sacred writings" are "breathed out by God."

It is indeed true that God worked through human authors to convey His message in the Bible. But, imagine a great waterfall with two rivers running together and converging just above

the falls. Once the water from each river has gone over the fall, it is impossible either to separate them or to identify them one from the other; they have become one greater river below the falls.

So it is with the divine inspiration of Scripture as it flows from the pen of the human author. If God is like one of the rivers and the human author is like the other, then their creative convergence at the falls generates “sacred writings.” After their composition, it is impossible to separate the human and divine sources or identify them one from another. Our passage says that “all Scripture is breathed by God (or spoken into being) . . . that the man or woman of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (v.16).

Why? Because everything Christian—the knowledge of God, worship, faith, beliefs, or behavior—rises or falls based upon the Bible, where the Creator addresses His beloved creatures through the instrumentality of human authors. This is God’s promise to every believer: in Scripture is the knowledge of what is universally and timelessly true, good, and right. Says who? Says God!

*R&D Why do you think God went to all this trouble inspiring the Bible? Do you think it has anything to do with you? In what respect?*

*Prayer: Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life.*

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## Day 57

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**Read: Titus 1:5—2:1**

### Sound Doctrine

The fifty-sixth book of the Bible is the Epistle to Titus, the third of the Pastoral Epistles. It contains advice about the organization of the churches in Crete, which had been left in the charge of Titus.

There does not seem to be much “devotional” about “doctrine.” At least, until one puts it together with its counterpart: sound doctrine leads to sacred living; right beliefs produce right behavior; or, more technically, orthodoxy is the foundation for orthopraxy (right action or practice). Indeed, part of the traditional evaluation of what is correct Christian theology is whether or not it will lead to godly living.

Regularly, I hear people claim that you can make the Bible say anything you want it to say. Is that true? Sure! It is true of any piece of literature. You can take out phrases, sentences, even passages from the narrative and create your own tale around it. There is nothing insightful here, or new. Indeed, the book of Titus has plenty to say about just such first century false teachers, and condemns their beliefs in the same two-fold manner: “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works” (v.16).

How can you and I know what the correct understanding of the Bible is? The answer is very, very old. The Apostles co-labored with the Spirit of God to write the New Testament books, and it was the same Holy Spirit who helped them individually, and as a group, to understand the divinely intended meaning of those Scriptures. This was universally referred to in the first two centuries of the church as the “apostolic faith.” For example, one generation away from the Apostle John, Irenaeus argued against one of the Church’s first heresies, Gnosticism, by stating that orthodoxy was founded solely on the “apostolic faith” and that you cannot legitimately

make the Scriptures say whatever you want. The “apostolic faith” was, and still is, the Christian Church’s measure of “sound doctrine” (2:1).

*R&D Is God speaking to your heart in the present from the Bible written so long ago? What is He saying?*

*Prayer: Blessed Lord, guard our beliefs that we may always be in Your will.*

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## Day 58

**Read: Philemon**

### **Never Beyond the Grace of God!**

The Epistle to Philemon is the fifty-seventh book of the Bible. It is a personal letter to a friend, urging him to take back, in Christian love, a runaway slave who has been with Paul in Rome.

The Apostle Paul led the runaway slave, named Onesimus, to repentance of his sin(s) and to faith in Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord, while both were in a Roman prison (vv.9-10). No matter how one arrived in a Roman prison, it was a very bad place to be. But as bad as the prison was, for Onesimus to be returned to his master, from whom he had stolen, was perhaps a grimmer prospect than jail—but for the Grace of God!

By the grace of God, Paul shares with Onesimus how Christ interceded for him to the Father to save him eternally. In like manner, Paul intercedes for Onesimus to his master, Philemon, to save and restore his life temporally. Martin Luther once said, “Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus also does Paul for Onesimus with Philemon.”

By the grace of God, Onesimus’ story is also my story—a rebel who found forgiveness. But this short book of the Bible connects with me on a second level, because Philemon was also a pastor and the church he shepherded met in his home (vv.1-2). Church leaders, like Philemon, are to be filled with grace. Indeed, family members, fellow Christians, and church leaders are all admonished to be willing to restore to fellowship this penitent new believer.

This does not ignore the implications of sin (vv.17-19). Yet, Paul offers us a real-life example of how to treat a repentant sinner and, thereby, demonstrates his fidelity to the command of Jesus: “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven” (Luke 6:37). The Christian message proclaims that one is never beyond the grace of God.

*R&D Who at work, in your family, at the gym, or elsewhere could be blessed by your sharing the hope-filled message of life in Christ?*

*Prayer: Lord, help me to be one who both sends and receives in Your name.*

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## Day 59

**Read: Hebrews 9:11-26**

### **Pleasing to God**

The Epistle to the Hebrews, the fifty-eighth book of the Bible, is in the nature of an essay. It was apparently written to persons under pressure of ostracism or persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ. It stresses the supremacy and finality of the revelation of Christ.

The ministry of an Old Testament priest was to offer sacrifice to make the worshippers pleasing to God. For this to occur, they had to perform essentially two priestly actions: 1) kill the



animal and catch its blood in a basin and, then, 2) take it into the Holy of Holies and offer it upon the Ark of the Covenant.

Why death and blood? Because sin against the Creator is a capital offense for the creature (Genesis 2:17; Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Romans 6:23), and the animal was to die in the place of the offender. An animal was not “good enough” for a human being, but it was the offering of it in faith that made it effectual.

What does the New Testament book of Hebrews say about Jesus’ priestly ministry, as it parallels the two actions of the Old Testament priest? First, the last Jewish prophet, John the Baptist, predicted Jesus’ death on the cross, calling him the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

If the death of Christ and his blood shed on the cross was the fulfillment of the first Old Testament priestly action, what was the second? The resurrection of Jesus was the second priestly action, “For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (v.24).

We are pleasing to God because of these two priestly actions of our great High Priest: 1) on the cross, Jesus took the place of all humanity, receiving in our place our deserved capital punishment and, then, 2) through the resurrection, Jesus offered his life in our place before the very throne of God and, thereby, made us worthy to stand before God—for he is worthy and we are now “in Christ.”

*R&D Have you ever felt that you were ashamed of your life? What could you do to become pleasing to God? Hint: Romans 10:9-13.*

*Prayer: Blessed Jesus, you did it all for us. We are eternally grateful.*

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## Day 60

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**Read: James 2:14-26**

### Faithfulness to God

The fifty-ninth book of the Bible is the Epistle of James, a “General Epistle” (because it is addressed to a wide circle of leaders rather than to a particular group). It contains practical advice in how to “be doers of the word and not hearers only.”

A huge issue at hand in the early Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem and beyond (“the Dispersion” 1:1) was just how far away from the teachings of the Law could new Christians go behaviorally. We can easily appreciate the sheer delight felt by these early Christians from a Jewish background who were freed from the oppression of being forced to keep both the biblical Law and the rabbis’ minute prescriptions of it to everyday life. They proclaimed to the world liberty from the works of the Law, now that faith had come!

James must have seemed like a real sourpuss when he condemned their folly, saying, “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (v.17). Nor did he endear himself by his analogy: “Even the demons believe—and shudder” and are under the condemnation of God (v.19).

James holds up for them and us the example of Abraham, the father of all the faith-filled, “You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works” (v.22). Not only were Abraham’s righteous works faith-filled, but his works completed his faith.

Here is the great lesson for us: James calls Christians to a “completed faith.” That can mean at least two things. First, the idea of completed means that faith and works go together and one without the other is incomplete. Second, the idea of completed has to do with something’s

intended outcome, its purpose or goal, and the purpose of faith has as its goal the formation of the character of our life—decision by decision, action by action. A Christian’s deliberately chosen faith-filled works of righteousness equal, over time, faithfulness to God. This faithfulness to God is seen in a Christian’s life as integrity, the quality of being complete in faith and works. Its importance is felt—almost viscerally—when one considers persons whose professed faith is not matched by how they behave—choice by choice, action by action.

*R&D What area of your life illustrates a disconnect between what you believe and what you do? How could you work at changing that?*

*Prayer: Lord, help me to be a doer of the word and not a hearer only.*

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## Day 61

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**Read: 1 Peter 5:1-11**

### Humility Leads to Utility

The First Epistle of Peter is the sixtieth book of the Bible and is believed to have been written by the Apostle Peter. It shows him to be a practical adviser to the humble followers of Christ rather than a learned or systematic theologian.

One of the best ways to get a handle on a concept is to understand its opposite. If our passage calls forth humility in Christians, then one would think pride is that which should be renounced. So, let’s look for a moment at a word picture painted by the original New Testament word for pride, the Greek word *hubris*.

In non-biblical Greek, one of the everyday uses of *hubris* by the ancient Greek writers was to refer to a wild horse: beautiful, dangerous, but of no use. It was not until the horse was “broken” that it became useful. These early writers spoke of a stallion that had been broken as being “meek”—not weak; for all of its beauty and dangerous, raw power was now usable!

Peter says, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that in time he will lift you up in honor” (v.6). This says that God’s hand is at work to bring us to power-filled meekness; our response to His creative work in us is to humble ourselves. Once God has “broken” us of our pride, through the circumstances of life, He will lift us up to the honor of serving our God. Humility leads to utility.

The great preacher of a few generations ago, Phillips Brooks, wonderfully puts our bridled strength in its right perspective by saying, “The true way to be humble is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatness is.” It is that realization that exalts us in humility.

*R&D Are you too proud or too timid in how you view your greatness? Remember, God made you. Do you know how He wants to use you?*

*Prayer: Lord, help us to be able to look realistically at who we are: both grateful and humble that we are made in Your image.*

## Day 62

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**Read: 2 Peter 1:16-18**

### The Voice of God

The Second Epistle of Peter (like James, a “General Epistle”), is the sixty-first book of the Bible. Written during a time of threatening heresies, it urges Christians to hold firmly to the truth.

St. Peter wrote, “We made known to you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Blessed Peter heard “the voice borne to him by the Majestic Glory...for we were with him [Jesus] on the holy mountain” (vv.16-17).

When have you heard God’s voice? When has God spoken to you? I have had a few “mountaintop” experiences, but I have heard Him mainly in the valleys of life. I have heard Him speak to me in the midst of literally tens of thousands of people praising God as loudly as they could, and also in such stillness that I was unwilling to move. He has spoken to me huddled in the forward gun tub of a tanker during wartime in heavy weather off Cape Hatteras, and in the quiet of a retreat house during total silence. He has spoken to me in worship services in a great cathedral with organ, choir and trumpets, and in a tiny chapel with only three people present. God has spoken to me through my sobs when my father died when I was barely sixteen. He has been silent when I believed I would die if He did not speak.

God’s words have been precious, but He Himself, His presence, has been more precious still. As we listen and ask, we too will know the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus—if we are hungry, hungry, hungry for God and His word for us.

*R&D Reflect on the many ways in which God communicates with us. What is most meaningful for you?*

Prayer: *Come, Lord Jesus.*

## Day 63

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**Read: 1 John 4:1-3**

### Test the Spirits

The First Epistle of John is the sixty-second book of the Bible and is also a General Epistle. It discusses the personal spiritual life of Christians.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come in the flesh. Every time I read these words or say them, a little renewing spark of truth turns on a light within me. These words are the key to him and who he is as the Light of the World.

It is easy to see Jesus as one among many, “our” way to God, or as a wonderful, compassionate leader, the Spirit of Love, or something else. Specifically, God has come in our flesh, in one great moment, in the fullness of time, being born of a virgin.

We speak of hearing God. John tells us to test the spirits. If you want to know if you are hearing the Spirit of God, ask this question of the spirit to which you are listening: “Has Jesus Christ come in the flesh?” If you sense a “yes”, you can listen more.

How blessed we are that Jesus is the way, the truth, the life—the unique savior of the world. Someone asked Visser ‘t Hooft, first president of the World Council of Churches, about the uniqueness of Christ: “If Jesus Christ is not unique, there is no gospel.” Our unique Savior, Jesus, son of Mary, Son of God—bless his holy name.

*R&D Reflect on your relationship with our unique and blessed Savior.*

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you for who you are, and who we are privileged to be in you.*

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## Day 64

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**Read: 2 John 12**

### Being with Jesus

The Second Epistle of John is the sixty-third book of the Bible. It contains practical guidelines for Christian living.

I hate to confess my personal use of 2 John was mostly during the Second World War when I was courting the beautiful girl who was to become my wife. My Navy duty required frequent changes of ships and much uncertainty. So I would use (as oldtimers will remember) Western Union telegrams. Trying to keep them as short as possible, I would always end with our verse for today. That seemed to sum up my urgent desire.

As I have grown older (much older!), this more and more sums up my times with the Lord, in prayer and Bible reading. It isn't the paper and ink of the Holy Bible, as precious as that gift is. It is the relationship that goes far beyond paper and ink; it is just being, face to face, in the presence of Blessed Jesus through the Holy Spirit. What can possibly be better than that?

Often, in pressing times, I get frustrated about not "getting my prayers said." Prayers said are, of course, important. But nothing beats seeing and talking face to face. Come, Lord Jesus.

R&D *What are your best times with the Lord? Explain.*

Prayer: *Cause me, Lord Jesus, to know and show forth the joy of your presence.*

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## Day 65

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**Read: 3 John 1-8**

### Hospitality

The Third Epistle of John is the sixty-fourth book of the Bible. It is addressed to Gaius, evidently an officer or member of a local church, commending and encouraging him.

The first five years of my ministry were divided between two small towns in Arkansas, almost 60 miles apart. So, when I visited the "other congregation," there was a couple who took me in to spend the night after an evening meeting or worship service. I used to call my hostess "the Shunamite woman" after the one who provided Elisha "a bed, a table, a chair and a lamp (2 Kings 4:10). Those folks were a wonderful blessing to me.

In the many years of ministry after my official "retirement", I have enjoyed the hospitality of many saints in their homes after many teaching and healing meetings in various parts of the country and around the world.

The relationships that grew out of such generous hospitality enriched me and my ministry greatly, and I am sure my experience in that regard has not been unique.

My wife and I have been able to offer similar hospitality to honored guests and not a few "wayfaring strangers." And always, one way or another, the blessing was given and received.

R&D *Reflect on hospitality as an important gift of the Holy Spirit, and your role in that ministry.*

Prayer: *Lord, give me the sensitivity to show hospitality to all, knowing that, one day, I may entertain an angel unawares.*

## Day 66

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**Read: Jude 17-22**

### Pray in the Spirit

The Epistle of Jude is the sixty-fifth book of the Bible. It is a brief General Epistle, dealing with heresies in the church.

Jude writes of those within the Church who seem to do more damage than those outside it. And what are we (who are, of course, right) to do? Today's Scripture passage give us an exact prescription for the illness of our age.

We are to keep ourselves in love, wait for the mercy of Jesus, and, above all, pray in the Holy Spirit. Whatever the last phrase means—and how many different meanings it may have—the one that means the most to me is letting the Spirit pray through me!

No matter how eloquent or heart-felt our prayers may be, and however we may pray, the time comes when we can only turn our concerns over to the master pray-er, the Holy Spirit. Whenever we do that, something happens. Sometimes we feel it, sometimes we doubt it, sometimes it makes us happy, sometimes it makes us cry, and sometimes it may even make us angry. Yet, asking the Holy Spirit to pray through us always does something; and, when the Holy Spirit is praying through us, the will of God is at work!

*R&D How do you pray in the Holy Spirit? Explain.*

*Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, and kindle in me the fire of your love.*

## Day 67

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**Read: Revelation 5:1-14**

### The Lamb

Revelation is the sixty-sixth and final book of the Bible. It is unique because it is the only prophetic book in the New Testament. The heart of the book is a series of visions, the meaning of which has long puzzled scholars.

“I saw a Lamb, standing as though it had been slain” (v.6). I go back again and again in my Bible reading and praying to the fourth and fifth chapters of the book of Revelation.

Someone else came to appreciate the Lamb at the center of that scene: Philip Yancey, a great Christian writer. On a trip to England, Yancey had been coerced to attend a performance of Handel's Messiah, and those great choruses swept through his heart and spirit. The last one begins: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain and hath redeemed us to God by his Blood, to receive power and riches and wisdom....”

Yancey wrote: “We were light years removed from the imagery of slaughtered lambs, yet history has proven that nothing fashioned by the hand of humanity will last. We need something greater than history, something outside history. We need a Lamb slain before the foundation of the world.”

If we are honest, we must admit that we are drowning in a flood of our sins: personal, corporate, national, ecclesiastical. What can take them away? We need a Lamb, and we have a Lamb. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

*R&D What has been your experience of Handel's Messiah? Explain.*

Prayer: *Lord, we have been on a journey with You through Scripture. May our appreciation of Your Holy Word ever grow in our hearts and minds. Amen.*

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