



Echoes *from* Edman

A 365-Day Devotional

By Rev. Dr. Angulus Wilson, Chaplain



WHEATON
COLLEGE

For Christ & His Kingdom



Echoes *from* **Edman**

A 365-Day Devotional



By Rev. Dr. Angulus Wilson, *Chaplain*

Dedication

I would like to dedicate “Echoes From Edman: A 365-Day Devotional” to spiritual leaders as they seek to draw close to God in the work of the ministry. Your commitment to seeking truth, love, and purpose in all you do is a testament to the transformative power of faith. May these pages be a source of encouragement, reflection, and spiritual growth as you continue to walk this extraordinary path that God has set you on.

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of The LORD, knowing that in The LORD your labor is not in vain.”

-1 Corinthians 15:58 ESV

Special Thank You

Thank you to Ms. Grace Mamalat for your invaluable assistance in editing the “Echoes From Edman.” Your dedication to this project has been truly remarkable, and your keen editorial insights have elevated the content to new heights.

Your meticulous attention to detail, your commitment to maintaining the authenticity of the message, and your unwavering support throughout the editing process have made a significant difference. Your ability to polish words while preserving the heart and soul of the devotional is a rare gift, and I am deeply appreciative of your talents.

With deepest appreciation,

Chaplain Wilson

A Call to Lay it All on The Line!

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect Will of God.

-ROMANS 12:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: HIS BODY TOOK THE GRENADE

Some time ago the Portland Oregonians carried the story of the posthumous award of the Medal of Honor to an Afro-American soldier from the South. This soldier with several buddies was in a trench during a Vietcong attack when a grenade was thrown into the trench. Without hesitation, the soldier encircled the grenade with his body and took the full force of the explosion. His commanding officer, in making the citation, said that his sacrificial and heroic act had saved the lives of the other soldiers in the trench.

AS A SOLDIER... he laid it all on the line. AND HERE IS THE PERFECT PICTURE OF LIVING THE LIFE OF A HUMAN SACRIFICE.

Romans 12 begins the final section of “Service” (chpts. 12–16). Paul tells us how to put our learning into practice, and in this chapter, the apostle gives us **one picture** of the Christian and reminds us of our spiritual duty. We are to live our lives as a sacrifice to God. Out of love for Him, we are called to live a life that is holy and acceptable to Him. We no longer live for ourselves.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does sacrifice mean to you?

How can you put your learning into practice as a living sacrifice to God today?

A Call to Lay it All on The Line!

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect Will of God.

-ROMANS 12:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: A SACRIFICE ON THE ALTAR

The motive for dedication is love; Paul does not say, “I command you” but “I beseech you, because of what God has already done for you.” We do not serve Christ in order to receive His mercies, because we already have them (Romans 3:21-8:39). Instead, we serve Him out of love and appreciation.

That being said, true Christian service and living must begin with personal dedication to The LORD. However, the Christian who fails in life is the one who has first failed at the altar, refusing to surrender completely to Christ.

True dedication is the **presenting** of **body, mind**, and **Will to God** day by day:

1. It is daily yielding the body to Him, having the mind renewed by the Word, and surrendering the will through prayer and obedience.
2. And **do not** be **conformed** to this **world**, but be **transformed** by the **renewing** of your **mind**, that you **may prove** what is that **good** and **acceptable** and **perfect** will of God.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How is your sacrifice at the altar?

Are you surrendering yourself and your desires completely to Christ?

A Call to Lay it All on The Line!

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect Will of God.

-ROMANS 12:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: BEING TRANSFORMED AND DEDICATED

Warren Wiersbe says this about our verse: “Every Christian is either a conformer, **living for and like the world**, or a **transformer, daily becoming more like Christ**. (An interesting thing to note here is that the Greek word for “transform” is the same as the one for “transfigure” in Matt. 17:2.) Paul again in the book of Second Corinthians 3:18 suggests that we are **transformed** (transfigured) as we allow the **Spirit** to **reveal Christ** through the Word of God. Read that part of the verse again:

“...that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God....” (v. 2b)

It is only when the believer is **dedicated to God** that he/she can know **God’s Will** for his/her life. And as His disciples we grow in our appreciation of God’s Will.

1. Some Christians obey God because they know that obedience is good for them, and they fear chastening.
2. Others obey because they find God’s will acceptable.
3. But the deepest devotion is in those who love God’s will and find it perfect.

As priests, we are to present “spiritual sacrifices” to God (1 Peter 2:5), and the first sacrifice He wants each day is our body, mind, and will in total surrender to Him.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Are you truly dedicated to living for God and His service?

The Joy of Finding Jesus

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a Man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be The Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward Him.

-JOHN 4:28-30

BIBLE STUDY: THE WOMAN'S DISCOVERY

Her life was being lived in disappointment after disappointment! She had men problems; she had lovers to let her down. Her hopes had been dashed by five divorces, and her name and her business was all in the streets. This woman had some problems that only her and God knew about.

When she discovers Jesus, her heart and her mind are instantly filled as she finds what she truly needs. The water she had walked so far to get was no longer what she needed; it was no longer important. She leaves her water jar and makes her way into the city.

When she discovers Jesus, she lets go of the jar. When she discovers Jesus, she finds more than enough. When she discovers Jesus, her satisfaction with only water is no more. When she discovers Jesus, she can let go of the cares of the World because Jesus is all she needs!

Like this woman, we all have our own water jars that we can let go of when we discover Jesus ourselves. When we do, He becomes more than enough for us. Nothing in this world can satisfy.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What about you? Have you made the same discovery as this woman?

What are you leaving behind as you discover more of Jesus?

The Joy of Finding Jesus

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a Man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be The Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward Him.

-JOHN 4:28-30

BIBLE STUDY: THE WOMAN'S DISCUSSION

This sister had come a long way. She had problems with me, difficulty in relationships, and she had bad experiences in the past. Within the town, each time she was held at fault, each time she was the object of ridicule, and each time the blame was on her.

However, after she discovers Jesus and leaves her water jar behind, she goes back to the town and speaks of Jesus. Now, she goes to the gate of the city where the court was held and speaks with them. She was talking about what God had revealed to her in front of all the members of the town that knew her story. What a transformation!

She invites the people saying, "Come, see a Man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be The Messiah?" (v. 29). An interesting piece of history to note is that the Samaritans were waiting for The Messiah, and they knew that when He came, He would reveal all things to them. I believe that when they heard this, they had to come and see Him for themselves!

Like this woman, when we discover Jesus, we cannot keep His Good News to ourselves. There is a joy we want to share with everyone!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How has Christ redeemed your life and your story?

Who can you share the joy of discovering Jesus with?

The Joy of Finding Jesus

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a Man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be The Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward Him.

-JOHN 4:28-30

BIBLE STUDY: THE PEOPLE'S DECISION

Isn't it ironic that the ones that caused the woman so much grief were the ones that she ran to first to tell about Jesus? And isn't it strange that God can fill your desires in such a way that the thing you thought you needed the most becomes the thing that you give up first?

At first, this woman could not live without a man, no matter how much grief it caused her that she had to have one. None of these men could bring her joy, and none of them could give her the love that she was truly looking for.

When God met her at the well, He was MORE than enough! He satisfied her thirst, and she left all her past behind. God lifted her burdens of disappointment, set her free from guilt, and took away her pain.

God wants to meet you at the well today. And when He does, you will be willing to go to the ones who have hurt you and tell them what The LORD has done for you. You will tell them that you have discovered Jesus!

And note another thing: The people were so moved by her report that they left from the Gate of the city to go and see Jesus for themselves. They left their tasks, stopping what they were doing to discover Jesus for themselves! The people saw the true transformation of the woman, and they wanted to meet God too!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How has God lifted your burdens of disappointment and helped you to share His joy with those who have hurt you?

The Joy of Finding Jesus

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a Man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be The Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward Him.

-JOHN 4:28-30

BIBLE STUDY: IN JESUS IS LOVE!

When the woman found Jesus, she found True Joy! She found The Living Water of Life and found that life was worth living because The Master had come. She found The Savior of mankind. She found hope for her future, answers to life's problems, and True Love.

And it was because of Love that God sent His Son. It was because of Love that The Son gave His life. It was because of Love that God purchased us with His blood.

It was Love that carried Him to Calvary's cross. It was Love that allowed them to drive nails in His hands. It was because of Love that He wore a crown of thorns on His head. It was because of Love that He was lifted high upon earth and cursed by man. It was for Love that He died and was buried.

Because of the Love of God, He rose from the grave with all the power of Heaven and earth in His hands. It is because of His Love that we can come to God freely and boldly kneel before His throne. It is because of His love that we can look with eyes toward eternity and have hope for the future.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What have you found in Christ?

How do you celebrate His great Love in your life? With others?

Waiting for a Miracle

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie – the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, He asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath.

-JOHN 5:1-9

BIBLE STUDY: THE MAN’S PROBLEM

The first person we see in the text is a product of life. He has been wounded and left to suffer for 38 years. He is a sick man, he can’t work, he can’t support himself, and because he can’t take care of himself, he has to depend on the handouts of others as his body doesn’t work like it should. He is almost half a man.

This man looks like some of us. He has the pains of life written on his face. Maybe he looks like someone we know. He has been in pain all his life, waiting for a cure that never comes. He’s sick and in need of help, but help never comes. He’s had to live life stuck, crippled, and labeled because of something that wasn’t his fault!

We know this brother, don’t we? And we know exactly what he is looking for. What he needs is a Savior to come and save him and change his life!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What hope or healing are you or someone you know looking for right now?

How can you come to Jesus for that healing?

Waiting for a Miracle

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, He asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath.

-JOHN 5:6-9

BIBLE STUDY: THE MAN'S POSITION

There are three things for us to note:

1. Though this man was lame, he was lame under the observation of Heaven. God had been watching over this man for 38 years.
2. God saw Him there when the pain first began.
3. God was watching the situation closely. He knew when, where, and how He would intervene.

Jesus, when the time was right, came to the man, "Do you want to get well?"

The brother's response reveals that he cannot begin to process being made well. He has been disappointed so many times, so why should anything new happen now? He has been depressed so long that it is someone else's fault that he cannot get well. There is always someone who goes down to the pool ahead of him!

Do you know someone like this? They have been hurt so many times and passed up so often that it is everybody else's fault that they can't get help. They have been overlooked by others that they don't really believe that their circumstances will ever change. They have gotten comfortable with their situation.

However, like the lame man, we often look for healing instead of The Healer!

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where are you looking for healing instead of looking directly to The Healer?

Waiting for a Miracle

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, He asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath.

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BIBLE STUDY: THE MAN'S CURE

Jesus takes the opportunity to minister to the man. He tells him to pick up his mat and walk. The man's cure came when the time was right! The cure wasn't in the pool or the water; the cure came solely from The Healer Himself!

There are a couple things to note about this healing:

1. When Jesus spoke, the man let go of his position by the pool.
2. When Jesus spoke, the man moved his legs and body.
3. When Jesus spoke, the man himself walked for the first time in 38 years.

How does this apply to us today?

- When God frees you, you should let go of your position and pain.
- When God frees you, leave from bad company.
- When God frees you, relocate yourself and head in a different direction.

No one deserves to be made well. In reality, we deserve destruction and hell because of our sin and rebellion against God. But when mercy intervenes, it delivers us from the bondage of being lame! That is what happened at Calvary. He took our sins upon Himself and saved us when we were unable to save ourselves. How wonderful is that!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How have you responded to God's healing and freeing in your life?

Having the Right Mind

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And The God of Peace will be with you.

-PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

BIBLE STUDY: THE MAIN IDEA

It is a true thing to say that before we were Christians, we had terrible minds. We considered doing and participating in many things against God's Will. But after we were born again, our thinking was changed to want and do those things that God requires of us.

The Apostle Paul writes this letter while in prison in Rome. This letter to the Philippians is written to the church to encourage them not to go back to the old mentality. During that time, there were some problems within the church. Two sisters were having a doctrinal problem, and the conflict between them was affecting the entire fellowship.

Paul writes to encourage others to help these sisters solve the issue and to teach the entire church to change their thoughts from what is negative to thoughts of that which is most important. They are also encouraged to have joy in Jesus and grow in knowledge of The LORD and Savior Jesus Christ.

The mind is an explosive thing, and the devil knows that the Christian mind is a powerful tool in the Hand of The LORD. He knows the child of God that thinks and dwells on the things of God. These children can defend themselves with the Word of God against the enemy of God.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where have you struggled with the old mentality of your mind?

In what areas do you need to change your perspective and thoughts to focus more on the joy of God?

Having the Right Mind

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.

-PHILIPPIANS 4:8

BIBLE STUDY: THE EXHORTATIONS

Through his exhortations, Paul is encouraging the church of Philippi to dwell on the things that are pleasing to God and what is truly important. Let us go through each one:

- **Whatever is true:** Paul is encouraging them here to think on those things that are honest. Whatever is right to do, they must do it for Jesus.
- **Whatever is noble:** Paul is encouraging them here to think on those things that are noble. Whatever lifts up justice and righteousness, they should exercise those things.
- **Whatever is right:** Paul is encouraging them here to think on those things that are right. When we focus on what is right, the enemy can't trick us in doing wrong or thinking wrongly.
- **Whatever is pure:** Paul is encouraging them here to think on those things that are pure. Whenever your thoughts are pure about others, your actions toward them will follow.
- **Whatever is lovely:** Paul is encouraging them here to think on those things that are lovely. Whenever your thoughts are laced with loveliness, you become useful to them in your conduct and conversation.
- **Whatever is admirable:** Paul is encouraging them here to think on those things that are of a good report. Whenever something is admirable, it usually comes with a good report about someone.
- **If anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things:** Paul is encouraging them here to think on those things that are so important in the Body that they spend their time praising God.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you practice what these exhortations are teaching?

The Ministry of a Leader

I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

-COLOSSIANS 2:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: TRUE CONCERN

I like this part of Paul's letter to the church of Colossae because herein lies the true picture of the ministry for a leader. Every Christian leader (no matter who or where) has to model certain characteristics in order to lead effectively. Paul does that for us in this text. His heart has been with the Colossians from the beginning, and he writes as a father beloved, concerned, committed, and filled with compassion for the Body of Christ.

True leaders are:

1. **Filled with compassion** for those they serve. There is no pretense with them or pseudo behavior to mis-lead others.
2. **Filling up continually** with the concern of those under their watch (they want to know how they are doing). They have a shepherd's heart and a servant's mentality.
3. **Filled with agony** to know the estate of others that they serve. They long to see them prosper and do what God had ordained them to do.
4. **Driven by goals** to help others to know more about God and to draw closer to God. They long to see people tap into the richness of the Kingdom of Heaven. They want others to know more about Christ.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How is your leadership?

What attributes of true leadership are you currently using?

How can you more closely follow Paul's model?

The Ministry of a Leader

My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

-COLOSSIANS 2:2-5

BIBLE STUDY: TRUE COMMUNICATION

Paul has a strong talent for communicating the truth and the desires of his heart. He wants the church of Colossae to know what God has to say (treasure of wisdom) and what God has revealed unto man (treasures of knowledge).

Wisdom and knowledge are different! They are cousins of divine insight that the child of God can have if only they would seek God's face. Knowledge is commonly defined as the study of new information. One can become more knowledgeable through reading, researching, and memorizing. Wisdom, however, has more to do with insight. It is defined as the understanding and accepting of the things of life. It involves having perspective and the ability to make sound judgments.

If the leader of ministry would ask for both of these attributes, they will have the traveling companion of peace to help them as they wait on God in difficult situations.

Pray and ask God to give you the wisdom you need for your ministry and your leadership. Dedicate your service to Him and ask Him to guide you.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How do you communicate the truth with others?

What difficult situations might you be facing in which you need God's wisdom and knowledge to help guide you?

The Ministry of a Leader

For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

- COLOSSIANS 2:5

BIBLE STUDY: TRUE COMMITMENT

Paul did not have to write this letter. He did not have to be concerned or care about the church in Colossae. He did not have to pray and intercede for them. However, he was committed to the work of God in the earth and God's people in the earth. Because he was truly committed, his heart was in the ministry and leadership.

True commitment takes up your time, energy, and ideas. True commitment also takes investing. True commitment requires a leader's whole heart.

Check this:

- You *cannot* lead with **excellence** if your heart is not in it.
- You *cannot* lead with **passion** if your heart is not in it.
- You *cannot* lead with **promise** if your heart is not in it.

Paul is a good example for the child of God because he had a heart like Jesus.

Jesus is our leadership example. It was passion, commitment, promise, dedication, and Love that led Him through Calvary, the grave, and to the right hand of The Father!

THINGS TO PONDER:

Are you truly committed to your ministry and leadership?

Is your heart fully in it?

Are you leading with excellence, passion, and promise?

How to Handle Difficult Assignments

Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God!" So he named that place Mahanaim. Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

-GENESIS 32:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: GOD'S CALL

Jacob has gotten the call from God to go back home. He is not the same man he was when he left. He left home on bad terms and will now have to face up to his old behavior. This was not Jacob's idea, but rather, it was God's call to start a new chapter in his life.

Sometimes when we sin against others, we too have to go back and face them. God demands in these times that we repent and that we return to make things right. Like Jacob, we can learn how to trust God even while facing difficult assignments.

It takes three things to heal others when we have offended them:

1. Repentance
2. Restoration
3. Reconciliation

Over the next couple of days, we will look more closely at Jacob's journey. He is a picture for us of what is needed when we have trespassed against others.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What about you? Is God calling you to a new chapter in your life?

How can you help heal and begin restoration with those you may have offended?

How to Handle Difficult Assignments

Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God!" So he named that place Mahanaim. Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

-GENESIS 32:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: GOD'S DIVINE ASSISTANCE

Jacob is called to go back home, but it will be difficult to face his brother again. God knows the difficulty of Jacob's journey and assignment, and so God sends His angels to assist him on the way.

The angels are God's warriors and divine messengers. They are dispatched to watch over Jacob and his family as they travel. Jacob calls the place *Mahanaim*, which translates as "Two Camps." This was to memorialize that his own camp was sharing the place with God's.

Because He is God, He will never send His children on a mission without His divine supervision. God's plan for you is to complete His assignment, not for you to fail.

- He encourages you as you travel, sending divine escorts to watch over you as you go.
- He reminds you to trust in Him and His faithfulness.
- While you are in His Will, He protects, guides, and directs you every step of the way.

Every time that God reveals Himself to you before an assignment, you ought to remember the place. Mark the place as a marker for those you will tell the story to.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Has God ever called you to go somewhere for Him?

How has He revealed that He was with you on the journey?

Can you remember the place where you saw His goodness, protection, and supervision over your life?

How to Handle Difficult Assignments

Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God!" So he named that place Mahanaim. Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

-GENESIS 32:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: GOING DOWN ANXIOUS

Jacob's journey home brought anxiety because he had done wrong before he left. If he had not mistreated his brother, he would have no fear about returning.

Notice how Jacob approaches this meeting:

1. He does not show up unannounced.
2. He sends a peace party to see if it is alright to proceed.
3. He sends word that has been with family.
4. He sends word that he has plenty of resources.
5. He also desires that Esau will be willing to accept him.

Esau was ready to kill Jacob. He promised that he would when his father had died. Jacob remembered this and was fearful of the mighty hunter (Genesis 27:41).

Sometimes, when we have sinned against others, it is difficult to face them. The same, guilt, and anxiety can be overwhelming. Jacob does several things to try and test the waters with Esau. He does not want any trouble.

As believers, we too have to be willing to go back and fix things that we have done to hurt others in the past. We have to be willing to repent and ask for forgiveness from those that we have sinned against.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How would you have handled this assignment from God if you were Jacob?

Has God ever called you to reconcile a particular situation?

How have you approached someone that you have offended?

Wrestling with God

So Jacob's gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp. That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent overall his possessions.

-GENESIS 32:21-23

BIBLE STUDY: JACOB'S INSULATION

Jacob has been brought to the place where God has revealed Himself to him. In this place, Jacob forgets God's covenant and becomes fearful of his life being threatened. He moves his family and all his possessions that are left behind. Jacob is trying to insulate himself from Esau. Fear is at work in his heart.

Jacob has forgotten that he is in the place where God wants him. He is in the Will of God, but out of fear, Jacob is acting like an unbeliever. He thinks things are going to happen to him. He is imagining things that have never happened.

Jacob's fear has him in a headlock. He is imagining the wrath of Esau taking place. He knows Esau is coming with 400 men, but he does not know if he is coming to kill him and his family, so he separates his family from himself.

Because of his lack of faith, Jacob cannot wait for God to move in his life. He feels that he needs to handle things himself. However, Jacob doesn't remember that God has made a covenant to protect him. Out of fear, Jacob has worked all night long trying to move his family and prepare to see his brother. He couldn't wait on God, so he took matters into his own hands.

How often do we act like this? We act out of fear instead of trusting in God's faithfulness and protection. Like Jacob, unbelief will make you unsure of what you know to be true. Place your trust in God instead of your own insulation.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How devastating is fear in the life of a child of God?

Where do you need to trust God more?

Wrestling with God

So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

-GENESIS 32:24-26

BIBLE STUDY: JACOB'S ISOLATION

Jacob was not expecting unseen visitors in the place of God. He isolated himself trying to escape everyone. This man is an Old Testament appearance of Christ.

God wants to do something in Jacob's life so He shows up to strengthen and test him. This wrestling match is to get Jacob to conform to the Will of God and to quit conforming back into his old ways. However, Jacob refused to give up, turn away from, or submit to God. So, God inflicted him with pain in order to get his attention.

God had the power to hurt Jacob all the time, but He wanted him to willingly submit himself to God's Will. When Jacob refused to give in willingly, God had to cause him some suffering in order for Jacob to humble himself.

Once the hip is out of socket, Jacob is now hanging on for life. He is in no position to wrestle anyone anymore. Clinging to God for dear life, he is now willing to do whatever God wants him to do and is finally dependent upon God alone.

Here are a few observations:

- God moves in our lives at unexpected times.
- God uses isolation to drive us into His presence.
- When we wrestle against God, He will sometimes inflict pain on us in order to get us to surrender our ways for His Will.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you ever had to wrestle with God over an issue in your life?

If so, what was the issue and why?

Wrestling with God

The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered.

The man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

-GENESIS 32:27-32

BIBLE STUDY: JACOB'S IDENTIFICATION

After touching Jacob's socket, God changed his identity. Jacob was not the same man he was before he wrestled with God. He walked differently, thought differently, his name was changed, and he had seen the face of God.

Jacob had an encounter with God, and this made the difference in his life. The change that came to him was a result of a divine encounter. Jacob's first name means "deceiver, cheater, trickster, or slick one." It was a name that was symbolic to his old way of life.

His new name, Israel, means "He struggles with God." It was a new name that was going to bring the world a Savior. Jesus comes through Jacob's bloodline to redeem mankind.

As children of God, we ought to have a new walk, new name, and new understanding of God after we have a divine encounter with Him. We ought not to be the old man or woman we used to be after wrestling with God. We ought to be wiser, stronger, and better able to understand Who God is after we have encountered Him.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How have you changed after your encounter with God?

Be Committed No Matter What

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

-2 TIMOTHY 1:13

BIBLE STUDY: KEEP YOUR GRIP

In his letter to Timothy, Paul wants to give him three critical things to do as a follower of Christ. He also gives clear examples of what not to do as a follower of Christ. Following after his instruction will help the committed believer to go after God with all their life and pursue Christ with a clear mind.

Paul's first critical point is a reminder for Timothy to **keep his grip**.

The first thing we see in this verse is that Paul charges Timothy to never lose or leave the teaching he has received from the faith. He is told to remember, copy, and embody it. The second thing we see is that not only does Paul want him to hold on, but he wants Timothy to remember to live in the faith and love that God has given! Living what you have been taught is just as important as remembering what you have been taught. If you live it, you believe it.

To live in the love of Jesus Christ means that we abandon all other ways of life. We choose not to live in fear, hate, greed, lust, envy, pride, greed, jealousy, or wrath. We are to be satisfied with Jesus and content with all He has given us. To live in His love encompasses loving everyone all the time for God's good pleasure.

For the believer, we must have a grip on the truth that has been passed down. We must have an identity and affinity for the faith of Christianity. It is imperative that we know what we believe and *why* we believe it. It is also imperative that we *live* what we believe because we believe it.

The time is urgent, and the testimony of the church is at stake. To live in the faith and love that you have in Christ is a call for us to obey God in every area of our lives, even when it is uncomfortable.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you living out your faith and the love of God in your life?

Be Committed No Matter What

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of The Holy Spirit Who lives in us.

-2 TIMOTHY 1:14

BIBLE STUDY: KEEP WITH GOD

Paul's second critical point is a reminder for Timothy to **keep with God**.

In this verse, Timothy is exhorted to guard all that has been given to him by God, with the help of The Holy Spirit. To guard means to protect it from the enemy who loves to steal and destroy it.

What did Timothy have?

He has his faith, witness, gift, church community, and his relationship with Paul. He has dreams for his ministry, his desire for God, his passion for worship, and his love of the saints. In his letter, Paul tells Timothy to guard this.

How would he do this?

Through prayer, communication, reading, serving, worshiping, living a holy life, spending time with God, ministering to the church, and using his gifts.

In order to keep with God in a hostile world, the believer must have help from God. He is the reason we are able to sustain against the temptations to no longer walk with Him.

The believer must be willing to let God help guard their gifts. We have been entrusted with the same things Timothy had (our faith, witness, gift, church community, relationships with other believers, dreams for ministry, desire for God, passion for worship, and love for the saints). We must be willing to trust God, forsake the sin nature, and say no to temptation.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What is God calling you to guard?

Are you willing to let God help you guard your gifts?

Be Committed No Matter What

You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. May The LORD show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me.

-2 TIMOTHY 1:15-17

BIBLE STUDY: KEEP THE COVENANT

Paul's third critical point is a reminder for Timothy to **keep the covenant**.

In these verses, Timothy gets to hear the bad news about the church covenant. The people that Paul disciplined had bailed out on him when his case got bad. And Paul is sharing this news with Timothy so that Timothy would not do the same thing to others who are going through hard times. Believers are to be committed in a covenant relationship with others, not leaving people behind because of their suffering for the Gospel.

In verse 16, we get to see a Covenant Keeper. This is the man Paul wants Timothy to know about: Onesiphorus. This is the man that God wants us to remember too! He has kept and guarded the covenant. In these verses, we also find a prayer and blessing from Paul for the one who remembered his gift. Onesiphorus showed great commitment to his friend that he would not give up until he could minister to him, searching everywhere until he found Paul.

When we are in a covenant relationship with one another, we don't walk away when one of us suffers for The LORD. Paul is not suffering for doing wrong; he is suffering for the cause of Christ. He has not brought shame to Christ. But rather, he has brought honor to the Cross. The believers who deserted Paul missed a great opportunity to show the love of Christ to their brother who had shown love to them once before.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How committed are you to your church family?

Do you value the covenant relationship?

The Salt of the Earth

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

-MATTHEW 5:13

BIBLE STUDY: CALLED TO BE SALT

God has given us a mandate while we are here on earth, and that is to affect every part of society in our sphere of influence. Every aspect of society is to be touched by our lives. We are called to be world-changers, global citizens and ambassadors for the Kingdom of God!

God's desire for the church is that each one of us would be salt of the earth. Like salt, we enhance the level of living for those who are outside of Christ.

As Christians, we are:

- The people who have a lasting impact in this world!
- The people who change society!
- The people who change the world!
- The people who are contagious!
- The people who are powerful for Him!
- The people who impact and represent Him wherever we go!

As the Body of Christ, our calling is to have a spiritual influence in the lives of the people we encounter. When trials and tribulations come, it is the church that rises to the occasion to influence evil with good. When devastating events are happening in the world, it is the church that is poured out like salt to serve, savor, and sacrifice to make this world a better place for those who are suffering. And when pain and persecution come, it is the church who takes in the homeless, clothes the naked, feeds the hungry, and gives so that others may have.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does it mean to you to be the "salt of the earth"?

How can you bring hope and help to a suffering world?

The Salt of the Earth

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

-MATTHEW 5:13

BIBLE STUDY: THE SERIOUSNESS OF SERVING

In this passage, The Master informs the disciples of the magnitude of their service for Him and the Kingdom. Their assignment is to impact the entire human race.

We see Jesus calling, reminding, and commanding the disciples that they were to be the type of people that were summoned to a higher calling in life, a calling to work, a calling to serve, and a calling to live for God as change agents in this world. They were to be the salt of the world.

Salt is used as a metaphor to explain that they were going to be used to effect change in the earth. So, as Christ's followers, how do we effect change?

Here are some ways to think about and practice:

1. We are to live lives that are *engaged* in service, building relationships, caring for those who do not know Christ.
2. We can meet the needs of those around us who are without a personal relationship with Jesus.
3. We can simply love people in such a way that we are available, accessible, accountable, and aware of where they are and what they are truly in need of.

As we live in a broken world that is lacking godly influence, illumination, and instruction, we are called to represent the love of God and share His hope.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where is God calling you to effect change for Him?

What are some ways you can practice this?

The Salt of the Earth

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

-MATTHEW 5:13

BIBLE STUDY: THE SEVERITY OF SALT-LESSNESS

The Master in the second part of this verse raises the question of what will happen if we are not living as salt.

There are nine negatives of being a salt-less believer!

1. When we are salt-less, **the world cannot be salted.**
2. When we are salt-less, **the institutions of life cannot experience change.**
3. When we are salt-less, **the people around and with us cannot know the powerful love of Christ.**
4. When we are salt-less, **those who are without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ cannot experience His grace through us.**
5. When we are salt-less, **the hope for change is all but lost.**
6. When we are salt-less, **the conditions for peace are not good.**
7. When we are salt-less, **people cannot see why they need a Savior.**
8. When we are salt-less, **children won't need to know why they should be law-abiding and obedient.**
9. When we are salt-less, **we miss the opportunity to influence and have an effect on the earth.**

When The Master says we are to be the salt of the earth, this isn't an option; **it is a command.** And the power of our saltiness is going to be determined by the *character* of our life.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Which of the nine negatives of being a salt-less believer stands out most to you?

How can you better live out the command of being the "salt of the earth"?

The Salt of the Earth

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

-MATTHEW 5:13

BIBLE STUDY: PRESERVING OUR SALTINESS

Just as food is flavored by salt, we Christians are to have seasoned lives of service, love, compassion, and concern to impact the people around us in such a way that they will come to know Jesus Christ.

Take note of this:

- When our lives are salty, there is a *direct influence* that we make on the culture.
- When our lives lose flavor, it is because we let the “unconfessed” sin rule and reign in our lives. When this happens, we *lessen* the strength of our witness for Christ.
- So, in order to preserve the power of our “saltiness,” we must *guard* the way we live. This way, our impact can be strong and lasting.

Jesus said, “*But if salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.*” This is a bold statement and should cause us to examine the effect of our salt and our service. If we are to be powerful witnesses for Christ, our lives should reflect His love and His hope to the world!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How powerful is your salt and your service to others?

How can you raise the standard of your Christian witness?

The Salt of the Earth

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

-MATTHEW 5:13

BIBLE STUDY: BE SALTY LIKE JESUS AND LIVE SACRIFICIALLY FOR HIM!

Remember how Jesus' actions changed the world:

1. When He was born, the Great Advent took place!
2. When He was born, He came into the world as a world-changer!
3. When He was born, everything about time had to change!
4. When Jesus came into the world, He affected lives wherever The Father sent Him.
5. When Jesus came into the world, He came with the purpose of making a difference! He knew His calling!

Jesus was so salty that He lived a sacrificial life! And as a Living Sacrifice, He was poured out on an old rugged cross to die so that you and I could live! As a Living Sacrifice, He was poured out in a borrowed tomb, where He destroyed the sting of death, so you could live beyond the grave. And early Easter morning, The Father raised Him from the dead so that you and I could experience the salty life too.

You are the **salt** of the earth! You are the **witnesses** sent by God! You are the **believers** who know the Truth! You are the **children** of the Kingdom of God! You are the **ambassadors** of Heaven! You are **change agents** in a dying world!

So, I charge you in the Name of God and with the Love of Jesus, give The LORD all you got! Give Him your minds, talents, careers, and professions so that He can effect change in all the earth. Let Him promote, perfect, empower, and push you to places you have never been before.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What about you? Are you effecting change?

How will you live a life of saltiness and sacrifice as Jesus did?

Chosen to Serve God

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The LORD is with you!"

-LUKE 1:26-28

BIBLE STUDY: MARY'S ANNOUNCEMENT

When the time was right, God came in an unusual way. God made Himself known through a messenger named Gabriel, an angel who served before God. He spoke what God commanded him to speak, and he went where God said to go. He did whatever The LORD commanded him to do.

The first thing to observe in this passage is that God chose an unlikely place. The second thing we see is that He selects for Himself an unlikely choice for a vessel to carry His Son. Whenever God is up to something in the earth, He always uses the unqualified, the least likely candidate, the one almost everyone else has written off. (That's how you know it's by The LORD.)

There are some other things to note:

- When God chose Mary, she had found favor in the eyes of The LORD.
- When God chose Mary, she received grace from God.
- When God called Mary, she was encouraged to trust in The LORD because God was with her.

Like Mary, God can use the poor people on the earth. He can use the unqualified, least likely candidates, the ones that almost everyone else has written off.

And when God calls them, they have the favor of God in their lives, they have all of heaven on their side, and they can do anything that The LORD asks of them because they are working for Him in the earth.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you been called by God to a specific mission, ministry, or position?

How have you felt His favor in your life?

Chosen to Serve God

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God."

-LUKE 1:29-30

BIBLE STUDY: MARY'S ANXIETY

The call of God is a frightening thing. It completely catches you off guard, and it always alarms you. Mary was disturbed because the messenger Gabriel appeared to her, and Mary was alarmed because he had given her the word of The LORD.

Mary never thought of herself as having favor from The LORD. She never thought of herself as being blessed and favored among all women. In fact, Mary was poor, young, and had little to no education like we do today. She was a teenager who was struggling like everyone else, and now she finds out that The LORD is on her side. But, like any other teenager, she does not have a clue what this means!

However, the angel Gabriel comforts her with the charge that she is not to be afraid because God has decided to bless her. Mary did not have to be anxious or afraid because God had a plan for her life. She did not have to be worried about what all this meant because God was in full control, and He had all the details worked out.

Like Mary, we may find ourselves in situations where we may be terribly uncomfortable with a call of God upon our lives to serve Him in the earth. But even though we may feel terribly uncomfortable, there is always a call of comfort to accompany the call to serve.

God always comforts you to trust in Him and not be afraid of what it is that He has called you to do. Where and when God calls, He also provides for the one he has called. He equips us to fulfill His purposes.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When have you felt terribly uncomfortable with a call of God in your life?

How did God comfort you and equip you to fulfill this call?

Chosen to Serve God

“You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called The Son of The Most High. The LORD God will give Him the throne of His ancestor David, and He will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; His Kingdom will never end.”

-LUKE 1:31-33

BIBLE STUDY: MARY’S ASSIGNMENT

According to Mary’s assignment, her life would have to change. She would have to change everything about herself. What she ate, what she wore, what she thought, where she slept, how she slept, how she walked, how she talked. She would be pregnant soon, and all eyes would be on her.

- She would have to change from being a virgin to carrying The God of the Universe inside her.
- Mary was going to change from being an ordinary teenager to being the mother of God.
- She was going to change from being a “nobody” to becoming the greatest woman who lived.
- Mary was going to become a partner with God in redeeming a lost and dying world.
- She was bringing her own Savior into the world.

Mary was God’s servant with a big assignment! Just like Mary, we have also been given an assignment to share His Truth and Good News with the world.

We too have the privilege to partner with God on the earth. We too have the responsibility to do something bigger than ourselves on the earth. We have been given the joy to carry Jesus with us everywhere we go. We have been chosen to carry the Word of God to places where it has not been before. We are called to be filled with The Spirit, just like Mary, and deliver His Word to those who will hear.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Since Jesus has come into your life, how has your life changed?

How can you partner with God to share His hope and love with the world?

Chosen to Serve God

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of The Most High will overshadow you. So The Holy One to be born will be called The Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am The LORD's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

-LUKE 1:34-38

BIBLE STUDY: MARY'S ANSWER

After Gabriel convinced Mary, her answer was remarkable.

1. *"I am The LORD's servant"* (she accepts the assignment)
2. *"I am willing to accept whatever He wants"* (she is all in for the plan of God)
3. *"May your word to me be fulfilled"* (she hoped in the prophecy of God)

Mary was a youth on a mission for God! She was sold out in every way. Her mind was made up, and her heart was fixed on serving The LORD on the earth. She was focused and had now found her purpose for living.

Mary is a good example for some of us who are on the fence about serving God.

We should take our cues from her and have a made up mind. We should have our heart fixed on serving Christ. We should be focused on God's calling for our lives, live dedicated to Him and His calling, and live out His purposes for us.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What about Mary's assignment stands out to you?

What cues can you take from Mary's answer?

Good News for the Gentiles

Praise be to The God and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

-1 PETER 1:3

BIBLE STUDY: THE PRAISE OF THE GENTILES

In his letter, Peter reveals why we have the blessing that we have in Christ. He unfolds what eternal life is, how we got it, and what it does for us as we live in Christ. This was the Good News for the non-Jewish believers living in a difficult world and being faced with the threat of death all around them.

To open the letter, Peter begins with the language of praise for the Gentile church: *"Praise be to The God and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ!"*

This is not just some honor. This is great praise that goes to God The Father because of His great mercy. It is by His great mercy that we have the privilege of being born again. Peter says that God ought to receive the praise because He has shown us His salvation and given us new birth and a living hope.

- God's mercy implies that we do not deserve to be saved.
- God's mercy implies that we should have been dead.
- God's mercy implies that what could have been and should have been didn't happen because God didn't give me what we should've received.

We have been spared from God's wrath by His great mercy. And with this mercy also comes a privilege: *"the ability to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."*

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you praise God for His great mercy today?

What does His mercy mean to you?

Good News for the Gentiles

And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

-1 PETER 1:4-6

BIBLE STUDY: THE PRIZE OF THE GENTILES

In these verses, we discover that there is a prize that the Gentile Christian receives as a result of this free salvation that comes from Christ:

1. He has reserved a priceless inheritance (a reward that far exceeds earthly treasures).
2. This reward is waiting for us in heaven.
3. This reward is pure (without tarnish or corruption).
4. This reward will not be defiled.
5. This reward is beyond the reach of decay (it is a heavenly reward, not subject to earth's contamination; it comes from up above).

This is not the reward of eternal life or a crown for our labors. This is another reward that comes to us as a result of being in Christ and being made an heir to God's throne. It is a continuation of the gift of salvation. This prize comes from our inheritance, and it is so precious that God Himself has desired to protect us until we receive it! We get this protection because we have decided to trust in Christ for this salvation.

Remember this:

- Trusting Jesus will give you divine protection.
- Trusting in Christ's salvation guarantees divine security.
- Trusting in Christ produces eternal benefits for the child of God.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does it mean to trust in Christ's salvation?

Good News for the Gentiles

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

-1 PETER 1:6-9

BIBLE STUDY: THE POSITION OF THE GENTILES

Here we see that the Gentiles have been given a position in Christ. It is a position of prominence, and the prominence is that they have been put on display to suffer for the world. In their sufferings, they are on trial and being tried because of what they believe and Who they believe in.

As they are being tested, they are also being watched by God. As they are being watched by God, their faith in God is being purified and is seen as being very precious before His throne. Their faith is also being strengthened because of the trials they face. When they come through these trials, they will receive a great reward.

For us today, pure trials bring strong faith, and pure trouble produces strong Christians. As long as the Christian struggles, they have the privilege to grow strong in Christ. God allows trials in our lives so that our faith can grow and that when we have passed through these trials faithfully, He may reward us in the end.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does the believer's prize mean to you?

How does the believer's position impact your own life?

What did you discover from the believer's praise that will affect your worship?

How to Handle the Transitions of Life

Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. After three days the officers went throughout the camp, giving orders to the people: "When you see the Ark of the Covenant of The LORD your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits between you and the Ark; do not go near it."

Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow The LORD will do amazing things among you."

-JOSHUA 3:1-5

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In many ways, this text deals with the handling of difficult times in our lives. The transitions of life can be worrisome, painful, deadly, discouraging, and filled with despair. Like the Israelites, we too have Jordan Rivers that we need to cross in this life. This text teaches the child of God how to handle our Jordan Rivers when faced with the difficulty of transitioning from one place to another.

The Israelites had followed Moses and The LORD for forty years in the wilderness. As a result, they had developed a wandering mentality while they were out there. Now it was time to move again. After Moses had left them, God called Joshua to rise up and take them to a new location. Joshua became their new leader, and his first assignment was a hard one!

Nevertheless, when Joshua got the call, he moved out with urgency. With The LORD's command, he started out toward the new destination. This journey would be a journey of faith, but Joshua was convinced that he had heard from The LORD and that this was the right thing to do. It is a good thing to know that you have heard from The LORD and He has directed your path.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where have you felt God's leading in your life?

How were you convinced you heard from The LORD?

How to Handle the Transitions of Life

Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over.

-JOSHUA 3:1

BIBLE STUDY: JOSHUA'S LEADERSHIP

In this verse, we see several things:

1. Following The LORD requires early morning direction. Joshua is up before the crack of dawn preparing the people to relocate.
2. Joshua in this text represents a leader who is not lazy but is rather an early rise who is prepared for the events of the day.
3. As a leader, he is prepared and motivated to serve his people.
4. He had an early morning meeting with The Master, got his agenda, and all the people knew what it was.
5. They were moving that day, and everybody was awake to follow Joshua.

I am sure that this could not have been an easy task. There were thousands of them in the desert, and there must have at least been someone in the crowd with an opposing attitude about the transition. Because it is the nature of people to rebel against leadership, I think there may have been at least one person who was upset and was not going to cooperate well with everyone else.

Nevertheless, Joshua presses on with God's plan. We can learn from Joshua's example of leadership here. When God tells us to do something, we have to press on, no matter what opposition we may face. God has given us a command, and the command is to go over to the other side.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you follow Joshua's leadership example in an area of your life?

How have you dealt with opposition in the past?

How can you press on to accomplish God's Will despite opposition?

How to Handle the Transitions of Life

Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. After three days the officers went throughout the camp.

-JOSHUA 3:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: TRANSITION THROUGH A DIFFICULT AREA

The transition called for Joshua to lead them to a dangerous area, to a place of difficulty. This transition called for Joshua to lead them to the place where The LORD had directed them. The Jordan River was dangerous to live next to and even more dangerous to attempt to cross. During the time of this text, the river would have been at flood time and would have had full banks. The Jordan had underlying currents that could drag you under and do damage and physical harm.

The Jordan River was unpredictable, unreliable, unforgiving, and impenetrable. Joshua led the children there to camp for three days, and for those three days, the Israelites thought about the nature of their obstacle!

For three days, they played out in front of danger. For three days, they stared into the face of trouble. They saw the Jordan River in the morning, at noon, in the evening. The truth of what could happen was always on their mind.

I notice sometimes in life that our greatest fears are what The LORD wants us to face. The very thing we are worried about He brings our way for us to transition right through it.

Sometimes, God brings our fears up close and personal for us to realize that we have nothing to fear. In Christ, His perfect love will cast out all fear.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you ever worried about something?

How did God show you His perfect love and cast out your fear?

How to Handle the Transitions of Life

After three days the officers went throughout the camp, giving orders to the people: "When you see the Ark of the Covenant of The LORD your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits between you and the Ark; do not go near it.

-JOSHUA 3:2-4

BIBLE STUDY: JOSHUA'S LOAD

In his new leadership responsibilities, Joshua had surrounded himself with some men that could help carry the load.

Joshua had a great deal to manage. He had thousands of lives that he was responsible for. This load of responsibility was no ordinary load, and he needed some help if he was going to lead well in this season of transition.

And so it was. Just like Moses, Joshua had trusted men that could walk with him in this tough assignment. Earlier in Chapter 2, it says that Joshua sent spies in the land of Jericho to see what they could find out about the area. While the spies were across the Jordan, Joshua got the people ready to move. After three days, the spies came back with a good report, and it was time to transition.

When Joshua's men got word from their leader, they knew just what to do. They moved out with confidence, and they were a united front. They commanded the people to get ready and that when they saw the Ark of the Covenant moving through the camp, they were to follow.

This is what we need today in the Body of Christ: men and women that can help follow their leadership. People who will be supporters and help God's people get to the location where God wants them to be.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Who are you surrounding yourself with?

How can you share your current load?

How to Handle the Transitions of Life

Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits between you and the Ark; do not go near it.

-JOSHUA 3:4

BIBLE STUDY: GUIDED BY THE WORD OF GOD

The officers told the people that they must keep a distance between themselves and the Ark. Two thousand cubits measures out to a little over half a mile in our terms. Here's the interesting thing: distance was needed because the Ark was the Place where The LORD dwelled. Anyone not of the Levitical priesthood was not able to enter into the presence of the Ark or to come near to touch it. In fact, the punishment for touching the Ark was death. God had a reputation for putting to death those who became too familiar with Him. The LORD is holy and demands holiness. The people were to follow from a great distance so that they would have great reverence for the Word.

When the Ark of the Covenant moves through our communities, it looks like the Bible. We ought to follow it because it is a picture of the Word of God that leads, guides, directs, and takes us through our transitions in life. The charge in this text is for the people of God to follow the Word of God. However, they must not become too familiar with it. The Word of God is holy and is to be revered.

- When we follow *behind* His Word, **miracles take place.**
- When we follow *behind* His Word, **divine intervention takes place.**
- When we follow *behind* His Word, **God will do great things in our lives.**
- When we follow *behind* His Word, **God gives wisdom to face dangers.**
- When we follow *behind* His Word, **we can rest in the presence of God.**

In order to handle the transitions of life, we must stay *behind* God's Word. For any transitions you are facing today, if you will stay *behind* God's Word, you can make it through any Jordan River experience.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you following behind God's Word in your transitions?

How to Handle the Transitions of Life

Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow The LORD will do amazing things among you."

-JOSHUA 3:5

BIBLE STUDY: JOSHUA'S LESSON

When we come to this portion of the text, we get to see what it looks like for the people of God to be called into consecration. Joshua commanded the people to consecrate and purify themselves because this journey was a holy journey. Consecration was needed because God had set them apart for such a time as this, and He was going to do wonders among them.

It is always good for the people of God to consecrate themselves before The LORD and to present themselves holy before His presence.

But what does this look like?

- Forgiving one another
- Loving one another
- Putting away false idols
- Worshiping the True God of Heaven and earth

The priests were to be consecrated as well. They had to separate themselves for the work of the ministry and to lead the people of God. The task of handling the Ark was a holy task. It was not to be handled lightly. It was to be revered and taken seriously. Not only were they to take it up, but they were to transport the Ark before the people. They were God's representatives before the people of God, and they were to walk and present themselves a certain way.

Like the people of Israel, we should consecrate ourselves as we seek God's guidance and direction. When we face transitions, we need to place our trust and faith in God to work through us, performing His wonders through our lives.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you walking through the transitions of your life?

How are you consecrating yourself before God?

How to Handle the Transitions of Life

Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the Ark of the Covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them. And The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses."

-JOSHUA 3:6-7

BIBLE STUDY: SACRIFICIAL LIVING

For the Israelites, everyone was to lay their lives on the line. This transition was for the whole community. Everyone was heading down toward the dangerous river, where they were going to wait on God to do something phenomenal.

The Jordan River represented danger because of its seasonal flooding and mudslides. It represented trouble because it was not safe to venture into these deep waters. And it represented crisis and hardship because once you were in, there was no way to escape.

When we go through transitions, we may see some similarities with the Jordan River. The places we may be transitioning to may be full of danger, trouble, crisis, and hardship. However, Joshua received his comfort from The LORD as He spoke to him. And as God spoke to Joshua, He also speaks to us through His Word.

In the rest of the account, we read that God's miracle didn't happen until the people and the Ark got down in the Jordan River. The miracle didn't happen until the people stepped out in faith, until they touched the deep water, and until they sacrificed all that they had and depended on The LORD.

Similarly, our miracle won't happen until we put God's Word first in our lives and we go down and face our Jordan. It won't happen until we step out in faith and go down in obedience and prayer. Our miracle won't happen until we sacrifice everything and trust The LORD completely.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What transition are you facing now?

How will you step out in faith and trust?

How to Handle the Transitions of Life

And The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses."

-JOSHUA 3:7

BIBLE STUDY: TRUSTING IN TRANSITIONS

For the Israelites, stepping into the Jordan River required trust in God completely. When we face transitions in our lives, we also need to completely trust in God.

When we trust God instead of giving into fear, things start happening:

- The currents of our Jordan River will back up.
- The trouble in our lives will have to give in to Jesus.
- The crisis of our lives will have to submit to the Word of God.
- The Word of God will show you how to cross over on dry ground.

If God leads you to a Jordan River, He is leading you to cross it. He has the Word to show you what to do. He has the power to make the water behave. He has the authority to give you dry ground. He will give you the faith to step into the deep. And He intends to work everything out to see you across.

I am reminded of Jesus, Who had to face life-threatening transitions while He walked on the earth. He faced many trials, encountered numerous struggles, and was hated by His own people because He sought to do the Will of God and serve others. He lived in transition. His life was always threatened, He was surrounded by enemies, and He moved His ministry around from town to town.

His greatest trial and transition was when He had to face the wrath of His Father for your sins and mine. He died for the sins of the world, was buried in a borrowed tomb, and rose early Easter morning in victory. He stepped in His Jordan River and walked across dry ground.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does it mean to trust God in your life transitions?

How does the example of Jesus give you confidence and hope in your transitions?

God Remembers Sarah

Now The LORD was gracious to Sarah as He had said, and The LORD did for Sarah what He had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.

-GENESIS 21:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: THE PROMISE AND BIRTH OF ISAAC

Has God's promises ever come to pass in your life? Sarah has a story where she has been blessed by God and now receives a wonderful gift from God. The promise has come to pass and finally, she is the mother of a son even in her old age! God remembers her and honors His word.

In the first two verses, we see the faithfulness of God at work. Even though life has given Sarah an impossible situation, her situation changed according to God's plan for her. The passage says, "*The LORD did for Sarah what He had promised.*" This means that God kept His word!

- God kept His promise!
- God gave Sarah a blessing!
- God did not forget her in her time of need!

From the example of Sarah in this text, we can learn that if God said it will be so, then it will come to pass. If He has promised it, He will make it available in His time. The child of God can trust in the word of God and in the Will of God. God is faithful to keep His promises, and we can trust Him to fulfill it in His time.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What promise are you waiting on God for right now?

How can you learn to trust Him more through Sarah's story?

God Remembers Sarah

Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

-GENESIS 21:3-7

BIBLE STUDY: THE CELEBRATION OF ISAAC

In these verses, we see the obedience of Abraham and the miracle of God. We learn that God is able to do great and impossible things in spite of our early limitations. The promises of God have nothing to do with our earthly abilities, possessions, talents, strengths, or pedigrees. God can use anybody to fulfill His divine plan for their lives.

We can also learn from these verses that obedience is crucial to the Will of God. Abraham does two things for Isaac in the first two verses: Abraham names Isaac, and he circumcises him. These were things that God had told Abraham to do. After he was blessed with a son, Abraham obeys God. Like Abraham, when we receive blessings and answers to our prayers, we too need to honor God's Word and do what He has commanded us to do with the blessing.

In the following verses, the miracle of life and God's ability to do what He says He will do are revealed. When Sarah's body said no to childbearing, God said yes.

- Isaac means "laughter." Sarah had no laughter in her life until he came.
- The gift of laughter was important for a life where there is no joy.
- Sarah's son would bring others in her life who could enjoy laughing and joy.

What God says will come to pass. When God says He will bless you, He will do just as He says. He always blesses us so that He can bless others as well.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When you received a blessing from God, how did you obey Him with it?

Ministry, Mandates, and Miracles

Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As The LORD, The God of Israel, lives, Whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.

-1 KINGS 17:1

BIBLE STUDY: THE APPOINTMENT OF ELIJAH

Elijah has a different background than most prophets. His name means "My God is Jehovah!" He was of the inhabitants of Gilead, on the other side of the Jordan. He was called a Tishbite, because he came out of the town of Tishbe, a town in that country. He is appointed to speak on behalf of The LORD, and in his appointment, he is to pronounce judgment on the king. By doing this, he is literally declaring war on the king's authority and sovereignty. In his declaration to King Ahab, Elijah is literally challenging the gods of Baal worship, the king, his wife, and anyone else who had something to say.

Elijah was a one man army that was sent, led, empowered, encouraged, and equipped by God to speak and serve Him. Elijah lets Ahab know three things:

1. The LORD Jehovah is The God of Israel, whom Ahab has forsaken.
2. Jehovah is a living God, not like the gods Ahab worshiped.
3. He himself is God's servant and a messenger sent by God.

This was Elijah's ministry and his mandate! And like Elijah, Christians are also appointed by God to be His hands and feet on earth. We are called to be witnesses for Him, speaking in places where He is despised. We are called to go against the crowd and nation that rejects Him, boldly declaring His Truth.

Let us, like Elijah, become bold in our witness. Let us not shrink back in pronouncement of judgment against sin. We must be like Elijah and prepared to stand even if we must stand alone. God has left a witness in a dark and dying world, and we are that witness!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does it mean to be appointed by God and be bold in our witness?

Ministry, Mandates, and Miracles

Then the word of The LORD came to Elijah: "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan."

-1 KINGS 17:2-3

BIBLE STUDY: THE ASSIGNMENT OF ELIJAH

Here we discover a strange turn in the ministry mandate of Elijah. He was appointed to proclaim the judgment of God and declare a drought on the whole nation. In his pronouncement, he was empowered to say that it would be God's word that "turned the water off in heaven" and that Israel would suffer the wrath of God because of their idolatrous ways. But here we see, God is now telling him to run! And not only to run, but to hide!

Ever notice how sometimes the ministry is strange and that sometimes, God can be using you boldly then asking you to do something strangely? To Elijah, He says, "Speak, now run!" Sometimes, in our ministry, what we hear God say does not make sense! But in those things that look seemingly like contradictions, trust the word of The LORD because it is the assignment of God for your life!

In times when we are told to hide and step back, this is also a time for us to see the Hand of God working. Elijah was ordered to hide. In obedience, he went and dwelt alone in some obscure, unfrequented place, where he could not be discovered. In his hiding, he experienced solitude and silence, waiting for God to act and work.

Like Elijah, we can also use our times of "hiding" to learn to be patient and sit quietly before God. We experience solitude and silence, making us well-rounded for ministry and service. It teaches you how to walk, live, and serve alone. It also teaches us how to *trust in God alone*, not on our abilities and strength.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where is God leading you to "hide" right now?

How can you grow closer to God in this season?

Ministry, Mandates, and Miracles

"You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there."

-1 KINGS 17:4

BIBLE STUDY: THE ARRANGEMENT FOR ELIJAH

Here we see a divine arrangement for God's servant on a mission for Him. Elijah's assignment caused him to isolate himself and to prepare for the rest of the task at hand. You have heard it said, "Where God guides, He provides." We see a wonderful example of this is Elijah's life.

Although Ahab's sin had affected the entire nation, causing drought and despair across the land, Elijah was cared for in spite of what was happening all around him. For Elijah, the brook and hiding was a gift from God and a reminder of His faithfulness while he waited on the next move from God.

Notice another thing. Even though Elijah is at the brook and has water to quench his thirst, there is also another ministry that emerges: the ministry of the ravens. God said, *"I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there."* Through the ravens, God reveals His power. The raven is a selfish bird. They care only for themselves, and they are scavengers. Yet, even before they feed themselves, they bring food to Elijah. This continued on for the three years of drought, and everyday, Elijah had a meal from heaven prepared and clear, clean water to drink. His needs were met by God, his desires were taken care of by God, and his flesh was cared for by God. Elijah was in the center of God's Will in the midst of the drought!

Like Elijah, when God has you by the brook, don't worry about what you will eat, how you will eat, or when you will eat. God has already gone before you to prepare food for you while you practice solitude and rest in Him. It may not be a steak and shrimp on the grill, but it will be enough to sustain you for the ministry.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How have you seen the provision of God in your seasons of drought?

What has God been teaching you while you are "by the brook"?

Ministry, Mandates, and Miracles

So he did what The LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

-1 KINGS 17:5-6

BIBLE STUDY: THE OBEDIENCE OF ELIJAH

As we come to a close of this study, we learn in these verses that God's servant chose to obey the instruction of The LORD! And because of his obedience, he was able to make it from day to day.

- Because of Elijah's obedience, **he was sustained in the ministry.**
- Because of his obedience, **he was able to make it in the drought.**
- Because of his obedience, **he was able to experience the provision of God each and every day for his three-year ministry at the brook.**

Warren Wiersbe once said, "The obedient servant can always depend on his Master's faithful care."¹ Our obedience reveals our faithfulness and trust in God to provide and guide us where He wants us. God will not direct where He will not equip, strengthen, and provide for you.

Moreover, I am reminded of Christ. He had a humble beginning in Nazareth, had a prophetic ministry against the kings of His day, had to wait on The Father to meet His physical needs, and had moments where He was often alone with God, waiting for God to speak and move on His behalf.

Just like Elijah, Jesus did nothing without the permission of His Father. He lived sacrificially, served sacrificially, spoke powerfully, believed authentically, gave His life for the ministry, and exchanged ministry for His life. Through Christ, we can now have a divine appointment, assignment, and arrangement of God, just like Elijah. Let's give our all to the ministry, mandates, and miracles of God!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you faithfully fulfilling the mission God has called you to?

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (1 Ki 17). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

How to Encourage Yourself in The LORD

David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, and had taken captive the women and everyone else in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way. When David and his men reached Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. David's two wives had been captured – Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in The LORD his God.

-1 SAMUEL 30:1-6

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

There are some troubles in life that will come to break the child of God. When these types of dangers attack us, the believer needs to know what to do and how to do it. In this passage, David has been caught in one of life's most trying situations, and he didn't have anyone on his side to encourage him in The LORD. David, in spite of being alone in one of his darkest times, has to learn how to encourage himself, so that he may endure this trial.

After David and his men are dismissed from the Philistine army, they head back home to Ziklag. When they arrive, they discover that every last one of their wives, children, and family members has been taken captive by an invading enemy, all their resources are stolen, and their homes and city are burned to the ground.

David and his men are in a crisis! Their livelihood has been threatened, their egos have been stepped on, their families mistreated, and these men believe that this is all David's fault. They began to talk about stoning him because they were bitter in spirit. The man they had once loved and followed is the man they now hate! But David steps up and leads as God's man in the midst of trouble. He becomes a good picture of a servant leader in difficult times.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When have you faced a difficult situation as a leader?

How to Encourage Yourself in The LORD

David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in The LORD his God. Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelek, "Bring me the ephod." Abiathar brought it to him.

-1 SAMUEL 30:6-7

BIBLE STUDY: DAVID ENCOURAGES HIMSELF

When we arrive at this passage, we see something phenomenal happen in the midst of the crisis. When the loyal men of David get so grieved, they turn on their leader. Their grief overtakes them, and they turn on the one who has been leading them in every battle they had ever fought! They forgot that this was David the great, Israel's most famous warrior. Most importantly, they forgot that David's family was taken too! He had been violated just like them!

Leadership is a hard thing to do when you are leading God's people. Sometimes, they love you and sometimes, they turn on you. But a leader has to stay focused with precision-like determination and never take it personal when the troops start to misbehave. A leader has to step up and lead in the worst of situations. They have to know where to go when nobody else knows where to go.

In this situation, David goes to the priest and asks him to bring him the ephod. The ephod was a significant piece of clothing ascribed to the high priest to be worn with his uniform. It was to be worn when the priest was going on behalf of the people to God. David knows where to go to encourage himself: to God! David recognizes that he is going to need God's help if he is going to be victorious.

Like David, we need to get ourselves in position to hear from God. We must encourage ourselves by praying and taking initiative to get to the throne of God, seeking His face and favor for what is necessary to do. Position yourself to be taught, instructed, and led by The Only One Who can help you. God has just what you need for the crisis that you are in!

THINGS TO PONDER:

When faced with a crisis, how can you position yourself to hear from God?

How to Encourage Yourself in The LORD

Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelek, "Bring me the ephod." Abiathar brought it to him, and David inquired of The LORD, "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?"

"Pursue them," He answered. "You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue."

-1 SAMUEL 30:7-8

BIBLE STUDY: DAVID EMPOWERS HIMSELF

When we arrive at this portion of the text, we see that David empowers himself in the midst of the crisis. Normally, the priest would pray for David, but in this case, David's crisis is personal, pivotal, and preeminent! He cannot wait on second-hand intercession; he's got to pray for himself! He asks God two questions: "*Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?*" He seeks The LORD before acting.

David teaches us how to pray in a crisis. Doing nothing in a crisis is a sign of giving up, and David teaches us that we must never give up! Fighting to the end is what a warrior must do!

In seeking The LORD's guidance, David empowered himself. He empowered himself to get God's permission, to talk to The LORD about his troubles, and to hear the word of instruction for his family's well-being. David took advantage of his position in God, his training in war, his mantle of leadership, and his life experiences. And because David sought The LORD, David got his answer that instructed him what to do.

Like David, when you get serious about a crisis and you pursue God in prayer, you too will get an answer for what you are supposed to do! When you learn to empower yourself and seek The LORD for yourself, nobody will have to tell you what God has said because you will have heard Him for yourself! When you learn to empower yourself to pray, you might not see God working, but you can surely feel Him and the empowerment of His Holy Spirit within you.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you better empower yourself through prayer and seeking The LORD?

How to Encourage Yourself in The LORD

David and the six hundred men with him came to the Besor Valley, where some stayed behind. Two hundred of them were too exhausted to cross the valley, but David and the other four hundred continued the pursuit.

-1 SAMUEL 30:9-10

BIBLE STUDY: DAVID EMPLOYED HIMSELF

In this text, we see that David employs himself to go out and pursue the raiding party because he has gotten word from The LORD. It is with this encouragement and empowerment from God that David has strength and hope. David employs himself, he believes in himself, he has recovered himself, he has revived himself, and he leads himself with six hundred men.

However, as they rode out, two hundred men grew exhausted and couldn't make it go on further to fight for their families. But the Bible says that David kept going, leaving the exhausted men behind!

From this passage, I learned that when you have people like this in your ranks, sometimes you will have to leave them behind because they will slow you down when you are trying to save your family! These exhausted soldiers require attention, and their need for attention will take you off the pursuit of those who need your help! If the troops are too needy, they will demand all of your attention, time, and energy. Here is what I learned:

- You can't fight the enemy and baby-sit the troops too!
- You can't fight the enemy and nurse the wounded at the same time.
- Nurses and warriors are two different people.
- Nurses are for the wounded, but warriors are for the battle.

So, in your battle and crisis, take only those that will follow you in your pursuit. Don't take the weak into battle. Take those that will strengthen, support, and stand with you in a united front against the enemy.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Are you more of a warrior or a nurse? How do you know?

How to Encourage Yourself in The LORD

They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David. They gave him water to drink and food to eat – part of a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of raisins. He ate and was revived, for he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and three nights. David asked him, “Who do you belong to? Where do you come from?” He said, “I am an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite. My master abandoned me when I became ill three days ago. We raided the Negev of the Kerethites, some territory belonging to Judah and the Negev of Caleb. And we burned Ziklag.”

David answered him, “Can you lead me down to this raiding party?” He answered, “Swear to me before God that you will not kill me or hand me over to my master, and I will take you down to them.” He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and reveling because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah.

-1 SAMUEL 30:11-16

BIBLE STUDY: DAVID FINDS AN ALLY

As we come to the close of this narrative, David is smart enough to take care of somebody who has been mistreated by the same enemy! He has found himself an ally and has made a new brother in the fight against his enemy. Because the Egyptian knows the Amalekite whereabouts, traditions, strategies, and warfare techniques, David can use his military intelligence for saving his family.

Every now and then on this journey of life, God will send you an ally that knows more about your enemy than you do. That ally is sent to you to aid you in the deliverance of your loved ones and friends from captivity. So, don't despise, kill, misuse, or mistreat the ally. Let them help you reach your loved ones.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Who has God placed in your life as an ally?

How have they supported and helped you through your crisis?

How to Encourage Yourself in The LORD

David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled. David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives. Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back.

Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow him and who were left behind at the Besor Valley. They came out to meet David and the men with him. As David and his men approached, he asked them how they were. But all the evil men and troublemakers among David's followers said, "Because they did not go out with us, we will not share with them the plunder we recovered. However, each man may take his wife and children and go." David replied, "no, my brothers, you must not do that with what The LORD has given us. He has protected us and delivered into our hands the raiding party that came against us."

-1 SAMUEL 30:17-20, 22-23

BIBLE STUDY: WICKED VS. WEAK

In this text, we see that there are two types of soldiers: wicked and weak. David has to stop them from judging and abusing each other. He reminds them of Who has given them the victory. He says that if it wasn't for God, they would not have been victorious. When you are victorious in your crisis or battle,

- Don't forget Who it is that gives you victory.
- Don't forget those who did not go into battle with you.
- Don't forget to save their families too while you are saving yours.

Sometimes, we can get like this too. Just because somebody doesn't serve like we do, we can get an attitude about what we do vs. what they don't do. But we can't lead in this way. We have to be like David and serve everybody that needs serving. We have to bless everybody who needs blessing.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you become more like David in your leadership?

How to Encourage Yourself in The LORD

David replied, "no, my brothers, you must not do that with what The LORD has given us. He has protected us and delivered into our hands the raiding party that came against us."

-1 SAMUEL 30:23

BIBLE STUDY: DON'T BE DISCOURAGED

There is a story of a man who stopped to watch a Little League baseball game.

As he stopped, he asked one of the youngsters what the score was. The youngster replied, "We're losing 18-0."

"Well," said the man. "I must say you don't look discouraged."

"Discouraged?" the boy asked, puzzled. "Why should we be discouraged? We haven't come up to bat yet."

Did you get it? In life, our situations and circumstances may look bleak at first, but don't be discouraged. The score is about to change! Your time to bat is coming soon! Don't throw in the towel; you will get a chance to score after a while.

Through David's example of leadership, we know how to encourage, empower, and employ ourselves in the midst of adversity and crisis. When we come to God, He equips and strengthens us to go through our battles and come out victorious. He provides allies to support and encourage us along the way. And when we have gone through the crisis with victory, we must not forget Who has given us victory. Even though people may stay behind (as the exhausted soldiers did to David), we must remember to serve, bless, and love them as Christ would.

In the end, remember to not give up! Jesus is with you, and we will be victorious!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What have you learned through David's example of leadership?

How has your perspective changed?

God Knows Just What You Need

"If you love Me, keep My commands. And I will ask The Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – The Spirit of Truth. The World cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

-JOHN 14:15-18

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Everybody every now and then needs help to overcome the pains of this life! When help comes to the believer, it is always right on time, especially when it is divine in essence and supernatural power!

The power in this passage is the assurance of knowing that God knows just what we need and when we need it! Even when we don't know what it would take or what it would cost, God knows. In our lesson, He demonstrates this fact and reveals for the reader that He has clearly thought about our needs and is at work continuously meeting them and serving them for His honor and His glory.

The disciples were in need of comfort because their hearts were heavy and their spirits were sad at the news that Jesus was leaving them and going back to be with His Father. This was more than they could understand. However, Jesus lifts their spirits by telling them that though He was leaving them, He would be going to prepare a place for them and that when He comes back for them, they would be able to come and dwell with Him in The Father's house. He would also make them a promise that everything would be alright because His Father was going to make all things good. He was going to send them a **Helper** that would keep them and help them until Christ came back for them.

From this passage, we can learn that God is always looking out for His children, He is always concerned about the discouragement we feel, and He will equip us with all our needs as we live for Him.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where do you need this encouragement in your life right now?

God Knows Just What You Need

"If you love Me, keep My commands."

-JOHN 14:15

BIBLE STUDY: THE CHARGE OF THE MASTER

In this verse, we see that there is a charge being given by The Master that will help the disciples with their sorrow. It is the *command* to keep His commandments. Jesus knows that if they do this, it will combat the sadness that is trying to overtake their hearts. He says that if they love Him, then they will do this!

The first thing to notice here is a conditional requirement: **"IF you love ME."** Why is this important? I believe that the conditional requirement is given because the blessing is in the latter part of the charge to the disciples. If they love Him, they will receive the blessing! The blessing lies in their obedience. If they obey, they receive something that will help them in their sorrow.

Perhaps it's by keeping the commandments that they would turn their hearts from what was wrong and instead to what God wanted them to do on earth:

1. To keep His commands.
2. To trust in His Word.
3. To adhere to His standard.
4. To identify with what He had in store for them.
5. To trust Him and follow Him even in His physical absence.

Sometimes in this life, the believer needs to remember what Jesus gave us to do, so that we too can escape from the sorrow of this life. It's the Word of God that helps us to be lifted up and separates us from those thoughts that come to take us prisoner and to do us the greatest harm. This is why Jesus commands them to keep His commandments. He knew that their love for Him and His Word could trump anything else that might try to come and draw them away from Him.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you ever had sadness and sorrow that kept you from enjoying God's love?

How did you get through this sadness and sorrow?

God Knows Just What You Need

“And I will ask The Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever.”

-JOHN 14:16

BIBLE STUDY: THE COMFORT OF THE MASTER, PART 1

Jesus is comforting the disciples with the promise that He is going to do a supernatural act on their behalf that will give them what they will need in His absence! The request of Jesus to The Father for another advocate (The Holy Spirit) not only blesses the disciples and helps them, but it also brings glory to The Father that The Son would want to see His disciples filled with His Spirit!

Jesus knew that they would need the same kind of help in His absence and that no one else could satisfy or serve them like He could. God The Spirit Himself would come and finish what The Son had started. God would send His Spirit to care for His disciples! In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit came *upon* them but did not *dwell with* them. However, now He would come to *live inside* of them and *remain* forever! Jesus knew that they did not just the impartation of His grace but they needed the full indwelling of His grace.

Here is the comforting promise given by Jesus: He knows just what the disciples need in the midst of their trouble, and He knows just what we need. His disciples were worried about not being able to see Him, hear Him, or have Him near. But Jesus would comfort them by revealing His plan for their lives!

- God’s plan for them did not involve them being lonely!
- God’s plan for them did not involve them being without a shepherd!
- God’s plan for them did not involve them living without Him and His divine wisdom, guidance, protection, grace, mercy, provision, and communion!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How has your communion and relationship with God grown through this truth?

What does it mean to have God’s Holy Spirit dwelling within you?

God Knows Just What You Need

"And I will ask The Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever."

-JOHN 14:16

BIBLE STUDY: THE COMFORT OF THE MASTER, PART 2

The disciples were going to receive The Comforter. If they loved Him, they would keep His commandments. And this love of Him would enable Him to work on their behalf by sending another Helper to look after them. His ministry in their hearts would come alongside them as they trudged through this evil world. He would come alongside them by living in them, serving them, guiding them, lifting them, encouraging them, providing for them, and making a divine presence in their lives!

When I look at this text, I can see the divine favor of the child of God in this life! Jesus has not left us without help to make it through this barren land. By giving us His Spirit, Jesus has been more than good to us! We too have had and are continuing to have the divine favor of God in our lives because God lives in us. In His living in us, He continues to take care of us, smile on us, serve us, care for us, provide for us, lead us, guide us, direct us, superintend to our needs, lift up or bowed-down hearts, and move supernaturally in every area of our lives!

I don't know where we would be without The LORD. We could not have made it this far without Him, and we would've given up long ago without His help. We would be lost and headed for hell without His mercy. I am glad today that He walks with us and talks with us along life's narrow road. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter, King, Way Maker, Guide, and Compass. He is the fulfilled promise of The Savior in every area of our lives! He has come alongside us and made His residence in us. He knows just what we need!

THINGS TO PONDER:

In what ways are you thankful for The Holy Spirit's presence in your life?

Where have you felt the comfort of The Master?

God Knows Just What You Need

“And I will ask The Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – The Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you.”

-JOHN 14:16-17

BIBLE STUDY: THE CONNECTION OF THE MASTER

In our passage, Jesus identifies the ministry of The Holy Spirit! He is connecting the disciples with The One Who will come and continue to totally transform their way of life:

1. He identifies Him as **The Spirit of Truth.**
2. He identifies Him as **The Source of Truth.**
3. He identifies Him as **The One Who communicates Truth.**
4. He identifies Him as being **The Only Way that men can know Truth.**

The Holy Spirit is called The Spirit of Truth because His teaching is true, and He glorifies Christ Who is The Truth! As The One responsible for the illumination of men, Jesus says that the world could not receive Him because they couldn't see Him. But why? Unbelievers want to see *before* they believe. They would only believe if they saw, and even then, not many of them would believe still.

This is a stark contrast to the believer. We can see The Holy Spirit because we believe in Christ. The unbeliever cannot see The Holy Spirit because they do not believe in Christ. And, as a result, they do not have access to the work of The Holy Spirit or His divine activity in the world and in the circumstances of life.

The promise of The Holy Spirit is good news for the believer. It is also a promise that God will be with them and that everything will be alright. There is no need to dwell in sorrow or sadness because we have The Promised Comforter.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does this truth of seeing The Holy Spirit mean to you today?

How can you encourage others with this truth?

God Knows Just What You Need

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

-JOHN 14:18

BIBLE STUDY: THE COMING OF THE MASTER

There is another divine promise from Christ in this passage: *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."* The word for orphans is also the word for "comfortless." According to His promise, we are not alone, abandoned, helpless, and hopeless! Wherever we go, The Spirit is with us. There is no need to have a troubled heart when you have The Spirit of God dwelling within you!

In addition, Jesus' promise of coming again has three connotations:

1. He is coming again after His resurrection from the Dead.
2. He is coming again in the person of The Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
3. He is coming again to take us from this world to be with Him in Heaven.

All three of these connotations are correct theology for the believer. However, I believe He is talking about the great world of The Comforter in this text that is The One to come at the day of Pentecost.

And because The Spirit of Truth was coming,

- He was never going to leave them again.
- He was never going to be separate from them again.
- He was never going to leave them lonely.
- They would forever know that He was with them always.
- They would know that He loves, serves, feeds, cares for, walks with, and meets every one of their needs.

This is wonderful news for us today too! God also gives us His Holy Spirit to comfort us in our troubles, our loneliness, and our sorrow.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you combat the feelings of loneliness and sorrow with this promise?

How are you faithfully awaiting the coming of The Master?

God Knows Just What You Need

“And I will ask The Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – The Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

-JOHN 14:16-18

BIBLE STUDY: THE GIFT OF THE MASTER

God knows just what we need. Even in the midst of discouragement, sadness, sorrow, grief, despair, loneliness, and depression, God knows what we need. There is no sorrow that God cannot fix, for He has left the believer the greatest gift they could ever have: The Comforter and the indwelling power of The Holy Spirit.

In Christ, we are never alone. Because of The Spirit of God, Who dwells in us, we have an Advocate and an Intercessor!

- As our personal Advocate, He pleads our case before The Father.
- As our Advocate, He defends us and maintains our case before God.
- As our Advocate, He supports and promotes the interest of The Father in our minds and keeps us focused on what God’s Will is for us.
- As our personal Intercessor, He is always praying for us and speaking on our behalf to The Father.
- When we don’t know what to pray, He intercedes for us.
- When we have done all we know how to do, He does the rest on our behalf.
- He is our God, Friend, Voice, Access to The Father, Peace, and Help in time of need.

God knows what we need. Just as He knew the disciples would need His leadership and guidance, He promised the gift of The Holy Spirit. This gift is also for us, Who without physically seeing Him, need His presence and guidance in our lives to bring us into closer relationship with God and intercede on our behalf.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How has God provided just what you needed in a moment of despair or trouble?

How did you thank Him in response?

Hard Lessons for Hard Times

Jesus and His disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way He asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are The Messiah."

-MARK 8:27-29

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

One of the most challenging things for the child of God is living in a fallen world and dealing with lies and deceits from the devil. Because of sin, everything around us has been contaminated by the Fall. All of sin's temptations cloud out the Word of God and attempt to keep us from knowing His Will for our lives and His plans for our future.

In this text, Jesus wants to reveal Himself to His disciples. At the time, Caesarea Philippi was a pagan city built by a gentile king named Herod-Philip. He erected this place in honor of the Roman emperor Caesar the Great. It was a wicked city, a den of shame, and a place of idol worship. The city itself was known also for Caesar worship, and they had a god for every occasion.

It was in this city that Jesus and His disciples had come to. It is in Jesus' final stretch of ministry, and He is on His way to the cross. However, before He goes, He comes to Caesarea Philippi and gathers a contemporary perspective on what the ministry has done on earth. As they gather together and look out over the pagan city and over the unbelieving population, Jesus asks, "*Who do **people** say I am?*"

And then He directs this same question to the disciples: "*Who do **you** say I am?*" Their response to this question would reveal their belief and their faith.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How do you answer this question? Who do you say Jesus is?

Hard Lessons for Hard Times

Jesus and His disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way He asked them, "Who do people say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

-MARK 8:27-28

BIBLE STUDY: THE DISCIPLES' REFLECTION

The disciples' reflection upon The Master's question brought forth answers from some of those they heard talking and some who they had asked. They gave three answers:

1. ***Some say John the Baptist***
 - a. Because Jesus preached like John.
 - b. Because like John, Jesus did not give in to the Pharisees.
 - c. They had the same message of repentance and judgment.
2. ***Others say Elijah***
 - a. Because Jesus could perform miracles.
 - b. Because like Elijah, Jesus was powerful and mighty through God.
 - c. Jesus preached like Elijah preached and prophesied.
3. ***And still others, one of the prophets***
 - a. Because some still did not know Who Jesus was, but they believed that He was like the prophets of old.
 - b. They knew He was sent from God, and He was not like other men.

The people had seen and heard The Master, but they did not know Who Jesus really was. In His teaching and miracles, Jesus proclaimed and gave evidence that He was God. However, the people were still confused and unsure Who He was. I believe that this is a picture for today. Many people still do not know Who Christ is. It is a tragedy when people believe the social commentary of their unbelieving peers rather than what Christ Himself says in His Word.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How do the people around you answer this question?

How can you point them even closer to Christ?

Hard Lessons for Hard Times

"But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are The Messiah."

-MARK 8:29

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S REDIRECTION

In the midst of unbelief, The Master redirects the question to the disciples to see Who they say He is. Jesus wants to know if they have a grasp on the Truth of Scripture, if they believe all they have seen and heard, if they have understood Who He truly is, if they too have hard hearts and dull ears, and if they realize that they have been in the presence of God.

As Peter responds, he says Jesus is The Messiah. By responding this way, Peter is also claiming that Jesus is The Anointed One, The Fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy, God's Son, and The Christ. Peter's answer is in authority, absolute confidence, and in total agreement of all he has seen and heard by The Master.

In our world today, true Christians must be able to respond in this way too.

- We must know, without a shadow of a doubt, that Jesus is God's Son.
- We must know that there is no one equal to Christ on the earth.
- We must know that we live, move, and have our being because of Jesus.
- We must know that He is Emmanuel, God with us.
- We must know that He is The Way, The Truth, and The Life.
- We must know that He is greater than all.
- We must be able to say with complete authority and confidence that He is The Only Way to God The Father. There is no other way but Him.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you, like Peter, be bold and confident in your response?

Who do you say Jesus is?

Hard Lessons for Hard Times

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about Him. He then began to teach them that The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law, and that He must be killed and after three days rise again.

-MARK 8:30-31

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S REVELATION

Jesus warns the disciples here not to tell anyone about Him because of the opposition His disciples would receive if they did. It was not the appointed time. The Scripture had to first be fulfilled and then the time would be right to proclaim Him as The Messiah.

When the disciples recognized Who Jesus was, the time was concerning the purpose of Christ on earth. Jesus wanted them to understand what the Scriptures had already proclaimed about Him and what would happen in the future. Peter's confession was correct, but Jesus wanted to also open for them the complete counsel of God, revealing to them all that was said about Him in the Scriptures (*see Isaiah 53:3-5*).

God delights in revealing His Will to His church. God's pleasure lies also in our understanding of His plan for all of humanity and for His Kingdom. He reveals it through His Word. God also wants you to know what His Will is for your life, so He speaks to you through the Scriptures.

Jesus then begins to teach the disciples about His coming death and resurrection. The news of the impending trouble was not good news for them. They were not prepared to handle this teaching from Jesus. I imagine that they must have been upset, confused, and disturbed. They probably could not believe that The Master was talking this way. Yet, the disciples did have a good thing going: they wanted an earthly king to reestablish Jewish nationalism. And they believed that Jesus had come to do this very thing.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What is God revealing to you through His Word today?

Hard Lessons for Hard Times

He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when Jesus turned and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" He said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

-MARK 8:32-33

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S REBUKE

In this passage, we see The Master displaying several things:

1. Jesus has an **unchanging agenda** to go to Calvary.
2. Jesus has an **unyielding attitude** to Peter's emotions!
3. Jesus has a **non-negotiable commitment** to The Father's plan!
4. Jesus has an **undying love and loyalty** to humanity and its redemption!
5. Jesus has an **act of grace** because God was gracious with Peter! (He could have destroyed him for his outbursts, rebukes, and satanic suggestions.)
6. Jesus has an **act of mercy** because God was merciful to Peter! (By all rights, calamity should have been his for getting too casual with God.)

Jesus rebukes Peter, speaking directly to the one who influenced him to say such a thing (Satan). Peter was not Satan, but Satan was lurking in the crowd, waiting and watching for someone he could tempt in the fellowship. You see, Satan wanted Jesus to by-pass Calvary because he knew that if Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures, humanity would be saved from sin. So, he tried to use Peter's emotions to change Jesus' mind. And as a result, Peter tried to argue with God!

When you are I argue against what the Word of God says, we too must be rebuked. Jesus saw the future, and He knew what was needed in order to save us. He had to go to Calvary to pay redemption's price and take away our sins. Without His sacrifice, Peter, the disciples, and all of humanity would not be saved. God knows the future, so in the situations we face, we should not argue with God. If His Word says it, we must obey it!

THINGS TO PONDER:

When have you responded like Peter? What was the outcome?

Nothing But Leaves

The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to find out if it had any fruit. When He reached it, He found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.

-MARK 11:12-13

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S EXPECTATION

On His way to the city along the road, Jesus spots a tree standing alone. He goes to it to find fruit. The Master had an expectation of the fig tree. He desired for the tree to produce what He had created it to produce. He was only looking for figs, nothing else. The Master desired for the tree to give back to Him what He knows it ought to have within it to give to Him. This fig tree was designed in glory, and the basic essentials of its make-up was created by the word of God's mouth.

The Master's expectation of the fig tree gives us a picture of two things:

1. It is a picture of **Old Testament** Israel and what she was supposed to do on earth. He came in expectation to see the fruit of Israel's labor on earth because she was the nation God had chosen to bring salvation to the world. God had an expectation concerning the spiritual fruit of her labors.
2. It is also a **New Testament** picture of Christ's expectation of all of us who claim to have been born again. There is a great expectation of Christ to see fruit from our lives. He expects our living to be fruitful, not in vain. Jesus has saved and filled us with His Spirit so that we might bear much fruit for Him.

We are like the fig tree in this text. We are the ones on examination. And we are the ones that ought to have lives that reproduce the fruits of righteousness. God expects fruit to be produced from how we live for Him, and He expects our fruit to be shown and manifested through our lives.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Are you aware that God is expecting great things of you?

What fruit are you currently producing?

Nothing But Leaves

Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to find out if it had any fruit. When He reached it, He found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.

-MARK 11:13

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S EXAMINATION

Fig trees in Northern Palestine were not like other trees. For other trees, they would first produce leaves and then bear fruit. However, fig trees did the opposite. They first produced figs and then had leaves. When you saw a fig tree with leaves, that was a sign that the figs were already ripe for picking and harvesting. And when you saw a fig tree without leaves, that meant that the buds were growing and the figs were on their way.

In the text, we are told that it was not the season for figs. However, figs were ripe in Judea as early as the Passover, and the harvest came after the Passover. At the time of this text, it was five days until the time the figs could be harvested. It was not the season for figs because the figs were not quite ripe yet. But they would be soon! When Jesus comes to the fig tree, it would have been a few days before the harvesting time. So, there should have been fruit on the tree.

However, this fig tree only has leaves but no fruit. It was deceitful and pretending to have something it did not. It offered false hope to the hungry passersby, and it had nothing to offer those in need. It was nothing but leaves.

- Because it was nothing but leaves, it gave off the false appearance that it was a mature tree that had produced fruit.
- Because it was nothing but leaves, it gave off the appearance that anyone who came its way could taste its sweet fruit.
- Because it was nothing but leaves, it gave off the appearance that it was truly a fig tree. **However, upon closer examination by The Master, it was revealed for the fake, phony, and perpetrator that it really was.**

THINGS TO PONDER:

What appearance are you displaying to others?

Upon closer examination by The Master, would God agree with this appearance?

Nothing But Leaves

Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to find out if it had any fruit. When He reached it, He found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.

-MARK 11:13

BIBLE STUDY: THE FRUIT TEST

Unfortunately, in our day and age, we also face fig trees like the one in our passage. Even many churches and believers can be compared to this fig tree. On the outside, they have plenty of pretty green leaves, but underneath, there is no Christian fruit. They do not have the fruit of The Spirit on their branches.

But the fruit of The Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

-GALATIANS 5:22-23

Here is a **test** to check your fruit. Ask yourself these questions:

1. Does The Spirit of God control my life?
2. Does the love of God live in my heart for all people?
3. Does the joy of your salvation possess your soul, thoughts, and lifestyle?
4. Does the peace that passes all understanding belong to you?
5. Does the patience of The Spirit rule your decision making?
6. Does the kindness of The Master dictate how you interact with others?
7. Does goodness and faithfulness teach you how to serve?
8. Does gentleness and self-control describe your behavior on earth?

Chances are that if you cannot answer “yes” to three or more of these questions, the fruit has fallen off the tree. If the fruits of The Spirit do not describe your life, you are nothing but leaves. If this is the case, check yourself and ask God to reveal where you can bear His fruit more in your life.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What about you? Are you all talk and no walk?

How is your spiritual fruit?

Nothing But Leaves

Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to find out if it had any fruit. When He reached it, He found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.

-MARK 11:13

BIBLE STUDY: THE MODERN FIG TREES OF TODAY

When you survey America today, you see a pseudo church larger than life on T.V. People portray that they love God, but they have no desire to serve the hungry, homeless, prisoners, prostitutes, poor, or anyone that does not look or act like them! I have a concern today for people who are nothing but leaves, for the dressed-up fig trees. I have a concern for the modern day fig trees.

- They act religious on the outside but have nothing to show for it in their lives and internally.
- They participate and go to church on Sunday morning, but their lives have not been with Jesus.
- They sing in our choirs and listen to our teaching, but their souls are not affected by the words they proclaim and hear.
- They preach in our pulpits, but they hate the folks they preach to.
- They take the money from the offering plate and spend it on themselves while those in their congregations live on fixed incomes.
- They claim they have the love of God but treat their families with no love behind closed doors.

As Jesus had a problem then, I am sure He has a problem with them now. Israel, for example, thought they were too good for the Gentiles. They thought they were too good for Jesus too and rejected Him as their Messiah and King. As a result, they were nothing but leaves. And because they were nothing but leaves, judgment was passed upon them.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you met a modern-day fig tree?

In your own words, what does it mean to be “nothing but leaves”?

Nothing But Leaves

Then He said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And His disciples heard Him say it.

-MARK 11:14

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S EVALUATION

After not meeting The Master's expectation and failing His examination, The Master evaluated the tree's disposition and ordered it condemned.

- After close evaluation, **the tree was cursed.**
- After close evaluation, **the tree was no good to The Master.**
- After close evaluation, **the tree was found to be useless.**
- After close evaluation, **the tree was only a fake.**
- After close evaluation, **the tree was good to no one.**
- After close evaluation, **the tree was put out of service.**

The Master's evaluation was final! There was no second opinion, no second option, no second mercy, no second grace, no second opportunity to bear fruit. The tree had one time in this season to produce; it would not get another. Judgment came for the tree that day.

The lesson is clear: that which is designed to produce fruit and does not is cut off. Because tomorrow is not guaranteed, every day is the last day you and I have to produce fruits of righteousness. Every day is the last day you and I have to share the love of God with others. Every day is the last day you and I have to display the peace that passes all understanding. Every day is the last day you and I have to be long-suffering and kind to others. Every day is the last day you and I have to distribute and display the fruits of goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The Master is expecting this of us! He is examining and evaluating us to see if we are truly producing fruit or if we are nothing but leaves.

THINGS TO PONDER:

After close evaluation, what would The Master say of your fruit?

Since tomorrow is not guaranteed, how will you bear fruit today?

How to Live for Jesus in a Wicked World

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God Who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose.

-PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

BIBLE STUDY: THE CHRISTIAN CALL

The child of God has a unique calling in the world. In this passage, Paul identifies for us what that calling is:

- We are to be careful to put into action all that God tells us to do.
- We are to be careful to show how God has saved us by obeying His Word in every area of our lives.
- We are to be careful to show how God has saved us by having a reverence and fear of God in the world. (If we have this, we will avoid worldly behavior because we believe that God is watching and desires us to be like Him.)
- As Christians, we are called to obey God because He is working in us to do what pleases Him.

This is a big deal! As Christians, we no longer just live for ourselves, but our lives now must be a reflection and display of Christ in us. We are called to be careful, remembering that how we live, respond, and act would bring glory to God, not ourselves or anyone else. The world is watching, and we are called to display and share God's hope and love with those around us.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What are Christians called to do on the earth?

What does this calling mean to you?

How to Live for Jesus in a Wicked World

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.

-PHILIPPIANS 2:14-15

BIBLE STUDY: THE CHRISTIAN CHALLENGE

As Christians, the Philippians lived in a pagan world. There was strange worship and immoral living all around them. They were constantly faced with the temptation to do wrong and to compromise their faith.

- They had a challenge to not be like the world.
- They had a challenge to stay away from complaining and arguing.
- They had a challenge to do this so that the world could not pass any blame on them.
- They had a challenge to live clean and sober lives.
- They had a challenge to live innocent lives because their world was living in rebellion against God.
- They had a challenge to let their lives be a bright light to a dark world.

I am sure the Philippian believers felt the weight and pressure of this challenge as they were constantly faced with wrongdoing in their city. However, for believers, we have a greater calling, and our lives are no longer our own. We live for the glory of God, and He gives us the strength to continue and endure till the end.

THINGS TO PONDER:

The Philippians had several challenges facing them. How can you resonate with the believers of Philippi?

What are some of our challenges today?

How to Live for Jesus in a Wicked World

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the Word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

-PHILIPPIANS 2:14-18

BIBLE STUDY: THE CHRISTIAN CHARGE

The Philippians were given a mandate by Paul that was to help them in the ministry of the church. It was also to encourage him for his labors.

- They were charged to hold tightly to the Word of life (to not let it go, but to guard it closely).
- They were charged to make Paul proud by holding onto the Truth of God.
- They were charged to remember that his life was a “libation,” a poured out offering upon the sacrifice of their service to God.
- They were charged with knowing that Paul’s suffering for them brought him joy, and they were encouraged to rejoice with him in those sufferings.

For the Philippian church, this is a serious charge that should not be taken lightly. And like the Philippians, we too are given this charge. We are called to hold tightly to God’s Word and Truth. By keeping this charge, we bring honor to God and joy to those who have been alongside us in our spiritual journey. And if we are to suffer for the sake of Christ, we are to count it all joy.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How important was the charge to the Philippian church?

How can we respond to this same charge today?

True Worship Before God

Then I looked, and there before me was The Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with Him 144,000 who had His Name and His Father's Name written on their foreheads.

-REVELATION 14:1

BIBLE STUDY: IN POSITION FOR WORSHIP

When God shows John this picture, it is a vision of what is to come on the earth. Jesus, The Lamb, will one day stand on the great Mount Zion (Jerusalem), and He will return with the Jews who have been removed from their homes. Jesus will one day rule the world again from His Holy City, Jerusalem.

The 144,000 are those who came to faith in Christ during the Great Tribulation. They were protected and kept by God during the early years of the devil's reign on earth (see *Revelation 7*). They were also given His Name as an identifying mark that reveals Whose they were. In the End Times, there are only two types of people in the earth: those who belong to God and those who belong to Satan.

These 144,000 are in position to worship The One Who saved them from their sins and Who protected them from the evil one during the Great Tribulation. And just like these 144,000, we too are in position to worship The God of our salvation!

- As Christians today, Jesus rules and reigns in our hearts.
- We are the children of God awaiting The Master's return for us.
- We are set apart by faith in Jesus and salvation in His Name.
- We have the mark of Christ on our hearts, and we have been saved by the precious blood shed for us at Calvary's cross.

Our position in Christ is great, and we don't have to experience the Great Tribulation. We can praise Him now!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you worship God for His salvation today?

What does it mean to have Christ's Name on your heart?

True Worship Before God

And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.

-REVELATION 14:2

BIBLE STUDY: IN PARTNERSHIP TO WORSHIP

When John looked up and saw The Lamb, he heard a sound! The sound was what was about to take place in heaven and earth. The vision is of Jesus on earth in Jerusalem, and there is a sound that takes place in heaven.

Here are a couple things to observe:

1. Evidently, the time has not yet come for Christ to return because the tribulation is still in progress. God wants John to see what is coming at the end of the tribulation. It is a picture of the celebration of worship that is to come!
2. There will be wonderful participation on that day! All of those who play instruments will make a sound that will penetrate heaven. Our voices will also rise in song and praise to God Almighty!

From this exciting news, we ought to get excited thinking about this. Even today, there ought to be a great anticipation on our part when it comes to worship! We ought to make a noise with our instruments and voices that move heaven when we worship. We too ought to have a great enthusiastic feeling about praising God while we live here on earth!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How do you imagine this great assembly of praise in heaven?

What are you most looking forward to in eternity?

How can you invite more enthusiasm into your worship and praise?

True Worship Before God

And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

-REVELATION 14:3

BIBLE STUDY: IN PARTICIPATION OF WORSHIP

The 144,000 Jews that were together in worship made up a special choir that sang in front of the throne of God. They had an audience of one, and their selection was something new! They brought God the gift of praise and worship.

This is a special song that no one else could sing but them. And this is because no one had experienced what they had gone through during the tribulation period. They were all united in one voice and one heart to sing praise to The LORD, Who had redeemed them from the earth.

While we are waiting upon the earth for this coming day, we too should delight in singing praises to God. While we serve Him on earth, we should remember that our songs are for God alone, an audience of one! And while we journey through time in our lives, let us make our music as holy as we can so that we can worship God with a sound that is like no other!

We need more songs like this and more songwriters with this type of worship in mind. We need God-fearing men and women that can compose music that heaven will rejoice over. We need people who know that when we worship, it is not about them but rather, it is about God!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How would you define worship in your own words?

How has your perspective changed after reading about the song of the 144,000?

How can you praise God with this new perspective in mind?

True Worship Before God

These [the 144,000] are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow The Lamb wherever He goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and The Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

-REVELATION 14:4-5

BIBLE STUDY: THEIR POWER IN WORSHIP

The 144,000 were pure because God had saved them from sin. They were pure because they kept themselves from worshiping the false gods of the world. They were called pure because their hearts were only for Jesus during their journey on earth. They followed The Lamb and lived lives of obedience, and they did not follow any other religions. They were sold out to the cross and their “talk” matched their “walk.” They were holy people who loved The LORD.

In addition, they were purchased by God from among other people on the earth! And in this way, they were also a special offering to God and The Lamb! Because of God’s love for them when they surrendered their lives back to God, they lived sacrificially. They lived their lives as an offering to God and did nothing to offend Him or to defile themselves (see *Romans 12:1-2*). Because of the way they lived, no falsehood could be charged against them. They were genuine believers on fire and on point for God!

- God is looking for us to also live our lives this way for Him while we are on earth.
- Because of Christ, we too were made pure by the finished work at Calvary.
- We too must keep yourselves from worshiping the false gods of the world.
- We too are called to purity when our hearts are only for Jesus during our journey on earth.
- When we follow The Lamb and live lives of obedience, we too are living sacrifices for Him.
- We too must learn to be sold out to the cross and live out our faith.

THINGS TO PONDER:

In what ways can you honor God more as you look forward to eternity?

When Trouble Came to Joseph

But they saw him [Joseph] in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."

-GENESIS 37:18-20

BIBLE STUDY: AN EVIL PLOT

Sometimes, God uses our troubles to prepare us for leadership in the future. This is what He did for Joseph. In order for Joseph to be a great leader, it was going to take great humility. So here, we get to see what God does and allows to happen to Joseph in order for him to be prepared to do great things for Him in the future.

When we come to this portion of Joseph's story, the brothers are out of town on business, and Joseph is sent to go and check on them "once again." As he travels to check on them, he has no idea what is about to happen to him:

1. Here we learn that the brothers hate Joseph and make plans to kill him. This is family dysfunction at its best.
2. They call him a "dreamer," and this is the reason their hatred is fueled toward him. In addition, he is highly favored by their father.
3. Here we also learn that they have devised a plan to kill, bury, and lie. They hate Joseph so much that they are willing to lie about his death.

This is evil, diabolical and satanic even. Murder, lying, and hatred are all from the evil one. Behind the scenes of this family dysfunction is the tempter attempting to steal, kill, and destroy. And like Joseph's family, the world today also hates the believer and tries to destroy their witness. It lays in the shadows, thinking of ways to silence their witness. This is why it is so important to stand grounded and firm in The LORD, allowing Him to protect you and work His Will in your life.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What stands out to you about the brothers' behavior in this passage?

Have you ever seen the world do this to Christians before? How?

When Trouble Came to Joseph

When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

-GENESIS 37:21-22

BIBLE STUDY: AN ETERNAL PROTECTION

Here, we see a divine interaction being discussed in the midst of a diabolical scheme. It is divine because God is not going to allow Joseph to be killed; He has a plan for his life. Reuben, the elder brother, is caught in between his brothers' rage and his own love for Joseph. He acts as if he is a collaborator with his brothers, but he really does not want to see Joseph get hurt. So, he offers another idea that may buy him some time to come back and rescue Joseph.

In a way, Reuben resembles Pontius Pilot when the crowd brought Jesus before him in order to crucify Him (see *Luke 23:13-16*). Pilot did not want to kill Jesus. He had no reason to murder The Messiah. However, because of the pressure from the evil crowd, he sought another way to punish Him (sending Jesus to Herod and then sending Him to be flogged and whipped). Joseph is innocent, and Reuben knows this. Yet, instead of doing the right thing, he does not have the courage to openly protect Joseph from those who want him dead.

The world is filled with people who like "options" when it comes to persecuting believers and the innocent. In Reuben's case, he was looking for an alternative that he may not have Joseph's blood on his hands and that he might rescue him from the presence of his brothers. However, he is not willing to openly stand up for Joseph.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How many "Modern-Day Reubens" do you know?

Have you ever been convinced to stand up for someone but been afraid to do so?

What should Reuben have done instead of agreeing to do harm to Joseph?

When Trouble Came to Joseph

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe – the ornate robe he was wearing – and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it. As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

-GENESIS 37:23-25

BIBLE STUDY: EXECUTING EVIL PLANS

In this passage, we see just how ruthless these men were to their own brother:

1. They go through with their evil scheme which reveals the true motives of their hearts.
2. They also have no remorse. This was a premeditated act of murder. They were planning for Joseph to just die in the pit. There was no water in this cistern, so there was no opportunity for Joseph to survive or climb out.
3. They were evil to him and then they sat down to have a meal. There were no feelings for their brother. Their hearts were totally corrupted.
4. They also stripped him of his robe! They took away the physical thing that was going to be a reminder to them of who he was and what he said God told him he was going to be.
5. They separated him from his community, isolated him, and left him alone.
6. They attempted to cut him off from the living because murder and evil was in their hearts.

When the world assaults the believer, these are the same methods they use. They attempt to strip us of our witness and cut us off politically, socially, psychologically, and emotionally from others. Yet, even in the midst of this evil plan, God was at work. His brother's plan was to kill him, but God's plan was to get Joseph to Egypt.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What have you observed about the trouble that comes from the world?

Can you see how God directed the entire event in Joseph's journey?

When Trouble Came to Joseph

Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood! His brothers agreed. So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

-GENESIS 37:26-28

BIBLE STUDY: AN EVIL PROFIT

Here we see what appears to be a change of heart. However, it is only a change in that Judah is aware that his conscience is going to trouble him if he participates in this murder. However, he is not repentant; he is only feeling guilty. Like Rueben, he now offers an alternative plan: selling Joseph as a slave.

We learn here that repentance and guilt are two different things:

1. Feeling guilty does not make you turn from your sin.
2. Guilt comes from not doing what you know you should do.
3. Repentance comes when God is drawing you to flee from sin, and you obey the prompting of His Holy Spirit and follow Him in obedience.
(“Godly sorrow is what leads to salvation.”)

Judah does not have godly sorrow; he only has guilt. He does not turn from the evil intentions of his heart to get rid of Joseph. He adjusts his plan in order to “keep his conscience clean.” We face many modern-day Judahs today too. Those who betray, hurt, and sin against us. When they do, they may feel guilt. But without repentance, it is not the godly sorrow that leads to salvation.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How many “Modern-day Judahs” do you know?

Have you ever had guilt over your behavior but you were not willing to stop what you were doing?

Why is godly sorrow so important for true repentance versus guilt?

When Trouble Came to Joseph

When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?" Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe."

He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces." Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave." So his father wept for him. Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of the Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

-GENESIS 37:29-36

BIBLE STUDY: AN ACT OF DISHONOR

Here we have an interesting section of the story. Evidently, Reuben was missing when his brothers came up with the plan to sell Joseph. After the transaction was complete and they had all gone to the next location, Reuben comes back with the idea that he will release Joseph now.

From Reuben, we can learn that **failing to act on behalf of the innocent when you have the opportunity to do so is a sin**. We have to be willing to help people when they need our help. We cannot allow the need of the believer to go unmet for the sake of our convenience or the fear of what others may say.

When the brothers bring the robe spilled with goat's blood, we see evil and deception at its highest point. They even dishonor their father by lying to him. However, what they meant for evil, God meant for good. God can use the plans of the unrighteous to move the righteous on the center stage of His divine plan.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What lessons can you take away from Joseph's story and God's divine plan for him, despite the evil that was done and conspired against him?

Pharaoh's Dreams and Joseph's Destiny

Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, The LORD was with him; He showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because The LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

-GENESIS 39:20-23

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Joseph has gone from being a seventeen year-old boy who was full of pride by being the chosen son of his father to now being humbled, understanding how others try and use you. He now understands the temptations of the world and how important it is to be a good leader. These years of growth for Joseph can be seen as a time of preparation and change. Joseph has been prepared to be the one that would bless all of God's people.

This is the way God works in our lives too. Everything has to happen in God's time. You might want the answer today, but God has perfect timing that is for our best. God brings His people through a process of testing and trials in order for them to grow to be the people He created them to be in His time.

This is true no matter what age you are or what circumstances you are facing. You might be feeling like you have waited long enough for God to do something with you. Perhaps He already has. Or perhaps He has brought you through whatever trials and temptations you were facing so that you could still be a blessing to others in your senior years. God works His plan in His time. This is what God was up to the whole time in Joseph's experience.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What do you think about this truth?

How can you relate to this part of Joseph's life?

In what ways has your journey been similar?

Pharaoh's Dreams and Joseph's Destiny

When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

-GENESIS 41:1-4

BIBLE STUDY: PHARAOH'S PROBLEM, GOD'S TIMING, PART 1

The first verse in this passage says that two full years had passed. If you remember from Joseph's time in prison, he interprets the dreams of a baker and a cupbearer. When the cupbearer is called back to serve Pharaoh once again, he tells Joseph that he will remember him. However, Scripture tells us that the cupbearer forgot about Joseph. And now, we are told two full years have passed before the cupbearer is reminded of Joseph. I am sure by this time, Joseph may have given up hope that the cupbearer would do anything to rescue him out of prison.

This brings us to the familiar part of the story: the dreams. The most powerful man in Egypt has dreams that he cannot interpret and a problem he cannot fix. He is disturbed and only God can help him. God is going to use these dreams to move Pharaoh on God's larger agenda to work in Joseph's life.

It has been two years of prison time, but Joseph can't do anything but wait. He has been placed in a situation where God is at work. He may not like it, and it may not be comfortable. It may be hard, and it may be difficult. However, God is not moving him out of prison yet. Joseph is spending time in solitude with God, for God, and because of God's grace. God has a plan to promote him, but it will happen in God's time.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you been in a situation like this in your life?

Can you understand what Joseph is going through?

Pharaoh's Dreams and Joseph's Destiny

When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted – thin and scorched by the east wind. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up; it had been a dream.

In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

- GENESIS 41:1-8

BIBLE STUDY: PHARAOH'S PROBLEM, GOD'S TIMING, PART 2

These are vivid dreams. In the first dream, they are about fat cows followed by skinny cows. The skinny cows eat the fat ones. In the second dream, there are good heads of wheat and thin ones. The good heads of wheat are swallowed up by the thin heads that follow.

This is beyond the Pharaoh's ability to understand. And in this way, he is powerless. He has power but not the kind that reveals the mysteries of heaven. He has power but not the kind that gives deep wisdom and revelation.

It is when Pharaoh cannot get anyone to interpret his dreams that the cupbearer finally remembers Joseph, the young man that interpreted his dream while in prison. God's plan to promote Joseph is in the works. Even though it has been two full years, God puts Joseph on the cupbearer's mind at just the right time.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When have you felt powerless like Pharaoh?

How did you turn to God for strength and wisdom in that moment?

Pharaoh's Dreams and Joseph's Destiny

In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

-GENESIS 41:8

BIBLE STUDY: PHARAOH'S PROBLEM, GOD'S TIMING, PART 3

The dreams that Pharaoh had carried their own evidence that they were sent by God. Therefore, when he awoke, his mind was troubled. His magicians were also troubled. These dreams of Pharaoh, it seems, did not fall within their power, and they could not offer their interpretation. But God was working. This paved the way to make Joseph's performance by The Spirit of God all the more admirable. These dreams are about the future of Egypt and what God is going to allow in the country. God is setting the stage for His servant, Joseph, to fulfill the plan.

The magicians of Egypt are frequently referred to in the history of Exodus. Magic was an inherent part of the ancient Egyptian religion and was a large part of their daily life. These particular magicians were an order of Egyptian priests who supposedly understood and could interpret sacred writings. They cultivated a knowledge of art, studied science, interpreted dreams, and practiced divination and sorcery (see *Exodus 7:11-12*). They were men of great influence and were much esteemed and highly honored. They were sought out for direction and assistance on any subjects that required knowledge far out of the ordinary. For his dreams, Pharaoh sent for the magicians when he desired an interpretation.

Pharaoh is very disturbed by what he dreams, and he turns to the world for answers. But God is The Giver of dreams, and He gives the interpretation also. He is using these dreams to promote Joseph before Pharaoh. And like He did with Joseph, God can also use the problems of humanity today to give His children an audience in the presence of unbelievers to witness and share His Truth.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you ever encountered something like this in your walk with God?

Has God ever used you to share with someone who was troubled?

Pharaoh's Dreams and Joseph's Destiny

Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. And things turned out exactly as he had interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was impaled."

So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

-GENESIS 41:9-16

BIBLE STUDY: PHARAOH'S PREDICAMENT, JOSEPH'S PROMOTION

No one can help this powerful man with this unknown mystery. Then his cupbearer remembers Joseph. The first thing we notice is that he forgot who Joseph was and what he did for him. The second thing we see is that the cupbearer also admits that he forgot him. I want to suggest that God allowed this so that when the time was right, He could bring Joseph before Pharaoh.

Joseph has been remembered and is on his way before Pharaoh. He does not know what for or why he has been summoned, but he goes. Joseph is experiencing the Hand of God, and no one can stop what God is doing and why He is doing it. Joseph must simply be present and available to be used by God.

Like Joseph, we must also be faithful, present, and available for God to use us at all times for His glory and His plan. He has the perfect timing.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What have you learned from Joseph's experience?

How has this changed your thinking about suffering and God's plan for your life?

What Leaders Need to Know About Jesus

The Son is the Image of The Invisible God, The Firstborn over all creation. For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him.

-COLOSSIANS 1:15-16

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Word had come to the prison where Paul was that false teachers had crept into the church. They were trying to mislead God's people from believing in Jesus Christ.

- They were claiming that Jesus could not be fully God and fully man.
- They were saying that Jesus could not have died and risen again with all power of heaven and earth in His hands.
- They were claiming that people needed much more to save them, such as practicing religious rituals and practices that verified their goodness.
- They were even saying that Christians needed to partake in a higher consciousness so that they could achieve the ultimate status with God.

Paul had gotten wind of this poisonous teaching, and he sat down to write a letter to the church of Colossae. The false teachers had a bad Christology. Their understanding of Jesus would lead people down a wrong path. Paul dearly loved the church, and he did not want any to fall away from the faith by these false teachers. So, he writes a letter to correct this teaching.

We face many false teachers today too. And although we cannot receive a letter from Paul to address our specific situations, we do have the Word of God in which we can find truth and teachings that will help keep our faith and Christology on the right path. In addition, we also have access to Paul's letters, which can also speak truth into our situations and experiences today.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you heard bad Christology like this before?

How would you respond to these false teachings?

What Leaders Need to Know About Jesus

For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.

-COLOSSIANS 1:19-20

BIBLE STUDY: THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS

When it came to God redeeming mankind, The Father had one plan: Jesus. Everything that God wanted to take place on earth to save His creation was wrapped up in Jesus Christ. He was God's answer for man's rebellion and reconciliation with God.

And because of the ability and the authority that was in Christ when He came to earth, He is The Only One that could do what The Father wanted Him to do! He reconciled us back to God and became the Divine Bridge for us to come back into communion with God.

Because of the sins of Adam and Eve, we had no way to enter back into a right relationship with The Father. But Jesus, as our Savior and Redeemer, became the Sacrifice and Atonement for all our sins. He became the Sacrifice that was needed to redeem us and take our sins. His blood shed at Calvary reconciled us back to God, and it continues to reconcile us today. It washed us once and continues to wash us now, sanctifying us and always cleansing us.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does it mean to you to know you have been saved by God's Only Son?

How can you give God the praise for His great gift of salvation today?

What Leaders Need to Know About Jesus

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

-COLOSSIANS 1:21-22

BIBLE STUDY: THE TRUTH ABOUT THE BELIEVERS

One of the marvelous things about this verse is that God was at work on the earth, fixing our situation. We were undeserving of salvation, forgiveness, and pardon from God. We deserve to be chained to our sin because of our fallen human nature. We were outside of God's favor, and we were His enemies because of our sins. We were born sinners and were separated from a Holy God. We could not do right, not act right, not stay right. There was nothing good in us. We needed a Savior to rescue and redeem us!

That is when God's plan in Christ took over and was introduced as the only answer for our situation. Through the reconciliation of Jesus Christ and the washing of the blood, we have been set free from the prison of sin and the debt that we owe. But now, through Christ, we are no longer God's enemies; we can now be called His children!

He has done so much for us, and as leaders, we owe God everything!

- As leaders in church and ministry, **we are in debt to God.**
- As leaders in church and ministry, **our lives are not our own.**
- As leaders in church and ministry, **we work for God first and foremost.**
- As leaders in church and ministry, **we want to do, be, and go where He wants us to go.**

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you worship God more in your leadership and ministry roles?

What does it mean to you to "owe God everything"?

What Leaders Need to Know About Jesus

But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the Gospel. This is the Gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

-COLOSSIANS 1:22-23

BIBLE STUDY: THE TRUTH ABOUT SALVATION

From this passage, we learn that the teaching of salvation is to be continued in! The doctrine of the Cross is to be proclaimed, and we are to be grounded in and solid in the understanding of its power! We are never to be swayed or deceived into disregarding the cross. We are not to be moved by strange doctrines about salvation. Nothing ought to mislead us away from Calvary and the fundamentals of what it took to save us. Paul is warning the Christians of Colossae to stay in the faith by sticking with the Gospel. He does not want them to wander and waver from the faith.

- In the Gospel, there is **hope**.
- In the Gospel, there is **joy**.
- In the Gospel, there is **salvation**.
- In the Gospel, there is **mercy and grace**.
- In the Gospel, there is **Good News**.
- In the Gospel, there is **love**.

In the Gospel, there is God's plan for mankind. When we face false teaching in our lives today, we should stick with the Gospel. Do not let another form of salvation or Christology deceive you. Nothing can change or save you but the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Not rituals, not chants, not magic spells, not horoscopes, not psychology, not biology, not humanology, not philosophy, and not any other religion or spiritual practice. Only the Gospel. Stay with the Gospel!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does it personally mean to you to "stay with the Gospel"?

A Savior Who Overcomes

Then Jesus' disciples said, "Now You are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now we can see that You know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that You came from God."

-JOHN 16:29-30

BIBLE STUDY: THE DISCIPLES' DISCOVERY

In this passage, we find the disciples gathered with Jesus in the upper room, prior to going to Calvary. He has announced His betrayal, released His betrayer, warned them of impending dangers to come, and invited them to see into the future when a Helper would come and bless them to follow His words.

However, even though the disciples were present with Jesus for three long years, they still did not understand everything He taught them. They saw Him work, heard Him preach, listened to His teachings. Yet, they still did not grasp everything fully. Now, while Jesus speaks to them in the upper room, they finally hear something they can grasp.

Sometimes, it takes the child of God a while before they truly understand what God is saying to them. Sometimes, it takes a while for them to truly recognize Who Jesus is. It may take a season or two, but God reveals Himself and His plan in His perfect timing!

I want to encourage you today to be patient and wait until The Spirit of God reveals Himself in His perfect way to you. Do not be quick to get frustrated, angry, upset when you do not fully understand. Do not grow impatient or weary along the journey. The discipleship process is a journey, and sometimes, the journey is longer than we would like it to be. But God is working to grow you and your spiritual walk with Him in the most perfect way. Just trust His work in you.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Has there been a time in your Christian walk in which you did not fully grasp something?

How did you see God grow you in that experience?

A Savior Who Overcomes

“Do you now believe?” Jesus replied. “A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave Me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for My Father is with Me.”

-JOHN 16:31-32

BIBLE STUDY: THE DISCIPLES’ DIFFICULTY, PART 1

Here we have a direct and difficult rhetorical question. It is not meant to be answered, but rather, it is to be thought about. Jesus asks this so that they would think about what they had just said. He wants them to ponder what they are talking about and what they have just claimed.

Sometimes, in the life of the believer, we make claims like the disciples. We say stuff that we do not mean or we have yet to see those things in a manner in which our lives have truly been impacted by them. Sometimes, we claim that we understand something from God, but we really do not know what it is we are saying.

Jesus asks *“Do you now believe?”* because His disciples have no idea what is about to happen to Him or to them. He is asking because they are ignorant to the trial that is going to try their faith. He is asking because what is about to come is going to make them question what they truly believe about Jesus being God!

Warren Wiersbe also comments on this passage saying, “It is possible to have faith, understanding, and assurance *and still fail The LORD*. . . . Unless we practice that faith, apply that understanding, and rest on that assurance, we will fail when the time of testing comes.”² This is what happened to the disciples, and Jesus warned them that it would happen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you been in a similar place as Jesus’ disciples were?

Have you ever had your faith tested and tried?

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Jn 16:29). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

A Savior Who Overcomes

“Do you now believe?” Jesus replied. “A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave Me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for My Father is with Me.”

-JOHN 16:31-32

BIBLE STUDY: THE DISCIPLES’ DIFFICULTY, PART 2

In this passage, we discover that the time was on its way. It had not yet come, but they were all going to exercise fear!

- Fear was going to cause them to scatter.
- Fear was going to cause them to forget what they had said.
- Fear was going to cause them to fret.
- Fear was going to cause them to leave The Master alone.
- Fear was going to cause them to forsake their promise, flee their commitments, forsake their allegiance to Jesus, and forget that they said He was from God, knowing all things!

The problem was going to seem so great that they would think that they had to choose between their lives and being with Jesus. He is announcing for them that they do not know Him or believe in Him like they think they do. They will face circumstances that will reveal that their fear is still greater than their faith. When the guards come to the Garden of Gethsemane, we know that they scatter and run, and we know that Peter denied Him three times.

When trials come to test your faith, what will you do? Do not let your fear be greater than your faith.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you ever been in a similar situation where God showed you that you were not as committed as you thought you were?

Has He ever revealed your true self to you and made you think twice about who you were and what He was calling you to do?

A Savior Who Overcomes

"I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

-JOHN 16:33

BIBLE STUDY: THE DISCIPLES' DELIVERANCE, PART 1

When we come to this verse, we get to see Jesus help His disciples in their moment of difficulty. His aim is to deliver them from the impending fear that will overtake them shortly!

The second thing we observe in this verse is the use of several prophetic actions that the disciples of Christ will participate in. Jesus announces that the first thing they are to do is to have peace in Him when all these things come to pass. The phrase should be properly understood to say that they should "keep on having peace in Me even when I am put to death" (see *John 14:27*). This prophetic peace can only come from Him and is a by-product of His power and promise towards their deliverance! This peace cannot be bought or earned; it only comes from trusting in the promises of The Only One Who has the authority to grant it.

However, there will come trouble. When Jesus says this, He gives a continuation of the prophetic announcement. He says that the world is going to be a hostile place.

- The world will be against them.
- The world will mistreat them.
- The world will see them as enemies.
- They will encounter trouble in their witness and in the church.

Yet, Jesus tells His disciples to take heart because He has overcome the world. This is a command! It is active and powerful!

THINGS TO PONDER:

When have you experienced God's perfect peace?

If you heard these words from Jesus with the disciples, what would your initial reaction be?

A Savior Who Overcomes

"I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

-JOHN 16:33

BIBLE STUDY: THE DISCIPLES' DELIVERANCE, PART 2

This verse is a prophetic announcement to the disciples. Although they will face trouble and fear, Jesus tells them to take heart for He has overcome the world.

In the previous verses, Jesus told His disciples that because of fear, they will leave Him alone. Now, He tells them that they will encounter tribulation and trouble in this world. Yet, Jesus does not leave it at that. He *commands* them to take heart! This means to have courage in the face of danger and not shrink back because of the fear they experience and the trouble they encounter. This also means that the disciples must never be ashamed of Him, and they should be bold for Him till the end!

Jesus is prophetically speaking of the spiritual victory He will attain for His disciples. And in just a few short days, He will go to Calvary and die for the sins of the world. In a few days, He will prove His power over His enemies and over the underworld. He will prove His power over death and the world.

And on the cross, He will declare His victory before them all. When He descends into the grave and defeats the sting of death, He will prove to them all that He has overcome the world. When He rises from the dead, they will all know that He is God and there is none other!

So, while we face trouble in this life, take heart! Be of good cheer! Our God has overcome the world! We are more than conquerors through Him!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What troubles are you currently facing?

How does this message of spiritual victory through Christ give you comfort?

Jesus is The Gate

Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am The Gate for the sheep."

-JOHN 10:7

BIBLE STUDY: THE DECLARATION OF CHRIST

When Jesus says that He is The Gate for the sheep, He is saying that He is the final Divine Authority that keeps the sheep secure in the sheepfold. In this way, He completely protects them! You see, a sheepfold without a gate was a nightmare for the sheep. They would be left without a guard. At night, the shepherd would position his body in the front of the cave or pen and lay down across the threshold. The sheep would lay next to him, but they would never leave his presence. In this position, the shepherd could protect, guard, and nurture them in the evening. During the day, the sheep would go in and out as they liked, and the shepherd was present to keep watch over them.

The Pharisees are the false shepherds, the thieves, and the robbers. They will not have access to God because Jesus, The Gate, is present. And because He is present, there is protection for His sheep. When the believer is in Christ, they are protected by Him. Thieves and robbers do not have access because Christ is our Protector! Jesus has the final divine authority to keep us secure from the evil one.

Our Good Shepherd is The Gate. He watches over us at night and keeps us safe from the evils of the day. He guards our souls from harm. As The Gate, Jesus delivers singers from bondage and leads them into freedom. We have the assurance that deliverance and salvation are ours! Even in the worst of situations, God leads us out and in because He sees all and knows all.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Why is having a gate so important for the sheep?

What does it personally mean to you to know that Jesus, The Gate, protects you all day and all night?

Jesus is The Gate

"All who have come before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them."

-JOHN 10:8

BIBLE STUDY: THE DEFINITION OF CHRIST

In this verse, Jesus is declaring and defining who it was that has tried to oppose the work of God in the earth! These others that have come have claimed to be shepherds, but they were really imposters. They came before He came, and they came with intentions to deceive the sheep and motives to do harm to God's people. Here Jesus describes how they came:

- They came as thieves (those with desires to take while no one is watching).
- They came to take from God what is His.
- They came as robbers to take that which belongs to God by force.

These two enemies of God (thieves and robbers) have very different mentalities. Both are frightening and fearless. The thief is one no one can trust because as soon as they can, they will take what they want, leave devastation in their path, and violate your rights wherever they go. For the robber, they care nothing for your life, property, safety, and feelings. They take from you with no fear, and they take while you watch and see them. And even worse, they dare you to do something about it!

But though they came, Jesus says that the sheep did not hear or listen to them. The Greek word here is "*Akouo*" which means to literally have an ear only for the things of God. The sheep were not listening for another voice. They would not be deceived by the imposter. They had a purpose and an ear for God's voice!

Here is a picture of the follower of Christ. They can only hear and obey God's voice. They can only respond to what Jesus is saying because only His voice matters! As we walk through this life, keep resisting the voice of thieves and robbers. Keep listening for the voice of The Master, and He will rescue you.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you tune your ears to hear God's voice and resist the imposters?

Jesus is The Gate

"I am The Gate; whoever enters through Me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture."

-JOHN 10:9

BIBLE STUDY: THE DIRECTION OF CHRIST

Here we discover that Jesus declares again that He is The Gate! He is The Keeper and Protector, guarding the sheep. Secondly, He proclaims that He is The Only One by Whom we can enter. The action of entering in through The Gate leads one into a salvific relationship with Christ. Thirdly, when the sheep enter, they go in and out, and they will find pasture.

When you go through The Gate, you receive life and are saved through Jesus Christ. As you go in and out through Him, you also enjoy abundant life in the rich pasture of God.

- His sheep enjoy fullness and freedom.
- His sheep enjoy safety and security.
- His sheep enjoy endless provision.
- His sheep enjoy grace and peace.
- Even in the storms of life, His sheep have comfort in knowing that everything will be alright because He has all things in His hands.
- Even in the pain and sorrow of this life, His sheep have assurance.
- Even in the discouragement of human failure, His sheep have confidence.
- Even in the consequences of living in a fallen world, there is a forward action of love driving the believer to persevere.

Jesus not only gave His life for us, but He *gives* His life to us right now! God's pasture is where we belong. It is where we are at rest, where our home is, where we find nourishment and sustenance. Only through Him can we have the good life. Only through Him can we obtain all we need, have all our needs met, and be totally fulfilled. Only through Him is the promise of green pasture found!

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where are you seeking rest and nourishment currently?

Jesus is The Gate

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

-JOHN 10:10

BIBLE STUDY: THE DELIVERANCE OF CHRIST

This is a clear description from Christ of what the thief has come to do: to steal, to kill, and to destroy. These three verbs denote an evil motif of the one who hates the sheep. Jesus uses the imagery of thieves and robbers to reveal the treachery of their evil nature as well as paint a portrait of the evil character and nature of Satan himself. He comes just like a false shepherd, wishing to harm the sheep.

Yet, although the believer may face hatred in this life, Jesus declares what it is that He has come to do: to give life and to give it abundantly.

- The thief came to steal, but Jesus has come to provide.
- The thief came to kill, but Jesus has come to supply a need only He can.
- The thief came to destroy, but Jesus has come to give us life abundantly.

Through Christ, there is the benefit of being heirs to the throne of God. Through Him, we have all that we need. Through Him, our life has meaning and purpose. Through Him, Heaven becomes our home. Through Him, we are accepted and beloved. Through Him, we receive access to God. He is The Gate to eternal life, joy, peace, love, mercy, grace, and a personal relationship with God The Father. Jesus is The Gate of our salvation, and if anyone enters in through Him, He will go in and out to find green pastures!

THINGS TO PONDER:

Think of a time when you faced hatred and hostility in this life. How did you find comfort and life through the promises of Jesus?

How can you encourage others with this truth?

The Right Kind of Shepherd

"I am The Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."

-JOHN 10:11

BIBLE STUDY: WHAT HE LOOKS LIKE

If there was ever a need in life that mankind had, it is the need to have a good shepherd. A good shepherd has the ability to watch over, provide for, lead, guide, and protect the sheep. Here we discover that Jesus once again proclaims His deity and destiny. The word begins with the statement, "I AM." He proclaims that not only will you know Him as The Gate to the sheep, but you will also know Him as God, The Good Shepherd.

The word here translates as "*Kalos Poimen*," which means "*Beautiful Minister*." There is nobody like Him! Nobody can do what He does! More than that, He lays down His life for the sheep. He uses the word "*lay down*" which means to set down. It denotes that it is in the hand of the owner, and it is in control of only one person. Nobody takes His life from Him; He lays it down!

In Greek, this phrase is written in the present active tense. This means that the action was being performed as Jesus was speaking.

- While He was speaking, He was already preparing to die.
- While He was speaking, He was already getting ready for suffering.
- While He was speaking, He was already positioning Himself to take on our sins.
- While He was speaking, He was getting ready to go to Calvary.

He is The Good Shepherd. He lays down His life for the sheep. In our leadership and in whatever roles we may be serving in, we need to model ourselves after Christ in how we care for others and the flock that God has given us.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you follow the example of Christ in your leadership?

How can you lead others to follow this example too?

The Right Kind of Shepherd

“The hired hand is not The Shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”

-JOHN 10:12-13

BIBLE STUDY: WHAT HE DOES NOT LOOKS LIKE

These verses offer a stark contrast to what The Good Shepherd is not! The Shepherd and the hireling are different, and even though they watch over the same flock, their commitment to the sheep is very different. In ancient Israel, shepherds would have hired hands who would help them serve the flock. These hired hands would be paid to serve and watch the flock. But money was their only interest and motivation! Money was their sole reason for service. They did not have the same interest and care for the flock as the shepherd did.

In this case, the Pharisees were only interested in “the sheep” of Israel for what they could get out of them. They were not loyal to God, and they did not truly care for the flock. That is why Jesus says that when the wolf comes, the hired hand will not protect the sheep. Instead, they will run away and abandon the flock. When they see trouble coming, they leave the sheep to fend for themselves.

The Greek word used here to describe a wolf is “*Lykos*.” This describes a fierce-person. It refers to people who are dangerous inside the flock. They snatch and scatter the sheep through deception. It can be anyone, and sometimes they run in packs with others, sitting on committees, easing their way in to destroy from the inside out. They are not even fearful of God.

With this description, Jesus is revealing the evil works of evil people who want to devour and destroy those that love and follow God faithfully. One attack from a wolf is one too many. As leaders in our ministries, we need to remain vigilant against wolves in our communities.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How will you seek God’s guidance as you guard your flock against wolves?

The Right Kind of Shepherd

"I am The Good Shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me – just as The Father knows Me and I know The Father – and I lay down My life for the sheep."

-JOHN 10:14-15

BIBLE STUDY: WHAT THE SHEPHERD DOES

As The Beautiful Minister, Jesus knows His sheep! He knows His children, and His children know Him! They have a relationship, and this relationship is sacred. It is divine, godly, spiritual, supernatural, unbreakable, and eternal.

By knowing His sheep, Jesus stresses ownership and watchful oversight. By knowing Christ, we have reciprocal knowledge and intimacy with Him. This intimacy is modeled on the love and trusting mutual relationship of The Father and The Son. Jesus' care and concern for us is evident by His prediction of His coming death and resurrection. He willingly gave His life for His sheep.

- He is The Good Shepherd; we shall not want, He makes us lie down in green pastures, He leads us beside still waters, and He restores our souls.
- He is The Good Shepherd; He leads us in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.
- He is The Good Shepherd; even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of earth, we will fear no evil because He is with us.
- He is The Good Shepherd; His rod and staff comfort us.
- He is The Good Shepherd; He prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies, He anoints our heads with oil, and our cup overflows.
- He is The Good Shepherd; surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, and we shall dwell in His house forever.

Christ is The Good Shepherd. He lived sacrificially so that we may have eternal life.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where are you seeking God's good shepherding in your life right now?

What does it mean to have a sacred relationship with Jesus?

A House Filled With Worship

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

-JOHN 12:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: THREE ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP

The Master is six days away from Calvary, where He is going to be killed for the sins of the world. He is in the town called Bethany, two miles away from Jerusalem. He had been in this town before when He raised Lazarus from the dead. But now, He comes back for one last visit prior to His crucifixion. Within this visit, we get to see three elements of worship in Bethany: work, worship, and witness!

1. Martha represents **worship as work** as she served the dinner she had prepared for Jesus. It was an honor for her to cook for Jesus on this day! The text does not say much about this gift, but it was a gift that she could give to Jesus for all that He had given to her! Cooking for Jesus was a way to serve and worship Him. It was her ministry of work and service that was done in Jesus' honor.
2. Mary represents the **giving of gifts as worship**. She appears to be the only one with her worship of Jesus on display. She was grateful for all He had done and wished to display her gratitude through her act of worship.
3. Lazarus represents **worship as witness**. People went to Bethany just to be able to see the man who had been raised back to life by Jesus. His life had become an opportunity to draw others to Jesus!

Yet, even in these wonderful displays of worship and gratitude to Jesus, we also see displays of jealousy, deceit, and hatred being prompted by one of Jesus' disciples later in this passage. As Jesus had enemies in the house, so we face enemies too in our lives and in our service to God. But, as Jesus endured, He also gives us the strength and grace to endure the hate and evil of others.

THINGS TO PONDER:

In what ways are you displaying your worship to Christ?

A House Filled With Worship

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

-JOHN 12:3

BIBLE STUDY: MARY'S WORSHIP

It would have required a whole year's wages to purchase this perfume. And look at Mary's posture. Warren Wiersbe puts it this way: "When she came to the feet of Jesus, Mary *took the place of a slave*. When she undid her hair (something Jewish women did not do in public), she humbled herself and laid her glory at Jesus' feet. Of course, she was misunderstood and criticized, but this is what usually happens when somebody gives his or her best to The LORD."³

- **Mary's act of worship was public.** She did it in spite of what others might say or think. She worshiped in spite of what it would look like to others. Her worship was on display. It was monitored, investigated, and criticized, but she worshiped anyway because her worship was for Jesus alone.
- **Her act of worship was personal.** It was between her and The LORD. It was designed to please just one person. It was only for Jesus' enjoyment and honor. Her heart was only on what He thought, not the world.
- **Her act of worship was priceless.** This perfume was worth a year of a common laborer's wages, and it was sealed in an alabaster jar. Once this was broken, its contents had to be used immediately. Her anointing of Jesus represents a major sacrifice and indicates the depth of her love. She gave her best and her all in a sacrificial offering to Jesus.

Like Mary, our worship ought to be priceless and the absolute best we can give. Our worship should give glory to God, personal for your soul, and priceless. He is deserving of our best for He has given us Jesus. Give Him the best you can!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What can you learn from Mary's act of worship?

³Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Jn 12:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

A House Filled With Worship

But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray Him objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

-JOHN 12:4-6

BIBLE STUDY: JUDAS' WORDS

In this broken and fallen world, there is contempt towards true and genuine worship. This passage records Judas' first words found anywhere in the four Gospels, and they are words of criticism towards Mary's act of worship. Judas denounced, deduced, and demolished her worship.

It was **denounced** (condemned openly as being evil). Mary's worship was scrutinized before it was celebrated. It was **deduced** (Judas assumed wrongly through his misguided reasoning). Mary's worship was belittled and reasoned against because Judas did not understand. It was **demolished** (torn down completely). She was accused of wasting money, fragrance, and opportunity to serve and help the poor. Judas tried to tear her down, but he had no idea that giving to God was greater than anything she could give to the poor.

As we learn from the passage, Judas was not truly interested in helping the poor; he was interested in the money. He did not care about serving others; he wanted to serve himself. Sometimes in your worship, you may face similar people and be in a similar situation. They look like disciples, have jobs like disciples, walk with other disciples, but their hearts are filled with deceit and evil motives. Be careful who you worship with. Sometimes, people are going to try to stop you because of the way you worship. But you should never let anyone stop you from giving your best to God. Worship is a personal thing, and it should never be neglected.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you faced criticism like Mary before?

How does this study help embolden your worship to God?

A House Filled With Worship

“Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of My burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have Me.”

-JOHN 12:7-8

BIBLE STUDY: JESUS’ WORTH

There are three things about Jesus’ response that stand out to me:

1. **It is a divine rebuke.** The Master is a banner of protection for those who, like Mary, are falsely accused and attacked!
2. **It is a divine response.** Along with demanding that they quit troubling her, Jesus demands that she be recognized for what she has done: she has pleased and honored Him with her sacrificial worship. Her offering was for His glory, and her submission was for His service and honor.
3. **It was a decisive reflection.** Jesus calls their minds to a truth that says that they will always have a chance to serve the poor, but the present hour is set aside for Christ.

When your heart is in the right place, so is your worship! God will defend you when others accuse you falsely. When you give your all to God, He will give to you. When you worship God, you get blessed in the process. When you give Him your best, God gives you grace in the process. When you worship and bring your all to Him, not only do you receive from Him, but you get to hear His voice!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How has Christ been a banner of protection for you?

How is your worship? Is it half-hearted and feels like you are just going through the motions? Or is it fully devoted to Christ, giving its best for His glory?

A House Filled With Worship

Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of Him but also to see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in Him.

-JOHN 12:9-11

BIBLE STUDY: FINAL THOUGHTS

Lazarus was a witness of God's great power. Through his worship of witness, we read that many came to Jesus and started to believe in Him. It is what God did for him that others came to see Christ's power for themselves! Lazarus was once dead, but now he is alive again. His life is evidence of being a friend of Christ.

However, because he is drawing people to Christ, Lazarus' life is on the line! Because others have seen God's power on display in Him, his life is in danger! Because of God's work in his life, Lazarus is counted as an enemy of the chief priests. They were making plans to kill him!

Lazarus' house was filled with worship through Martha's service, Mary's sacrificial offering, and Lazarus' witness. Sometimes, when a house is filled with worship, trouble is a natural byproduct. Others may seek to take our lives or wish evil on us because of our devotion to Christ. But, in order to live in Christ, we must die to self and suffer at the hands of others.

While Jesus was heading toward Calvary, Lazarus was headed for trouble. While Christ was preparing to suffer for our sins, Lazarus was headed for ostracization. Jesus was headed toward crucifixion, and Lazarus was headed for a death wish. For the life of the believer, to associate with Jesus is to put your life on the line and to invite trouble, pain, and hardship. If you follow Christ, you must go all the way to Calvary. He went all the way for you!

THINGS TO PONDER:

Is your house filled with worship? Is your heart?

What does it mean to be willing to go "all the way to Calvary"?

A Servant With A Towel Ministry

When He had finished washing their feet, He put on His clothes and returned to His place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" He asked them. "You call Me 'Teacher' and 'LORD,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your LORD and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet."

-JOHN 13:12-14

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

When it comes to serving others, there is nobody like Jesus. While living on earth, Jesus gave everything He had as The Servant of God. He healed the blind, cured the sick, raised the dead, and brought good news to the poor.

It takes real humility to serve those that you know will run out on you! It takes real humility to serve somebody other than yourself. And it takes real humility to give up your time, energy, and resources to minister to someone else. When Jesus washed His disciples' feet, He was teaching while He was serving. He was demonstrating what true servant leadership is.

This type of servant leadership serves those who do not deserve it, those who are not faithful to us, those who are filled with evil desires, those who are unkind, those who are unwilling to change, those who are not always spiritual, and those who could care less who you are.

According to this passage, Jesus asked the disciples if they understood what He had done. When they did not, He explained it to them again. He gave them a lesson in humility and service. In calling Jesus their Master and Teacher, they were now responsible for following His teaching, following His example, and doing exactly what they saw Him doing. Because Jesus loves His disciples, He gives them an example of what a servant of the Kingdom of God should look like and what they should be doing.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Do you have a towel ministry today? What does it look like?

Who are you serving? How are you serving?

A Servant With A Towel Ministry

"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

-JOHN 13:15

BIBLE STUDY: A MINISTRY MODEL TO REMEMBER

Jesus uses a purpose clause in this verse to declare that the disciples are to be following this example continuously. It is not a one-time activity. It is meant to be something that is practiced throughout their lives. As He modeled it for them, they are now charged with following His example.

Another thing to notice here is that Jesus does not institute another ordinance. Instead, He models and reveals the humility that they are to have among each other. It is an example of ministry in the Body of Christ and a picture of what our mentalities ought to look like. His example reveals a servant who serves others, follows Christ, does what others are not willing to do, and seeks to please God in every area of their service and devotion to Him.

According to this verse and Christ's example, the disciples must be willing to humble themselves and serve one another. There can be no divisions, strife, hatred, evil feelings, or wicked behavior among them. They are to hold each other in high esteem and be willing to serve one another.

In our lives, we are also called to obey this teaching of Jesus as a ministry model for our leadership and service. We should esteem each other and serve one another in such a way that Christ would be glorified in our lives and love for each other. We should honor one another in our dealings, ministry, and callings. We should not deceive each other, belittle, harm, cheat, steal, mistreat, or abuse one another. We are called to serve others. This is our ministry model, and to do this well, we need to have a Kingdom mentality focused on Christ.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What is a Kingdom mentality?

How are you diligently following Christ's model in your ministry and leadership?

A Servant With A Towel Ministry

"Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against Me.'"

-JOHN 13:16-18

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S MINISTRY MANDATE

Here is a very interesting mandate from Christ: if you **know**, and if you **do**, you will be **blessed**. And here is also the key to joy and happiness within the church. Jesus is giving the key to ministering to one another and with one another. It takes humility, service, and the honoring of each other.

The sequence of knowing, doing, and being blessed is important. If you are humble to listen, and if you aim for holiness in obeying God, then you will be happy and blessed. Happiness is the by-product of a life that is lived in the Will of God. When we humbly serve others, walk in God's path of holiness, and do what He tells us, then we will enjoy His joy.⁴

When Jesus says that He is not referring to all of them, this hints at the betrayal of Judas Iscariot. Even though Satan used Judas as a tool against Christ, ultimately, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ would defeat sin and the grave. Jesus knew those He had chosen to save, and He also knew the one who would betray Him, that Scripture might be fulfilled. The remarkable thing is that the others at the table with Jesus did not know that Judas was an unbeliever and a traitor.

In our ministry and leadership, we will also face opposition to what we are called to do. There will be those that Satan influences and uses to harm you. Yet, nothing gets past God. He is aware of every action and intention of the heart. We are to be just like Him and serve Him to the end.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you seeking the happiness that only comes from knowing Christ?

⁴ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Jn 13:12). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

A Servant With A Towel Ministry

"I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I Am Who I Am. Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts Me; and whoever accepts Me accepts The One Who sent Me."

-JOHN 13:19-20

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S MINISTRY MENTALITY

Here we see Jesus instructing the disciples on what was to take place. His mind is on the sacrificial choice He has made with His life. Jesus informs His disciples of the "it" that is going to take place: the betrayal, the deception, the act of treason, and the act of delivering over The Son of Man. And when this "it" happens, they will believe that Jesus is The Messiah.

When the disciples would see all of this fulfilled, it would make their faith stronger. There would no longer be doubts or questions about Jesus' identity. They would know Him as The Promised Messiah they were waiting for!

Jesus reveals that whoever receives those He has sent will also receive Him. And if they receive Him, they will also receive The One Who sent Him. This is an indicator for Jesus' disciples for them to know who they are and Who it is that has sent them into the world. They have been sent by Christ as His ambassadors and as representatives of The Father!

What a privilege to be ambassadors of King Jesus! Like the disciples, we are also hand-picked and chosen by God to represent Him in the earth. As God has opened our hearts to receive His Son, we are now His children. We are a royal people with authority and privilege from God!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does it personally mean to you to know you were hand-picked by God?

What does it mean to be an ambassador of Jesus Christ?

Dinner With The Enemy

After He had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray Me."

-JOHN 13:21

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Have you ever had dinner with somebody that wanted to kill or betray you? Have you ever eaten with somebody that had your ill-will in mind? Have you ever been in the presence of someone who said they loved you but really hated what you stood for? Jesus did. He knows exactly what that is like.

It was time for the Passover feast, the annual celebration had fallen upon Jerusalem again. Every Jewish family was required to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to remember what God had done for them when they left slavery in Egypt. However, this Passover, there was murder in the air. Those who were running the Temple and religious affairs were filled with contempt and hatred for Jesus.

The horrible thing about this text is that Jesus was first betrayed by one of His own disciples, who was being used by the devil to destroy the work of God on the earth. The Webster Dictionary defines "*betrayal*" as leading someone astray, seducing, delivering one to an enemy by treachery, or failing (deserting) someone in their time of need.⁵ The act of betrayal violates one's trust or confidence.

This is what Judas did; he faked his love for Jesus in the eyes of others. He seduced people into believing that he was all in, but he was a traitor the whole time. He delivered Jesus over in an act of treachery, and when the other disciples needed him the most, Judas deserted them.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When have you met a "Modern-day Judas"?

How have you seen the restorative work of God heal your heart after a betrayal from someone you knew?

⁵ Merriam-Webster Dictionary: "Betray Definition and Meaning." 2023.

Dinner With The Enemy

After He had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray Me." His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them He meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to Him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask Him which one He means." Leaning back against Jesus, he asked Him, "LORD, who is it?"

-JOHN 13:22-25

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S SITUATION

John, in his Gospel, reflects on the Passover evening from his position at the table with Jesus. He begins by saying that something was not quite right in the atmosphere: Jesus was troubled.

His spirit was troubled, and His heart was heavy. Jesus again announces that someone was going to betray Him. Simon Peter motions to John to ask Jesus who it was that was going to betray Him.

I believe that Peter wanted to know this for two reasons:

- He wanted to take care of whoever it was that was trying to bring harm to Jesus. Peter had an eye out for betrayers.
- He thought he could take care of betrayal in the flesh. He believed that he was "man-enough" to try and fix it himself.

However, what Peter did not know was that this was a sinful-problem. It was diabolical and satanic. This was a problem no mere human could defeat. Only God could fight this problem and come out victorious. The problem in the disciples' ranks was bigger than any one man. It was caused by evil working within the group. Jesus knew about it, but He was going to use it for His honor and glory!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How would you have responded if you had been at the table with Jesus?

Who do you turn to first in order to fight against betrayal? Yourself or God?

Dinner With The Enemy

Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, He gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.

-JOHN 13:26

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S SIGN

In this portion of the text, we see a startling picture. It appears that Jesus is going to expose Judas before the others. He gives us a sign of who the betrayer is. However, there is a cultural act taking place on the canvas of our minds. At the dinner table, the father or elder of the family always breaks the bread, dips it, and then passes it. In this way, everyone partakes of it. Jesus had said that one that I give this too after I dip will betray Him.

Although Jesus had spoken before of a traitor (see *John 6:70*), the disciples did not seem to take it so close to heart as they do now. When Jesus speaks openly about it again at the table, His disciples are perplexed. It is also possible that Jesus' reply to John's question was not heard by everyone at the table. They were most likely carrying on discussions among themselves about who the traitor might be (see *Luke 22:23*).

When Jesus gave bread to Judas, it was interpreted as an act of love and honor. In fact, Judas was seated at the place of honor, so that Jesus' actions were seen in that light. He was bestowing a special honor on Judas. No wonder then, after Judas left the room, that the disciples got into an argument over who was the greatest (see *Luke 22:24-30*).

Once again we see Jesus giving Judas honor. In addition, Jesus also washed His traitor's feet. Jesus sat Judas at the head of the table, and He serves Judas as he is directly next to Him. Yet, after all this, Judas still has evil in his heart.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How does John's first-hand witness of the Passover feast change your perspective of what this night may have been like with Jesus?

Where have you encountered people like Judas in your life and ministry?

Dinner With The Enemy

As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do it quickly."

-JOHN 13:27

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S SIGNAL

Here we see a signal when things are set in motion for Judas to accomplish his diabolical plan. The text says that after he had taken the bread, Satan entered into him. The devil and Judas have been given the signal by Jesus.

Satan literally entered into Judas. He did not possess him, but Satan brought Judas under his influence by deceiving his mind and thoughts. Through the avenue of his mind, Satan entered Judas' heart. He filled Judas' mind with an evil passion and then influenced him to betray his Master.

There is a warning here for all of us. Satan does not have to possess you in order to make you misbehave or sin. He can enter your thoughts and change your behavior. He is always lurking about, looking for those who hunger for greed, wealth, lust, and covetousness. He seeks to destroy any witness of the Truth. And if he enters into Judas in the presence of Christ, he will not mind entering our churches, our Christian communities, and our homes.

Even more alarming is the portion of our text where Jesus says, "*What you are about to do, do it quickly.*" This is frightening because Jesus sends Judas on his mission. It was as if He said to Judas, "You are about to begin My suffering. Do it quickly! You are now on the side of Satan. Move away from My presence and do it quickly." Judas' sin was so reprehensible that Jesus would not tolerate His betrayal any longer. He gave Judas a signal to accomplish his evil plan.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How does this thought change your perception of Satan and how he works?

How can you take better care in guarding your mind and heart against him?

Dinner With The Enemy

But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

-JOHN 13:28-30

BIBLE STUDY: CROSSING THE LINE

Even though Satan has entered into Judas, Jesus yet protects him before the others. He does not give him up. Since Judas was the treasurer, it was logical for the disciples to think that he had been sent on a special mission by Jesus.

Judas knew exactly what he was doing, and he did it deliberately. He had already met with the Jewish religious leaders and agreed to lead them to Jesus in such a way that there would not be any public disturbance (see *Luke 21:37-22:6*). He had also heard Jesus say, “*But woe to the man who betrays The Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born*” (see *Matthew 26:24*). Yet, even hearing this, Judas persisted in his unbelief and treachery. Why? Because he was greedy for money, and he had evil in his heart. Satan had entered into him and influenced his mind. Satan would pay Judas, but Judas would pay too.

Judas would pay a price he did not know of. It would be a price too heavy to bear. It would cost him his soul for all of eternity. Because of his greed and lust for power, he would pay. He was not the tool of Satan. He had sold himself to the enemy. He crossed the line. The behavior of Judas was inconsistent with that of being a follower of Christ. He consented with evil and gave approval to do what was wrong. After crossing this line, he was a worker of Satan.

Our lives as believers should be consistent with the teachings and example of Christ. When we consent to evil, we agree to do wrong and, like Judas, give approval to what is detestable to God. May we never cross this line of evil.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When faced with the temptation to get close to this line, how can you turn to Christ? How can you encourage others to do the same?

Dinner With The Enemy

But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

-JOHN 13:28-30

BIBLE STUDY: RUN TO THE CROSS

After the signal, Judas left the meeting and went back to be with the pharisees. Every hour afterwards, his heart got more determined to do the wrong thing. There was no turning around for Judas. In his heart and mind, he was working towards the betrayal of Jesus Christ.

In our lives, we also face situations in which we can make terrible decisions. Do not be like Judas! When you have betrayed Christ and not repented of your sins, do not take communion and act as if you have not betrayed Him. If you have knowingly sin and have not repented, do not dip your hand in the dish and smile in His face. Do not take the cup and drink through your betrayal. Do not meet Christ in the garden and betray Him with a kiss.

Instead, repent today and run to the cross where you can see The King of Glory hanging there for your sins.

- Run to the cross where you can see the nails in His hands for you.
- Run to the cross where you can be forgiven for all your sins.
- Run to the cross where you can be revived, cleansed, and saved!
- Run to the cross where salvation is free.
- Run to the cross where the blood of Jesus can make you whole.
- Run to the cross where you can be redeemed.

On the cross, He died for the Judas in all of us. He took away our sins. He was buried in a borrowed tomb, and early Easter morning, He rose from the dead!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you running to the cross today?

Praying The Right Way, For The Right Reason

After Jesus said this, He looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify you."

-JOHN 17:1

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S INTERCESSION

As Jesus prays in this text, He teaches us how to approach trials and tribulation while living for God in difficult times. The first thing we see in His prayer is His willingness to pray for Himself and request of The Father to work on His behalf. We notice that Jesus could approach God in prayer because of His divine relationship to The Father. As children of God, we too can approach the throne of God through Jesus Christ with confidence and assurance that He will hear us.

The second thing we see is that Jesus declares that the hour has now come. It is a direct statement indicating that the time to fulfill the plan of The Father has arrived. It is the divine plan of redemption of God for humanity. Jesus had faced plenty of challenges and trouble. But now the actual hour of His trial was upon Him, and He needed The Father to glorify Him. This request for glorification included sustaining Jesus in suffering, accepting His sacrifice, resurrecting Him, and restoring Him to His previous glory.

The purpose of this request was that The Father would be glorified by The Son and that God's wisdom, power, and love might be known through Jesus.

We too can pray like this. When the trials of this life come upon us, we can learn to intercede for ourselves, asking God to do something glorious in our behavior that will please Him while we suffer for His Name's sake! We can learn to pray for God's glory to be seen in the midst of the struggles we face. We can learn to pray for God's perfect plan and for His Name to be glorified even in the trouble we face. This is praying with wisdom, power, and love so that God might be known through our relationship with Him.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you grow in your prayer life?

When faced with trials for the sake of Christ, how can you bring God glory?

Praying The Right Way, For The Right Reason

"For You granted Him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have given Him."

-JOHN 17:2

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S INSPIRATION

Jesus is inspired in His reflection of what God has given Him to do on earth as His Son. The Father gave Jesus authority, and Jesus is The First and Only Human to be endowed with this divine grace! Additionally, He is The Only Human endowed with this power over all flesh.

With this power and authority, Jesus also has the supernatural assignment and ability to give eternal life. No one else has this power. Jesus has eternal life to give to as many as The Father has given Him! However, this gift of eternal life will not go to everyone. Only to those whom God has given His Son. Here we discover the doctrine of election for the believer. It says that only those who God has called and elected will be saved. Scripture teaches that God has called all of humanity, but not everyone has come to Him. All those that God has given to Christ are those that will receive eternal life. Because we are given to Christ by God, we are gifts of The Father. We are chosen and special. We were given so that He may reveal His plan for our lives.

Like Jesus, we can pray with inspiration like this when we too have done all that God has called us to do. We can pray like this when we have assurance that God has used us in the earth for His purposes. Praying with inspiration always leads the believer to remember what God has done for and through us. It reminds us that we are given a special privilege to be His representatives on earth.

As Christians, we also have authority on the earth. We have the authority and privilege to work on God's behalf. We have the power to help people, change things, lead others to God, and make a difference in the world. We ought to start praying with it!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you using your authority and privilege for the glory of God?

Praying The Right Way, For The Right Reason

"Now this is eternal life: that they know You, The Only True God, and Jesus Christ, Whom You have sent."

-JOHN 17:3

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S INVITATION

Here we see our Inspired Savior defining what it means to have an eternal relationship with His Father! Eternal life, as defined by Jesus, involves the experience of knowing The Only True God and His Son. It is a personal relationship of intimacy which is continuous and dynamic. A person who knows God has an intimate personal relationship with Him, and this relationship is eternal.

We should also take notice that eternal life is not simply an endless existence. Everyone will exist somewhere forever, but the question is: in what condition or in what relationship will they spend eternity? For those that Christ has come for, they have this gift of eternal life!

- They know The Father!
- They know Who He is!
- They know what He does!
- They know how He operates!
- They know what He delights in!
- They know His Name!
- They know His character!
- They know His Word!

Additionally, when we receive eternal life and we have this intimacy with The Father through His Son, we will get to know The Only True God! And nobody but The Father can grant eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ!

When we pray, let us remember Who we are praying to! Let us understand that there is no one like The Father! He is not on the same level as anyone. He has given us eternal life in His Son. He is The Only One Who can!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does "having eternal life" mean for your spiritual walk today?

Praying The Right Way, For The Right Reason

"I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me and they have obeyed Your Word. Now they know that everything You have given Me comes from You. For I gave them the words You gave Me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from You, and they believed that You sent Me."

-JOHN 17:6-8

BIBLE STUDY: HIS REPORT TO THE FATHER

As we arrive at these verses, we see The Master giving the report of the disciples' faith in what He taught them concerning God's mission for their lives on earth.

This was their mission:

1. That they would receive, listen to, submit to, accept the call and invitation of, and then keep the words of His Son that He gave them.
2. That they would have heard everything and known everything that The Father had given Christ to give to them.
3. That they would receive and believe His Word.

Here we also get a clear understanding of what a disciple really is. They receive and believe God's Word. They also believe that Jesus was, is, and that He comes from God.

In His prayer, Jesus also claims successful accomplishment of His task. He has made The Father known on earth, and He has revealed The Son. When we look at this passage in its future context, we can learn that when we stand before God today, these same things that Christ prayed for in the lives of His servants are also present in our own lives. We have received His Word, we have believed that Jesus was, is, and comes from God, and we know that by applying His Word to our hearts, we can live by His Word.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What encourages you about Jesus' report of His disciples to His Father?

How are you living out God's mission in your spiritual life?

Praying The Right Way, For The Right Reason

"I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those You have given Me, for they are Yours. All I have is Yours, and all You have is Mine. And glory has come to Me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your Name, the Name You gave Me, so that they may be one as We are one."

-JOHN 17:9-11

BIBLE STUDY: HIS REFLECTION WITH THE FATHER

Jesus begins His intercession specifically for His disciples. Here He is about to talk to The Father concerning the things that the disciples were facing and what they would face in the future. Jesus prays with focus, purpose, and a heart for His disciples.

He is not praying for the world, but His focus is on the ones who will carry the Gospel to the end of the world. Christ loves the world, but His focus is on those who will be tortured by the world for following Him. He is not rejecting the world, but He is interceding for His disciples because Calvary is around the corner, and the Great Tribulation is on the way.

Christ's remaining disciples are set apart as special gifts from The Father to The Son. They are special to Christ because they were special to His Father. Since they would be in the world, Jesus prayed for their protection. They were to stay in the world to carry out God's plan in spreading the Good News of redemption and starting the Church. Christ wants The Father to protect them from sin and enmity of the world by the power of His Name.

In our intercession for those we lead and care for, we too should pray the right way for their protection and guidance. We too should pray for God's Name to be displayed over their lives.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What can you learn through Jesus' reflection and intercession with The Father?

How can you intercede for those you lead and care for?

Praying The Right Way, For The Right Reason

"I am coming to You now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of My joy within them. I have given them Your Word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the Truth; Your Word is Truth. As You sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify Myself, that they too may be truly sanctified."

-JOHN 17:13-19

BIBLE STUDY: HIS REQUEST OF THE FATHER

As we come to the final words for the disciples' intercession, we have four points:

1. The words of comfort spoken by Jesus to His disciples were of great joy later on! Following His crucifixion and resurrection, they would recall Christ's words and experience the full measure of His joy. He had conquered evil and brought them eternal life.
2. Jesus' intercession for the disciples continued with a reminder of their value and their coming danger. The world would hate them because they belonged to Christ and were not a part of the world.
3. God's plan was not to remove the disciples from danger and opposition. Instead, it was to preserve them in the midst of conflict. Christians must not take themselves out of the world but remain in meaningful contact with it, trusting in God's protection while they witness and live for Jesus.
4. Just as Jesus did not belong to the world, so His believers did not. They belong to the heavenly kingdom.

Jesus also prayed for the sanctification of His disciples. To be sanctified means that one is set apart for special use. A believer is to be distinct from the world's sin, values, and goals. Sanctification results in a change of living as believers are set apart for God. Their lives are lived in order to honor God.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does it mean to be sanctified? How are you living set-apart for God's glory?

Praying The Right Way, For The Right Reason

“My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the Truth; Your Word is Truth. As You sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify Myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message.”

-JOHN 17:15-20

BIBLE STUDY: A MODEL FOR EVERY BELIEVER

Jesus was sent into the world on a mission by His Father. Just so, believers are also sent out into the world on a mission by The Son to make The Father known. With this, each Christian should view themselves as a missionary with the task of communicating God's Truth to others.

In the last verse of our passage, Jesus says that He sanctifies Himself for the benefit of the disciples. Jesus separated and dedicated His life so that all who believe and come to Him in faith may too be truly sanctified. The purpose of the death of Christ is to dedicate or separate believers to God.⁶

To be truly sanctified means that one is sanctified in truth. Only God's Truth is the means of sanctification. This is why Christ prayed this prayer and interceded for Himself and for them. And like the disciples, we have been given the privilege to represent Christ as His ambassadors in this day and age. We go through times of darkness, loneliness, pain, isolation, difficulty, trouble, persecution, mistreatment, confusion, and much more. Yet, we can take great comfort in being reminded that Jesus has already prayed for us and is praying for us even now!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How do you see yourself as a missionary for Christ, tasked with communicating His Truth to others?

What comfort do you find in knowing that Jesus prayed for you before Calvary?

⁶ Blum, E. A., (1985). John. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *Vol. 2: The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Ed.) (332-333). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Praying The Right Way, For The Right Reason

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me."

-JOHN 17:20-21

BIBLE STUDY: JESUS PRAYS FOR UNITY

As Jesus prays, He teaches us how to approach trials and tribulations while living for God in difficult times. We can identify four things in this prayer:

1. We can learn how to embrace the trials of this life as given to us by God.
2. We can learn how to develop the right mind of prayer during trials.
3. We can learn how to give God all the praise no matter what we face.
4. Finally, we can learn that prayer is the preparation we need to endure the suffering and tribulations that come our way.

When we get to this part of His prayer, we see that Jesus asks The Father that we be changed and made to be one! This implies that we need to be transformed into what Christ has in mind for His church! Although we may still differ on minor matters from time to time, we are still united in loving Christ and one another in Him.⁷ We are united in our worship of God and united in His Truth!

Christ prayed that we would be one so that the world would believe the Gospel! When we are one and united for Christ, we reflect His love and Truth. However, when we are not one, we work against our witness of the Gospel. And where there is no unity, there is confusion. Where there is confusion, it leads to suspicion, then pride, then sin, and then isolation. And where there is isolation, there is an ineffective witness. Let us not work against Christ in this body. As Jesus prayed for us, let us strive to be one, as He and The Father are one.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does it mean to be "one as The Father and The Son are one"?

⁷ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on The New Testament* (p. 259). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Praying The Right Way, For The Right Reason

"I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one – I in them and You in Me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me."

-JOHN 17:22-23

BIBLE STUDY: JESUS PRAYS FOR UNANIMITY

Jesus here is praying for the unanimity of the future believers! This is the mindset that says that we unanimously agree that we are one. In praying this, Jesus is praying that The Father would unify us also in our minds, that they may be of one accord and centered on Christ. When we are of one accord for Christ, our witness and work for His Kingdom is so much greater.

Not only does Jesus pray that we would be unified, but He gives us His glory that The Father has given Him. This prayer is powerful! Jesus has given us the glory that God has given to Him in order that we may all be one. His glory is divine and yet, He wants us to partake of this same glory. This means that as Christians, we have been called to follow Him and the suffering that He endured, we must also endure. During our trials, we too can bring God pleasure and honor. During our difficulties, God can be lifted high and praised. As Christians, when others see us loving one another, serving the poor, and living the Gospel, they will see His glory!

Jesus knows what we need, and He prays for us that we may also have the glory of God through Him. He knows what we need on our journey of life. He knows we need each other to be loved and surrounded by believers. We need His glory, and we need His ever present love with us. Through Him and with each other, we can be about the work of the Kingdom of God. We can spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. We will be willing to work with others, reach the broken, and heal the hurting. With His glory and love, our hearts long to seek and do His Will.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does unanimity among believers look like to you?

How can you pursue this more in your community?

Praying The Right Way, For The Right Reason

“Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, and to see My glory, the glory You have given Me because You loved Me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know You, I know You, and they know that You have sent Me. I have made You known to them, and will continue to make You known in order that the love You have for Me may be in them and that I Myself may be in them.”

-JOHN 17:24-26

BIBLE STUDY: RIGHT BEFORE THE CROSS

As we come to the close of this prayer, the heart of The Master is seen. In His heart and on His lips is the desire for the unity of Christians, the opportunity for them to be with Him in glory, and the opportunity for the world to know that God is, that Jesus is His Son, and that the desire of God be evident in the lives of His believers.

Jesus prays this right before the cross. This is on His heart right before the cross. He is praying for others and praying that they would be blessed and able to know His Truth right before the cross. In spite of His future suffering, He has His mind on others being blessed. In spite of His impending trouble, He wants you and I to have access to Heaven. In spite of what is to come, He wants the world to be able to know God’s Truth and to know that Jesus is God’s Answer!

Through Jesus’ prayer, I am learning how to pray. I am learning how to put others before myself even in spite of troubles that come my way. I am learning how to keep my eyes on Christ no matter what comes. I am learning how to pray for those who hate me and to ask God to open their eyes and hearts so that they too may know Christ. I am learning how to pray for the unity and unanimity of believers.

Prayer will make you want to do what Christ wants, to desire what He desires, and long for what He longs for!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you grow closer to Christ through your prayer life?

What can you take away from how Jesus prays right before the cross?

When Jesus Died

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

-MARK 15:33

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

More than two thousand years ago, God showed us His Will for saving humanity. He allowed Jesus to be shamed, hanged, and killed. Since humankind rebelled against God in the beginning with Adam and Eve, God had a plan to give us grace and mercy through the death of His Son. He had a plan to forgive us all of our sins and blot out all of our transgressions through the death of His Only Son.

And so Jesus came down from Heaven, was born of a virgin to save sinners, and to die a criminal's death on the cross in order to save you and I. He's taken all of our sins and nailed them to the cross so that all who repent and believe will be saved, no longer lost. The Master gave up His life so that we might be saved and forgiven with His blood. And because of Him, there is Good News!

In our passage today, we remember Jesus at Calvary, where He is crucified for the sins of the world. This was God's plan by which He would save us all from our sins. This plan consisted of sending His Only Begotten Son down to earth and have Him become sin for us and sacrifice His very life in our place as a sacrifice unto God. This was the only way we could be saved. God required a holy, sinless offering to atone for sin; Jesus is and was this Special Offering. It is through His death that we can be saved, and this is the only way that we can come to God: through His Son.

When Jesus died on the cross for you and I, it brought us the only way to escape God's wrath, punishment, and eternal separation. This is called salvation by grace, and it is something we do not deserve. Yet, because of His perfect love, God made it available to us through His Son. Salvation is a free gift from God through His love and grace. All you have to do is turn to Him, repent, and accept it.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What encourages you most as you reflect on this?

How can you spend a few moments to praise God for His gift of salvation today?

When Jesus Died

*At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.
And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema
sabachthani?" (which means "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?").*

-MARK 15:33-34

BIBLE STUDY: HEAVEN WENT INTO MOURNING

From twelve in the afternoon until three, Jesus bore the full judgment of God against our sins. The heavens themselves were full of sorrow with their darkness. At the sight of Jesus on the cross, the heavens went into mourning. We read two of the greatest mysteries on earth taking place when Jesus was on the cross:

1. The Solar System stood as a witness against man for the price of our sins.
2. The humanity of Jesus could not stand the awful separation that took place between Him and The Father because of sin.

If creation can bow down in humility at the sight of Christ on the cross, then surely you and I can show God some reverence during the worship hour! If creation can stop what it is doing in honor of the sacrifice given by Jesus, then surely we can stop life's activities to give Him reverence on Sunday! If creation can recognize its Creator, then we who are made in God's image have no excuse!

Jesus also cries out to God in Aramaic. This is the mourning of Heaven's King as He suffers alone for us. In the Old Testament, when the sacrifice was offered in the temple, the animal being slain would cry out as its blood was being shed for the sins of the people. Here we have The Lamb of God being crucified and killed for our sins. As He is paying the price, He cries out as lambs would in the temple sacrifice! Christ experiences separation from God because of our sin.

Sin has a way of causing great pain in sorrow, but it hurts worse when you are living righteously and sin occurs against you. Jesus knows your pain, your trouble, and your experience. But He says you can hold on because help is coming!

THINGS TO PONDER:

Take a moment to ponder what Christ experienced. How does this change the way you understand the cost of your sin and the sacrifice of Christ for you?

When Jesus Died

When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, He's calling Elijah." Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave Him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take Him down," he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed His last.

-MARK 15:35-37

BIBLE STUDY: HEATHENS WENT INTO MOCKING

In this portion of our passage, we see the reality of wickedness. Even while hanging on the cross, mankind yet inflicts more agony upon Christ. The first thing we notice is the ill-reverent humor at the cross. The observers make fun of The Master's prayer in the midst of His suffering. They twist His prayer and mock His agony, suggesting that He is calling for Elijah to come and save Him.

They first make this statement because all religious Jews believed that Elijah was a great prophet who was miraculously taken to Heaven upon a fiery chariot. They also believed that one day, he would come back again. But here, you have vile sinners mocking Christ and mocking Scripture, attempting to inflict more pain upon Him. They even offer Him sour wine that they gave to criminals on the cross. They equated Christ, The King of Glory, with being a common thief!

Every now and then, we also have enemies who cannot get enough of our suffering. They look for more ways to hurt us when we are already hurting. They will even go out of their way to make your already crucified life filled with pain. As Christians, we are called to carry the cross and then called to die daily upon it. The crucified life of Christ is an example of how we are to live in a hostile world for The One Who has redeemed us from sin (see *Romans 6:5-11*). With Him, we are dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God. Death no longer has power, and we will share in the new life of Christ.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When have you experienced mocking like this? How did you handle it?

How are you carrying your cross daily? How are you following Christ's example?

When Jesus Died

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how He died, he said, "Surely this Man was The Son of God!" Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed Him and cared for His needs. Many other women who had come up with Him to Jerusalem were also there.

-MARK 15:38-41

BIBLE STUDY: HISTORY WAS IN THE MAKING

When Jesus died, history was in the making! When He died, the new covenant was established! When He died, God changed the entire sacrificial system! His death tore the curtain of the temple. We now have access to God through Christ!

The curtain that was in the temple separated the Inner Court from the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could enter in to offer prayers to God for the people (see *Hebrews 10:19-22*). But when Jesus died, He became our High Priest Who went into the Holy of Holies and tore down the curtain that kept us separated from God!

Because He died, you and I now have access to God! Because He died, we no longer have to offer animal sacrifices. Christ died once and for all! Because He died, we can come to God anytime and anywhere. We can tell Him how we feel and bring our worries to Him. We can go to God and cry out for His help when we face trouble and suffering. When Jesus died, history was made because our Savior had finally paid it all! History was made because God's sacrifice was complete, and there was nothing else needed to pay for sin. History was made because the old law was replaced with the new covenant! History was made because we can now be born again by the blood of The Lamb!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you rejoice and give God worship for this new history?

What does this new history mean for you personally?

When Jesus Died

It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the Kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that He was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where He was laid.

-MARK 15:42-47

BIBLE STUDY: NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD

When Jesus died, He shed His precious blood for you and I. And because of His blood, He has washed all my sins away.

- What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
- What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
- No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
- For my pardon, this is see, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
- For my cleansing, this my plea, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
- Nothing can for sin atone, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
- Naught of good that I have done, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
- This is all my hope and peace, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
- This is all my righteousness, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh, precious is the flow that makes us white as snow! There is none other but Him! His blood has cleansed us from all our sin when He died on the cross for us.

But Christ did not stay dead. Early Easter morning, He rose from the dead with all power of Heaven in His hands! Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does being "washed by the blood of Christ" mean to you personally?

How can you share this Good News with others?

The Power of Love

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

-JOHN 15:12-13

BIBLE STUDY: THE CHARGE OF CHRIST

Before going to Calvary, it was on The Master’s heart to leave us with a command that would transform and enhance our relationship with Him and with one another. Jesus, in this portion of Scripture, is sharing deep, intimate thoughts from the throne on what our behavior in the church is to look like on earth. We are to be a body of believers that truly love and care for one another. Loving others, then, is not an option; it is a command!

When we arrive at this verse, we hear The Master calling His disciples to obey and demonstrate His love for the brethren. The Greek word used for “love one another” is a command and is written in the present active-tense, emphasizing that the command is ongoing: “Keep on doing it! Do not stop!”

Jesus’ command to love those within the church was intended to produce a compelling testimony to those outside of the church. Our love for one another would offer the world demonstrable proof in three ways:

1. Their love for one another would reveal Christ-like love in their hearts.
2. Their love would be the basis for a vital human community only in Christ!
3. Their love would prove that what Jesus said about Himself was true.

This command is not an option. They were called to love in spite of differences and attitudes. They had to demonstrate their love for each other as Christ showed them. To love involves constantly forgiving, overcoming offenses, choosing others before ourselves, serving others, and praying for one another.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you show more love to your fellow brothers and sisters in the faith?

How do you believe our love for one another points to Christ?

The Power of Love

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

-JOHN 15:13

BIBLE STUDY: THE COMPARISON OF CHRIST

Here we see the modeled version of the demonstrative love of God in action! The key words are "*than this*." The use of these words are very subtle and suggestive. No man has greater love than this type of love. These words are important enough that they have a way of directing the object of love to a final and sacrificial offering on behalf of the one in need. The words "*than this*" decisively separate the love of Christ from any type of love than humanity knows. There is no better love than the love of Christ!

The disciples are learning here what real love is:

- It is **sacrificial**.
- It is **unselfish**.
- It is **unconditional**.
- It is **forever**.
- It is **free of demonic intrusion**.
- It is **filled with divine favor**.
- It **does not demand its own way**.
- It **makes one give up themselves in order that someone else may live**.

To lay down one's life is to willingly surrender, exchange, or take another's place at the time of death, so that they may go free. It is not just a great love; it is the *greatest* love. Jesus says that this love for His disciples comes to them because He is willing to die for His friends. He is willing to give it all up and forego life that they may have it. He is willing to serve them with His own life and put their needs before His own. In His love, He is willing to live sacrificially so that we may live.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Do you know anyone with this kind of love?

As Christ has shown this love to you, how can you share His love with others?

The Power of Love

“You are My friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything I learned from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in My Name The Father will give you. This is My command: Love each other.”

-JOHN 15:14-17

BIBLE STUDY: THE COMMAND OF CHRIST

The disciples were going to be left in a hostile world after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Tensions against followers of Christ would increase, and there would be danger facing them if they were not loving toward one another!

So Jesus leaves them with a command, a standing order, a divine charge! Their love should be of such a nature that they were willing to die for one another.

How can you tell that God loves you?

1. His sacrifice at Calvary.
2. His commitment to rescue you from sin and death.
3. His suffering for your sins.
4. His selflessness to help you.
5. His offering for you to be redeemed.
6. His victory for you through His resurrection.

It is His love that keeps, holds, and draws you in. It drives you, compels you, calls you, and moves you. When we are too busy loving each other, we do not fight each other. We encourage and build up. We support and unite. We help uplift another and comfort those in pain. The disciples are called to this type of love and devotion. There is no greater love known to man like that of the love of God. And we are called to follow His example! The love of God is powerful, and God wants it to be on display in the earth through you and I.

THINGS TO PONDER:

In what ways have you seen God’s love for you? How can you display His love?

A Savior For The City

When David was told, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors," he inquired of The LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" The LORD answered him, "Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah."

-1 SAMUEL 23:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: INFORMATION ABOUT THE ENEMY

Every now and then we run across one of those passages where it is obvious that God is at work. In these passages, there always seems to be a theme of salvation and obedience for the one who seeks to do God's Will.

As we read this passage, we see a city that was under siege from a hostile enemy. The men who are following David bring him some important news. It is news concerning their enemies, their activity, and their diabolical behavior against their neighbors. According to this report, this enemy was not only fighting ruthlessly against the people of Keilah, but they were robbing their threshing floors! The people of Keilah were small in number and would not have been able to fully protect themselves. When David was with King Saul, he would have been the one to go and stop the Philistines from their attack. But now that Saul has turned his attention to killing David, there is no one in Israel with the tenacity and commitment of David to fight against Israel's enemies. So when David gets this report, it is a call to do something on behalf of those who need help.

Sometimes in life, we too are made aware of the enemy's activity in the lives of those that we love. Sometimes, God brings a crisis to you to see what you will do and how you will respond on His behalf. Sometimes, believers are needed to help rescue people who are under the attack of the enemy. This passage is a great picture of the world because just like the citizens of Keilah, Satan is at war with many and is doing his best to kill, separate families, and destroy their lives. The child of God who has been successful in previous warfare has an obligation to help those who are under attack from the wicked one!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What enemy attacks are you facing or aware of? How will you respond?

A Savior For The City

When David was told, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors," he inquired of The LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" The LORD answered him, "Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah."

-1 SAMUEL 23:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: INQUIRY ABOUT THE ENEMY

In his response to this news, David displays a heart for justice. When he hears of Keilah's struggle, he inquires of The LORD to ask if he should go fight on behalf of the innocent. We can learn a few things from his response:

1. David inquires whether or not he should do it.
2. He is a man of prayer!
3. He consults God first to discern if The LORD is with him and if what he is about to do is in His Will.

David is a warrior, but he is not fighting everything that comes his way. He is not fighting every enemy and not fighting what he is not led to fight. He goes to fight on Keilah's behalf because The LORD has given him permission to defeat the Philistines. He is fighting for the Name of The LORD! He is fighting that God may be glorified. After David inquires, God hears his prayer request and gives him instruction. He told David to go and to attack the enemy.

This is important for the child of God. We have to learn how to fight at the right times, how to fight when God says to fight, and how to fight because He has called us to fight!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What fights or attacks are you currently facing?

How will you respond to this fight? How will you inquire of The LORD?

A Savior For The City

But David's men said to him, "Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!" Once again David inquired of The LORD, and The LORD answered him, "Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand."

-1 SAMUEL 23:3-4

BIBLE STUDY: INSECURITY ABOUT THE ENEMY, PART 1

When we come to this portion of the text, we see what David did not see. We see fear creep into the ranks of his men! David had already received an answer from God, but his men have not heard from God concerning these divine instructions. All they knew was that the Philistines were marching in Keilah and were devastating God's people.

They were fearful of this enemy even though David had a good record of wins against the Philistines. Situation and circumstance made them afraid. And notice what they say, *"Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!"* Fear made these men unsure, unstable, unsteady, unreliable, and unreasonable.

But when David heard his men, he went back into prayer. This portion of the narrative is interesting because we actually see David going back into prayer about this battle when he has already heard God tell him to go ahead and fight the Philistines. It is interesting because it is almost as if the fear of the men started to cause David to doubt what he had heard God tell him to do. He feels a need to inquire of The LORD again to affirm that this is truly God's Will for them to fight for Keilah against the Philistines. And once again, God answers.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you been in a similar situation as David was?

What was your response?

A Savior For The City

But David's men said to him, "Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!" Once again David inquired of The LORD, and The LORD answered him, "Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand."

-1 SAMUEL 23:3-4

BIBLE STUDY: INSECURITY ABOUT THE ENEMY, PART 2

Fear is contagious. It has a way of killing dreams and paralyzing hopes. It can turn dreams into nightmares. It can take your eyes off of what God shows you and put it in the "what if's." Fear has caused many a Christian to stay in the pews of safety in the sanctuary instead of doing something greater for God. Many a Christian have stayed home from the mission field instead of trusting God. Many a Christian have let go of their burning desire to run for God and have settled for something unfulfilling instead. Because of fear, churches have settled for subpar ministries instead of doing something big in the Name of The LORD.

After the response of his men, fear and doubt almost grip David too until he runs back to the presence of God. It is His presence where David is renewed and reminded of what he has been called to do. It is in the presence of God where David gets revived to believe that he can and will be victorious against the Philistines. In God's presence, David is able to escape the fears of the men.

In ministry, fear immobilizes. It causes you to do nothing when you should move at God's command! Fear causes you to doubt that God has you in the center of His Will for your life. It causes you to distrust and second-guess what God has said.

If you want to escape the fears and doubts of others, go into prayer and listen for God's voice. Go into the presence of God and seek His Will. If you need confirmation regarding what The LORD is calling you to do, do not seek it from man; go back in prayer with God!

THINGS TO PONDER:

When have you sought confirmation from others first? How can you practice returning to God's presence in prayer instead?

A Savior For The City

So David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines and carried off their livestock. He inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines and saved the people of Keilah.

-1 SAMUEL 23:5

BIBLE STUDY: VICTORY AGAINST THE ENEMY

Fear had almost gotten to David, but he went back into God's presence. The LORD spoke to David and answered him again because The LORD had a mission for David to complete. And when God spoke this time, David was confident in what he had heard, and he moved out in obedience to The LORD's command! Because of faith, David was victorious against the enemy. He took back what was stolen and brought justice back to Keilah.

In this verse, we see David leading men who were fearful into The LORD's battle. The believer should pay attention to this passage because if you were ever unsure how to lead in fearful crowds, here is what it looks like!

- You lead by example and obedience!
- You do it because The LORD has told you what to do!
- You do it because you have a guaranteed victory with The LORD on your side!

However, you still have to fight to get victory. You still have to engage. You still have to step out in faith to get what The LORD has promised you.

When David leads, the men follow. They still may be afraid, but they follow the leader. Why? Because he has given them confidence. David leads by confidence in The LORD. He leads by faith and assurance that God is in control. He leads by the word of God, and he leads by example.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When faced with fear, how can you respond in faith?

As a leader, how can you follow the example of David?

Important Standards For The Church

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. Give proper recognition to these widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame.

-1 TIMOTHY 5:1-7

BIBLE STUDY: RESPECT IN THE CHURCH

In this portion of Paul's letter, he encourages Timothy to teach the following things so that the church will have healthy relationships, honor, respect, and know what their responsibilities are to care for one another.

The first thing Paul shares with Timothy is that the church ought to be a community of respect among the believers. Nobody in the church is ever to be disrespected. Older men ought to be treated as fathers, older women as mothers, younger men as brothers, and younger women as sisters. All of these terms denote "family." The church is a family and must be governed as such. Our relations should reveal how much we care for each other and take care of one another.

The church also has an obligation to take care of its members. Paul especially speaks of widows and how they must be cared for. However, if they have families, then their families must be their primary source of help and support. If the widow has lived a godly lifestyle, she is to be honored. These instructions were to be taught and practiced in the church so that there would not be any slander or false blame put against those who were being helped and supported in the church.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How is your church community governed as a family of believers?

Important Standards For The Church

Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of The LORD's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds. As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge.

-1 TIMOTHY 5:8-12

BIBLE STUDY: RELIEF IN THE CHURCH, PART 1

Here Paul first reveals the heart of those in the church that will not take care of their own family. He says that if they refuse to do this, they have denied the faith, revealing that they do not believe what is preached and taught. In fact, they are worse than unbelievers. Timothy is to teach this so that the people will not act like unbelievers but would behave like those who know Christ and believe in Him.

Next, Paul points to the requirements for relief within the church, specifically for widows. She must be over sixty and a servant with a deep love for God. She must be well respected and known for her faithfulness to her husband. Her reputation must be that she has been in ministry in the church, helping those in need. There is a difference between a young widow and an older widow. The younger will want to remarry because she will have a desire to do so. Paul says that these desires will ultimately overpower her desire to be single with Christ for the rest of her life. When this happens, she will break her devotion to singleness and desire to be remarried.

As the church, our responsibility is to care for those within our own families, revealing our faith through our obedience to Christ and love for one another.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where can you reveal your faith more through love for your family? Your church?

Important Standards For The Church

Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity to slander. Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan. If any woman who is a believer has widows in her care, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.

-1 TIMOTHY 5:13-16

BIBLE STUDY: RELIEF IN THE CHURCH, PART 2

For younger widows, Paul first gives Timothy reasons for why they should remarry. This way, they will not become idle or troublemakers in the Body of believers. If they were simply to be taken care of by the church, they do not have the maturity of an older woman to stay focused on the ministry; they could become distractions. Their desires for companionship and human relations would override their commitment to be single for Christ.

As Paul concludes the matter, he speaks to believing sisters who are caring for widows. They should continue to help them, not the church. It is the believing woman's responsibility, obligation, and ministry to do so.

Paul refers to women in this passage because in those times, more women outlived men. And just like today, many were left with the responsibility of caring for their parents. It is an honor to glorify God by caring for those who need help, especially their parents.

All believers, men and women, have a responsibility to share God's love, build His Kingdom, and bring glory to Him. When we have fellow believers in need, our aim should be to continue to serve and honor God as we help and care for them.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What type of ministry has God called you to in caring for others?

How can you bring more glory and God by caring for those in need?

Important Standards For The Church

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning. I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without any partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism. Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

-1 TIMOTHY 5:17-22

BIBLE STUDY: RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH

Here, Paul gives clear instructions for Timothy to give to the church. These instructions are for the care of the pastors and the elders. According to Paul, the preacher should be taken care of, looked after, and supported by the church.

We also see another responsibility of Timothy: he has a responsibility to not listen to the complaints against the preachers and elders he will appoint if these complaints are not proven to be true. Paul is also talking about those who would accuse him of wrongdoing without any fault or justification for their allegations. If there is evidence of bad behavior, Timothy is to rebuke these elders and preachers openly in front of the church so that others may not sin or follow their example.

At the close of this part of his letter, Paul gives a charge before all of heaven. Timothy is charged to do nothing out of favoritism and to not be hasty in appointing pastors. Instead, he is charged to make sure that those he lays hands upon are genuine and true. Additionally, Timothy is not to participate in the sins of others. He is warned to keep himself pure in the work God has called him to.

Like Timothy, we are also charged to keep ourselves pure in our ministry and lives.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What stands out most to you in Paul's charge to Timothy?

How can you keep yourself pure in your service to God?

God Promises Deliverance

Then The LORD said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of My mighty hand he will let them go; because of My mighty hand he will drive them out of his country."

-EXODUS 6:1

BIBLE STUDY: MINISTRY REVELATION FOR MOSES

There are some things in ministry that are hard to deal with. When discouragement comes, it can be hard to bounce back from. Sometimes, God sets you up to know Him better. However, the tests can be extremely hard to deal with. Moses, just like you and I, had to struggle with ministry. As Moses remembers the covenant from God, it gives him strength, assurance, and hope to persevere and not quit doing what God has called him to do.

In the first verse of this chapter of Exodus, there are two facts we can discover:

1. The Word of God is a powerful antidote for discouragement. God responded to Moses' discouragement by reminding him of four things: His Name, His promise, His covenant, and His compassion.
2. Because of God's mighty hand (mentioned twice), Pharaoh would not merely allow Israel to leave Egypt; he would actually drive them out!

God is going to use Pharaoh to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. Through God's power and His plagues to Egypt, Pharaoh will want them out of his country. Through Pharaoh, God accomplishes His plan, and Israel is released from slavery.

Sometimes God will use His enemies to bless His children. The suffering of His hand against them will cause them to release resources to those who need them most and give them freedom from the land of bondage.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What struggles or challenges are you facing in your ministry right now?

How can you find strength, assurance, and hope as Moses did?

God Promises Deliverance

God also said to Moses, "I am The LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by My Name The LORD I did not make Myself fully known to them. I also established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they resided as foreigners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered My covenant."

-EXODUS 6:2-5

BIBLE STUDY: MINISTRY RECOLLECTION FOR MOSES

Here we can discover something new about God: His delayed response to Moses' situation is so that He could reveal Himself to him in a new way. In patriarchal times, God had revealed Himself as El Shaddai, God Almighty, and The God Whose almighty power worked in the lives of faithful men and women. Now, He is revealing Himself as Yahweh, The Eternal, Self-Existing, Self-Consistent God.

Difficult assignments, like the one Moses faced, allows for the servant of God to learn things about God that they have not known before. Moses now gets the chance to know God for himself.

We also discover that God does not forget His promises and covenants. He is a God Who remembers all, knows all, is over all, and is working out all things. In His covenant, He will provide for His people in His perfect timing. We also learn that God is in touch with the sufferings of His people, and He will not forget His covenant with them. He is a compassionate God.

The child of God can learn that God also has not forgotten about us. He has made a promise to provide, protect, and care for His children in this evil land. God is bound to His people by His covenant with them (see *Matthew 28:19-20*). Knowing this, we can rest in the fact of knowing that God loves us and is compassionate toward us. He is willing to provide and protect on behalf of His children.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How has God made Himself known to you personally?

What comfort can you take from this study and these truths?

God Promises Deliverance

“Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am The LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am The LORD your God, Who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am The LORD.’”

-EXODUS 6:6-8

BIBLE STUDY: MINISTRY REMEMBRANCE FOR MOSES, PART 1

From this passage, we can discover that the Israelites grew discouraged when The LORD did not come and rescue them right away. Their hope in Him began to fade. They were looking for God to move instantly, but God did not respond in the manner that they wanted Him to. His plan was to use Pharaoh to drive them out of Egypt. Here we also discover the declarative statements from The LORD:

- “I will bring you out...”
- “I will free you from...”
- “I will redeem you with...”
- “I will take you as...”
- “I will be your God...”
- “I will bring you to...”
- “I will give it to you...”

The Eternal God intended to redeem Israel with an outstretched arm and mighty acts of judgment. By delivering Israel from bondage, God would be choosing them as His own. He would honor the oath which He had given to their patriarchs; He would give them a land of their own.

In spite of trials, the believer can trust in God’s promises. If He has promised, He will be faithful to complete it. It is by faith that we must trust Him.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you find encouragement as your trust in God’s promises for your life?

God Promises Deliverance

Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and harsh labor. Then The LORD said to Moses, "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country." But Moses said to The LORD, "If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?"

-EXODUS 6:9-12

BIBLE STUDY: MINISTRY REMEMBRANCE FOR MOSES, PART 2

Here we again see that God will keep His Word, and He will honor His covenant. This covenantal promise is not about the people, but rather, it is all about God. It reveals to the people Who God is and what His nature and character is like.

Yet, in spite of what God is trying to teach them, the people are not grasping the lesson because of the harsh slavery and their broken spirits. Discouragement has robbed them of knowing God. Like the Israelites, when we are living in the pits of despair in life, we too have a hard time trying to hear from God or even believe that His covenant promises are for us.

It is in this moment of the narrative that Moses' ministry gets very difficult. The people are not listening. They no longer trust in God's promises, and they do not trust Moses as he speaks God's words to the people. But Moses was called by God to serve Him and the people, so he had to follow God in spite of difficulty.

Some of you may be in ministries like Moses. Your task is great, the people have no faith, and you may feel as if your efforts and teaching make no difference. Yet, by faith, you are hanging in there. In these moments, remember that God has not forgotten about you. He has a Name you can trust. He will keep His promise, so remain faithful to obey Him.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What is your immediate response to difficulty in ministry?

How can you choose to trust God's faithfulness over discouragement?

God Promises Deliverance

Then The LORD said to Moses, "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country." But Moses said to The LORD, "If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?" Now The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron about the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, and He commanded them to bring the Israelites out of Egypt.

-EXODUS 6:10-13

BIBLE STUDY: MINISTRY STRENGTH FOR MOSES

Moses obeyed The LORD and delivered the message. The discouragement of the Israelites, however, was so great that they would not listen to the words he spoke. God then gave Moses another assignment. He was to return to Pharaoh to demand the release of God's people. Moses objects. How will Pharaoh listen to him if the Israelites, his own people, will not listen to him? If even the Israelites would not listen, what hope would there be of any positive response from Pharaoh? In addition, Moses again brings up the matter of his speaking condition and faltering lips.

Sometimes, ministry seems impossible, and it seems as if you just cannot win. Israel did not believe Moses, Pharaoh was out of control, and now the preacher does not believe that he can preach anymore. Moses also is facing discouragement.

Discouragement can be a dangerous thing if not confronted with hope and truth. It can knock you down and cause you to lose trust. In turn, doubt can disable and disarm you of your confidence. So, do not let dismay take hold of you. Do not give in to doubt and discouragement. Pick yourself up and revisit the covenantal promises God has with you. Trust His Word against all odds. Follow what He has asked of you. He will surely reveal to you Who He is and what He is doing in your life through His Name. Do not be discouraged! Take hope in The LORD!

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where can you combat discouragement with God's truths in your life or ministry?

What takeaways can you apply to your spiritual walk from this Bible study?

Revival Starts With Us

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

-1 PETER 2:1

BIBLE STUDY: GETTING RID OF SOME STUFF

We have learned from Peter that there must be a change when a believer comes to faith in Christ. God has called us to a new standard of living, and He has empowered us to live like Him in a fallen world. In this study, Peter teaches us how to live this way and gives us the keys to this new standard.

The first key to rising up to a new standard of living is to deny our old nature. We can do this by doing the following things:

- Getting rid of **malicious behavior** (having or showing a desire to cause harm to someone).
- Getting rid of **deceitful behavior** (the act or practice of not being truthful).
- Not **pretending to be good** but actually being good in every area of our lives.
- Being done with **hypocrisy** (feigning to be what one is not or to believe what one does not, giving a false assumption or appearance of virtue, morals values, or religion).
- Being done with **jealousy** (covetousness and envy).
- Being done with **backstabbing** (hurting others or saying evil things about them behind their backs to others).

Peter is mentioning these things because they will keep the believer from rising up to the new standard of righteous living in Christ. These are all the works of the flesh, and they wage war against The Spirit and the new nature of the believer. If we get rid of these sinful things of our old nature, we can do what God commands us to do and live how He commands us to live.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where might you still need to get rid of parts of your old nature?

How will getting rid of these sinful things strengthen your witness for Christ?

Revival Starts With Us

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that The LORD is good.

-1 PETER 2:2-3

BIBLE STUDY: GETTING READY FOR SOME STUFF

In these verses, Peter introduces us to what we should be ready to receive and what we ought to be craving in order to rise to the new standard in Christ.

1. We are called to crave pure spiritual milk (beg for, demand more of that which you cannot live without).
2. The spiritual milk that we should long for is the fundamental doctrines of the faith, the Truth of Jesus and what He came to do for humanity. The cravings we ought to have are for the things of God, the biblical teachings of the deeper life in Christ, and those things that draw us closer to Him and make us more like Him. This spiritual milk will help us to let go of the things we need to get rid of.
3. According to Paul, if we crave the spiritual milk of the Word, we will grow into the fullness of our salvation.
4. We are to cry out for the divine nourishment that can only come from a relationship with Christ.

Peter uses an analogy of babies who are hungry for the milk from their mothers. They cry loud, long, consistently, and repeatedly until their desires, cravings, and needs are met. Like newborn babies, we also ought to be in the desire for a change in our behaviors and lifestyle. We ought to cry out for more of God.

Peter closes by saying that the believer ought to do this now that they have had a taste of The LORD's goodness. Once we have tasted of His goodness, how can we not cry out for more of Him? We should desire Him more and more each day!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What can you take away from this lesson that will help you change your behavior?

What can you learn from Peter's words that you can teach to someone else?

The Cost Of Servant Leadership

Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's affections, for the sake of His Body, which is the church.

-COLOSSIANS 1:24

BIBLE STUDY: TWO VIEWS OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

One of the newest buzzwords in the business market is “servant leadership.” This term defines leaders as those who are willing to put others before themselves. In the corporate world, this term denotes service being done for those who serve you. However, in the church, it means something totally different.

- A servant leader in the church is a church slave.
- A servant leader is one who works for Christ in order that others may get to know Him.
- A servant leader does not serve for reimbursement here on earth.
- A servant leader does not serve for status, and they do not wait for others to serve them in return.
- A servant leader serves because of who they are.
- A servant leader is a servant first, then a leader second.
- A servant leader is born from above, not below.
- A servant leader is loyal to the cross and to Christ.
- A servant leader is committed to God and His Word.
- A servant leader is sacrificial in living and giving their all to help others see Jesus.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he writes to give his audience insights to the calling and ministry of servant leadership on earth. His love for the Gentile Church enabled him to endure unwanted sufferings and the trials of this world, for the sake of Christ.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does a servant leader look like to you? How do they serve?

How can you practice being a servant first, then a leader?

The Cost Of Servant Leadership

Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His Body, which is the church.

-COLOSSIANS 1:24

BIBLE STUDY: A LEADER WHO SUFFERS

In this verse, Paul considers his persecutions, as far as the Jews were concerned, a blessing for the Gentiles. It was for the Gentiles that he brought them the Gospel. However, this caused trouble with the Jews. Because of his calling to preach to the Gentiles, there were others against him who tried to kill him in Jerusalem. In order to save his life, he had to appeal to Caesar in Rome and stand trial for the Gospel.

For Paul, there were still some afflictions he had to pass through before his race was finished. The afflictions he would face would come to him because of the Gospel and because he was preaching to the church. Paul declares that he fills up his life with this trouble because of the church. Because he serves the church, he suffers for the church.

Leadership in the church will also have to face many difficulties on the journey. Sometimes, we will have to lead while our own lives are in danger. Leading in the church is a call to suffer for others in order that they may grow close to Christ.

Persecution can come in many forms, and when it comes, it always comes to break, make, or stop a leader from doing the work of the ministry. However, like Paul, Christian leaders have to know who they are, Who they serve, and why they are doing what they do in the Name of The LORD. Any servant that loves the church and teaches the Gospel will one day encounter afflictions for the sake of Christ. These afflictions and troubles do not come because you have done wrong, but rather because you have done right.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What can you take away from Paul's response to affliction for the church?

How does this encourage you to be a better servant leader?

The Cost Of Servant Leadership

I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the Word of God in its fullness – the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to The LORD’s people. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. He is The One we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

- COLOSSIANS 1:25-29

BIBLE STUDY: A LEADER WHO SERVES

Paul clearly denotes why he does what he does: because he has been called by God! Paul is a servant (in Greek, *diakonos*, meaning “slave”) commissioned by God to preach the Gospel. He is also to share the unsearchable riches of the Kingdom of God. This mystery was previously hidden from the eyes of men, but it is now clearly seen. Paul is made a steward of the ministry on earth by God. And he now serves him with all that he has!

Paul wants to convince the believers that he is all in with Jesus. He has committed his way to The LORD. Paul was sold out on his ministry, and his goal was to see everyone perfect in Christ.

Like Paul, any servant leader with a passion for the church must love to admonish others. Any servant leader with a passion for new believers has to be willing to teach the Word of The LORD to others. Any servant leader who loves God has to be willing to struggle with and alongside the church through the transitions of life. This work is hard, and sometimes, it may appear unappreciated. However, servant leadership is a non-stopping task. For the sake of Christ and out of our love for Him, we should serve Him with all we have!

THINGS TO PONDER:

In your ministry, what passions do you have as a servant leader?

Where is God calling you to serve Him with all you have?

A Search For A Modern-Day Noah

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

-HEBREWS 11:7

BIBLE STUDY: AN EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW

The letter to the Hebrews was written at a time when there was a great need among believers to be put in remembrance of what they believed and why they believed it. These believers were in danger of falling away from the faith out of fear of death and punishment. This verse gives an account of a faithful servant of God. It is just one out of many in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Through Noah's example of faith, we too can be encouraged when we face troubling times. More than that, this text also gives us instruction towards righteousness.

There are three things we should note from the life and faith of Noah:

1. **Noah's dedication to God.** Noah feared God, he was just, and he was blameless. He found grace in the eyes of The LORD, and the Old Testament says that Noah "*walked faithfully with God*" (see Genesis 6:9).
2. **Noah's devotion to God.** Noah was separate from the world, had fellowship with God, and God established His covenant with Noah (see Genesis 6:18).
3. **Noah's desire for God.** Noah was obedient to God's commands because he wanted to please The LORD (see Genesis 6:22).

Noah obeyed God because he had confidence in God, and he put his unwavering reliance on the truth of God's divine declaration. Noah had been warned by God of things not yet seen. He responded in obedience and in holy fear and faith. Noah was influenced with the dread of what was coming and reverence for God. In building the ark, he condemned the world because he showed the guilt and folly of their lives by the contrast of his conduct and theirs. Because of his faith, Noah was considered an heir of righteousness. We need more lives full of faith like this!

THINGS TO PONDER:

Reflecting on the example of Noah, what does a life of faith look like to you?

Four Kinds Of Hearers

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around Him was so large that He got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in His teaching said: "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed."

-MARK 4:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Jesus, as He speaks to the crowd, shares a parable to explain the difference between the four types of hearers that come and listen to the Word of God. They are each unique and with a different reason for doing what they do when they hear the Word of God. These four types of hearers are as follows:

1. Those with **stubborn** and **hard** hearts.
2. Those with **open but stony** hearts.
3. Those with **soft but cluttered** hearts.
4. Those that have **submissive** and **good** hearts.

In Jesus' day, farming looked very different from the big machines and large plows we see today. Everyone in Jesus' crowd could relate to the illustration of the farmer. They knew the difficulty of planting and harvesting.

With this parable, Jesus would expose the conditions of the human heart and use this illustration to preach. The seed represented the Word of God communicated to the minds of people by preaching. The Word is sown all across the world by those who proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

God knows who truly has a heart for worship. God knows the hearts of those who hear His Word. He also knows those that do choose not to listen. Through these four types of hearers, we are reminded that God is all-knowing, all-seeing, and all-powerful!

THINGS TO PONDER:

If Jesus were to expose the conditions of your heart right now, what would He see?

How does your heart respond to hearing God's Word?

Four Kinds Of Hearers

He taught them many things by parables, and in His teaching said: "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up."

Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the Word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the Word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the Word that was sown in them."

-MARK 4:2-4, 13-15

BIBLE STUDY: HEARERS WITH HARDENED HEARTS

The first kind of hearers are those that do not care about the things of God. These hearts are not interested in the Word, and they are not going to get interested in the future. They sit under the sower for other reasons and usually have hidden agendas. They do not have a desire to get closer to God. Instead, this kind of hearer does not allow the Word to penetrate their heart. And as a result, the devil has constant access to them and snatches the Word away.

These kinds of hearers will come and sit under the Word, but then once the sermon and worship is done, they will return to their own way of life, as if they had not been to church. These hearers will sit under the preaching of the Gospel, but they may also be distracted at church, not really focusing on hearing the message. They have a hard heart, and no matter what is said, they cannot and do not hear the Word. Because they have hardened hearts, no one can reach them with the Gospel. They have made up their minds that they "do not need Jesus now" and can receive Him when it works out for them.

The biggest tragedy of this type of life is that their lives will never be changed or saved because they do not have a desire for the Gospel or for Jesus Christ. Their hearts must be broken in order to be penetrated.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Do you know someone who is this kind of hearer?

How can you pray for them and share God's love with them?

Four Kinds Of Hearers

“Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.”

“Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the Word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, they quickly fall away.”

-MARK 4:5-6, 16-17

BIBLE STUDY: THE STONY HEART HEARER

The second kind of hearer has their hearts broken up a little bit. There is room for the Word to penetrate, and when they first hear the Good News, they receive it with joy. They like what they hear and are motivated to keep coming. Unfortunately, their excitement and joy lasts only for a season because when the scorching rays of trials and tribulations come against them because of the Word of God, they become scorched and withered. They quit coming to church, they give in to the world, and they give up on the faith. They are shallow hearers; they are the ones that follow Jesus when things are good and exciting, but as soon as things get hard, these hearers look for a way out.

These hearers lack moisture and deep roots in their hearts. They do not have The Spirit's living water in their hearts to nurture the seed that has been planted. So, naturally, what has no water will soon die out.

They are the first ones that will shout and be enthused at first but then quit coming when things become hard or inconvenient for them. These hearers have no roots; they are not grounded firmly in the Word of God. They are like “Sunday morning cheerleaders” off to the side and only attend when it is convenient for them. They are root-less and cannot help themselves.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Do you know someone who is this kind of hearer?

How can you pray for them and share God's love with them?

Four Kinds Of Hearers

“Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.”

“Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the Word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the Word, making it unfruitful.”

-MARK 4:7, 18-19

BIBLE STUDY: THE THORNY HEART HEARER

The third type of hearer has heard the Word and accepted it. However, the problem is that they have accepted worldly things along with the Word. In this way, the Word has been sown in their hearts among “thorns” which eventually battles against the Word.

These types of hearers grow up well for a season, but then they get attached to other things. In the process, the Word ultimately gets choked out. These hearers embrace Jesus for a season, but then they start desiring the riches of this world. The desire for worldly things chokes out the truth of God’s Word in their lives. This desire slowly creeps into the heart of the hearer and takes the focus off of Christ and onto worldly things. Their hearts are filled with thorns, they wrestle with the lust of many things, and they become torn in two over worldly desires versus total dedication and commitment to Christ.

This type of crowd wants more and more stuff, and they become consumed with the cares of this world. They have been taken with the desires of the flesh so much so that the Word is soon choked out of their lives and their hearts.

They quit coming to worship, meetings, and church. Money and worldly desires drive their motives, and they are always looking for the next big thing the world has to offer. The Word of God, unfortunately, has been choked out.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Do you know someone who is this kind of hearer?

How can you pray for them and share God’s love with them?

Four Kinds Of Hearers

“Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.”

“Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the Word, accept it, and produce a crop – some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”

-MARK 4:8, 20

BIBLE STUDY: THE GOOD-HEARTED HEARER

The fourth type of hearer brings forth a plentiful harvest with the growth of God’s Word in their hearts. When the Word of God is preached to this hearer, there is nothing to prevent it, scorch it, choke it, or remove it. This type of hearer has a heart of one who is hungry for God. Their heart has been prepared to receive from The LORD. It takes every Scripture in, eats, and produces what the Word tells them to produce.

This type of hearer comes to worship with a serving heart and a Bible. They are obedient to the Word and committed to Christ. They are a worker for the Kingdom of Heaven, and they have an active prayer life. Above all, they are motivated by the love of God.

This hearer wins others to Jesus. You know them because they are Christian; they walk like Jesus, talk like Jesus, give like Jesus, and live like Jesus. They want what Jesus wants, and they desire what He desires. With good hearts, they produce disciples. They have embraced the fact that in order to be like Jesus, they must go the way of Calvary and die to themselves in order that, through Christ, they may live. They are not enticed by the passions and desires of the world; their hearts and minds are focused on Christ. When troubles and tribulations come, they do not get choked by the world. They are producers who make a difference for the Kingdom. They are movers and shakers in the Kingdom.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What can you learn from this type of hearer?

How can you grow more into this type of hearer, winning others to Christ?

Four Kinds Of Hearers

Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." When He was alone, the Twelve and the others around Him asked Him about the parables. He told them, "The secret of the Kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'"

-MARK 4:9-12

BIBLE STUDY: AN EXAMPLE FOR GOOD HEARERS TODAY

The fourth type of hearer, the good-hearted hearer, is a servant and a leader. They serve anyone, anywhere, anytime, any place, and under any condition. They lead crowds from the back, serving in any way they can. And one day, at the close of all things, they will hear these words from The Father: "Well done, My good and faithful servant." How wonderful it would be to hear these words from The LORD!

Part of being a producer and a good-hearted hearer is that you are willing to give up yourself for somebody else. And our greatest example of this type of love and service is Jesus Christ.

- He gave up everything to produce the fruit of righteousness.
- He gave up His home in Heaven to come and save mankind.
- He gave up His position on the throne to make you a member of His family.
- He gave up His life at Calvary's cross to die for the sins of the world so that all who believe may have eternal life.
- His shed blood produced cleansing for our sins and new life through Him.
- His victory over the grave produced power to live and die on earth.

His life, death, and resurrection has changed our lives. And Christ is yet producing fruit, and you can be changed today if you will accept Jesus in your heart as your personal LORD and Savior.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Which of the four types of hearers speaks the most to you and your life?

What takeaways inspire you as you look at Christ's example?

When Jonah Got A Reason To Pray

Now The LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. From inside the fish Jonah prayed to The LORD his God.

-JONAH 1:17-2:1

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

When we come to this portion of Jonah's account, we see a man who is in rebellion against God. Jonah has chosen to not do what The LORD has commissioned, called, and commanded him to do. And as a result of his disobedience, Jonah tells the sailors to throw him overboard in the middle of the storm so that it would cease. When they did, the Bible says that God prepared a huge fish to swallow Jonah in his season of disobedience.

The first thing we notice in this passage is that God was in control of the whole situation. God would not allow Jonah to die in the storm. Why? Because God was not through with him yet.

Secondly, we see that God prepares Jonah's journey. This journey that Jonah was going to take was going to be one that he would remember. As a prophet of God, God was going to reveal some things to Jonah that He never revealed to anyone else. Jonah is the only prophet in the history of Israel who has been swallowed by a huge fish and kept incarcerated in the bowels of a fish for three days and three nights.

Lastly, we also see three interesting portions of Jonah's story: his despair, his discouragement, and his deliverance.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you ever responded to a calling from God as Jonah did?

In what ways were you reminded that God was ultimately in control?

When Jonah Got A Reason To Pray

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to The LORD his God. He said, "In my distress I called to The LORD, and He answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and You listened to my cry. You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all Your waves and breakers swept over me."

-JONAH 2:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: JONAH'S DESPAIR

In this portion of Jonah's story, we see that the prophet is in great despair. The ocean has taken him, and a great fish has come at the call of God to swallow Jonah whole. It was then that Jonah prayed!

Notice that Jonah did not pray when he was being thrown over. He did not pray when he was boarding the ship. He did not pray while he was in rebellion. Jonah did not pray until despair came upon him. When he prays, he does so from the inside of the fish! In other words, it is when he gets incarcerated that he begins to talk to God. It is when Jonah is near death and fear has gripped him that he begins to have a conversation with God.

It is at this moment in the belly of the fish that Jonah has decided that he needs God. In his despair, he cries out to God, but notice here that he does not repent. Jonah's cry of despair is not a cry of remorse, repentance, or reconciliation. It is simply a cry of fear in his calamity.

In his cry, Jonah also describes what he saw and what he felt. When he was thrown overboard and swallowed by the fish, Jonah saw God's power. Jonah knew that he could not run and could not hide from God. In his despair in the belly of the fish, Jonah had a reason to pray and cry out to God.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What surprises you about Jonah's response to his despair?

When was a time that you had to cry out to God to fix your situation?

When Jonah Got A Reason To Pray

"I said, 'I have been banished from Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.' The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But You, LORD my God, brought my life from the pit."

-JONAH 2:4-6

BIBLE STUDY: JONAH'S DISCOURAGEMENT

The prophet is in despair and great discouragement. He is in trouble! He believes that The LORD has driven him from His presence! Jonah is feeling this way because he is experiencing the consequences of his behavior. And because he has rebelled against God's calling, he has been thrown in the depths of the ocean and is now experiencing an absence from the presence of The LORD.

In his prayer, Jonah says that he will once more look toward God's holy temple. In other words, Jonah has come to himself and feels the sting of his disobedience. He now looks again towards God.

For the believer who acts like Jonah, it is good to have their attention turned back to God in times of trouble and despair. It is good to remember Who God is and where He is when guilt, despair, and discouragement have engulfed them. It is good for the "Jonah-type believer" to be shocked into remembering the holiness of God. And every now and then, every believer should revisit Who God is.

Jonah, in his prayer, is aware that God sees him and knows exactly where he is. God has brought his life from the pit and saved him from death. God still hears His prophet from the belly of the fish. And if God can hear Jonah's prayer in a time and situation like this, God can certainly hear yours too!

THINGS TO PONDER:

When have you faced discouragement like Jonah?

Every now and then, it is good for every believer to revisit Who God is for them. Ponder and reflect on this: Who is He for you?

When Jonah Got A Reason To Pray

“When my life was ebbing away, I remembered You, LORD, and my prayer rose to You, to Your holy temple. Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to You. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, ‘Salvation comes from The LORD.’”

And The LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

-JONAH 2:7-10

BIBLE STUDY: JONAH’S DELIVERANCE

As we come to a close in this narrative, we see Jonah’s deliverance on the way. The first thing is that Jonah is delivered from his negative attitude towards God. He is no longer acting rebellious, and in fact, he has humbled himself. Secondly, Jonah confesses that all other gods are false. He is going to worship God, offer sacrifices with grateful praise, and fulfill his vows that he made to God. In other words, Jonah is saying, “LORD, if you get me out of this one, I promise that I am going to live for You, serve You, and obey You.”

When Jonah finished his prayer, The LORD ordered the fish to spit Jonah out onto the dry land. I find this portion of the text fascinating! God hears the prophet pray in the belly of the fish. And when the time is right, God orders the fish to spit him out. He can command a huge fish to obey Him, just as He did the waves and the storm! God was in control of Jonah’s entire journey and situation.

All of creation works for God! Jonah recognizes that God is in control of everything. However, even in seeing and experiencing all of this, Jonah still does not repent of his previous rebellion. He recognizes, remembers, recollects, but does not repent. He is a picture of a believer whose disobedience brought no benefit. It is always better to do what God says in spite of what you feel or think.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where do you resonate with Jonah’s experience? His attitude?

What do you learn about God through Jonah’s deliverance?

Warnings Against A Lack Of Reverence

"I The LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from My decrees and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says The LORD Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?'"

-MALACHI 3:6-7

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In the first chapter of Malachi, the priests were acting wicked before God. They offered polluted offerings to The LORD on the altar. They would offer blind, sick, and weak animals to God while keeping the better offerings for themselves.

Later, in the second chapter, we read that the priests were declared by God to be cursed because they began to lie to God's people and were corrupting the Word of The LORD. They encouraged infidelity and divorce. They polluted the office of priesthood.

Then, in the third chapter, Malachi, the prophet, warns the priests that a messenger was coming who was going to straighten out the wickedness of the priests and sons of Levi. This messenger was going to restore the office of priesthood, and there would be some major changes in their giving, living, and leading.

As we come to this passage, we see a dialogue between God and His people. Instead of destroying them, God has mercy and calls them to repentance. He calls them to return to Him, and if they do, He will return to them. The people ask, "*How are we to return?*" God answers that they must return to Him, change their evil ways, and stop robbing His house.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where have you seen polluted and half-hearted service to God like these priests?

How do you think God feels towards these polluted offerings?

What surprises you about His response and mercy towards His people?

Warnings Against A Lack Of Reverence

“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob Me.

“But you ask, ‘How are we robbing You?’

“In tithes and offerings.”

-MALACHI 3:8

BIBLE STUDY: THE ACCUSATION OF GOD

In this text, God accuses Israel of treachery, deceit, and unrighteous behavior. God tells them that they have secretly and openly violated Him with the stuff He Himself has given to them. The LORD asks a question and yet knows the answer. This question is also answered with a divine accusation: “You have robbed Me in failure to give Me what belongs to Me in tithes and offerings.”

When Israel hears this from God, they ask, “*How are we robbing You?*” The people did not even recognize how sin had blinded their eyes. Their sin had caused them to stray from God so that God demands that they return back to Him. They robbed God by keeping back from Him what was His, and they defrauded Him by refusing to surrender what He demanded for His sacrifice. They were robbing The One Who had brought them out of slavery. He had blessed them, gave them bountiful crops, watered their soil, and made them prosperous. After all He had done for them, the people were robbing Him of proper worship and service.

In our churches and spiritual lives today, we also see examples of this kind of activity. We are not exempt! On Sunday mornings, we can rob God at the offering plate by not giving tithes. We can enjoy the blessings He gives us during the week but not give our heart to Him during the Sunday service. We need to be careful of this. When our lives are good, let us not forget The One Who has given us the good in our lives. Let us not forget that all that we have is from Him. May we never rob Him of our hearts and the glory He deserves.

THINGS TO PONDER:

In your own words, what does it mean to rob and defraud God?

When have you been tempted to act as the Israelites did?

Warnings Against A Lack Of Reverence

“You are under a curse – your whole nation – because you are robbing Me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. 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 there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says The LORD Almighty.

-MALACHI 3:9-11

BIBLE STUDY: THE ANGER AND CHALLENGE OF GOD

Because of the wickedness of Israel, their sin had to be judged. When they robbed God, He pulled back the hedges of His grace and let stuff go wrong in their lives. The whole nation had to suffer because of the wickedness that God’s people had committed. In the case of Israel, the nation suffered when people held back from God what rightly belonged to Him.

Israel was cursed because of their sins. The people had created God and got the same results in their own dealings. They reaped what they had sowed. It would have been better for them to obey and surrender to God instead of suffering the consequences of their disobedience and dishonesty.

It is a terrible thing to rob God, and it is even more foolish to buy into the lie that He will not mind being cheated of what is rightfully His.

- When you rob God, you will never get ahead.
- When you rob God, you will always have your finances under a curse.
- When you rob God, you will never have something to save, something to treat yourself, and something to help someone else.

God challenges Israel to test His faithfulness. If they offer the whole tithe He is due, He will bless them abundantly and take away the curse they have inflicted on themselves by their own sin. When we give to God what is His, He blesses us and even gives us more than we need.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What speaks to you the most about this passage and study?

The Need For Fellowship In Suffering

Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.

-2 TIMOTHY 4:9-11

BIBLE STUDY: WHO IS IMPORTANT

In his letter, Paul is longing to see Timothy before it is too late. He exhorts him to come and visit him in prison as soon as he can. There was a need for fellowship and discipleship. Timothy is important to Paul because they have established a spiritual bond, which is a critical bond for the life of a believer. They are sealed through God and His Holy Spirit, and they enable us to become closer to Him and to the family of believers.

Demas, however, is the opposite of Timothy. He is important to remember because he is a deserter. He was portrayed as if he was part of the family, committed wholly to the ministry. Yet, in the end, he forsook Paul because he wanted the things of this world. Paul says that Demas had deserted him, suggesting that Demas had left in a critical time of need.

Crescens and Titus are also important because they stayed with Paul to the end, and they departed to go back to the work of ministry in the region where Paul had served before. They were true sons committed to the ministry, and they took assignments to serve in the church. They did not desert him. Instead, they went on assignment from him to encourage the church.

In the last verse of our passage, Paul's faithful companion and scribe, Luke, is mentioned. He was there with Paul to record and document all that was transpiring. Paul also asks for Mark. Both he and Luke are important for the ministry and expansion of Paul's work for Christ.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Who have you surrounded yourself with in ministry?

Who can help you carry the load in tough times?

The Need For Fellowship In Suffering

I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The LORD will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But The LORD stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The LORD will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to His heavenly Kingdom. To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

-2 TIMOTHY 4:12-18

BIBLE STUDY: WHAT IS IMPORTANT

There are five things of importance in this passage: Timothy's replacement, Paul's ministry tools, the betrayer, the last appearance in court, and the promise of The LORD.

1. Timothy was to leave Ephesus to come to Rome, but Tychicus was to go to Ephesus and help until Timothy returned.
2. Seasons were changing in the prison, and winter was on its way. Paul needed his cloak and tools.
3. The evil one used Alexander the metalworker to betray and harm Paul. Here, Paul is warning Timothy against him.
4. Paul has learned how to walk alone in this stage of ministry. He has also learned how to trust in God for whatever the outcome would be. He knew that God was with him when nobody else was.
5. Salvation is available for the child of God, even in the darkest times of life. God is able to deliver. Paul models the salvation of life and the salvation of circumstance. God has rescued him and will bring Him to His Kingdom.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What truth stands out to you from this study?

What have you learned about yourself from Paul's situation?

A Close Look At Jesus

About eight days after Jesus said this, He took Peter, John and James with Him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As He was praying, the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.

-LUKE 9:28-29

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

There is no greater joy on the Christian journey than to have an invitation from God, to get alone with Him, and to see what no one else has had the privilege to see. Every now and then when we pray, God has a way of revealing Himself to His children so that they can have the assurance of knowing that He is really God.

In this passage, Jesus is showing Peter, John, and James what they can look forward to when they pray. He gives them a deeper glimpse into His deity.

We live in a fallen world. There are times in my life that mess with my mind, and that is when I need to pray so that I can see Jesus like I have never seen Him before. When I retreat to pray, I need to be reminded that God is God and that He has the power to help me through the difficult stuff in life. I need to be reminded that when I call on Him, He will meet me in the secret place and reveal Himself to me like I have never seen Him before.

For the disciples, they do not know it fully yet, but Calvary is coming, and it is going to change the world. They do not know it yet, but they will run when the soldiers come for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Difficult times will come for the disciples too, but Jesus gives them this glimpse of His true glory beforehand. We can also take encouragement in this. Even though we may face difficulties and trials in the future, we can rest in the truth that God is still in control, He is full of glory, and He is more powerful than any situation we face in this world.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What difficulty are you facing right now?

How does the truth of God's glory encourage you?

A Close Look At Jesus

About eight days after Jesus said this, He took Peter, John and James with Him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As He was praying, the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about His departure, which He was about to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem.

-LUKE 9:28-31

BIBLE STUDY: THE APPEARANCE OF GOD

When we come to this portion of the text, we see four powerful things about how Jesus reveals the appearance of God to His disciples:

1. **Invitation** - In order to get to see what God is up to in the secret place, you have to be invited by Him to come along; you have to be a disciple. As Jesus invites Peter, John, and James, He invites them in a special call to participate with Him in prayer and be a part of something sacred, special, and holy. These three disciples were handpicked to experience Jesus this way.
2. **Remote Area** - Jesus, with the three disciples, went to a remote area to pray. The remote area was sacred and isolated, a place of prayer, solitude, and divine instruction.
3. **Transfiguration** - The experience of the disciples would change them. Jesus' appearance was changed, and His clothes became bright like lightning. He was literally changed and transformed. This is interesting because Jesus, as God, had already become flesh. However, here He changes again to give the disciples a glimpse of His true glory. No earthly colors could compare to His beauty and radiance.
4. **Not Alone** - Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus at the Transfiguration. These heroes from the Old Testament now have a conversation with Jesus on earth. Although they did not have the privilege of walking with Him during His time on earth, their lives are a part of His grand story.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What is God currently revealing to you about His appearance and nature?

Where is God currently inviting you to grow closer to Him?

A Close Look At Jesus

Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to Him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put three shelters – one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)

-LUKE 9:32-33

BIBLE STUDY: THE AWESOMENESS OF GOD

Jesus has transfigured, and Moses and Elijah are with Him. Upon seeing this, Peter speaks into this reality. He is awe-struck and filled with wonder at what he has seen. As a result of what he has encountered, he has a brilliant idea. He wants to stay in this place and dwell there longer. He wants to make three shelters (three sacred tents, tabernacles) to serve as memorials and dwelling places. He gets a glimpse of the power and eternal glory of Jesus. He sees the saints of old and delights to fellowship with them. For a brief moment, he escapes the pain of the world and finds total peace on the mountain with Jesus. He did not want to leave the place of the miraculous encounter.

Although Peter's idea is not a bad one, it is not the right one. Peter had not considered the mission of Christ and how it had not yet been fulfilled. He got a glimpse of Jesus' true glory, but he did not see the end of the story and understand the purpose of His coming yet.

Like Peter, every now and then we too have holy moments with God and get inspirational ideas. We desire to stay in those moments forever with God. We recognize the fact that we are in the presence of Jesus and would rather enjoy the moment, staying in it permanently. However, we will still live in a fallen world. Our journey in this life does not stop in those moments, and God calls us to keep going, keep living for His glory, and keep sharing His hope with the world.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you relate to Peter?

Recall a moment you spent with God. What glimpse did this give you of eternity?

A Close Look At Jesus

While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, Whom I have chosen, listen to Him." When the voice had spoken, they found Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

-LUKE 9:34-36

BIBLE STUDY: THE ASSIGNMENT OF GOD

Right after Peter's comment, God The Father brought his thoughts back into focus. According to the text, God appeared like He had shown up in the past with Moses: His voice came in the form of a cloud. This was no ordinary cloud; it was a cloud sent by The Father to overshadow them. God was not in the cloud, but it was a vehicle sent by Him to veil the omnipotence of God and cover the humanity of Peter, John, and James. This cloud also carried the voice of God that they might know the Will of The Father.

In speaking to the disciples, God also gives divine instruction. He speaks and informs the disciples that Jesus is The Beloved Son of Glory. They are instructed to listen to Him and hear Him.

Like the disciples, this is also a command to us. We too have to be reminded that the thoughts and ideas of humans are not to be taken as "words of deity." All that is commanded of us is to hear Jesus.

After this encounter with Jesus and The Father, the disciples leave the mountain and keep this experience to themselves. The Holy Father had spoken to them, and there were no words to describe their wonder and awe. There were no words to describe an encounter as sacred as this.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How have you heard God speak to you about Who He is?

Where is God calling you to listen and hear Jesus more?

Secret Conversations With God

The LORD said to Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to Me there on top of the mountain. No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain; not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain."

-EXODUS 34:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE SERVANT

In the passage, God wants Moses to bring two stone tablets like the ones Moses had broken when he saw the idolatry of the Israelites. God is going to give the commandments again. The stone tablets were to be exactly like the first ones. The original tablets had been personally provided by God. Here, Moses would have to chisel them out of stone.

God also calls Moses to come up on Mount Sinai the next morning, ready to present himself before God. Mount Sinai was set apart, sacred, holy, and a reminder that God's presence must be entered with great reverence and respect. God instructs Moses that he is to come alone; no one is to come with him or be seen anywhere on the mountain.

God's holiness is powerful and demands that no unholy thing be in His presence. Nothing and no one who He does not specifically declare acceptable may safely approach Him. Accordingly, God issues a warning against the people and animals that they are not to be anywhere on the mountain.

God's holiness demands great reverence, honor, and respect. We should never forget Who God is. He is The Maker of Heaven and Earth, The Sustainer of life, and The LORD over all creation. Through Jesus and the New Covenant, we have the special privilege of coming before His throne with boldness.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does the holiness of God mean to you and how you approach His throne?

Secret Conversations With God

So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as The LORD had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. Then The LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed His Name, The LORD. And He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, The LORD, The Compassionate and Gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

-EXODUS 34:4-6

BIBLE STUDY: IMPORTANT DECISIONS FOR THE SERVANT

Moses obeys the word of God and works at God's command. He chiseled out the stone tablets and seeks to obey whatever God asks of him. He rises early, as God had commanded him, and goes to meet with God on Mount Sinai.

When Moses comes, The LORD meets him in the cloud and proclaims His Name. By coming down, God manifested Himself specially and personally in Moses' presence. Moses had sought to know that The LORD would be with him and Israel as they left Sinai and headed toward the Promised Land. Moses desired to know Who God really was and to see His glory.

God passes in front of Moses, proclaiming His Name and attributes. The first two attributes proclaim the truth of God's compassion and graciousness. He genuinely cares about His people and has concern and mercy towards them. Despite their sin and rebellion, God also does things for His people that they do not deserve, even going beyond what might be expected in order to grant kind favor towards His people.

God also describes Himself as being slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness. Although the people of Israel have rebelled and sinned against God and fallen short in their relationship with Him, He remains faithful at all times. People may fail, but God never will.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What stands out to you about Moses' obedience to God's instructions?

What encourages you most as you read God's proclamation in this passage?

Secret Conversations With God

And He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, The LORD, The Compassionate and Gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished; He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped.

-EXODUS 34:6-8

BIBLE STUDY: ILLUMINATION FOR THE SERVANT

The list of God's divine attributes continues. He describes Himself as maintaining His love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. The forgiveness of all sin is something only God alone can accomplish. Thus, the New Testament doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, on which the promise of eternal life so decidedly depends, flows from the very nature of God. He does not reluctantly forgive sins against Himself and others; He does so eagerly and as a manifestation of His character, by which He delights in doing so.

Even though God is merciful in His character, He is also just. He does not leave the guilty unpunished. By proclaiming this, God reminds Moses and the people of Israel that they could not rightly think that they could get away with sin. God is just and will punish the wickedness of the people, even punishing future generations.

In response to hearing this proclamation and being in the presence of God, Moses bows to the ground at once and worships. He is awestruck and knows that He is in the presence of The Holy God. In reverence, Moses bows and gives God praise and honor. Adoration of The LORD was Moses' immediate and natural response.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What is your immediate and natural response to being in the presence of God?

Where might you have become "too comfortable" and in need of a reminder of God's true holiness and just nature?

Secret Conversations With God

Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. "LORD," he said, "If I have found favor in Your eyes, then let The LORD go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance."

Then The LORD said: "I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, The LORD, will do for you."

-EXODUS 34:8-10

BIBLE STUDY: RESPONSE OF THE SERVANT AND GOD'S ANSWER

Moses' natural and immediate response to being in the presence of God was to worship. His worship preceded his appeal; *his adoration went ahead of his supplication*. His posture of bowing to the ground was an act of placing himself at the mercy of The One above him. By doing this, Moses also indicated his unworthiness and submission to God.

Moses pleads for the people of Israel. He acknowledges their rebellious nature and stiff-necked character. They are stubborn, but because of God's forgiving and merciful nature, Moses asks God to forgive them and accept them as His inheritance.

In response to Moses' request, God answers that He is making a new covenant. If His people will keep to the covenant, God will go with them. God has a special concern for the witness of His people to His sovereign nature as they live for Him and keep His covenant in the midst of nonbelievers. God also proclaims that He will do wonders that have never been done before in the world. Through His wonders, the nations around Israel would see how awesome God is.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What posture do you take before The LORD?

Does your adoration precede your supplication?

How To Live For Jesus In A Wicked World

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God Who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose. Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the Word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.

-PHILIPPIANS 2:12-16

BIBLE STUDY: THE CHRISTIAN CALL AND CHARGE

The child of God has a unique calling in the world. Paul identifies what this calling is. As Christians,

- We are to be careful to put into action all that God says to do.
- We are to be careful to show how God has saved us, by obeying His Word.
- We are to be careful to show how God has saved us, by having a reverence and fear of God in the world. If we have this, we will avoid worldly behavior because we believe that God is watching, and He desires us to be like Him.
- We are called to obey God because He is working in us to do what is pleasing to Him.

The Philippians lived in a pagan world. There was strange worship and immoral living all around them. They were constantly faced with the temptation to do wrong and compromise their faith. But, as Christians, they were charged to live differently.

- They were not to be like the world but to live righteous lives.
- They were not to argue and grumble.
- They were to let their lives be a bright light to a dark world.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you living in response to the Christian Call?

How can you be a bright light to a dark and fallen world?

How To Live For Jesus In A Wicked World

But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

-PHILIPPIANS 2:17-18

BIBLE STUDY: THE CHRISTIAN JOY

The Philippians were given a mandate by Paul that was to help them in the ministry of the church. It was also to encourage him for his labors.

- They were charged to hold tightly to the Word of life.
- They were charged to guard the Word of life closely.
- They were charged to make Paul proud by holding onto the Truth of God.
- They were charged to remember that Paul's life was a "libation" (it was a poured out offering) upon the sacrifice of their services to God.
- They were charged with knowing that Paul's suffering for them brought him joy. He was glad and rejoiced with all of them.
- They were encouraged to also rejoice with him in those sufferings he faced.

Paul, in his letter, encourages the Philippians to be glad and rejoice with him. Paul found joy in being poured out like a drink offering for the sacrifice and service that came from the faith of the Philippians. He knew that his sacrifice would not be in vain if they held firmly to faith they had received.

Like the Philippians, we also are charged to hold tightly to the faith and the Word of life. We are called to live righteously, bearing witness to the Truth of Christ in our lives in a fallen world.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What things are we, as Christians, called to do in the earth?

The Philippians had several challenges facing them. What are some of the challenges you are facing today?

How important was Paul's charge to the Philippian church? And how can we respond today to this same charge?

How To Pray Under Persecution

Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?" To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran."

-ACTS 7:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This chapter records the longest single speech in the Book of Acts as well as the turning point in Israel's spiritual history. It records the nation's third important murder (John the Baptist, Christ, and now Stephen). It is also a final rejection of the message of salvation.

In his speech, Stephen reviews the history of Israel and points out that the nation has always rejected God's chosen leaders when they first appeared. And as a result of this, Stephen is persecuted for his faith in Christ. He was a man whose life was yielded to God in every area, and God used his life as a witness of His Truth, even in the persecution Stephen faced. God used this persecution and harsh treatment of others to bring glory to Himself. In this, He also exalted Stephen, allowing him to see The Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (see *Acts 7:54-56*). Stephen did not fear; he trusted God because he knew that his life was for a higher purpose: to bring honor and glory to God.

God still uses hostile situations and persecution to bring honor and glory to Himself today. This passage teaches us that God is The One Who organizes and is in control of our lives. Our lives are not our own; we were created to honor and glorify God, living as witnesses to His life, death, and resurrection. Through our lives, we bear witness to His hope and love to the world.

In his speech, Stephen calls the audience to remember the Old Testament Scripture. He reveals to them the plan of God from the beginning.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you living your life as Stephen did, yielding to God in every area?

What does it mean to be a living witness of God's Truth?

How To Pray Under Persecution

To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.' So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. God spoke to him in this way: 'For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and they will be enslaved and mistreated. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship Me in this place.' Then He gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs."

-ACTS 7:2-8

BIBLE STUDY: THE ABRAHAM STORY

In this first portion of his speech, Stephen reveals the covenant with Abraham recorded in Genesis 13, 15, and 17. It included the ownership of the Land of Promise by Abraham's descendants.

The seal of this covenant was circumcision. This covenant with Abraham was also the foundation of the Jewish nation. God did not make this covenant with the Gentiles, and it also does not apply to the Church. God promised the Jews a land and a kingdom. However, because of their disobedience and rebellion, they lost possession of the land and failed to receive their kingdom.

Yet, this covenant with Abraham still stands, and it will be fulfilled when Christ returns to set up His Kingdom on earth. What a glorious day that will be!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What stands out to you about this portion of Stephen's speech?

How To Pray Under Persecution

“Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace. Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph’s family. After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had brought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.”

-ACTS 7:9-16

BIBLE STUDY: THE JOSEPH STORY

In the next section, Stephen reveals the account of Joseph, a descendant of Abraham. Joseph is a wonderful resemblance of Christ in many ways, Who also was rejected by His Own kind.

- He was beloved by his father.
- He was hated and envied by his brethren.
- He was sold for the price of a slave.
- He was falsely accused.
- He was exalted to honor.

Stephen’s argument here is that the Jews had treated Christ the way the patriarchs treated Joseph. However, he does not bring this accusation out until the end. Just as God used the trials and suffering of Joseph to save Israel, so God also used the suffering of Christ to save all humankind.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What encourages you most as you reflect on God’s plan for Joseph’s life?

What stands out to you about this portion of Stephen’s speech?

How To Pray Under Persecution

“As the time drew near for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. Then ‘a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.’ He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die. At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. . . . After forty years had passed [since he fled to Midian], an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard The LORD say: ‘I am The God of your fathers, The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. Then The LORD said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have indeed seen the oppression of My people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’ This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God Himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.”

-Acts 7:17-22, 30-36

BIBLE STUDY: THE MOSES STORY

After recalling the account of Joseph, Stephen reveals the story of Moses who was also rejected by Israel. Like Christ, Moses was persecuted and almost slain when he was a child. He also refused the world so that he could save his people. Moses became a shepherd and leader for the people of Israel. Yet, the people of Israel still rebelled against God and Moses’ leadership by turning to idolatry.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What elements of Moses’ account stand out to you in Stephen’s speech?

How To Pray Under Persecution

“But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets: ‘Did you bring Me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel? You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile’ beyond Babylon. Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God’s favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for The God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. However, The Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says: ‘Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. What kind of house will you build for Me? says The LORD. Or where will My resting place be? Has not My hand made all these things?’”

-ACTS 7:42-50

BIBLE STUDY: THE STORY OF THE PROPHETS

In this passage, Stephen reveals the accounts of Amos and Isaiah. The Jews thought that because they had the Temple, they were safe from harm and were blessed from God. The former prophets warned them that the Temple would not assure them of blessing if their hearts were not in the right place before God.

Unfortunately, for Israel, religious life was more of a formality. They had the outward forms of religions while their hearts were far from God. They had rejected the voice of the prophets, even persecuting and killing them. When Christ, The Prophet, appeared, they also rejected His words and crucified Him!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What stands out to you about this portion of Stephen’s speech?

Is Christianity just a formality for you? If so, how can you change this?

Where is your heart? Is it in the right place before God?

How To Pray Under Persecution

“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist The Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of The Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him – you who have received the Law that was given through angels have not obeyed it.” When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of The Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and The Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “LORD Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “LORD, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

-ACTS 7:51-60

BIBLE STUDY: THE STORY OF ISRAEL’S JUDGMENT

In the final verses, Stephen calls to attention Israel’s murderous past. The Jews had slain John the Baptist, also rejecting The Father Who had sent John to prepare the way for Christ. In addition, when they crucified Jesus Christ, they rejected God’s Son. Now, in slaying Stephen, they were rejecting The Holy Spirit. God would have forgiven the nation for its treatment of His Son, but He could not forgive the rejection of The Holy Spirit, Who witnessed so mightily of His Son.

God had given every evidence to Israel that Christ was The Messiah. Yet, the people preferred to harden their hearts just like many today. In our modern day, we can learn from Stephen’s prayer while under persecution. He prayed for God to receive his spirit and for the forgiveness of his persecutors. His prayer shows his own love for his people and reminds us of Christ’s intercession for us on the cross.

THINGS TO PONDER:

As you think about your witness for Christ, what can you learn from Stephen?

To God Be The Glory

To Him Who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to The Only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our LORD, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

-JUDE 24-25

BIBLE STUDY: THE PURPOSE OF OUR PRAISE

In Jude's letter to the church, he ends with a hymn, the doxology. When we come to this portion of the letter, Jude quotes a famous song in the church to remind the believers of the purpose of their praise. In other words, the praise of believers has a singular focus: God. Our praise centers on Who He is, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He is going to do for His glory. In quoting a doxology at the end of his letter, Jude is reminding his audience that the purpose of their praise is in recognizing what God is able to do and knowing that He is The Only One Who is able to do it!

Christ is The One Who **keeps us from stumbling**. Not only does He keep us upright in a fallen world, but He also will present us **without fault** to God and before His glorious presence. Even more, He will present us with **great joy**!

One day, Jesus will present us as a spotless bride to God The Father. It will be His honor to present us as a bride that is faultless, who never stumbled, and who was without blemish. This is not because of our good works or righteous living. We will not be there for our glory; we will be there to glorify The Father through the works of The Son. Making us faultless by His blood and presenting us to The Father will be His joy, and it is a joy that will exceed all other joy known in the earth! He will present us as His Own, His bride, His prize, His people, His flock, and His gift from The Father. He will do so with an exceeding joy!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What encourages you the most as you reflect on this hymn Jude quotes?

How can you praise God today for this great promise?

To God Be The Glory

To Him Who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to The Only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our LORD, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

-JUDE 24-25

BIBLE STUDY: THE PERSON OF OUR PRAISE

Also in quoting this doxology hymn, Jude points to The Person of our praise. First of all, we sing to Jesus. He is God, Creator, Sustainer of all life, Alpha, Omega, Beginning, and End. He is God, and it is to Him that we worship. Not only is He God, but He is God The Savior. He is The One Who saves, redeems, recovers, rescues, restores, revives, and renews! This is the only place in Jude's letter where he calls our LORD "Savior." He purposefully saves it for the doxology!

Jude then goes on: Christ is not only our Savior; He is The Only Wise God. In other words, only Christ can give you the wisdom you need to live your life to the glory of God. The world cannot even begin to match the wisdom and knowledge of Christ! There were many false teachers in Jude's day who boasted of having "special knowledge," but they lacked true spiritual wisdom. When Jude uses the word "only," he is using it to say that there is no one who can compare to Jesus:

- The wisdom He possesses cannot be duplicated.
- The wisdom He gives is not like any worldly wisdom.
- The wisdom that comes from Him cannot be found anywhere else.
- The wisdom of God is from Him, for Him, to glorify Him, and it honors Him.

Knowing these truths should inspire the way we worship. We ought to worship Christ as our Savior and The Only Wise God! We should not worship Him any other way. It is for Him only that we sing, praise, and worship.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How do these truths inspire your worship of God as Savior?

How can you praise God more for His wisdom?

To God Be The Glory

To Him Who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to The Only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our LORD, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

-JUDE 24-25

BIBLE STUDY: THE POWER OF OUR PRAISE

As we come to the final point of this study of the end of Jude's letter, we discover the power that is proclaimed in the hymn! The doxology that Jude includes in the final verses of his letter is a song that proclaims the exclusive power that only belongs to God. It is a hymn that reminds, centers, leads, guides, directs, and keeps your heart and mind on Jesus Christ.

Firstly, Jude says that glory and majesty are distinctly reserved for Christ. The word used for glory here is a word that describes the sum total of all that God is and does. In other words, the sum total of His glory is that everything about Him is glorious! God is not like us. The glory we may achieve in this life fades just like the grass, but the glory of God is eternal. He is majestic and glorious!

Secondly, Jude refers to the authority and dominion of Christ. God is sovereign and above all things. He has complete control and exclusive power of all things. This power and authority is eternal, and it continues forever and ever! The power of God is more than any we can find on earth. God's power is great and wonderful. It is a power that transforms, renews, restores, rejuvenates, regenerates, and reinvigorates. It gives birth to new beginnings and saves what is lost and broken.

With all glory, majesty, power, and authority, Jesus is worthy of all our praise and worship. His reign and dominion will never end! Hallelujah!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What encourages you most as you think about the eternal glory of God?

How will you praise God today for His great and saving power?

What The Believer Should Know

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened."

-1 PETER 3:13-14

BIBLE STUDY: A MIND TO ENDURE

As he addresses the church, Peter encourages them to do what is right in a fallen and hostile world. He asks them to have a mind to endure. He raises the question even though there are many who are being persecuted for their faith: "*Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?*" Being eager to do good is to live a life that jumps at every opportunity to bless someone else, even if they do not bless you in return. The heart of an eager person looks, desires, and longs to serve. In Peter's admonishment, he suggests that suffering may come. Even if you are eager to do good but suffer for it, God will reward and bless you. The believer should not be afraid to suffer for the sake of Christ.

- In these two verses, the Christian believer is called to serve and be willing to suffer if God calls you to do it.
- With the right mentality, the believer can see God's hand on their life, even in the midst of challenges and difficulties.
- We have a promise in God's Word that even if we are chosen to suffer, God will be with us and will reward us.
- We are also told not to be afraid. Our trust and hope must be in Christ.

Every believer ought to have a mind to endure through these evil times. Our minds should be focused to obey The Word of God. As believers, we must also be eager to serve broken people in a fallen world and be ready to live a life of suffering if God calls you to do so.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Are you living in a way that is eager to do good and serve others?

In what ways might God be calling you to suffer for His sake?

What The Believer Should Know

But in your hearts revere Christ as LORD. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

-1 PETER 3:15-16

BIBLE STUDY: A MIND TO ENGAGE

Here we see how the believer is to nurture the right mentality. To nurture our thinking, we must have a mind that is engaged with the things of God. Peter says that while we live in a fallen world, we must worship Christ as LORD. This means that we must submit our entire being to God so that our lives are dedicated and determined to live for Christ. This implies that we ought to set Him above everyone and everything! We ought to see God as our Protector, Provider, and Sustainer for all that occurs or does not occur in our lives. He is to be esteemed above all and to be worshiped as LORD. He is The Supreme Ruler of all!

As LORD, He is in control even in the midst of dangers, troubles, and trials. We are not to be intimidated because nothing can happen to us unless He allows and desires it for His plan for our lives. And if you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. Peter reminds the believers that when someone asks us how it is that we are living the way we are, we ought to be prepared to be a witness for Christ. According to this passage, we ought to be ready to respond and give a reason for our hope in Christ. In having a mind to engage, Peter says that there is a way that we ought to respond. We are to be **gentle, respectful**, and of **clear conscience** so that you may witness with confidence and without shame.

If we engage like this, and yet others still mistreat and slander us, they will be ashamed of their behavior when they see how we live as Christians.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How is your mentality? Do you have a mind that is willing to endure and engage?

How should we engage as a community of believers in this fallen world?

The Preacher That Did Not Quit

One night The LORD spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the Word of God.

-ACTS 18:9-11

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In a season of doubt and dismay, God speaks to Paul. He encourages, supports, and empowers Paul to continue to serve Him. At the time of Paul’s ministry, his new church plant in Corinth was growing. He had already planted churches in Antioch, Thesalonica, Philippi, and Ephesus.

When Paul first came to Corinth, he hit a snag in the work. He was alone for a season, but then God sent him a young couple who had a heart for the Kingdom of God. This couple, Pricilla and Aquila, were tent makers and shared the same trade as Paul. They supported Paul in ministry until Timothy and Silas arrived. Afterwards, we are told in preceding chapters that the local Jews in the town turned on Paul, rejecting the Good News.

There was a brother, Justus, who loved God. In addition, his entire house believed the Gospel, and Paul began to start the ministry in Justus’ house. Later, the synagogue ruler, Crispus, got saved. His whole house joined the ministry also. Paul had a thriving young church, and The LORD was doing a good thing!

However, instead of celebrating the work God was doing, Paul entered a season of doubt. This was a season of speculation, sorrow, and sadness. According to the passage, Paul seems to have some fear about serving in the region. It seems as if he is beginning to wonder if he has really done the right thing. Paul does not have reason to doubt God, but his mind is playing tricks on him. But it is in this moment that God encourages and reassures His servant.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Recall a time when you felt like Paul. How did God encourage you through it?

The Preacher That Did Not Quit

One night The LORD spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent."

-Acts 18:9

BIBLE STUDY: THE PROCLAMATION OF GOD

The first thing we see in this verse is that God initiates the conversation with Paul in a vision. The second thing is that God could have chosen to speak in any way He wanted, but God chose to reveal Himself to Paul through this vision. And as He speaks, God addresses Paul's fears and concerns about the ministry in Corinth. Through the vision, God declares that Paul should not be afraid and that he should keep on speaking.

Paul's concern must have been enough to cause him doubt. It must have been enough that God spoke to him personally to encourage him to keep going. God did not want Paul to stop preaching, and this is powerful because it was preaching that was causing the change in the people.

Thinking about Paul's previous ministry experience, he had recently been beaten and jailed in Philippi, nearly arrested again in Thesalonica, cornered and questioned in Athens and Berea, and now facing the same hostility in Corinth. Paul may have had a premonition that even though the church was growing, things were not going too well. Drama was building, and the city was talking. Paul probably began to feel it in his spirit, and he began to feel doubt and discouragement. However, God wanted to get Paul's attention, and He encouraged His servant, through a vision, to keep going.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you ever been tempted to quit in the ministry? How did God encourage you not to quit or give up?

Have you ever had to see what you could not see before in order to hang in there?

The Preacher That Did Not Quit

"For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."

-ACTS 18:10

BIBLE STUDY: THE PROMISE OF GOD

The promise in this verse is from The Eternal One. Though Paul knew that God could be trusted, he still recalled memories of being run out of town, beaten, and put in prison for the sake of the Gospel. God comforts Paul in saying that no one would attack or harm him. This promise consists of physically protecting Paul while he does what God has called him to do. The promise is that God is with him. He is watching over, talking with, leading, guiding, and protecting Paul from the physical dangers of the ministry assignment. The elements that may be stirring up to harm Paul will not have access to him because God is with him.

In addition, God says that He has many other people in the city who will be for Paul and his ministry. Paul has support that he does not even know about yet. He has others who are willing and waiting for God to send them to help.

When we face troubles, discouragements, and doubts in our ministry, God promises that He will always be with us. He will never leave us or forsake us (see *Matthew 28:19-20*). So when we start to doubt as Paul did, continue to trust God. He is faithful to keep His promises.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What encourages you most as you read God's promise to Paul?

When you faced troubles and doubts in the past, how did God comfort you?

The Preacher That Did Not Quit

So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the Word of God.

-ACTS 18:11

BIBLE STUDY: THE POWER OF GOD

After the divine encounter with God in a vision, Paul was energized to remain in the work! After his divine meeting with God, Paul received power and strength to stay and serve God's people in Corinth. Paul had peace about the assignment now, and he could preach and continue to minister to the church. In the same way, there is a lot a leader can do if they have peace and strength from God. And even without peace, if God gives His servant power to persevere, they can press on.

The passage says that Paul continued to teach them the Word of God. This is a powerful statement because it implies two things:

1. It suggests that Paul had settled down, and he was no longer fearful because he was able to teach. He had a calm assurance that he was in the right place.
2. It also suggests that he was teaching what he himself was also learning. What Paul was learning, he was also giving to the church through his teaching.

The church of Corinth was growing, and God was moving in the preaching and teaching because God encouraged their preacher, Paul. In our churches today, we ought to pray that God encourages and equips our pastors and leaders. We ought to pray that He enlightens, invigorates, and strengthens them to continue to teach and serve. If our pastors and leaders are encouraged, they can withstand the hardships and challenges of life. They can live and die sacrificially so others can come to know God. They can endure because The LORD is with them. With His strength and power, they can become the "preachers that did not quit."

THINGS TO PONDER:

Think about a time you felt encouraged by God. How did He strengthen you?

What does it mean to be a "preacher that doesn't quit"?

The Philistines Meet Yahweh

After the Philistines had captured the Ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then they carried the Ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon.

-1 SAMUEL 5:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: THE ENEMIES' EXPERIMENT

As we come to this narrative and try to understand what God is doing, we first of all must identify that there is no one like our God. He is all-powerful, almighty, and holy. Nothing can compare with The True and Living God.

In this chapter of 1 Samuel, we see that the Philistines have taken the Ark of God and have placed it inside the temple of their god as a trophy from their victory over Israel. They have no idea what they are doing. They are testing God and have no frame of reference for what He will do to them. There are problems with this kind of thinking:

1. God will not be mocked by idols.
2. No statue or self-made god will claim Yahweh as a trophy.
3. The Philistines have no idea Who God was and what He could do.

The text says that they placed the Ark of God next to their god, Dagon. This idol was to represent a half-fish, half-man deity. Dagon was worshiped as their creator and the god of fertility. When the Philistines placed the Ark of God at the feet of their god, they were thinking that their god was more powerful than Yahweh. However, they had no idea that God was The One Who had given them victory over Israel so that He might discipline and teach His people. God allows the Ark to be taken and placed in Dagon's temple, and He allows them to think that they are in control so that He can reveal Himself and His power.

This is a picture of the unbeliever who believes that their success in life grants them authority over God. They are mistaken because they have no idea that any success they may have has only been given to them by God. He is only allowing success so that they may come to know Who He truly is.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What surprises you as you reflect on this study?

The Philistines Meet Yahweh

When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the Ark of The LORD! They took Dagon and put him back in his place. But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the Ark of The LORD! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained.

-1 SAMUEL 5:3-4

BIBLE STUDY: THE ENEMIES' EDUCATION

When we come to this portion of the text, we see that God reveals Who He is and His power over Dagon. However, the Philistines did not realize this the first time. It takes a second time to see their god utterly destroyed before they realize the power of The True and Living God. Yahweh will always remove idols from before His presence. There is no man-made god that can stand against The Only True and Living God. Yahweh will destroy all idols and will never share His throne with any man-made gods.

The Philistines found their god on his face and with his head and hands broken off; only his body remained. But why did not God disintegrate and completely destroy the idol of Dagon? Why did He leave the torso? Some believe that this was an invitation for the Philistines to repent and destroy the rest of Dagon for themselves. They could see that God was more powerful than their idol, and they could see that their god had no power; he was defeated. The torso may have been left so that they could see and bear witness that it was in fact their idol that was defeated in the presence of Yahweh. In response, the Philistines could make a decision of who they would serve: continue to serve Dagon or turn to Yahweh.

This is a picture of what happens when God enters into our hearts and unclean spaces. He immediately throws down our idols and false gods we have set up. He will reveal His power and glory; He will reveal Who is truly in control.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Can you remember how God cleansed the temple of your heart from false idols?

How can you praise Him for His great power and glory that is beyond compare?

The Philistines Meet Yahweh

That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon's temple at Ashdod step on the threshold. The LORD's hand was heavy on the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; He brought devastation on them and afflicted them with tumors. When the people of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, "The Ark of The God of Israel must not stay here with us, because His hand is heavy on us and on Dagon our god." So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and asked them, "What shall we do with the Ark of The God of Israel?" They answered, "Have the Ark of The God of Israel moved to Gath." So they moved the Ark of The God of Israel. But after they had moved it, The LORD's hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of tumors.

-1 SAMUEL 5:5-9

BIBLE STUDY: THE ENEMIES' ENCOUNTER

In this passage, we read that the Philistines have an encounter with God. The priests of Dagon and the people of Ashdod have come into the awareness that Yahweh is more powerful than their god. They refuse to enter the place where Dagon has been destroyed, and they suffer physical illness because the wrath of God is upon them. However, instead of repenting and drawing closer to seek Yahweh, they want to drive Him away and out of their presence!

According to the text, the Philistines, in their rejection of God, were afflicted with tumors, and many people died. They could have surrendered their lives and entered into a relationship with God, but they rejected Him and turned to their own ways. This is just like today. God reveals Himself to wicked humanity and demonstrates His power. However, many flee and choose to incur the wrath of God instead of turning to Him. They try to put God as far away as possible from themselves instead of entering a covenant relationship with Him. And the problem with this is that it will never get better; it only gets worse. There is great tragedy in running from The Almighty God Who loves you and desires to save you.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you share the love of God with those who are choosing to resist Him?

The Philistines Meet Yahweh

So they sent the Ark of God to Ekron. As the Ark of God was entering Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought the Ark of The God of Israel around to us to kill us and our people." So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and said, "Send the Ark of The God of Israel away; let it go back to its own place, or it will kill us and our people." For death had filled the city with panic; God's hand was very heavy on it. Those who did not die were afflicted with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven.

-1 SAMUEL 5:10-12

BIBLE STUDY: THE ENEMIES' REJECTION

As we read this passage, we see that God had visited the Philistines, but they wanted nothing to do with Him. He gave them the opportunity to see Who He was, but they rejected Him and wanted their god, Dagon, instead. When Yahweh struck them with a physical sign, instead of repenting, they resented His presence. They even tried to push Him off to Ekron as their hearts were hardened.

History shows us that the Philistines were not the only ones who did this. As we read in the New Testament, the Pharisees also did it! They too were wrong about the power and presence of God in their lives.

They saw miracles, victories, and evidence that He was God's Son, but still wanted nothing to do with Christ. They rejected, crucified, and resented Him because of their hard hearts. Yet, God was going to use their rejection to glorify Himself! He was going to be glorified even in their refusal to serve Him, and His victory over death proved that He was Yahweh, The One True and Living God!

Even though they had rejected their Savior, God made sure that they knew He was Yahweh. His power over the grave proved this. His birth of the Church proved this. His power over the evil one proved this. He is God, The Creator of Heaven and Earth. There is no one that can compare with or stand against Him!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How has God revealed His character, presence, and power to you?

The Return Of The Ark

When the Ark of The LORD had been in Philistine territory seven months, the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, "What shall we do with the Ark of The LORD? Tell us how we should send it back to its place." They answered, "If you return the Ark of The God of Israel, do not send it back to Him without a gift; by all means send a guilt offering to Him. Then you will be healed, and you will know why His hand has not been lifted from you." The Philistines asked, "What guilt offering should we send to Him?" They replied, "Five gold tumors and five gold rats, according to the number of the Philistine rulers, because the same plague has struck both you and your rulers. Make models of the tumors and of the rats that are destroying the country, and give glory to Israel's God. Perhaps He will lift His hand from you and your gods and your land. Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When Israel's God dealt harshly with them, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way?"

-1 SAMUEL 6:1-6

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As we come to this text, we discover that God is on the move again. The Philistines got a glimpse of His power but refused to follow and serve Him. Now they devise a plan to get rid of the Ark's presence and God's power from their lives and land. We learn from this account that God was merciful and kind to the Philistines. And He had a plan to reveal Himself to those who were enemies of His people.

In these opening verses, we read that the Philistines are planning how to send the Ark back to the people of Israel. They also decide to give a guilt offering to Yahweh for offending Him and decide to repent for their actions. They are sorry, but they are not ready to have a relationship with Him in their lives yet. And this is exactly what we see in many people's lives today. They may have an encounter with God, but the impact of such an encounter does not make them want to submit to Him. They simply want to give a guilt offering and move on with their lives.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does it mean to truly submit to God rather than just giving a guilt offering?

The Return Of The Ark

“Now then, get a new cart ready, with two cows that have calved and have never been yoked. Hitch the cows to the cart, but take their calves away and pen them up. Take the Ark of The LORD and put it on the cart, and in a chest beside it put the gold objects you are sending back to Him as a guilt offering. Send it on its way, but keep watching it. If it goes up to its own territory, toward Beth Shemesh, then The LORD has brought this great disaster on us. But if it does not, then we will know that it was not His hand that struck us but that it happened to us by chance.” So they did this. They took two such cows and hitched them to the cart and penned up their calves. They placed the Ark of The LORD on the cart and along with it the chest containing the gold rats and the models of the tumors. Then the cows went straight up toward Beth Shemesh, keeping on the road and lowing all the way; they did not turn to the right or to the left. The rulers of the Philistines followed them as far as the border of Beth Shemesh.

-1 SAMUEL 6:7-12

BIBLE STUDY: THE BETH-SHEMESH TEST

The Beth-Shemesh test conducted by the Philistines was to test and see if Yahweh had sent their calamity. If the Ark left on its own and headed back to its country, they would affirm that it was Yahweh Who had brought calamity upon them.

However, if the Ark did not leave their presence, they would determine that their calamity was not from Yahweh. They even separated the cows from their calves. It would have been totally unnatural for a nursing cow to leave her young, but if this happened, it would serve as an evident sign that the cause of the judgment of the Philistines was supernatural.

The cows pull the cart in obedience to their Creator, lowing as they go. This was a moaning sound that would have been heard from anyone close to the road or in the countryside. It is an announcement being made that the Ark is on the way. From the cows, we get a picture of what a living sacrifice is: forsaking all to follow the Will of God and being separated for God's honor and glory.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What can you learn from the picture of the two cows that pulled the Ark on a cart?

The Return Of The Ark

Now the people of Beth Shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley, and when they looked up and saw the Ark, they rejoiced at the sight. The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and there it stopped beside a large rock. The people chopped up the wood of the cart and sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering to The LORD. The Levites took down the Ark of The LORD, together with the chest containing the gold objects, and placed them on the large rock. On that day the people of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to The LORD.

-1 SAMUEL 6:13-15

BIBLE STUDY: THE BETH-SHEMESH TESTIMONY

When we come to this portion of the text, we see that the citizens of the Levite town are in the field reaping the wheat harvest. When they see the Ark approaching on a cart, they rejoice! That which they thought they had lost has come back to them. They did nothing to deserve it, and they did nothing to make it happen. They were simply beneficiaries of the grace of God.

When the Ark came, it stood in the field of Joshua, where they were reaping. This was an invitation to come and worship The One Who had found them in their loneliness. It was an invitation to return back to The One Who had saved them and established an eternal covenant with them. The field of Joshua was turned into a temporary worship site as the cows that had pulled the cart were ritually slaughtered and presented as a burnt offering to The LORD.

However, this act of celebration was also a bit reckless on their part. There were certain instructions for worship that the Israelites did not follow. For example, God had demanded that male animals be offered in sacrifice; these cows were heifers. Yet, even in their recklessness, God was merciful. It is a dangerous thing to take worship lightly. We must always remember that God has a standard for worship, and holiness is this standard. It is a dangerous thing to become too casual in your worship of God. He is worthy of all honor and glory.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where have you become too casual in your worship? How can you change this?

The Return Of The Ark

The five rulers of the Philistines saw all this and then returned that same day to Ekron. These are the gold tumors the Philistines sent as a guilt offering to The LORD – one each for Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron. And the number of the gold rats was according to the number of Philistine towns belonging to the five rulers – the fortified towns with their country villages. The large rock on which the Levites set the Ark of The LORD is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh. But God struck down some of the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they looked into the Ark of The LORD. The people mourned because of the heavy blow The LORD had dealt them.

-1 SAMUEL 6:16-19

BIBLE STUDY: THE BETH-SHEMESH REMINDER

In these verses, we are reminded of the Philistines. They watched the entire ceremony of worship and then returned back to their home country. Their superstitious act was proven true. God was The One Who had caused them calamity in their five cities.

More than this, the text also reveals that God is still holy, and He is to be revered by those He has set apart unto Himself. According to the Torah, no Israelites outside the Aaronic priesthood were permitted to see even the exterior of the Ark, much less its interior. However, far from concealing the Ark, the people set the Ark on the large rock and then looked inside. This shameless disregard for the Ark's sanctity and the violation of its sacred space brought swift and direct judgment from God. The people became too familiar with God, and their worship became too casual as a result.

The experience of the Israelites serves as a reminder to us that just because God is merciful does not mean that He is not just. He is holy, and we ought to set ourselves apart for Him. Our lives are no longer our own; they are meant to be lived as living sacrifices that are holy and pleasing to The LORD.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How have you set yourself apart as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God?

How To Cultivate The Elements Of Revival

So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the Ark of The LORD. They brought it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the Ark of The LORD. The Ark remained at Kiriath Jearim a long time – twenty years in all. Then all the people of Israel turned back to The LORD.

-1 SAMUEL 7:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

One of the greatest needs in the life of the believer is the need to be revived. Sometimes, as we journey with Christ every now and then, we tend to get carnal, lazy, comfortable, rebellious, hard to get along with, and even disobedient. These seasons make us dull and too familiar with the things of God. When this happens, we need a revival in our minds and hearts.

When revival comes, we start to pray with a renewed heart and mind, we repent for our past behavior, we open our hearts to forgive others for offending us, our worship changes, and we desire to praise and give God thanks. When revival comes, God can use us to do great things in the earth on His behalf. That is what this text is about. It is about recovering the elements of revival in our lives again.

Israel has experienced a season of rebellion against God, and He has had to discipline them because they became too familiar with the Ark. They thought they could handle something so sacred in such a casual manner. When God's wrath fell, many died, and the Israelites got the picture that God would not settle for anything less than holiness from His people.

As God reingages Israel, I believe that He is preparing them for revival. God is working, His work is eternal, and eternity is what He is shaping His people for.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where do you find the joy of your salvation?

After a season of disobedience or laziness, how do you find revival?

How To Cultivate The Elements Of Revival

So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the Ark of The LORD. They brought it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the Ark of The LORD. The Ark remained at Kiriath Jearim a long time – twenty years in all. Then all the people of Israel turned back to The LORD.

-1 SAMUEL 7:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: PRACTICE THE ELEMENT OF SERVITUDE

The first thing I notice in the text is that for revival, there must first be the element of service and personal responsibility. The text says that the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the Ark of The LORD. The land of Kiriath Jearim was a small place in the hills and called the “City of the Woods.” It was also the nearest town to Beth Shemesh.

Notice that we also do not have any names mentioned among the men. All we know is that they all came together for one common goal: to serve their brothers and serve The LORD. They drew near to God instead of withdrawing from Him.

In addition, these men were also representing their families. They were willing to bring their communities and families into subjection by going to the Ark. They knew the danger that could come upon them, but they had a covenant community to bring the presence of God into their neighborhoods. And most importantly, these men had the critical element of revival among them.

There is a need for revival in our communities too. We need to unite and co-labor together for the glory of God and the building of His Kingdom. We need spiritual leaders to grab a hold of the authority of God and bring it into our families and communities. We need to practice and learn the element of servitude.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does it mean to have an element of servitude?

What can you learn from these men of Kiriath Jearim?

How To Cultivate The Elements Of Revival

So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the Ark of The LORD. They brought it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the Ark of The LORD. The Ark remained at Kiriath Jearim a long time – twenty years in all. Then all the people of Israel turned back to The LORD.

-1 SAMUEL 7:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: PRACTICE THE ELEMENT OF SUBMISSION

In this text, we see another element for revival: the element of submission. Here the men of Kiriath Jearim brought the Ark to the house of Abinadab on the hill. Abinadab was not a Levite, priest, scholar, or a man steeped in privilege. But he was a man that was submissive to be available to draw near to God.

Abinadab was not qualified to have the Ark in his home. But nevertheless, he would make himself available for whatever The LORD wanted to do with him. Abinadab was ready to draw near to God instead of withdrawing from Him. He opened up his home to God and invited Him to stay and dwell there. Abinadab was available to be used by God, and his home became the dwelling place of God!

This is one of the elements of revival: our total lives lived in abandon unto God. In the element of submission, God has access to every area of your life. God delights to reign with those who live to bring Him honor and glory. God delights to dwell with those who will give Him total access into their homes and lives.

If we want revival to come into our lives and to our homes, we first have to be servants to our families, to God, and for His mission in the earth. Secondly, we have to be submissive to one another and to the things that God asks of us, no matter what they are or will be. The submissive heart and mind looks like Abinadab, and the submissive servant of God makes every area of their life available to be used by Him.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Like Abinadab, are you available for God to use for His plan and purposes?

When everyone else rejects God, will you continue to submit to Him?

How To Cultivate The Elements Of Revival

So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the Ark of The LORD. They brought it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the Ark of The LORD. The Ark remained at Kiriath Jearim a long time – twenty years in all. Then all the people of Israel turned back to The LORD.

-1 SAMUEL 7:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: PRACTICE THE ELEMENT OF SACRIFICE

Within the text, we see a wonderful thing taking place: the men of Kiriath Jearim bring the Ark to the house of Abinadab on the hill. Then they decide to consecrate Eleazar, the son of Abinadab, for the service of submission and sacrifice. Eleazar became the type of servant that could be trusted with the holy things of God.

But what made them select Eleazar? Could God have been responsible for setting up this whole journey? Could He have orchestrated this appointment so that the house of Abinadab would be blessed? Could God have been calling the people back to Himself, for Himself, because of Himself, and on behalf of Himself? I believe so! I think God wanted to use Eleazar as an example of what the servants of God ought to look like. I think God was modeling how His people are to serve Him through His work in Eleazar's life.

As we practice the element of sacrifice, God wants us to be servants that are willing to do the hard things, submissive to His Will, and willing to be living sacrifices for His glory. He wants us to also open our homes and our hearts to His presence daily. Through the elements of servitude, submission, and sacrifice, God shows His people how to keep Him exalted as we walk, live, lead, teach, and serve each other for the growth of the Church and the building of His Kingdom.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Like Abinadab, are you available for God to use for His plan and purposes?

When everyone else rejects God, will you continue to submit to Him?

How To Cultivate The Elements Of Revival

So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the Ark of The LORD. They brought it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the Ark of The LORD. The Ark remained at Kiriath Jearim a long time – twenty years in all. Then all the people of Israel turned back to The LORD.

-1 SAMUEL 7:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: PRACTICE THE ELEMENT OF SURRENDER

The Bible says that the Ark remained in Kiriath Jearim for a long time: twenty years in all. As we read this, we cannot help but notice that God has caused His Ark to remain there for twenty years so that God could work in, on, and for His people because He delighted in them. He was rejected in the Philistine country. He was rejected in Beth Shemesh. But here, in Kiriath Jearim, He has found servants that are willing to dwell with God.

After twenty years, the people of Israel began to reminisce about what it was that caused them to be separated from God. They began to think about how they walked away from God and began to open their hearts to Him. After twenty years, they decided to repent, lament, and turn back to God. They surrendered to His plan and Will. Their lamentation was a sign that they were ready for revival. They knew that they had strayed from God long enough, and they were now ready to return to Him.

God was patient, merciful, and gracious during these years. He waited on the hill, He waited in obscurity, and He waited in their presence for their hearts to turn back to Him. He was and is a patient God. Even in the midst of their blindness, God was waiting patiently. He waits patiently for us today too.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When have you experienced God's patience, mercy, and grace as you began to see your sin as you had never seen it before?

When has God displayed His mercy and grace when you were not deserving of it?

The Elements Of Revival (Continued)

So Samuel said to all the Israelites, "If you are returning to The LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to The LORD and serve Him only, and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served The LORD only.

-1 SAMUEL 7:3-4

BIBLE STUDY: CORPORATE PROCLAMATION

Even though the people of Israel began to lament before God because of their sins, God was not through with them yet. He desired something more from them. He desired true worship and intimate fellowship with them.

In this passage, we see several things happening through Samuel's corporate proclamation:

1. Through proclamation, Samuel is calling for Israel to return to God.
2. Through proclamation, Samuel is calling them to forsake their old ways and to come back to what God has called them to do.
3. Through proclamation, Samuel lists for them to return to God with all their hearts and serve Him only.
4. Through proclamation, Samuel instructs them to put away their foreign gods and prepare their hearts to serve God only. If they did, God would deliver them from their spiritual and physical enemies.

Samuel was preaching a message of repentance for the people because they could not enter revival without it. Repentance is necessary for restoration, salvation, and renewal. If the Israelites were going to get back on track with God and in-step with His Will, they need to change their ways and their hearts. God wants the same from us today. He wants us to repent, turn our hearts to Him, put away our idols and foreign gods, and serve Him with our whole hearts.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Are you willing to turn away from distractions in order to serve God fully?

Are you willing to give up your idols and seek God with your whole heart?

The Elements Of Revival (Continued)

Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will intercede with The LORD for you." When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before The LORD. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against The LORD." Now Samuel was serving as leader of Israel at Mizpah.

-1 SAMUEL 7:5-6

BIBLE STUDY: CORPORATE PRAYER

When we come to these verses, we see what happens when Samuel's words are taken to heart. His public proclamation led to corporate prayer and confession. And in this call to prayer, Samuel asks Israel to do one thing: gather everyone together in a specific place. We should take note of this because it is strategic for revival. In strategic revival, everybody should be present and active in prayer.

Once everyone has gathered together, Samuel says that he will intercede with The LORD for them. Samuel makes this statement and request with boldness and assurance. He says this because his relationship is right with God. He has the authority to pray corporately as an intercessor. Samuel also has a certain confidence that God hears him when he prays because he walks with God and has committed his life to Him.

There is also a ritual mentioned in this passage. The people of Israel drew water and poured it out before God. The pouring out of water was symbolic that they were going to empty themselves of their transgression against God. They were no longer going to fill themselves with sin and wickedness. Instead, they were going to fill their lives with God, obey Him, and follow His ways. The people also fasted and confessed. They were in prayer for themselves, their families, and their nation. From their ritual, we can learn how we ought to assemble together for corporate prayer and repentance. Perhaps if we would pray like this, we could do so much more for God and see His power like we have never seen it before!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What stands out to you most in the corporate prayer ritual of the Israelites?

The Elements Of Revival (Continued)

When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. When the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. They said to Samuel, "Do not stop crying out to The LORD our God for us, that He may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines."

-1 SAMUEL 7:7-8

BIBLE STUDY: CORPORATE PROBLEMS

In these verses, we discover that while God's children were praying, the enemy was moving. When the Philistines heard that Israel was praying in Mizpah, they mobilized for war. This enemy had been victorious over Israel for more than twenty years. They had captured their cities, killed many of their men, dominated their lives, and kept them in check at will. Now, they get word that Israel is gathering together to do something, and the Philistines desire to impose their wicked power over them one more time.

We see this happen today too in the devil's battle strategy against the church and God's people. Whenever believers align themselves with God, the enemy gets nervous and tries to work against us in order to keep us in bondage and in fear of him. However, when we assemble together and confess our sins before God, something supernatural happens. When God brings revival, He also brings victory.

The people of Israel ask Samuel to keep on praying to God on their behalf. I like this because here we discover that they knew Samuel had the answer to their problem against their enemy. The people recognized that prayer changes things and that Yahweh is more powerful than the Philistines. They recognize that the enemy has to bow down to God, and God can fight for them. He is in control.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When you face attacks from the enemy, where do you turn first?

Do you believe that God can handle whatever it is that you are going through?

The Elements Of Revival (Continued)

Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to The LORD. He cried out to The LORD on Israel's behalf, and The LORD answered him. While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day The LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Kar. Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far The LORD has helped us." So the Philistines were subdued and they stopped invading Israel's territory. Throughout Samuel's lifetime, the hand of The LORD was against the Philistines.

-1 SAMUEL 7:9-13

BIBLE STUDY: CORPORATE POWER

When we come to this portion of the text, we see the results of prayer and sacrifice. As the enemy was moving, the people were praying. Samuel was making a sacrifice to God, and The LORD heard their prayer. God listens to the voice that has been sacrificially covered with a sin offering. This is why it is so important for the Christian to pray in the midst of their trouble: Jesus is our High Priest, and He is our Sacrificial Lamb Whose blood has covered all our sins. Through His sacrifice, we know that our prayers are being heard by The Father. When Samuel prays, God moves on behalf of His children.

While Samuel sacrificed the burnt offering, God thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines, and He threw them into such a panic. The thunder that made the Philistines run was the same weapon that brought the Israelites victory. Even after we pray, God continues working. We may not see it in the moment, but God has a plan for His ultimate glory and our victory. When the enemy is moving against you, do not give up. Continue to cry out to God as the Israelites did.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How might you relate to Israel when they called upon The LORD?

Do you believe that He hears you when you call?

The Rejection of Yahweh

When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But the sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

-1 SAMUEL 8:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

At the time of this text, God had been King of Israel and had cared for the nation since the beginning. However, now the elders of the nation want another king to lead them, and in this desire, they are rejecting God. Their request was motivated by several factors:

- Samuel's sons as associate judges were not godly, and the elders feared that they would lead the nation astray when Samuel died.
- Since the time of the judges, the nation had been through a series of temporary leaders. Now, the elders wanted a more permanent ruler.
- Israel wanted to be like the other nations and have a king to honor. The powerful nations around Israel were a constant threat, and the elders felt that a king would give them greater security.

While these reasons may have seemed logical to them, they were foolish in reality. God had taken care of Israel, not any human judge! God had provided for them and ordered their steps. He had been with them through everything, but they had chosen to reject Him for what was temporal and temperamental. They wanted to replace God with a human, mortal ruler as king.

It is a terrible thing when God's children reject what is best and demand what is foolish instead. It is sad to see God's people decide that they want to be just like the world, demanding what the world offers. God knows what is best and what is good for us. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When have you been tempted to desire the world more than God?

Do you believe the truth that God is working out everything for your good?

The Rejection of Yahweh

But the sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

-1 SAMUEL 8:3-5

BIBLE STUDY: SAMUEL'S DISAPPOINTMENT

As Samuel has become an old man, it is time for a change in leadership. However, the fruit of Samuel's ministry has gone rotten as his two sons cannot be trusted with ministry. The text says that he put them in a position to serve God's people, but instead, they became evil and did not follow their father's ways.

They became corrupt and went after money. They misused the office of the judge and perverted justice. They trampled the authority and example of their father. All of these things must have been a major disappointment for Samuel. He gave his life to minister to his sons and his people. And now, in his old age, his sons have rejected his good example, turned away from The LORD, ruined his good name, and now see no value in following their father's ways.

And if this was not bad enough, the text continues to say that another tragedy occurs in the leadership and ministry of Samuel. The people tell him that he is old, his sons do not follow his ways, and they want a king instead. In this way, the people are acting as if God and Samuel had never done anything for them. It feels more like a rejection for Samuel, and this was also a reflection of what they thought about God as their Judge.

Rejection can also happen to us in ministry. And when it does, it is so important that we remember Who we are really serving. Our ministry should always be about serving God, not about pleasing others.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you ever had to go to God with a broken heart over someone you knew?

Have you ever had a broken spirit because of rejection, like Samuel?

The Rejection of Yahweh

But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to The LORD. And The LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected Me as their King. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking Me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."

-1 SAMUEL 8:6-9

BIBLE STUDY: SAMUEL'S DISPLEASURE

When we come to this passage, we see that Samuel has a great displeasure for how the children of Israel are acting. In his displeasure, he brings his complaint to The LORD. Instead of fighting with the people, chastising them, and go-off on them, Samuel prays about them. In his trouble, he prays to God, telling The LORD how they are misbehaving and acting toward God and man. Through Samuel's example, we too can learn how we ought to act and handle situations like this. When we have problems with those we are disciplining or ministering to, we ought to go to The LORD with every concern, issue, and trial that confronts us.

The Bible says that The LORD answered Samuel, but He did not change the situation. What God does instead is instructs Samuel to give the people what they want. Since the people wanted to be like the world, God was going to allow it so that they could learn for themselves. This is the permissive will of God at work in the life of Israel. What Israel wants is not what is best for them; it is not what will help them or bless them. It is not what God has ordained for them, but it is what He will allow so that they will learn to depend on Him.

In the same way, God may also allow things in your life in order to teach you through your mistakes. His permissive (not perfect) will allows us to do some things, but in the end, we will have to accept the consequences of our wrongs.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When has God used a previous mistake to teach you and bring you closer to Him?

The Rejection of Yahweh

Samuel told all the words of The LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but The LORD will not answer you in that day."

-1 SAMUEL 8:10-18

BIBLE STUDY: SAMUEL'S DISCOVERY

There is a powerful twist in the divine conversation between Samuel and The LORD. God gives Samuel a clear declaration about what Israel has done and why they have done it. He also instructs Samuel to warn them about what this decision will cost them in the future. The LORD reminds Samuel that they have not done it against him, but rather they have done it against God.

As Samuel warns the people against a king, he also warns them of the great tragedy they will face: in the end, they will cry out to God for help, but He will not listen. If only they had stayed with God, they could have kept their wealth, property, families, treasures, and livelihood. When they were insecure, God could be trusted. When they were afraid, God was their strength. When they could not trust anyone, they could always trust God. Yet, they wanted another king. They have chosen man over God. They have chosen the sinful over the perfect and holy.

THINGS TO PONDER:

To whom have you given domain and reign over your life?

In what areas of your life have you trusted human authority over God's?

The Rejection of Yahweh

But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight out battles." When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before The LORD. The LORD answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." Then Samuel said to the Israelites, "Everyone go back to your own town."

-1 SAMUEL 8:19-21

BIBLE STUDY: OUR HEAVENLY KING

Israel wanted an earthly king to serve and honor. They had rejected the rule and reign of God as their King. They had chosen man over God. They had chosen the wrong king.

Earthly kings can betray, break your trust, take your treasures, abuse your children, kill your futures, and ruin your dreams. However, God will never do these things. It is not His character, and He never changes. If you have chosen man over God, make the change today! Trust in the True and Living God. Keep the True and Living King! And here's why:

- Heaven's King has better benefits than any earthly king could ever have.
- Heaven's King has a better, eternal Kingdom.
- Heaven's King has power not of this world; His power is not limited.
- Heaven's King has a plan for your soul and a place for your future.
- Earthly kings will fall short, but Heaven's King never will.

More than two thousand years ago, the Heavenly King – The Lamb of God – died for all the sins of the world. Jesus is His Name, and He took your place on the cross to pay for all your sins. He died so that your debts of sin would be forgiven. Yet, He did not stay dead; He rose victorious over the grave Easter morning, and He is alive today, sitting at the right hand of the throne of God in Heaven.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you worship God as King in your life today?

How can you praise Jesus with thanksgiving for His free gift of salvation?

The Chronicles Of Saul

As they were going down to the edge of the town, Samuel said to Saul, "Tell the servant to go on ahead of us" – and the servant did so – "but you stay here for a while, so that I may give you a message from God."

-1 SAMUEL 9:27

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Israel was motivated to ask for a king by several factors. First, Samuel's sons were not godly, and the elders feared that they would lead the nation astray when Samuel died. Second, the nation of Israel had been through a series of temporary leaders during the period of the Judges. They now wanted a more permanent ruler over them. And third, Israel wanted to be like the other nations who had a king to honor. The powerful nations were a constant threat around Israel, and the elders felt that a king may give them greater security. However, as we read in the previous chapters, Samuel's reaction to Israel's request shows that he understood their unbelief and rebellion; the people of Israel were rejecting God as King.

And yet, with all the warnings against having an earthly king, the people asked for one just the same. They wanted to be like other nations even though God had called them to be separate and set apart as His people.

In Chapter 9, the author of the book explains how Saul was brought to Samuel and privately anointed for the kingship that the people of Israel requested. In his anointing, God gives Saul three special signs to assure him of his new ministry and position as a servant of God. However, as we know from Israel's history, Saul will fail as a man because he will not allow God to be Lord of his life.

From this, we can learn that it is better to obey God when He promotes you. The child of God can learn that all promotion is not necessarily good promotion when you have a heart that is bent towards disobedience. God knows what is best for you, and He desires for you to serve Him with your whole heart. It is always better to lean on and to depend on The LORD in every area of your life.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Why is it important for any leader to allow God to be Lord of their life?

The Chronicles Of Saul

Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not The LORD anointed you ruler over His inheritance?"

-1 SAMUEL 10:1

BIBLE STUDY: THE ANOINTING OF SAUL

When we come to this first verse of Chapter 10, we see several incredible "first things."

1. The LORD has just made Saul the first earthly king of Israel.
2. The LORD has just made Samuel the first prophet to lay hands on a king.
3. It is the first time in Scripture when God gives a man the oversight of a nation as their king because they wanted and asked for one.
4. It is also the first time in God's permissive will that He allows Himself to work within Israel's desire to want somebody else to rule over them rather than Himself.

The text says that Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head. God is establishing the manner in which kings would be installed into office. His assignment is given in private with Saul and Samuel alone. It is a private affair before it is a public event. The oil that Samuel uses is also symbolic of the presence of God over this anointing.

After pouring the oil, Samuel kisses Saul. This is a holy-kiss, and through it, Samuel reveals his own homage to Saul, his loyalty, and his submission to him as the king whom God has appointed over His inheritance. God, in His permissive will, sometimes promotes people into leadership whom others would never promote. When He does, they have an authority to serve and to lead even though they have never done so before. God can and will use people for great things that they never imagined that they would do. Saul had never been king before, and he was not even thinking about being king. Yet, God had a plan to use him in the earth.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When have you felt unprepared for a promotion from God?

How did God equip you to lead in this promotion?

The Chronicles Of Saul

When you leave me today, you will meet two men near Rachel's tomb, at Zelzah on the border of Benjamin. They will say to you, 'The donkeys you set out to look for have been found. And now your father has stopped thinking about them and is worried about you. He is asking, "What shall I do about my son?"' Then you will go on from there until you reach the great tree of Tabor. Three men going up to worship God at Bethel will meet you there. One will be carrying three young goats, another three loaves of bread, and another a skin of wine. They will greet you and offer you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from them. After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, timbrels, pipes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying. The Spirit of The LORD will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you. Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do."

-1 SAMUEL 10:2-8

BIBLE STUDY: THE ASSIGNMENT OF SAUL

A divine assignment has been given to Saul, and it will occur in four different events. The events will be evidence that The LORD is with Saul, and God has ordained him to be king of Israel. And when all these signs were fulfilled, the Bible says that Saul would be changed into a new man and that God would be with him.

Whenever God promotes you to do great things for Him, there are always signs of confirmation that you are the one for the task. You will also have a new heart to do the Will of God and carry out His duty for His honor and glory. The only way you can lead God's people is if He has called you.

You have to have a new heart in order to do what God has called you to do.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When have you felt unprepared for a promotion from God?

The Chronicles Of Saul

When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, "What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" A man who lived there answered, "And who is their father?" So it became a saying: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" After Saul stopped prophesying, he went to the high place. Now Saul's uncle asked him and his servant, "Where have you been?" "Looking for the donkeys," he said. "But when we saw they were not to be found, we went to Samuel." Saul's uncle said, "Tell me what Samuel said to you." Saul replied, "He assured us that the donkeys had been found." But he did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about the kingship.

-1 SAMUEL 10:11-16

BIBLE STUDY: THE ASSESSMENT OF SAUL

When we come to these verses, we see outside on-lookers assessing what has just happened to Saul. Outsiders see him prophesying and cannot help but wonder about the change that has come over him. Family members discover that he has been with the prophet and cannot help but wonder what he was doing with the man of God. Everybody has questions, and everybody wants answers. They are assessing his position, practice, his new demeanor, and his new attitude.

But notice that Saul is silent! Saul is not saying what God has done. He is keeping the encounter with Samuel to himself and protecting the proclamation that is upon him. Saul is not ready for publicity and is still sitting with the enormous announcement that he is about to be king. He is holding back from bragging, boasting, and celebrating. Saul is waiting on Samuel, just as instructed.

We can learn from Saul's response. Like him, we should wait before we brag or boast about what God has called us to do. We should keep serving Him faithfully until He reveals our promotion publicly. We should keep the promises of God tucked away in our hearts until He makes it clear that it is time to celebrate and announce what God is about to do.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What surprises you about Saul's assessment and his response?

The Chronicles Of Saul

Samuel summoned the people of Israel to The LORD at Mizpah and said to them, "This is what The LORD, The God of Israel, says: 'I brought Israel up out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the power of Egypt and all the kingdoms that oppressed you.' But you have now rejected your God, Who saves you out of all your disasters and calamities. And you have said, 'No, appoint a king over us.' So now present yourselves before The LORD by your tribes and clans." When Samuel had all Israel come forward by tribes, the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was taken. Finally Saul son of Kish was taken. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found. So they inquired further of The LORD, "Has the man come here yet?" And The LORD said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the supplies." They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man The LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." Then the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

-1 SAMUEL 10:17-24

BIBLE STUDY: THE APPOINTMENT OF SAUL

When we come to these verses, we see that Samuel has made it to the high place to offer sacrifices unto God for the people. In this time of worship, he summons the children of Israel to give them instruction according to the Word of God.

When Saul is selected as Israel's king, he is nowhere to be found. The Bible says they called for him, but he was not present. He was hiding and did not want to come out! It appears as if he did not want to be king and leader of the nation. Saul is announced as king, but he acted more like a coward than a king. We can learn from this text that sometimes God appoints the unqualified so that He can qualify them. Saul had a strong body, a humble mind, a new heart, power, friends, and, most importantly, the prayers and guidance of Samuel. Through the Will of God, Saul would learn how to rule and to serve.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How many leaders do you know that can relate to Saul's response to being king?

The Chronicles Of Saul

Samuel explained to the people the rights and duties of kingship. He wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before The LORD. Then Samuel dismissed the people to go to their own homes. Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched. But some scoundrels said, "How can this fellow save us?" They despised him and brought him no gifts. But Saul kept silent.

-1 SAMUEL 10:25-27

BIBLE STUDY: CONCLUSION

As we close this text, we see that Samuel instructed the people on the behavior of a king, according to God's command. We can see that as the first king, Saul has friends who are ready and willing to serve him and they even follow him to his home. We see that as the first king of Israel, Saul also has enemies who despised what God was doing through Saul.

From this text, we can learn that there will always be haters in the crowd. There will always be people who refuse to rejoice with you when God has promoted you. There will never be a complete consensus concerning the world of The LORD on this earth. Even though God has given the people of Israel what they wanted, they were not satisfied.

This makes me think of Jesus. He gave sight to the blind, and yet the people still yelled to crucify Him. He cured many of their diseases, and yet they yelled to nail Him on a cross. He performed countless miracles, and yet it was not enough. He died on the cross to forgive humanity of their sins, and yet many still reject Him. He rose back to life, conquering death, hell, and the grave. Yet, many still do not worship Him. Let us not be like those haters who rejected Saul. Instead, let us be like the valiant men whose hearts God had touched. Let us follow Jesus all of the way in this life for He is our True King.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What type of responder are you?

Do you initially reject those God has promoted or are you willing to serve and follow them?

A Miracle For Momma

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her.

-MARK 1:29-30

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Mothers are special, and they do a great many things to take care of their families. However, as we live in a sinful world, mothers also have to suffer from the effects of the Fall. The pain of living in a fallen world has taken its toll on Simon Peter's family. Things were not all well in his house. His mother-in-law had gotten ill with a fever. And this fever was bad enough to cause alarm in the disciples. They immediately told Jesus about her.

Simon Peter's mother-in-law was suffering, and there was nothing in anyone's power that could be done. She was suffering, and the doctors could not heal her. She was suffering, and her friends could not comfort her. Her family could not make it go away. It seemed as if death was in the room, waiting for the green light. Simon Peter's mother-in-law needed some help. She needed healing, and she needed a miracle.

This text is about getting help in the time of need. It is about God showing up in the final hour and delivering His daughter. It is about the grace of God and how sweet it is to be known by Him. And this text is about a sick mother's struggle and what God did to help her.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you or someone you know ever faced a situation like this?

When have you needed a miracle from God?

A Miracle For Momma

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her.

-MARK 1:29-30

BIBLE STUDY: THE MOTHER'S CASE

Simon Peter's mother-in-law had inherited something from her mother that had caused this terrible problem. Her mother had also gotten something from her mother, and her mother before had also passed it down to her. And for generations and generations, all of the family had inherited this tragic thing called Sin. It was responsible for illness, pain, suffering, heartache, and death. Sin was passed on to us from Adam and Eve because of their disobedience and rebellion against God. Because of this, Simon Peter's mother-in-law had to suffer and lay sick in bed with this fever. She was in need of miraculous healing.

The disciples immediately go and tell Jesus about her and her situation. This is the first time in Mark's Gospel where we see the request being made on behalf of a family member for Jesus to come and heal their mother. I like this because it gives us insight into praying for the healing of family members.

When Simon Peter's mother-in-law was sick in the house, Jesus came at the right time. And so did His healing grace. His healing grace came to her in her time of need, her hour of despair, in the midst of her storm, and when her body was under siege. In the same way, Jesus' healing grace is present today for us in our times of need. The grace of God is present to save you today if there is trouble in your life, and only His grace can save you from your sinful condition.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How has the grace of God saved you? Reflect on this and praise God for it.

Can you relate to Simon Peter's need to urgently call upon Jesus and His grace?

How can you pray more to God on behalf of your family members?

A Miracle For Momma

Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So He went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

-MARK 1:30-31

BIBLE STUDY: THE MOTHER'S CURE

When we come to these two verses, we see Jesus answering the request. He comes to the house after He has been invited. He comes to see about Simon Peter's mother-in-law, and He comes to save her from death. We also see that Jesus makes contact with and gets involved with the sick.

Jesus took her hand and helped her up. It did not matter that she was sick and had an illness. It did not matter that sin had done this to her. It did not matter she could not save herself. Jesus came because He cared and because He was concerned. He came because He could heal her, and He came because Simon Peter called for Him.

In the healing, there was a divine exchange. Her sickness was exchanged for good health, her gloom for grace, her pain for peace, and her suffering for The Savior. By taking her hand, Jesus' healing was personal. And by helping her up, He demonstrated His love in sharing her heavy burden. And what Jesus did for Simon Peter's mother-in-law, He can also do for all mothers and all of us today. He takes us by the hand and lifts us up.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How do you worship Christ as The Good Shepherd and as your Personal Savior?

What does it personally mean to you to know that Jesus takes us by the hand, lifts us up, saves us from the bondage and illness of sin, and shares our burdens?

A Miracle For Momma

Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So He went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

-MARK 1:30-31

BIBLE STUDY: THE MOTHER'S CONCERN

We see several things in this portion of the text. We see the mother's gratitude, gratefulness, good manners, giftedness, and graciousness. Now that Jesus had completely cured her and the fever had left her, she was able to minister to them. Jesus' healing did not leave her weak. Jesus' healing hand had healed her completely and strengthened her.

In being cured, she may now minister to Christ and to those that are His. Simon Peter's mother-in-law could now serve and minister to Jesus because He healed her for His glory. In response, she showed Christ her gratitude and praise. I need to tell you something. No miracle is a miracle only and unto itself. It is a miracle so that the one who has been saved and healed may now minister unto Christ in response. God heals that we may minister unto Him.

When Jesus touches us, something happens. There is joy unspeakable as He makes us whole. On the cross, Jesus died for our sins and touched all of us. He took our penalty and forgave all our trespasses. He rose early Easter morning in victory over sin, death, and the grave. Every morning is a new day because He still touches us in His mercy, grace, and love.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Has God healed you or someone you know before? What was your response?

When miracles and healing come your way, how can you minister to Christ?

How can you praise God for the way He has touched your life?

Encourage Somebody In The LORD

I thank God, Whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy.

-2 TIMOTHY 1:3-4

BIBLE STUDY: PAUL'S SOURCE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

If there was ever one thing that every believer needed, it was encouragement. You cannot live without it, you cannot succeed in tough times without it, and you cannot push on through the deep valleys of life without it. We all need encouragement, and sometimes we must be willing and able to encourage ourselves. Within his letter, Paul teaches Timothy about the importance of encouragement.

The first thing I observe in this passage is that Paul has a reason to be encouraged. He remembers Who God is and what He has done. Paul remembers to be thankful for his “son in the ministry,” Timothy. And Paul remembers that his ancestors served God. This too encouraged him. When we are thankful for others, we see how God has blessed us with the companionship of other believers in the Christian family. This is always a source of encouragement.

Another thing we see is that Paul's source of encouragement involved his desire to see Timothy again. They were very close, and they shared in the ministry work together. There was a strong relationship here that not even time or distance could break apart. This brought Paul encouragement.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What is your source of encouragement?

Who is someone that encourages you along your spiritual walk?

How can you thank God for the ways He encourages you?

Encourage Somebody In The LORD

I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

-2 TIMOTHY 1:5-7

BIBLE STUDY: PAUL'S SINCERITY IN ENCOURAGING

In these next verses, we learn that the one who is encouraged is the one who also encourages. Paul says to Timothy, *"I am reminded of your sincere faith."* In this way, Paul knows that Timothy still and sincerely trusts in God. This implies hope in the one who hears this because, in spite of what life has done or dragged them through, their faith has remained sincere and true.

The second thing we see is the reason why Paul believes Timothy still has this hope. He says it is because he has the same faith living in him as his mother and grandmother had. Timothy, just like Paul, has inherited a gift that was passed down from generation to generation. This is the gift of faith. And this would have been encouraging to hear by Timothy, and it would have inspired him to trust safely in what was passed down. Paul, in this verse, knows how to encourage Timothy to trust in the faith God had entrusted to him.

The third thing we see is that Paul desires to "fire-up" Timothy. He encourages Timothy to "*fan into flame*" the gift of God. This gift is Timothy's calling that God gave him at the ordination ceremony to preach the Good News and to pastor the people. When Paul and others prayed, a supernatural impartation took place. The gift of pastoral ministries was imparted to Timothy. However, this gift does not work if left static; it must be stirred, fanned, and worked in order to see fruit!

THINGS TO PONDER:

Who encourages you in your ministry? How can you also encourage them?

What gift has God given to you that you could "fan into flame"?

Encourage Somebody In The LORD

For The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

-2 TIMOTHY 1:7

BIBLE STUDY: PAUL'S ENCOURAGEMENT AGAINST FEAR

The final thing we see in Paul's appeal to Timothy is the idea of fear sneaking into the mind of the minister. Timothy may have been facing something in ministry that may have caused him to lose confidence in being bold. Paul writes to encourage the young preacher to be encouraged because what he may be feeling is only a feeling. We cannot trust just our feelings. God does not (and will not) ever issue the believer a spirit of fear.

You cannot have fear and work with confidence for The LORD. You cannot have fear and live boldly for God. You cannot entertain fear and do powerful things for God. You cannot give fear an opportunity to mix with your faith. They are mutually exclusive. They cannot co-exist because they will not share you with each other. Faith and Fear are complete opposites, and you must decide between the two!

What God does give the believer is listed in this same verse:

- **Power** to overcome fear, to flee from fear, to speak against your fears, to abandon your fears, and to dismiss your fears.
- **Love** to release your fears, to forgive those who cause you to fear, to enable you to stand against what is fearful, and to strengthen you to trust that in Christ, everything will be alright.
- **Self-Discipline** to withstand whatever will come your way, to keep your heart and mind stayed on Christ, and to not abandon the Truth of God's Word in the midst of whatever is thrown your way.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When change happens in your ministry, do you lean more into fear or faith?

In what ways has encouragement been a part of your ministry to others?

What have you discovered about yourself through this study?

Jesus Meets “The Crazy Man”

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet Him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain.

-MARK 5:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: BIBLE STUDY: “THE CRAZY MAN’S” PROFILE

In this text, we find The Master successfully completing the journey across the Sea of Galilee. The storm they had previously encountered had been no match for Jesus, and He had proven once again why He is The Messiah. The disciples had been exposed to a part of Christ that they had not known before. It was on this journey that Jesus increased their faith by displaying supernatural power over both the wind and the waves of the sea.

We also see that there was a ministry awaiting Jesus in the region of the Gerasenes. Somebody was in a dangerous, life and death situation. Somebody was in need of saving, and The Master had come to earth to seek and save that which was lost. This man has a difficult story; his life is not like that of yours and mine. His life was sorrowful and hopeless. His mind was filled with demonic rhetoric, and his flesh was filled with scars and wounds that were reminders of his fight with the enemy. His circumstances were hideous, his future was bleak, and his friends were few. He had a family, but he had been driven away from them. He had lost control of his life under demonic possession. His hair was unkempt, his clothes were gone, his hygiene was bad, his speech slurred, and his appearance was hideous. He looks and smells as if he is dead, and he lives among the dead.

It was Jesus Who would have to save him from his oppressor. It was Jesus Who would have to rescue him from satanic influence. It was Jesus Who would have to come unto him to deliver him from his terrible situation. Through this account, Jesus shows compassion, concern, and commitment to those who are in need of eternal life.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What stands out to you as you read about the ministry awaiting Jesus?

Jesus Meets “The Crazy Man”

This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

-MARK 5:3-5

BIBLE STUDY: “THE CRAZY MAN’S” PROBLEM

This man was treated like an enemy to the world, and he was always in pain and crying for relief. The societal social system had failed him, and they tried to chain him, but it would not help. He kept breaking out of the chains and breaking the irons that were on his hands and feet. As he fled to dwell among the tombs and hills, his case got worse and worse. His life and mind were sedated with demonic desires, devilish decisions, and dangerous dreams.

Every day and night, he was crying and screaming for relief because he was in severe pain. He even had a body full of self-inflicted cuts from stones. He was all carved up from the mental and physical suffering he was experiencing. He had problems that life could not fix. He had a spiritual problem. This man was in need of a Savior. He was in need of deliverance. And he was in need of a new beginning. Only God had the power to fix this!

This man’s problem was that he had a host of devils that had moved in and would not move out. He was a prisoner on death row in his own body. He was being tormented by thousands of demons who had come to steal, kill, and destroy. He had become open to demonic activity, and nobody knew how it had happened to him. One possible indication though, is that sin and the love of it, gave these unclean demons an avenue into this man’s head, heart, and body. Because of this, he was tormented day and night, and he was in trouble without a Savior.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What problems have you experienced in which only God could fix it?

When have you ever been in need of deliverance and a new beginning?

Jesus Meets “The Crazy Man”

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of Him. He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do You want with me, Jesus, Son of The Most High God? In God’s Name don’t torture me!” For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you impure spirit!” Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.” And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.” He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

-MARK 5:6-13

BIBLE STUDY: “THE CRAZY MAN’S” PLEA

In all of the turmoil and trouble in his life, one day, all of a sudden, Jesus had come through a storm to rescue him from the host of demons that held this man captive against his will. Jesus, upon seeing the man’s condition, rebuked the evil spirit and commanded it to leave the man. The Bible says that when the demon saw Jesus, it came running and fell down before Him. Out of the man’s mouth, the demons spoke and pleaded that Jesus would not torture them. Jesus commanded for the demons to come out of the man.

There was not just one demon that had possessed this man; there were many, as his name implies. In fact, a legion formed a complete army of infantry and calvary. In Jesus’ time, it would have implied about 6,000 men! This man had a “legion of demons” taking control of his life, movements, thoughts, desires, and intentions.

Through this interaction, we see that the demons had full recognition that The Master has power over them. They could not stand to roam the earth with no vessel to live in. They must dwell in someone or something, and this is why they seek the possession of souls. The evil one has knowledge of his future destruction, and he knows full well that Christ will have the ultimate eternal victory.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What surprises you about this interaction between Legion and The Master?

Jesus Meets “The Crazy Man”

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.” He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

-MARK 5:11-13

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER’S PARDON

In this interaction between the “crazy man” and Jesus, the demons beg for Jesus to send them among the pigs on the nearby hillside. Jesus dismisses the demons, to destroy them at a later time to be determined by His Father. Once they leave the man, Jesus turns His attention back to him. He has come to save him in his time of need.

Jesus had come through the storm to seek and save the lost. He had come to rescue the hurting and to deliver the distressed. He had come to make a way out of no way. He had come to help the helpless and give hope to the hopeless. He had come to defeat the enemy of mankind and to redeem His children.

After the demons get their wish, we see the result of the chaos they ensue. The herd of pigs, all two thousand of them, rushed down the steep bank and into the lake. They fall to their deaths and drown. A legion of demons killing a large herd of pigs is frightening to think about. I cannot imagine all the torture that the man faced when the legion of demons was dwelling in him. This also serves as a reminder to us about just how serious sin and spiritual warfare is. We need to be careful that we do not let sin have control and dominion over our lives. The longer we allow sin to have access in lives, the greater control it claims and the stronger it gets. We need to remember to stay in line with Jesus, abiding with Him and staying close to Him. If He has ultimate control and dominion in our lives and hearts, there is no empty space remaining and no room left for sin to dwell in us.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where in your life may you be experiencing a type of spiritual warfare?

How is the space in your heart? Is it all filled with Christ or is there empty space?

Jesus Meets “The Crazy Man”

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man – and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

-MARK 5:14-17

BIBLE STUDY: THE PEOPLE’S PERSPECTIVE

When those tending the pigs saw their source of livelihood (the herd of pigs) run violently over the cliff, they ran into the city and countryside to tell others what Jesus had done. The people were angry and begged for Jesus to leave. They had lost a great source of income. This loss of animals devastated the local economy and frightened the people. They also did not know what to do with the one who had previously been possessed. He was now clothed and in his right mind.

Because the demons failed to kill the man, they now sought after others they knew Jesus would save too. The demons wanted to do everything possible to keep the people from hearing and accepting the Good News of Jesus Christ. The demons know that if they destroyed the pigs, the people would not want to hear about Jesus. They attempted to turn the town against the ministry of Jesus even before He started to speak to them. The demons had their sights and intentions on destroying this region, and they would do anything necessary to keep the people from receiving the Good News of salvation in Christ.

One thing I notice is that a city that rejects Jesus is the city that has no hope. In rejecting Jesus, they have no protection against Satan. That city is alone and in grave danger of falling victim to Satan and suffering from wickedness. A city without Jesus is a city with no hope, peace, love, grace, and mercy.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you pray for your city and community?

What takeaway thoughts do you have from this lesson?

Jesus Meets “The Crazy Man”

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with Him. Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much The LORD has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you.” So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

-MARK 5:18-20

BIBLE STUDY: THE FINAL REQUEST

As we reach the end of this encounter, Jesus is getting into the boat to leave the area. The man who had been demon-possessed asks The Master if he could become a part of His ministry. Jesus had granted the legion of demons what they asked for (to enter the herd of pigs), and He had done what the people had begged Him to do (leave the region). But Jesus denies the man who had been demon-possessed his request, and He does so for a specific reason and a bigger plan. Jesus told him no because a witness was needed in that region. Someone had to tell of the good things that God had done.

Jesus told the man to go back home and tell the people how much God had done for him and how God had shown mercy to him. The man left the tombs and his old lifestyle to go spread the hope of the Gospel and become a witness for Jesus Christ. This man became a missionary for Decapolis. What a transformation!

He was once out of his mind with demonic possession, but now he has a new mind and heart for Jesus! He was once running wild in the tombs and cutting himself with stones, but now he is going through the city and sharing the hope of God’s great mercy! Just as Jesus saved this man, He also can make a difference in your life. He can save the wounded, make crooked ways straight, and grant new life through His death and resurrection.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Recall a time in your life where God took a bad situation and made it good?

Like the man in this study, how can you be a witness for Christ in your region?

The Son That Makes You Free

To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, "If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free."

-JOHN 8:31-32

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The believer can receive joy even in the midst of an unbelieving culture. We live in a world that does not believe that Jesus is The Son of The Living God. We live in a world that does not believe that He is The Only One Who can save you from your sin. We live in a world that rejects the deity of Christ, His authority, rule, and reign in the life of humanity. We are under attack every day for believing in the words of Jesus. And so to hear Christ declare that He is The Only One that can make a person free is good news to the believer.

In the text, Jesus is surrounded in the temple with two types of people: believers and unbelievers. The unbelievers have declared that they do not believe in Who Christ has proclaimed to be. They had contested His claims to be The Bread of Life, Living Water, The Light of the World, and The Great I Am.

In contrast, the believers have begun to acknowledge that this is the long awaited Messiah, Who had come to rescue Israel from their sins. This made the environment a hostile place to be in, and it made it a place where people did not agree in what the plan of God was for the world.

As we look more into this text, it is good for us to examine and reflect on Jesus' words because He reminds us of just how God delivers us and keeps us from bondage. In fact, the truth behind anybody being set free is discovered in this text. The only way for humanity to experience deliverance is to first believe in Christ and then to abide in Him. As we unveil these truths, we will begin to resonate with the voice of The Master and understand *how* He works, *when* He works, and *why* true freedom only comes through Jesus.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How does this text encourage you?

How can you encourage other believers as we live in an unbelieving world?

The Son That Makes You Free

To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, "If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free."

-JOHN 8:31-32

BIBLE STUDY: THE DISCOVERY OF DISCIPLESHIP - PART 1

For the child of God, the key to discipleship is found in these two verses. First, we discover that Jesus is not speaking to unbelievers in this verse; He is talking to believers only. The Jews believed Him, and they were convinced that He was The Son of God. They were on the same page with Jesus, and there was no doubt in their hearts about Who He claimed to be. They were also willing to believe in Him despite what the nonbelievers thought, and the believers were also fully committed to following His words.

The second thing we see is a clear command from Christ to the believer. It is a command that distinguishes and verifies who is a real disciple and who is not. Jesus says that if one holds to His teaching, they are really His disciples. In other words, one must abide and continue in His Word. To continue in His Word is to determine if you are His disciple or not. To continue in His Word is to reveal if He is truly your LORD or not. To continue in His Word and not give up on God is to unveil what you believe about God and how you are related to Him. The total relationship of discipleship is based on what you do with His Word. If we continue in the Word, then we are truly His disciples.

According to the culture of the day, students of the Rabbi would be known by how they held onto their teacher's teachings and how they lived by them. Here, Jesus is calling for and challenging the believers to distinguish themselves by their obedience to His Word and how they are modeling His teachings with their lives. The same is true for us. We are called to keep, trust, hold, model, be distinguished by, and be governed by, and live by His Word.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What do you do with God's Word? Do you only hear it or do you truly live it out?

What do you believe? How are you living it out now?

The Son That Makes You Free

To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, "If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free."

-JOHN 8:31-32

BIBLE STUDY: THE DISCOVERY OF DISCIPLESHIP - PART 2

Another thing we see in this passage about discipleship is that if you believe and you abide, you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free. We see that to believe and to continue in what Christ has said. As they do, they will know the Truth which makes them free! We come into a relationship with Christ, and He makes us intellectually, morally, and spiritually free after conversion by the Truth of His Word. It keeps us free from going back to our old ways and sinful patterns.

This is only for believers. The continuation of being free in Christ comes from being in close relationship with what He has said. The Truth makes you free, and the Word is Truth. When you are abiding in Christ, it keeps the shackles of immorality, carnal bondage, and psychological bondage off of you; you are free.

If you know His Truth, it keeps you unbound from lies of sin and shame. If you know His Truth, continuing in His Word keeps the lies of the world from making you a prisoner again because it is God's Truth that makes you free. If you know His Truth, you follow and abide in it. You are no longer vulnerable to forgetting who you are and Who you belong to.

To reject His Word when you have been freed by Christ, is to live in the place where you do not belong! This is one of the greatest tragedies of a believer who is trapped in sinful activity. It is tragic because they are not abiding in His Word. Instead, they have retreated to bondage. As a disciple, if you abide in Him, you know His Truth; to not continue in Him is to reject His Truth. You have been freed through relationship as a disciple, and you have been made spiritually, morally, and intellectually free by the Word. Do not go backwards; go forwards!

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you ever been tempted to quit abiding in God's Word?

What did you learn about God and His Word from that experience?

The Son That Makes You Free

They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can You say that we shall be set free?"

-JOHN 8:33

BIBLE STUDY: BIBLE STUDY: THE DENIAL OF DISCIPLESHIP

In the audience's response, we discover that the unbelievers in the crowd have a problem with being a follower of Jesus. They argue that they are Abraham's descendants, and as his descendants, they are not in bondage to anyone.

They declare themselves to Jesus that "we are not your disciples, and we will not be your disciples." This is a great tragedy. They are standing in the presence of God, but they are believing in the wrong way. They reject Christ's teaching because they have their own plan.

In their sin, they question God, "How can you say that we shall be set free?" In their minds, they were not in bondage to anyone even though Rome held them captive. They were spiritually blinded to the fact that Sin had them captive, and the devil had a hold on them. They were in the heat of an argument with Jesus, and they were blinded by their unbelief; they were unable to see Christ as The Son of God!

In the same way, the world is blinded by its unbelief. It rejects Christ's invitation to become His disciples. It rejects the opportunity to be one with Christ. It rejects the invitation to believe in Christ as The God of Heaven and Earth. It rejects Him as The Savior of humanity. It is the world's greatest tragedy to be offered the gift of salvation so freely but yet to reject it because of spiritual blindness and love of sin.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What lies have you been exposed to by sin in the world lately?

How does knowing and abiding in God's Word strengthen your faith?

The Son That Makes You Free

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever."

-JOHN 8:34-35

BIBLE STUDY: DISCERNMENT IN DISCIPLESHIP

Here we find a powerful statement and response from Jesus that distinguishes followers from unbelievers. He says that His disciples will be made free because He knows their position with Himself. They are His disciples, and because they follow Him and abide in His Word, the Truth sets them free. If they abide, they will be made free by the Truth of His Word. And by being in the Truth, they are no longer slaves to sin; through knowing the Truth, they are set free.

Whoever is a slave to sin will commit sin, and they are not free. They are in bondage to Sin, and they are slaves to it. This example is clear about the position of humanity. Those who are in Christ are free from Sin, and those outside of Christ are slaves to Sin. Jesus also offers another example. In a household, a slave has no permanent place within a family. They can be sold, traded, or cast out at any time. However, a child of the master of the house does have a permanent place in the family. The child is an heir and a family member. As a member, the child has privileges, authority, status, position, and freedom because they are a permanent part of the family. As we become children of God by becoming His disciples, we also become co-heirs with Christ; we become a permanent member of His family.

In my house, my dog lives inside but also has a doggy cage. My dog does not have total freedom to roam when or where it wants. In fact, my dog spends much of its time confined to the cage (in a way, it is a place of bondage). In this way, my dog is like the unbelievers of the world. The master of the house loves the dog, but it is not a permanent member of the family. However, my children are not confined to cages; they are totally free and made heirs to our family inheritance. My children have a special relationship within the family that my dog will never have. And like this, believers are also given this special permanent status in the family of Christ!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What is the difference between a household slave and a child of the household?

The Son That Makes You Free

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if The Son sets you free you will be free indeed."

-JOHN 8:34-36

BIBLE STUDY: COMPLETE FREEDOM THROUGH CHRIST

In Christ's statement to the audience in the temple, He is declaring the position of the believer. In His defense to His claim, He is forever positioning the Christian in a location and a position that the non-believer knows nothing about! Therefore, because of what Christ has done and is doing, I am in a position that the world is not. Christ has made me free, and He continues to make me free. As a result of His work, I will always be free in and through Him!

Notice that Jesus speaks in the present tense. He declares that He is setting the believer free. It declares that He is The Only One Who can do it, and because He does it, it is a done deed! He has completed the action, and it is guaranteed once and for all. Because of King Jesus, we have a new relationship with Him. Because of His life, death, and resurrection, we are made free! This good news causes me to remember the words of this beautiful hymn:

*'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, And to take Him at His Word; Just to rest upon His promise, And to know, "Thus says The LORD!" **Jesus, Jesus how I trust Him! How I've proved Him o'er and o'er. Jesus, Jesus, Precious Jesus, O for grace to trust Him more!** ... I'm so glad I learned to trust Thee, Precious Jesus, Savior, Friend; And I know that Thou art with me, Wilt be with me to the end.*

THINGS TO PONDER:

Take time to dwell on the words of the hymn above. What encourages you most?

What does it mean to be free in Christ? How does this change the way you live?

And Then Came Jesus

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

-MARK 1:9

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The task of God was big, the road for humanity's redemption was being paved, their need was great, and the time of salvation was now. God's plan was about to be revealed in His Son. It had been thirty long years of waiting in obscurity, thirty long years of living in adversity, thirty long years of waiting to heal, save, rescue, and to make lives new who were crying for help.

Jesus had come from Heaven to redeem humanity, and it was time to begin the work that The Father had sent Him to do. The mission of John the Baptist had been completed, and the message of The Coming Messiah had been preached. Multitudes of people had been encouraged and invited to look for The One Who would save Israel. Large crowds had come from all over the region, and all eyes were waiting for The Messiah, The Promised Savior.

The religious structure of the day was corrupt, the people of God were hungry for a new word, and the enemies of Israel had made life difficult for them to live in their own country. The people of the nation were in desperate need of the Kingdom of God. And then came Jesus.

Some say that Nazareth was sixty miles from the Jordan River. Jesus would have to have walked the distance in response to the fulfillment of God's mission. But He came anyway. He had no transportation, no means of travel. But He came anyway.

He came anyway to fulfill the mission God had planned long ago.

THINGS TO PONDER:

In what ways does the world look similar to the world in Jesus' day?

In what ways does it look different?

And Then Came Jesus

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn open and The Spirit descending on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are My Son, Whom I love; with You, I am well pleased."

-MARK 1:9-11

BIBLE STUDY: THE COMING OF JESUS

As Jesus came from Heaven to earth, He had to give up some things. It cost Jesus His Kingdom position of Heaven, its comforts, and the constant communion with God that Christ had before coming to earth and dwelling among us. Yet, He chose to come down to earth to redeem humankind. He gave up everything in glory to make the journey to earth and become a man.

Just like Jesus, following the Will of God for our lives will cost us something. We must be willing to make adjustments in order to respond and to obey the call of God in your life. We too must be prepared to make major adjustments, in our living, giving, and our serving.

But what exactly did the coming of Christ mean? It meant that God had come to live among men, that God would now walk, talk, and minister to them in person, that they would have access to God 24/7, and that they could now see what the Old Testament saints hoped for but could not see.

Christ's baptism also was extremely important. Jesus had to partake in the baptism of John to fulfill Scripture and the requirement of God. Jesus was sinless and was without sin. He did not need to repent of sin. Jesus had come to the Jordan River to be baptized to fulfill the plan of God for humankind. What we see in the life of Christ is total surrender to God. He is committed to the Will of The Father, even unto death. God calls for total commitment in our lives too.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What about you? Are you committed to go down the way of your Jordan, leaving behind, forsaking all others, and clinging to Christ alone?

And Then Came Jesus

Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn open and The Spirit descending on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are My Son, Whom I love; with You, I am well pleased."

-MARK 1:10-11

BIBLE STUDY: THE CONFIRMATION OF JESUS

There are several incredible facts about this baptism experience:

1. We have Jesus engaged, going voluntarily under the yoke of obedience.
2. We have Him consecrated and anointed with The Holy Spirit, divinely equipped for the work God had given Him to do.
3. We have him divinely identified by The Father.
4. He was publicly inaugurated and formally installed in the authority of His office as The Son of God in the flesh and the Object of His Father's love.
5. We get to see a glimpse of the activity of The Trinity on earth.

Christ's baptism also fulfills two Old Testament prophetic passages (see *Psalms 2:7* and *Isaiah 42:1*). His baptism was a picture of the resurrection from the dead to come. When we are baptized, we die to the old sin nature and are raised to a new life in Christ. God The Spirit descended from above at Jesus' baptism. When we are baptized, The Holy Spirit also identifies with the child of God, claiming us as His children. This is a picture of the indwelling power of The Holy Ghost Who would come to live in and on the believer.

God The Father spoke from above. This is a picture of God's verbal communication of His love for His children.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What encourages you most as you read and reflect on the baptism of Christ?

What do you learn about The Holy Spirit through this?

And Then Came Jesus

At once The Spirit sent Him out into the wilderness, and He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended Him.

-MARK 1:12-13

BIBLE STUDY: THE COMMISSION OF JESUS

After coming to the Jordan River and being confirmed by The Father, The Spirit of God (having commissioned His work on earth) sent Jesus into the desert. Several things happened during the course of His journey through the wilderness:

1. He was sent and separated in the wilderness.
2. He was secluded in solitude.
3. He was tempted by Satan himself.
4. He was attended to by angels.

Jesus was sent, ordained, and prepared to endure the hardness of the wilderness. The desert was a lonely place of hunger, poverty, and suffering. It is a place of warfare, pain, and separation. There is no comfort, no resources, and no protection from the elements in the desert.

Every now and then God sends His children into the desert places of life to be tried. He entrusts His servants with suffering on the journey, and He decides to refine us by giving us a desert experience. In these moments, God refines and *defines* His servants. He purifies, perfects, and produces godly character in us.

However, just because we are in the desert does not mean that we escape the traps of the evil one. While Jesus was in the wilderness, He was tempted three times. During our desert experience, we are often interrupted by the evil one who comes to steal, kill, and destroy. And just like Jesus, we must endure the temptation and refuse to give in. If Jesus survived His trial, you can too.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where have you felt sent to endure the hardness of the wilderness in your life?

What was this experience like for you?

And Then Came Jesus

At once The Spirit sent Him out into the wilderness, and He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended Him.

-MARK 1:12-13

BIBLE STUDY: THE VICTORY CAN BE WON

It is midnight in the wilderness of life, and the wild beasts are on the hunt at night. Life is lonely and depressing in its isolation at times, and even dangerous, but remember that Jesus survived the trial, and you can too.

There is victory in the battle of temptation. There is victory over sin and death. There is victory in the desert and the wilderness. Our victory is in Jesus because He is our help in time of need.

Adam fell in the Garden of Eden, but Jesus won in the wilderness. Adam fell in the place of pleasure, but Jesus won in the heart of the wilderness. Adam fell when he was lacking nothing, but Jesus won when He had no comfort. Christ is greater than the angels. He lives and dwells in us. He has won the victory once and for all.

When we had no way of escaping the wrath of God, then came Jesus. When we had no one to fight our battles, then came Jesus. When we were all on death row, doomed for a burning hell, then came Jesus. The King of Glory came down from heaven and saw the needs of mankind. He did not just sit back, but He got intimately involved with a hurting humanity. The blind could not see, the crippled could not walk, the demon-possessed had no peace, the diseased had no cure, but then came Jesus. One night at Calvary's cross He was crucified for the sins of the world. He laid down His life to take away all our sins. He died, was buried, and rose again. And one day, when the time is right, then will Jesus come again!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What encourages you most as you reflect on this study?

How can you encourage someone who is going through a desert experience?

Last Lessons in the Temple

As He taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the Law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."

-MARK 12:38-40

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This is the last time in Mark's Gospel that we see Jesus inside of the temple teaching the people and His disciples. He is days away from being put to death on Calvary's cross. The Master's life is in trouble, and He is going to lay it down to save you and I. As Jesus teaches, He is trying to share some crucial information for their journey after He would be gone. Today, we can learn a lot about this text and see just how The Master's warning is pertinent for us as we journey from earth to heaven.

Jesus is in His third year of the ministry. He has been watching the behavior of the scribes and religious leaders. He has dealt with their attitudes and examined their motives. The time has come for Him to warn the people about them before His time on earth is done. They are on His mind because sin has them under lock and key. Jesus feels the need to warn His followers about their behavior before He goes to the cross.

The Master has a teaching that rebuked and exposed the bad doctrine that was being taught by the religious leaders of His day. He constantly warned the people to beware of the scribes and Pharisees. For Jesus to expose them in this manner was to say what He truly felt about their presence and about their motives to oversee the people.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What are your thoughts on Jesus' warning to the people?

What surprises you the most?

Last Lessons in the Temple

As He taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the Law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."

-MARK 12:38-40

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S LAST WARNING IN THE CHURCH

Jesus, in his warning to the people in the church, identifies the Pharisees and scribes by their appearances. They wore long robes to appear great in the eyes of others. The Pharisees would walk about in the streets as princes, judges, and high officials in order that they may be seen and honored among others. The wearing of the robes was not sinful, but their motive for wearing, priding themselves in it, valuing themselves above other people, and then commanding people to respect them because they had it on was sin from and within their hearts.

Jesus also identifies them by their actions. He describes their prayers as lengthy and only for show. The scribes and Pharisees used to like to pray in public, to be seen by others. They acted like they genuinely enjoyed talking to God, they acted like they were close to God, and they acted like they had a wide open door to ask God for whatever they wanted. They prayed long, they prayed to impress, and they prayed to fool people because what they really had going on was a hustle to deceive people.

Lastly, Jesus identifies the scribes and Pharisees by their appetites. They had a taste for power and influence. They were deceivers, and they tricked many into giving them what they wanted. They fooled the vulnerable, and they acted as if they sincerely cared for the wellbeing of those in need. They abused the hurting and grieving for their own selfish gain. Sadly, there are still some like the scribes and Pharisees in our churches today. And we must be on our guard against them!

THINGS TO PONDER:

Jesus identifies the scribes and Pharisees through their appearances, actions, and appetites. Which one surprises you the most?

Last Lessons in the Temple

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling His disciples Him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on."

-MARK 12:41-44

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S LAST WITNESS IN THE CHURCH

After giving His warning, Jesus goes to sit on the opposite side where the offerings were put. He watches as those in the crowd put their money into the treasury. He watches both the rich and the poor and points out an important observation to His disciples.

As He had been watching and observing, the rich had put in large amounts of their wealth. Like the scribes and the Pharisees, a likely motive would have been for show and to receive honor from others in the crowd. As everyone was watching how much money each person put into the treasury, it is very likely that as many rich people "*threw in large amounts,*" they were conscious of the amount of eyes that were watching them, seeing their large contributions.

However, when a poor widow finally has her turn at the treasury, she puts in two very small copper coins. We are told that these coins would have been worth only a few cents, very little compared to the large amounts thrown in by the rich. Yet, this small contribution is actually very big. Jesus is not looking for quantity, but He is looking at the quality of one's giving and their heart. This poor widow gave out of her poverty, giving all she had to live on. She physically gave everything to God when she came to the treasury. She was not looking for the security of tomorrow. Instead, she was looking to her eternal reward and looking to God.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where are you looking today? Are you focused on eternity?

Do you prioritize the quality of your service to God?

A Sister To Remember

Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of The LORD, now that Ehud was dead. So The LORD sold them into the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. Sisera, the commander of his army, was based in Harosheth Haggoyim. Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to The LORD for help.

JUDGES 4:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

There was trouble in Israel. God's people were living in dangerous times. Enemies had surrounded them, and fear was running roughshod over the people of God. God's people were being led by national leaders, who were appointed by God. Deborah was one of the judges of Israel during the time of oppression. She is called a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth. The LORD spoke through her as she held court under a tree called "The Palm of Deborah" in Ephraim. She was Israel's only female judge. She was the mother of the nation, and God chose her because she was an encourager, a nurturer, and a wise woman who was in tune with God's Word, His voice, and His heart.

When Deborah became a judge, the Israelites had been subjugated for twenty years by Jabin, king of Canaan. The Israelites were treated very cruelly, and they needed deliverance. They needed God to intervene as He had done before. This text is a powerful one because it reveals that God is capable of defeating, delivering, and decisively defeating those who will do His people harm. And He chooses to do it through Deborah, the mother of the nation, a wife, a follower of God, a judge, a friend to the people, and a nurturer for all.

In this passage, Deborah models three things for us. She models how to be courageous, confident, and committed. She does all of this at a time of war, worry, and bewilderment. Like her, we live in a world that deals with the same things, and we can learn a lot from her example.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What surprises you most about who Deborah was?

A Sister To Remember

Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim. and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided. She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The LORD, The God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. I will lead Sisera the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'"

-JUDGES 4:4-7

BIBLE STUDY: A WOMAN OF COURAGE

In this portion of the narrative, Deborah sends for Barak. He is a leader, a warrior, and a well-known man in the Israelite community. The mother of the nation has heard from God, and she gives the instruction to Barak. God was going to set up the enemy; this was going to be a fixed fight, and God was going to use Deborah to encourage the men to defend the nation of Israel.

In her meeting with Barak, Deborah reminds him of the faithfulness and power of God: He is The LORD, The God of Israel, and He has commanded that Barak prepare to lead ten thousand men against Sisera and his troops. Even more, God says that He will grant victory by giving the enemy into Barak's hands. With her courage, Deborah relays these instructions to Barak. Even though fear had captured the hearts of the Israelites, God had not forsaken them.

Deborah, in a motherly way, builds up Barak. She does not call him out on his fear or degrade him. Instead, she exhorts him to remember Who God is and what He will do for His nation. She reminds him that God has not forgotten them. He has already given them the victory, and all Israel needs to do is to respond in obedience.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What motherly qualities do you see in Deborah?

Where is God calling you to obedience today?

A Sister To Remember

Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go." "Certainly I will go with you," said Deborah. "But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for The LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.

-JUDGES 4:8-10

BIBLE STUDY: A WOMAN OF CONFIDENCE

When we come to this second point of the narrative, Deborah's confidence is on display. Fear has crept up on Barak, and he does not have confidence to go up alone. Barak is a warrior, but he has become a man who is unsure of what he has heard from The LORD. He wants assurance that God is truly going to do what He has said. Since Deborah has heard God speak, and God has used her to bring him this message, Barak asks Deborah to join him. If he is going to face Sisera, Barak wants to make sure God is with him, just like He is with Deborah.

Barak is not asking her to fight; he is asking her to consult. He needs her advice if he is going to lead the way God has designed him to lead. Deborah agrees, but she also speaks prophetically. There will be victory, but because Barak does not fully trust that God is with him, the honor will not be his. Because of his lack of faith and assurance in God's Word, Sisera will be delivered into the hands of a woman. Barak will miss out on receiving any glory that God had in store for him to receive from this battle.

Here, Deborah does something powerful: she models what confidence looks like. She got up and went up with Barak to recruit men to fight against Sisera. Deborah trusted God at His Word, and she modeled what it looks like to walk by faith. She modeled trust in God even in uncertain times. She was a woman God could use.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where might you resonate with Barak?

How can you follow Deborah's example of trust and confidence in God?

A Sister To Remember

Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaananim near Kedesh. When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera summoned Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River all his men and his nine hundred chariots fitted with iron. Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day The LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not The LORD gone ahead of you?" So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him. At Barak's advance, The LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot. Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim, and all Sisera's troops fell by the sword; not a man was left.

-JUDGES 4:11-16

BIBLE STUDY: A WOMAN OF COMMITMENT

When we come to the last portion of this text, we see Deborah's commitment to God has given Barak the courage to fight the battle that God has called him to fight. According to the text, when the enemy made a move, Deborah told Barak to get up, and she spoke prophetically over his life. Her words of commitment, courage, and confidence are now ringing in his ear. Barak, with his men, ran down Mount Tabor, and began chasing the enemy.

Because Deborah gave him confidence and modeled commitment, Barak's faith increased in his time of unbelief and doubt! When he saw her model commitment, God gave him the courage he needed to step out in faith and obey the word of The LORD. When he went to the place God had told him to go, The LORD drove the enemy away. The LORD was giving Israel the victory as Barak obeyed the word of God. He got the victory, but because he had doubted before, Barak would not get the glory.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where, in your life, can you imitate Deborah's commitment?

Why is obedience so vital for our walk with God?

A Sister To Remember

Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite. Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid." So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket. "I'm thirsty," he said. "Please give me some water." She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up. "Stand in the doorway of the tent," he told her. "If someone comes by and asks you, 'Is anyone in there?' say 'No.'" But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died. Just then Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. "Come," she said, "I will show you the man you're looking for." So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple – dead. On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him.

-JUDGES 4:17-24

BIBLE STUDY: ANOTHER WOMAN OF EXAMPLE

When we approach the close of this narrative, Barak is pursuing Sisera on foot. A woman, Jael, is the granddaughter of Moses' Father-in-Law. She sees the battle happening in her community and gets involved to help the nation of Israel. She opened her home, took the enemy in, befriended the enemy, made him feel safe, showed him hospitality, gave him a blanket, gave him warm milk, and hid him away until the time was right.

Jael was a woman God could use. She became a woman of courage, confidence, and commitment. She was a real warrior, and she was the one Deborah had prophesied about. Jael was the woman who would get the glory for defeating the enemy. She was in the right place for God to use her to accomplish His plans.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What inspires you about Jael?

Are you standing in the right place for God to use you as He used Jael?

A Sister To Remember

Just then Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. "Come," she said, "I will show you the man you're looking for." So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple – dead. On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him.

-JUDGES 4:22-24

BIBLE STUDY: A WOMAN GOD COULD USE

Jael put the enemy to sleep, and when he had dozed off in her tent, Jael took a tent peg and drove it straight through his temple. By doing so, she killed Sisera, the enemy who had terrorized Israel. God gave Jael, the housewife, the glory of the battle and the credit. Barak chased him, but Jael killed him. God gave the glory to a Gentile-woman, who nobody expected would do something like this. She was a woman of courage, confidence, and commitment. And she had a role model like Deborah, who modeled what it looked like to encourage, support, and empower. This woman defended her home and defeated the enemy.

Both Deborah and Jael were used by and for God. And He has been using women in His plan and mission for creation. He used Naomi, Ruth, Esther, Abigail, Elizabeth, Mary, and Anna. And He can use you today to be a witness, a worker, a warrior, and a servant for His mission. Even more so, God used a woman to bring into the world His Son in human form. Fully God and fully man, Jesus Christ went to the cross to die for all men and women that they might be saved. He took the sting out of death that all may rise again and have everlasting life. And when He rose from the dead, He used the women who came to the tomb in the early morning to tell His disciples the Good News that Christ had risen from the dead! He is still using people today, like you and me, to be men and women of courage, confidence, and commitment for Him.

THINGS TO PONDER:

In what ways is God calling you to serve His great mission?

Where is God leading you to grow in courage, confidence, and commitment?

Faith Without Works Is Dead

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

-JAMES 2:14-16

BIBLE STUDY: A NEW WAY TO LIVE

The Book of James is about faith. However, it is *not* about just "saving faith." Instead, it is about the role faith plays in the life of a person who is already a believer. In this study, we see James' insights into personal and interpersonal aspects of the life of faith. His book lets us peek into the believer's character, attitudes, behavior, and life priorities. As we do, we see how all of them are reshaped and refined by faith. When a person becomes a believer, life is to be lived in a new manner and with a new focus. To live the Christian faith is to trust in The LORD in every area of life, which leads to a whole new way of living life.

The first thing we discover when we come to this passage is that James is issuing a challenge to the church that is scattered abroad. He begins his challenge with a question and then gives an example: if somebody you know has a need, and you have the ability to meet the need, but all you do is just give encouraging words, what good is that? With this, James challenges the believer. According to this question, the person has the resources to make a difference, but because he or she is not willing to give of themselves, they are not demonstrating that they are people of faith well. The Christian must be willing to demonstrate that they are people of faith that when they see a need, and they can help to meet that need, they do so by giving of themselves and their resources.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you living out the Christian faith? How has it changed the way you live?

Where is God calling you to use what He has given you to make a difference for Him and for His Kingdom?

Faith Without Works Is Dead

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

-JAMES 2:14-16

BIBLE STUDY: THE BELIEVER'S CHALLENGE

Faith without works is dead. You cannot say you believe in God and be unwilling to use what God has given you to make a difference for Him. In situations where God has equipped you with the resources to help those in need, James challenges the believer and suggests that the Christian is called to glorify God by doing so.

Let me tell you a story. Left on a sinking ship were three sailors and their captain. The captain spoke first saying, "Men, this business about a captain going down with his ship is nonsense. There is a three-man life raft on board, and I am going to be on it. To see who will come with me, I will ask you each one question. The one who cannot answer will stay behind. Here is the first question: What unsinkable ship went down when it hit an iceberg?" The first sailor answered, "The Titanic, sir." On to the next question, the captain asked, "How many people perished?" The second sailor said, "One thousand five hundred and seventeen, sir." Now for the third question, and the captain turned to the last sailor and asked, "What were their names?"

Like this story, sometimes your faith will be challenged with stuff you do not know or have the answer to. But, nevertheless, you must determine that no matter what you will demonstrate your faith by your works. Never let your faith be head knowledge only. Demonstrate what you believe by what you do and how you live.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How does this lesson challenge you?

Where are you demonstrating what you believe by your actions?

Faith Without Works Is Dead

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

-JAMES 2:17-20

BIBLE STUDY: THE BELIEVER'S CONVICTION

When we come to this portion of the lesson, James shares his conviction that just having faith is not enough. The genuineness of your faith must be shown by your good deeds. Then he gives a comparison: if you say that you believe, great. The demons do not have saving faith, but yet they still tremble before God. They believe in God, but mere belief alone does not save them or grant them salvation. Therefore, the Christian faith must be accompanied by works. These works of faith are evidence of what you believe. If one says they believe in God, then their lifestyle and actions must align with what they believe and what God's Word says. As believers, we must have the conviction that our faith should be accompanied by our actions. The two are intertwined. Let me share another story with you.

A well-known professional golfer was playing in a tournament with President Gerald Ford, fellow pro Jack Nicklaus, and Billy Graham. After the round was over, one of the other pros on the tour asked, "What was it like playing with the President and Billy Graham?" The pro replied, "I don't need Billy Graham stuffing religion down my throat!" His friend, confused, followed up, "Was Billy a little rough on you out there?" The pro sighed with embarrassment, "No, he didn't even mention religion." Astonishingly, Billy Graham had not talked about religion, but yet, he was accused of trying to stuff religion down this player's throat.

The believer's conviction about Who God is makes others aware of what you believe and why you believe it. Sometimes, like Graham, you do not have to say a word. Just let your light shine, and your convictions will speak for themselves.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How is your witness for Christ? Will your convictions speak for themselves?

Faith Without Works Is Dead

Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

-JAMES 2:21-26

BIBLE STUDY: THE BELIEVER'S CHARGE

In the last section of the text, James gives the believer a final charge. His charge comes in the form of two examples: Abraham and Rahab. James says that Abraham demonstrated his faith in God by offering up his only son, Isaac, as a sacrifice for the offering God required of him. He says that Abraham believed God and demonstrated it by his obedience. Secondly, James writes on the story of Rahab the prostitute. She was the one who tried to help God's messengers by protecting them from a murderous plot. Her life was on the line, and she could have been killed for protecting the men of God. However, nonetheless, Rahab demonstrated faith by helping to save others who were in need.

Faith without works is dead. These two biblical examples are given by James so that the saints will know that God requires action to accompany our faith. The truth is that if we believe God, then we will love God, and our actions will be like that of Abraham and Rahab. We will demonstrate our faith and love by our works for Him in the earth. We will do what He asks, and we will do what He desires. We will do what He suggests, and we will do what He requests of us. We will demonstrate our faith by our works when the opportunity presents itself.

THINGS TO PONDER:

As you recall the faith of Abraham and Rahab, what stands out to you?

How are you demonstrating your faith by your works presently?

Faith Without Works Is Dead

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

-JAMES 2:17

BIBLE STUDY: THE BELIEVER'S FAITH

In this study, we have looked at the believer's challenge, conviction, and charge. Let us now look at what the believers have when they put their faith in Christ. When we put our faith in Christ, we get Christ-like results. In Him we have:

- A love that can never be fathomed.
- A life that can never die.
- A righteousness that can never be tarnished.
- A place that can never be understood.
- A rest that can never be disturbed.
- A joy that can never be diminished.
- A hope that can never disappoint.
- A glory that can never be clouded.
- A light that can never be darkened.
- A purity that can never be defiled.
- A beauty that can never be marred.
- A wisdom that can never be baffled.
- Resources that can never be exhausted.

When you have faith in Jesus, you understand that He is indescribable, incomprehensible, invincible, and irresistible. The heavens cannot contain Him, and no man can explain Him. Because of Who He is, no power of man can come against Him. Death and Grave could not hold Him. When you have true faith in Jesus, you have all you need. Your life becomes transformed in the way only He can transform. Your heart becomes attuned to His as you abide and draw nearer to Him. Your lifestyle changes as you seek to live for Him, bringing Him glory.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What encourages you most as you read the list above?

As we finish this study, reflect on how faith and works are impossible to separate.

The Parable Of The Persistent Widow

Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'"

-LUKE 18:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Every now and then, we are fortunate enough to see a parable that shows us some of the many attributes of God. The Father has a way of speaking through His actions in certain seasons of our journey. I believe that our brother, Luke, is teaching us that God will always do what is right for those who have been unjustly treated. This passage encourages one who is about to give up. I believe that this parable speaks to us about never giving up hope, no matter how difficult the day or the situation may be.

Jesus tells His disciples a parable. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. In this parable, we see two things:

1. A contrast between an earthly judge and a holy God.
2. A comparison between a distraught widow and those who cry out to God.

The contrast in the story is to show us how God is in comparison to man. In the same way, we are told how we ought to behave in comparison to the widow.

There are some critical things we can learn from this text, and there are some attributes we can discover concerning the actions and the character of God. These points of interest will be covered in our Bible Study over the next couple days.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where in your life might you be tempted to give up hope?

Through whatever you may be going through, can you find hope in the knowledge and truth that God has a plan and purpose for your good and His glory?

The Parable Of The Persistent Widow

Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'"

-LUKE 18:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: THE WIDOW'S PROBLEM

When we come to this portion of the text, we see Jesus introduce a parable to His disciples to remind them about the importance of persistent prayer! In this parable, we see a widow who brings her case before a judge to try and get justice done in her life. Someone has been cruel to her, and as a result of this injustice, the widow desires to have somebody stand up against the adversary in her life!

This widow had nobody she could rely on or turn to. She needed a hero, and she needed one now! In that day, it was very difficult for poor widows to get justice because they lacked the means (financial standing, social status, civil importance, etc.) for bribing officers who would get the judge to act. However, this widow was not one to quit. She would not quit until the judge had given her what she was supposed to get: justice.

In including this parable, Luke is trying to tell us in this passage that this case is out of the ordinary. Every now and then, on this journey to heaven, we too can experience the sting of injustice. And when this occurs, we too like this widow have a need to compel a greater power to operate on our behalf in a fallen world.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When have you witnessed injustice in your life or the life of someone you know?

What gave you strength to persevere?

The Parable Of The Persistent Widow

Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'"

-LUKE 18:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: CHRISTY BROWN'S STORY

Let me share a story with you. Christy Brown, a cripple from Dublin, Ireland was born with inconceivable handicaps. He talked with a guttural sound, and he was unable to walk, dress himself, or feed himself. He never attended school a day in his life, but he wrote a literary masterpiece that received world acclaim.

In his autobiographical novel, *Down All the Days*, the author told the story of what it was like to be all but helpless, to be one of twenty-two children in his family, and to live in the slums. In all, it required Christy Brown fifteen years to write his book, and he typed it all with the little toe of his left foot.⁸

Brother Brown's story is relevant to our text today because it highlights how persistence works in the life of the one who has no odds of favor in their corner. Like Christy Brown, the widow in the parable has her back against the wall, but she becomes a picture of what it looks like to never give up!

This is what the believer ought to look like when it comes to engaging in prayer with our Holy God! We ought to pray without ceasing, with reverence, and with perseverance.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Reflect on Christy Brown's life and his story. What stands out to you most?

How does his story encourage you to persevere?

⁸ Jones, G.C. (1986). *1000 Illustrations For Preaching and Teaching* (pp. 281-282). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The Parable Of The Persistent Widow

“For some time he [the judge] refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’” And The LORD said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says.”

-LUKE 18:4-6

BIBLE STUDY: THE WIDOW’S POSITION

As we read this passage, we see that this widow’s problem has placed her in a perplexing position. She goes to the unjust judge, a person in authority who can offer help. However, instead of receiving help, this widow is denied access and assistance. She went to the right location to try and get the right one who could change her situation, but the judge was unjust and insensitive; he was not willing to do what was necessary to help and change her position.

He did not fear God, and he did not care what people thought about him. He lacked compassion, human decency, and empathy. He was unjust and did not care what would happen to the widow. What a horrible situation! The only reason he does eventually listen to the widow is because she has worn him down and gotten on his nerves through her persistence.

In this parable, Jesus is using this unjust judge to paint a contrast between God and this worldly judge. Because of Christ’s teaching, we know that God would never do this, would never not care about His children, and would never leave them dismayed, discouraged, or denied an opportunity for an audience with Him. God is not like this unjust judge. He looks at your problems and is aware of your position. He is ready to handle any injustice that has come your way, and I am so grateful for our Heavenly Father’s love and mercy. He hears our prayers right away, and He is already at work in each situation. We may not see immediate relief, but we can trust knowing that God is already working on our case.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Have you ever needed help but had the systems of this world deny you support?

How did God show up and help you through this? How did this grow your faith?

The Parable Of The Persistent Widow

“For some time he [the judge] refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’” And The LORD said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says.”

-LUKE 18:4-6

BIBLE STUDY: COURTROOM HISTORY

Scholars, when looking at this text, teach us that the courtroom in those days was not a building. Instead, it was most likely a portable tent that was moved from place to place as the judge covered his circuit area. And according to history, the judge would be the one to set the agenda for the court hearings each day. As he sat in great power and authority, he was surrounded by his assistants.

Those who had money could get their case heard and bribe the court assistants to try to get the verdict that they needed. Also, anybody could watch the proceedings from outside, but only those who were approved and accepted could have their cases tried. Once again, this usually meant bribing an assistant to get the judge to call one’s case and rule on their behalf.

Knowing this, we can look a little deeper at this parable. If this selfish judge finally decides to meet the needs of the poor widow who had no money or status, how much more will The Loving Heavenly Father meet the needs of His own children when they cry to Him for mercy in a time of great injustice?

This parable is not urging us to “press God” until He acts; it is pointing out that, unlike the unjust judge, God is ready and willing to hear and answer our prayers. What Jesus is teaching us is that it is a privilege to pray, and it is a divine gift to talk with our Holy Father. We are the children of God, and we have a High Priest Who intercedes for us as we come boldly to the throne of God in prayer.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What surprises you as you read about the history of the courtroom?

What is God teaching you about His love through this parable?

The Parable Of The Persistent Widow

And The LORD said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? I tell you, He will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when The Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

-LUKE 18:6-8

BIBLE STUDY: THE WIDOW'S PERSISTENCE

As we come to this last portion of the passage, we can see why Jesus has revealed to us the woman and her persistence. He uses her as a model for the disciples to emulate consistency and fervency in their prayers to The Father. Being persistent means to continue in a thing, in spite of the obstacles that may come your way. We ought to pray without ceasing, knowing that God hears, sees, and knows.

According to the text, Jesus said that God would "bring about justice." This is a reminder that God's time is not our time. And we remember that God's delays are not delays of inactivity **but of preparation**. In other words, God is always answering prayer, and He is working out our problems in ways that you and I cannot fathom or begin to understand.

This brings *Romans 8:28* to mind. In this verse, we are told that God works *all things* together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose for them. The moment we send a request to God that is in His Will and is consistent with His Word, God begins to work. We may not see it now, but one day, the answer will come.

God works in His speed, not ours. He can see what you and I cannot see. He can see what a little patience can do in your life as you learn to trust Him and His perfect timing. It is important that we remember that our lives are not our own. We were created for a purpose: to glorify God and live for Him. Therefore, in all we do and in all we pray for, we should seek that He would be glorified. When we do this and we seek His Kingdom first, this pleases God.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What are you persistently praying to God for? How are you seeking His glory in it?

The Parable Of The Persistent Widow

And The LORD said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? I tell you, He will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when The Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

-LUKE 18:6-8

BIBLE STUDY: A VERY PROFOUND QUESTION

Finally, as we close this study, we find a very profound question. In the last verse of this text, Jesus asks, "When The Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" As I pondered this question, I am reminded of what Scripture tells us:

- The End Times will not be days of great faith.
- Eight people were saved in Noah's day, only four out of Sodom (and one of them, Lot's wife, perished on the way), and very few actually kept the faith.
- Passages like *1 Timothy 4* and *2 Timothy 3* paint a dark picture of the last days. Very few will keep the faith.

As I survey the world today, there is very little faith in the earth. In the last days, the Church lacks faith to preach and proclaim the Gospel on every continent. It lacks faith to be the salt and light in the earth. It lacks faith to truly love one another. As a disciple and a friend of God, I am concerned today. I am concerned about the little faith we have and that we see on display in the world today.

What a question is asked by The LORD: "Will He find faith on the earth?" In other words, God is challenging us to examine our hearts. Ask yourself:

- What will God say when He looks at my life?
- What will He say about my service to Him?
- What will He say about the faith that is working in my heart?
- What will He say about how I represent Him to others?

THINGS TO PONDER:

Use the questions above to do a heart check. What might you need to work on?

Reflect on Jesus' profound question. Will you keep the faith in difficult times?

The Parable Of The Persistent Widow

"I tell you, He will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when The Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

-LUKE 18:8

BIBLE STUDY: CULTIVATING PERSISTENCE

In reflecting on this parable, we have studied the widow's problem, position, and persistence. This parable also teaches us how we should pray and trust God to answer. As we learn to trust God more, we need to cultivate a persistence in faithfulness, humility, and love. If I were you, I would develop a persistent faith to trust God more so that when He comes again, He would find faith at work through His children on the earth!

While on earth, Jesus modeled what persistent faith looks like through His life:

- He was persistent in doing the Will of The Father, even unto death.
- He was persistent in obeying the Word of The LORD.
- He was persistent as He served all those The Father brought to Him.
- He was persistent in teaching the disciples the way of the Kingdom of God.
- He was persistent in fulfilling the mission and vision of God The Father.

In the salvific plan of God to redeem us from sin, Jesus modeled persistence. Satan tried to get Him to fail in the garden, but Christ persistently ignored and escaped the temptations of the evil one. The world persistently came against Him, but He victoriously defeated their attempts to stop Him. The religious crowd lied about Him, His disciples betrayed Him, and they abandoned Him, but He persisted in The Spirit and fulfilled the plan of God for our salvation. Even when He died, He persisted as He took the sting out of death and had victory over the grave! And early Easter morning, He was raised with all power in His hands and now sits at the right hand of God, persistently working on our behalf and interceding for us!

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you cultivate persistence in your own life?

How can you personally grow closer to God through cultivating persistence?

A Struggle At Midnight

After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is The Prophet Who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make Him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by Himself.

-JOHN 6:14-15

BIBLE STUDY: A SAVIOR FOR THE STORM

One of the coldest things in the world is the fact that everyone born on the planet will one day encounter a storm of some kind. Life's struggles have a way of finding your address. It does not matter if you are good, rich, honest, successful, or happy. As you go through life, some form of storm will find your location and draw fear your way. The Christian has storms just like the non-Christian. No matter where you live or what phase of life you are in, everyone has struggles in their lives at some time or another. Because of sin and rebellion against God, life's storms have been ushered into the world. However, God also uses these storms to touch everyone who experiences them.

- God can use storms to open the eyes of His followers.
- God can use storms to draw us closer to Him.
- God can use storms to get us to pray more.
- God can use storms to break us from foolishness.
- God can use storms to teach us humility.
- God can use storms to reveal His purpose and plan for our lives.

Because we live in a fallen world, storms may alter our life and plans off course for a time. However, it is during these storms that we can learn to trust that God is still holding us. He is faithful to see us through the storms we face in life, and He wants to bring us closer to Him.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Take a moment to personally reflect. What storms might you be facing today?

What is God teaching you through this storm?

A Struggle At Midnight

When evening came, His disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough.

-JOHN 6:16-18

BIBLE STUDY: APPOINTMENT WITH A STORM

In today's text, the disciples have an appointment with a storm. It is during the course of their journey that God uses this storm to get them to understand Who He really is: The Savior of the world. The disciples' experience is a reminder that God uses difficult situations and circumstances to teach us more about Him and allow us to see Him as we have never seen Him before.

It had been a long and blessed day, and as evening came, Jesus sends the multitudes home. The disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and set off across the lake to Capernaum. Jesus was to meet them later. After sending the multitude of five thousand away, Jesus goes up on a mountainside to pray. He wanted to commune with His Father. As Jesus was praying, the disciples were journeying across the lake in the boat.

During this time, they were away from Jesus. They were forced to sail without the physical presence of Jesus during a difficult time. They were on this journey alone on the Sea of Galilee, which was known for its frequent storms that could drop out of the sky at a moment's notice. The Sea of Galilee is situated in a deep basin, and the wind swoops through the narrow surrounding gorges with power to pick up speed and sweep across the lake with great velocity. The wind could raise the waters with great force, causing wind storms. It was a dangerous risk to sail alone.

The storms can also come out of nowhere and come with great force. And just like the winds of Galilee, storms can have great power and speed. At times, we may feel that we are alone just like the disciples were. But, as we will see, God was with them even in this storm, and He is with us too.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Think of a time when you felt alone. How did God show up and get you through?

A Struggle At Midnight

A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. But He said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." Then they were willing to take Him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

-JOHN 6:18-21

BIBLE STUDY: LATE NIGHT STRUGGLE

The world today feels very similar to this experience on the lake: filled with darkness, loneliness, pain, isolation, difficulty, trouble, persecution, mistreatment, and confusion. We are facing a late night struggle with global chaos, terrorism, and persecution. Never has the world been so evil and corrupt.

And not only are we facing a very dark time, but the storms of life are also arising around us, especially when we least expect them. As the disciples were making the journey across the lake, a storm appeared, making the journey difficult, stressful, and tiresome. They struggled with rowing as they pushed against a strong wind. They struggled with direction as the night was dark. And then, they struggled with fear as they saw a figure approaching the boat and walking on the water! They were frightened and exhausted from their struggle with the storm.

Yet, in the midst of the storm, Jesus speaks to them and comforts them. He tells them to not be afraid because it is He, Jesus, Who is coming to them. Upon hearing this, *even as the storm is still raging on*, the disciples welcome Jesus aboard their boat. Once they knew Who was speaking and coming to them, the disciples took Him into the boat. The passage then says that the boat immediately reached the shore where they were heading. How miraculous!

This is how it is with us too sometimes. We face struggles in our tasks, in our faith, and in our hearts. But, once we have Jesus in our boat, He can give us the strength, wisdom, comfort, and direction we need.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Is Jesus in your boat? How can you seek His comfort in the midst of the storm?

Abiding In Christ, Producing Results

I am The True Vine, and My Father is The Gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.

-JOHN 15:1-4

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

If there was ever a message that needed to be preached to the Church, it is this message. Jesus is announcing the work of The Father in the life of the Church. This text is designed to instruct the believer and to reveal to them that the work of producing fruit is the work of abiding in God and yielding to the work of The Father as He meets the needs of those who are in Jesus Christ.

A deeper life for the believer is a yielded life. A child of God that is totally yielded to Him will endure and become the servant of God. They rely fully on God to guide, equip, and strengthen them to do His Will in their lives. By His work in them, they yield spiritual fruit and grow deeper in their relationship with Christ.

In Jesus' day, there were many who were claiming to be "vines" of God. In calling Himself The True Vine, Jesus separates Himself from others who claim to be true. Those who abide in Him will grow, flourish, and thrive. Today, we also face many false vines who claim to be from God. But, as we remain in Christ, we are not led astray. He protects and cares for us. Apart from Him, we cannot grow.

In this passage, Jesus says that He is The True Vine. The Father is The Gardener, and He is intimately concerned with the work of the vineyard. He plants, nurtures, looks after, protects, serves, secures, and ministers to the vine. He also prunes and produces in the ministry of inspection.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does it mean to abide in Christ?

How are you personally growing in Him?

Abiding In Christ, Producing Results

I am The True Vine, and My Father is The Gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

-JOHN 15:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: THE MINISTRY OF INSPECTION

As Gardener, the work of The Father is to take care of the branches and to examine which ones are producing and which ones are not. The Father looks at every branch; no branch goes without intervention and observation. Every branch has inspection done, and it must be found fruitful and healthy by God.

In this passage, we also get a glimpse at what He is looking for in each branch:

- He is looking to see if the branch is at work.
- He is looking to see that the branch is doing what it was designed to do.
- He is looking to see if the branch is obedient.
- He is looking to see if the branch is seeking His glory.
- He is looking to see if the branch bears fruit.

All branches have a chance to produce and bear fruit. However, some have chosen not to do so. Because of this, The Father removes them from the vine and takes them away. They do not get another season to try again. They do not get another semester to think things over. They do not get another day or hour because their time to produce has come and gone. Instead of leaving them on the vine to do nothing, they are removed from the work of the vineyard. In the time of harvest, they have failed to produce fruit!

Again, we see that where there is no more fruit, there is no more life. Everything living in Christ's Vine should produce. Why? Because it is an eternal vine, and He is The Life-giving Source! If the branch is producing, it is alive. If it is not, it is dead.

THINGS TO PONDER:

As God inspects each branch, what might He see about your growth in Christ?

Abiding In Christ, Producing Results

He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

-JOHN 15:2-3

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S EXPLANATION

The Gardener is responsible for either cutting branches to remove them or to prune them. When He cuts to prune the branches, there is more left for them to do! He wants quality in His harvest, not half-ripe fruit! In this passage, Christ also reveals another mystery involving the abiding process: the word spoken by Christ. We are made clean by the word that He has spoken to us.

The key word in this passage is “already.” We are not waiting for it to happen; we have been made clean already. The cleansing process has happened, and it has been completed. It is a done deal! Christ is saying that what He has spoken while He was on earth among us has caused a divine transaction to happen.

To be a branch in Christ's Vine means that we are united to Him and share His life. As we abide in Him, His life flows through us and produces fruit. Earlier in this same passage, Christ teaches that God prunes fruitful branches, making them clean so that they will bear more fruit. Through sanctification, we have been made clean, but God continues to cleanse us through His Word, making us more fruitful. This pruning process also helps to explain why a dedicated Christian may need to endure suffering. To be cleansed is to be pruned, washed, refreshed, strengthened, and spiritually fed by God.

The one who listens, obeys, and submits to Christ is the one who is cleansed and truly follows after Him. It is an honor to be washed, cleansed, and examined by God. It is an honor to talk with Him, and it is an honor to be taught, instructed, led, and guided by God as we walk with Him. He prunes us by His Word.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What is the importance of being pruned?

In your spiritual walk with Christ, how is He cleansing you by His Word?

Abiding In Christ, Producing Results

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.

-JOHN 15:3-4

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S EXHORTATION

God has cleansed you when you first came to Him, and He cleanses you now while you daily walk with Him. It is an honor to just know this truth! It is an honor to fear God, to obey His commands, to desire more of His Word, and to guard His Word in our hearts. As we walk in this world, we pick up dirt from sin. We need to be cleansed by God!

In the last verse of this passage, we see a very powerful exhortation. It starts with Jesus using the word "remain." This is a continuous action. To abide in Christ means that we should live in His Word, pray, obey His commandments, and keep our lives holy. The Christian who fails to abide in Christ becomes like a useless branch, like salt that loses its taste.

After the exhortation, Christ also gives His disciples a reminder of why this task is critical for their journey as His followers. Apart from Christ, we cannot bear fruit. If we do not abide in Him, we do not produce. The good disciple will want to obey and produce fruit, and the only way for them to do this is to abide in Christ.

To be a branch means to be united to Christ, sharing His life. And to be a branch means that we must abide in Him, The True Vine. If we abide and remain in Him, His life flows through us and enables us to produce fruit. However, if we are unwilling to abide in Him, we cannot produce fruit like a branch without a vine.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does it personally mean to you to remain and abide in Christ?

Why is this exhortation so important to the task of bearing fruit?

Abiding In Christ, Producing Results

Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.

-JOHN 15:4

BIBLE STUDY: A COINCIDENTAL JOURNEY IN SOUTH AFRICA

When the missionary Barnabas Shaw was forbidden to preach in Cape Town, South Africa, he decided not to leave Africa but to push into the interior. He bought a yoke of oxen, put his wife and his goods into a wagon, and started out. He was resolved to settle wherever he would be allowed to preach.

They journeyed for three hundred miles. One night, while they were camping, they discovered a band of *Hottentots* were also camping nearby. In a conversation with their leader, Shaw learned that the unbelievers were on their way to Cape Town to find a missionary.

The similar meeting of Philip and the eunuch flashed through his mind (refer to *Acts 8:26-40*). Shaw realized that God had been leading him where He wanted him to go and preach. The missionary that abides in Christ will hear His voice and bear much fruit!⁹

THINGS TO PONDER:

What stands out to you about this missionary's story?

How does this account influence or inspire you on your spiritual journey?

⁹ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times, Gospel Herald*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

Abiding In Christ, Producing Results

Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.

-JOHN 15:4

BIBLE STUDY: STAYING THERE AT DEERFIELD ACADEMY

Another story speaks about Headmaster Frank L. Boyden of the famous Deerfield Academy, one of the best-known boys' schools in America. Boyden was once offered a \$20,000 salary with a promise of \$6 million to fund and open a new school in the Midwest. There was one condition: he would have to leave Deerfield Academy, which at the time was a poor and struggling school.

This was a tempting offer to make to a teacher. In the midst of his inner conflict, Boyden went to His Bible. He read the place where it fell open. The verse said, "*If ye still abide in this land, then would I build you and not pull you down.*" Then and there, Boyden decided to stay at Deerfield, and the years have proven the wisdom of his decision.

The missionary that abides in Christ will hear His voice and know what to do in critical times. The LORD will give them wisdom as they make Kingdom decisions to change the lives of others. In Christ, they will bear much fruit!¹⁰

THINGS TO PONDER:

What stands out to you in this story?

How can you seek God's wisdom in making Kingdom decisions and share Christ's love with others?

¹⁰ Benjamin P. Browne

Abiding In Christ, Producing Results

Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.

-JOHN 15:4

BIBLE STUDY: A COINCIDENTAL JOURNEY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Our last story in this study tells the account of a former slave. Testifying before the Senate Agriculture Committee on the value of the peanut, George Washington Carver, a former slave (who as an infant was traded for a broken-down racehorse), said that he got his knowledge of peanuts from the Bible.

When asked what the Bible said about peanuts, he replied, “The Bible does not teach anything regarding the peanut. But it told me about God, and God told me about the peanut.”¹¹

The disciple that abides in Christ will have a love for the Word, and the Word will constantly tell them about Who God is and what He can do. And by faith, the disciple that abides in Christ will bear much fruit! They will serve the Kingdom and produce things that will change people’s lives.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What are your thoughts as you read this story?

How can you grow more in God’s Word and draw nearer to Christ?

¹¹ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times, Gospel Herald*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

Abiding In Christ, Producing Results

Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.

-JOHN 15:4

BIBLE STUDY: CONCLUSION

The key to producing fruit is one's relationship to The True Vine, Jesus Christ. By remaining and abiding in Him, we will produce much fruit. I need Him every day of my life. I cannot live without Him! I need Him to bless, keep, feed, and clothe me. I need His wisdom and understanding. I need Him to pick me up and strengthen me. I need Him to save me and fill me with Himself. I need Him as my Savior and Friend. I need Him to be my Shepherd in the valley of death. I need Him to lead me beside still waters and anoint my head with oil so that my cup overflows. I need Him to make a table for me in the presence of my enemies. I need His goodness and mercy to follow me all the days of my life. I need Him in every area of my life.

Christian songwriter Fernando Ortega wrote the song "*Just Give Me Jesus.*"

In the morning, when I rise (x3), give me Jesus.

Give me Jesus (x2). You can have all this world, but give me Jesus.

And when I am alone (x3), give me Jesus.

Give me Jesus (x2). You can have all this world, but give me Jesus.

And when I come to die (x3), give me Jesus.

Give me Jesus (x2). You can have all this world, but give me Jesus.

What a gift to know Him - The One Who laid down His life so that we might live.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Reflect on the song lyrics above. How are they speaking to your heart today?

Please Give Me The Crumbs

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet He could not keep His presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about Him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at His feet.

-MARK 7:24-25

BIBLE STUDY: THE WOMAN'S CRISIS

In today's text, we see Jesus engaging with a non-Jewish believer in a crisis situation. This is the first time in Scripture that Jesus has been in this portion of the country. There were some people who lived there whom the Jews were forbidden to mingle with. They were the Syro-Phoenecians, Gentiles that were descendants of the Canaanites (they were ancient enemies of Israel). These people were also considered to be an immoral race who God had marked for extinction at one time. In the Old Testament, God had ordered Joshua and the Israelites to destroy them in battle because of their idolatry and wickedness. However, some of these Gentiles survived the invasion of Canaan under Joshua.

This woman is a descendant of those survivors. In the text, we get a glimpse into her situation. Her daughter is possessed by an evil spirit who has inflicted pain and torment upon her. It was causing havoc and disorder in this woman's home and family, and she was unable to help her daughter. She was in desperate need of divine help and healing. She was in a terrible situation, a crisis of faith, hope, and human salvation. This crisis did not help her situation, but it gave her an even greater determination to see her baby well and seek out help from Jesus.

The Bible says that when she heard about Jesus, she came and fell at His feet. The situation she faced with her daughter caused her to experience complete desperation as she came to Jesus. Every now and then, you and I encounter dangerous situations in life that cause a crisis of faith. It is when the crisis of faith is upon us that we realize our need for Jesus, our need to come and fall at His feet.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What crisis might you be facing today?

Please Give Me The Crumbs

In fact, as soon as she heard about Him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at His feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

-MARK 7:25-26

BIBLE STUDY: THE WOMAN'S CIRCUMSTANCES AND COMMUNICATIONS

The woman in our text was a Gentile woman. She was Greek in her religious beliefs, Phoenician by birth, and Syrian by tongue. She was racially discriminated against by the Jews. She was exposed to the false gods of Greek culture (in mythology, astrology, and philosophy), and these gods were unable to help her and her daughter. She was alone in her misery and pain. She was separated, segregated, and subjected; her situation was beyond her control.

As a Gentile, she did not enjoy the privileges of God's chosen earthly people. She was an alien with no hope to call on God or The Messiah. But, when she heard of Jesus, she desperately begged Him to drive the demon out of her daughter. She interceded for her baby girl and made her request at the feet of Jesus.

Theologian Matthew Henry once reflected on his passage and its significance. He said that if one seeks mercy from Christ, they must throw themselves at His feet, humble themselves, and give themselves up to be ruled by Him. Christ never put away anyone that fell at His feet, and He meets this woman in her dire situation and desperation. This is a picture of how to handle crises in our lives. We beseech and fall at the feet of Jesus. As we fall at His feet, we worship Him, coming before Him in need of His saving grace, mercy, and love.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How might you relate to the woman's circumstances?

What does it mean to fall at the feet of Jesus?

Please Give Me The Crumbs

The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. "First let the children eat all they want," He told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

-MARK 7:26-27

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S RESPONSE

In His response to the Gentile woman, Jesus is not denying help. Rather, He is suggesting that there will be hope for the non-Jewish race soon. He says to first let the children (the Jews) eat all they want first. This foreshadows what Paul says in his letter to the Romans: *"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile"* (Romans 1:16).

Here, Jesus is testing the woman's faith for assurance to see if she truly believed. As we read in Scripture, we see that the Jews had already begun to be bored with the Gospel, and some had even desired that Jesus leave their towns and depart from their coasts. The children (the Jews) began to play with their bread, and what they would leave behind, the Gentiles were asking to receive.

Jesus also mentions that it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs. In Hebrew, the word here is *kuon* ("dog"), and it is used in three senses: natural, metaphorical, and in a puppy sense. Under the natural and metaphorical uses, "dog" refers to those who were unclean, impure, or workers of evil. This was a term used by the Jews for the Gentiles under the idea that they were ceremonially impure. However, under the puppy sense, "dog" refers to the household pet dogs that would spend mealtimes beneath the table. In the woman's answer, we will discover her understanding and the strength of her faith.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What stands out to you in today's study?

Please Give Me The Crumbs

“First let the children eat all they want,” He told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” “LORD,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Then He told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.” She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

-MARK 7:27-30

BIBLE STUDY: THE WOMAN’S ANSWER, JESUS’ MIRACLE

The woman’s answer to Jesus shows her urgent need to help her daughter, and her faith showed that she believed that only Jesus could heal her baby. Her reply also shows that she was willing to receive the miracles that the Jews had rejected.

The statement of the food that has fallen to the ground is the Old Testament picture of God’s grace being rejected by Israel. They were rejecting the bread of salvation that Christ was offering them. And for the Gentiles who were the dogs under the table, they were willing to take what the children (the Jews) rejected. The good news is that this bread is also a picture of Christ: Jesus is our Bread of Life. And whatever is in His loaf is in the crumbs that fall from the loaf.

So, give me the crumbs. I do not deserve the whole loaf, but I will take the crumbs. I do not deserve to sit at the table, but I will wait on the crumbs beneath the table. Yet, with Jesus, we receive hope, salvation, peace, mercy, and grace even if we only have the crumbs of His loaf. His crumbs can save sinners, heal the sick, turn the tide of evil, wash away doubt, dismiss every fear, cast out evil, save the lost, and bring them home. The crumbs of grace were given to the Gentile race. This woman knows there is power and mercy in the crumbs, and she asks Jesus for mercy in allowing her to have these crumbs. As Jesus sees her faith, He instructs her to go home and heals her daughter. When this Gentile woman obeys and arrives at her home, she sees her daughter well and the demon gone.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What inspires you about the woman’s answer?

How does this study help you to grow in your faith?

The Tragedy Of Trusting In Earthly Treasures

As Jesus started on His way, a man ran up to Him and fell on his knees before Him. "Good Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call Me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good – except God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," He said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

-MARK 10:17-22

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Every now and then in Scripture, a tragic event unfolds. These events are usually filled with those who have character flaws. Tragedy in the Word of God happens when someone has the opportunity to do the right thing, and you expect them to do the right thing, but their own flesh causes them to mess things up. In our passage today, we face a tragic situation with this young ruler.

The rich young ruler has a taste for eternity, but he desires to get there on his own. He is faced with the reality of God's plan for humans on earth, and when he does wrestle with the truth, the ruler walks away because he cannot let go of what worldly treasures he has gained. This rich young ruler had two problems:

1. **A pseudo love for God** - His love for God was outward in appearance, but he did not love God sacrificially. Instead, his money and wealth was more important and had priority over everything else.
2. **A problem with parting from possessions** - He could not separate himself from the money.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What priority does your relationship with God take in your life?

What earthly treasures might you be clinging to?

The Tragedy Of Trusting In Earthly Treasures

As Jesus started on His way, a man ran up to Him and fell on his knees before Him. "Good Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

-MARK 10:17

BIBLE STUDY: THE RICH MAN'S EXCITEMENT

As we open this passage, we see the excitement of this young ruler. He came running to Jesus in urgency. He came reverently, falling on his knees before Jesus. He came with respect, calling Jesus "Good Teacher." And he came with a request and question. He came to Jesus to seek to know the big question of life: *"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

There is an element of surprise in this text as we see a person of society acting differently than we have seen before. He asks in humility, bows in submission, and shows respect. This denotes several things about this young man:

1. He is in need.
2. Something is troubling him.
3. There is something heavy on his mind.
4. He is in a spiritual crisis.
5. The weight of eternity has been weighing on his heart.

This young ruler is a picture for all of us as we look to answer the question about life after death. We all want to know where we will spend eternity. Everyone, at one time or another, wants to answer the question about how they can enter Heaven and have eternal life.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What stands out to you in this study of the young ruler's excitement to see Jesus?

Do you have a taste for eternity?

The Tragedy Of Trusting In Earthly Treasures

As Jesus started on His way, a man ran up to Him and fell on his knees before Him. "Good Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call Me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good – except God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

-MARK 10:17-19

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S EXAMINATION

As the ruler asks his question, Jesus sees the potential in this young man and answers with an invitation for the rich man to acknowledge Who Jesus is. If the rich young ruler knew Jesus was God, then he was right to call Him good. But, if this young man was doing this to try and gain brownie points with Jesus, then he was not sincere. Jesus asks, "*Why do you call Me good?*" In asking this, Jesus is asking if this man believes that He is God. There is no one good but God. The rich ruler is given an opportunity to three things:

1. Acknowledge that Christ is God.
2. Self-acknowledge that he himself is a sinner.
3. Acknowledge his dependance on God to save him.

Jesus then reminds him of the Ten Commandments. The Law alone cannot grant eternal life and save one from their sins. What I find interesting is that first, Jesus points the ruler to the specific commandments, pointing to the duties of service to our neighbors. Matthew Henry once said that it is the love of God which produces the love of our neighbor. The apostle John also asks that if one does not love their brother whom they have seen, how can they possibly love God Whom they have not seen? In order to love our neighbor well, we must first love God.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What surprises you as you read this interaction between Jesus and the rich ruler?

How is our love for God evident and translated in our love for neighbor?

The Tragedy Of Trusting In Earthly Treasures

“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” He said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.”

-MARK 10:20-21

BIBLE STUDY: THE RICH MAN’S ESTIMATION, THE MASTER’S EVALUATION

The young man’s estimation of himself shows that he felt that he was fit for the inheritance of eternal life. He believed that he was good enough to make it into Heaven. His estimation of himself was deceiving because it was based on his outward actions, not his inward attitudes. He did not see that what was on the inside mattered most. He had placed his value in wealth instead of in God.

Jesus gives him a correct evaluation. He reveals to this young man that he was lacking in a crucial area. Only God could know where his heart was truly at. Jesus reveals the man’s deep problematic area and told him straight: *“Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.”* Jesus gives the man the opportunity to be free from love of the world. He also asks this young man to come and follow Him. By asking the ruler to surrender, submit, and sacrifice, it would be the ultimate sign of repentance. By asking him to come and follow, the young man would be denouncing the world and obeying God with his whole heart.

Jesus knew that this request was needed for this young man because he was tied up in the deception of love for worldly wealth and treasure. And, Jesus wanted this young man to see the truth of where his heart truly was and realize his need for Christ. Although the young man appeared good and righteous, Jesus looked straight at the heart and made His evaluation.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What is your inward attitude towards Christ? Is He your highest treasure?

Are your outward actions and your inward attitude aligned in obedience to God?

The Tragedy Of Trusting In Earthly Treasures

“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” He said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.” At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

-MARK 10:20-22

BIBLE STUDY: THE WARNING

At the end of this passage, we see that the young man goes away sad, and we see where his heart truly found its treasure: in worldly wealth. The tragedy in this account is that the young man had a chance to be saved, but he was too in love with his earthly wealth and possessed by his possessions. The Bible says that his face fell; he went away grieved and sad. His response is a warning to all of us as we learn from this young ruler.

If I were you, I would not let anything become priority over my heart and soul except for God. I would not let anything possess my thoughts but the love of God. I would not let anything that the world has to offer hold me captive. I would refuse to be captured by covetousness, trapped by earthly treasures, blinded by the beauty of wealth, and caught in the deception of money. This rich young ruler teaches us that we cannot have the treasures of the world and have Jesus too. It is better to seek first God’s Kingdom and His righteousness, letting God bring you all the other things He desires for you to have. God knows what you need, and He will provide for all your needs according to His riches in glory.

The Master wanted to lead this man into eternal life. And had this young ruler followed Jesus’ instructions, he would have seen the riches of heaven and the glory of God. Be careful that you are never entrapped in the lies and deceptions of what this world has to offer. Jesus is and will always be enough.

THINGS TO PONDER:

As you reflect on this study, spend time reflecting on your heart and its treasure.

Are you trusting Jesus for your every need? Are your eyes on eternity?

Ride On, King Jesus!

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of His disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The LORD needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

-MARK 11:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

One of my favorite songs is "Ride on King Jesus, No man can not hinder Thee." There is a verse in the song that says,

*"In that great getting up,
Morning fair Thee well,
No man can not hinder Thee,
No, no man can not hinder Thee."*

The song expresses the coming rule of our King of Glory in His great reign on earth. As I reflect on these words and this truth, I am reminded of the prophecies of Jesus and His time on earth.

There are three great triumphant entries that Jesus makes in the Scriptures. Today's text is the first where Christ is preparing to ride into Jerusalem a week before His death, burial, and resurrection. This is where He rides to rescue humanity. The second time He rides in the New Testament is at the time of the Rapture, when He comes to redeem His servants from the earth. And the third and final time He rides will be in revenge against the enemies of God.

I want to draw your attention to our Riding Savior. He is in full control of all that is happening on the earth and all that is going to happen in the future.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Spend time reflecting on what is happening in your life currently. How are you trusting Jesus for your present and your future?

Ride On, King Jesus!

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

-ZECHARIAH 9:9

BIBLE STUDY: RIDING TO RESCUE

In our passage today, we see the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scripture above. The prophet Zechariah had foreseen the day when Jesus would ride into Jerusalem to rescue her from her sins. This coming of The King was the promise of God being fulfilled, that Jesus would bring salvation to redeem humankind.

This passage is a perfect picture of our LORD and Savior in His divine role as a humble servant. His mission was to liberate the captives, set them free, and give them eternal life. When we see Him giving instructions to retrieve and prepare Him a donkey for His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (our passage yesterday), Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to fulfill the prophecy in Scripture.

Unlike kings and rulers who would ride upon stallions and steeds after battle, Jesus would ride a donkey in lowliness and meekness. And because of the prophecy, the Jews were looking for a donkey-riding king. Here, He is receiving honor and praise for two reasons:

1. The Jews were looking for a king to overthrow Rome and make Israel a nation of power once again.
2. Many of those who cried out “*Hosanna!*” had been healed by Jesus and were truly converted, convinced, and supportive of His rule and reign.

The phrase “*Hosanna!*” is translated in the Greek language as “*Save Now!*” They were literally calling Jesus to save and blessing Him: “Blessed is The One Who comes in the Name of The LORD to save us!”

THINGS TO PONDER:

Read the rest of the account in Mark 11:1-10. How is prophecy fulfilled as Jesus triumphantly rides into Jerusalem on a donkey?

Ride On, King Jesus!

For The LORD Himself will come down from Heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet The LORD in the air. And so we will be with The LORD forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

-1 THESSALONIANS 4:16-18

BIBLE STUDY: RIDING TO REDEEM

The second time in Scripture that we see Jesus coming is when He comes from Heaven in a swift type of action. He shows His power over death and the grave as He draws all believers to meet Him in the air. When He comes next time, He will come as The Resurrected Savior, coming to redeem His people.

I want to also draw your attention to 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 where it says,

“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’”

When Jesus comes a second time, He will come to rescue the living Christian from the sting of death. When He comes a second time, He will come to give the believers their new bodies. When He comes a second time, He will gather all the righteous from the earth.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What is important about this second coming?

What encourages you most about these two prophecies of eternity with Christ?

Ride On, King Jesus!

I saw Heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns. He has a name written on Him that no one knows but He Himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His Name is the Word of God. The armies of Heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of His mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

-REVELATION 19:11-16

BIBLE STUDY: RIDING TO REVENGE

In the final appearance of Christ as riding in the New Testament, we see a wonderful, terrible, powerful, and frightening picture of our King. When He rides this final time, He comes with the wrath of God. He comes as a Warrior and Conquering King. When He comes this last time, He will come in all His power, glory, and majesty to destroy the devil. He will come dressed for battle.

If you have not already, I would make sure that I have a relationship with Jesus and give Him my whole life right here and right now. Give your heart and soul to Jesus, and make sure that you know Who you are riding with at the end of time. There is no middle ground; you are either riding with God or riding without Him. With Him, there is everlasting life and victory. There is power, salvation, joy, peace, hope, and help.

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, is our Conqueror, our King, our Prince of Peace, and our LORD of Lords. Soon, and very soon, we are going to see The King. He is on the way, and no man can hinder His coming!

THINGS TO PONDER:

Who are you riding with?

What does this image of Jesus as riding to revenge teach you about His power?

The Master Goes To Church

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at His teaching, because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the Law.

-MARK 1:21-22

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In our text today, we see a divine picture of what happened when Jesus came to church. The Bible is clear that when Jesus entered the synagogue (the place of gathering) on the Sabbath (the day of rest), He had an agenda for being there. Jesus had come down from Heaven to teach the people of the mystery of the Kingdom. This agenda has not changed at all since Jesus' time on earth. The Kingdom of God is yet here among us, and Christ is still equipping, encouraging, and evangelizing today in our local churches and communities. Today, we have His Holy Spirit to show us the Kingdom of God and teach us.

For over 400 years, the people had not been taught or given a word from God. The book of Malachi was the last written word from a prophet in the Old Testament. There were no new words, no inspired voices, prophets, or teachers who had come to teach the people of God. When John the Baptist had come on the scene, he was a bright light and a breath of fresh air. However, his ministry did not consist of working in the synagogues; he baptized in the Jordan River. The traditional teachers and Pharisees had begun to pervert the Law and misinterpret Scripture. The synagogues were in need of revival and correction.

As we open this text, we find that Jesus had a love for the local church, and He made it a priority to attend worship. Not only was The Master in the place of worship with the people of God, but He was teaching during the service. He had a ministry in the local church, and we can follow His example.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you involved and serving your local church?

How can you encourage others to make ministry a priority in their lives?

The Master Goes To Church

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at His teaching, because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the Law.

-MARK 1:21-22

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S MINISTRY

Jesus' ministry came in power and influence. His teaching was a new word inspired by The Holy Spirit. His words were from God, and all who heard them knew this. He was the Logos of Heaven (the Word made flesh). When He taught, it was the exact word that the prophets had taught (because it was God Who had given it to them). When He taught, it was divine, and it reached the soul of the hearers. He spoke the words of God, and He spoke with authority.

The teachers of Jesus' day taught the Law with many additional words. They made new laws and placed heavy burdens too big for the people to embrace what they had been taught in the synagogues. The words of these Pharisees were not inspired by God.

In the same way, many of our churches today are struggling to proclaim the Word of God. A true word from God is what is missing in the church today. There are many things that are being discussed, but a true word from God is not always among those discussions. It is crucial that we listen closely and pay attention to the words Heaven speaks to us today. People want a word from God, and they need a fresh encounter with Him. Jesus wants to teach in the service, and He wants to serve in the church. He wants to get the people on the right track for their lives and for eternity.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you involved and serving your local church?

How can you encourage others to make ministry a priority in their lives?

The Master Goes To Church

The people were amazed at His teaching, because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the Law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know Who You are – The Holy One of God!"

-MARK 1:22-24

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S OPPOSITION

During the course of Jesus' message, there was a major disturbance in the synagogue. A man who was held captive against his will by the underworld came inside and disrupted the service. This man was possessed by an impure spirit and could not rescue himself. The man had no relief, and he was in need of a Savior. The demon had this man fully under its control, and it refused to let him go. It caused this man to come to the synagogue, where Jesus was teaching, and display its wicked power over the man.

The demon was not in the synagogue by chance. Each day, evil spirits seek to distract, tempt, and interfere with the minds of believers. This particular demon had an assignment to try and discredit the work of Christ in the eyes of those who were looking for the Kingdom of God that was to come. This demon worked hard to disrupt the teaching of Christ in the service, and it cried out in the voice of its hostage.

Even today, Satan continues to try to take the minds of people hostage, and he seeks to possess minds, hearts, and souls. He hates and opposes the Kingdom of God on earth. His possession is a wicked one; it is unclean and evil. He opposes the Word of God, and his job is to distract the saints, destroy their witness, discourage their faith, dismantle their hope, and dash their dreams in the Kingdom of God.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where might you feel a struggle against the evil one in your life?

How can you run to Jesus?

The Master Goes To Church

Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know Who You are – The Holy One of God!" "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

-MARK 1:23-26

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S ENEMY

As the impure spirit speaks through the man, he verbally assaults Jesus in front of the crowd. It was a deliberate assault to discredit His ministry and to disrupt the service because the people were being affected by the Word of God. The demon calls Him "*Jesus of Nazareth*" and asks if He has come to destroy them. Satan knows what his future is and what is to come of him at the end of time. And he asks, through this spirit, if this is the time of their destruction. He knows his kingdom is of no match for the Kingdom of God, and he admits the truth of Jesus' identity: "*I know Who You are – The Holy One of God!*" Even the impure spirit knows that Jesus is The Messiah.

Though the demon knew this, and though this impure spirit had no power against Jesus, it still tried to oppose Him and His ministry through the spite of demise. The wicked spirit should have bowed down and worshiped Christ, but instead, this spirit sought to rebuke, verbally assault, and disrupt the service in the synagogue.

Today, there are many people who are influenced by the underworld who sit in our churches today. They know they ought to give their lives to Christ, but they refuse to submit to His rule in their hearts. Jesus is known to many as God's answer for humanity's sin, but there are some who still refuse to surrender and come to Him for their salvation. There are many that would rather stay in their sin than to come to God, Who alone can save them from sin.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What strikes you most as you read this study?

What are your thoughts on the impure spirit's disruption in the synagogue?

The Master Goes To Church

"Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

-MARK 1:25-26

BIBLE STUDY: THE MASTER'S REBUKE

In response to the demon's disruption, Jesus commands the underworld with His authority. He rebukes with authority, and He heals with authority. Jesus commands the impure spirit to come out of the man, and the unclean spirit yields. However, even though the spirit had to obey Christ's command, it still tried to inflict great pain on the man. The text says that the demon shook the man violently and put him in a strong convulsion. Nevertheless, the demon came out, for it could not disobey the King of Heaven. Christ, by His grace, delivers poor souls out of the hands of Satan.

The evil one hates to let go of those he has control over. There is a price to pay when Satan has to leave the life of a person: withdrawals, broken hearts, prison, physical pain, etc. The evil one has come to destroy life, and even when God commands the demon to come out of a person, it does not leave without inflicting more pain upon that individual.

As it comes out of the man, the demon cries out with a shriek. It cries out with a loud voice to frighten the spectators, to make itself seem terrible, but evil was defeated, and everybody present in the synagogue saw it. Jesus had demonstrated His authority over the wicked one and His authority over man as The Only One Who could save the world from sin and death.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What encourages you most as you read this account?

The Master Goes To Church

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey Him." News about Him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

-MARK 1:27-28

BIBLE STUDY: THE CONCLUSION

The Master's ministry would now take off, and He would be known as The Messiah, The One Who had the authority of God in the earth. In His reign, He would have authority over sickness, pain, heartache, death, disease, unbelief, and suffering. Jesus came to the earth to set the captives free and to deliver the oppressed. He came to give freedom to those in bondage and to give eternal life to those facing eternal separation from God.

Jesus came to advance the Kingdom of God on earth, and His Kingdom would come with great power and authority. His Kingdom would come and supersede the power of evil and wickedness. The King of Glory had come down to save men from the kingdom of darkness once and for all.

He would do this through His sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection. And on the third day, that beautiful Easter morning, He would be victorious over death and the grave. And what a beautiful gift to serve The One Messiah, The One Who saved us from the chains of our sins. One day soon, He will gather His children to come and be with Him forever, to spend eternity with our LORD, King Jesus. Hallelujah!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What have you learned about the authority of Jesus?

How can you encourage someone with this truth today?

Growing In Faith

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, but prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

-PHILIPPIANS 4:6

BIBLE STUDY: PRAYER

Today, let us remember to keep prayer as a critical area in every part of our lives. It is a value, and it is the engine that drives the believers. As Paul's words to the Philippians says, "do not be anxious about anything, but in prayer. . ." Paul is telling them that when things get rough, they should take their worries and fears to God.

May The LORD bless you this week as you study, as you share, and as you have a wonderful journey in spiritual formation. Let me pray for you now:

Father, thank You for this month as we celebrate a new beginning. Thank You for the values as we tap in to go and grow deeper with You. We love You, LORD. Bless every community, every center, every faculty, staff, and student. May we continue to give You honor, glory, and praise for what You produce out of the rest of this year. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What have you learned from this charge and reminder to pray?

How will you include this in your daily activity?

Growing In Faith

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of Truth.

-2 TIMOTHY 2:15

BIBLE STUDY: THE WORD

The apostle Paul gives this letter to his son in the ministry, Timothy, to encourage him to be diligent in his studies as he serves the church in Ephesus. And today, as your chaplain, I want to give you this incredible value for this month.

You too should be diligent in studying God's Word. It will be a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path. It will help you, it will encourage you, and it will help you continue to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ.

So, when it gets difficult and you feel like giving up, hang in there and grab onto the Scriptures. God will bless you and meet you as you study His Word. Let me pray for you now:

Father, thank You for this value, this value of studying Your Word. Would You cultivate in our hearts a love for Your Scripture, a love to hear Your voice and a love to hear You speak and direct our paths. Please bless every listener and reader today. Bless every faculty and staff member. Bless each student. Help us to become diligent in studying Your Word and love You more. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What value does Scripture have in your life?

How can you dive deeper in your practice of reading and studying His Word?

Growing In Faith

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

-MATTHEW 28:19-20

BIBLE STUDY: MISSIONS

In this value of missions, we are called as believers to be on mission in our families, our neighborhoods, our states, our country, and throughout the world. That's right. You and I are called to missions. We are the hands and the feet of Christ called to serve the least of these, and our mission is to encourage one another to not forget that God would have you and I go into all the world.

As we talk about the values of prayer, studying the Word, and mission, let us continue to apply them to our lives so that we can continue to grow in God's Word and in His grace. By this, we can become all that He wants us to be to a dying and hurting world.

Let us pray about the mission right now:

Father God, I thank You today for every servant, teacher, and student. I pray that You would show them where You would have them serve Your mission. Father, open doors for us, lead us, and guide us. Provide us with the resources that we need to cross oceans, to cross railroad tracks, to go to the end of our blocks, to visit our neighbors even next door, and to share the Good News with all who will hear. You came, died, and rose again so that by You, we may have life. Give us the opportunities to share, even in our local communities. Thank You for the values of this month. Please teach us how to live them out well. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where is God calling you to share His Good News with others?

How can you seek His strength and guidance for the opportunities to share His Good News with others?

Growing In Faith

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the Word of God. On the contrary, by setting for the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

-2 CORINTHIANS 4:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: MINISTRY

These powerful words written by our brother, the apostle Paul, written to the church of Corinth remind us that God has something for all of us to do. Whether we are working in class, working in a gas station, making pizzas or climbing telephone poles, God has a plan and a ministry that He has given to every one of the members of His Body, the Church.

By His Spirit, we are not to lose heart. Instead, we are to renounce those secret and shameful ways we once walked in. As we continue to grow in Christ, we should grow in a desire to want to tell others about His great love so that all people would turn to Him. So today, as you are sitting in classes, as you are serving your families, or as you are working in your jobs, remember that God's Spirit has you right where He wants you.

When you pray, when you study God's Word, and when you live a life on mission, the ministry of The Holy Spirit will help you, encourage you, keep you, lead you, and guide you as you do all that you do for the glory of God. Let's pray:

Father God, thank You today for our families, our places of work, our places of study, our places of worship, and our communities. Continue to use us in the way that would give You the greatest glory as we live out our mission and share Your great love with the world. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How do you view ministry?

Where has God currently placed you to serve and glorify Him?

Growing In Faith

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.

-ACTS 4:32

BIBLE STUDY: STEWARDSHIP

This church in our passage today was on fire for God. They loved one another with all that they had and all that they were consumed with. They shared their entire lives with everybody so that nobody in the congregation or in the community went without what they needed. They valued the power of stewardship.

That is my challenge and charge to you today. Be a great steward over all your resources and gifts that God has given you. Be a great steward over your relationships. And most of all, be a great steward over anything that God would bring into your life.

So the question today is: how good of a steward are you? Are you a good steward over your time, your talents, your treasures, and your thoughts? What about your coursework?

Whatever it is that God has blessed you with, be a great steward for God. Share, give, and invest in the lives of others. Watch and see how God will bless you for your service to Him.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How has God blessed you?

How can you grow to be a great steward over the things in your life?

God's Love

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

-JOHN 15:12

BIBLE STUDY: WHAT IS LOVE?

Here in this passage, we see a new call to action from our LORD and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is a call to demonstrate what one believes and cherishes about love. It is a call to love in a difficult time, beyond our grievances, above all accusations, and in spite of all disappointments. See, instead of what one's flesh would do, this demonstrative act of sacrificial love is being taught to us by Christ. Here is what I have come to believe: this type of love that Jesus is talking about is not fickle. It is not sometimes on and sometimes off. In fact, this type of love is a sacrificial commitment that involves the whole being of a person and literally costs a person their life.

What is Christ talking to us about today? Well, I believe He is calling us to encounter Him through this marvelous act of love. In this passage, Jesus is pressing His way to the cross to pay for the sins of the world. This is the last night before He is going to be betrayed and handed over to those who would kill Him. These powerful words and this powerful command is instruction that is given to His disciples so that they would know exactly what God is calling them to do in a fallen world. My beloved, this is what I want you to know: as you are studying, as you are serving one another, and as you are ministering, remember to love one another because it is a commandment from God. So, how do we place this in active relation to everything that we are already doing? First of all, forgive those who have offended you. Then, serve the one who is least likely to be served. And whatever you do, put God first in every area of your life. Let's pray:

LORD, we thank You. Thank You for the privilege to love You and be loved by You. Help us to love in difficult times and help our love to reflect You well. Bless all that we plan to do as we seek to glorify You. In Jesus' Name, I pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you display God's love more in your life?

God's Love

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

-JOHN 15:12-13

BIBLE STUDY: THE EVIDENCE

When we come to the text today, we see that Jesus is charging the believer to do something. He is charging us to obey and demonstrate our love through the brethren. It is a command and is written in the present active tense. That means that it is something you keep on doing, not something that you do just one time. In other words, do not stop loving, no matter what the outcome is in the object of the thing in which you are loving. For example, my professor, Dr. Elwell once said that John uses this language over four times in the Gospel of John, and he is writing it because it is a word that is powerful to Him. As Jesus has loved His disciples, He is charging them to love one another in the same way. It is the same charge for us: to love one another as our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Through our love, we provide proof to a fallen world that we are His believers, His followers, and His children. Our love for one another is the evidence of our commitment to Christ. What about you? Do you have this evidence today? Do the people around you know that you love Christ and that you love them? If not, here is the love challenge for you this month: love somebody in spite of how they respond to you. Let us pray together:

Father, thank You so much for your love. Thank You for our communities, our friends, and our families. Thank You for the opportunity to study Your Word. Thank You for the reminder that greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for their friends. Teach us to know more what this means, and teach us how to live this out. Teach us to be brothers and sisters that truly love one another so that we give You honor, glory, and praise. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Do you have evidence of Christ's love at work in you?

How can you share the love of Christ more with those around you?

God's Love

You are My friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you.

-JOHN 15:14-15

BIBLE STUDY: THE LOVE CHALLENGE

Jesus is now calling His disciples His friends. His death on the cross has proved His love for them, and now they would prove their love for Him by loving one another and loving the world. Friends love and help each other, and the obedience of Christ that flows through the believer ought to be on display for a sick and dying world.

God is calling us to love our neighbors, to love one another, and to be the example of Christ on this earth. So, because we are His friends and He abides in us, we too ought to abide in Him and do the things He has taught us to do. In Scripture, we are reminded that Abraham was God's friend, and God told him the plans He had for a fallen world. And so today, I want to remind you that you too are a friend of God, and He has shared His plan with you. He loved the world so much that He gave us His One and Only Son. All who believe in Him will not perish, but they will have eternal life (*John 3:16*). Let's pray:

Eternal Father, thank You. Thank You for the love You have for us and the love You have shown us. Thank You for dying on the cross for our sins, rising victoriously from the grave, and giving to everyone freely the wonderful gift of eternal life as we believe in Jesus and confess our sins. We love You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does the love of Christ mean to you?

What does it personally mean to you to be called a friend of God's?

Ministry Of Friendship

Near the cross of Jesus stood His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

-JOHN 19:25

BIBLE STUDY: FRIENDS THROUGH HARDSHIP

When we come to this particular verse, we see The Master hanging on the cross of Calvary. As Jesus was hanging there, dying for your sins and mine, the text reminds us that His mother, His mother's sister, and Mary Magdalene are present. This is very important for us to take note of because what you see here in this particular writing of John is the ministry of friendship. Mary is not alone while she watches Jesus die upon the cross. With her sister and Mary Magdalene, Mary has community. These women model for us what it looks like to be a friend in a very difficult time. Only true friends will walk with you through times of calamity, be there for you when you are suffering, and be there for when you face a very tough season of life.

I am reminded of a story in my life. In 1995, my brother was killed. Two of my best friends came to my aid and ministered to me in my crisis. Today, I am grateful for friends in the ministry like that. How about you? What kind of friend are you for those in your circle? What kind of friend are you for your extended community? Do you love like this? Are you caring for one another like this? This is what we learn in our passage today: how to minister to those who are in need.

Let me pray for you now:

Father, thank You for this study. Help us to grow in Your grace and to learn what it means to be a friend in the ministry and serve those who are hurting in a difficult time of life. May we grow from this, may we learn, and may we bring You honor, glory, and praise. We love You. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What about you? Are you growing in the ministry of friendship?

Who do you know who is going through a difficult season right now? How can you minister to them?

Ministry Of Friendship

When Jesus saw His mother there, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to her, "Woman, here is your son."

-JOHN 19:26

BIBLE STUDY: THE GIFT OF RELATIONSHIP

Jesus observes His mother and also observes someone else at the cross – John, the beloved disciple. Jesus says to His mother, "*Woman, here is your son.*" What a powerful ministry, for this is the ministry of relationship. That's right – Jesus is giving His mother comfort in that John is now going to care for her. Why is this important? Well, in Jewish history, if the eldest son was left in charge of the family after the death of their father, it was his responsibility to care for the mother. In this case, Jesus is now giving up His life, and Jesus cares for His mother. He turns to His disciple and gives him an assignment: he is now to care for Mary.

What a powerful statement about ministry, and what a powerful gift that Jesus would give His mother in her time of need and grief. And I believe that Jesus is also calling you and I to think like this on earth when it comes to our own families and communities. Are we giving to them in their time of need? Are we ministering to them? Are we available to care for them? Let's pray:

Father, thank You for what we are learning in this text and how we are being challenged and pushed to step out of our comfort zones to serve others. Help us to have an eye for those in need and an eye for those who are lacking family and support in tough and difficult times. Help us to be Your hands and feet so that we, like John, may answer the same call to serve and minister to others. Bless us as we continue to grow in Your grace. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

As you ponder and reflect on this lesson, how does this apply to your life?

In what ways can you see yourself giving so that someone else may benefit from your love and grace?

Ministry Of Friendship

When Jesus saw His mother there, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

-JOHN 19:26-27

BIBLE STUDY: THE GIFT OF GIVING

Jesus, in the moment of dying for your sins and mine, gives John an assignment to care for His mother. He gives His mother great news that she is not going to be left alone for John now is her son. So when we come to this verse, we see what I call the ministry of giving. It is the ministry that has been initiated by God.

First of all, what you see in this text is God giving His Only Begotten Son to die for the sins of the world. Secondly, we see The Son giving Himself sacrificially on the cross to take your place for all our sins. Third, we see Jesus giving somebody to care for His mother. Isn't this powerful? What a powerful ministry, for it tells you and I that God has given us as gifts to minister to one another, care for one another, and to live in community with each other. That is true friendship.

Ponder this, and consider the ministry of giving in your life as an opportunity to serve God as you care for others. Let's go out really loving our families, being kind, gentle, and meek towards one another. Let's see what Christ wants to do in our lives. Let's pray together:

God, thank You for our families and communities. Thank You for the ministry we have to serve those in our homes and households. Help us to love them well and to appreciate them. There are many of us who have difficult homes in which we come from or know of so we need to be reminded that our family members are made in the image of God and that we ought to care for them and love them. Help us to be like John and willingly accept this assignment to care for those whom we love. Bless us today and teach us how to do this well so we may glorify You. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you minister to your family and/or community this week?

Ministry Of Friendship

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When He had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

-JOHN 19:28-30

BIBLE STUDY: IT IS FINISHED

After giving His ministry assignments to John and His mother, Jesus takes the sour wine that has been offered to Him on the cross and says, "*It is finished.*" It is a powerful statement. In Greek, this phrase translates into "*tetelestai*," meaning that it is finished and completed now, tomorrow, and for the future. Wow.

When Jesus is using these words, He is referring to sin's hold on us. When He dies on the cross, He dies for our sins today, tomorrow, and forever. Guess what family? God loves you that much that He gave you the ministry of friendship to last today, tomorrow, and forever. Why? Because He was our friend as well. He loved us, He saved us, and He died for us. He took our sins of today and tomorrow, casting them away forever.

Be encouraged as you press on to give God your very best and your all, serving one another with a Christ-like mentality.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you encouraged today?

How can you encourage others in the ministry of friendship and ministry of giving?

Ministry Of Friendship

But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

-MATTHEW 6:33

BIBLE STUDY: SEEKING THE KINGDOM

Brothers and sisters, as you look ahead to the plans God has for you, remember that if you need resources, seek first the Kingdom of God. He will supply what you need to accomplish the tasks in which He has called you to serve Him in.

As you go off to wherever God calls you after college, continue to seek Him. Stay in touch with us, and pray for us as we pray for you. Together, no matter the distance, we can continue to build the Kingdom of God by changing lives one person at a time.

Let me share this prayer with you:

Father, thank You for each student You have brought to Wheaton College. Thank You for their willingness to come and study at this university. Bless them now as they go into the world and make disciples. Guide them along the best pathway for their lives as they seek You first. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where is God calling you?

How are you seeking His Kingdom first in your life?

Before Worship

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon. Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.

-ACTS 3:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: SERVING THE LEAST OF THESE

When we come to this passage in Acts, we see the early church doing something that today's church is actively involved in: going to gather at the place of prayer to worship God. Peter and John are traveling together, and on their way to the temple, they see something powerful. They see a man who is lame and crippled laying at the gate. This is going to be a very powerful story for us because Peter and John do not bypass this man and his need. They see him struggling, broken, and hurting. Even before they go into the temple to worship, they stop and serve.

This is also our call: to serve the least of these. I am blown away by this text because Peter and John see it as a very important act of their worship to serve somebody who is broken and hurting. How about you today? Who are you serving on your way to worship? Who has your attention? Who has a need that you can meet and help before you go into worship?

Be looking out for this somebody you can serve. Someone, perhaps, who is on the outside of your place of worship, before you even go into prayer. How about meeting the needs of a brother or sister who is stranded on the outskirts of life, like the poor man in the parable of the Good Samaritan? Let's pray:

Father, thank You for our family of believers. Thank You for our time of studying and for Your Word. Please challenge us to continue to seek out ways in which we can serve the least of these. Help us to give, just as You gave. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Who might you know who needs your attention or help?

How can you help them on your way to worship?

Before Worship

Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

-ACTS 3:2-5

BIBLE STUDY: LOOK AT US!

In this passage, we see that on the way to the temple, Peter and John are addressed by the man at the gate. Before they even go into the temple, Peter and John are given an opportunity to minister and serve. I think this is important for us to take note of: in looking at the brothers, this man believes that they can help him.

Peter and John then look at the man and call him to do something powerful. They say three dangerous words, "Look at us!"

I find this very interesting. They have the faith to call this man to look at them, and I call these three words dangerous because if we are going to ask others in the world to look at us as believers, we ought to be ready for what they are about to see. If we are calling them to look at us, we ought to be living a lifestyle that is consistent with who God calls us to be and who God says we ought to be.

If we are going to ask the world to look at us too, we ought to be the children of God that can give the world hope and faith in the time of despair.

THINGS TO PONDER:

When the world looks at you, what do they see?

How can you point more to the hope and joy of Christ through your life?

Before Worship

Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

-ACTS 3:6-10

BIBLE STUDY: WOULD YOU LIKE TO WALK?

As we conclude this wonderful account, here is what we discover: there was a man who was born in an awful condition. He was lame from birth, unable to walk, could not jump, and could not run. He never experienced what it felt like to stand on his own two feet. This man is a picture of humanity for us. See, all of humanity has been born lame. Not physically, but spiritually lame. We have all been born sinners, separated from God, unable to walk upright in a life pleasing to Him.

We are like this man, born in a terrible condition. But God sent His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to go to the cross so that you and I might be saved and have the ability to walk uprightly before God. Peter and John identified this man and ministered to him. Instead of helping him with worldly wealth, they point the man to The One Who can truly save. As believers, when we go into the world and into places of worship, we should point them to God and extend a helping hand to them. Even as you go to your families, communities, churches, homes, and neighborhoods, be looking out for those who are spiritually lame. Be looking for those who do not have the ability to walk before God with holiness. Extend a hand of fellowship and prayer to them. Point them to Jesus. Ask them, "Would you like to walk? Would you like to have your life changed? Then believe in The LORD Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved."

THINGS TO PONDER:

This is a call to service: Let us go out into the world and make disciples for Christ!

Power In Prayer

When Solomon had finished the temple of The LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of The LORD and in his own palace, The LORD appeared to him at night and said: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a temple for sacrifices. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land or send a plague among My people, if My people, who are called by My Name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

-2 CHRONICLES 7:11-15

BIBLE STUDY: THE LORD'S PROMISE

Solomon is the new king of Israel, and he has built the temple of God. He has erected a great sacrifice to God, and God is pleased that He speaks to Solomon that night in a dream and gives him these powerful words. They are, what I like to call, "conditional words." The LORD first begins by saying that when the heavens have no rain, when the locusts devour the land, and when plagues come among the people, He will hear their prayers. This is a powerful statement because God literally says that He is going to allow calamity to come into the people's lives, and by this, He is going to give them a reason to pray.

This is true in our lives today too. We do not pray like we should always pray until a little trouble comes our way. When God sends trouble, He wants His children to pray. So, as we are praying in the midst of whatever trouble we may face, God has promised to heal our trouble if we turn from our evil ways and seek His face. If we do this, God promises to hear our prayers and forgive our sins. This is a powerful reminder for me. I pray that as you think about these things, if there is an area in your life that is not pleasing to God, do something about it today. Turn to Him and seek His face so that He may bless you as you draw closer to Him.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where, in your life, do you need to seek God's face more?

Power In Prayer

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in Heaven may forgive you your sins.

-MARK 11:25-26

BIBLE STUDY: THE POWER OF PRAYER

As we read this text today, Jesus is nearing Calvary where He is taking out time to clearly teach His disciples a true and powerful lesson on prayer. See, the disciples would need to know this if they were going to be in constant community and communication with The Father. They were going to need to understand that prayer was going to be so critical to them on their journey, that understanding prayer would help them communicate to God.

There is no such thing as a mature Christian who does not spend time in prayer. When you spend time in prayer, you begin to understand how God speaks, when He speaks, what He is saying, what He will do for you, what He wants you to know, and understand what He is teaching you in your relationship with Him. That is why this lesson is so critical. Jesus is talking to His disciples, and He wants them to know that in community with each other, you have to forgive, be patient with, and pray for one another. He even tells them to forgive others so that God may forgive them of their own sins. I wonder today, are you holding a grudge against someone? Are you struggling with forgiving someone who may have hurt you? God asks us to forgive them. I know it may be difficult, but here is where you start: ask God to first help you to forgive the one who has hurt you, and I guarantee you that the power of The Holy Spirit will begin to turn your heart and mind so that you can release the one who has done you wrong. Let us pray:

Father, thank You for Your forgiveness. Thank You for the challenge of forgiving those who have wronged us. Thank You for the reminder that we want to be forgiven, so we ought to forgive those who have hurt us. So help us to forgive and strengthen our hearts. We love You. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Practice praying for someone who has hurt you this week.

Power In Prayer

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign LORD," they said, "You made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by The Holy Spirit through the mouth of Your servant, our father David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against The LORD and against His anointed one.' Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against Your Holy Servant Jesus, Whom You anointed. They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, LORD, consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your word with great boldness. Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the Name of Your Holy Servant Jesus."

-ACTS 4:23-30

BIBLE STUDY: PRAYING FOR POWER IN MINISTRY

Here in this text, Peter and John had just been arrested in the temple for helping the crippled man. The religious leaders kept them in prison overnight, and at the end of their sentencing, they called them and commanded them never to preach in the Name of Jesus ever again. Well, the apostles, upon their release, went back to the church to give a report of what had happened. Once the congregation received this news, they instantly began to pray.

How about you? Do you pray about the things that have happened to family members or those in your community? As we read in the disciples' prayer above, they ask for God to reveal Himself, give them power to do His miracles, and grant them strength and boldness to proclaim His Word. That is powerful! In the midst of persecution and suffering, they ask for the power, ability, and opportunity to do it all over again.

THINGS TO PONDER:

I want to pray like this. Would you join me and pray that we would grow to be better prayer warriors, like Peter and John?

Power In Prayer

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up His clothes by casting lots.

-LUKE 23:34

BIBLE STUDY: PRAYING FOR THE ENEMY

See, one of the greatest things in the world is to pray for those who are hurting you. The Christian life is not void of pain and conflict. In fact, because you come to Christ, many times your life is going to get a whole lot harder before it gets better. Why? Because suffering and persecution come with carrying the cross. People may oppress you, they may close doors on you, they may not accept you, but know that they did it to Jesus as well. Here we can find that praying to God for the enemy is something that Jesus teaches us what to do. As He is hanging on the cross for the sins of the world, He prays for the people.

Jesus says these words in Matthew 5:44, *"But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."* This is a command to those who are faithful followers of Christ. Why? Because it shows unto an unbelieving planet that our God lives in us and that our God reigns in us. It takes power to forgive those who have hurt you. But guess what? That power lives in every child of God. It is the power of The Holy Spirit that walks with us, talks with us, encourages us, and leads us in the things of God.

So today, if you have enemies, if you are struggling with pardoning someone who has hurt you, take your lesson from Jesus. Ask God to give you the power that He gave to Christ in order for you to pray for your enemies.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you learn from the example of Christ on the cross?

Where do you still need to learn to love and forgive your enemies?

Power In Prayer

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." When He had said this, he breathed His last.

-LUKE 23:46

BIBLE STUDY: INTO YOUR HANDS

Family, it was Good Friday. Darkness had swept across the land, and The Master was fulfilling His commitment to The Father to rescue humanity from the sting of sin and death. The Lamb of God was being sacrificed on our behalf, and Luke writes that Jesus was praying to His Father as He hung on the cross.

Think about this. While in agony, Christ was talking to His Father on behalf of you and I. He was surrendering Himself to The Only Who could intervene. This is what prayer is all about. Prayer is having the ability to talk to God no matter what situation you may be in. Someone reading this today may need to be reminded that you too can talk to God in the midst of your troubles. You may need to be reminded that God hears you in the midst of your struggles. Jesus on the cross gives us great examples of what you and I can do in our time of need.

So, I invite you to pray. Pray through the struggles you may be encountering. Pray for the difficulties that come your way. I guarantee that God will hear you. Let's pray right now:

Father, thank You. Thank You that we have just dived into this wonderful passage and have examined the prayer of our Wonderful Savior on the cross. Please bless every student this month. There may be struggles in their homes, lives, and communities. Would You hear their prayers as they lift their worries to You. Bless them in a supernatural way that only You can. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What challenges might you be facing the rest of this month?

How can you seek God in the midst of these difficulties?

Power In Prayer

*Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."
When He had said this, he breathed His last.*

-LUKE 23:46

BIBLE STUDY: KEEPING SCRIPTURE ON YOUR MIND

Last time we saw that Jesus was praying to His Father in a moment of agony. Jesus' example shows us that we have access to The Father anytime, even in moments of stress, trouble, and trial. As we look at the same verse, we find out what Jesus is saying when He cries out. He is actually praying Psalm 31:5. Jesus is praying Scripture in the midst of His storm. Jesus out on the cross, literally dies with Scripture on His mind. Wow. This is powerful.

We too can have the Word of God on our minds in difficult and trying situations as we communicate with God. I like this example because I discover that when I am discouraged or when I am in trouble, Scripture helps my mind to meditate and be encouraged with knowing the outcome is in God's hands. And this is exactly what Jesus prays. He knew that God had all things in control.

As you are going through your journey of life, keep this in mind. Jesus is with you, and The LORD will see you through. Let me pray for you now:

Father, thank You for family and this wonderful passage of Scripture that reminds us that You hear us, even in the midst of our struggles and trials. As we learn from Jesus' example, we too can be encouraged to know that You will hear us when we pray, and You will see us through. We thank You for keeping us in Your hands. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What worries and fears do you have today?

How can you rest knowing that the outcome is already in God's hands?

Power In Prayer

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." When He had said this, he breathed His last.

-LUKE 23:46

BIBLE STUDY: THE GREAT INTERCESSOR

According to Luke, Jesus is out on the cross praying to The Father and interceding on our behalf. As Jesus is praying, He is also referring to Psalm 31:5, where it says, "*Into Your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, LORD, my Faithful God.*"

This psalm has a further and deeper meaning. See, scholars tell us that this was a famous psalm often prayed by Jewish children at the time they went to bed at night. Almost like our American children's prayer where we say, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray The LORD my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray The LORD my soul to take."

I like that this psalm is also a prayer of assurance. It is assurance in knowing that we are safe in The Father's hands. It is assurance in knowing that we can have confidence when we lay our eyes to sleep and rest in His Will. Jesus had confidence that The Father had Him even in His suffering and in His dying moment. I am glad today of this confidence because on Good Friday, Jesus died out on the old rugged cross. On Easter, He rose from the dead with all power of heaven and earth in His hands. That is why you and I celebrate. We celebrate what Christ did by conquering death, conquering the grave, and rising again with all power of heaven and earth in His hands.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Take time to read through the rest of Psalm 31.

Where do you find your assurance?

Giving Grateful Praise

Shout for joy to The LORD, all the earth. Worship The LORD with gladness; come before Him with joyful songs. Know that The LORD is God. It is He Who made us, and we are His; we His people, the sheep of His pasture.

-PSALM 100:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: REJOICE!

In this season of thanksgiving, we can remember the faithfulness of God. We can also remember how much He has blessed us and that we have the privilege of being His children.

In this psalm, there is a joyful call to worship and praise. The psalmist tells everyone to shout for joy, worship God with gladness, and come before Him with joyful songs. But most importantly, the psalmist also calls us to *know*.

We are to know that The LORD is God. We are to know that He made us. And we are to know that we are *His*. This call to know and remember shifts our hearts and our minds to even more praise and worship. As we remember that we are God's beloved and we remember Who He is, we are filled with a love and desire to praise God in joy.

Look also at the last part of this passage today. Not only are we His. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. As His people, we see God as LORD, and as His sheep, we see God as our Shepherd. Both of these images of God help us to remember that He will take care of us and protect us.

So, whatever you may be facing, remember that you are God's child, and He will take care of you.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How does this study encourage you today?

Where do you see God's faithfulness in your life?

Giving Grateful Praise

Know that The LORD is God. It is He Who made us, and we are His; we His people, the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His Name.

-PSALM 100:3-4

BIBLE STUDY: ENTER HIS GATES!

As we read yesterday, once we remember more of Who God is, the more we desire to praise Him, shout for joy, and come before Him in worship. Today, we are going to look at the posture we should approach the gates and courts of God.

The psalmist writes that we are God's people, the sheep of His pasture. As such, the posture in which we approach God should be special. We are not just running to the coffeeshop or the library. We are coming before our God and Father. Therefore, the psalmist tells us that we should enter into His gates with thanksgiving. And more so, we should enter His courts with praise.

The response of thanksgiving and praise comes from knowing Who God is, knowing that He has made us, and knowing who we are: His people and His sheep. Knowing that we serve our Awesome God is cause for celebration! Knowing we are free from sin and shame because of the love of God through Christ Jesus is cause for celebration! Knowing that we will share in eternity with Him is cause for celebration!

So, as you come before The LORD, come with thanksgiving and praise. Come in knowing that you are His child and that He loves you. Come, as the psalmist says, giving thanks to Him and praising His Name.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What posture are you coming before God with?

*What are you celebrating as you remember Who God is and what He has done for you?
How does this shape your worship?*

Giving Grateful Praise

Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His Name. For The LORD is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations.

-PSALM 100:4-5

BIBLE STUDY: HE IS GOOD!

Many times, when troubles come into our lives, it can be hard to find a ray of sunshine amidst stormy clouds. It can be hard trying to find a reason to rejoice when everything around us seems to be falling apart.

In our passage today, the psalmist tells us to remember that God is good. His love endures forever, and His faithfulness continues through all generations. As we come before Him in worship and joy, we remember Who He is and who we are. As we enter His gates and courts with praise and thanksgiving, we remember that He is deserving of all our worship.

Whatever we face in life, whether good or bad, we are reminded in this psalm to focus our hearts on the truth: God is good, and His love endures forever. There is not a day when God forgets His promises or stops being faithful. Just because our current circumstances may be bleak and troubling, God never stops being good.

We may not understand why we experience certain seasons of life, but I bet, if we time-traveled to the future and saw all the good that God had planned for us, we would see that all that we face is meant to grow, shape, and challenge us to be who God designed us to be for His glory. However, we cannot time-travel, but we can have faith in knowing that God has great plans for us, and He is faithful to keep His promises.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Take time today to also read Jeremiah 29:11. Remind yourself that His plans for you are always good.

Thoughts On Love

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of Him Who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

-REVELATION 2:1

BIBLE STUDY: KEEP YOUR LOVE ALIVE

When we come to this message, we get to see how to keep your love for God alive. God is sending a message to the church in Ephesus. At the time of this letter, Timothy is said to have been the pastor of the church, and this letter is to be read to the whole church.

It is a letter of responsibility to the whole congregation. See, this message is from The LORD Jesus Christ, and He is very involved in the life of His Church.

So, as we think about these things and as we ponder them, remember that spiritual formation is the work of God through the lives of His people. And here in this letter, He is going to remind them how to keep their love for God alive.

As God has written this letter to the church of Ephesus, He has also written this letter to you. This is your letter to also remember to keep your love for God alive.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How is your love for God? How can you grow in it?

Thoughts On Love

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for My Name, and have not grown weary.

-REVELATION 2:2-3

BIBLE STUDY: HE SEES YOU

In this text, Jesus informs the congregation that He knows everything about them. He has been walking among them. He sees the way they work, the things they put up with, and the evil things that are happening in their city. He sees their suffering, and He knows the doctrines and false teachings that surround them. The Master is closely supervising the life and activity of this church, and He sees them living among pagan religions, lying teachers, and deceptive preachers. He is aware of their painful struggles.

Now, this city looks like our city. It looks like you and I because we are living in a world where all these things are happening. Jesus, as He speaks, is telling them that He is aware of all that they are going through, and He wants them to know that God is with them, is walking with them, and sees all that they endure.

This passage is meant to encourage you today, so that you can know that whatever you may be facing, God has not forsaken you. He is with you, and He sees the difficulties you face. Let me pray for us:

Father, thank You. Thank You for this great reading. Thank You for this lesson and the truth that You see all. Even more so, You are with us in whatever we face. Help us to remember this when the dark moments of life come. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What difficulties are you currently facing?

How are you encouraged by the truth of today's passage?

Thoughts On Love

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

-REVELATION 2:4-5

BIBLE STUDY: TRUE LOVE

When we come to this portion of the text, we get to see an allegation that Christ has against the church of Ephesus. He says that they have lost their first love. They have no longer loved Him or each other the way they used to. They no longer were the people of God who were on fire for Him. Rather, they had become a profession, theological, Christian congregation. They did not stand for false teachers or false teachings. But, they quit having meaningful fellowship. No longer were they led by God's Spirit to really embrace and go deeper with God. This body of believers had quit supporting each other, looking out for each other, and taking care of each other. They stopped doing the things that prove that they loved one another. As a result, Christ shows up with a warning, an allegation to them to repent and turn.

See, this is a letter of relationship. And no relationship can last if love is not at the center of it. This is what I want to challenge us with today. I want to challenge us to be in love with God more. Not just in words, but in deed.

Maybe this is you today. Perhaps you have lost your first love. If that is it, do what Christ is calling them to do in this moment of spiritual formation: go back to the first things you used to do; go back and remember how you walked first with God, talked with Him, and loved Him. Let's pray together:

Father, thank You for this challenge today. Thank You for Your love. Help us to not be casual or just go through the moments with You, but help us to love You more than life itself. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How is your love?

Do you have a relationship with God that grows in love for Him?

Jesus Commands

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

-MATTHEW 5:13

BIBLE STUDY: BE SALTY

Jesus in this passage is standing on top of a great mountain in Galilee. He begins to encourage and exhort His disciples to do great and powerful things in the earth, to remind them Who they belong to and what God is calling them to do.

I thought I would need to share this because we too need to be reminded that God has left us in the earth to make a difference for Him. We are the salt of the earth. That means that we are the change agents for these people and the communities that are hurting. God has called us to be believers that make a difference and impact the lives of those who are hurting around us.

So, as you go about this week, remember that God has a wonderful plan for your life, and He has called you to make a difference in your jobs, studies, homes, and communities so that you can lead people into an eternal relationship with Him.

The Bible says that by our love for one another, the world will know that we are Christ's disciples. Let's pray:

Father, thank You so much for each member in the family of believers. Thank You for our communities and our families. Thank You for this reminder and call to be mindful of those who are hurting around us. Help us to be salt and light as we come to serve them. Bless our university, our president, our faculty, our staff, and our students. Help us to live like You and be like You in all that we say and do. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you making a difference for Jesus in your family?

How are you making an impact for Jesus in your community?

Jesus Commands

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven.

-MATTHEW 5:16

BIBLE STUDY: SHINE

What a powerful call to you and I as followers of Christ. Here is why He wants us to be the light of the world: because He wants men everywhere to see our good works and to glorify our Father in Heaven. When you are feeding the poor, your light is shining. When you are ministering to the widows or orphans, your light is shining. When you are visiting the prisoner, your light is shining. When you are caring for the least of them, those who are hungry, homeless, and destitute, your light is shining. When you are loving those who are unlovable, your light is shining.

Remember your call, and remember who you are. Remember the words from Christ to let your light shine before others. In seeing your light shine, they see your good deeds and glorify God. I want to encourage you to shine, shine, shine. Let me pray for you:

Father, thank You today for this passage and call to let our light shine so that we may glorify You. Continue to use us to shine our light before others. Allow them to see our good works so that they too may give glory to You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How are you shining your light?

How can you encourage others to give glory to God through the good works in your life?

Jesus Commands

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

-MATTHEW 5:3-12

BIBLE STUDY: THE BLESSINGS OF GOD

These verses give us a list of how the blessings of God are for the children of God. He would bless those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, those who hunger, those who are merciful, those who are pure in heart, and those who are peacemakers. All things to all humanity, that we might bring Him honor and glory.

So, as we go out into the world, let us be what Christ would have us be in the earth so that others would see Him and come into an intimate and personal relationship with Him. Let's pray together:

Father, thank You for this reminder today. Thank You for what You are calling us to do and be in the earth. Thank You for Your love for us. Most of all, thank You for Your words of life that encourage us, teach us how to live, and guide us as we learn to walk in the way You are calling us. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Take a minute today to remember how blessed you are. Thank God for His goodness and provision in your life.

In The Walk Of Life

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in The LORD in this way, dear friends! I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in The LORD. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the Gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

-PHILIPPIANS 4:1-3

BIBLE STUDY: SEEKING PEACE

As we think about what it means to be a peacemaker, we look to Scripture for our Kingdom worldview. The church in Philippi had a problem: several ladies in the congregation had a disagreement, and these ladies were key leaders in the church. Their disagreement began to cause much dissention among the congregation. So Paul, in his letter, writes to the other leaders in this church to encourage the women to get along with each other.

Over the next few studies, we are going to study what it means to be a peacemaker and how we ought to go about it. What are the steps, the ingredients to truly have the mind of Christ?

I hope you will take these lessons to heart as you seek to be a peacemaker in your homes, families, jobs, and communities. Let me pray for you now:

Father, thank You so much for our cohorts, our faculty, our staff, and our students. Thank You for what these lessons are going to mean for us and how they are going to encourage us. Help us to learn from the church of Philippi and help us to apply these key ingredients to our lives so that we may be the peacemakers that You have called us to be. We love You, and we thank You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

I want to challenge you and invite you to journey in thinking about what it means to be a peacemaker. Spend a few minutes reflecting on this.

How do you exemplify the love of Christ in every situation of your life?

In The Walk Of Life

Rejoice in The LORD always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The LORD is near.

-PHILIPPIANS 4:4-5

BIBLE STUDY: REJOICE!

I find these words powerful in the midst of building a culture of peace because joy and peace are the key ingredients of what it means to be a peacemaker. First of all, Paul says that the peacemaker ought to rejoice in The LORD. Then, he says, “always.” So, in spite of the circumstances we may face and in spite of the problems and issues that are before us, one key ingredient for how we can keep the peace is to rejoice in The LORD always. This means that our focus is not on our problems, but our focus is on The LORD.

Secondly, we see that Paul says it again: “I will say it again: Rejoice!” It is a reminder to do it often, consistently, and consecutively. In rejoicing, we make sure that our minds are on Christ.

And thirdly, Paul encourages the believers to let their gentleness be evident to all. This can be hard when we live in a hostile culture, but it is exactly in that culture that our gentleness can stand out the most. We should be gentle and treat those who are hostile to us with the kindness of Christ.

So, as we close our lesson today, we should remember that joy and peace are needed to be effective peacemakers. As we rejoice in The LORD, we focus our minds on Him and we can point others to Him. Let’s pray:

Father, I want to thank You for our families and communities. Thank You for our time and study what it means to be peacemakers. We need You, LORD. Teach us how to be Kingdom people who are peacemakers for Your glory. In Jesus’ Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where can you practice rejoicing more in your life?

How can you show your gentleness to others and point them to Christ?

In The Walk Of Life

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

-PHILIPPIANS 4:6

BIBLE STUDY: DO NOT BE ANXIOUS

Paul writes to the church in Philippi, telling them to not be anxious. He is basically saying, “Do not be so upset or worried that you do not trust God for the outcome.” Instead, give your worries and fears to God. Take everything to Him in prayer. This is the best way to handle our worry, anxiety, and fear.

When you are in a critical situation, be prayerful about it. Pray for one another, pray with one another, and pray about one another. Then, with supplication, write down your requests and make sure you bring them to God with a thankful heart.

In thankfulness, we are reminded of the faithfulness of God. He has been faithful in the past, He is faithful still, and He will continue to be faithful in the future. Being thankful when facing difficult situations shapes your heart as well, reminding you to surrender every fear to God and trusting that He holds the outcome in His hands. Let’s pray together:

Father, thank You for what You are teaching us. Help us as we practice giving all our fears and anxieties to You, trusting that You hold the outcomes of our situations in Your hands. Help us to practice thankfulness more as we surrender to You. You are always faithful. In Jesus’ Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What fears and worries do you need to give to God today?

How can you practice thankfulness as you surrender your situation to Him?

In The Walk Of Life

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

-PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

BIBLE STUDY: FINDING PEACE

Paul, in this very familiar passage, gives us the fruits of what it means to find peace. He is telling the believers that God is faithful, and He will always be with you in every circumstance as you continue to trust Him. He will show up in the midst of your trials and struggles, and He will give you His peace. The peace that He gives will surpass all understanding. In fact, it will not make sense to many people, but it will guard your heart and your mind. It will keep you in the love of Christ Jesus.

So, as we reflect on this passage today, my challenge is for you to take these words to heart. Practice surrendering your fears and worries, present your requests to God in thanksgiving, and seek His peace in every circumstance. Let's pray:

Father, I pray for Your servants as they live in this hostile world. I ask that You would accompany them, cover them, strengthen them, and empower them. I ask that You would give them Your peace that surpasses all understanding. This peace can only come from You, and it will quiet any and all fear as we trust You. Help us now. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where do you need the peace of God in your life?

How will you take these words to heart and begin to practice finding peace?

In The Walk Of Life

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.

-PHILIPPIANS 4:8

BIBLE STUDY: MEDITATE ON THESE THINGS

What powerful words we find from this letter. Paul says that if you are going to be a peacemaker, the key is going to be prayer. The key is also going to be the practice of being peaceful and gentle in spite of all the situations, challenges, and circumstances you are facing.

As we close this study of Paul's letter to the church of Philippi, I want to give you another challenge. First, fill your mind with the things of God. Then, read and study His Word. This will teach you and will always inspire you to trust Him. As you grow to trust God more, He will give you inner peace. Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy, we should think on these things. They will help us to be peacemakers in the most difficult and trying times. Memorize these words and place them in your heart. God will make you the change agent He wants you to be and will grow you to be a peacemaker in this hostile world. Let me pray for you now:

Father, in the Name of Jesus, I pray that as we meditate on Your Scripture and as we think on the things that are pleasing to You, that they would take root in our hearts as we grow into the change agents and peacemakers You have called us to be. May our lives be glorifying to You in all that we do. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Reflect on the challenge above. How can you meet the challenge today? This week? This month? Why is it important to fill our minds on the things of God?

Authority

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me."

-MATTHEW 28:18

BIBLE STUDY: EXCOUSIA

This very powerful statement by our Christ is wonderful for us to hear. As He meets with His disciples who are sitting with Him on the hillside in Galilee, they are astonished and amazed because He has been resurrected from the dead, and He has conquered the grave. As He speaks to them, He says that all authority has been given to Him. The Greek word here is *excousia*, and it translates as "to have power and control over all things."

What a powerful truth to know today: our Christ, our Savior, our God, and our King is alive! And He has all power of Heaven and earth in His hands. This should encourage us to know that there is no trouble or circumstance that we may face that Christ does not have power over. There is nothing that you may be struggling with that Christ does not have power over.

So, if you are going through something, struggling with something, or feeling anxious about something, give it over to God. Why? Because all *excousia* of Heaven and earth belongs to Him! Let me pray for you:

Father, thank You. Thank You for the power that rests in You. Thank You that we have access to You. Please help us to remember that You have power over all things, even all the challenges, situations, and circumstances we face. We trust You and know that You already know the outcome. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What are you currently struggling with or feeling anxious about?

How can you give it all over to God?

Authority

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Spirit.

-MATTHEW 28:19

BIBLE STUDY: GO, MAKE DISCIPLES, BAPTIZE THEM

In His Great Commission to the disciples, Jesus gives them clear instructions for how they are to fulfill this mission: Go into the world, make disciples, and baptize them. They were to make disciples so that the Good News of Jesus Christ would be spread. They were to be evangelists of the Gospel and disciplemakers.

Within the Great Commission, there are two major components: evangelism and discipleship. Although these two things are different, they are inseparable. You cannot have one without the other. You need evangelism to make disciples, and you need discipleship to raise up evangelists who will go out into the world to make more disciples. These two things are integral to fulfilling the Great Commission and growing the Kingdom of God on earth. They form a never-ending cycle of evangelism and discipleship as we share the Gospel with others and help them grow in their faith.

This Great Commission applies to the Church today. We are also called to go out into the world, make disciples, and baptize them. We are called to evangelism and discipleship. I do not know about you, but I feel so encouraged and inspired to know that I can share in this Great Commission. May God continue to strengthen us and make us bold in our witness for His glory and His Kingdom.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Why is evangelism so important for discipleship?

Why is discipleship so important for evangelism?

Authority

And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

-MATTHEW 28:20

BIBLE STUDY: OBSERVE WHAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU

As followers of Jesus Christ, it is the Church's mission to both evangelize and make disciples. We are called to share the Good News about salvation with a broken and hurting world. We are also called to help one another grow spiritually.

Jesus instructs His disciples to teach future disciples to obey everything that He has commanded them. What has He commanded? That we ought to love our neighbors as ourselves, that we ought love The LORD with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, that we ought to serve the poor, that we ought to visit the prisoner, that we ought to heal those who are sick, and so much more. We ought to be spreading the Good News until He returns to take us home.

Remember that the Church's primary responsibility is to go and serve. As we are called to evangelism and discipleship, we are also called to care for the needs of those both in the Body of Christ and those who are outside our church community. We are called to be the light of Christ in a dark world. This is a wonderful privilege.

When Christ returns, may we be able to say that we did all we could for His Kingdom, that we served Him faithfully till the very end. Let's pray:

Father, thank You so much for allowing us to share in the Great Commission. Thank You for the Body of believers. Strengthen us to be Your light in a dark world. And grant us the opportunities to evangelize, make disciples, and share Your love with all we meet. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Reflect on this lesson. Who can you share the love of Christ with this season?

In The Season Of Advent

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of The LORD appeared to them, and the glory of The LORD shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is The Messiah, The LORD. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests."

-LUKE 2:8-14

BIBLE STUDY: INTRODUCTION

Luke, the great physician, is writing this text. He is writing for a Gentile audience who wants to know the story of Christ and the history of His lineage. Here we find that Christ Himself had a heavenly escort that came before Him. They were angels, and they first proclaimed the good news to shepherds in a nearby field. That day, the shepherds would find The Living Savior. That is why we are here today, celebrating this great season. December and Advent reminds us of the birth of Christ and why He came into the world.

The most important thing to me about this text is that in it, we see something marvelous. When the angels gave the good news to the shepherds, the angel was suddenly joined with a heavenly host. Together, the angels were declaring a promise for us today. And I want to declare this same promise to you. I pray that in your hearts and minds, God would be forever glorified and that there would be peace and goodwill to you this season. Let's pray now:

Father, thank You for this wonderful reminder of Christmas and the birth of Your Son. Thank You for our families and our community. May You be praised this season as we celebrate the joy of the season. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does Advent mean to you?

In The Season Of Advent

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of The LORD appeared to them, and the glory of The LORD shone around them, and they were terrified.

-LUKE 2:8-9

BIBLE STUDY: THE ADVENT OF CHRIST

As we enter into the season of Advent, we remember the birth and incarnation of Christ that happened all those years ago. Mary and Joseph had gone to Bethlehem, and they were unable to find any room in the inns there. However, they found shelter in a stable, and when Jesus was born, they laid Him in a manger. God's Son had come down from Heaven to be among us.

This was prophecy fulfilled and the start of God's wonderful plan for salvation! What is interesting here is that the author turns our attention to the shepherds in a nearby field. In the time of Jesus, shepherds were considered to be pretty low on the hierarchy of society. They were not wealthy, they were uneducated, and they were not the most hygienic people to be around.

However, God wanted them to hear the good news that Christ had been born. An angel of God appeared to them, and they experienced the glory of God shining around them. They had never seen anything like it, and they were terrified. But, they were about to hear the greatest news that they had ever heard.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Why do you think God wanted the shepherds to be the first ones to know Christ had come and was born in Bethlehem?

If you were one of the shepherds, how would you have reacted?

In The Season Of Advent

An angel of The LORD appeared to them, and the glory of The LORD shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is The Messiah, The LORD. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

-LUKE 2:9-12

BIBLE STUDY: THE ANGEL MESSAGE

The shepherds were keeping watch over in a nearby field. They were going about their usual "night-shift" routine that evening, watching the sheep and keeping watch for any predators. What they were not expecting was an angel to appear and the glory of God to shine around them. What a sight that was to behold!

The passage tells us that the shepherds were terrified and rightly so. We are told of the power and radiance of God's glory earlier in Scripture, specifically in Exodus. Moses had had many conversations with God as the Israelites had sojourned through the wilderness to the Promised Land. During one of their meetings, Moses made a very special request: he asked to see God's glorious presence. However, God's glory was so powerful that no one could see it and live. So, God allowed Moses to see Him from behind. We read after this that Moses' face shone with the radiance of God's glory. He would even put a veil over his face when he spoke with the people because it was so bright (see *Exodus 33-34*).

Knowing this, imagine the great light the shepherds would have seen in the middle of a dark night. It must have been powerful to behold! Along with this sight, the angel brought them the good news of Jesus' birth and the fulfillment of prophecy; The Messiah has been born! Even more so, the shepherds were given a sign of how they could find Him. Wonderful news indeed!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What have you learned about the glory of God through this lesson?

Take time to read Moses' encounter in Exodus 33-34.

In The Season Of Advent

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into Heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which The LORD has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

-LUKE 2:13-16

BIBLE STUDY: THE SHEPHERDS' RESPONSE

An angel had appeared to the shepherds and had told them the good news of Jesus' birth and the coming of The Promised Messiah. Suddenly, a great host of angels joined and praised God. Imagine the glorious sound they raised!

After they leave, we see the response of the shepherds. No longer were they terrified, but they were eager to "*see this thing that has happened, which The LORD has told us about.*" You see, the shepherds did not just go back to their business; they wanted to see Jesus! They wanted to see Him so much that they hurried off, leaving their sheep, to go to see The Promised Messiah.

I like the response of these shepherds. They did not waste any time because they wanted to see what God had told them about. They wanted to see their King Jesus. And from their example, we can learn how we should respond when God speaks to us and shows us His glory. When we read His Word, He speaks to us. When we pray, He draws us closer to Him. And when we praise, He is glorified. Like the shepherds, we should hurry to respond when Christ reveals Himself to us and calls us to Himself.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where is God speaking to you in your personal life?

How will you respond?

In The Season Of Advent

When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, He was named Jesus, the name the angel had given Him before He was conceived.

-LUKE 2:17-21

BIBLE STUDY: THE FIRST EVANGELISTS

Immediately after they saw Jesus, the shepherds went to spread the good news! They went into the town and told anyone who would listen. They had just seen Jesus, and their hearts were filled with so much joy that they wanted to share it with others. All who heard were astonished and amazed, and many were encouraged to hear that The Promised Messiah had been born.

This reminds me of a song (“*I’ve Just Seen Jesus*”) by Christian artist, Sandi Patty. It is a song usually sung around Easter, but the lyrics of the chorus ring true for anyone who has seen Jesus. Once they truly see Him, they are completely transformed. The last two lines of the chorus say,

*“I’ve just seen Jesus,
And I’ll never be the same again.”*

Once they had seen Jesus, the shepherds were not the same. After seeing Jesus, they did not just say, “Oh, that’s nice” and head back to watching sheep. They wanted to tell everyone about what they saw and witnessed that night. They had just seen Jesus, and they were not going to be the same! They became the first evangelists, telling everyone about Jesus.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you grow in your witness for Christ?

What does it mean to you to truly see Jesus?

The Darkness Turns To Light

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before You as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, You have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince Of Peace.

-ISAIAH 9:2-6

BIBLE STUDY: THERE SHALL BE JOY

Isaiah was a prophet for The LORD, and in our passage today, we look at the prophecy of Christ. He gives encouragement to those who were in distress, telling them that darkness will be turned to light. Those who once walked in the land of darkness will see a light dawning. This light of hope will bring joy to all who see it, even more joy than farmers collecting a good harvest or warriors dividing the plunder of a victorious battle. What a joy this is! The yoke that once burdened them, Isaiah now says it will be shattered, and the rod of their oppressor will be broken. This promised light will bring freedom and hope.

But what is this light? Isaiah tells us that a Child will be born, a Son will be given. And this Son and Child will be God's Son, Jesus Christ. In this passage, Isaiah also calls Him our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince Of Peace. He will give light to the darkness, hope to those in distress, freedom to the oppressed, and joy to all nations.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does this prophecy mean to you personally?

Where has God given you light, hope, freedom, and joy today?

The Darkness Turns To Light

For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince Of Peace. Of the greatness of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of The LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

-ISAIAH 9:6-7

BIBLE STUDY: THERE WILL BE NO END

As we read yesterday, Isaiah prophesied of God's coming light, His Son. Today, we will dive a bit deeper into this prophecy and look at Christ's rule and reign.

Jesus is given more names in this passage. He is also called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince Of Peace. We are also told that His government and peace will be great and will never end. As we read this passage and live in the New Testament, we can celebrate this passage. Jesus Christ has conquered sin and the grave. However, we also know that His Kingdom is "here but not yet." His Kingdom is established here on earth as we have a renewed and restored relationship with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But, we also await its complete fulfillment when He will come again, evil will be forever destroyed, and there will be a new Heaven and earth.

Jesus is our King, and His rule and reign will have no end. Through His justice and righteousness, He will uphold His Kingdom forever. What is even more wonderful is that Isaiah says that the zeal of The LORD will accomplish this. To have zeal is to have great passion, energy, or enthusiasm for something. God has great passion to uphold His Kingdom with justice, peace, and righteousness forever. He has great enthusiasm to accomplish this promise. And if He has great enthusiasm to fulfill this, just think of His zeal to accomplish His Will in your life too. Praise God!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What encourages you most as you read this prophecy from Isaiah?

Where do you need to trust God more to accomplish His Will in your life?

The First Prophecy

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of The LORD God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from The LORD God among the trees of the garden. But The LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." After He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman You put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

-GENESIS 3:6-12

BIBLE STUDY: THE DAY CREATION FELL

We all know the account of Adam and Eve and how their disobedience brought sin and death into the world. We read how sin brought shame and broke their relationship with God. Because God is holy and perfect, no sin can enter His presence. Therefore, Adam and Eve could no longer walk with God and have perfect fellowship with Him as they had before.

Even more so, Adam and Eve felt shame because they were naked. When God calls to them in the garden, Adam says that he was afraid because he was naked, and because of his fear and shame, he hid from God. And even when confronted, Adam shifts the blame. Sin causes us to disobey God, and as sinners, we cannot be in the presence of a holy God. Yet, God did not give up on His creation, and He already had a plan for our redemption.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where has sin taken hold in your life? How can you repent and surrender to God?

How can you turn to Jesus in times of feeling shame because of sin?

The First Prophecy

Then The LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." So The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel."

-GENESIS 3:13-15

BIBLE STUDY: HE WILL CRUSH YOUR HEAD

God now turns His attention to Eve. She tells The LORD that she ate because the serpent had deceived her. When God turns His attention to the serpent, He punishes and curses the serpent. At the same time, God also says that He will put enmity between it and the woman, between her offspring and the serpent's. Enmity is defined as being actively opposed to or hostile toward someone or something. In other words, to have enmity between the woman and the serpent meant that there would be hostility, animosity, and hatred between them.

What I want to draw our attention to is the last words of our passage today: *"He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel."* This is the first prophecy of Jesus in Scripture. As we live in the New Testament, we see this prophecy fulfilled through the death and resurrection of Christ. Although Christ was pierced for our transgressions, He defeated Satan at the cross. Jesus was victorious over sin and death as He died in our place, taking all our sins upon Himself. How wonderful to know that even then, God had a plan for our salvation and redemption through Jesus Christ, our Savior!

THINGS TO PONDER:

What are your thoughts as you reflect on this prophecy?

As you think about what Christ accomplished at the cross, how can you praise God for sending His Son to save us from sin and death?

The First Prophecy

The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And The LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So The LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After He drove the man out, He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

-GENESIS 3:21-24

BIBLE STUDY: THE FIRST SACRIFICE

After God had given punishment to the serpent, Adam, and Eve, things would never be the same as they once had been in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had sinned, and they could not continue to have perfect fellowship with God anymore. Yet, God did not abandon them. Scripture tells us that God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife to clothe them. God Himself covered their nakedness and shame.

But where did God get the skins to make these garments? To acquire these skins must have meant that some animals had to die. Many believers see this as the first sacrifice mentioned in Scripture. These animals were killed in order to cover the shame of sin for Adam and Eve. Just as sacrifices we read in the Old Testament that sacrifices were made to cover the sins of the people, so too we see that God took the skins of these animals in order to cover Adam and Eve after they had sinned and disobeyed God.

After this, God sent them out from the Garden of Eden. Because they had sinned, Adam and Eve could not be allowed to stay and eat of the Tree of Life. Their relationship with God had been broken, and His perfect creation had been tainted with sin and death. We were in desperate need of a Savior to save us from our sins and restore a right relationship with God. We needed a perfect sacrifice to cover the sins of all the world. Hallelujah! God has saved us through His Son.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How can you thank God today for the sending of His Son to save and redeem you?

The First Prophecy

For God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.

-JOHN 3:16-17

BIBLE STUDY: THE FULFILLMENT

John 3:16 is the most quoted verse when sharing the Gospel message with someone. And, as we study it today, we see how God's prophecy is fulfilled through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As we read yesterday, Adam and Eve had sinned. But God took care and clothed them to cover their nakedness and shame using the skins of animals. We see this as the first sacrifice, and we see this continued exchange of offering sacrifices to cover and atone for sins in the rest of the Old Testament. However, no sacrifice could redeem all our sins and restore a right relationship with God The Father. We were in need of a Savior, Who would take our sin and shame, become The Perfect Sacrifice to cover us, and to restore us to a renewed fellowship with The LORD. This Perfect Sacrifice has a name. His Name is Jesus, and He is our Savior.

As we move closer to Christmas Day, we celebrate the birth and incarnation of Jesus Christ. He came down to earth to be our Savior, to take on all our sin, and to be the just atonement that was required to bring us into perfect fellowship with God once again. In our passage today, we read how Christ came to fulfill the prophecy; He is The Promised Messiah. We also see the immense love of God in that, even though we were sinners and destined to die, He sent His Only Son so that through Him we would have eternal life. By Christ's death on the cross, we can now come to God. Christ came to save the world, but He first came in the form of a baby. He wanted to live among us, to teach us and show us what true love is. He truly is The Reason for the season.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Take a few minutes to reflect on our passage today. Meditate on what Christ has done for you. Pray and thank Him for all He has done.

The Promised King

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is The One Who has been born King of the Jews? We saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him."

-MATTHEW 2:1-2

BIBLE STUDY: SEARCHING FOR THE KING

The Magi from the east had seen a star rise. However, to them, this star was not just any star; it was the star of *"The One Who has been born King of the Jews."* The wise men went to Herod and asked where The King of the Jews had been born because they had seen His star when it rose.

This star must have been a sight to capture the attention of the Magi in the east. It is believed that this star was uniquely designed and moved by God to lead the wise men to Jesus later in this passage.

The Magi had come from the east all the way to Jerusalem to find The King of the Jews so that they could worship Him. They had knowledge of the ancient prophecies that One was to be born Who would be King of the Jews. They were eager to find Him, traveling more than 900 miles in order to worship Him. This journey to Jerusalem would have taken them an estimated 3-4 months and about an additional 12 days to find Jesus in Bethlehem. These Magi desired to see The Infant King so much that they were willing to travel great lengths to worship Him. How much more does Christ deserve our worship and adoration today!

THINGS TO PONDER:

Living in the New Testament, we have access to God no matter where we are. Take a moment now to pray and thank God for the gift of Jesus Christ and the gift of salvation.

How can you share the Good News of Christ with someone this Christmas?

The Promised King

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where The Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"

-MATTHEW 2:3-6

BIBLE STUDY: PROPHECY OF BETHLEHEM

When the Magi had arrived and had asked where they could find The Messiah, Herod was disturbed. Other Bible translations say that Herod was troubled, terrified, and frightened. And not only was he upset and afraid but also was all of Jerusalem with him. They all knew of the prophecy of The Messiah, and a promise of The King meant a new reign and rule for the Jews.

Herod called the chief priests and teachers of the law in order to ask them about the prophecy, specifically where Jesus was to be born. The chief priests and teachers refer to the prophet Micah's words in the Old Testament (5:2, 4):

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathat, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me One Who will be Ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.' . . . He will stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of The LORD, in the majesty of the Name of The LORD His God. And they will live securely, for then His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth."

Micah's prophecy was about Christ, Who would be born in Bethlehem and be The Chosen Shepherd of God's people. All of Jerusalem was awaiting The Promised Messiah, and now the time had come.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Take some time today to read the rest of Micah 5. What stands out to you as you read the rest of this prophecy?

The Promised King

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child. As soon as you find Him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship Him."

-MATTHEW 2:7-8

BIBLE STUDY: THE EVIL INTENT OF HEROD

Upon learning that The Messiah was to come from Bethlehem, Herod calls the Magi to him secretly in order to find out when they had first seen the star. Jesus had already been born at this time and was most likely a few months old.

What I want us to catch here is Herod's words and intentions: "*As soon as you find Him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship Him.*" If you recall a few days ago, we looked at the Magi's inquiry of where Jesus was to be born. They had come from the east in order to find Him and worship Him. Here, Herod uses the same language, but his intentions are far from having the same meaning. As we know, Herod intended to kill Jesus in order to prevent the prophecy from being fulfilled. Herod manipulated the wise men into believing he was genuine and honest, that he truly did want to find and worship The Messiah. But God knew Herod's heart, and He would not allow for Herod's evil plan to be successful.

Even at His birth, there was much opposition against Jesus. But God's grand plan for salvation was unfolding. The time had now come for The Messiah to ransom and redeem creation, and not even the great King Herod could prevent God's Will from being accomplished.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does today's lesson teach about the Will of God?

What does this lesson teach you about God's faithfulness in completing His Will?

The Promised King

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the Child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

-MATTHEW 2:9-12

BIBLE STUDY: GIFTS FOR THE PROMISED KING

Merry Christmas to you! May this day bring you much joy as we celebrate the gift of our King, Jesus Christ. In today's passage, we also see the exchanging of gifts from the wise men when they see King Jesus. Although the wise men were not present when Jesus was born, I want to focus our attention on their arrival today because of the beautiful image of worship and adoration we see in this passage.

Upon seeing Jesus, they bowed down to worship Him. They had traveled over 900 miles to see Him, and they were full of joy and adoration. Jesus was probably a few months to a year old, and they brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to honor Him. These three gifts were given to honor a king or deity in the ancient world. Even the prophet Isaiah spoke of this when prophesying about the reign of King Jesus (see *Isaiah 60:6*). Gold was a precious metal, frankincense was a perfume incense, and myrrh was an anointing oil. Scholars believe that these gifts were also symbolic in representing Jesus' reign as King, His role as our Heavenly Priest, and His foretold death and resurrection.

Through this picture of the wise men honoring Jesus with gifts and bowing to worship Him, we can learn about how we ought to give Jesus our worship and adoration. Although we do not have gold, frankincense, and myrrh, we do have what God truly desires from us: our whole heart. This Christmas Day, offer up your whole heart in praise to Christ and give Him all your worship and adoration.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What does it mean to offer up your whole heart to Christ in adoration and praise?

The Promised King

When they had gone, an angel of The LORD appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the Child and His mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the Child to kill Him." So he got up, took the Child and His mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what The LORD had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called My Son." When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

-MATTHEW 2:13-18

BIBLE STUDY: JESUS, THE REFUGEE KING

Just because Jesus had come did not mean that the world would accept Him as He deserved. As we read a couple days ago, Herod had an evil plan to find Jesus and kill Him. He had been waiting for the return of the wise men who had gone out to find The Messiah. However, the Magi had been warned not to return to Herod, and they went home another way.

Once Herod realizes he has been tricked, he becomes furious. And in his fury, he ordered a massacre of all young baby boys who were only 2 years old or younger. However, God would not allow Herod to find Jesus. By an angel, Joseph was warned and instructed to flee to Egypt. God's Son was going to be a refugee and grow up in a foreign land.

As our Refugee King, Jesus knows how it feels to be a refugee and to face persecution. Whenever you face danger and persecution, above all, seek your refuge in Jesus. He knows how it feels, and He will strengthen and comfort you with the peace and safety only He can give.

THINGS TO PONDER:

How does this lesson speak into your life today?

The Promised King

After Herod died, an angel of The LORD appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the Child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the Child's life are dead." So he got up, took the Child and His mother and went to the land of Israel. But when He heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that He would be called a Nazarene.

-MATTHEW 2:19-23

BIBLE STUDY: RETURN TO NAZARETH

After Herod died, Joseph was instructed to return to Israel. What I want to focus on in today's study is the obedience of Joseph. I am sure by this point Joseph and Mary had already become accustomed to life in Egypt. They probably had a place to live, and Joseph was most likely working in some capacity to provide for his young family. However, one night, an angel appears to him in a dream. This time, the angel instructs him to take Jesus and Mary to return to the land of Israel.

Joseph does not hesitate or try to bargain with God for more time. Instead, he acts in true obedience to what the angel had told him. They leave their life in Egypt behind in obedience to God, and they make the journey back to their home country. When they arrive and Joseph hears that Herod's son, Archelaus, was on the throne, he is afraid to enter Judea. The angel speaks again to him in a dream, warning him to take Jesus and Mary to withdraw elsewhere.

Again, Joseph responds and acts in obedience. He takes his young family to the district of Galilee and settles in Nazareth. What I also find wonderful in this passage is that all of this was done so that prophecy would be fulfilled. Jesus was to be called a Nazarene, and this is the town where Joseph and Mary retreated to. God's hand was in all the details of Jesus' arrival, and this reminds me that His hand is also in all the details of His Will in our lives too.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Like Joseph, how can you respond in obedience to God when He calls you?

Trusting God, Having Hope

May The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of The Holy Spirit.

-ROMANS 15:13

BIBLE STUDY: HOPE IN TIMES OF CHANGE

One of the greatest powers in the world is the power of hope! It transcends doubt, it moves dismay, it breaks unbelief, and it empowers miracles.

Hope enables the discouraged to believe again. Hope helps the student who longs for opportunity to strive for what they have never seen before. Hope is powerful! It makes us trust God and believe that He can do things in us that we have never dreamed of accomplishing.

Hope was created by God to help us to trust Him more:

- It is what coaches give in difficult times and crucial situations.
- It is what parents teach their babies to have in spite of what things look like.
- It is what preachers possess and preach about to others who are fearful about the future and life after death.
- It is what I pray you cultivate in your hearts this semester and all through your lives.

In Christ, hope manifests into greatness. Through Him, we can do all things, endure all things, survive all things, and embrace all things. In Christ, we can walk in hope, sow in hope, teach in hope, believe in hope, and most of all, we can keep faith, hope, and the love of Jesus Christ in everything we say and do. Let's pray:

Father, increase our hope today. Help us to never forget where our hope truly comes from in this season. In Jesus Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Why is hope so important for our lives, our relationships, and our situations?

Where do you need to place your hope in Christ?

Trusting God, Having Hope

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, He said to him, "Follow Me." Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found The One Moses wrote about in the Law, and about Whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, The Son of Joseph." "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, He said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." "How do You know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, You are The Son of God; You are The King of Israel." Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'Heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' The Son of Man."

-JOHN 1:43-51

BIBLE STUDY: IS GOD CALLING YOU?

Make no mistake about it, The God of Heaven and earth is still calling men and women to follow and obey Him. In today's text, Jesus first summons Philip to come and be one of His disciples. This call was an invitation to come and get to know Him more. We also see Jesus calling Nathanael, who had his doubts before, but when He meets Jesus, He knows the Truth: Jesus is The Son of God.

Through these two encounters, we see a picture of the intimacy of God. He is still calling people to come unto Him and get near to Him. He is calling us to know Him more. Let's pray together:

Our Father and our God, continue to call us to get to know You more. As we approach the end of this year and look ahead to the next, continue to draw us near You. In Jesus Name, we pray, Amen.

THINGS TO PONDER:

Where is God calling you to know Him more?

How can you tell others about Jesus?

Trusting God, Having Hope

The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

-ACTS 16:22-25

BIBLE STUDY: WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS

Paul and Silas are on their second missionary journey in the region of Asia when they run into satanic opposition. Paul, under the power of The Holy Spirit, rebukes the underworld and sets free a young woman who has been held captive as a prisoner of an evil spirit. Her captors were men who were under the influence of money. They used her bondage for their personal spoils and gains.

When Paul and Silas had delivered her soul, these men had them charged, falsely arrested, whipped, and put in prison. Here is where our text begins. It opens with the apostles in the penitentiary, locked in solitary confinement, beaten and placed in an object of torture called “the stocks.” Here, in this place, they are given a divine opportunity by God to be on display in their trouble.

There is opportunity for the soldiers of Jesus Christ in this cage of adversity. Trials and tribulations can be strategic locations for the witness of Jesus Christ. When the problems of life confine us, it becomes a time for prayer and worship. For it is through the seasons of adversity that we grow most in our dependence and relationship with The Master. At this moment, Paul and Silas choose to sing.

In much the same way, a caged bird still sings because it was designed to sing. Whether free or confined, the setting for which it exists has no bearing on the tune of its song. It cannot help but sing; it has to worship The Creator.

THINGS TO PONDER:

What troubles are you currently facing?

How can you use this opportunity to praise God?

Trusting God, Having Hope

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose.

-ACTS 16:25-26

BIBLE STUDY: CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS

As a college, we have been given the privilege to represent Christ as His ambassadors in the midnight hour of this age. The world is filled with darkness, loneliness, pain, isolation, difficulty, trouble, persecution, and much more.

However, we will not fear for our God is on the throne, and He is watching over us and awaiting our request to deliver us. Just like our brothers Paul and Silas, if we are willing to obey God at all costs, we too can sing as a caged bird does. We too can have a hope that will transcend despair for we too have the same God, we have the same hope, and we have the same access to The Father through His Son, Jesus Christ.

What I learn from this lesson is that when you are in Christ, salvation and deliverance from the trials of life always come when you least expect it. I know that in the midnight hour of our dilemmas, it is very hard to see the salvation of The LORD.

As we head into a new year, we face many unknowns. Nevertheless, God is always watching His children, and He is very much attentive to their every need. There is salvation available for us as well in our seasons of adversity. So, in every situation, no matter what we face, let us continue to worship and praise God in spite of difficulty. He is worthy of all the praise, honor, and glory. He is always faithful. I wish you all a very blessed New Year ahead!

THINGS TO PONDER:

Take a minute to reflect on God's faithfulness this past year. Thank Him for all He has done. And pray that, no matter what this new year brings, you would draw closer to Him and trust Him in everything.

Author Bio:

Rev. Dr. Angulus Dion Wilson, PhD., DMin.

Rev. Angulus Wilson was called by the Lord into the Gospel ministry in 1991.

He is married to the beautiful Sharon Wilson, and together they have shared the wonderful duty of raising three sons whom he loves dearly. Compelled to work with students in need of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; For 30 years Dr. Wilson has labored in National and International ministry.

As a Pastor and church planter he has started congregations across North America, and matriculated through several Universities of higher learning. Angulus has a Bachelors Degree in Social Work from Fresno Pacific University, a Masters Degree in Spiritual Formation and Evangelism from Wheaton College, and Doctorate of Philosophy from Ecclesia University of Divinity and Doctorate of Ministry from Azusa Pacific University.

Because of his passion for making disciples and equipping students for the work of ministry, he develops International Bible Schools, conferences and seminars to train leaders for Christian service. Dr. Wilson has served Universities such as Wheaton College, Samford University, and Fresno Pacific University. He enjoys traveling internationally with students, preaching and teaching God's Word through networks, mission agencies and biblical conferences.

Angulus has a passion for developing new frontiers, where students can share the Good News of the Gospel with a hurting world. He is a trusted shepherd on the journey and servant of the Kingdom.

"There is no greater joy than to serve students in this critical time of formation on their journey. To be an exegetical guide in their maturation is worth more than the tongue can tell. I'm truly honored and excited to be a part of the Wheaton Family."

Grace Mamalat

An alumna of Wheaton College, Grace Mamalat graduated with a degree in Elementary Education and an emphasis in Mathematics. Upon graduation, Grace worked as a teacher in the public school system teaching fifth grade and middle grade mathematics. Grace recently earned her MA in Ministry Leadership and is currently serving as the Christian Curriculum Coordinator for Willow Creek Community Church in their children's ministry. In her free time, Grace enjoys reading, playing and making music, writing, and being out in nature.



